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# EVALUATION OF THE ZIMBABWE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FRAMEWORK (2022-2026)

Final Report



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## Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by the authors for the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Zimbabwe, for services specified in the Terms of Reference and contract of engagement. This is the report of an independent evaluation and the opinions expressed therein are those of the evaluation team, and do not necessarily reflect those of the UNCT. Responsibility for the opinions expressed therefore, rests solely with the authors.

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## Acronyms

<b>AfDB</b>	African Development Bank
<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
<b>ART</b>	Antiretroviral Therapy
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>AY4SF</b>	Adolescents & Youth for a Sustainable Future
<b>BEAM</b>	Basic Education Assistance Module
<b>BEmONC</b>	Basic Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care
<b>BOS</b>	Business Operations Strategy
<b>CCA</b>	Common Country Assessment
<b>CEDAW</b>	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
<b>CERF</b>	Central Emergency Response Fund
<b>CF</b>	Cooperation Framework
<b>CPD</b>	Country Programme Document
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DCO</b>	Development Cooperation Office
<b>DFDI</b>	Data for Development and Innovation
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>DTP3</b>	Diphtheria Tetanus Pertussis (Vaccine 3rd dose)
<b>ECA</b>	Economic Commission for Africa
<b>ECD</b>	Early Childhood Development
<b>EDF</b>	Education Development Fund
<b>EIB</b>	European Investment Bank
<b>EM</b>	Evaluation Manager
<b>EQ</b>	Evaluation Question
<b>ERG</b>	Evaluation Reference Group
<b>ERVHIZ</b>	Enhanced Resilience for Vulnerable Households in Zimbabwe
<b>EU</b>	European Union

<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>FLA</b>	Financial Landscape Analysis
<b>FM</b>	Frequency Modulation (Radio)
<b>GALS</b>	Gender Action Learning System
<b>GANHRI</b>	Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence
<b>GCF</b>	Green Climate Fund
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environment Facility
<b>GPE</b>	Global Partnership for Education
<b>HCFC</b>	Hydrochlorofluorocarbons
<b>HDF</b>	Health Development Fund
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>HFC</b>	Hydrofluorocarbons
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>HLPC</b>	High-Level Political Compact
<b>HRF</b>	Health Resilience Fund
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan
<b>HSCF</b>	Health Sector Coordination Framework
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>IDBZ</b>	Infrastructure Development Bank of Zimbabwe
<b>IDI</b>	In-Depth Interview
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration

<b>IP</b>	Implementing Partner
<b>IRBM</b>	Integrated Results-Based Management
<b>IRRC</b>	Integrated Resource Recovery Centre
<b>JICA</b>	Japan International Cooperation Agency
<b>JP</b>	Joint Programme
<b>JSC</b>	Joint Steering Committee
<b>JWP</b>	Joint Work Plan
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>KM</b>	Knowledge Management
<b>LNOB</b>	Leave No One Behind
<b>LTA</b>	Long-Term Agreement
<b>MCECs</b>	Material Cycle/Comm Recovery Centres (Contextual infrastructure term, not explicitly defined in text)
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MHTESTD</b>	Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development
<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
<b>MIS</b>	Management Information System
<b>MMR</b>	Maternal Mortality Ratio
<b>MNH</b>	Maternal and Neonatal Health
<b>MPSLSW</b>	Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare
<b>MSMEs</b>	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>NCMS</b>	National Case Management System
<b>NDCs</b>	Nationally Determined Contributions
<b>NDS1</b>	National Development Strategy 1
<b>NEET</b>	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NPRC</b>	National Peace and Reconciliation Commission
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>OECD/DAC</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee

<b>OMT</b>	Operations Management Team
<b>OPC</b>	Office of the President and Cabinet
<b>OPD</b>	Organizations of Persons with Disabilities
<b>PDC</b>	Provincial Development Committee
<b>PFM</b>	Public Finance Management
<b>PMT</b>	Programme Management Team
<b>PPT</b>	PowerPoint
<b>PRM</b>	Partnerships and Resource Mobilization
<b>PVO</b>	Private Voluntary Organization
<b>PWD</b>	Persons with Disabilities
<b>RBF</b>	Results-Based Financing
<b>RBM</b>	Results-Based Management
<b>RC</b>	Resident Coordinator
<b>RCO</b>	Resident Coordinator's Office
<b>REDD+</b>	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
<b>RG</b>	Results Group
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SH</b>	Stakeholders
<b>SIG</b>	School Improvement Grant
<b>SOGIESC</b>	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
<b>SP-MIS</b>	Social Protection Management Information System
<b>SRH</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>UHC</b>	Universal Health Coverage
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

<b>UNDAF</b>	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNDRR</b>	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>UNEG</b>	United Nations Evaluation Group
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNIDO</b>	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
<b>UNOPS</b>	United Nations Office for Project Services
<b>UNPRPD</b>	UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>UNSDCF</b>	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
<b>UPR</b>	Universal Periodic Review
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>VBU</b>	Village Business Unit
<b>VFC</b>	Victim Friendly Court
<b>VNR</b>	Voluntary National Review
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>ZDHS</b>	Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey
<b>ZEC</b>	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
<b>ZHRC</b>	Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission
<b>ZiG</b>	Zimbabwe Gold (currency)
<b>ZIM-ECO 2</b>	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Capacity Building Project Phase II
<b>ZIMSTAT</b>	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency
<b>ZimVAC</b>	Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee
<b>ZRBF</b>	Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund
<b>ZUNDAF</b>	Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<b>ZUNSDCF</b>	Zimbabwe United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

# Executive Summary

## Background and Introduction

The overall purpose of this evaluation was to independently assess the Zimbabwe UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2022–2026), examining its relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability in advancing national priorities under Vision 2030 and NDS1. The evaluation reviews progress across the four pillars of People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace, including five priority joint programmes and cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, youth empowerment, human rights, disability inclusion, and climate resilience. Covering activities from 2022 to mid-2025, the evaluation analyses the UN’s contributions, added value, coordination mechanisms, and partnerships. The evaluation is intended to serve the dual purpose of i) accountability for performance regarding commitments; and ii) learning, by generating lessons and good practices to inform the design of the next strategy, and support evidence-based decision-making.

Zimbabwe, a lower-middle-income country with strong growth potential, continues to face macroeconomic instability, climate shocks, high informality, and governance challenges that hinder progress toward Vision 2030 despite improvements in health, education, digital transformation, and climate policy. Economic growth slowed to 2% in 2024 but is projected to rebound to 6% in 2025, while inflation pressures, debt distress, and currency volatility persist. Social indicators show a young and growing population, high youth unemployment, and mixed progress on the SDGs, with advances in gender equality and education but stagnation in hunger, WASH, energy, and decent work. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation increasingly strain livelihoods, while democratic performance remains low due to weak rule of law, limited civic space, and governance deficits. These dynamics shape the operating context for the UN’s ZUNSDCF 2022–2026, which aligns with NDS1 and focuses on strengthening human development, climate resilience, inclusive economic transformation, and accountable governance.

## Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation used a theory-based, mixed-methods and utilisation-focused approach that was grounded in the ZUNSDCF Theory of Change, to assess the UN’s contribution, effectiveness, and lessons learned. The evaluation was guided by a set of evaluation questions which were clustered around the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)- Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria around of relevance including adaptability, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, orientation towards impact and sustainability, including cross-cutting priorities of gender and social inclusion, human rights and leaving no one behind. Following a stakeholder analysis and mapping of intervention partners, purposive sampling was used to identify respondents from three levels: UN system, national (donors, government and other implementing partners) and 4 provinces. Data were analysed through triangulation and contribution analysis to understand causal pathways and contextual influences. The process followed three phases: inception, data collection, and reporting, with strong stakeholder engagement, rigorous quality assurance, and strict ethical safeguards. Despite time constraints, mitigation measures ensured credible evidence and inclusive participation.

## Findings

### *Relevance and adaptability*

**Through the ZUNSDCF, the UN system has strategically aligned international cooperation with Zimbabwe’s NDS1 and Vision 2030**, with its four pillars mirroring government priorities and SDG commitments through joint governance co-led by the OPC and RCO. Government-led coordination, joint programming, and tangible gains in education, health, and resilience have strengthened national ownership and policy coherence. While the pillars’ theories of change remain largely sound,

stakeholders noted limited mechanisms to update priorities mid-cycle, and collective implementation across agencies requires further strengthening.

**The CF's four pillars has helped the UNCT focus on key priority areas**, including health, education, social protection, gender equality, climate resilience, and governance, in line with Vision 2030 and the SDGs. Despite fiscal constraints, the UN–Government partnership remains effective, though integration of economic transformation and environmental sustainability is still incomplete, underscoring the need for greater emphasis on livelihoods and more assertive engagement on sensitive governance issues such as transparency and anti-corruption.

**UN support under the CF has improved Zimbabwe's capacity to anticipate**, respond to, and recover from shocks, including health emergencies and climate-related crises, with strengthened early-warning systems and anticipatory action. However, adaptive capacity remains uneven, and inclusion gaps persist for persons with disabilities, migrants, and the urban poor.

### *Coherence*

**The CF has strengthened UN coordination and coherence in Zimbabwe** through structures such as the PMT, OMT, Results Groups, and the RCO, enabling more integrated planning, joint programming, and collective monitoring across the four pillars. Most agencies now align workplans with the ZUNSDCF, and joint programmes account for about half of delivery, improving resource mobilisation, reducing fragmentation, and enhancing policy influence. The RCO's neutral leadership has improved government alignment and fostered a more collaborative UNCT culture, while thematic groups have strengthened technical coordination, though performance varies.

**The UNCT's convening power is a major asset of the CF**, enabling more inclusive engagement with government, civil society, the private sector, academia, and development partners. The RCO has enhanced policy dialogue, donor coordination, and joint advocacy, becoming a trusted entry point for partners. However, coordination remains demanding, with ongoing challenges related to uneven agency integration, overlapping mandates, internal competition, and limited funding.

### *Efficiency*

**The CF has demonstrated increasing agility by prioritising needs and reallocating resources in response to changing circumstances**, particularly in emergencies and joint programming, though persistent funding, coordination, and bureaucratic constraints continue to limit timely and impactful delivery. The UN's contribution has centred on fiduciary assurance, targeted humanitarian and development financing, and institutional support for recovery, resilience, and governance despite shrinking ODA, global crises, and donor reticence.

**The RCO's resource mobilization and partnership strategy has strengthened joint donor engagement** and secured funding for several multi-agency initiatives, including youth employment, climate resilience, and social protection. However, financing remains largely earmarked, constraining flexibility. Joint programmes and pooled funds have attracted major partners including the EU, USAID, and the Green Climate Fund, and supported government access to climate and health financing, yet the UN has not fully leveraged its convening power to mobilise private-sector, diaspora, or blended finance. Resource flows remain heavily concentrated in the People Pillar, reflecting donor priorities, limited private-sector engagement, fragmented outreach, and broader structural economic constraints.

### *Effectiveness*

**The UN expanded social services, strengthened climate resilience, improved livelihoods, and supported governance by leveraging its convening power, technical expertise, and coordinated delivery across the four pillars.** Progress was enabled by strong government–UN coordination,

pooled funding, and joint programming aligned with national priorities, resulting in measurable gains for vulnerable populations and foundations for more resilient and inclusive development.

**Results across the pillars were mixed but meaningful.** The **People Pillar** delivered strong gains in health, education, and social protection, though rural water access, neonatal mortality, and sustainability of donor-dependent programmes remain concerns. The **Planet Pillar** showed solid progress in climate resilience, DRR, irrigation, and early-warning systems, but food insecurity and climate shocks continue to undermine outcomes. The **Prosperity Pillar** recorded limited progress due to high unemployment, weak data, and underfunded economic programmes, despite promising local livelihood initiatives. The **Peace Pillar** achieved modest governance improvements, including service delivery, legal reforms, and digitised justice, but many indicators remain at baseline due to funding and data gaps.

**Overall progress has been uneven**, constrained by funding limitations, system weaknesses, data gaps, especially under Prosperity and Peace; and recurrent economic and climate shocks that reversed some gains and threaten sustainability. Nonetheless, joint programmes such as Spotlight, HRF, and GPE demonstrate effective harmonised delivery, while stronger government–UN co-planning, early-warning systems, and social registries provide a foundation for scaling climate-smart development in the next CF cycle.

**Key lessons from implementation include** (1) the Theory of Change must be treated as a living tool, regularly updated to guide adaptive management amid shocks; (2) cross-pillar coherence needs strengthening, to improve synergies between social, economic, environmental, and governance interventions; (3) government coordination has been strong at national level but uneven sub-nationally, requiring deeper engagement with provinces and districts; (4) joint programming proved highly effective but needs more institutionalisation through shared budgets, pooled financing, and joint monitoring to maximise collective impact; and (5) the RCO’s central role in driving coherence is critical, yet under-resourced, and requires strengthened capacity to sustain strategic leadership, evidence-based coordination, and integrated policy engagement.

### *Cross-cutting priorities*

**The UNCT has effectively mainstreamed the principles of leaving no one behind, as well as cross-cutting priorities of human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, and environmental sustainability.** The UN advanced these priorities by driving key policy reforms, and strengthening systems for justice, gender, disability, and climate governance. Through joint programmes, it translated these reforms into tangible services such GBV support, disability inclusion, youth empowerment, and climate-resilient livelihoods; ensuring marginalized groups directly benefited. This linkage of policy, systems, and services enabled the UN to embed LNOB across sectors despite data, financing, and political constraints.

### *Orientation towards impact*

**Using wellbeing lenses as proxies for impact, evidence shows that the UN contributed to meaningful improvements in the lives of Zimbabweans** through coordinated support to national priorities. By strengthening frontline systems, expanding services, and building institutional capacity, the UN drove positive shifts across health, protection, resilience, and governance.

**Health gains** are evident in immunization, HIV treatment, and maternal services, while UN-supported social protection has helped stabilise household welfare amid economic instability, climate shocks, and labour market inequities. Progress in education has been constrained by economic and drought-related pressures, but protection services for women, children, and other vulnerable groups expanded significantly with UN support.

**UN assistance also strengthened climate resilience**, with all 92 local authorities implementing DRR programmes and growing adoption of climate-smart agriculture at household level. Governance

reforms advanced transparency, participation, and gender-responsive leadership, including strengthened compliance with international human rights obligations. Overall, UN support has improved institutional performance, influenced behaviours, and strengthened national systems, advancing progress toward the SDGs and Zimbabwe’s development vision.

### *Resilience building*

**The CF has driven a shift** from fragmented, reactive responses to more integrated, risk-informed, and inclusive development systems, strengthening both community and institutional capacity to manage shocks. UN financial support acted as a stabilising force, helping vulnerable communities cope with crises while reinforcing national systems for long-term resilience.

**Interventions in agriculture, education, health, and social protection strengthened adaptive capacity and self-reliance.** The ZRBF reached over 1.1 million people—mainly women and youth—through climate-smart agriculture, diversified livelihoods, and access to finance and insurance. Investments in irrigation, drought-tolerant crops, and environmental conservation helped reduce food insecurity from 56% in 2020 to 26% in 2023 and improved agricultural productivity.

**The scale-up of Village Business Units after the 2024 El Niño further boosted market-oriented, year-round production,** with over 10,000 VBUs institutionalised by government. Solarisation of health facilities and schools improved service continuity and resilience, saving an estimated 77,000 lives in 2024. However, macroeconomic instability, recurring climate shocks, and unilateral coercive measures continue to constrain resilience gains.

### *Sustainability*

**The CF has embedded sustainability through strong alignment with NDS1,** institutional capacity development, and attention to social and environmental inclusion. Its governance structures—led by the Joint Steering Committee, Results Groups, and national monitoring systems—have ensured policy coherence and strong government ownership.

**UN support has increasingly focused on upstream institutional strengthening,** including public finance, social protection, and climate risk management, enabling national institutions to take long-term responsibility. Social and environmental safeguards are well mainstreamed, though tracking of environmental outcomes remains weak. Financial sustainability is the main challenge, with over 80% of resources donor-funded and limited domestic financing, leaving many programmes vulnerable despite strong policy ownership and resource mobilisation efforts

### **Conclusions**

**The CF is strongly aligned with Vision 2030, NDS1, and the SDGs,** with clear theories of change and strong government ownership driving results in social sectors and governance. However, economic transformation, especially youth employment and private sector engagement was underemphasised, and delayed ToC updates limited adaptive decision-making amid changing macroeconomic and political conditions.

**RCO-led coordination improved coherence,** reduced duplication, and expanded joint programming, with neutrality fostering trust and accountability. Nonetheless, agency competition, uneven participation, and limited RCO resourcing continue to constrain full operational integration and joint accountability.

**The UNCT responded effectively to humanitarian shocks** through anticipatory action and early-warning systems but was less equipped to address macroeconomic instability and governance challenges, weakening resilience and transitions from crisis response to recovery.

**Joint donor engagement has improved**, yet heavy donor dependence means priorities remain funding driven. Less than half of CF resources were mobilised, with financing skewed toward humanitarian and social sectors, high earmarking, and limited flexibility to address underfunded priorities.

**The CF delivered strong results for vulnerable groups in health, education, social protection, and resilience**, but outcomes were uneven. Economic transformation and youth employment lagged due to underfunding, limited engagement of economic agencies, and reliance on short-term interventions, while sustainability was constrained by fiscal limits and recurring shocks.

**The CF strengthened national systems and community resilience** through durable investments, but sustainability is uneven. Promising approaches such as anticipatory action and area-based convergence remain insufficiently institutionalised and underfunded, with declining and earmarked ODA posing ongoing risks.

**CF sustainability is moderate**, strongest where national systems and policies were reinforced, but fragile due to donor dependence, weak fiscal space, and uneven institutional integration. Despite strong alignment with national planning and upstream policy support, long-term sustainability remains constrained by limited domestic financing.

## **Recommendations**

**The UNCT should rebalance the next CF portfolio to prioritize concrete actions that advance structural economic transformation, market development, governance reforms, and macro-level resilience.** The CF should integrate employment, enterprise development, and digital inclusion across all pillars, leveraging agencies like UNIDO, ECA, and UNCTAD, and stronger UN–private sector platforms complemented by deeper collaboration with the World Bank and IMF to align macroeconomic dialogue with inclusive growth.

**The UNCT should advocate for and support the national government in strengthening devolution** by anchoring this explicitly in the CF through a dedicated outcome or cross-cutting result, supported by provincial analysis, capacity-building, inclusive consultations, and scaled place-based programming to improve equitable service delivery.

**The UNCT should strengthen strategic adaptability by embedding adaptive management practices within the CF, using evidence and results data to enable timely course correction**, using real-time data, strengthened RBM, and clear adaptive management triggers to keep the framework responsive to evolving risks and shocks.

**In line with UN reforms, the Results Groups should consolidate joint programming as the default modality for UN cooperation, with support and oversight from the PMT**, supported by a unified resource mobilization strategy, and incentives from HQ to reward country-level heads of agencies for joint programming and resource mobilisation.

**The UNCT should strengthen cross-pillar coherence through shared priorities**, joint indicators, and integrated data systems, while securing predictable funding and enhanced capacity for the RCO to lead coordination, monitoring, and UN–government alignment.

**The UNCT should systematize knowledge management through a unified learning strategy**, regular Results Group learning cycles, shared dashboards, and joint UN–government analytics to strengthen evidence-based decision-making and accountability.

**The UNCT should improve sustainability by embedding successful models into national systems**, co-developing exit strategies, expanding pooled and blended financing, strengthening SDG-aligned budgeting, and deepening private-sector and sub-national capacity to sustain results.

# 1. Introduction

This Final Evaluation Report presents findings and analysis from the independent evaluation of the Zimbabwe United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (ZUNSDCF) 2022–2026, conducted between September and November 2025. Commissioned by the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Zimbabwe, the evaluation assesses the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of the Framework in supporting national priorities outlined in Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1).

The evaluation serves as both a mirror and a compass—reflecting the UN system’s progress in Zimbabwe over the past four years and guiding future efforts toward a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development path. It draws on the lived experiences of Zimbabweans, incorporating insights from government, civil society, donors, and communities, underpinned by robust evidence.

The ZUNSDCF marked a shift from fragmented assistance to a coherent, integrated, and results-based cooperation model. It aimed to align UN support with national priorities and the SDGs while keeping people—especially those furthest behind—at the centre of development. This evaluation examines how effectively that vision has been realized.

## 1.1. Purpose and specific objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation provides evidence on the progress, achievements, and lessons from implementing the ZUNSDCF. Its findings will inform the next Cooperation Framework (CF) and enhance the UN’s contribution to Zimbabwe’s national development priorities. As outlined in the Terms of Reference, the evaluation was to serve two main purposes:

**Accountability:** It objectively assesses results achieved and the effectiveness of strategies and interventions, enabling stakeholders—including government and donors—to hold the UN Country Team (UNCT) and partners accountable for their commitments.

**Learning and improvement:** It offers insights to strengthen programming, coordination, and decision-making for the next CF cycle. By documenting good practices and lessons learned, the evaluation also contributes to broader UN learning through the Development Cooperation Office (DCO).

*The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:*

- Assess the UN’s contribution to national development results using evidence-based evaluation criteria (accountability).
- Identify factors influencing UN performance, including key enablers and bottlenecks (learning).
- Draw conclusions on the UN’s overall contribution across the evaluated scope.
- Provide actionable, evidence-based recommendations and draw out lessons, to strengthen the UN’s future Cooperation Framework.

Table 1 below identifies the primary and secondary intended users of the evaluation. Primary users are the main audience, defining the requirement for utilization, while secondary users are key stakeholders whose needs also shape the process and report. The evaluation supports decision-making for primary users, contributes to a broader evidence base for secondary users, and informs the UNCT’s strategic positioning at national and subnational levels—reflecting ZUNSDCF implementation contexts, NDS1 progress, and preparations for the next Cooperation Framework.

Table 1: Intended users and uses of the evaluation

	Accountability	Decision-making	Learning
<b>UNCT (Programme Management Team (PMT), including the Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO))</b>	Primary	Primary	Primary
<b>Partners (Government, Civil Society)</b>	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary
<b>Donors</b>	Secondary	Secondary	Primary

## 1.2. Scope and Subject of the Evaluation

The evaluation of the ZUNSDCF (2022–2026) covers all strategic priorities, outcomes, and outputs, assessing progress across its four pillars using the UN Country Common Assessment (CCA), the 2024 Voluntary National Review (VNR), and other national data sources. It reviews both expected and unintended results, evaluating how effectively the Framework has delivered coherent, sustainable, and cost-efficient support to UN system outcomes and Zimbabwe’s national priorities under the 2030 Agenda. Cross-cutting issues: gender equality, youth empowerment, human rights, non-discrimination, disability inclusion, and climate resilience; are integrated throughout the analysis to ensure a comprehensive assessment of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

### 1.2.1 Programmatic Scope

The evaluation prioritised five joint programmes selected for primary field data collection because of their coverage and representation of the four pillars. These are:

- Global Partnership for Education (GPE)
- Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Capacity Building Project Phase II (ZIM-ECO 2)
- Enhanced Resilience for Vulnerable Households in Zimbabwe (ERVHIZ)
- Health Resilience Fund
- Zimbabwe Joint SDG Fund Programme

In addition to the above, joint programmes implemented between 2022 and 2025 that have already been evaluated were reviewed using existing secondary data. Where relevant, individual UN agency programmes were examined through key informant interviews with selected partners. No primary data are collected at the project level; instead, existing evaluations inform the overall assessment of the Cooperation Framework. The evaluation also reviewed joint UN interventions coordinated through thematic groups—such as Gender, Youth, and Disability—to assess their role in enhancing integration, coherence, and cross-sectoral collaboration.

### 1.2.2 Stakeholder Scope

The evaluation gathered perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders, including government ministries, the Office of the President and Cabinet, and development partners funding the five joint programmes. Interviews and surveys explore alignment, funding, the UN’s added value, and contributions to national SDG goals. Guided by the Cooperation Framework’s principles—human rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability, results-based management, and capacity development—it assesses how well these are integrated into design, implementation, and results. To ensure inclusivity, the evaluation engages marginalised groups such as women, youth, rural communities, persons with disabilities, people living with chronic illnesses, and internally displaced persons, as well as representatives from academia, civil society, the private sector, and international financial institutions.

### 1.2.3 Temporal and Geographic Scope

The temporal scope of the evaluation covered the period from January 2022 to June 2025. The geographic scope encompasses interventions at both national and sub-national levels. At the sub-national level, four provinces were purposely selected through a transparent sampling process to provide a representative picture of progress across different contexts. The selection of provinces and interventions was undertaken in consultation with the UN Country Team (UNCT) and the Government of Zimbabwe to ensure fairness, balance, and relevance.

### 1.3 Evaluation Subject

The evaluation examined the performance and contribution of the ZUNSDCF to Zimbabwe’s national development priorities and the SDGs. As the UN’s collective response to the country’s development challenges (2022–2026), the Framework aligns all UN efforts with Vision 2030 and NDS1 (2021–2025). The evaluation assessed results achieved across the Framework’s four strategic pillars.

**People** - Enhancing access to quality social services and protection, especially for women, girls, and marginalized communities.

**Planet** - Promoting environmental sustainability, climate resilience, and robust food systems.

**Prosperity** - Supporting inclusive and sustainable economic growth with decent employment opportunities.

**Peace** - Strengthening accountable institutions, rule of law, human rights, and access to justice.

The evaluation examines how UN interventions across the four pillars have advanced national priorities, focusing on results, partnerships, and the UN’s added value. It assesses collaboration through the Resident Coordinator’s Office, Results Groups, and joint programmes to enhance coherence and impact. Cross-cutting issues: gender equality, human rights, resilience, youth empowerment, and disability inclusion; are reviewed for their integration across the Framework. The evaluation also assesses the UN’s comparative advantage in fostering partnerships, driving innovation, and supporting evidence-based policymaking. Overall, it appraises how effectively the ZUNSDCF has advanced sustainable development and how the UN system is positioned to address emerging national challenges and opportunities.

