

UNEP Management Response to the Evaluation of the Subprogramme Nature Action 2014 - 2025

A. Introduction

An evaluation of the Subprogramme Nature Action (SP-NA) was conducted by the UNEP Evaluation Office, covering the period from January 2014 – June 2025. The evaluation states the SP-NA remains a relevant and critical vehicle for UNEP to advocate for strategic nature action initiatives, while resulting in five recommendations (See page 6 of the Evaluation Report).

This document outlines the **management response** to these recommendations, elaborated by the Ecosystems Division, as lead for the Nature Action Subprogramme. In developing the recommendations' implementation plan for submission to the Evaluation Office, management will continue to consult relevant Divisions and Offices, recognizing that several issues require UNEP-wide input.

B. Management Response to the evaluation's recommendations

The UNEP management response for each recommendation is summarized below. Unless otherwise indicated, most actions will be implemented by December 2028, and UNEP Management appreciates the support of the Evaluation Office in tracking and reporting on progress.

Recommendation 1. Sharpen focus in operations in line with the SP-NA strategic priorities by targeting fewer, high-impact thematic areas consistent with a nexus-driven agenda such as support to NBSAP planning, financial mechanisms to support biodiversity and innovative approaches to key biodiversity risks, amongst others. Address the key risks with clearer sustainability plans, scaling strategies and adaptive delivery models.

Management response

UNEP welcomes the recommendation as an opportunity to further strengthen its approach and will reinforce a sharp operational focus aligned with Nature Action priorities. The subprogramme will continue to strengthen its programmatic approach to maintain a focused portfolio of high-impact, interlinked interventions.

The portfolio will be refined around: (i) addressing drivers of biodiversity loss through ecosystem management and restoration; (ii) integration of biodiversity, land, freshwater, and ocean management into cross-sectoral decision-making; (iii) aligning public and private finance with MEAs and national strategies; and (iv) strengthening transparency, accountability, and governance.

To support this, the subprogramme will enhance portfolio coherence, align projects under these priorities, and strengthen sustainability, scalability, and adaptive delivery—particularly in GEF investments—while better aligning resources and partnerships.

Portfolio prioritization and strategic direction will continue to be driven by the broader programmatic framework and larger-scale investment projects, which incorporate risk mitigation, sustainability planning, and scaling pathways.

Recommendation 2. Institutionalize targeted integration across UNEP subprogrammes, MEAs and UN agency collaboration to strengthen and extend existing good coordination practices and also address the need for strategic coordination such as regular knowledge sharing amongst and between teams. This will also require active and strong relationships

with partners and Member States to focus on the most critical global issues as well as support countries in their specific contexts to protect the most vulnerable land, water and biodiversity assets. This also means improved communication skills and capacity, active project reporting – not just compliance -- and robust adaptive planning approach to work with partners and Member States to adjust implementation to the changing contexts. The NA-SP needs to work proactively with UNEP-wide efforts in knowledge management to improve subprogramme outcomes.

Management response

UNEP welcomes the recommendation and will strengthen institutionalized coordination, integration, and adaptive collaboration across subprogrammes, MEAs, and UN partners. Building on existing programmatic approaches, strong collaboration with relevant MEAs and on existing partnerships with other UN agencies the Nature Action subprogramme will further institutionalize and scale up a process for cross-portfolio learning, strategic alignment, and knowledge sharing.

It will also further promote nexus approaches across subprogramme portfolios to maximize environmental co-benefits, with contributions from all relevant subprogrammes, while strengthening support to countries to fulfil their obligations under relevant MEAs.

Recognizing that effective knowledge management requires a systemic approach supported by dedicated resources, these efforts will include regular and structured knowledge exchange, joint planning, and strengthened engagement with partners and Member States. This will be supported by facilitating feedback loops between headquarters, and regional offices to ensure portfolio design and implementation are informed by national and regional priorities and contribute to national, regional and global outcomes. including in protecting vulnerable land, water, and biodiversity assets.

To reinforce delivery, the subprogramme will systematize knowledge sharing, strengthen communication and reporting beyond compliance, and apply adaptive management to respond to evolving contexts. These actions will align with UNEP-wide knowledge management efforts and enhance coherence, integration, and overall impact.

Recommendation 3. Leverage proven and promising partnerships for country and regional impact through a stronger regional role for the NA-SP, with regional and national MEA initiatives related to biodiversity and land, and in regional and national forums, as well as in UN country team coordination.

Management response

UNEP welcomes the recommendation and will take actions to strengthen engagement with partners at regional and national levels. The Nature Action subprogramme will further enhance its regional role by actively convening partners, strengthening coordination across MEA and Regional Seas Conventions and Protocols initiatives, and scaling up engagement in regional forums and UN Country Team processes, including through Regional Subprogramme Coordinators (RSPCs) and Regional Offices (ROs).

The subprogramme will also systematize collaboration approaches to strengthen delivery across regions. This will require additional resources and deeper collaboration with Regional Offices, given the relatively limited non-extrabudgetary (non-XB) staffing within the Nature Action subprogramme.

Recommendation 4. Strengthen vertical fund engagement at early stages of MTS and NA-SP PoW planning and during implementation to acknowledge the importance of working strategically with vertical funds, building on current relationships and positive results, reducing future resource risks and complementing wider NA-SP objectives.

Management response

UNEP welcomes the recommendation and notes that early and strategic engagement with vertical funds is an existing standard practice within the Nature Action subprogramme that we can further strengthen. The subprogramme results framework is aligned with the strategic directions of relevant vertical funds, including, where appropriate, alignment with Global Environment Facility (GEF) core indicators to ensure complementarity and coherence.

The subprogramme will continue systematic engagement with UNEP vertical funds' portfolio managers throughout the MTS and PoW cycles and will further formalize and strengthen this engagement to maximize synergies while maintaining alignment with subprogramme objectives.

At the same time, engagement with vertical funds will complement—rather than substitute—the subprogramme's primary financing mechanisms, supporting sustainable delivery and shared environmental outcomes.

Recommendation 5. Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning as a strategic subprogramme asset, more actively harnessing the lessons inherent in the NA-SP portfolio as a growing body of knowledge for biodiversity outcomes. Despite UNEP's standard M&E framework, project managers responding to the evaluation survey identified key challenges, including differing donor and reporting requirements, insufficient staff resources, limited time for data analysis, lessons from reports, mid-term reviews and evaluations not being systematically actioned, and gaps in data availability and quality.

Management response

UNEP welcomes the recommendation and recognizes the importance of strengthening monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) as a strategic asset of the Nature Action subprogramme, including better use of portfolio-wide lessons.

The challenges identified point to the need for streamlined processes and will require coordinated, corporate-level efforts to harmonize approaches and invest in strengthening systems.

The subprogramme will support these efforts by strengthening MEL practices, promoting the systematic use of lessons learned, and contributing to UNEP-wide initiatives to improve data quality, knowledge integration, and learning, subject to resource availability.