

Thematic Evaluation of SDG Climate- Focused Partnerships

17 Jan 2025

IED-24-025



INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

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Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) assessed the relevance, effectiveness and coherence of United Nations partnerships with non-government entities in support of Member State achievement of climate-focused SDGs. The importance of these partnerships has been regularly reaffirmed by Member States as a vital modality to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Partnerships have played a positive role in accelerating progress on climate-focused SDGs, including effectively contributing to the achievement of climate action targets, as well as transferring knowledge and raising awareness around climate change. There was consensus among stakeholder groups interviewed and surveyed, including external partners, that climate-focused partnerships were contributing to positive outcomes particularly with regard to reducing harmful emissions and improving disaster resilience. Effective transfer of knowledge through partnership work enhanced technical understanding and strengthened capacities for climate action, while awareness raising on critical climate issues provided the foundation for further action to reach climate-related goals.

Despite these positive contributions, the effectiveness of climate-focused partnerships was challenged by an insufficient enabling environment. The absence of a Secretariat-wide strategy, standards, guidance and procedures led to a lack of clarity and inefficiency around decision-making processes for partnership development. The lack of a central repository and monitoring system for Secretariat partnerships also made it challenging to track and assess the effectiveness of climate-focused partnerships across the Organization. Gender, human rights and youth were more widely integrated into climate-focused partnerships than disability inclusion and Indigenous People's issues, the latter of which was needed to ensure impact for local indigenous populations.

OIOS outlines several opportunities for programme managers to strengthen their use of partnerships to accelerate climate-related goals. These include:

- Developing an entity-specific partnership strategy which is fit-for-purpose with clear operational guidelines;
- Investing in more intentional, rigorous prospective partner research to identify the most strategically aligned partners based on entity mandate, partnership objective and outstanding needs;
- Developing clear roadmaps for partnership work, including measurable targets;
- Engaging in Secretariat-wide partnership platforms for information exchange, good practice sharing, and joint work to address common partnership challenges.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of this Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness, and coherence of United Nations partnerships with non-governmental entities in support of Member State achievement of climate-focused Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹
2. The evaluation conforms with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations System. Management responses from Secretariat evaluated entities are included in the annex.

II. Background

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

3. The goal of SDG 17 to “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” is a catalyst for achieving all SDGs. Designed to be a cross-cutting goal, it highlights the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships and underscores alliances as essential vehicles for mobilizing the collective knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources to support the achievement of all SDGs.
4. In 76/224, the General Assembly highlighted the unique position of the United Nations as a “builder of bridges among countries and all stakeholders,” as well as the critical role of accelerating SDG implementation using partnerships to mobilize key stakeholders. Accordingly, in 2018 the Secretary-General laid out the following five key actions to accelerate the impact of partnerships: ²
 - (1) Moving away from donation-based partnerships and building more strategic relationships;
 - (2) Shaping more innovation-based partnerships that leverage partner competencies and technologies;
 - (3) Increasing the focus on multi-stakeholder partnerships;
 - (4) Connecting and convening a broader range of actors;
 - (5) Achieving greater local impact, including by expanding opportunities for engaging micro-, small, and medium enterprises.

In 2021, the Secretary-General followed up on these actions, noting that while the United Nations system had made considerable progress along these five pathways, there was a need for more inclusive and networked multilateral cooperation.

III. Scope and Methodology

5. For the purpose of this evaluation, a partnership is defined as a collaborative agreement by two or more parties that share responsibilities and accountability for common goals.
6. The scope of this evaluation included an assessment of:
 - i) Climate-focused partnerships which met the following criteria:

Focused on contributing to the achievement of SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 15 (Life on Land) and/or SDG 17 (Partnerships);

¹ It is being conducted as part of the division workplan. Proposed Programme Budget for 2023 available at [undocs.org/A/77/6\(Sect.30\)](https://undocs.org/A/77/6(Sect.30)), para 30.7.

² A/73/326, Report of the Secretary-General: Enhanced cooperation between the United Nations all relevant partners, in particular the private sector, 15 August 2018.

Included one or more non-government, non-UN entity (including for-profits entities) and were active between January 2022 and September 2023.

- ii) The thirteen UN Secretariat entities below which had climate-focused partnerships:
 - United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
 - United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
 - United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
 - United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
 - United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)
 - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
 - United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)
 - Office of Legal Affairs (OLA)
 - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
 - United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP)
 - Global Compact Office (GCO)
 - United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)
 - United Nations Development Coordination Office (DCO)³

- iii) The contributions of climate-focused partnerships to the following outcomes:
 - More effective innovation-based and transformational modalities;
 - Enhanced strategic relationships to achieve greater local level outcomes;
 - Enhanced national government capacities, for example, for policy design that contributes to greater environmental impact;
 - Enhanced collaboration and coordination among United Nations entities, national governments and the for-profit sector towards achievement of climate-focused SDGs.