### 1.4 Evaluation Questions

The evaluation team streamlined the original 15 questions in the Terms of Reference (ToR) – Annex 1; into 13 overarching evaluation questions, as shown in Table 2 below. This was done to avoid overlaps in the questions and to ensure coherence. First, the two questions on sustainability were merged and streamlined into one question because of overlaps and similarities. Secondly, the original third question under coordination was streamlined with the first question on coherence to become EQ3. The questions are grouped under the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) evaluation criteria of relevance and adaptability, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, coordination, impact orientation, and sustainability. A detailed evaluation matrix of the questions and sub-questions can be found in Annex 2.

Table 2: Evaluation questions, based on OECD-DAC criteria and others

Evaluation Criteria	Streamlined Evaluation Question (EQ)
<b>Relevance and Adaptability</b>	EQ1: To what extent are ZUNSDCF objectives aligned with Zimbabwe’s national priorities, regional and global agenda (NDS1, Vision 2030, AU65, SDGs)?
	EQ2: How effectively has the CF adapted to unforeseen needs such as economic, political and social shocks and natural disasters, especially for vulnerable and marginalised groups?
<b>Coherence</b>	EQ3: To what extent has the CF enhanced coordination and fostered partnerships among UNCT members, and with civil society, the private sector, national and local government, legislature, and other national institutions?

	EQ4: How effectively has the ZUNSDCF promoted complementarity and avoided duplication with other development partners (bilateral and multilateral)?
<b>Effectiveness</b>	EQ5: To what extent has the ZUNSDCF achieved its intended results, especially for marginalized populations?
	EQ6: How effectively has the UN system under the CF promoted human rights, gender equality, youth inclusion, disability inclusion, and environmental sustainability?
<b>Efficiency</b>	EQ7: To what extent has the ZUNSDCF prioritized activities based on needs rather than resource availability, and has reallocation been used to respond to evolving circumstances?
	EQ8: How efficiently have UN entities disbursed funds, mobilised resources and facilitated access to additional financing for national partners?
<b>Coordination</b>	EQ9: After the UN reform, to what extent have UN agency workplans been derived from the ZUNSDCF in both design and implementation?
	EQ10: How has the Resident Coordinator’s office contributed to improved UNCT coherence and joint convening power?
<b>Orientation Towards Impact</b>	EQ11: To what extent have ZUNSDCF interventions improved the lives of those often left behind?
	EQ12: How have ZUNSDCF programmes contributed to strengthening institutional and individual resilience and reduced vulnerability to shocks and crises?
<b>Sustainability</b>	EQ13: What mechanisms exist to ensure the socio-political, institutional, financial, and environmental sustainability of ZUNSDCF results?

## 1.5. Structure of the Report

In this document, the previous section is the **executive summary**, which provides an overall synopsis of the evaluation. This section (**introduction**) outlines the purpose, subject, scope, and objectives of the evaluation, as well as the evaluation questions and the structure of the report.

**Section 2** provides the **country context**, presenting an overview of Zimbabwe’s socio-economic and political situation, key development challenges and opportunities, and national priorities under Vision 2030 and National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1). It situates the Cooperation Framework within these national and global frameworks.

**Section 3 (Methodology)** details the evaluation design, data collection methods, and data analysis processes. It also outlines how the evaluation complies with United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards and integrates the UN programming principles of gender equality, human rights, social inclusion, and leaving no one behind. The section further discusses evaluation governance, ethical considerations, and limitations encountered during implementation.

**Section 4 (Findings)** presents the key evaluation findings and assessments, structured around the OECD-DAC criteria and the UN programming principles. It explains not only ‘what’ changes occurred but also ‘why’ they occurred, highlighting lessons that can inform future programming.

**Section 5 (Conclusions)** summarises the main evaluative judgements, drawing together evidence from across the findings to provide a coherent picture of the UN’s contribution to Zimbabwe’s development outcomes.

**Section 6 (Recommendations)** offers actionable, forward-looking guidance based on the evaluation results and conclusions. These recommendations are intended to inform the next Cooperation Framework and strengthen the UN’s strategic positioning and delivery in Zimbabwe.

Together, these sections provide a comprehensive and coherent account of the evaluation process, findings, and implications, ensuring transparency, credibility, and practical utility for decision-making and learning.

The **annex section** includes the Terms of Reference for the evaluation, the evaluation matrix and data collection tools, detailed sampling frame, the list of stakeholders consulted, reference documents reviewed, and summaries of field notes from the Provincial visits which highlights the achievements of the ZUNSDCF during the evaluation period (2022–2025).

## 2. Country Context

### 2.1 Context

Zimbabwe, a lower-middle-income country in Sub-Saharan Africa, has strong growth potential driven by its skilled workforce, natural resources, and strategic location. However, persistent macroeconomic and development challenges continue to impede its goal of achieving upper-middle-income status by 2030.<sup>1</sup> According to the World Bank<sup>2</sup> Zimbabwe's GDP stood at approximately \$44.19 billion in 2024, with a GDP per capita of \$2,656.41. Economic growth slowed from 5.3% in 2023<sup>3</sup> to 2% in 2024 due to El Niño-related droughts, declining mineral prices, and ongoing macroeconomic instability. However, the 2025 National Budget projects a 6% growth, driven by strong recoveries in agriculture (12.8%), electricity generation (10.6%), ICT (9.9%), and mining (5.6%).<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1: Zimbabwe: Capital with Major Cities



Map Sources: ESRI, UNCS, The Times Atlas of the World.

The introduction of the Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG) currency in April 2024 initially stabilized prices, but this stability was lost in late 2024 following fiscal slippages and a significant currency devaluation. However, the subsequent adoption of tight monetary policy measures (including a steep interest rate hike) helped restore exchange rate consistency and moderate month-on-month inflation throughout

<sup>1</sup> [Zimbabwe Overview: Development news, research, data | World Bank](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Economy | Zimbabwe | World Bank Data360](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099013025065013130/pdf/P507080-79273934-3058-455d-9d65-9c295d34cc66.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [zimtreasury.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2025-National-Budget-Statement-FINAL.pdf](#) -see p23 and table 5 on p.24 with sectorial breakdown of GDP growth.

2025. While the local currency still struggles against the US Dollar in a heavily dollarized economy, the widening gap between the official and parallel market rates has significantly narrowed through 2025, indicating a return to relative stability.<sup>5 6 7 8</sup> Public debt reached \$21.2 billion in 2023, accounting for 96.6% of GDP, largely driven by external arrears and increased capital spending.<sup>9</sup> The IMF's 2025 Article IV consultation emphasized the need for fiscal consolidation, stronger public financial management, and greater transparency in monetary and exchange rate policies to restore macroeconomic stability and build investor confidence.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) 2022 Population and Housing Census Report (released 2023), Zimbabwe's population stands at 15,178,979,<sup>11</sup> and is projected to reach 25.9 million by 2050. About 22% are under 15, 73.2% are aged 15–64, and 4.8% are over 65. Life expectancy rose from 45.7 years in 2000 to 58.5 in 2021, with healthy life expectancy increasing from 40.5 to 51.2 years. According to the 2025 ZIMSTAT Q2 Labour Force Survey, the working-age population is 8.5 million, with a 47.1% labour force participation rate and 37.3% employment-to-population ratio. Employment is 35.8% formal, 58.5% informal, and 5.7% household/community based. Unemployment stands at 20.7% (37.1% expanded), while 49.2% of youth (15–35) are not in employment, education, or training (NEET)-highlighting key challenges for the NDS1 decent work and inclusivity agenda.

WHO's 2023 Annual Report highlights Zimbabwe's efforts to strengthen health systems, combat infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, and address noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular conditions. The country also made strides in maternal and child health and responded effectively to cholera outbreaks<sup>12</sup>. Complementing WHO's efforts, UNDP supported health system resilience through digital supply chain systems and renewable energy for health facilities.<sup>13</sup>

Zimbabwe has demonstrated a strong commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aligning its national development frameworks particularly the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) 2021–2025<sup>14</sup> with SDG targets and principles. The country has participated in three Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), with the most recent presented in July 2024, reflecting a consultative and inclusive approach to tracking progress. Despite these efforts, Zimbabwe's overall performance on the SDGs remains mixed. According to the Sustainable Development Report 2025<sup>15</sup> Zimbabwe ranks 137th out of 167 countries on the global SDG Index, with a score of 57.41. This marks a decline from Zimbabwe's 2019 SDG Index ranking of 121st to 134th in 2023, indicating stagnation across multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2024 UN Common Country Analysis (CCA)<sup>16</sup> the report notes that while progress on many SDGs has stalled—particularly on Zero Hunger, Clean Water, Clean Energy, Decent Work, Health, Industry, Cities, Life on Land, Peace, and Partnerships—due to economic challenges, droughts, and COVID-19 impacts, Zimbabwe has advanced in education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5). Education

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<sup>5</sup> [ZIMBABWE MPO](#)

<sup>6</sup> [MPC - Monetary Policy Committee Press Statement 27J Sept 2024](#)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2025/English/1zweea2025001-source-pdf.ashx>

<sup>8</sup> [Microsoft Word - CONSOLIDATED MPS APRIL 2024 Final Draft.docx](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Zimbabwe Overview: Development news, research, data | World Bank](#)

<sup>10</sup> [IMF Staff Completes 2025 Article IV Mission to Zimbabwe](#)

<sup>11</sup> [2022 population and housing census preliminary report on population figures.pdf](#)

<sup>12</sup> [WHO Zimbabwe 2023 Annual Report | WHO | Regional Office for Africa](#)

<sup>13</sup> [2024 Annual Report | UNDP Zimbabwe | People](#)

<sup>14</sup> [National Development Strategy Document Final web](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Sustainable Development Report 2025](#)

<sup>16</sup> [UNCT\\_ZW\\_CommonCountryAnalysis\\_2024.pdf](#)

enrolment and completion rates have improved, and female representation in local councils rose to 42% following a 30% quota system.

The country has also launched initiatives such as the Presidential Borehole Drilling Programme, targeting 35,000 villages and 10,000 schools to improve access to clean water and nutrition<sup>17</sup>. The third VNR also reported improvements in life expectancy, which rose from 38 years in 2012 to 64.7 years in 2022, and a reduction in maternal mortality from 614 to 362 per 100,000 live births. Nonetheless, challenges persist, including data gaps, limited disaggregation, and weak infrastructure in areas such as clean water (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7), and employment (SDG 8).

Human capital development remains central to Zimbabwe's progress toward sustainable growth and resilience. However, the 2025 Human Development Report warns that global human development gains have slowed, with widening gaps between high and low HDI countries. In this context, leveraging technology, particularly artificial intelligence, presents both opportunities and risks. AI can enhance human capital by personalizing education, improving healthcare delivery, and making advanced expertise more accessible, even in resource-constrained settings. Yet these benefits depend on deliberate investments in foundational capabilities such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and equitable access to technology. Without such investments, AI could deepen existing inequalities rather than bridge them. Building a 'complementarity economy,' where AI augments rather than replaces human skills, is therefore critical to unlocking Zimbabwe's demographic dividend and accelerating progress toward Vision 2030.<sup>18</sup>

Zimbabwe is undergoing a digital transformation that is reshaping its development landscape. With over 7.1 million mobile wallet holders and 96 percent of formal sector transactions conducted digitally, the country has made significant strides in digital financial inclusion. However, the digital divide remains a persistent challenge, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized groups.<sup>19</sup> UNDP emphasizes that the digital divide is not just about access, but also about affordability, content relevance, and the ability to use digital tools meaningfully. Women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural populations are disproportionately affected by these barriers.<sup>20</sup> The Government of Zimbabwe, through its National ICT Policy (2022–2027) and the Smart Zimbabwe 2030 Master Plan, has prioritized digital transformation as a cross-cutting enabler of development.<sup>21</sup> These frameworks aim to reduce the urban-rural divide, expand ICT infrastructure, and promote digital literacy and innovation across sectors such as education, health, agriculture, and governance.<sup>22</sup> UNDP and other UN agencies have supported these efforts by investing in digital public infrastructure, promoting inclusive digital services, and piloting AI-based tools in agriculture and climate resilience. For example, UNDP has helped install automatic weather stations and hydro-gauging systems in rural districts, enabling communities to access real-time data for disaster preparedness.<sup>23</sup>

Zimbabwe's diverse ecosystems (savannas, forests, wetlands, and rich biodiversity) support agriculture, tourism, and rural livelihoods but face mounting pressure from human activity and climate change. Deforestation, poaching, and land conversion are driving biodiversity loss, with forest cover shrinking by about 36,800 hectares annually. Forests still cover roughly 31% of the land, support 5.3 million rural people, and contribute about 4% of GDP, highlighting their vital economic and ecological

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<sup>17</sup> [https://unosd.un.org/sites/unosd.un.org/files/session\\_1\\_mr\\_tawanda\\_chitambara\\_zimbabwe.pdf](https://unosd.un.org/sites/unosd.un.org/files/session_1_mr_tawanda_chitambara_zimbabwe.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> [hdr2025reporten\\_2.pdf](#)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/zimbabwe/publication/digital-transformation-a-key-enabler-of-long-term-resilient-growth-in-zimbabwe>

<sup>20</sup> [The evolving digital divide | United Nations Development Programme](#)

<sup>21</sup> [SMART ZIMBABWE 2030 MASTER PLAN](#)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> [Zimbabwe's AI Moment: A New Chapter for Human Development | United Nations Development Programme](#)

role.<sup>24</sup> Climate change is intensifying Zimbabwe’s challenges, with rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and frequent droughts and storms—including Cyclone Idai—damaging agriculture and rural livelihoods. Shifting agro-ecological zones and water scarcity have worsened food insecurity and resource competition.<sup>25</sup> In response, Zimbabwe has strengthened its climate policies, raising its emission reduction target from 33% to 40% in its updated NDCs and advancing REDD+ initiatives to curb deforestation and promote sustainable livelihoods.<sup>26</sup> The Government is also promoting a biodiversity economy, identifying investment opportunities in wildlife tourism, forestry, fisheries, and bio trade. With over a quarter of land under formal protection, these efforts signal opportunities to align conservation with inclusive, sustainable growth.<sup>27</sup>

The updated 2024 Common Country Analysis<sup>28</sup> shows that Zimbabwe continues to face structural challenges and emerging risks affecting its development path. Although the Human Development Index rose slightly to 0.550 in 2022, the country fell 13 global ranks, showing slower progress than peers. SDG gains in gender equality and climate action are offset by stagnation in hunger, WASH, energy, and decent work. The 2023–2024 El Niño drought left six million food-insecure and 2.6 million facing water shortages. Macroeconomic instability, debt distress, and limited fiscal space restrict social investment, while 38% youth unemployment and high informality hinder inclusive growth. These challenges highlight the need for resilience, social protection, and governance reforms, alongside more integrated humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts to achieve Vision 2030.

In the three categories of the [Global State of Democracy Framework](#), Zimbabwe has low [ratings](#) for Representation, Rights and Rule of Law. However, the country has mid-range ratings for Participation. [For Rights and the Rule of Law, it is grouped among the bottom 25 percent of countries assessed, and this is due to multiple factors, including weaknesses in rule of law and justice, where it struggles with a severe absence of corruption and concerns over judicial independence. Reports highlight that high-level graft rarely results in successful prosecutions, while access to the justice system remains limited for many citizens, particularly women survivors of all forms of violence, and political activists.](#) Civil liberties and rights are also severely constrained, with repressive legislation, such as the widely contested Private Voluntary Organization (PVO) Amendment Act (signed into law in April 2025), grants the government broad power to interfere with civil society, effectively shrinking civic space and undermining fundamental rights.

Political accountability remains weak, as recent elections were marred by widespread allegations of voter intimidation and bureaucratic irregularities, contributing to low confidence in the integrity of the electoral process and the representation of the populace.

Table 3: Global ranking of Zimbabwe per category of democratic performance in 2024

Performance indicator	Ranking among 173 Countries
Representation	116
Rights	118
Rule of law	147
Participation	111

<sup>24</sup> [zimbabwe\\_frel\\_submission\\_to\\_unfccc\\_2024.pdf](#)

<sup>25</sup> [ZBE Report Final Copy - 080923.pdf](#)

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

<sup>28</sup> [0e022e67-c110-4d20-b45c-44fbb1ae87aa\\_Draft CCA with new guidelines 300924.docx](#)

Other related key issues include significant human rights violations, including political violence, and intimidation of the opposition and civil society, which are heavily monitored. The judiciary and other state institutions are not only politicized but increasingly becoming militarised. Despite constitutional protections, rule of law and due process are frequently not enforced, with security forces often acting with impunity.

Compared to five years ago, Zimbabwe has experienced notable declines in Economic Equality and Access to Justice. It is a lower-middle income country with an [economy](#) driven by the agricultural, mining, and tourism sectors. Since the 1990s, it has experienced [multiple currency crises](#) and its economy faces many challenges, including vulnerability to [climate shocks](#), [debt distress](#), [sanctions](#) and [corruption](#). Poverty, unemployment and income inequality are [high](#).

These socio-economic, environmental, and governance dynamics collectively shape the operating context of the ZUNSDCF. They underline the relevance of its four strategic pillars - People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace in addressing systemic inequalities, strengthening resilience, and promoting accountable governance toward Vision 2030.

## 2.2 UN Strategic response and Country Programme

The Zimbabwe United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (ZUNSDCF) 2022–2026 builds upon the foundations laid by the Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework (ZUNDAF) 2016–2020, reflecting a strategic evolution in the UN’s engagement with Zimbabwe. While ZUNDAF focused on sectoral support for poverty reduction, governance, gender equality, and service delivery, ZUNSDCF adopts a more integrated and results-based approach aligned with Zimbabwe’s Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) 2021–2025 (United Nations Zimbabwe, 2021). The transition from ZUNDAF to ZUNSDCF is driven by the need to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), enhance coordination among stakeholders, and respond to emerging challenges such as climate change, economic instability, and social inequality. ZUNSDCF incorporates lessons learned from ZUNDAF, emphasizing inclusive growth, resilience building, human rights, and transformative partnerships, thereby marking a shift from development assistance to strategic cooperation (United Nations Zimbabwe, 2021)

NDS1 is the country’s first five-year medium-term plan designed to operationalise Vision 2030, a national aspiration to become an upper-middle-income society by 2030. NDS1 is structured around 14 national priority areas, each designed to catalyse inclusive and sustainable development as summarised below:

- Economic Growth and Stability
- Food and Nutrition Security
- Governance
- Moving the Economy up the Value Chain and Structural Transformation
- Human Capital Development
- Environmental Protection, Climate Resilience and Natural Resource Management
- Housing Delivery
- Digital Economy
- Health and Well-being
- Infrastructure and Utilities
- Image Building and International Engagement and Re-Engagement
- Social Protection
- Youth, Sport and Culture
- Devolution

To ensure effective delivery, NDS1 is anchored in a robust implementation architecture consisting of the following components

- **Results-Based Management (RBM):** Anchored in performance indicators and monitoring systems.
- **Integrated Results Framework:** Links national targets with SDG indicators.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Includes civil society, private sector, and development partners.
- **Communication Strategy:** Enhances public awareness and accountability (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2020; United Nations Zimbabwe, 2020).

NDS1 is designed to align with the SDGs and Africa’s Agenda 2063. The strategy adopts the SDG principle of “leaving no one and no place behind,” ensuring that development is inclusive, equitable, and sustainable (United Nations Zimbabwe, 2020).

Zimbabwe’s National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025) is closely aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), serving as a national roadmap toward inclusive and sustainable development. NDS1 integrates SDG principles into its 14 priority areas, including poverty reduction, health, education, gender equality, and climate resilience, thereby operationalising Vision 2030 through a domesticated SDG framework (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2020). Ministries and agencies have aligned their plans and budgets to NDS1 and the SDGs, adopting a Whole-of-Government Performance Management approach to ensure coherence and impact (Chaturuka, 2023). The strategy also emphasises localising SDGs through national planning, budgeting, and monitoring systems. NDS1’s monitoring and evaluation framework is designed to track progress against both national targets and SDG indicators, reinforcing Zimbabwe’s commitment to Agenda 2030 and Africa’s Agenda 2063 (Ministry of Mines, 2023). It also encourages partnerships with UN agencies, the World Bank, and civil society to support implementation (United Nations Zimbabwe, 2020).

### 2.3 Strategic Pillars and Outcomes

The ZUNSDCF 2022–2026 is the UN’s main framework for supporting Zimbabwe’s national development priorities. Aligned with Vision 2030 and NDS1, it shifts from fragmented programming to a coherent, results-based approach that promotes national ownership, inclusivity, and transformative change. As a strategic, participatory roadmap, it aligns national priorities with global commitments while driving cross-sectoral transformation (United Nations Zimbabwe, 2021). The ZUNSDCF is structured around four strategic intervention pillars, each designed to address key development challenges while promoting equity, resilience, and sustainability. The four pillars and their outcome statements are summarised in Table 4 below. Annex 3 elaborates this table to include participating agencies, resources and funding gaps.

Table 4: ZUNSDCF strategic pillars and outcomes

Strategic pillar	Expected outcomes
<b>People:</b> People-centred, inclusive, equitable human development and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improved access to quality, inclusive education, health, nutrition, and social protection</li> <li>● Strengthened systems for gender equality, youth empowerment, and protection of vulnerable populations</li> </ul>
<b>Planet:</b> Environmental protection, climate resilience and natural resources management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improved implementation of climate adaptation and mitigation practices</li> <li>● Enhanced biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resource use</li> <li>● Improved disaster preparedness and resilience to climate shocks</li> </ul>
<b>Prosperity:</b> Economic transformation, equitable and inclusive growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enhanced productivity, decent work, and economic opportunities, especially for women and youth</li> <li>● Strengthened climate-smart agriculture and inclusive food systems</li> <li>● Improved access to sustainable energy, infrastructure, and digital technologies</li> </ul>
<b>Peace:</b> Transformative, accountable, equitable and inclusive governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthened rule of law, access to justice, and protection of human rights</li> <li>● Enhanced civic participation, transparency, and accountability</li> <li>● Improved capacities for conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and social cohesion</li> </ul>

The CF's research, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms envisage periodic research, assessments and special studies to strengthen evidence generation to inform the UNSDCF implementation and/or SDG policy advocacy. Participating agencies were expected to support implementation of the National Data Strategy to strengthen monitoring of SGD and NDS progress. The CF Evaluation will assess how well the UNCT has developed a joint research and data strategy which was envisioned to strengthen data availability, data mining and visualisation to produce evidence-based reports and working papers on sustainable development. Through the UN M&E Team and the Data for Development Working Group, the UNCT also planned to collect Baseline data per CF Outcome and output indicator, including all relevant disaggregation to enable analysis of cross-cutting issues such as human rights, gender-responsiveness, youth inclusivity and leaving no one behind principles. Baseline data would inform the work of UN including sharpening focus and strategy.

All relevant Results Groups and with support from the M&E Team were expected to steer development of Joint Annual Work Plans, to ensure coherence and collective delivery of CF and adaptation of the UNCT support to the changes in context, informed by the updated Common Country Assessment, and national priorities. The Evaluation will interrogate the effectiveness of these institutional arrangements, in generating information for decision-making and timely adaptation in CF implementation strategy. Risk management and situational monitoring tools such as the CCA will be analysed to better understand how the UNCT responded to risks and kept the CF on course.

CF annual reviews and mid-year strategic priority performance reviews were envisaged, to enable the UN to reflect upon the overall progress towards outcomes. Hence, the Evaluation Team will engage the PMT, the UN M&E Team and Results Group leads to confirm the utility of these reviews in helping the UNCT to devise strategies to accelerate the implementation of SP annual work plan interventions.

It was foreseen that the Operation Management Team of the UN would conduct mid-year and End of Year Reviews of the OMT work plan and the Business Operations Strategy (BOS). The CF will assess the extent to which the UNCT systematically conducted joint programme and thematic evaluations, how the results were utilised to distil lessons and make use of the reports produced. Joint planning of among the UN and with the Government, of programme and thematic evaluations will be interrogated to gauge utility for all stakeholders. The extent to which, the UN deepened its partnerships with the Government in results monitoring and measurement, including participation of Government agencies at the sub-national (provincial, district and local levels), including with relevant line ministries and state institutions, will be assessed. In this regard, Government's leadership of and participation in mechanisms such as the Joint Steering Committee, Results Groups and technical level committees to design and monitor projects, will be examined.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Overall Approach

The ZUNSDCF 2022–2026 evaluation uses a **theory-based, mixed-methods** approach combining accountability and learning. Grounded in the CF's Theory of Change, it assesses UN performance and identifies lessons to strengthen future cooperation. Using contribution and theory of change analyses, the evaluation examines how and why change occurred and the UN's role in achieving results. The contribution analysis approach includes several key elements:

- **Revising and validating** the ZUNSDCF ToC to confirm its internal logic and underlying assumptions.
- **Documenting evidence** in a performance story that compares planned and actual achievements, identifies lessons learned, and explains the factors that have influenced outcomes.

- **Building a contribution story** that systematically assembles primary and secondary evidence into a consolidated narrative demonstrating the UN’s contribution to results across the four strategic pillars.

This approach enables the evaluation to go beyond measuring outputs and focus on understanding the causal pathways that link UN interventions to outcomes and impact, considering contextual influences and other contributing actors.

The evaluation is **utilisation-focused**, ensuring findings are relevant and practical for the UNCT, Government of Zimbabwe, partners, and civil society. Ongoing stakeholder engagement promotes ownership and use of results in planning and decision-making. It follows UNEG Norms and OECD-DAC criteria—relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability—while integrating UN principles of human rights, gender equality, resilience, environmental sustainability, disability inclusion, and leaving no one behind. The mixed-methods design combines qualitative and quantitative evidence for robust triangulation as follows:

- A structured **desk review** of UN, government, and partner documents
- **Key informant interviews (KIIs)** with government officials, UN staff, donors, and partners
- **Focus group discussions (FGDs)** at community level

This combination ensures robust, credible findings that reflect the perspectives of diverse stakeholders at national, sub-national, and community levels. The participatory and inclusive nature of the approach ensures that the views of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups are adequately captured, reinforcing the principle of leaving no one behind. The evaluation leveraged UN and government-supported data systems such as the MICS and ZDHS to strengthen the evidence base. These systems provided disaggregated data which enabled triangulation and reinforcing the robustness of the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework.

### 3.2 Overview of the Evaluation Process

We sought to keep to the timeline detailed in the TOR, as demonstrated below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Phases of the evaluation Figure

Inception Phase	Data Collection and Analysis	Synthesis and Reporting
September 15 – 26 2025	Sept 29 - Oct 20 2025	Oct 20 – Nov 28 2025
Key Activities	Key Activities	Key Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Kick-off meetings</li> <li>● Preliminary desk reviews</li> <li>● Approach refinement /development of tools</li> <li>● Internal design meeting</li> <li>● Refine evaluation questions and compile evaluation matrix</li> <li>● Draft and submit inception report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Extended desk review (document, secondary data mining)</li> <li>● KII and FGDs at the UN system, Federal and State levels</li> <li>● Review and synthesis of data to identify emerging themes</li> <li>● Cross case analysis</li> <li>● Discuss preliminary findings with EM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Draft preliminary synthesis findings</li> <li>● Present preliminary findings to PMT</li> <li>● Compile draft final report</li> <li>● Integrate feedback received</li> <li>● Submit final report</li> </ul>
Deliverables	Deliverables	Deliverables
PPT and Inception report with elaborated methodology and evaluation timelines	PPT and preliminary findings report	Draft and final synthesis report

The evaluation process follows a phased and consultative approach that ensures methodological rigour, stakeholder participation, and the practical use of findings. It is conducted in three key phases:

inception, data collection and analysis, and synthesis and reporting. Each phase builds on the previous one to ensure coherence, quality assurance, and alignment with UNEG Norms and Standards.

Given the nature and timing of the evaluation, the inception phase has been a critical component of the overall process. The purpose of this phase is to ensure a shared understanding of the scope, objectives, and expectations of the evaluation, to clarify the evaluation questions, and to finalise the specifics of the design and implementation plan. During the inception phase, several key activities were undertaken to lay the foundation for a credible and inclusive evaluation process:

- A kick-off meeting was held with the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO), the Evaluation Manager (EM), and the Development Coordination Office (DCO) to build a common understanding of the evaluation purpose, questions, and evidence requirements. This meeting also helped shape the overall design and clarify roles and responsibilities.
- An elaborated list of intervention partners was agreed upon with Results Area Leads, in collaboration with the EM and RCO, and the sampling of respondents from the stakeholder list was finalised.
- The draft evaluation questions from the ToR were reviewed and refined. The evaluation matrix was further developed, including the finalised questions, data collection tools, interview guides, templates, and protocols, as well as the indicators, sources of information, and methods to guide analysis and triangulation.
- A presentation of the inception phase progress was made to the Programme Management Team (PMT), followed by the submission of the Inception Report, which detailed the agreed methodological design, scope, and work plan.

The inception phase therefore established a shared understanding among stakeholders, confirmed the feasibility of the proposed methodology, and ensured that all preparatory elements were in place before the data collection began. Details of the subsequent two phases - data collection and analysis, and synthesis and reporting are presented in Sections 3.4 and 3.5.

### 3.3 Stakeholders Analysis and Sampling

A multi-stage purposive sampling strategy was applied to ensure that evidence reflects national, sub-national, and community perspectives while capturing the diversity of contexts in which ZUNSDCF interventions operate. The sampling process ensured that voices from multiple levels of engagement are represented, including policy, programme, and beneficiary levels. As part of the inception activities, a comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise was conducted in collaboration with the Results Groups, which formed the overall sampling frame (Annex 4). For each ZUNSDCF outcome, Results Leads, and participating UN entities provided information on implementing partners, geographic coverage, target groups, and donors. This data informed the purposive selection of programmes, partners, sites, and informants.

The multi-stage sampling process was carried out as follows:

**Selection of UN Entities:** All Results Group Leads, and participating agencies were included, covering both resident and non-resident entities. These include the RCO, PMT, Operations Management Team (OMT), and thematic groups such as Gender, Youth, Disability, Monitoring and Evaluation, Partnerships, and Communications.

**Selection of Joint Programmes:** The evaluation prioritised joint programmes to reflect the collaborative nature of UN support. Five ongoing joint programmes were selected for field engagement - Health Resilience Fund (HRF), Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Zimbabwe Renewable Energy Fund, Enhanced Resilience for Vulnerable Households in Zimbabwe (ERVHIZ), and the

Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Capacity Building Project Phase II (ZIM-ECO2). In addition, five completed or evaluated programmes were reviewed to generate secondary evidence, including the Health Development Fund (HDF), Zimbabwe Idai Recovery Programme, UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Empowering Women in Food Markets (COVID-19 response), and the Spotlight Initiative.

**Selection of Provinces and Districts:** Using a matrix that mapped joint programmes against provinces, four provinces were selected to ensure geographical and socio-economic diversity. Where coverage was similar, child poverty indicators were used as an additional criterion. The final selection included Manicaland (Chipingwe District), Mashonaland East (Marondera District), Matabeleland South (Mangwe District), and Mashonaland Central (Mbire District).

**Selection of Donor Agencies:** Donors were sampled based on their support to the selected joint programmes. Four main donors - World Bank, European Union (EU), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and Old Mutual were interviewed face-to-face, while other donors and international financial institutions (such as AfDB and EIB) participated through online surveys.

**Selection of Government Partners:** The Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) was included together with lead ministries for each pillar: the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare; the Ministry of Environment, Climate and Wildlife; the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion; and the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs. ZIMSTAT is also included as a cross-cutting agency responsible for statistics and data coordination.

**Selection of Implementing Partners:** Implementing partners were selected from each of the five joint programmes, prioritising those working across multiple initiatives. Two partners were chosen per programme, with one additional partner representing coalitions or associations, bringing the total to 13 implementing partners, including both national and international organisations. The full list of sampled respondents can be found in Annex 5.

### 3.4 Data Collection Methods

The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative evidence with systematic triangulation across data sources and methods. This approach ensured that findings are robust, credible, and reflective of diverse stakeholder perspectives at national, sub-national, and community levels. Data collection was guided by the evaluation matrix that was elaborated as part of the inception period – please see Annex 2. Quantitative data are drawn largely from secondary sources, particularly from within the UN system. These include financial data on funding flows, national statistics, household survey data, and administrative information from government ministries and departments.

Primary data are qualitative in nature and complement the information gathered through the extensive desk review of programme and partner documents. The qualitative evidence is generated through key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and consultations with representatives from government, UN agencies, civil society, implementing partners, donors, and communities. These engagements provide deeper insights into the processes, results, and contextual factors that have influenced the implementation and performance of the Cooperation Framework. Semi-structured interview guides are developed to support data collection and ensure consistency across respondent groups (see Annex 6).

#### 3.4.1 Secondary Data Collection

During the inception phase, the evaluation team conducted a scoping desk review to examine the quantity and type of programme documents, UN system reports, and other secondary data available to inform the evaluation findings. A structured data review tool was used to ensure that all relevant

information was systematically assembled against each of the evaluation questions (EQs). This approach allowed users of the final report to clearly trace each recommendation back to the evidence on which it was based.

### 3.4.2 Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection was carried out in October 2025 to complement the desk review and provide qualitative evidence on the performance and relevance of the ZUNSDCF. Data were gathered through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and stakeholder consultations at national and sub-national levels. Interviews were conducted with representatives of government ministries, the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC), the UNDP Resident Representative, UN agencies, development partners, civil society organisations, implementing partners, and thematic working groups. These included discussions with the Disability Group led by UNESCO and UNDP, as well as the team managing the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Capacity Building Project Phase II (ZIM-ECO). At community level, focus group discussions were held in Manicaland (Chipinge), Mashonaland East (Marondera), Matabeleland South (Mangwe), and Mashonaland Central (Mbire) with women, men, youth, and persons with disabilities, ensuring that diverse voices were represented in line with the principle of leaving no one behind. These engagements generated insights into the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of UN-supported interventions and helped validate findings through triangulation across data sources. The total number of interviews conducted under each of the mapped stakeholders can be found in Annex 8, while the full list of respondents interviewed can be found in Annex 15.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a systematic and iterative process to ensure credibility, transparency, and evidence-based conclusions. Both qualitative and quantitative data were integrated within a triangulated framework guided by the evaluation matrix and the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, ensuring that all data were appropriately disaggregated and analysed through a gender, human rights, and inclusivity lens. All interview and FGD notes were documented and coded promptly, and evidence was consolidated in an Evidence Assessment Framework (Table 5 below) designed to organise data by evaluation question, indicator, and source. This framework provided a clear audit trail linking findings to underlying data, ensured consistency and traceability from evidence to conclusions, and facilitated triangulation across multiple sources such as UN reports, government statistics, and stakeholder perspectives.

Table 5: Evidence assessment framework

Core evaluation questions/ sub-questions	Indicators	Data sources			Emerging findings
		Desk review	KIIs		
			UN	IPs	
EQ1				FGDs with primary SH women, men, youth, PWD	

Qualitative data were analysed thematically, identifying patterns and relationships aligned with the ZUNSDCF Theory of Change and the evaluation questions. Quantitative data were summarised using descriptive statistics and trend analysis where applicable. Rather than seeking direct attribution, the evaluation applied contribution analysis to test the plausibility of causal pathways in the ZUNSDCF Theory of Change, considering alternative explanations and contextual factors that may have influenced results. Through triangulating findings from these various sources, the evaluation built a comprehensive picture of how and why change occurred (or did not occur) across different results areas and levels of implementation. Triangulation occurred across data sources, methods, and stakeholder groups to strengthen the validity and credibility of the findings. All these streams of

evidence fed into a consolidated qualitative and quantitative synthesis, forming the basis for the findings, conclusions, and recommendations presented in this final evaluation report.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality

The evaluation adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards (2016) and the UNEG Ethical Guidelines (2020) at every stage of the process, observing the principles of integrity, accountability, respect, and beneficence. These principles guided the evaluation design, sampling, data collection, synthesis, and validation of findings. Users of the evaluation findings were actively involved throughout these stages to ensure transparency and shared ownership.

Participation in the evaluation was voluntary, inclusive, and free from external pressure. Separate in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted for specific beneficiary groups, particularly women, adolescent girls, and persons with disabilities. Cultural sensitivities were always respected, with careful attention paid to differences in culture, local behaviour and norms, religious beliefs and practices, gender roles, disability, age, and ethnicity, as well as other social characteristics such as class.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before any data collection activity began. The confidentiality of information, privacy, and anonymity of respondents were always ensured. All interviewees were notified at the start of each interview that the information they provided would be treated as confidential, and they had the right to withdraw from the process or provide information in confidence. During the key informant interviews (KIIs), the evaluation team recorded the discussions only after obtaining verbal consent from the participants. Interview notes were stored securely, accessible only to the evaluation team, and will be destroyed after the evaluation is finalised. Individual names and any other personally identifiable information were not used in this report unless explicit permission was granted by the interviewees. Quotes used in the report were anonymised and attributed only by stakeholder category (for example, “UN official,” “government representative,” or “community participant”).

In line with the UNEG Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations (2014), the evaluation tools incorporated questions designed to detect meaningful changes and assess the contribution of UNSDCF interventions to the enjoyment of rights, empowerment of rights holders, and increased institutional capacities. Respondent categories included women, men, youth, adults, the elderly, those employed and non-employed, persons with disabilities, the poor and marginalised (in rural, urban, and peri-urban areas), people of different religions, displaced persons, refugees, those in prison, ethnic minorities, stateless people, and populations affected by emergencies.

### 3.7 Evaluation governance including quality assurance

The RCO engaged a multidisciplinary team of experts to undertake this evaluation. Details of the evaluation team members including roles and responsibilities are included in Annex 7. The evaluation was managed by the Evaluation Committee under the leadership of the Evaluation Manager, who functioned as the main contact between the UN system and the evaluation team. We saw quality assurance as critical processes that will lead to concrete actions throughout the evaluation. The process was participatory, ensuring a high level of excellence in both the evaluation processes and outputs at every stage. It comprised seven key elements, summarised in Table 6 below.

As highlighted in the stakeholder analysis, the evaluation steering committee’s role was to ensure the evaluation team’s independent verification of performance & results by providing robust governance for the evaluation. In line with the utilisation focus of the evaluation, the evaluation team had interactions with the steering committee at key intervals: e.g., post-inception, post-data collection check-ins, post-data collection and findings report /presentation and post-final evaluation report/presentation.

Table 6: Key Elements of Evaluation Governance and Quality Assurance

<i>Role clarity and alignment with team strengths</i>	All team members were assigned clear technical roles and responsibilities based on their respective areas of expertise.
<i>Adherence to UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation and related guidance</i>	The development of study methods, tools, and sampling, as well as data collection, analysis, and reporting, was aligned with the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation and the UNEG Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations.
<i>Robust methodology and tools</i>	During the inception phase, the evaluation team refined the methodology under the Evaluation Manager’s direction and with support from the DCO.
<i>Realistic planning</i>	The evaluation design, including the KII sample size and depth of analysis, was tailored and adjusted as implementation progressed to ensure delivery within agreed timelines.
<i>Joint working sessions as Team and with Evaluation Stakeholders</i>	The team held regular working sessions internally and with the Evaluation Manager at every stage of the assignment to ensure access to information, effective coordination, and synergy in efforts.
<i>Targeted data collection, verification of secondary data, and triangulation of evidence</i>	To ensure analytical rigour, information was collected from multiple sources using a range of methods. The accuracy and completeness of data were verified, and all evidence generated was triangulated.
<i>Content review and alignment of deliverables</i>	A thorough content review of all draft reports was carried out to meet the criteria set out in the UNEG Quality Checklist for Evaluation Reports.

A sizeable amount of the data analysed came from secondary sources. As part of the quality assurance procedures, it was necessary to assess the quality of secondary data before its inclusion in the synthesis. Given the wide range of data sources, it was not possible to specify a single set of quality standards for assessing the credibility of all secondary data. Instead, a two-step approach was applied. In the first instance, the team checked whether the producers of the data had applied credible quality standards in a transparent manner. Most of the documents used as secondary data sources originated from the UN system, and it was assumed that the data in these sources had been collected in accordance with high quality standards. Nonetheless, the evaluation team worked with the RCO to look for evidence of the application of quality standards. Where such evidence was not found in the documentation, the team followed up with the producers of the data to determine what steps had been taken to ensure that the data were credible and, therefore, reliable.

### 3.8 Risks, challenges, limitations, and lessons

The evaluation team identified and managed a range of potential risks that could have affected the quality or timely completion of the evaluation. Anticipating these challenges allowed for proactive mitigation and adaptive management throughout the process. The main risks and their corresponding mitigation strategies are summarised in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Risk and Mitigation Matrix

<b>Risk Description</b>	<b>Mitigatory strategy</b>
<b>Delays in scheduling appointments with key stakeholders:</b> Stakeholders may not be available or responsive in time due to busy schedules	Introductory letters were used to formally introduce the evaluation and help secure appointments with key stakeholders. The UNRCO emphasised to the UN Agencies the urgency of the Evaluation and the latter were also keen to have results of the Evaluation available in time for county programming. UN Agencies made deliberate efforts to avail themselves even at short notice.
<b>Technical Issues During Remote Interviews &amp; feedback meetings:</b> Connectivity issues or technical problems during virtual interviews and feedback meetings.	Technology and internet connectivity were tested prior to meetings, and backup communication channels (such as phone calls or alternative platforms) were arranged in advance.

<b>Misalignment of expectations:</b> Differences in expectations or objectives among key stakeholders	Alignment was ensured through timely working sessions with the ERG and a briefing meeting by the DCO during the inception phase and maintained throughout the evaluation through clear communication and regular check-ins with stakeholders.
<b>Limited participation of beneficiaries:</b> Challenges in data collection at beneficiary level due to logistical issues	Adequate logistical support was provided, with regular updates between the evaluation team and the Reference Group, alongside implementation of a data quality assurance process.
<b>Delays in Report Writing:</b> Unexpected delays in drafting or feedback incorporation. Feedback sessions were scheduled in advance with clear deadlines, and stakeholders were	Internal deadlines were set earlier than the final submission date to allow flexibility, and critical sections were prioritised to ensure timely delivery.
<b>Stakeholder Feedback Delays:</b> Reference Group or other stakeholders may take longer to provide feedback on the draft report.	Reminded of the importance of timely review. The quality assurance loop was deployed through clear task allocation and continuous engagement with the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG).
<b>Confidentiality or Data Security Breaches:</b> Risk of sensitive data being exposed or mishandled.	Strict data handling and security protocols were implemented to safeguard information throughout the evaluation process.
<b>Bias to protect country image:</b> Bias can be introduced during high profile meetings with key stakeholders	The evaluation team, maintained objectivity through independent analysis and triangulation of data sources, evaluators, and collection methods.

### *Timeframe*

Overall, the timeframe for the evaluation given the scope and depth of investigations required, was very ambitious. The ToR and subsequent inception period realignments meant that there were only two weeks available for each of the inception period, data collection and data analysis plus reporting. The evaluation team is of the opinion that an evaluation of this scope requires up to 16 or more weeks to execute. Overall, the evaluation timeframe was highly ambitious given the scope, with only two weeks each for inception, data collection, and analysis/reporting, whereas an evaluation of this scale would typically require 16 weeks or more. The compressed schedule limited flexibility in sequencing activities and severely constrained time for team interaction, reflection, and synthesis, particularly during analysis and report drafting.

Despite these constraints, the team prioritised data quality and rigour. The diversity of expertise strengthened the credibility of findings, while a clear division of labour and collaborative working methods supported efficient delivery. Strong coordination by the RCO and Evaluation Reference Group, clear roles, and regular communication helped address challenges and maintain focus. Early political buy-in from the Office of the President and Cabinet and active engagement of UN Agency leadership ensured ownership, timely participation, and effective data collection.

Overall, the evaluation team views this as a very successful process and with high quality desirables, but this type of timing should NOT be seen as a norm. **The key lesson for timeframe is for the UNCT to allocate enough time and budgets for undertaking partnership/cooperation framework evaluations.**

## 4. Findings from the Evaluation

The findings from the evaluation are arranged according to the three conceptual areas as with the relevant OECD-DAC criteria. In line with a theory-based approach, each of the major findings are accompanied with a short summary contribution story, that is, why things happened under the finding. Furthermore, the supporting narratives also highlight the contribution stories by surfacing why and the UN contribution to each of the issues under discourse.

### 4.1. Focussing on the right things (relevance and adaptability)

This section covers the evaluation questions 1 and 2, with an overarching frame: To what extent is the UNSDCF focusing on the right topics and what lessons/recommendations for strategic repositioning to improve relevance of the CF? Key issues explored included the appropriate selection of strategies, activities, outputs, and outcomes to be delivered, and responsiveness and adaptability to changing contexts in the country.

#### 4.1.1. Relevance and normative alignment

EQ1 To what extent are the CF objectives aligned with national, regional and global priorities?

#### **Finding 1: ZUNSDCF objectives and interventions are relevant and align with Zimbabwean priorities (in both process and substance).**

Through the ZUNSDCF, the UN system has made a strategic contribution to aligning international cooperation with Zimbabwe's national priorities. By fostering government-led coordination, introducing innovative joint programming models, and delivering concrete improvements in education, health, and resilience, the UN has enhanced national ownership and policy coherence, laying the foundation for more integrated, transformative development outcomes.

**The evaluation found that across data sources, there was evidence of strong alignment of the ZUNSDCF with Zimbabwe's overarching development Vision 2030, alignment to the 5-year development framework, the NDS1.** Document reviews showed that the framework's four pillars (People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace) mirror NDS1's thematic areas and Vision 2030's pillars of "*prosperity through inclusive growth*." In addition, the annual UN results reports explicitly link outcomes to NDS1 and the SDGs, thus reinforcing the CF's role as the "main cooperation vehicle" for advancing national aspirations and global commitments. The ZUNSDCF (2022 – 2026) marks a significant shift from fragmented programming to a coherent, integrated, and results-based approach that emphasises national ownership, inclusive development, and transformative change. **This alignment has been made possible by participatory design and governance mechanisms.** The ZUNSDCF mirrors NDS1's thematic structure and operates through Results Groups that parallel the 14 thematic working groups under NDS1: each co-chaired by government with active participation from UN agencies. The joint coordination between the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) and the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) has ensured a shared roadmap for delivering on both national aspirations and global commitments (SDGs).

**The articulation of theories of change for each of the CF pillars reinforce the relevance of the CF** and ensure that its design and implementation are well aligned with Zimbabwe's national priorities as well as SDGs. The evaluability assessment conducted in 2024 as well as an interrogation of the ToC and the assumptions underpinning the change process during the inception period, affirmed the validity of the logic for the pillars. Most of the original assumptions in the ToC held through the

implementation, but the evaluability assessment and the evaluation revised the assumption to ensure better alignment going forward. Please see Annex 9 for details of the revised ToC and assumptions.

**However, the evaluation also found that despite strong relevance and operational flexibility, the CF's formal mechanisms for updating priorities and revising the theory of change mid-cycle are limited.** Several stakeholders expressed concern that adjustments happening at agency level are not mirrored at the CF level. As a UN respondent put it, “The CF is very static. In a space of four years, a lot can change.” The Permanent Secretary for Social Welfare echoed this, emphasizing that the theory of change receives too little attention: “We report on it, but no one talks about it... it's not getting the attention it should.”

**Interactions with service-level actors (teachers, nurses, and local officials) opined that many UN-supported interventions are indeed responding to national needs.** Accounts by school administrators described how UN-supported infrastructure investments improved enrolment, teacher retention, and gender parity; these outcomes are directly aligned with NDS1 education goals. According to a head teacher in Chipinge, “*when classrooms were built and teachers got accommodation, learning improved. These are priorities our government talks about every day — access, quality, inclusion. The UN is helping us realise them*”. Accounts by local health workers also stated that investments in maternal and child health, nutrition, and GBV services are concrete evidence that UN efforts are making contributions to national priorities.

Stakeholders also recognised **promising innovations within the CF implementation**. Notable examples include:

- Area-based convergence models that combine interventions from multiple agencies within a single district; described as “UN working as one at community level.” For example, there is evidence of that complementarity support provide by UNCT Agencies in promoting Health Resilience at community level through provision of health-related infrastructure (i.e.); state of the art equipment; consumables, mothers shelters and support provided to health village workers help to promote health service deliveries in the visited districts of Mbire, Marondera; Chipinge and Mangwe.
- Blended financing and pooled funds that channel resources toward climate resilience and livelihood recovery.
- Anticipatory action frameworks using early warning data to trigger humanitarian and resilience responses, particularly during drought and cholera outbreaks.
- School-level flexibility pilots that allow minor infrastructure or ICT investments based on local priorities — improving ownership and relevance. The Global Partnership in Education (GPEs) support provided a firm foundation for improving learning outcomes; facilitating rural school transformation through provision of infrastructure (school building and wash facilities); desks and learning materials. This support has also facilitated broader community involvement through moulding bricks, provision of building aggregates and school feeding programmes.

**While the cooperation framework's normative/strategic alignment is robust, there are indications of sometimes fragmented operational alignment.** Document reviews and agency consultations confirm that most CPDs align with the CF and that joint planning and programmes have improved coordination and reduced duplication. However, stakeholders noted uneven operational integration, with agencies often reporting against the CF without fully coordinating implementation. Examples included overlapping activities in similar thematic areas and initially fragmented disability programming, later addressed through an inter-agency group under the RCO. Donors also highlighted that despite a coherent framework aligned with NDS1 and the SDGs, competition for shrinking resources and continued sectoral silos limit effective collective action.

## **Finding 2: ZUNSDCF has selected the right priorities, but weighting appear to be uneven**

The CF's four pillars has enabled the UNCT to select priorities that are aligned with Zimbabwe's social foundations and human development, while expanding issues like climate and disaster resilience, inclusive rural livelihoods, and governance systems. The main gap has been in scaling up economic transformation and youth employment, and deepening support for accountability reforms.

**The evaluation found that the CF generally identifies the right priority areas**, especially in social sectors and governance. Interactions with stakeholders consistently highlighted progress in areas such as health system strengthening, inclusive education, social protection, gender equality, and climate resilience. These areas were also recognised as “foundational” in the country's Vision 2030 and the SDGs agenda. Zimbabwe's transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains in progress. The MDG era largely focused on health and education outcomes, while the SDGs broadened priorities to include economic growth, environmental protection, and governance. The ongoing integration of prosperity and planet dimensions into national planning frameworks through NDS1 and ZUNSDCF indicates steady but incomplete alignment with the full SDG agenda.