- 7. The methodology included the following qualitative and quantitative methods:
 - a. **Interviews** with 101 United Nations evaluand entity partnership staff and external partners; overall, there were 44 per cent female and 56 per cent male interviewees.
 - b. **Surveys** of the following populations as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Survey information, including Response Rates

Survey	Survey Population Size	Response Rate	Percent Female/ Male/ Other respondents
Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) partnership officers	105	90 percent	56 percent Female 44 percent Male
UN staff involved in partnership work	281	80 percent	51 percent Female 48 percent Male 1 percent Other
Climate-focused partners	438	46 percent	41 percent Female 59 Percent Male

³ See Annex I on the DCO management response comments regarding a DCO mapping of United Nations collaboration with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) which was outside of the scope of this evaluation.

- c. **Case studies of three United Nations entities - UNEP, ECLAC and UNDRR - with a high number of climate-focused partnerships.** Based on a preliminary analysis of partnership data, and in consultation with focal points, a sub-set of each case study entity’s climate-focused partnerships were identified for further analysis, to include 11 partnerships in UNEP, 7 partnerships in ECLAC, and 5 partnerships in UNDRR.
- d. **Structured Document Review** of partnership-related entity strategies, guidance, annual reports, performance data and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs).
- e. **Analysis of a dataset of all climate-focused partnerships** engaged in by eight of the scoped entities that had active partnerships between January 2022 and September 2023.

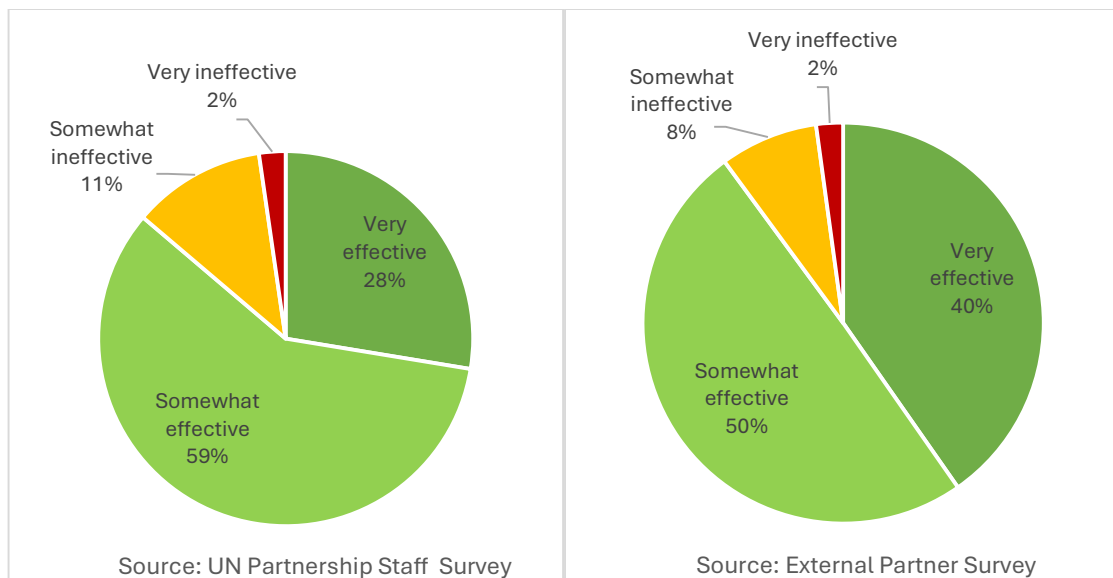
IV. Evaluation Results

- A. Partnerships have played a positive role in accelerating progress on climate-focused SDGs, including effectively contributing to the achievement of climate action targets as well as transferring knowledge and raising awareness around climate change

Stakeholders reported that partnerships had contributed towards the acceleration of progress on climate-focused SDGs

- 8. Overall, stakeholders perceived partnerships to have supported progress on climate-focused SDGs. Staff and stakeholders surveyed across all evaluand entities reported primarily positive assessments of the effectiveness of partnerships as a modality to support Member State achievement of SDGs, as shown in Figure 1. More specifically, survey respondents also rated partnerships with each of the full range of non-government entities - academia, civil society, and the private sector - as being very or somewhat effective.

Figure 1: Effectiveness of Partnerships as a Modality for SDG Achievement



- 9. Staff and stakeholders interviewed confirmed this positive assessment and reported a wide variety of ways in which partnerships were effective, including through:

- (1) Providing a single point of departure for partners to work together on climate action issues;
- (2) Bringing partners with complementary expertise together to address bottlenecks;
- (3) Sharing data to support climate action initiatives;
- (4) Connecting stakeholders with information that supports climate action legislation;
- (5) Providing technical assistance to enhance capacities that support sustainable development activities.