**The CF's partnership model is assessed as fit-for-purpose** in a constrained fiscal context, enabling sustained technical collaboration between the UN and Government despite limited donor funding. Notable priorities across the pillars are itemised below:

**People:** Focussing on improved access to quality, inclusive education, health, nutrition, and social protection was achieved alongside strengthened systems for gender equality, youth empowerment, and the protection of vulnerable populations.

- **Planet:** Focussing on improved implementation of climate adaptation and mitigation practices, enhanced biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resource use, and strengthened disaster preparedness and resilience to climate shocks collectively advanced environmental sustainability and climate resilience.
- **Prosperity:** Focussing on enhanced productivity, decent work, and economic opportunities—especially for women and youth, together with strengthened climate-smart agriculture and inclusive food systems, and improved access to sustainable energy, infrastructure, and digital technologies, collectively supported more inclusive and sustainable economic development.
- **Peace:** focussing on strengthened rule of law, access to justice, and human rights protection, together with enhanced civic participation, transparency, and accountability, and improved capacities for conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and social cohesion, collectively advanced more peaceful, just, and inclusive governance.
- **Cross-cutting themes** such as gender, youth, climate resilience, and disability inclusion; are mainstreamed across results groups.

The evidence from document reviews and stakeholder interviews however showed some **missed or underrepresented areas particularly around the productive economy and youth employment nexus**. A recurrent issue highlighted in stakeholder interviews was the limited focus on decent work, entrepreneurship, and job creation. According to a UN official, “*we have made people healthier and more educated — but not necessarily more employable. Prosperity needs a sharper economic edge.*” A senior government official also observed that “*we have social programmes well covered, but employment, value addition, and enterprise — the engines of growth — are not receiving the same level of focus. That's where we need more UN support.*”

**Low focus on employment stems** from limited resources, gaps in agency participation such as the lack of country programmes by UNCT agencies such as UNIDO and non-resident entities (i.e. ECA

and UNCTAD) programming not adequately reflected and embedded within the CF. In addition, major players like the IMF and World Bank, whose support shapes key macroeconomic and sectoral policies, remain outside the CF scope. UN agency representatives and donors acknowledged that not all priorities could be addressed within the available funding envelope, and that some areas such as economic transformation under the Prosperity pillar have lagged due to limited resources and donor focus on social sectors.

At the provincial level, young focus group discussants in Chipinge and Mangwe also **highlighted limited livelihood opportunities** despite training programmes. One youth representative commented that: *“we learn skills, but the jobs or start-up capital don’t follow. The cooperation framework should push harder on creating real economic chances for young people.”* Several development partners and civil society actors also **perceived a cautious approach to politically sensitive areas** such as accountability and anti-corruption. One partner stated that: *“the UN is doing well in governance capacity building, but it avoids the harder conversations around transparency and rights. That’s where SDG16 is tested.”*

#### 4.1.2. Adaptations to evolving situations and context

EQ2 How effectively has the CF adapted to unforeseen needs such as economic, political and social shocks and natural disasters, especially for vulnerable and marginalised groups?

**Finding 3: While the UNCT has responded well to a wide range of emerging shocks and emergencies, the speed of responses have been uneven, though there are good lessons learned.**

UN’s work under the CF has enhanced Zimbabwe’s ability to anticipate, respond to, and recover from shocks, though adaptive capacity remains uneven across sectors. Across multiple shocks from cholera outbreaks and COVID-19 to droughts and El Niño-driven food insecurity, the UN played a critical role in supporting Zimbabwe’s crisis response and resilience. The CF also enabled stronger anticipatory action, with expanded early-warning systems, pre-emptive cholera and drought protocols, and adaptive initiatives. However, inclusion gaps persisted for persons with disabilities, migrants, and the urban poor.

**The evaluation found that the CF has been responsive to several challenges, but the speed and coherence of adaptation varied by sector and pillar.** Zimbabwe’s operating environment over the CF period has been marked by multiple shocks; from economic volatility, the lingering effects of COVID-19, droughts, cholera and polio outbreaks, to the El Niño-induced drought and food insecurity over the 2023/24 period. The evidence from document reviews show that the UN Country Team (UNCT) rapidly mobilised to support government-led responses during the 2023–2024 cholera outbreak, coordinating through the Health and WASH clusters. The CF’s People and Planet pillars served as the operational anchors for these interventions. Accounts by stakeholders consistently noted that the UN’s anticipatory action planning and joint appeals have enabled timely interventions during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Cyclone Idai, El Niño-induced drought, and cholera outbreaks.

Similarly, drought and food insecurity during the 2023 – 2024 season triggers under the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) were activated in close coordination with the CF’s resilience programming. A senior government official stated that: *“When the drought hit, UN agencies were among the first to respond through water trucking, food support, and rehabilitation of boreholes were done quickly. What’s improved is that they now coordinate these actions through the same CF mechanisms rather than ad hoc appeals.”*

**Several stakeholders highlighted however, that adaptation may have been more reactive than predictive, and uneven across sectors.** A key observation from interviews revealed that while UN agencies with ongoing humanitarian footprints were able to pivot resources quickly, those working in governance or longer-term development areas faced procedural constraints. Specifically, while health, WASH, and climate resilience components adapted quickly, **economic and governance-related shocks** received slower responses due to structural and procedural rigidity. A development partner summarised this dichotomy succinctly: *“The UN moves fast when there is a flood or an outbreak — that’s muscle memory. But for economic shocks or political transitions, adaptation is slower because it requires policy shifts, not logistics.”*

Accounts from respondents in **Matabeleland and Masvingo provinces** acknowledged that food, water, and health responses were timely, but expressed frustration that **economic shocks** such as sudden price hikes and currency changes were not addressed with equal urgency. One local councillor stated, *“People received food, yes, but prices of everything else doubled. The help came for hunger, but not for the cost of living.”* Stakeholders also highlighted that while initial response to shocks has often been swift, there are challenges in sustaining support through the full cycle of recovery. District officials and community members in Mangwe and Chipinge noted that *“the exit came too soon before the end of the crisis,”* with government having to take over food assistance before the drought had fully abated. This pattern was echoed by a provincial stakeholder in Matabeleland South: *“Support was timely, especially during the lean season. However, the exit came too soon before the end of the crisis. But government took over the programme to ensure that people survive the disaster.”*

**The evaluation also found that responses** demonstrated a deliberate focus on **vulnerable and marginalised populations** particularly women, children, rural communities, remote and informal settlement. For example, during the cholera outbreaks, community health volunteers trained under the CF’s resilience and social protection workstreams were instrumental in reaching remote settlements and informal areas in districts such as Chimanimani, Chipinge, and areas within Mbire and Mt. Darwin. As one local health worker described: *“When cholera came, the training we had earlier helped. We didn’t wait for outsiders; we already knew the protocol for reporting and isolating cases. That’s because of the preparedness work done before.”* However, the evidence suggests that **despite the CF’s broader inclusion commitments, disability inclusion appears to be inconsistent in emergency and environmental responses.** Accounts from stakeholder interviews highlighted that persons with disabilities were often excluded from humanitarian relief during Cyclone Idai and subsequent droughts (e.g., inaccessible distribution sites, loss of assistive devices). Inclusion measures and budgeting for accessibility and assistive devices are still not systematically integrated into DRR or Planet Pillar programming. Other stakeholders also raised concerns about other less visible groups especially urban poor, informal workers, and migrants. An NGO representative working with returnees from South Africa observed, *“Migrants are invisible in most emergency plans. When they come back with nothing, there is no livelihood support window for them, yet they are among the most vulnerable.”*

**The evaluation found that despite systemic challenges, good lessons from innovative adaptive practices have emerged under the CF.** The evidence from desk reviews and stakeholder interviews suggests that lessons from past shocks have progressively shaped CF programming, particularly in climate resilience and disaster preparedness. The UNCT and government have integrated anticipatory action mechanisms; for example, expanding weather radar systems and early-warning stations and have developed pre-emptive drought and cholera response protocols. A UN agency lead explained: *“We learned from Cyclone Idai that early coordination saves lives. That’s why the current CF invests in anticipatory action, we don’t wait for disaster to strike.”*

Stakeholders also opined that the UNCT is **“learning to anticipate rather than react”**. The evidence shows that the UNCT has systematically incorporated “resilience modifiers” or adaptive programming

tools triggered when shocks alter baseline conditions. For example, the Village Business Unit initiative was piloted in districts such as Mt Darwin Chirumhanzu and Buhera; in response to the 2024 El Niño event to promote solar-powered irrigation and diversified livelihoods. The Solar for Health Initiative (covering over 1,000 clinics) emerged directly from lessons learned during power shortages in previous climate events, ensuring continuity of care during future crises. The UN’s anticipatory action planning model (US\$28 million plan) reflects institutional learning from Cyclone Idai and COVID-19, using early warning data to trigger pre-emptive actions.

Nevertheless, it has been noted that **institutional memory appear to be person dependent**. One development partner cautioned: *“We’ve made progress in learning, but too often the learning sits with individuals rather than systems. When staff rotate, the same lessons are relearned.”* In addition, while learning has been strong in areas such as health and disaster risk management, economic shock responsiveness appears to be less developed, and the CF may have yet institutionalised adaptive mechanisms to counter currency instability, inflation, or market disruptions, even though these shocks have profound social implications. A representative from a national research institute noted that *“We treat economic shocks as context, not as part of the risk architecture of development programmes. Yet livelihoods are the first casualty of macro instability.”*

## 4.2 Implementing interventions in the Right Ways (Coherence, Efficiency, and coordination)

This section covered evaluation questions 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10, with an overarching frame: how well do the UNSDCF fit and be implemented as planned? Key issues explored included coordination, collaboration, complementarity, as well as funding model, partnerships, and resource mobilization.

### 4.2.1. Operational alignment and coherence

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| EQ3  | To what extent has the CF enhanced internal coordination and fostered partnerships among UNCT members, as well as with civil society, the private sector, local and national government, Parliament, and other national institutions? |
| EQ4  | How effectively has the ZUNSDCF promoted complementarity and avoided duplication with other development partners (bilateral and multilateral)?  |
| EQ9  | After the UN reform, to what extent have UN agency workplans been derived from the ZUNSDCF in both design and implementation?   |
| EQ10 | How has the Resident Coordinator’s office contributed to improved UNCT coherence and joint convening power?   |

#### 4.2.1.1 Internal coordination

**Finding 4: Formal mechanisms (such as PMT, and thematic working groups), including the Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO) has helped to tighten UNCT coordination and coherence, by bringing together UN entities and avoiding duplication.**

As envisioned in the CF these coordinated structures (PMT, OMT, and thematic groups) has made the UN in Zimbabwe more coherent and collaborative, with stronger joint planning, delivery, and resource mobilization. Neutral leadership from the RCO and these coordinated structures have aligned agencies around national priorities and expanded joint programmes, making the UN a more unified and effective partner despite some remaining mandate overlaps.

**The evaluation assesses that the CF has substantially improved internal coordination, coherence, and joint delivery mechanisms within the UNCT.** Consistent accounts by respondents noted that functional coordination structures such as the Programme Management Team (PMT), the Operations

Management Team (OMT), and the Communications and Partnerships and Resource Mobilization (PRM) group have led to more structured and collaborative planning. Evidence from key informant interviews and desk review indicates that the CF has provided a common strategic platform for UN agencies, moving the system beyond siloed operations toward more coherent and collective action. The evaluation found that the CF's four-pillar structure namely People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace, has provided a shared language and results framework, facilitating alignment of agency workplans and joint monitoring.

**Following the UN reform, the alignment of UN agency workplans with the ZUNSDCF has become more systematic and explicit, both in design and implementation.** The evaluation found that the CF is the central reference for UN agency workplans, guiding joint planning, coherence, and results-based management through interagency mechanisms and the RCO. Interviews and document reviews confirmed that most agencies align their plans and reporting with the CF's four pillars, enabling joint monitoring, though some activities still fall outside the CF due to global mandates or earmarked funding. One UN Resident Representative explained that agency country programme documents *"can never be developed without the Cooperation Framework,"* a view echoed by another UN agency Country Representative, who affirmed 100% alignment with national priorities. Desk review of annual reports confirmed that most agencies, including UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, and WHO, now map their workplans directly to ZUNSDCF outcomes, with UNDP deriving at least 75% of its indicators from the Framework.

**The evaluation assesses that alignment of agency workplans with the ZUNSDCF is high at design but less so in implementation.** The evidence suggests that while the CF provides a clear strategic anchor, with most agencies demonstrating explicit mapping of their outcomes to the CF results framework and by extension, to NDS1 priorities. Document reviews and accounts by UN agencies revealed that their CPDs outputs correspond directly to CF results but also constitute the primary reference for programming and results reporting. Observations from UN and external stakeholders alike, opined that although CPDs were derived from the CF, actual programme delivery adapts more rapidly to contextual changes and donor priorities than the CF cycle allows. According to a UN respondent, *"Our country strategic plan was quite flexible... the CF is very static; I haven't been called to any conversation to look at adjustments."* The evaluation however noted that the CF was designed with a broad scope to allow for adjustments at activity and output levels without necessarily changing the outcomes. Necessary adjustments are discussed during meetings of relevant structures such as the Results Group.

**The evaluation found that joint planning is institutionalised through Joint Programme (JP) with the PMT providing quality assurance.** Documentary evidence show that joint programming is now the norm for a large share of delivery, constituting approximately 50% of USD 380m (2023) and approximately 51–52% of USD 317.8m (2024) flowing through 10–11 Joint Programmes (e.g., Health Resilience Fund, Joint SDG Fund for Renewable Energy, UNPRPD, 2Gether4SRHR, GPE, ERVHIZ, Great Zimbabwe, Joint UNAIDS). This signals substantive CF-driven integration in design and financing. There is also evidence that joint policy engagement has influenced national budgeting (e.g., increased 2022 allocations to MPSLSW and MHTESTD; sectoral budget proposals for 2023 largely accepted), indicating coordinated resource mobilisation and policy leverage. According to the UN<sup>29</sup>, these initiatives demonstrate how the UNCT is leveraging joint programming to align interventions with comparative strengths, reduce fragmentation, and pool resources and expertise." **From the foregoing, the evaluation assesses that resource mobilization has been robust and increasingly collective.** Data from UN Info and corroborated by a UN respondent posits that, *"Joint resource*

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<sup>29</sup> UN Zimbabwe Annual Results Report 2024

*mobilization has yielded USD 1.2 billion (as of mid-2024) for health, food systems, renewable energy, and disability inclusion initiatives.”*

**The Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO) has institutionalized a coherent coordination framework that effectively links strategic leadership with operational implementation, reducing duplication and enhancing the overall efficiency and coherence of the UN Country Team.** The RCO was consistently cited as a key enabler, with one UN agency head stating, *“The RCO brings agencies and government together, ensuring government ownership and presentation of CF reviews. Strong OPC leadership ensures NDS alignment; Heads of Agencies actively lead OMT/PMT/Comms-PRM groups.”* The separation of the RC function from UNDP and the addition of specialised RCO staff have strengthened impartial leadership, accountability, and coordination. The RCO has fostered government ownership, built trust among UN agencies, reduced competition, mainstreamed cross-cutting priorities, and improved coherence and responsiveness through *“Delivering as One.”*

**Coordination mechanisms** such as the Joint Work Plans (JWPs) aligned with CF outcomes and NDS1 priorities; joint M&E framework integrating SDG and national indicators; as well as common reporting tools for collective accountability have been observed to have reduced transaction costs and strengthened internal alignment. The CF’s joint platforms and thematic frameworks (youth, disability inclusion, resilience, gender) have also increased complementarities across agencies and pillars. This sentiment was echoed by other respondents who described more predictable coordination routines and joint accountability for results. The coordination mechanisms have also improved planning discipline and routine joint performance monitoring.

**Thematic and technical working groups have been instrumental in achieving ZUNSDCF results, translating strategic commitments into coordinated, cross-sectoral interventions.** For example, the **M&E technical working group** comprises of M&E staff from the different agencies, and a senior staff from an agency leads the group on a rotational basis. The M&E group manages the UN Info, a Management Information System (MIS) platform which tracks the CF and JWP targets. The group regularly undertakes capacity sessions with IPs which helps capacitate these partners. The **gender thematic group** has been effective particularly in joint advocacy, GBV prevention, and policy dialogue. Of note is the enhanced coordination of gender data and statistics through collaboration with ZIMSTAT and the data for development and innovation group. **The data for development and innovation group** (DFDI) has been revamped to deal with the fragmented data in the country, with signs of value-addition, particularly in ensuring joint monitoring and accountability. Evidence shows that the **disability group** strengthened accountability and inclusivity, advancing a rights-based approach, though sustained support is needed. The **youth group** enhanced relevance and innovation but requires better coordination and resourcing. The **communications group** improved coherence and credibility, while the **partnership group** supported resource mobilisation and coordination, though funding competition and declining aid remain key challenges.

Respondents observed that **while thematic working groups are effective and central mechanisms for CF delivery, their performance vary.** A main challenge is that people who belong to several working groups often struggle to manage their roles across different group. In such situations, there could be conflicting priorities and workload issues impacting on the capacity of individuals to participate meaningfully in every working group. **Several respondents also highlighted procedural bottlenecks**, stating that, duplication has not been eliminated, while persistent mandate overlaps and competition for visibility were highlighted as ongoing issues. According to a donor respondent, *“Different UN agencies compete in the same areas—for example, ILO working on private sector and labour issues, UNDP on similar themes, and IOM entering climate work. With limited resources and overlapping mandates, the framework hasn’t truly coordinated them.”* Another UN staff member reflected on communication gaps within the system, saying that *“When I joined, I realized agencies working in similar areas barely knew what others were doing. I proposed that every UNCT meeting*

include a 15-minute slot for one agency to present its work.” Plans are however underway as part of the ongoing UN80 reforms to review overlapping mandates with the aim of streamlining delivery and reducing duplication.

#### 4.2.1.2. External Partnerships and collaborations

##### **Finding 5: The UNCT leverages on its comparative strength and strategic partnerships in addressing the priority needs of Zimbabwe.**

The UN’s comparative advantage, rooted in its neutrality, technical expertise, and convening power, has reinforced its relevance to Zimbabwe’s development plan and strengthened its position as a credible and reliable partner. While challenges remain in fully coordinating mandates and reducing fragmentation, the emerging consensus is that the UN’s unique mandate and approach have added significant value to the country’s efforts to achieve the SDGs.

**The evaluation assesses that the convening power of the UNCT and the ability to bring several stakeholders together is a core strength.** The evidence suggests that the CF has fostered more systematic and inclusive engagement with government, civil society, the private sector, academia, and development partners. The UN system’s unique convening power enables it to bring diverse actors together around shared priorities and coordinated responses to critical national challenges. The CF is explicitly framed as a vehicle for implementing the National Development Strategy (NDS1), ensuring policy alignment and joint ownership. According to a UN respondent, *“Government ownership of the CF as an expression of NDS is high—heads of agencies actively lead OMT/PMT/Comms-PRM groups, ensuring NDS alignment.”*

Other respondents also note that **civil society has been integral to CF implementation**, especially in education, social protection, and human rights, it has also expanded engagement with private investors and international financial institutions, demonstrating its ability to leverage non-traditional partners. For example, the USD 45 million Renewable Energy Fund launched with Old Mutual and IDBZ is designed to leverage private investment for renewable energy projects. Similarly, the Zimbabwe Idai Recovery Project with the World Bank and seven UN agencies showcases multi-actor coordination bridging humanitarian and development efforts.

**The evaluation also noted that the RCO has played a pivotal convening role between the UNCT, Government of Zimbabwe, and external partners.** The RC co-chairs the Joint Steering Committee (JSC) with the Chief Secretary to the President and Cabinet, a partnership viewed as high-level and strategic. Respondents also highlighted the RC’s credibility and access as key to ensuring government engagement across ministries and sectors. According to a donor respondent, *“The RC has managed to maintain a strong relationship with the OPC, which allows the UN to influence policy more effectively.”*

**The RCO’s convening role has been equally visible in donor coordination and joint advocacy.** Through regular briefings, joint statements (e.g., on El Niño, SDG acceleration, and humanitarian appeals), and the Partnerships and Resource Mobilization (PRM) group, the RCO has enhanced the UN’s collective voice. In the words of a donor respondent, *“We see the RC’s office as our single point of contact when we want to understand what the UN is doing collectively. That’s new and very helpful.”* Under RC leadership, the UNCT now presents joint policy positions and advocacy messages, particularly around human rights, gender equality, food systems transformation, and climate resilience. The UN Communications Group, coordinated through the RCO, has increased visibility of the UN’s collective footprint through joint publications and events such as UN Day, 16 days of Activism, and SDG Week.

While partnerships have been broadly effective, coordinating a wide and diverse set of partners including government institutions, development partners, NGOs, CSOs, private sector, youth organizations, and disability groups; requires significant effort to maintain alignment and coherence. Internally, the UN system still faces alignment challenges, with agencies sometimes competing rather than collaborating, underscoring the need for clearer mechanisms to leverage comparative advantages and reduce overlaps.

#### 4.2.2. Operational efficiency

**EQ7** To what extent has the ZUNSDCF prioritized activities based on needs rather than resource availability, and has reallocation been used to respond to evolving circumstances?

This evaluation question considered the extent to which the CF prioritise activities based on needs; and whether and to what extent it is fit-for-purpose, fast and agile enough to seize key opportunities and deliver in a timely manner.

##### 4.2.2.1. Prioritization based on needs versus resource availability, and use of reallocation to respond to evolving circumstances

**Finding 6: While the CF design and planning processes are strongly needs-driven, implementation is constrained by funding shortfalls and reallocation is often reactive and humanitarian focused.**

By prioritizing activities based on needs and demonstrating a growing capacity for resource reallocation in response to evolving circumstances, the CF strategy has shown increasing agility and fit-for-purpose delivery, particularly in emergencies and through joint programming. However, persistent challenges in funding, coordination, and bureaucratic processes continue to affect the system’s ability to deliver timely and impactful results.

#### Prioritization based on needs vs resource availability

The evaluation assesses that the processes and approaches for developing the CF ensured that anticipated change processes in the ToC and results areas were strongly grounded in national development needs and evidence. Evidence from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and desk review indicates that the ZUNSDCF’s strategic planning and annual workplans are grounded in needs assessments, vulnerability analyses, and government priorities. The evaluation noted that the CF was strongly grounded in the needs and structural challenges identified in the 2021 CCA, with most priority areas such as maternal mortality, chronic food insecurity, weak social protection systems, and governance deficits directly reflected in the CF’s four strategic pillars. The grounding of the CF on the CCA findings is demonstrated on Table 8 below.

Table 8: Mapping of CCA findings against CF priorities

CCA Finding / Gap	Groups Most Affected	ZUNSDCF Response (Pillar / Outcome)	Assessment (Addressed?)
High maternal mortality and limited access to skilled maternal care (rural)	Pregnant women, rural populations	Pillar 1 (People) – Health systems strengthening, SRHR, MNH outcomes	Addressed in design; implementation dependent on funding
Food insecurity, malnutrition, drought vulnerability	Smallholder farmers, under-five children, rural poor	Pillar 1 & Planet – Food security, nutrition, resilience, DRR outcomes	Addressed through joint programmes; scale limited by funding
Weak health system capacity for outbreaks (cholera, epidemics)	Poor and remote communities	Pillar 1 – Health security, emergency preparedness	Addressed; operationalised via pooled emergency funds

Child protection, low school access, early marriage	Rural girls, adolescents, out-of-school children	Pillar 1 – Education, GBV, child protection outcomes	Included in CF; implementation varies by sector coordination
High youth unemployment, weak private-sector opportunities	Urban and rural youth	Pillar 3 (Prosperity) – Decent work, enterprise development	Included; industrialisation/innovation underfunded

**However, alignment during implementation has been uneven.** While high-need areas such as health and social protection received substantial attention through joint programmes and pooled funding, several structurally important but underfunded CCA-identified gaps such as industrialization, digital transformation, and youth economic participation were insufficiently addressed due to limited or highly earmarked resources. In addition, some emerging needs highlighted in the CCA, including urban vulnerability and disability inclusion, were only partially integrated into CF programming. For example, the 2024 UN Zimbabwe Annual Results Report shows that over 10 million people were reached with basic services, including health, education, social protection, and WASH, with a deliberate focus on rural, remote, and low-income communities. Nearly 1.1 million children accessed quality education through school improvement grants and digital learning, while 736,000 people including nearly 9,000 persons with disabilities benefited from cash transfers, food assistance, and school feeding programmes. A school head in Mudzi District described the impact of these interventions stating that, “*Students are motivated to attend school every day because they know they will receive a meal. This has had a positive effect on both attendance and enrolment.*”

**The evaluation found that targeted resource mobilisation has been used to respond to shocks and emerging needs.** For example, the use of pooled mechanisms such as the *Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF)*, *Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)*, and *Anticipatory Action Plans* enabled rapid pivoting during the cholera outbreak and El Niño-induced droughts. During the 2023–2024 El Niño event, the UN system mobilized a US\$430 million humanitarian appeal and secured US\$8 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund to support anticipatory action and contain a cholera outbreak. Provincial and district health officials confirmed that “support came on time,” with one District Health Services Administrator in one of the visited district hospitals stating, “Within two days they went out to investigate the malaria outbreak]”

### **Fitness-for-purpose, speed, and agility of the CF**

**The evaluation found that the UNCT has shown significant agility in crisis contexts.** Documentary evidence and interviews show that RCO-led coordination enabled rapid, effective responses to cholera, COVID-19, and El Niño through anticipatory action, joint appeals, and multi-sectoral interventions. The UNCT demonstrated strong agility in emergencies, delivering life-saving health, WASH, and education support, including outbreak response measures and remote learning during COVID-19. UN agency representatives described how annual reviews and joint monitoring visits have enabled ongoing alignment and course correction. One UN agency Country Representative stated, “*We have mechanisms within the cooperation framework to address development, emergencies, and recovery. Under the framework, we can reallocate or appeal for funds, as we did under the joint HRF program. So yes, flexibility is there to shift resources from regular programming to emergency response.*” Another UN agency Programme Specialist highlighted the integrated approach: “*We analysed how [the drought] might increase GBV or affect maternal health and adapted our interventions to mitigate these effects. Our approach is to ensure that crises do not reverse progress in SRH or gender outcomes.*”

This scenario was however not the case for regular development programming. The evaluation found the system is less agile because procurement processes, financial approvals, and risk management protocols tend to be highly centralized and time-consuming. Accounts from implementing partners revealed delays that disrupt processes like agricultural seasons and infrastructure timelines. According

to one implementing partner, “under ERVHIZ, some FAO procurements had not been delivered even after our project ended in May 2024. This frustrates both communities and local government stakeholders.” Similar sentiments were echoed by one government official in Mangwe district who said, “Procurement delays are a big issue. Implementing partners often wait too long for materials to be released. It would be better if local implementing partners could handle procurement directly to speed things up.”