Climate-focused partnerships in the three case studies demonstrated how the partnerships effectively contributed to reaching specific climate action targets, such as the reduction of harmful emissions and decarbonization of financial portfolios

10. Many UNEP partnerships demonstrated significant contributions to specific climate action targets, particularly in reducing harmful emissions and decarbonizing financial portfolios. Examples of these partnerships included:
 - The **Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles (PCFV)** contributed to the official end of the use of lead petrol worldwide by 2021; this milestone, reportedly, prevented more than 1.2 million premature deaths globally per year and saved USD 2.45 trillion a year. Additionally, through the work of the partnership, 50 countries are reportedly moving on lowering sulfur in fuels.
 - The **Oil and Gas Methane Partnership (OGMP) 2.0**, the only measurement-based international reporting framework for the sector, with representation covering more than 40 per cent of global oil and gas production, has been recognized as the best existing vehicle for improving the industry's measurement, reporting and verification capabilities. It is also the basis for the EU methane regulations. OGMP 2.0 is a noteworthy example of a successful partnership that is built around strategic relationships rather than resource mobilization, in line with the Secretary-General's key partnership impact accelerators.
 - The **Finance Initiative (UNEP FI)** contributed towards alignment with the SDGs through the Principles for Responsible Banking, which was launched in collaboration with a core group of founding banks. Approximately 220 financial institutions have set near term portfolio decarbonization targets for their businesses. The partnership has also collaborated with the V20 group of finance ministers, later expanded to 68 countries, to foster similar initiatives within the context of the insurance industry.
11. Furthermore, UNDRR's **Making Cities Resilient Partnership (MCR2030)**, which was a partnership with a wide variety of local governments and other interested entities, also demonstrated measurable contributions to climate action targets such as enhanced early warning systems. They did this by supporting the development of tools such as the Disaster Resilience Scorecard for Cities. The use of these scorecards by local governments contributed to measurable enhanced disaster risk governance and increased climate related disaster preparedness in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
12. Also, some UNEP climate-focused partnerships demonstrated measurable contributions in strategic financing, a further climate action target. In line with SDG 17, these partnerships identified funding gaps which enabled the acceleration of climate action in key areas. Examples included:
 - The **Seed Capital Assistance Facility Partnership (SCAF)** supported climate-friendly technology which catalyzed over USD 4 billion in investments by directly supporting 40+ projects involving 24 partners across 19 countries. There was some evidence that inexpensive solar power currently available in, for example, Burkina Faso would not exist without the SCAF support provided.

- The **Restoration Seed Capital Facility Partnership (RSCF)** provided early-stage funding for ecosystem restoration projects which, as of the last annual report, had catalyzed approximately USD 67 million in subsequent private sector investment.

Many case study climate-focused partnerships additionally contributed to the transfer of knowledge which enhanced technical understanding and strengthened capacities for climate action

13. Through knowledge transfer activities, including specifically related to technical expertise, many climate-focused partnerships in the three case studies made significant contributions which strengthened technical understanding and contributed to enhanced capacity and climate-focused action. ECLAC partnerships that achieved these results included:

- The **Latin American and Caribbean Observatory on Climate Change (OPCC) Partnership** created an online platform which supported the formulation of effective legislation by providing a benchmark for climate-related legislation.
- The **IICA Partnership** enhanced the knowledge and experience of regional governments and experts focusing on gaps in science and technology policies at the national level, enabling targeted efforts to close the identified policy gaps.

14. Similarly, several UNDRR partnerships made significant contributions by transferring knowledge and enhancing capacities that promoted climate action, including:

- The **Early Warnings for All initiative Partnership (EW4All)** leveraged the specific knowledge and capacities of its partners --The World Meteorological Organization, The International Telecommunication Union and Microsoft-- by using satellite imagery and Artificial Intelligence to support early warning systems which, in turn, helped partner governments to better understand the exposure of their populations to potential disasters.
- The **ARISE Private Sector Alliance Partnership** promoted business resilience and disaster risk reduction knowledge sharing through a series of National network engagements driven through participation of the private sector; this strengthened coordination with local governments in preparing and responding to disasters and led to coordination agreements between national and local governments.
- The **Science and Technology Advisory Group Partnership (STAG)** mapped and shared disaster risk reduction (DRR) research amongst DRR agencies, academia, and technology companies, thus contributing to the identification of gaps based on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Framework priorities and informing future decision-making.

15. In UNEP, examples of partnerships which primarily focused on knowledge sharing included:

- The **District Energy in Cities Initiative Partnership** brought technical expertise available in some countries to other countries which were then able to increase their use of sustainable energy.
- The **United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration Partnership** provided a common platform for individuals and organizations to find data on projects, partners, funding, and knowledge thereby contributing to ecosystem restoration.

Additionally, partnerships contributed to awareness raising

16. Many partnerships also raised awareness about climate-related issues which served as the foundation upon which specific outcomes and targets could be achieved. One example was the **UNEP Cool Coalition partnership** which, through its political platform and global advocacy, raised awareness

around sustainable cooling, thus resulting in 71 countries signing a Global Cooling Pledge making “all of government” policy commitments on sustainable cooling.

Several key factors facilitated effective climate-focused partnerships

17. The key factors associated with successful partnerships revolved around: (1) good decision-making on who to partner with; (2) efficient and strategic organization of the partnership; and (3) sound partnership management. Table 2 provides related details on these enabling factors.

Table 2: Factors Facilitating Effective Climate-focused Partnerships

Who to Partner With:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strategically including stakeholder groups which are critical to achieve change (such as industry groups, policy makers, regulators, civil society) ✓ Bringing together actors with complementary knowledge and skills ✓ Engaging with innovative partners, including leveraging private sector technology ✓ Working with trusted partners
How to Organize the Work of the Partnership:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identifying partnership objectives that can be measured ✓ Prioritizing one clear and potentially impactful initiative at a time (e.g., achieving lead-free petrol, methane reduction) ✓ Creating a clear roadmap or action plan for the partnership ✓ Sharing knowledge that is sufficiently targeted ✓ Creating large robust networks at the global, regional and national levels
Sound Partnership Management:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Focusing partnership work on filling a specific gap or issue that has not received sufficient attention ✓ Working in alignment with a larger climate action framework (e.g., Sendai Framework, Escazu Agreement, Paris Agreement, New Urban Agenda) ✓ Including a pilot project component ✓ Focusing on producing tangible tools for utilization ✓ Providing support for implementation of country-level legislative and policy changes ✓ Ensuring the existence of adequate monitoring and reporting tools for partnership result or outcome tracking

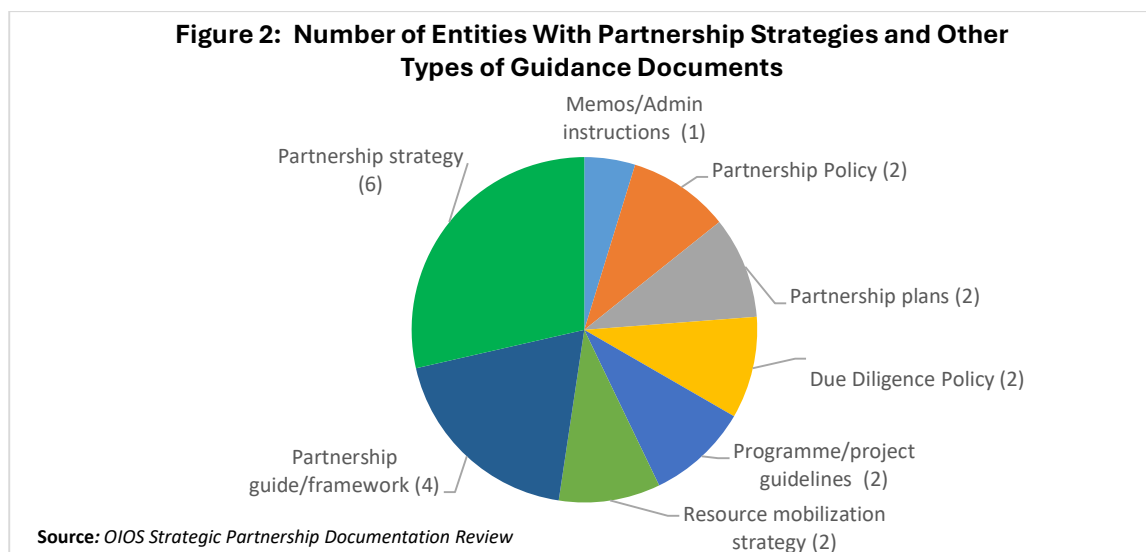
Source: OIOS Case Study Analysis

B. Despite these positive contributions, the effectiveness of climate-focused partnerships was challenged by an insufficient enabling environment, including on partnering with for-profit entities

The absence of a Secretariat-wide strategy, standards, guidance and procedures hindered clarity and efficiency around partnership development

18. There is no Secretariat-wide partnership strategy, and less than half of the entities assessed (6 of 13) had a dedicated entity-level partnership strategy. These varied widely in terms of their level of detail

and substantive guidance, with very few addressing partnerships with for-profit entities. However, 8 of the 13 entities did have other types of guidance materials which were intended to support decision-making related to prospective partnership formation and partner selection, as shown in Figure 2. These included documents developed by the Organization’s primary partnership entities, such as the Global Compact Office, the United Nations Office for Partnerships, and the Office of Legal Affairs, as well as the Partnership Results Group within the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG). A Private Sector Focal Point Network was also in existence.



19. Despite the availability of these partnership strategies and guidance documents, staff interviewed indicated that the absence of an organization-wide strategy that provided an effective roadmap for decision-making created inefficiencies. Interviewees described significant variation regarding the processes for deciding on the types of partnerships to pursue and for identifying potential partners. While some decisions were taken following formalized processes, others were made informally, resulting in inconsistent practices.
20. Stakeholders interviewed also emphasized that the lack of Secretariat-wide standards, as well as streamlined guidance and procedures hindered efficient partnership development. Nearly half of interviewees (46 per cent) identified cumbersome administrative processes as a key barrier to setting up a partnership. They noted that it was difficult to navigate the myriad administrative processes in place when seeking to form partnerships. One staff member interviewed voiced a common perspective when stating that establishing partnerships was “heavy, time consuming and burdensome.”