**There is evidence from stakeholder interviews that joint programming mechanisms have invariably enhanced cost-efficiency and fostered collaboration**, but coordination across pillars is still uneven, with potential overlaps and competition among agencies occasionally leading to duplication or fragmented delivery. In addition, although the RCO has improved overall coherence, decision-making still appear diffuse in instances, while the time required to reach consensus among multiple agencies tended to reduce responsiveness.

**The evaluation found that the ZUNSDCF has been able to seize key opportunities, particularly through pooled funding mechanisms and joint programming.** In 2024, over 51% of the UN’s \$317.8 million expenditure in Zimbabwe was channelled through 10 joint programmes, including the Health Resilience Fund, the Joint SDG Fund for Renewable Energy, and the Enhanced Resilience for Vulnerable Households in Zimbabwe (ERVHIZ). These funds have enabled the UN to act as a convenor, bringing together multiple agencies and donors to deliver integrated support in priority sectors. A government official reflected, “We are now at a stage where we can anticipate future challenges and put in place preventive measures and preparedness plans. The UN has worked with us to provide relief assistance through flash appeals, aimed at funding both relief and early recovery.”

**There were mixed messages related to adaptive management within the CF implementation period.** Stakeholders consistently noted that the CF’s formal mechanisms for revising the theory of change and updating priorities mid-cycle remain limited. Several stakeholders, including the Deputy Country Representative of one of the UN agencies, observed, “For me, what would be important is to check if this adjustment happening at agency level is also happening at CF level. For me, that’s where the deficiency is—the CF is very static. In a space of four years, a lot can change.” On the contrary, data triangulation revealed that the CF was revised in 2024. This included the revision and updating of the ToC and updating of the Results Framework including adoption of Global SDGs output indicators and consolidation of some indicators and the provision of indicator definitions. The evaluation assesses that the ToC (at least assumptions) require annual revisions.

#### 4.2.2.1. Funds disbursements and resource mobilization

EQ8 How efficiently have UN entities disbursed funds, mobilised resources and facilitated access to additional financing for national partners?

#### Efficiency of funds disbursements

**Finding 7: While fund disbursement processes are rigorous and transparent, perceptions of slow disbursements persist among partners and is seen as potentially limiting timeliness and efficiency of delivery.**

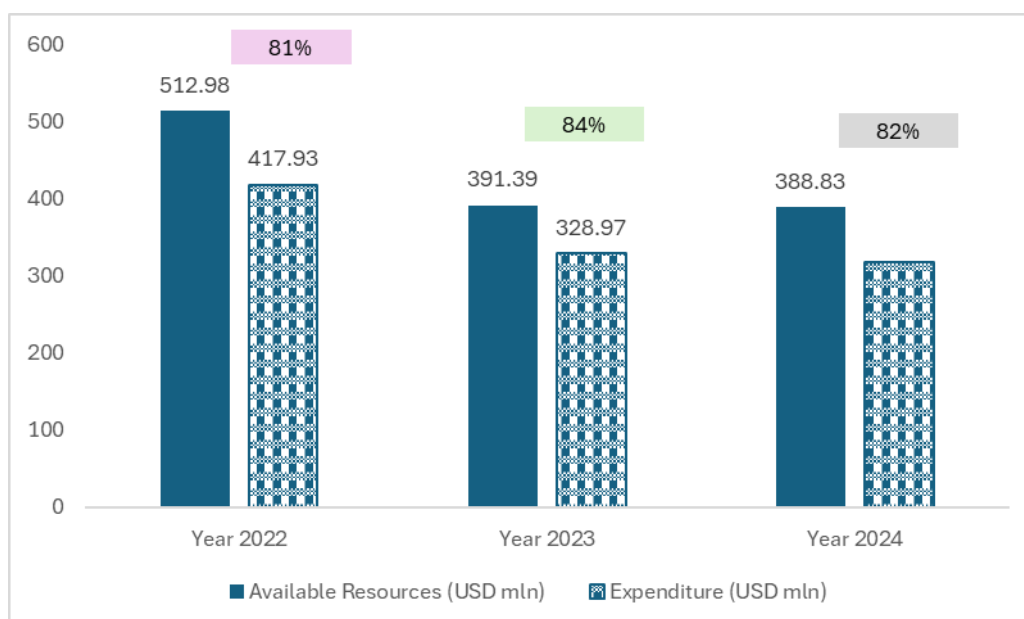
Across the CF period, the UN’s contribution lay in combining strong fiduciary assurance, targeted humanitarian and development financing, and institutional support to recovery, resilience, and governance, even in a constrained and competitive resource environment. Despite widening financing gaps driven by shrinking ODA, global crises, and donor reticence, the UN sustained support to government priorities, including food security, health, governance, human rights, and social protection.

**The evaluation found that like other UN agencies the UN in Zimbabwe adhere to global financial control standards, ensuring transparency, auditability, and fiduciary compliance.** Documentary evidence shows that disbursements follow established agency systems and are released after verification of deliverables and reporting. While some partners report delays due to multi-layered approvals, UN stakeholders note these often arise from unmet conditions or ineligible expenditures; when requirements are met, disbursement is generally timely, with advances provided against workplans and subsequent tranches released after at least 80% acquittal. The 2024 midterm review of the CF noted that while financial reporting compliance exceeded 95%, timeliness of disbursement was rated as moderately satisfactory, indicating that the system prioritizes control over speed. Despite these challenges, findings show that the UN system has made efforts to improve efficiency using Long-Term Agreements (LTAs), shared services, and joint monitoring. The Operations Management Team (OMT) has provided guidance on cost containment, and the use of pooled funds has reduced duplication and transaction costs.

Related to the above, the evaluation also found that while the introduction of the Business Operations Strategy (BOS II) and common back-office arrangements (e.g., shared premises, procurement harmonization) has reduced administrative duplication and generated cost avoidance, each agency continues to operate separate financial management systems, making joint programming and co-financing arrangements cumbersome. The evidence also suggests limited use of pooled funds or joint financing platforms at the country level, which could otherwise streamline disbursement and reduce overhead costs.

Figure 2 shows ZUNSDCF financial outlays from 2022–2024, with implementation rates of 81%, 84%, and 82% respectively. In 2022, spending was driven by major humanitarian responses to COVID-19 and the unprecedented impact of Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, with 86% of expenditure concentrated in the People Pillar, while Planet, Prosperity, and Peace accounted for 12%, 1%, and 1%. This reflected efforts to protect SDG gains, recover from climate shocks, and support governance, social cohesion, and human rights, particularly for vulnerable groups.

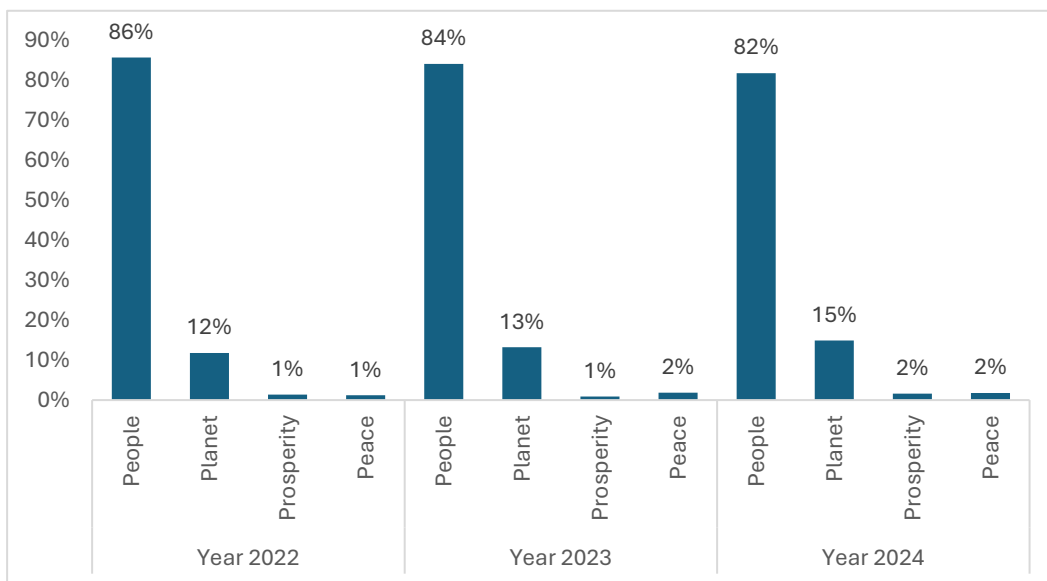
Figure 2: ZUNSDCF Financial Summary 2022 - 2024



The expenditure distribution for the three years shows a consistent pattern with the People Pillar absorbing more than 80% of the total expenditure, but with the Planet Pillar slowly increasing in 2023

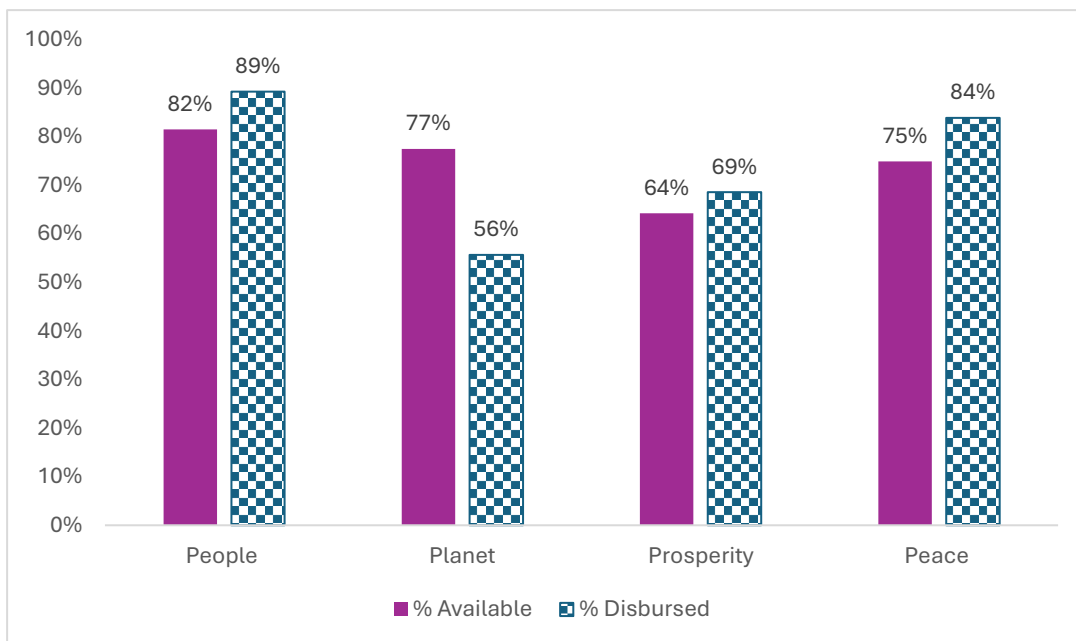
and 2024 but not exceeding 15% of total spending (Figure 3). Prosperity and Peace Pillars were consistently lower than 3% of total spending.

Figure 3: Proportion (%) of ZUNSDCF expenditure by Pillar, 2022 - 2024



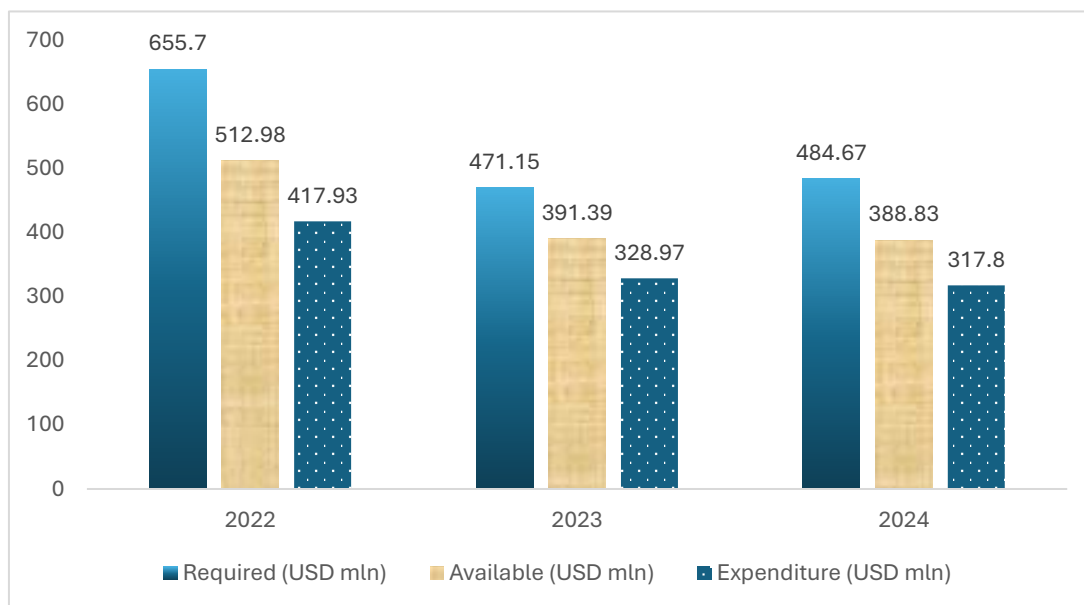
A consistent low performance of the prosperity pillar shows the challenges UN partners had in both mobilising resources and spending the little that was available for the pillar. Prosperity disbursed 69% of available funds while peace had the second highest proportion of budget absorption at 84% over the three years. The proportion of expenditure under the Planet Pillar out of total ZUNSDCF spending could have been higher had the respective UN agencies improved funds absorption performance from 56% to a rate comparable to 89% achieved by the People Pillar over the same three-year period.

Figure 4: Proportion (%) of cumulative resource requirements available, and disbursement rate per pillar, 2022 - 2024



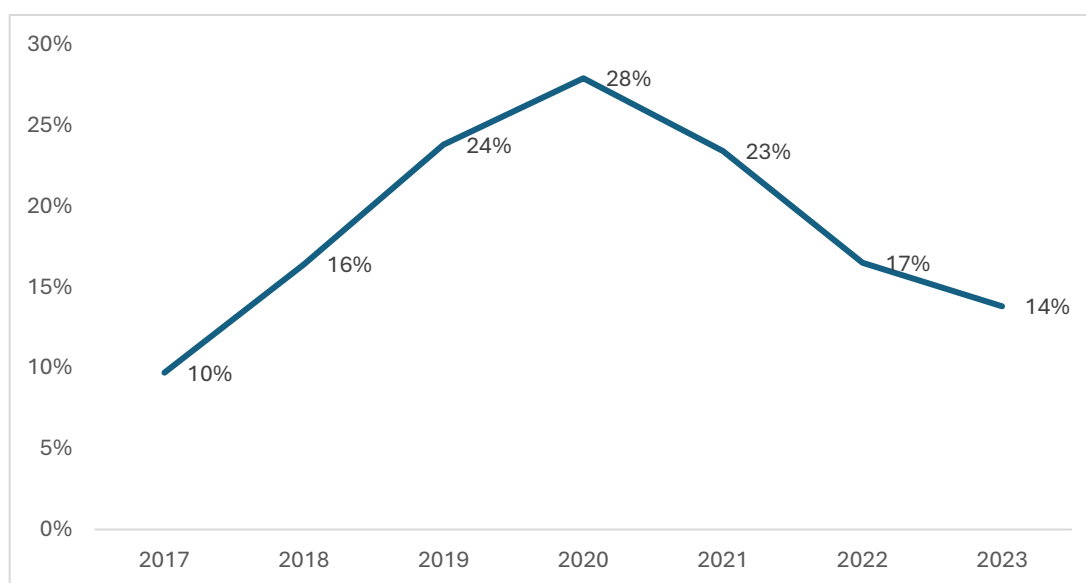
When the ZUNSDCF financing gap is analysed year by year, the results in Figure 5 below show a perennial shortfall in the planned versus available resources, and the gap is widening. As stated in the framework document, an estimated \$2.8 Billion is required to deliver the plan, which translates to an annual average of \$560 Million. In 2022, \$513 Million was pledged, which was about 91% of mean annual requirement.

Figure 5: Planned versus available resources for UNSDPF implementation, 2022 -2024



However, available funds drastically reduced to \$391 Million (70%) and \$389 Million (69%), respectively in 2023 and 2024. Resource availability in 2022 was high compared to both mean annual requirement and subsequent resource adequacy levels, because there was significant humanitarian funding for the emergency and recovery response to Cyclones, and Covid-19 at the start of the CF.

Figure 6: Net ODA to Zimbabwe as a Proportion of Gross Capital Formation, 2017 - 2023



Source: <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=DT.ODA.ODAT.GI.ZS&country=ZWE>

In 2024, geopolitical conflicts and inward-looking policies by major donors led to aid cuts, contributing to a 2% decline in net ODA to sub-Saharan Africa. In Zimbabwe, net ODA receipts fell sharply from 27% of gross capital formation in 2020 to about half that level by 2023 (Figure 6)<sup>30</sup>. This decline partly explains the challenges that the UNCT encountered in funding its CF. These downward pressures saw the UNCT only able to raise US\$1,293,198,784 (45.9%) of the US\$2,815,801,856 needed to implement the CF (2022-2026), and US\$104 million of the US\$430 million flash appeal made in 2024 to respond to food insecurity caused by the El-Nino-induced drought.

### Major challenges contributing to the ZUNSDCF funding gap

Resource mobilisation has been a major challenge during the CF period, with limited private sector engagement and mixed results with foundations and non-traditional donors. Traditional donor funding has been heavily earmarked for health and food security, leaving the Prosperity and Planet pillars underfunded, while the Peace Pillar emerged as the most underfunded outcome area (UNRCO, FLA 2023; page 33). Food security was the most frequently cited development objective funded by development funders (85% of development partners that participated in the study's on-line survey confirmed funding food security) (UNRCO, 2023)<sup>31</sup>. This was followed by health. SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) was least funded. Development partners cited shrinking ODA, internal UN competition, and macroeconomic instability as key constraints, pushing funding toward humanitarian social sectors. Election-related perceptions and global food security pressures further reduced donor willingness to sustain or increase funding to Zimbabwe.

The UN agencies, themselves added constraints such as varying internal resource mobilisation capacities, lack of coordination when approaching donors, although a draft resource mobilisation strategy was reported to be in place at the time of the evaluation. They also concurred on the limited scope of their efforts to mobilise private capital, confining such partnerships to service or supply contracts to the private sector to implement some of the activities or using them as a vehicle for public awareness campaigns on critical issues such as GBV prevention and response (e.g., mobile phone companies). Tapping into insurance funds and depositors' funds through commercial banks was hardly pursued.

### Resource mobilisation and joint financing

**Finding 8: While the UNCT has made progress in coordinated resource mobilization, facilitation access to additional financing for national partners, it has yet to scale up partnerships and instruments for blended or private financing that could diversify and expand national financing for the SDGs.**

Multi-agency proposals helped secure major funding from partners such as the EU, USAID, the GCF, and the Joint SDG Fund via successful joint programmes on youth employment, climate resilience, social protection, and renewable energy. UN catalytic support also helped the government access significant climate, agriculture, and health financing from global funds. Although most resources remained earmarked and private or blended finance is still emerging, mechanisms like the Health Resilience Fund demonstrated the UN's ability to pool donor support and expand Zimbabwe's access to international public finance.

**The evaluation notes that the RCO has established a Resource Mobilization and Partnership Strategy aligned with the CF results.** The UNCT has jointly engaged donors through thematic groups and developed multi-agency proposals (e.g., on resilience, food systems, and gender equality). This

<sup>30</sup> <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=DT.ODA.ODAT.GI.ZS&country=ZWE> (25/10/2025; 21:30 hrs)

<sup>31</sup> UNRCO, 2023, Financial Landscape Analysis for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, 2022-2026.

coordinated approach has resulted in increased visibility and coherence, attracting contributions from the EU, USAID, and the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Several joint programmes — such as those on youth employment, climate resilience, and social protection — were successfully funded through this approach. These include the Joint SDG Fund focusing on catalyzing local investments in renewable energy, gender-responsive energy access, and formation of green enterprises, and Adolescents & Youth for a Sustainable Future (AY4SF) supporting green jobs, land restoration, value chain development for youth.

**While these efforts have increased the national resource envelope**, and the UN support has enhanced Zimbabwe’s access to international public finance, private and blended financing remains nascent and underutilised. Despite pilot initiatives such as the SDG Investor Map and UNICEF Innovation Fund, the UN has yet to fully leverage its convening power, though pooled mechanisms like the Health Resilience Fund demonstrate strong capacity to mobilise coordinated donor support and respond rapidly to crises. A government official described the collaborative approach: *“We attend the International Labour Conference. We are a member of the Budget Committee and have a labour partnership based in Geneva. So our voice is heard and we make a lot of noise to influence the distribution of resources.”*

**An assessment of the funding streams show that approximately 80% of resources mobilized under the CF period are earmarked or project-specific, leaving limited space for flexible allocation or reprogramming.** This scenario tends to restrict the ability of the UNCT to adjust to emerging opportunities or underfunded areas. While the RCO has initiated dialogue on pooled and joint funding mechanisms, these remain nascent. In addition, efforts to strengthen joint resource mobilization have been hindered by internal competition among agencies and varying donor engagement approaches.

**The evaluation notes that several UN agencies have played a catalytic role in enabling the government and national institutions to access international finance.** These include:

- **UNDP and UNEP** supported the Government in preparing proposals for the **Green Climate Fund (GCF)** and the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)**, resulting in approved projects on climate-smart agriculture and ecosystem resilience.
- **FAO and WFP** facilitated smallholder access to **climate adaptation and resilience financing**, including partnerships with the Adaptation Fund and IFAD.
- **UNICEF and WHO** supported national systems in leveraging **Global Fund and Gavi** resources for health and immunization programmes.
- IFAD, FAO, WFP, under joint MOUs with JICA. FAO handles climate-smart agriculture, WFP handles nutrition, and IFAD handles smallholder resilience.

**While these efforts expanded public financing and strengthened Zimbabwe’s credibility**, access to private and blended finance remains limited. The UN has not yet fully leveraged its convening power to attract impact investors, diaspora finance, or PPPs, and initiatives such as the SDG Investor Map and UNICEF Innovation Fund remain at pilot scale.

### **4.3. Delivering the Right Results (Effectiveness, Orientation towards Impact, and Sustainability)**

This section covered evaluation questions 5, 6, 11, 12, and 13, with an overarching frame: how effective is the CF meeting the expected results, and how sustainable are the results? There is also an assessment of what has worked and what has not worked, missed opportunities, lessons learnt, to feed into the next strategy. Issues that were explored included achievement of strategic objectives including against the CF results framework, and the likelihood of sustainability of results achieved including

ownership by country partners. The extent to which cross-cutting priorities (human rights, gender, disability and LNOB) were mainstreamed into implementation, was also considered.

#### 4.3.1. Achievements of intended results

**EQ5** To what extent has the ZUNSDCF achieved its intended results, especially for marginalized populations?

This evaluation question explored several interrelated issues as follows: i) What progress has been made in meeting the results defined in the CF at outcomes and outputs levels? ii) To what extent did these results contribute to the achievements of the SDGs? iii) What are the challenges and opportunities (external or internal) that have hindered or facilitated progress towards the achieving the expected results? iv) Are the CF outcomes and outputs still relevant or require a review? and v) What lessons can be learnt/drawn for future programming and implementation?

**Finding 9: The CF has largely achieved its intended results, demonstrating strong relevance and tangible benefits for marginalized and vulnerable populations, but progress toward outcome-level and systemic change remains uneven.**

The UN contributed to expanded social services, stronger climate resilience, improved livelihoods, and enhanced governance by leveraging its convening power, technical expertise, and coordinated delivery mechanisms across the four pillars. Progress was made possible through strong government–UN coordination platforms, pooled funding, and joint programming that aligned partners behind national priorities. By mobilizing resources, providing policy support, and strengthening national systems, the UN enabled measurable gains for vulnerable populations and laid the groundwork for more resilient and inclusive development.