The lack of a central repository and monitoring system for Secretariat partnerships made it challenging to track and assess the effectiveness of climate-focused partnerships aggregately

21. The Secretariat lacks a central partnership repository and there is limited performance data on the use and effectiveness of climate-focused partnerships. Existing partnership data were dispersed across multiple online databases, websites and reports, which did not facilitate the aggregation of partnership-related data or provide a comprehensive Secretariat-wide overview of partnership activities and

outcomes.⁴ This fragmentation undermined the Secretariat's ability to measure the overall effectiveness of its partnership work in general and climate-focused partnerships in particular, as well as the opportunity to more systematically identify gaps and areas for improvement.

For-profit climate-focused partnership opportunities were not fully harnessed

22. The Secretary-General's partnership acceleration framework highlighted the importance of increasing the collaboration and participation of for-profit partners. However, stakeholders surveyed and interviewed all noted that unclear, insufficiently transparent and cumbersome administrative processes were the primary impediment to setting up effective partnerships with for-profit entities. Similarly, for-profit partners interviewed noted their hesitation to engage with the United Nations due to the slow pace of partnership formation, noting that these partnerships often took multiple years to be formalized. A majority of United Nations staff interviewed shared additional challenges in partnering with the private sector, including:

- (1) Lack of for-profit-focused modalities for partnering;
- (2) Risk aversion to work with for-profit entities in some entities;
- (3) Length of time to complete relevant due diligence and administrative processes.

Additional challenges related to resource mobilization and local adaptation have also impeded partnership effectiveness

23. While some entities expressed their intention to move away from donation-based partnerships to more strategic models, funding and resource mobilization challenges remained significant obstacles to achieving this ambition. Resource limitations were highlighted by 25 per cent of staff and 22 per cent of external partner survey respondents. They were also the second most frequently cited concern by Resident Coordinator Office Partnership Officers (26 per cent of respondents). Furthermore, challenges related to funding and resource mobilization were cited by one-third of interviewees, including:

- (1) Insufficient resources to develop and implement partnerships;
- (2) Lack of regular budgetary funding pushing entities to seek funding-based partnerships;
- (3) Impact of short-term and insufficient funding on the sustainability of climate-focused partnerships regarding both United Nations entity and external partners.

24. The aspiration to achieve local impact through climate-focused partnerships remained a notable challenge. Despite the engagement of evaluand entities in partnerships contributing to local impact, feedback from key informants and survey respondents pointed to the need for some entities to better understand local contexts. This included addressing the needs and priorities of specific populations and adapting partnership activities and goals accordingly. Some survey respondents (17 per cent) referenced challenges associated with achieving local impact.

Entities engaged in climate-focused partnerships also reported challenges related to competition for resources, duplication and unequal access to country-level stakeholders

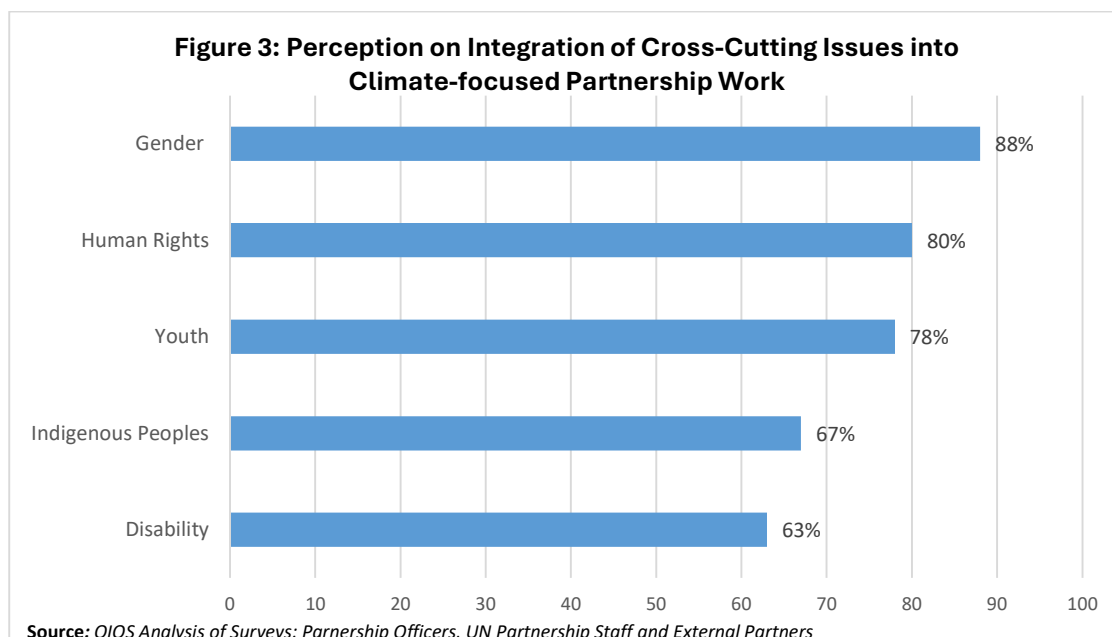
25. Across entities challenges related to several additional factors were reported, including competition for resources. Staff and stakeholders surveyed and interviewed indicated they were vying for funding and,