##### 4.3.1.1. Progress in meeting the CF Results at Outcome and Output levels

**The results across the four pillars show meaningful but uneven progress, with notable gains in service delivery and climate resilience, modest advances in governance, and persistent challenges in economic inclusion.**

##### *People Pillar*

The people pillar of the CF has achieved modest but tangible progress in advancing inclusive service delivery. Between the baseline and 2024, essential health service coverage increased from 49% to 55%, and early childhood education enrolment rose from 60.79% to 65.20%, reflecting gains in foundational access – please see Annex 10 for details of the progress on the pillar. Outputs such as expanded social protection coverage, strengthened health systems, and functional GBV referral pathways were successfully implemented. Notably, pooled funding mechanisms like the Health Resilience Fund (HRF)<sup>32</sup> which sustained over 1,000 health facilities, and the Education Development Fund (EDF), which supported inclusive education through School Improvement Grants (SIG) and the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM). A headteacher in Gokwe district reported that: “*The SIG allowed us to fix classrooms and buy learning materials. Our pass rate increased from 37% to 58% over two years. The feeding programme helped children stay in school.*”

Documentary evidence including stakeholder interviews **shows that** social assistance has reached the poorest and most excluded groups. The UN also strengthened government social protection systems, supporting the development of the Social Protection Management Information System (SP-MIS) and National Social Registry, both of which improve targeting of vulnerable households. Cash transfers in refugee settings, such as Tongogara Camp, enhanced dignity and self-reliance, with beneficiaries

<sup>32</sup> UN Zimbabwe. (2022). *Health Resilience Fund Annual Report*. United Nations Country Team in Zimbabwe.

reporting greater autonomy in household decision-making. According to a refugee respondent, “*Before the cash support, we depended on handouts. Now I can choose what my family eats and pay for my child’s school things*”. Specific examples include:

- In 2024, 736,000 people benefited from UN-supported social assistance, including around 9,000 persons with disabilities, through cash transfers, food aid, and school feeding programmes.
- The Tongogara Refugee Camp achieved 100% cash-transfer coverage for 9,776 households, ensuring predictable income for refugees and asylum seekers.

*“The cash we receive through the UN programme helps us manage small businesses inside the camp. We no longer rely only on food rations.”*

Refugee, Tongogara Camp

**Despite the achievements of the school feeding programmes, they remain donor-dependent, and the government’s fiscal space to absorb these costs is limited.** In addition, many learners still attend classes under the tree, as the available physical school infrastructure, and the pace of on-going school construction projects fail to cope with population growth.

**The people pillar has also been vital in expanding access to essential health and nutrition services,** demonstrating tangible gains in population health, particularly for women and children in low-income and rural areas who otherwise face limited access to clinics, clean water, and nutrition.

- Over 10 million people accessed essential health services in 2024 alone.
- 1.23 million people living with HIV are now on ART, with a 96% viral suppression rate—a major achievement in sustaining HIV control.
- 1.5 million children received nutrition support; 13,000 children were treated for severe wasting (with a 79% recovery rate).
- UN support enabled swift polio and cholera outbreak responses, averting thousands of deaths through vaccination and WASH improvements.

However, although maternal mortality rate (MMR) has declined considerably, for example due to improved technical skills of health staff that have improved service delivery more antenatal bookings and deliveries attended by a qualified health professional, and UN support with equipment and supplies for delivery of MRCH services, neonatal mortality remained stagnant, signalling a “**gap between service coverage and outcome-level change**,” as one UN respondent noted: “*The HRF has kept the system alive. Without it, some rural clinics would have closed. But we’re still losing too many babies in the first month — we need to tackle quality, not just access.*” This was in reference to Outcome 1 (*By 2026, all people in Zimbabwe, especially women and girls and those in the most vulnerable and marginalised communities, benefit from equitable and quality social services and protection*) and Indicator 1.1 (*Health: Coverage of essential health services*).

Staff of health facilities in sampled districts who were interviewed concurred that MMR has declined but the challenge that remains is that demand for ANC services now outstrips service delivery capacities of the health institutions. In Chipinge the number of pregnant women admitted into waiting mothers’ shelters was found to be more than double the carrying capacities of existing facilities, and this compromised quality of services.

**Education-focused interventions have strengthened access, inclusion, and quality,** by broadening access for children with disabilities, girls, and learners in marginalized communities, narrowing equity gaps in education outcomes.

- 1.1 million children benefited from improved learning environments through School Improvement Grants (SIGs), early childhood education support, and digital learning resources.

*“As a person with disability, I used to stay home. After receiving my assistive device, I can now attend school and play with my friends.”*

Child beneficiary, Inclusive Education Programme, Gokwe

- Targeted inclusion efforts reached children with disabilities: 12,278 learners with disabilities received assistive devices in 2021; 77,310 learners benefited from inclusive education interventions in 2022.
- Evidence from field key informant interviews (KIIs) indicates that UN-supported interventions (feeding programmes, WASH facilities, SIGs) significantly improved attendance and pass rates in rural schools.

**Beyond infrastructure, WASH interventions have reduced disease burdens and absenteeism (particularly among girls), improving dignity and wellbeing.**

- In 2024, 574,000 people gained access to improved water and sanitation services, including 94,000 through solar-powered systems.
- Inclusive school WASH facilities reached 78,000 learners, including menstrual hygiene support for adolescent girls.
- The UN also contributed to policy-level gains through support to the National Sanitation Policy and WASH Financing Strategy.

*“The new borehole means we no longer walk long distances for water. Our girls are safer, and we can focus on our gardens again.”*

Community member, Mutoko (WASH intervention)

**Concerning reversals were observed in rural access to basic drinking water**, which declined from 60% to 48%, and in social assistance coverage for the extreme poor, which dropped from 66% in 2023 to 43% in 2024. These trends underscore persistent equity and sustainability challenges, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

**Other key challenges include** limited national fiscal capacity to absorb donor-funded programmes, fragmented delivery across UN entities, and external shocks such as drought and economic instability. These constraints have undermined the sustainability of interventions and slowed progress toward deeper systemic change.

*Planet Pillar*

**The pillar has achieved notable progress in strengthening local climate resilience and disaster preparedness**, with good examples in irrigation rehabilitation and revitalisation (spearheaded by IFAD, UNOPS and IFAD), that have adopted the build back better principle. Examples good work include water abstraction systems from riverbeds, more resilient weirs for diverting water to irrigation schemes, lining of earth canals with concrete to reduce seepage, improvement of irrigation scheduling, and promotion of moisture conservation within irrigation schemes, and strengthening dryland farming through livestock and enhancing complementarity between dryland farming systems and irrigated agriculture.

**The adoption of IFAD’s GALS methodology and FAO’s market-led production approach has driven more inclusive, market-oriented, and resilient decision-making among irrigators.** Collaboration between UNOPS and UNESCO under the Cyclone Idai Recovery Programme, including the establishment of Chimanimani Community FM, strengthened DRR and early warning systems, demonstrating sustainable, community-based resilience building. By 2024, the share of local governments implementing DRR strategies rose from 18% to 92%, driven by UN-supported capacity-building, decentralised planning tools, and integration of climate resilience into local development plans (Annex 11). Despite these gains, rising food insecurity and fluctuating child stunting rates highlight ongoing fragilities in nutrition and climate resilience systems.

The pillar contributes directly to SDGs 13.1, 13.2, and 13.3 (climate action), SDGs 11.b and 11.3 (sustainable urbanization), and SDGs 6.1 and 6.2 (water and sanitation), through strengthened DRR, climate adaptation, and participatory governance. However, worsening food security and nutrition

outcomes, driven by economic shocks, climate variability, and the 2024 El Niño drought, have undermined resilience gains, particularly for vulnerable populations.

**While reliance on external funding and limited fiscal space constrain sustainability**, strengthened platforms such as Provincial Development Coordinating Committees offer opportunities for deeper sub-national collaboration. Integrating DRR into local planning and scaling community-level innovations, including SMS flood alerts and river monitoring systems, demonstrate the potential of locally driven, technology-enabled resilience solutions.

### *Prosperity Pillar*

**Progress under the pillar has been uneven and difficult to quantify due to significant gaps in outcome-level data.** Of the four outcome indicators defined in the Cooperation Framework (CF), two reported only baseline values, one lacked any data, and one showed a sharp rise in unemployment, from 18.5% at baseline to 47.8% in 2023, undermining SDG 8.5 and 8.6 (Annex 12). Rising unemployment has disproportionately affected youth, women, and informal workers, worsening inequality and social cohesion risks. Despite this, UN-supported livelihood and value chain interventions—such as FAO and UNDP-supported drip irrigation in Masvingo—have improved productivity, incomes, and food security for marginalized groups. A provincial official in Masvingo highlighted: *“With FAO and UNDP support, farmers are now using drip irrigation. Yields have doubled in some wards. But sustainability depends on maintenance and access to markets.”*

**The pillar is aligned with SDGs 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 1 (No Poverty).** However, the lack of robust, disaggregated, and time-series data severely limits the ability to assess contributions to these goals. Rising unemployment directly undermines SDG 8.5 and 8.6, while the absence of integrated data systems compromises progress tracking for SDG 10. Nonetheless, targeted interventions in agriculture and micro-enterprise development support SDG 8.3 by promoting the formalization of small businesses and expanding access to finance. These efforts have enhanced economic participation among youth and women, albeit without sufficient evidence to confirm systemic impact.

Key challenges include weak links to national statistical systems, data gaps, especially under the pillar, and macroeconomic instability, which limit adaptive management and credible results reporting. Despite these constraints, opportunities exist to scale labour-intensive, green, and youth-focused interventions by strengthening data systems, market access, infrastructure, and alignment with NDS1.

### *Peace Pillar*

The PEACE Pillar of the ZUNSDCF has made notable progress in strengthening governance, justice, and civic engagement systems in Zimbabwe, though outcome-level measurement remains limited. Among the 25 outcome indicators under this pillar, only two demonstrated measurable trends during the implementation period, while the rest remained at baseline levels (UN Zimbabwe, 2024<sup>Error! Bookmark not defined.</sup>). One positive trend was the increase in public satisfaction with the last experience of public service, which rose from 60% to 70.81% in 2024. This suggests that investments in justice sector reform, digitization of services, and local government capacity-building; led by UNDP, UNICEF, and other agencies, are yielding tangible improvements in institutional performance. At the output level, the UN has supported legislative reforms, institutional capacity building, and civic engagement initiatives. These include technical assistance to align national laws with international human rights instruments, particularly in areas such as access to justice, gender equality, and protection of vulnerable groups. The UN also backed the review of laws related to elections, anti-corruption, and public finance management, and supported the Parliament of Zimbabwe in enhancing its legislative and oversight functions through training, legislative tracking systems, and public consultations (UN

Zimbabwe, 2024<sup>Error! Bookmark not defined.</sup>). Additionally, the modernization of court systems and expansion of legal aid services especially for women, children, and persons with disabilities, have improved transparency and reduced case backlogs.

The pillar directly contributes to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), particularly targets 16.3 (rule of law), 16.6 (accountable institutions), and 16.7 (inclusive decision-making). The increase in public satisfaction with services aligns with SDG 16.6, while support for electoral law reform and voter education ahead of the 2023 elections contributes to SDG 16.7. The UN’s facilitation of community dialogues and truth-telling through the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) also supports SDG 16.1 (reduction of violence) and 16.b (promotion of non-discriminatory laws and policies). The rise in reported cases of discrimination, from 344 to 1,299 in 2023, presents a dual narrative. On one hand, it may reflect increased civic awareness and willingness to report due to legal empowerment and expanded access to complaint mechanisms. On the other, it may signal persistent or worsening structural inequities, particularly affecting women, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and ethnic minorities (UN Zimbabwe, 2024<sup>Error! Bookmark not defined.</sup>). This underscores the need for intensified efforts under SDGs 5 (Gender Equality) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Annex 13 shows that the UN’s support for civic education, legal empowerment, and digitization of justice services has laid a foundation for more inclusive governance. Platforms such as the NPRC and Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC); the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) have been strengthened through technical assistance and capacity-building. The UN and ZGC coordinated a national inquiry on sexual exploitation, focusing on girls, women, and persons with disabilities in the period under reporting, while the ZHRC recorded a 48% increase in cases during the last election period compared to the previous election, indicating improved reporting but also potential stress on human rights.

The implementation of the pillar has faced several challenges. Chief among them is limited funding for governance programming, which has constrained the full realization of intended outcomes. Additionally, the lack of disaggregated and time-series data for most indicators hinders robust monitoring and adaptive management. Structural inequities and social exclusion continue to undermine the inclusivity of peacebuilding efforts, despite normative reforms. Nonetheless, there are significant opportunities.

#### 4.3.1.4. Challenges and Opportunities

**There were some challenges in making overall conclusions related to the progress against some of the CF indicator values in the UN Info, as** there were missing information in some of the indicators, for example under the Prosperity and Peace Pillars. We have provided excerpts below to highlight this. The Prosperity Pillar’s Outcome Indicator 3.4. Private Sector: Sectoral growth rate as % (NDS1) has several components namely i.e. Manufacturing sector growth rate (%), Agriculture sector growth rate (%), (mining sector growth although it was not in the initial set), Private sector investments in agriculture (%), Contribution of value-added exports to total (%) and Value-Added contribution. Out of these, Private sector investments in agriculture (%), Contribution of value-added exports to total (%) and Value-Added contribution; all have no values from baseline up till 2024.

Prosperity Pillar	3.4 Private sector: Sectorial growth %	Private sector investments in agriculture (%): TBA
		Contribution of value-added exports to total (%) - 16.2%, 2020 exports
		Value Added contribution - NDS-11.7%, 2020

Similarly, Peace Pillar’ indicator 4.1: Transparent and accountable institutions and systems: Proportion of population by sex, age, disability who indicate satisfaction in surveys with their last experience of public services (modified SDGs). % of total population (no breakdown by Gender) was tracked consistently from baseline. But there are no figures for PWD youth from baseline until 2024.

Peace Pillar	4.1 Transparent and accountable institutions and systems: Proportion of population by sex, age, disability who indicate satisfaction in surveys with their last experience of public services (modified SDGs 16.6.2)	PWD: 0%, Female: 0, Male: 0
		Youths: 0% Female: Male:

As some of these components/values are missing, then it becomes difficult to conclude on the indicator itself. While conclusions can be certainly drawn regarding the different components, it is fairly challenging to make concrete conclusions on overall progress made so far.

Both internal (currency devaluation, and lack of follow-through on commitments to reduce public debt) and **external shocks such as the El Niño-induced drought** reversed some gains, particularly in food security and health outcomes. However, sustainability risks persist due to the absence of firm government funding commitments for several flagship interventions, including Results-Based Financing (RBF), the School Improvement Grant (SIG), and the national school feeding programme.

In terms of **opportunities**, the evaluation assesses that **joint programming successes** (e.g., Spotlight, HRF, GPE) show the potential for harmonized delivery and stronger national ownership. Furthermore, **government–UN co-planning structures** are now better aligned with the NDS1 through a) adoption of Integrated Results-Based Management (IRBM) system within the Government (which enables UN alignment with a clear results framework), b) extensive stakeholder consultations (including co-creation with development partners), and the c) strong steering by the UNRCO towards ensuring direct alignment of the new Zimbabwe-UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (ZUNSDCF) with NDS1 priorities through UN joint programming. This has the potential for continuation into the next cycle of the national development strategy and the UNSDCF. **Resilience mainstreaming** (e.g., weather stations, early warning systems, and social registries) provides a platform for scaling climate-smart interventions.

#### 4.3.1.5. Continued Relevance of the CF Outcomes and Outputs

**The evaluation confirms that the CF outcomes and outputs remain highly relevant** to Zimbabwe’s development priorities and the SDG agenda. The CF’s theory and intervention logic for the four pillars coupled with the intervention package enabled significant gains across key service areas. As has been noted in earlier sections, rapid shifts in the enabling environment around economic instability, climate shocks, and constrained fiscal space has slightly undermined sustainability and reversed some achievements in social protection, WASH, BEmONC, HIV postnatal care, and education. Nonetheless, the framework’s alignment with **Vision 2030, NDS1, and Agenda 2063** ensures continued policy relevance. However, revisions are required to refocus on the emerging priorities of the country. Specifically:

- **Expanding focus on youth employment, digital inclusion, and climate-smart livelihoods.**
- **Deepening inclusion for persons with disabilities, migrants, and SOGIESC populations.**
- **Expanding infrastructure in health, education, and GBV** to cater for significant growth in demand for services that has been triggered by improvements in service coverage and quality, together with a growing awareness by citizens on the importance of these services in improving their quality of life.

- **Investments in infrastructure upgrading and upgrading** (building back better) for resilience-building, especially in the development of rural water supply systems for household use and agriculture purposes remains pivotal for resilience in food systems.
- **Strengthening the use of the Theory of Change** in adaptive management. The evaluation opines that there may have been missed opportunities in revising the ToC following the major shocks or contextual shifts that occurred such as climate-related disasters, or shifts in political will, governance structures, and financing levels. With the related (potential) shifts in the ToC key assumptions, there could have been missed opportunities to also revise the assumption until 2024.

#### 4.3.1.5. *Lessons learned from implementation*

**Robust CF design should be accompanied with systematic revisions and updates** so that change processes continuously inform planning, resource allocation, and programme adaptation, hence ensuring that interventions remain relevant, responsive, and impactful amid changing national and global conditions. The evaluation findings show that while the CF design including the **ToC** provided a solid strategic foundation and logical framework for aligning interventions with Zimbabwe’s national priorities and the SDGs, its **use as a living management and learning tool was limited**, reducing its potential to guide adaptive decision-making and course correction during implementation. The evidence suggests that opportunities were missed in **revisiting or updating** the ToC for example during the midterm review of the CF. While the UN was agile, risk factors were too many and unpredictable, especially economic shocks, the political context after the harmonised general elections, funding constraints, and climate events.

**Conceptual alignment and coherence among the CF pillars requires more robust coordination and pillar linkages** to ensure a breaking down operational silos, while promoting systemic solutions across social, economic, and environmental dimensions, and ensuring that UN interventions collectively reinforce one another toward achieving sustainable and inclusive national outcomes. The evaluation findings showed that the CF’s four pillars namely **People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace** were conceptually well-aligned and collectively addressed Zimbabwe’s development priorities. However, coherence across pillars in practice remained uneven, with strong integration in humanitarian and social sectors but weaker linkages between economic transformation, governance, and environmental sustainability. While joint planning and results groups improved coordination within individual pillars, especially under *People* and *Planet*, cross-pillar collaboration was limited by siloed agency mandates, uneven resource planning and progress reporting. For example, while social protection and climate resilience programmes worked well together, connections with the *Prosperity* and *Peace* pillars, particularly around inclusive growth, youth employment, and governance reforms, were less systematic.

Coordination with the Government of Zimbabwe under the ZUNSDCF has been **highly strategic and politically anchored**, and has ensured national ownership, while contributing to improving delivery efficiency, and embedding the UN’s support more deeply within government systems for sustainable development outcomes. This needs to be sustained and extended to provincial and district level with more intensive involvement of these levels in programme formulation. The evaluation findings show that the UN’s partnership with the OPC and line ministries has ensured that the CF is directly aligned to the NDS1. This high-level co-leadership has enhanced policy coherence, credibility, and trust. However, coordination at subnational levels remains inconsistent due to limited institutional capacity, fragmented planning systems, and parallel reporting structures. In some cases, ministries and provincial offices lack adequate technical and financial resources to fully engage in joint planning and monitoring. This calls for deepening joint planning (project proposal writing) and monitoring structures at provincial and district levels to ensure vertical integration between national priorities and local implementation, and to capture institutional capacity building needs at the subnational level in the programmes so that they are addressed accordingly.

**Joint programming under the CF has proven to be a powerful driver of coherence, efficiency, and collective impact**, demonstrating how coordinated planning, pooled funding, and shared accountability can amplify results. The evaluation findings showed that joint programmes strengthened the UN’s convening power, enhanced government ownership, and mobilized substantial resources for national priorities. However, the depth of integration and adaptability varied across sectors — with agencies often reverting to siloed implementation, competition for visibility, and uneven capacities limiting full operational synergy. To consolidate gains, joint programming must evolve from a coordination mechanism into a fully integrated delivery model. This requires institutionalizing shared budgets, pooled financing, joint monitoring systems, and adaptive management processes that allow real-time adjustments. Investing in RCO capacity, clarifying agency roles, and ensuring equitable participation (particularly for smaller agencies) will reinforce collaboration and inclusivity. By embedding joint programming as the default modality for UN cooperation (where this is feasible), while complementing with other modalities depending on development objectives in line with UN delivery guidelines, supported by stronger resourcing and adaptive systems, the UNCT will enhance coherence, efficiency, and credibility ensuring that collective interventions deliver sustained, high-impact outcomes aligned with national and SDG priorities.

The **Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO)** has been pivotal in driving UN coherence and strategic alignment, but require more adequate resourcing to sustain UN coherence, drive evidence-based coordination, and lead integrated policy engagement, to position the UN as a more agile, strategic, and trusted partner for government and donors alike. The evaluation found that while the RCO successfully fostered trust, coherence, and collective accountability across agencies, and outside the UN system, its ability to provide sustained technical support and follow-up on all pillars appeared to be uneven, due to its limited resourcing and wide functional scope, while increasing demands from joint programming, monitoring, and resource mobilization have stretched its capacity. For example, the RCO’s small team manages a broad portfolio (coordination, partnerships, data, communications) with limited staff and funding.

#### 4.3.2. Integration of LNOB and other Cross-Cutting Priorities

**EQ6** How effectively has the UN system under the CF promoted human rights, gender equality, youth inclusion, disability inclusion, and environmental sustainability?

This question explored how cross-cutting priorities (gender and social inclusion, human rights-based approach, Leaving No One Behind), as well as environmental sustainability, have been reflected in the implementation of interventions

**Finding 10: The UNCT has effectively mainstreamed the principles of leaving no one behind, as well as cross-cutting priorities of human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, and environmental sustainability across programme design, policy influence, and service delivery.**

The UN advanced these priorities by driving key policy reforms, and strengthening systems for justice, gender, disability, and climate governance. Through joint programmes, it translated these reforms into tangible services such GBV support, disability inclusion, youth empowerment, and climate-resilient livelihoods; ensuring marginalized groups directly benefited. This linkage of policy, systems, and services enabled the UN to embed LNOB across sectors despite data, financing, and political constraints.

**Documentary evidence and stakeholder interviews show that LNOB was mainstreamed from design to implementation.** LNOB was implemented both as a targeting principle (who benefits) and a process principle (participation, empowerment, accountability). The Common Country Analysis (CCA) identified marginalized populations, including women, children, youth, refugees, migrants, persons with disabilities, and minority ethnic groups as LNOB priority groups. Following from this,

programme design reflected this targeting through joint programmes and area-based approaches that directly addressed geographic and social exclusion. While the evidence suggest that these groups were broadly covered, there was limited evidence on minority ethnic groups, as there were no explicit reference in reports or narratives.

### ***Policy and normative influence***

**Using the CF as the umbrella normative instrument, the UN targeted support (policy drafting, technical inputs, advocacy) to convert high-level LNOB and rights commitments into national policy instruments (disability policy, labour law, electoral/inclusion provisions).** The ZUNSDCF itself explicitly anchored the UN country engagement on the principle of *leaving no one behind* and steered national planning toward reaching the furthest behind. This provided the normative frame that guided downstream policy influence and joint programming. The UN supported concrete policy instruments that institutionalize inclusion: e.g., joint support for Zimbabwe’s **National Disability Policy (June 2021)** moved disability from ad-hoc projects to a national rights-based policy framework (Government of Zimbabwe, 2021). On gender and representation, UN technical and political engagement contributed to reforms and campaigns that were reflected in constitutional/amendment processes and electoral inclusion measures. The UN also helped advance labour protections that institutionalize gender-sensitive workplace standards: Zimbabwe’s recent Labour Amendment (2023) strengthened prohibitions on workplace violence and harassment and advanced equal-pay provisions.

**The evaluation found evidence that policy and systemic reforms have made strides to institutionalized LNOB principles in national frameworks.** Documentary evidence points to the institutionalisation of disability inclusion, thus ensuring that PWDs are not just beneficiaries but active agents in development and policymaking. Specifically,

- The National Disability Policy (2021), developed with UN support, aligns with the CRPD and drives cross-sectoral inclusion, guiding ministries and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).
- Work on a Disability Bill continued, embedding legal and programmatic provisions for accessibility, inclusive education, and participation.
- Spotlight Initiative mainstreamed disability-inclusive GBV/SRHR services, setting precedent for integrated service delivery.

*“The Disability Policy has changed how ministries plan. We now consult organizations of persons with disabilities at every stage.”*

Senior Official, Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare

**There is evidence of emerging policy shifts for a previously overlooked group – migrants and refugees** – thus ensuring their inclusion in national development and protection systems. Specifically,

- The National Migration Policy now recognizes refugees, returnees, and migrants as rights holders.
- The Refugee Act review and policy frameworks embed social protection, education, and livelihoods access for displaced populations.

**Social protection and fiscal reforms are aimed at** ensuring that resources reach those most at risk of exclusion. Specifically, the UN’s technical support has strengthened social protection governance, including:

- Operationalization of the **Social Protection Steering Committee**.
- Establishment of the **SP-MIS** and **National Social Registry**.
- Increased budget allocation for social protection from **4% to 6.9%** of the national budget.
- Introduction of innovative financing mechanisms such as the **health “sugar tax”**, earmarked for public health spending.

*“Before the UN-supported social registry, we didn’t know exactly who needed help. Now we have data to make sure assistance goes to those most in need.”*

Government Social Protection Officer

### ***Institutional and system strengthening***

**Institutional strengthening was the “engine” that converted policy language into recurring public functions, including justice decentralization, disability in national data/systems, gender budgeting and climate policy capacity are examples of durable systems change.** The UN emphasised institutional pathways for rights and inclusion rather than stand-alone projects, strengthening justice, disability, gender, and climate systems. Support to bodies such as the ZHRC, decentralised courts, disability-inclusive data systems, gender-responsive budgeting, and climate-resilient sector planning demonstrates system-level integration benefiting marginalised groups.