⁴ OIOS data confirms the concern raised in A/73/326, para 41: "Given the multiple formats and varying content of partnership information that is disclosed in online databases, websites and reports, the information is not easily collated to provide a central overview of partnership activity throughout the United Nations system and enable comparison and measurement. Agency headquarters have also noted challenges in maintaining a comprehensive overview of the number and scope of business partnerships occurring across disparate field operations."

at times, were competing for resources from the same private sector partners. Competition was often seen as disincentivizing the ability to work across United Nations entities collectively to support the achievement of climate-focused goals through effective partnerships; rather, this was reported as incentivizing working in siloes. Furthermore, some interviewees and survey respondents also reported duplication and overlap of partnership activities which created inefficiency. Related to this, several staff interviewed shared the view that unequal access to country-level stakeholders adversely impacted coordination opportunities. They indicated that non-resident and smaller Secretariat entities had limited access to engage with the United Nation Country Team (UNCT), country-level stakeholders and prospective country-level for-profit partners, such as small and medium-sized private enterprises.

C. Gender, human rights and youth were more widely integrated in climate-focused partnerships than disability inclusion and indigenous people’s issues

26. Cross-cutting issues have been unevenly integrated in climate-focused partnerships, as shown in Figure 3. While integration of gender, human rights and youth in climate-focused partnerships was generally strong, disability inclusion was less effectively integrated. The integration of indigenous people’s issues, which is needed to ensure impact for local indigenous populations, was also less effectively integrated.



27. **Gender** was perceived as having been most effectively integrated into the work of climate-focused partnerships, with 88 per cent of survey respondents across all three surveys rating it as sufficiently integrated. Interviewees confirmed these results; many noted that gender was systematically integrated in operational practices, with most large-scale projects and donors requiring a gender strategy, and review committees ensuring that gender was integrated into project proposals.

28. **Human rights** was the second most effectively integrated issue, with 80 per cent of survey respondents reporting sufficient integration and interviewees identifying multiple examples where human rights issues were explicitly incorporated into operational policies or business practices of partner organizations. However, some also noted that a prominent challenge to human rights integration was the lack of clarity on how to ensure human rights mainstreaming into climate-focused partnerships.

29. **Youth** was perceived by most survey respondents (78 per cent) as sufficiently integrated, especially in disaster risk reduction and climate resilience related partnerships. Some interviewees, however, noted the lack of formalized and regular engagement mechanisms needed to consistently engage youth, particularly in those regions with large youth populations.
30. **Indigenous peoples' issues** were recognized to be an important foundation for ensuring that climate-focused partnerships adapted to local contexts and the needs of local populations, and a majority of survey respondents (67 per cent) reported sufficient integration of these issues. For example, indigenous peoples' political participation in decision-making processes on issues related to environmental rights was an important component of the UNEP United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration partnership. Nonetheless, some interviewees raised concerns that many partnership projects lacked clear strategies for more meaningful engagement with indigenous peoples.
31. **Disability inclusion** was also perceived to be sufficiently integrated by most survey respondents (63 per cent), but limited funding to support disability inclusion initiatives and difficulties implementing accessibility measures for persons with disabilities were cited as particular challenges. For example, a partnership coordinator from the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ECLAC) pointed to the significant costs associated with launching publications in braille.

V. Conclusion

32. The General Assembly has widely recognized⁵ the need for the Organization to continue building new paths to support the achievement the SDGs, and to expand the scope and impact of its collaboration with partners in the for-profit sector, civil society, and academia in doing so. Both the General Assembly and the Secretary-General have emphasized the criticality of effectively leveraging the competencies, expertise, innovation, technology and resources of United Nations partners for the Organization to strengthen its support to Member States in accelerating their SDG progress.
33. For the most part, Secretariat entities have heard the message. Many climate-focused partnerships have shifted from being based on donations to strategically aligning with programme implementation in support of the achievement of the SDGs. They have set ambitious targets of working aggressively with industries to reduce harmful emissions. Other partnerships have demonstrated innovation and made strides in their work to support the achievement of the Goals, including through working alongside industry leaders in the private sector. However, obstacles remain which impede the success of these partnerships. Perhaps most significantly, there is a lack of overall clarity on the processes and associated administrative rules for engaging with partners, and in those cases where rules do exist, they often involve time-consuming processes which do not facilitate the most efficient establishment of effective partnerships.
34. On partnership guidance, various documents have been developed by the Organization's primary partnership entities, such as the Global Compact Office, the United Nations Office for Partnerships, and the Office of Legal Affairs, as well as the Partnership Results Group within the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG). These resources aim to support the Organization's decision-making processes and facilitate the strategic use of partnerships. Additionally, many Secretariat entities have also developed their own entity-specific partnership guidance. While all these documents offer potential value, they lack cohesion and fail to provide a clear, comprehensive and over-arching Secretariat guidance framework on partnerships. These partnership challenges, many of which were pointed out earlier in a 2017 JIU review⁶ of the topic, are not new. They are particularly acute regarding efforts to harness the potential power of partnerships with for-profit partners. None of these issues are

⁵ A/73/254.