### ***Programming and service delivery***

**Mainstreaming displayed measurable service outputs across protection (GBV), justice, disability services, youth empowerment and climate-resilient livelihoods, showing that policy and institutional gains were translated into citizen-level results.** Programming applied LNOB both as a **targeting principle** (who benefits such as women, children, youth, refugees, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities) and as a **process principle** (participation, empowerment, accountability). The CCA→ZUNSDCF pipeline ensured programmes were designed to reach geographically and socially excluded populations through joint and area-based programming.

**Gender & GBV response:** the Spotlight Initiative and UN-led GBV services produced measurable service gains, e.g., safe spaces, helplines, and service networks reached tens of thousands (Spotlight Initiative Zimbabwe, 2024). Youth and SRH/digital inclusion: programmes scaled sexuality education (CSE reached >35,000 tertiary students) and entrepreneurship/digital skills (thousands of youths and women supported to start/expand businesses), shifting youth from passive beneficiaries to active co-partners in design and policy dialogue.

**Disability service delivery:** large-scale distribution of assistive devices (77,310 children provided devices) and integration of disability committees into justice and other service points show service-level inclusion. Environment/climate in service delivery: mainstreaming climate-smart agriculture and resilience into livelihoods reached large numbers; the UN’s country reporting notes over 500,000 individuals benefited from enhanced access to climate-smart agriculture, water, transport, and renewable energy infrastructure, strengthening resilience, food security, economic opportunities, and environmental sustainability.

**Protection services have significantly strengthened safety nets for women, girls, and PWDs, promoting access to justice and psychosocial care for survivors of violence.**

- Nearly 600,000 people accessed protection services in 2024, and 44,000+ GBV survivors received multi-sectoral support (health, legal, psychosocial).
- The Spotlight Initiative pioneered mobile one-stop centres, safe markets, and community-based shelters, expanding GBV prevention and response capacity nationwide.
- Justice systems became more disability-inclusive through disability committees within Victim Friendly Courts (VFCs).

**The evaluation also notes that the UNCT has embedded environmental sustainability across all CF outcomes, promoting resilience and climate action, while linking environmental outcomes to human development, livelihoods, and gender/youth empowerment. Specific initiatives include:**

- Environmental sustainability is a strategic CF accelerator, influencing livelihoods, public services, and resilience systems.
- **Agriculture:** Climate-smart techniques scaled to over 1.3 million farmers; drought-resistant seed distribution improved food security. According to a smallholder farmer in Manicaland, *“With climate-smart farming, I’m harvesting even when the rains are poor. It’s practical training that changed our livelihoods.”*

- **Disaster risk management:** Installation of five modern weather radars improved early warning and preparedness across provinces.
- **Energy:** Solar power expanded access to reliable electricity in rural health and education facilities, reducing carbon footprints and supporting continuity of essential services. In the words of a Midwife in Mutoko Rural Health Centre, *“Solar power at our clinic means we can deliver babies at night safely. The system is clean, quiet, and reliable.”*
- **Urban systems:** UN-Habitat’s IRRCs and MCECs advanced circular economy models, integrating waste management, renewable energy, and job creation for women and youth.
- **Institutional change:** Ministries received capacity development on climate policy and environmental governance, while Green Climate Fund (GCF) concept notes were developed for scaling.

The evaluation assesses that the implementation of LNOB and other cross-cutting priorities faced several interlinked challenges. Institutional capacity and data systems to identify and monitor marginalized groups were uneven, especially at sub-national levels. Persistent social norms, gender-based violence, and limited youth representation continued to constrain participation and empowerment, while disability inclusion advanced more slowly due to resource and expertise gaps. Environmental interventions achieved strong pilot results but lacked the financing and policy coherence needed for national scaling. Political sensitivities curtailed open human-rights advocacy, and fragmented inter-agency coordination and data systems weakened collective tracking of who is being left behind.

#### 4.3.3. Orientation towards impact

EQ11 To what extent have ZUNSDCF interventions improved the lives of those often left behind?

This evaluation question assessed the CF’s orientation toward impact, focusing on whether interventions equitably benefit vulnerable groups. In the absence of a direct impact evaluation, proxy indicators were used to assess how UN-supported interventions contribute to transformative improvements in the lives of Zimbabweans. This approach systematically assessed the evidence of change (at the outcome level) from the four CF pillars, and how these are contributing to improving wellbeing; using the following proxies: 1) Access to quality services, 2) Household economic security 3) Safety, protection and inclusion, 4) Resilience to shocks, and 5) Governance, voice and accountability

**Finding 11: The CF interventions have improved the lives of those often left behind by expanding inclusive access to essential services, strengthening national systems for social protection and disability inclusion, but the depth and sustainability of these gains remain uneven due to persistent funding constraints, coordination challenges, and reliance on external resources.**

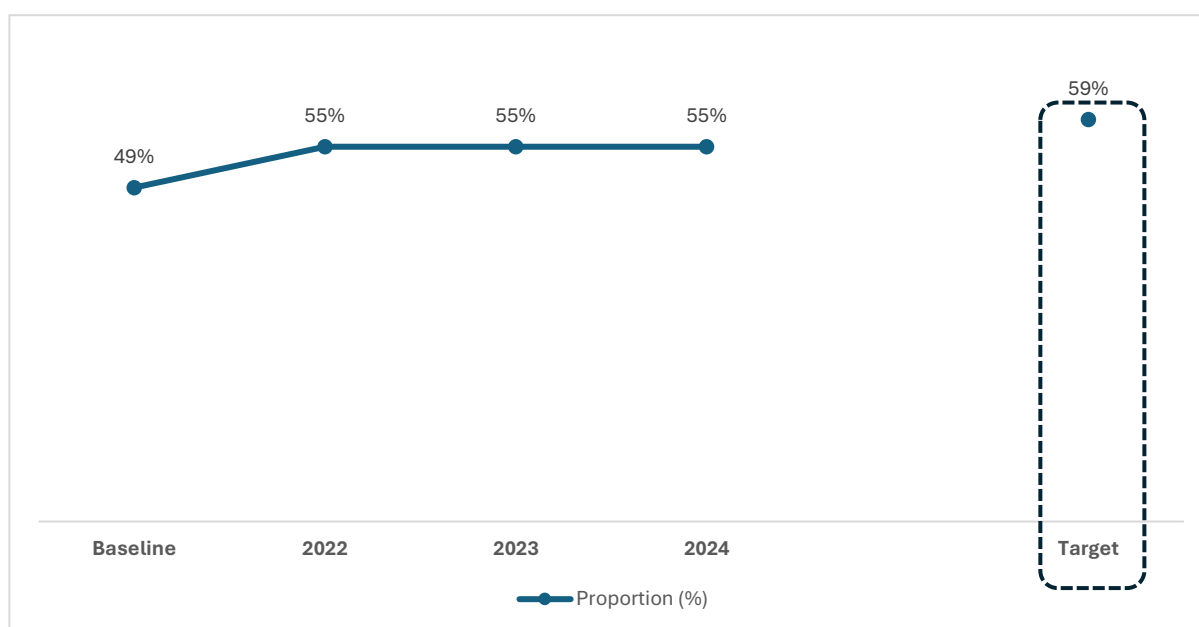
Through its coordinated support to national priorities, the UN contributed to measurable and meaningful improvements in the lives of Zimbabweans. By strengthening frontline systems, expanding service coverage, and building institutional capacity, the UN helped drive key shifts across health, protection, resilience, and governance. The UN contribution has helped shift behaviours, improve institutional performance, and strengthen national systems—demonstrating clear progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals and Zimbabwe’s broader development vision.

### 4.3.3.1. Access to quality social services

The UN supported Zimbabwe to record important gains in expanding access to critical social services, though overall progress remains mixed. As a core determinant of wellbeing, health sector improvements are visible in immunization coverage, HIV treatment outcomes, and maternal health services. DTP3 vaccination rose markedly from 77% in 2022 to 94% in 2024, surpassing national targets and contributing to declining under-five mortality. At the same time, deployment of pregnancy test kits at community level increased early antenatal care bookings from 18% to 23%, enabling earlier identification of high-risk pregnancies.

Despite these gains, systemic gaps persist. Figure 7 below shows that the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) index for essential services remains static at 55%, and neonatal mortality rose from 32 to 37 per 1,000 live births, signalling gaps in newborn care and quality of emergency obstetric services. Workforce shortages, at 23 skilled health workers per 10,000, far below the SDG threshold of 44.5; continue to limit service availability, particularly in rural areas. Nevertheless, sustained HIV investments enabled Zimbabwe to meet 95–95–95 targets and reduce AIDS-related deaths by 16.6% between 2021 and 2024.

Figure 7: Coverage of essential health services



In education, progress on access has been constrained by economic pressures and drought-related household vulnerabilities. At 42.91% in 2024 early childhood development enrolment has not risen to the baseline figures of 60.57% (2021) and is off target (70% in 2026), while senior secondary school enrolment dropped to 52.18% in 2024 compared to the 54.25 in 2021 – please see Table 9 below. However, junior school enrolment stabilised, and gender disparities in early learning remain low. These trends highlight the need for targeted catch-up interventions, fee support, and infrastructure strengthening to prevent long-term learning losses.

Table 9: Enrolment figures

Education Level	Baseline	2022 (%)	2023 (%)	2024 (%)	Target
ECD (Early Childhood Development)	60.57%	44.15%	42.70%	42.91%	70%
Junior School	81.18%	81.97%	79.16%	80.59%	90%
Secondary School	54.25%	56.06%	56.86%	52.18%	

**Access to clean water and sanitation remains a major determinant of health and well-being.** Table 10 below shows that while **64% of households** have access to basic drinking water, masking significant rural–urban inequalities, sanitation access has stagnated at **36%**, well below national targets. Yet community-led sanitation efforts helped reduce open defecation from **29% to 25%** between 2020 and 2024, demonstrating behaviour change gains. Hygiene access also shows persistent inequality, with only **36% of rural households** having adequate hygiene compared to **56% in urban areas**, highlighting the continued need for targeted WASH investments.

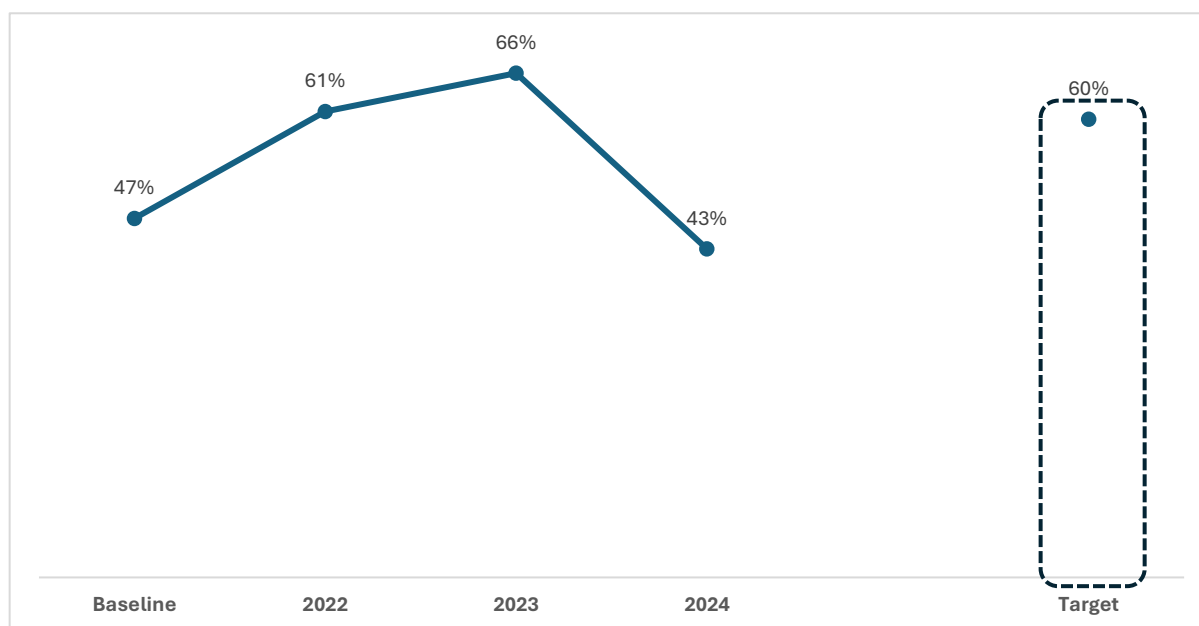
Table 10: Access to basic drinking water

Year	National Water Coverage	Rural	Urban
2020-Baseline	63%	60%	95%
2023	62%	48%	93%
2024	64%	48%	93%
Target	67%	63%	95%

#### 4.3.3.2. Household economic security

**While household economic security weakened due to macroeconomic instability, the El Niño-induced agricultural downturn, and persistent labour market inequities, UN supported social protection systems continue to play a critical role in stabilizing household welfare.** Figure 8 below shows that coverage rose from **61% in 2022 to 66% in 2023**, although it declined to **43% in 2024** following the rural cash ban.

Figure 8: Percentage of the of extreme poor covered by social assistance programmes



Notwithstanding the above, UN-supported social protection programs reached **1.46 million individuals** with food assistance, cash transfers, and resilience-building interventions, cushioning vulnerable households from the worst impacts of drought and economic shocks.

**Other indices have not fared too well.** National unemployment rose to **21.8% in 2024**, with women (24.6%) and youth (41.2% among those aged 15–24) disproportionately affected. Youth Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) rates increased to **48.1%**, signalling structural gaps in job creation, skills development, and school-to-work transitions. Persons with disabilities remain

particularly vulnerable, experiencing a sharp increase in unemployment to **22.1%**, up from 6.8% the previous year.

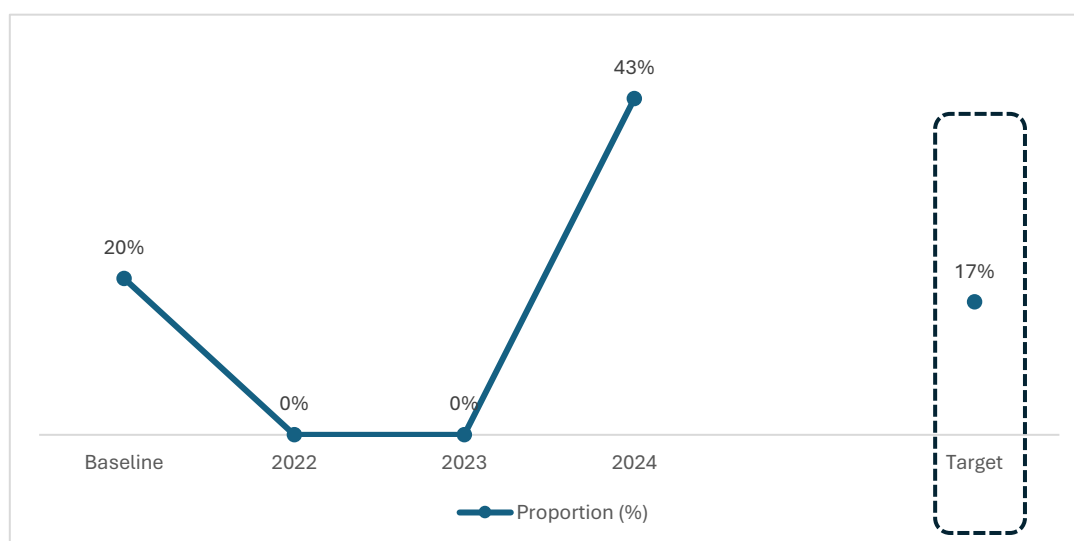
ZIMSTAT statistics show that formal employment grew modestly to **14.5% of total employment** in 2024, from 13% in 2023, but this improvement was insufficient to offset widespread informality and declining rural incomes. This recent uptick, the current level remains far below both the baseline and the target of 30%. This trend suggests that formal job creation has not kept pace with the labour force, and that most employment remains concentrated in the informal sector. Agricultural GDP contracted by **15% in 2024** due to drought conditions, undermining household livelihoods, particularly given the sector’s centrality to income and food security. However, projections for 2025 indicate a strong rebound of **12.8%**, suggesting potential recovery where climate-smart practices are scaled up.

Achieving the formal employment target will require targeted policies to stimulate formal sector growth, improve labour regulations, and expand access to skilled employment opportunities, particularly for women and youth.

### 4.3.3.3. Safety, Protection and Inclusion

**With UN support, Zimbabwe made substantial progress in expanding protection services for women, children, and other vulnerable groups.** Since 2022, more than **944,000 people** have accessed comprehensive protection services including child protection, GBV support, psychosocial care, and justice services; through mobile and static one-stop centres, safe spaces, and strengthened victim-friendly courts. These efforts occur against a backdrop of persistently high gender-based violence: **42.5% of women aged 15–49** report physical or sexual violence.

Figure 9: Proportion of ever partnered women and girls aged 15 -49 years subjected violence in the previous 12 months



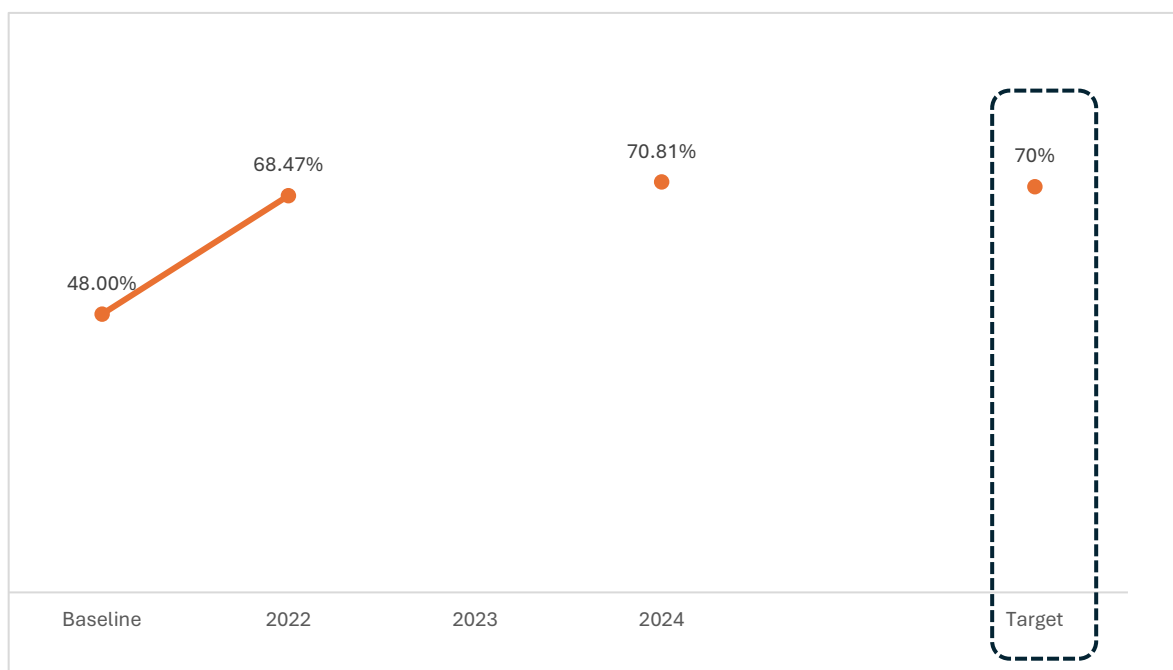
MICS, ZDHS, ZimVAC, Population Census Administrative Data, NCMS Reports

Figure 9 above shows that the baseline prevalence was 20% but reported cases dropped to 0% in both 2022 and 2023, which is likely due to data gaps or underreporting rather than an actual elimination of violence. By 2024, the rate surged dramatically to 43%, more than double the baseline level and far above the target of 17%. This sharp increase indicates either a real escalation in intimate partner violence or improved detection and reporting, but in either case, it signals a need for urgent action to strengthen prevention, protection, and support systems for survivors.

Justice sector reforms resulted in **67,056 vulnerable individuals**, including 818 children, accessing decentralized and more affordable legal services. Diversion programmes achieved a **95% success rate**,

demonstrating strong potential for rehabilitative justice. Establishment of disability committees in **88% of Victim Friendly Courts** improved access for persons with disabilities and enhanced compliance with human rights standards. Figure 10 below shows that the perceptions of inclusion and service accountability improved (**modified SDGs 16.6.2**), with the national satisfaction index rising from **67.78% in 2022 to 70.81% in 2024**, suggesting renewed public confidence in service delivery as decentralization and governance reforms advance.

Figure 10: Proportion of population who indicate satisfaction in surveys with their last experience of public services



Source: PSC Annual Report/Satisfaction Surveys/National Development/Strategy1

The proportion of the population satisfied with their most recent experience of public services has increased significantly over time. Satisfaction rose from 48% at baseline to 68.47% in 2022, and then slightly increased to 70.81% in 2023. This level of satisfaction already exceeds the target of 70%, indicating strong progress in public service delivery and citizen perception. The upward trend suggests that reforms or improvements in service quality are having a positive impact.

#### 4.3.3.4. Resilience to shocks

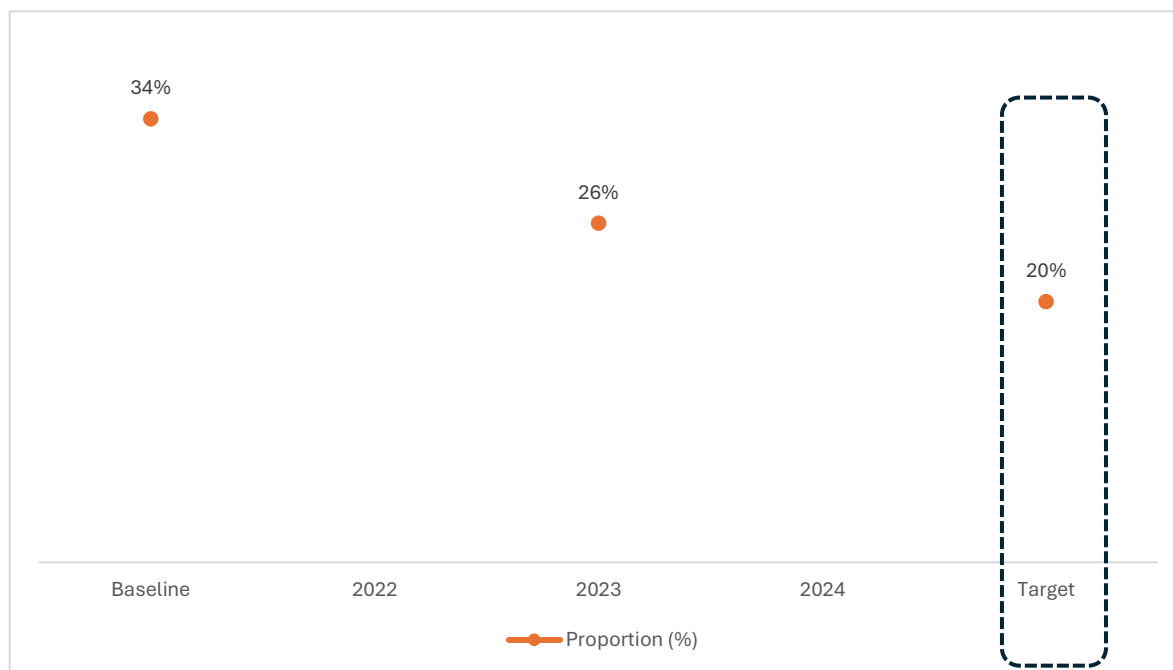
**The UN support has enabled Zimbabwe to significantly strengthen institutional and community capacity to withstand climate shocks.** All **92 local authorities (100%)** are now implementing DRR programmes aligned with national strategies, marking a critical step toward localized and sustainable resilience planning. This has enhanced preparedness, early warning dissemination, and coordinated response mechanisms, including addressing migration-related risks in high-mobility border districts like Beitbridge.

**At the household level, adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices is expanding.** The Pfumvudza/Intwasa conservation agriculture programme contributed **12% of the national maize planting area** in the 2023/24 season, supporting yield stability even under drought conditions. Rehabilitation of irrigation schemes and promotion of agroecology are mitigating climate-induced productivity losses.

Figure 11 below shows that the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity (SDG 2.1.1) has improved since the baseline but remains above the target. Food insecurity decreased from 34% at

baseline to 26% in 2023, reflecting progress in reducing household vulnerability and improving food access. However, the current level is still 6 percentage points higher than the target of 20%. Continued efforts will be necessary to strengthen food systems, enhance social protection, and cushion households from economic shocks to achieve the desired reduction in food insecurity.

Figure 11: Trends in the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity



Source: Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS).

Childhood stunting increased from 23.5% at baseline to 27% in 2023–2024, moving further away from the 17% target, pointing to complex, multi-dimensional nutrition challenges linked to agricultural shocks, WASH access, and health service utilisation. Zimbabwe is also making strides in environmental protection, achieving a **67.3% reduction in total greenhouse gas emissions** by 2024 and being on track to meet HCFC and HFC reduction commitments.