⁶ JIU/REP/2017/8 - The United Nations System - Private Sector Partnerships Arrangements in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

easy to address, but time is running out. As entities continue to devise a way forward on how to effectively utilize partnerships as accelerators for change, two questions in particular warrant some response:

1. To move forward to a higher level of effective partnership work, particularly with for-profit entities, what needs to change?
2. Considering the many entities with partnership related mandates, where does the primary responsibility and accountability for Secretariat leadership on partnerships reside?

These important questions need to be prioritized by the Organization in order for partnerships to be fully harnessed as important accelerators for SDG achievement.

VI. Opportunities for Entities to Strengthen their Climate-Focused Partnerships

35. While acknowledging the need for Organization-wide improvements, particularly in the context of the UNSDG Strategic Partnership Results Group and the Private Sector Focal Point Network, there are several entity-level opportunities for improvement. These include:

- Developing an entity-specific partnership strategy which is fit-for-purpose with clear operational guidelines, factoring in any available Secretariat-level guidance; ideally, this would include a section dedicated to the inclusion of private sector partnership engagement.
- Investing in more intentional, rigorous prospective partner research to identify the most strategically aligned partners based on entity mandate, partnership objective and outstanding needs; in some instances, this would benefit from incorporating considerations related to better adaptation to local contexts for increased local climate action and impact.
- Developing clear roadmaps for partnership work, including measurable targets; if possible, aligning roadmaps and expected contributions to targets with globally and regionally agreed upon climate-focused frameworks, for example, COP 29 agreement documents, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework.
- Engaging in Secretariat-wide partnership platforms for information exchange, good practice sharing, and joint work to address common partnership challenges.

Annex I.

Comments from entities on the draft report

In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from entities. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee. The comments have been produced as received.

Development Coordination Office

I am writing with reference to your memo of 17 December 2024, conveying the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the Thematic evaluation of SDG Climate-Focused Partnerships.

The Development Coordination Office (DCO) has reviewed the report and welcomes the findings and opportunities highlighted for entities to strengthen partnerships focused on climate. As such, in a context of resource constraints, DCO is making efforts to strengthen partnerships on all fronts for SDG acceleration, and the report provides useful insight that DCO will consider.

As noted in DCO's informal comments to OIOS, the report is also aligned with the findings of a recent mapping conducted by DCO on UN collaboration with International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The report also highlights that at the global level, the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution represents the most common thematic focus of collaboration with IFIs, with ten respondent entities reporting current engagements with IFIs on this area. At the regional level, 68% of entities reported that climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution is the priority thematic area in their engagement with IFIs; while at country level, 85% of respondents' UNCTs report that climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution represent the number one priority for their engagement with IFIs. As such, DCO believes that reference to findings of this mapping and to the importance of partnering with IFIs would further strengthen the draft and would suggest that this point be reflected in the report.

Moving forward, DCO will work in concert with all relevant entities to support Member States in the urgent imperative of SDG Acceleration, including through the important modality of climate-focused partnerships.

Economic Commission for Europe

1. I refer to your memorandum dated 17 December 2024, transmitting the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the Thematic Evaluation of SDG Climate-Focused Partnerships.
2. ECE appreciates the continuous efforts of OIOS to outline opportunities for the Secretariat to strengthen its use of partnerships to accelerate climate-related goals to better support Member States in their achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. I am pleased to note that many opportunities for improvement suggested by OIOS have already been implemented by ECE. In December 2023, ECE presented a Note on Partnerships to its Executive Committee, spelling out guiding principles, objectives, and modalities.
4. Internal operational guidelines have also been developed and regularly enriched, including due diligence processes for non-state partners, in line with recommendations from past OIOS audits.
5. ECE will continue refining its partnership processes to identify the most effective partnerships in supporting Member States' achievement of the SDGs.
6. I take this opportunity to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Report and to commend the professionalism of the OIOS team led by Mr. Juan Carlos Peña.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

ECLAC welcomes this comprehensive report, which provides evidence demonstrating the positive role partnerships have played in accelerating progress on climate-focused SDGs.

We will consider with attention the findings, conclusions and opportunities to strengthen the use of partnerships outlined in the report.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for this report and to thank OIOS for the collaborative approach in this evaluation.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

1. With reference to your memo dated 17 December 2024, ESCAP appreciates the thorough and insightful evaluation conducted by OIOS on the relevance, effectiveness and coherence of UN partnerships with non-governmental entities in supporting climate-focused SDGs. We are pleased to note the recognition of the positive role these partnerships have played in advancing climate action, raising awareness, and strengthening capacities for climate-related goals. The consensus among stakeholders regarding the value of these partnerships highlights their importance as a core modality in achieving the SDGs.
2. Regarding the opportunities for entities to strengthen climate-focused partnerships contained in the draft report, ESCAP has developed operational partnership guidelines to support strategic, effective and results-driven partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders, including non-governmental entities. Strong and result-oriented partnerships with the private sector and foundations have become critical for ESCAP in making a difference in the Asia-Pacific region. Such partnerships allow considerable leveraging of each partner's unique strengths and resources. As part of the UN Secretariat, ESCAP follows a number of guidelines on cooperation with the private sector taking into account the principles set out in the UN Global Compact and drives businesses in working towards the achievement of the SDGs through its ESCAP Sustainable Business Network.
3. Thank you.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

On behalf of Ms. Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, kindly find below the formal management response on the report:

“We had a chance to discuss the report and the recommendations made. We have no specific comments on the report, but would like to address the first two recommendations of the report, namely:

Developing an entity-specific partnership strategy which is fit-for-purpose with clear operational guidelines;

Investing more in intentional, rigorous prospective partner research to identify the most strategically aligned partners based on entity mandate, partnership objective and outstanding needs.