#### 4.3.3.4. Governance, Voice and Accountability

**UN supported governance reforms and civic engagement efforts continued to advance transparency, participation, and gender-responsive leadership.** Zimbabwe delivered **seven major state party reports** to regional and international human rights bodies, demonstrating strengthened institutional compliance with global governance standards. Table 11 below shows the most recent (2024) levels of compliance with international, continental and regional human rights and treaty bodies instruments/covenants (modified SDG 16.a.1)

Table 11: Compliance with international human rights or governance standards

Indicator	Measure / Status	Trend / Notes
<b>National Inquiry (Sexual Exploitation, Child Marriage)</b>	283 survivors interviewed; 2,470 community engagements; 529 reported cases (10 male, 519 females; 48 PWD)	Focus on women, girls, and persons with disabilities; high rates of unreported cases
<b>State Party Reports Submitted</b>	9 reports during the review period	Includes periodic reports to African and UN human rights bodies

<b>Treaty Compliance</b>	Submitted reports under: African Charter (16th), Women’s Protocol (2nd), and 6 conventions on labour rights	Demonstrates proactive reporting under ILO conventions
<b>New Accession Approved</b>	International Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Families – to be submitted in 2024	Moving toward compliance with remaining human rights instruments
<b>Outstanding Instruments</b>	2 core instruments remaining: Convention Against Torture and Convention on Enforced Disappearances	Indicates near-complete ratification landscape
<b>UPR Follow-Up</b>	National Plan of Action developed for 3rd Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations	Reflects implementation progress
<b>Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC)</b>	Re-accredited “A” status in 2023 by GANHRI	In compliance with UN Paris Principles; high global standards
<b>Additional Reports</b>	7 state party reports submitted via Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights, including ICCPR, CEDAW, ILO conventions, and Beijing +30	Represents high inter-agency coordination
<b>SDG Monitoring / Press Freedom</b>	SDG 16.10 reporting and a chapter in the "State of Press Freedom in Southern Africa"	Focused on Article 19 of ICCPR (freedom of expression)

Source: compiled from UN Info

**Evidence also suggest that with UN support, Zimbabwe is making significant progress toward fulfilling its international human rights obligations. With:**

- Re-accreditation of its Human Rights Commission at the highest level,
- Substantial treaty reporting,
- Legislative and administrative steps toward accession to remaining treaties,
- Active follow-up of UPR recommendations,

**The UN deployed a set of complementary tools and frameworks to strengthen women’s leadership and political participation.** The **National Strategy on Women in Leadership** provided a policy foundation for addressing structural barriers, while **media monitoring tools** enabled stakeholders to track and challenge gender bias in public discourse. To build individual capacities, the UN supported the development of a comprehensive **Women’s Political Participation Training Manual** and an accessible **Pocket Guide for aspiring women candidates and female councillors**, offering practical guidance on campaigning, public engagement, and navigating political structures.

Together, these tools created a supportive ecosystem that enhanced both the enabling environment and women’s readiness to participate effectively in governance. Table 12 below shows the trends in positions held by women **compared to national distributions and other related indices (SDG 16.7.1)**

Table 12: Proportions of positions held by women compared to national distributions, and other governance indices

Indicator	2018 Elections	2023 Elections	Change/Trend
Women in National Assembly	81 (approx. 30.6%)	86 (30.8%)	+5 women (+0.2%)
Women in Senate	34 of 80 (42.5%)	36 of 80 (45%)	+2 women (+2.5%)

Global Ranking (National Parl.)		61st	Improved by 2 positions
Global Ranking (Senate)		7th	Improved by 2 positions, shared with Belgium
First-Past-the-Post Women MPs	Unspecified	23 (11%)	Decrease in proportion
Women Presidential Candidates		1	First identified instance
Women Ministers		6 of 26 (~23%)	Represents a minority
Provincial Women Ministers		5 of 10	50%
Women Senators (Proportional Representation)		35	Increased representation through PR
Women Representatives in Local Councils		Guaranteed minimum of 23%	Constitutional Amendment No. 2 (2022)

Overall, there has been progress toward gender equality in politics is notable:

- **36 of 80 Senators** are women, placing Zimbabwe 7th among upper houses globally.
- Women hold **30.8% of National Assembly seats** and occupy 23% of ministerial posts.
- Constitutional Amendment No. 2 ensured a minimum **23% female representation in local councils**, improving women’s roles in local governance and development planning.

These shifts reflect sustained engagement by government, civil society, and UN partners to expand civic voice, promote inclusive leadership, and strengthen accountability frameworks.

#### 4.3.3.3. Strengthening Resilience

EQ12 How have ZUNSDCF programmes contributed to strengthening institutional and individual resilience and reduced vulnerability to shocks and crises?

This is the second of the evaluation questions that assessed the orientation towards impact. It looked at the extent to which the CF interventions contributed to strengthening individual and institutional resilience. There are different definitions and understandings of resilience. For this evaluation, we have used the FCDO definitions of resilience<sup>33</sup>, which is understood as the ability to anticipate, avoid, plan for, cope with, recover from and adapt to shocks and stresses. Outcomes of resilience-building processes are seen as a set of interlinked ‘capacities’ to absorb, anticipate and adapt to shocks and stresses.

- **Absorptive capacity** refers to the ability to face and manage adverse conditions, using available skills and resources.
- **Anticipatory capacity** means anticipating and reducing the impact of shocks and stresses through preparedness and planning.
- **Adaptive capacity** is being able to adapt to multiple, long-term and future risks, and to learn and adjust after a disaster.

Based on the above, the evaluation looked at absorptive and adaptive capacities at the individual and community levels, including reduced vulnerabilities to shocks and crises, while anticipatory capacity was assessed looking at institutional capacity for resilience.

<sup>33</sup> Sturgess, P.; DFID. Measuring Resilience. Evidence on Demand, UK (2016) 51 pp. [DOI: 10.12774/eod\_tg.may2016.sturgess2]

**Finding 12: The CF has catalysed a systemic shift from fragmented, reactive responses to integrated, risk-informed, and inclusive development systems that seek to strengthen both institutional and community capacities to anticipate, absorb, and recover from shocks and crises.**

In line with the theory of change pathways, the UN support to policy reforms and the policy achievements demonstrated the UN's catalytic role in helping Government embed durable, SDG-aligned reforms that drive long-term, systemic impact. Service delivery capacities expanded meaningfully across health, protection, and agriculture. These improvements reflect the UN's direct role in elevating the quality, reach, and inclusiveness of service delivery across Zimbabwe. Across all sectors, UN financial support acted as a stabilising force, enabling vulnerable communities to withstand shocks while reinforcing national systems for long-term resilience.

### **Policy coherence and strengthening institutional resilience and preparedness**

**At the institutional level, the CF has reinforced policy alignment, improved coordination, and embedded inclusion and accountability into national systems.** The evaluation found that the CF has helped to reinforce government's institutional capacity for resilience. Documentary evidence and stakeholder interviews show that the UN supported the integration of risk management, climate adaptation, and inclusion frameworks into national planning processes. This supported included:

- Technical assistance in developing the National Disaster Risk Management Strategy, **mainstreaming risk-informed budgeting** across national planning, and supporting local development planning through OPC and the Civil Protection Department.
- At the provincial level, initiatives aimed at strengthening local governance systems and decentralised planning capacities, has enabled provincial and district authorities to incorporate resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR) into development plans. Many local councils now have district disaster management plans and climate change adaptation strategies aligned to national priorities.
- UN collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development on the Climate Finance Framework has established new fiscal instruments for risk management, ensuring that resilience financing is embedded in public financial systems.

**The UN's work on climate and disaster governance** built institutional capacity to anticipate and respond to shocks. Under the CF, five weather radars, 30 automatic weather stations, and national risk profiling systems were installed or upgraded, significantly improving the accuracy of early warning and climate data. These investments have enabled ministries to plan proactively rather than reactively to crises.

**The evaluation found that CF interventions have enhanced Zimbabwe's capacity to anticipate and respond to crises, helping to move from reactive to risk-informed programming.** Documentary evidence and stakeholder interviews revealed that during drought and food insecurity periods, UN agencies worked alongside government structures to ensure continuity of essential services. A senior government official recounted that during the El Niño-induced drought: *"We rose to the task... government and WFP did well under an environment of shrinking funding."* Similarly, a UN respondent provided a clear example of institutional agility and emergency response capacity: *"During Cyclone Idai, IOM deployed staff from different regions within a week to support coordination, shelter, and camp management. Our systems allow us to respond quickly."*

Further evidence indicates that the UN system has progressively shifted from short-term humanitarian interventions toward integrated resilience programming. Overall, this has helped to foster adaptive social protection systems that cushion households during shocks but also empower them to rebuild sustainably. For instance, under the Food Deficit Mitigation Programme, government and the UN

jointly targeted vulnerable rural households to ensure food security while building local capacity. According to a senior government official, *“Our food deficit mitigation programme is basically rural... we distribute grain in rural areas because vulnerability tends to be higher there.”*

### **Strengthening individual and community resilience**

**The evaluation notes that at the community and individual levels, interventions in agriculture, education, health, and social protection have enhanced adaptive capacity, self-reliance, and behavioural resilience.** Documentary evidence shows that the ZRBF reached over 1.1 million people (62% women, 20% youth) across 18 districts, building adaptive capacity through climate-smart agriculture, diversified livelihoods, and access to microfinance and insurance. The introduction of solar and piped irrigation systems, coupled with training in environmental conservation, has climate-proofed livelihoods and reduced dependency on rainfall. In addition, Farmers adopted drought-tolerant crops, agroecological practices, and water-harvesting techniques, with 6,000 smallholders accessing microinsurance worth US\$598,400. As a result, food insecurity fell from 56% in 2020 to 26% in 2023.

According to a UN respondent, *“We’ve enhanced food, nutrition, and livelihood security for smallholder farmers — our main target group... Farmers are trained extensively, and we’ve established nutrition champions and lead farmers integrated into government’s Farmer Field Schools.”*

Another respondent from SAT provided further evidence, stating that *“Under EFIS, sorghum yields increased from 0.38 to 0.45 tons/ha, cowpea yields from 0.24 to 0.34 tons/ha, and the area under agroecological practices expanded from 9,800 to 22,403 hectares.”*

**The establishment of Village Business Units (VBUs) pilots by the UN in districts such as Pfura, Chiwundura and Buhera; in response to the 2024 El Niño event has significantly transformed household economies and community wellbeing.** Each VBU serves as a self-sustaining, solar-powered micro-enterprise hub that integrates irrigated agriculture, aquaculture, and livestock management. Through the installation of solar-powered boreholes and irrigation systems, every participating community now has access to at least two hectares of irrigated land and 24-hour clean water supply. These systems not only ensure year-round agricultural production but also support fishponds and livestock watering points, providing multiple, climate-resilient income streams. Irrigated gardens and fish farming have diversified diets and improved nutrition, while surplus produce is sold in local markets, creating stable sources of income. Even under drought conditions, participating households have maintained productive agricultural cycles, marking a notable shift from subsistence dependence to sustainable, market-oriented production. The government has now institutionalised the VBUs with more than 10,000 already established at the time of the evaluation.

**The solarisation of health facilities anchored by the UN is noted to have contributed to energy access and infrastructure resilience, with a transformative effect on community well-being and service delivery.** The initiative which covered over 1,100 health facilities and 150 schools has ensured uninterrupted power for essential services, especially in rural areas prone to grid failure. These efforts are estimated to have saved more than 77,000 lives by maintaining power for maternity wards, cold chains, and emergency care during outages. Intrinsically, this initiative links clean energy and resilience, simultaneously addressing sustainability, adaptation, and mitigation.

**Despite the important strides in resilience building, the evaluation notes several challenges, principal of which is the persisting structural and economic vulnerabilities occasioned by the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the country.** Overall, resilience efforts are unfolding within a broader context of macroeconomic volatility, inflation, and recurrent climatic shocks, which frequently erode progress. Thus, even well-designed programmes struggle against systemic challenges

such as currency instability, migration pressures, and drought recurrence. As one UN respondent observed: *“Resilience is not a one-off achievement — every new shock tests the system anew.”*

**The evaluation also notes that the reliance on short-term, donor-driven funding impacts on deep and sustained resilience building.** Many local partners and NGOs reported that funding is rarely multi-year or predictable, making it difficult to consolidate gains or plan adaptive phases beyond the project period. While the ZRBF was widely praised for its scale and innovation for example, its dependence on external donor contributions is considered to have created uncertainty for long-term continuation.

**The evaluation notes further that there are limitations to local ownership and community participation at the programme design stages.** For example, while community-level results are visible, several respondents highlighted that programme design and prioritisation remain largely top-down, especially in early phases, with local actors reported to often play an implementing rather than decision-making role. Respondents opine that community consultations under some joint programmes were described as “informative rather than participatory,” which limits local innovation and sustainability.

#### 4.3.4. Sustainability

EQ13 What mechanisms exist to ensure the socio-political, institutional, financial, and environmental sustainability of ZUNSDCF results?

For this evaluation, the assessment of sustainability sought to answer the following questions: (a) How did the UNSDCF design and implementation address the sustainability (institutional, financial, etc.) of the interventions? (b) To what extent do national stakeholders demonstrate commitment and ownership over the results achieved?

#### Mechanisms supporting the sustainability of results

**Finding 13: The CF has effectively embedded sustainability through national alignment, institutional capacity development, and social inclusion, but financial sustainability remains the weakest dimension.**

**The evaluation judges that the CF’s direct alignment with NDS1 means that it is deeply embedded in Zimbabwe’s national planning architecture,** thus providing a strong socio-political foundation for sustainability. Key mechanisms ensuring political and institutional anchoring include:

- **Joint Steering Committee (JSC)** co-chaired by OPC and the UN RCO, providing high-level policy oversight.
- **Results Groups (RGs) and Pillar Working Groups** co-led by line ministries and UN agencies, ensuring continuous government participation in programme design, implementation, and monitoring.
- **Integration into national systems,** such as the alignment of CF indicators with the NDS1 monitoring framework and ZIMSTAT data systems.

These arrangements strengthen policy coherence, government ownership, and institutional continuity, even as political or administrative conditions evolve. A government respondent explained: *“The CF is not a parallel plan; it is embedded in our national development priorities. Every outcome area corresponds to an NDS1 pillar, so the UN work supports what we already planned to do.”*

**The evaluation also notes that sustainability has been embedded in design through a strong emphasis on capacity development of public institutions.** Across all pillars, UN agencies have supported institutional reforms and system strengthening, which has progressively shifted the UN’s

role from direct service delivery to upstream policy support, fostering long-term institutional sustainability. Notable examples include:

- Technical assistance for public finance management (PFM) and governance reforms
- Support for the establishment of integrated social protection systems and a national social registry.
- Development of early warning systems and climate risk management tools under the Planet pillar.

A senior government official noted that *“The social protection system we are now using was designed with UN support, but it is managed by us. That’s a good example of sustainability in practice.”*

**Documentary evidence and stakeholder interviews also show that the CF integrates social and environmental safeguards** to ensure interventions are inclusive and resilient. For example, gender equality, disability inclusion, and environmental sustainability are cross-cutting priorities reflected in all four outcome areas. Evidence of safeguards include the mainstreaming of climate adaptation in agriculture, promotion of renewable energy, and application of environmental and social standards in infrastructure support. While environmental sustainability is well articulated however, the evaluation notes that monitoring frameworks for tracking environmental outcomes remain weak and fragmented across agencies. An NGO partner confirmed that *“The UN has been deliberate in embedding climate and gender lenses across its programmes. For instance, resilience projects now have environmental safeguards and women’s leadership indicators.”*

**The evaluation assesses that financial sustainability is constrained by heavy donor dependence.** Although the CF design envisioned national co-financing and progressive transition to domestic resource mobilization, for example strategic partnerships with Pension Funds and Philanthropic Foundations. The documentary evidence showed that most interventions remain externally funded with over 80% of resources donor-provided and limited domestic fiscal contribution beyond staff time or infrastructure. The evaluation notes that this reliance on external funding poses sustainability risks once projects end. In some cases in fact, programme continuation depends on follow-up donor cycles rather than national budget integration. A donor respondent observed that *“The UN’s support is well targeted, but the scale is still dependent on donor cycles. Once funding dries up, activities risk losing momentum.”*

While efforts are underway to mitigate this, such as the development of a joint resource mobilization strategy under the RCO and capacity-building for national resource mobilization, **domestic financing remains limited**, reflecting macroeconomic constraints and competing fiscal priorities occasioned partly by the sanctions on the country. The evaluation also found that the Government of Zimbabwe has shown **strong policy ownership** over the CF, evidenced by its leadership of the Joint Steering Committee and alignment with national development priorities, including the participation of ministries in Results Groups and co-chairing thematic platforms. However, **operational ownership varies with some** ministries demonstrating limited engagement beyond formal participation, especially where funding or implementation capacity is low.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

The following conclusions draw on the key findings under the multiple evaluation questions and criteria

**Conclusion 1: The CF is strongly aligned with national priorities, with the ToC providing a sound design logic and coherence across pillars; but needs sharper economic focus going forward [drawn from EQ1, EQ2, EQ5 findings]**

The evaluation found that the Cooperation Framework is highly relevant and well aligned with Vision 2030, NDS1, and the SDGs, reflecting strong government ownership, policy coherence, and clear theories of change that supported results in health, education, social protection, and governance. However, economic transformation particularly youth employment, value addition, and private sector engagement; was underrepresented, indicating the need for future frameworks to better balance social investments with inclusive economic growth. While the ToC assumptions largely held, major contextual shifts such as macroeconomic instability and political developments were not incorporated until late in the cycle, limiting their influence on earlier programming. As a result, opportunities were missed to use the ToC as a living tool for adaptive learning, evidence-based decision-making, and timely course correction.

**Conclusion 2: Coordination architecture is robust and has improved coherence and contributed to the CF achievements, but operational integration require improvements [drawn from EQ3, EQ4, EQ9, EQ10 findings]**

The evaluation findings showed that formal coordination mechanisms such as the RCO, PMT, as well as thematic and results groups have strengthened coherence, reduced duplication across agencies, while enhancing collective action, with an increase in joint programmes. The RCO's neutrality and convening power have fostered trust and collective accountability. However, agency competition, uneven participation, and limited RCO resourcing constrain full operational integration. Thus, while the "Delivering as One" reform has taken root, but achieving full coherence requires sustained investment in the RCO, clearer division of labour among agencies, and stronger joint accountability mechanisms to maintain collaboration from design through implementation.

**Conclusion 3: Humanitarian and climate-related adaptive capacity has improved, but economic and governance adaptation remains weak [drawn from EQ2, EQ5, EQ6 findings]**

The evaluation findings showed that the UNCT demonstrated agility during humanitarian crises such as droughts, cholera, and El Niño; supported by anticipatory action and early-warning systems. However, capacity was far weaker for macroeconomic instability, policy shifts, and governance challenges, despite their significant impact on development outcomes. This imbalance reduced resilience and hindered transitions from crisis response to sustainable recovery.

**Conclusion 4: Resource mobilization is improving but prioritization of implementation is mostly guided by resource availability rather than relative need due to heavy donor-dependence [drawn from EQ7, EQ8 findings]**

The evaluation found that the UNCT has jointly engaged donors and mobilised multi-agency funding, but less than half of required CF resources have been secured, resulting in uneven financing. Funding is heavily skewed toward social and humanitarian sectors, leaving the Prosperity and Peace pillars underfunded, while high earmarking (about 80%) limits flexibility, alignment with national priorities, and the ability to scale interventions in high-need areas.

**Conclusion 5: The CF achieved good results and made valuable contributions to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups, but results are uneven [drawn from EQ5, EQ6, EQ 9, EQ10, EQ11 findings]**

The evaluation found that the CF delivered strong results in health, education, social protection, and resilience, supported by system-strengthening and significant funding, with clear benefits for vulnerable groups. However, economic transformation, decent work, and youth employment lagged due to underfunding of the Prosperity pillar, limited engagement of specialised economic agencies, reliance on short-term training, and donor funding patterns skewed toward social sectors.

Joint programmes improved service access, inclusion, and resilience—particularly for women, children, refugees, and persons with disabilities—and effectively mainstreamed human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, and environmental sustainability. However, sustainability of outcomes remains constrained by limited fiscal space, fragmented UN delivery, and recurring economic and climate shocks.

**Conclusion 6: The CF contributed to system-level capacity and community resilience, but sustainability remains uneven due to funding volatility and limited institutionalisation [drawn from EQ5, EQ10, EQ11 findings]**

The evaluation findings show that the CF strengthened national systems and community resilience. Durable contributions include the Solar for Health initiative, school infrastructure upgrades, strengthened health systems, and community preparedness mechanisms. Government has also institutionalised the Village Business Units pilots with more than 10,000 established. In addition, joint programmes enhanced institutional capacity in health, social protection, and disaster risk management. However, models such as anticipatory action and area-based convergence show strong potential but lack national institutionalisation and budget anchoring. National counterparts expressed concerns about early programme exits during drought recovery, while declining ODA and highly earmarked funds pose structural risks to sustaining gains.

**Conclusion 7: The sustainability of CF interventions is moderate but uneven — anchored where national systems and policies have been strengthened, yet constrained where donor dependence, weak fiscal space, and limited institutional capacity persist. [drawn from EQ1, EQ13].**

The evaluation found that the CF’s strong alignment with NDS1 embeds it firmly in Zimbabwe’s national planning system, supporting sustainability through institutional capacity development and a shift from direct service delivery to upstream policy support. While the CF achieved high-impact results in health, education, gender equality, and social protection, sustainability remains fragile due to heavy donor dependence, limited fiscal space, and uneven institutional integration, with domestic financing constrained by macroeconomic pressures and competing priorities.

**5.2 Recommendations**

The evaluation team opines the following recommendations based on the findings and conclusions. These have been validated with the evaluation manager and the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG). The recommendations have been prioritised using three variables as follows:

- **Urgency of implementing the recommendation** –**high** (immediate), **medium** (next 3 - 6 months), **low** (next 12 months)
- **Impact of implementing the recommendation on PF/CF delivery** – high, medium, low
- **Difficulty of implementing the recommendation by the UNCT** – high, medium, low

**Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the UNCT should rebalance the next CF portfolio to prioritize concrete actions that advance structural economic transformation, market development, governance reforms, and macro-level resilience [drawn from Conclusions 1 and 5]**

**Urgency:** High  
**Impact:** High  
**Difficulty:** Medium

The evaluation found that the CF’s alignment with NDS1 embeds it in national planning and supports sustainability through institutional capacity building and upstream policy support. However, despite

strong results in social sectors, sustainability remains fragile due to donor dependence, limited fiscal space, and uneven institutional integration.

**Recommendation 2: It is recommended that the UN should advocate for and support the national government in strengthening devolution [drawn from Conclusions 5 and 6].** | **Urgency:** Medium  
**Impact:** High  
**Difficulty:** Medium

The evaluation found that while national-level coordination has improved, uneven sub-national implementation continues to constrain impact. Strengthening devolution is essential to translate national policies into effective, context-specific outcomes at provincial and district levels.

**Recommendation 3: It is recommended that The UNCT should strengthen strategic adaptability by embedding adaptive management practices within the CF, using evidence and results data to enable timely course correction [drawn from Conclusions 1 and 3].** | **Urgency:** High  
**Impact:** High  
**Difficulty:** Low

The evaluation found that although the CF had robust theories of change, they were underused as adaptive management tools, limiting responsiveness to economic, climate, and youth-related shifts. Strengthening results-based management and systematically revisiting assumptions and risks would enable more agile, evidence-driven implementation.

**Recommendation 4: In line with UN reforms, it is recommended that the Results Groups should consolidate joint programming as the default modality for UN cooperation, with support from the PMT [drawn from Conclusions 2 and 5]** | **Urgency:** High  
**Impact:** High  
**Difficulty:** Medium

The evaluation observed that joint programmes improved coherence and efficiency but were unevenly implemented and sometimes undermined by agency competition. Nonetheless, joint programmes constituted more than 50% of the delivery during the current CF implementation. Working more through joint programmes would lead to a more cohesive and cost-effective UN system delivering integrated, high-impact programmes aligned with national priorities. The next cycle should more aggressively explore opportunities for joint programming buttressed by a well-documented joint UN resource mobilization strategy, which encourages HQ institutional policies of individual UN agencies to provide support by rewarding country-level heads of agencies for joint programming and resource mobilisation.

**Recommendation 5: It is recommended for the UNCT to enhance coherence and synergy across the CF pillars and invest in the RCO capacity and resourcing to strengthen CF coordination, implementation and monitoring [drawn from Conclusions 2 and 5]** | **Urgency:** Medium  
**Impact:** High  
**Difficulty:** Medium

While each CF pillar made progress, cross-pillar linkages were not consistently operationalised. Stronger integration is needed, with Joint Work Plans treated as the primary planning instrument and agency budgets and activities derived directly from CF outcomes. Strengthening RCO resourcing and establishing a dedicated SDGs Steering Committee Secretariat would further improve coordination, coherence, and joint advocacy.

**Recommendation 6: It is recommended for the UNCT to systematize knowledge management and lesson learning in the next CF. [drawn from Conclusions 5 and 6].**

**Urgency:** High  
**Impact:** High  
**Difficulty:** Medium

There are good lessons related to joint work planning in terms of coordination, capacity building and sustainability. There are also lessons on working through results groups co-led with government agencies, which showed that this has been helpful in ensuring direction and efforts towards measuring results. However, there are perceptions that knowledge sometimes reside with staff members and this can be lost due to staff turnover. Overall, having a systematised approach will ensure that lessons learned are systematically captured and integrated into future programming and decision-making.

**Recommendation 7: Enhance sustainability through national institutionalisation and diversified financing models [drawn from Conclusions 4, 6 and 7].**

**Urgency:** Medium  
**Impact:** High  
**Difficulty:** Low

The evaluation observed that the CF contributed meaningfully to durable systems, such as Solar for Health, strengthened surveillance, early-warning systems, and social protection reforms. The government has also now institutionalised the Village Business Units with more than 10,000 currently on place. However, sustainability remains uneven due to heavy donor dependence, declining ODA, short programme cycles, and limited government absorption of successful models. There is need to further institutionalise other promising pilots like the anticipatory action (nationally budgeted), while premature programme exits risk undermining resilience gains.