As we are in ESCWA already working on the ESCWA 2.0 vision and strategy, it could be complemented by a revision of our existing Partnership Strategy to make sure it is fit-for-purpose for ESCWA 2.0 and includes more intentional prospective partner research to identify the most strategically aligned partners for ESCWA (based on the strategic approach ESCWA adopts).”

Your efforts are highly appreciated.

Office of Legal Affairs

1. The Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) acknowledges your memo of 17 December 2024, conveying the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the Thematic evaluation of SDG Climate-Focused Partnerships.

2. OLA wishes to acknowledge the importance of this evaluation and to extend its appreciation to OIOS and the evaluation team for its work.
3. OLA will continue to strive for the establishment of efficient and effective partnerships, including by building on existing partnerships and identifying opportunities for new ones in the context of OLA's mandates. The Office SDG Working Group will continue to follow up on the results and will inform its discussions with the present report.
4. OLA will continue to study ways to replicate best practices and successful experiences, like the partnerships established in the context of World Ocean Day and its capacity-building activities, not only with donors but also with other implementing partners.
5. In support of the Organization's efforts towards the achievement of the SDGs, including through strengthened collaboration with partners in the for-profit sector, civil society, and academia, OLA will take into account the opportunities for improvement identified in the draft report, with a view to aligning with and enhancing the implementation of UN Secretariat partnership strategies in the broader context of relevant legal frameworks.
6. I thank you for your kind cooperation.

United Nations Environment Programme

1. This memorandum serves as the management response to the draft report 'Thematic Evaluation of SDG Climate-Focused Partnerships' of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED).
2. UNEP has taken note of the content of the report and the evidence-based suggestions proposed, many of which UNEP has or is in the process of incorporating into our partnership strategies.
3. Specifically, UNEP seeks to develop tailored partnership strategies that incorporate Secretariat-level guidance, ensuring clear operational guidelines on private sector engagement. This will help establish partnerships that are both purpose-driven and effective and create clear roadmaps, including measurable targets that align globally recognized frameworks such as the Paris Agreement.
4. We also welcome the suggestion to foster collaboration across Secretariat-wide partnership platforms and facilitate the exchange of information, the sharing of best practices, and the joint tackling of common partnership challenges, ultimately contributing to more effective climate action.
5. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your staff, in particular the Inspection and Evaluation team, for the excellent cooperation and assistance accorded to UNEP.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Please find below the official UNFCCC management response:

The UNFCCC secretariat acknowledges the comprehensive analysis provided in the evaluation report on the relevance, effectiveness, and coherence of United Nations partnerships with non-governmental entities. The report underscores the critical role of partnerships in accelerating progress toward climate-focused Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action) and the overarching objectives of the Paris Agreement.

In line with the report's findings, we recognize the significant value of robust, inclusive, and innovative partnerships in achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. We particularly appreciate the following observations, which are highly relevant to our work:

- *The report's emphasis on the effectiveness of partnerships in driving decarbonization, reducing emissions, and facilitating knowledge transfer is especially welcome and resonates strongly.*

- *The evaluation highlights the critical role of partnerships in supporting policy design and capacity building for climate action, aligning well with the UNFCCC secretariat's mandate.*
- *The focus on leveraging partnerships to strengthen multilateralism and ensure a networked approach to climate action is particularly relevant to our role in facilitating international cooperation under the Paris Agreement.*
- *The identification of gaps in disability inclusion and Indigenous Peoples' participation in climate-focused partnerships is important. The UNFCCC process strives to demonstrate good practices in engaging these groups in climate action discussions, ensuring alignment with broader UN principles of equity and justice in the transition to low-carbon economies.*
- *The recommendation for a centralized repository for partnership data aligns closely with the objectives of the UN 2.0 initiative, to which the UNFCCC secretariat is fully committed.*

We extend our gratitude for this valuable evaluation, which provides actionable insights to strengthen the UN system's collective climate response. The findings will serve as a valuable resource in advancing the shared goals of the Paris Agreement.

Thank you once again for your efforts in preparing this thorough and impactful evaluation.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

UNDRR acknowledges receipt of this final draft and takes note of the observations outlined as opportunities for entities to strengthen their Climate Focused Partnerships. The evaluation report will be shared with the Senior Management Team so that the observations and lessons learnt can be taken into consideration in our future substantive work.