



UNFPA APRO

Formative Evaluation of the Asia and Pacific Regional Programme Action Plan 2022-2025

Final Evaluation Report

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UNFPA Asia and Pacific Regional Office	Oyuntsetseg Chuluundorj Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser - Evaluation Manager
Independent Evaluation Team	Silvia Salinas Evaluation Team Leader
	Josefina Natividad Evaluation Team Member
	Weerapak Samsiripong Young and Emerging Evaluator

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Acronyms

AI	Artificial intelligence
APMD	Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development
APRO	Asia Pacific Regional Office
BANI	Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear and Incomprehensible
CPR	Contraceptive Prevalence Rates
CO	Country Office
CP	Country Programme
CPDs	Country programme documents
CSO	Civil society organizations
CSE	Comprehensive sexuality education
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EM	Evaluation Manager
EO	Evaluation Office
EQ	Evaluation Question
EQAA	Evaluation Quality Assurance and Assessment
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FGM	Female genital mutilation
FLE	Family Life Education
FP	Family planning
GBSS	Gender-biased Sex Selection
GBV	Gender-based violence
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDI	Global Disability Innovation
GEWE	Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment
GFF	Global Financing Facility
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
GSDR	Global Sustainable Development Report
HDP	Humanitarian, Development and Peace
HMIC	High-Middle Income Countries
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Rights
HRD	Humanitarian Response Division
IBC	Issue Based Coalition
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
ICPD PoA	International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
KM	Knowledge management
LDC	Least Developed Country
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and other identities
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MCO	Multi-Country Office

MIC	Middle Income Countries
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
MTR	Mid-Term Review
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NTA	National Transfer Accounts
OEE	Organizational effectiveness and efficiency
PICTs	Pacific Island Countries & Territories
PMD	Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development
PSRO	Pacific Sub-Regional Office
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
P&D	Population & Development
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
ROs	Regional Office
RPAP	Regional Programme Action Plan
RPEs	Regional Programme Evaluations
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPE	Strategic Plan Evaluation
SP	Strategic Plan
SRH(R)	Sexual and Reproductive Health (and Rights)
SRO	Sub-regional Office
SROI	Social Return on Investment
SSTC	South-South and Triangular Cooperation
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TRs	Transformative results
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNCT-SWAP	United Nations Country Team – UN System-Wide Action Plan
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF Framework	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNW RO	UN Women Regional Office
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WCEA	World Continuing Education Alliance

Executive Summary

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION, INTENDED AUDIENCE

The Regional Programme Evaluation for the Asia Pacific Region (RPE) is part of the global formative evaluation of the UNFPA Strategic Plan (SP) 2022-2025 that focuses on organizational readiness and strategic positioning. This SP is the second in a series of three successive strategic plans focused on accelerate the achievement of three transformative results: (i) ending the unmet need for family planning; (ii) ending preventable maternal deaths; and (iii) ending gender-based violence and all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage.

The **purpose** of this evaluation is to provide evidence to support UNFPA's learning related to what works (and what does not) in the ongoing implementation of the current SP, to inform the design of the third and final Strategic Plan of this series. The **objective** of the evaluation is to catalyse a discussion on the design of the next Regional Programme 2026-2029, focusing on understanding the enabling and inhibiting factors and the key lessons learnt, to provide valuable, in-depth insights to boost the capacity of the organization to remain relevant, increase effectiveness and impact orientation, maximize efficiency, be coherent and consistent, adapt to changes, learn and innovate to enhance its readiness for the future. The **scope** of the evaluation is the current Asia Pacific Regional Programme Action Plan (RPAP) 2022-2025. All 36 countries (22 countries + 14 PICs) are included with the PICs being covered through the Pacific Sub-Regional Office (PSRO).

The primary intended users of the evaluation are: (i) UNFPA Asia and Pacific Regional Office (APRO); (ii) UNFPA Country Offices (COs) in the region; and (iii) UNFPA business units at headquarters. The evaluation should also be of interest to the UNFPA Executive Board and other UN organizations.

METHODOLOGY

The analytical framework of the evaluation follows three lines of inquiry: (i) relevance of strategic shifts and accelerators; (ii) operationalization of strategic shifts and accelerators; (iii) extent to which the identified enablers are facilitating the operationalization of the accelerators and shifts.

Bangladesh and Samoa, two states with contrasting realities, were selected for a more in-depth investigation of the evaluation issues. Nepal was also included to learn about the effects of federalization/decentralization on UNFPA work, while Thailand was chosen as a case study on low fertility and population ageing. In addition, the evaluation also conducted a specific analysis into partnerships, with a focus into in the Pacific subregion.

Applying a mixed methods approach, more than 390 documents were reviewed and 194 national and regional stakeholders were interviewed, predominantly UNFPA staff, followed in descending order, by government, civil society organizations, UN agencies, donors and academia. Additionally, a survey assessing all evaluation questions was conducted, achieving 100% of responses from 22 country offices, the Pacific Sub-Regional Office and the Samoa Multi-country Office.

The evaluation adhered to the basic ethical principles of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent in the conduct of the stakeholder interviews. Additionally, close coordination and collaboration with the SPE team, was a crucial factor to ensure quality.

MAIN FINDINGS

Finding 1: In the context of great regional diversity, countries are requesting a clear articulation of UNFPA's position on the demographic shift toward low fertility. Specifically, COs as well as external stakeholders, would like **UNFPA to pivot back to the bigger framework on population**, ensuring

agile but root-focused responses to the complex realities and rapid demographic transitions beyond the 3 TR, **positioning UNFPA as a forward-looking agency**, uniquely equipped to anticipate changes and prepare the region to respond innovatively to population and human rights (HR) concerns.

Finding 2: The need for a **new organizational mindset and systems thinking is the main challenge** for APRO, including enhanced catalytic, connecting, harvesting and accelerating competencies.

Finding 3: UNFPA is **recognized for its capability to engage with governments**, to advocate for policy in its mandate areas, to influence policy approaches, to tackle sensitive issues and deal with pushbacks. Nevertheless, **the normative function of UNFPA is not yet fully defined**, particularly to address decentralized systems of government, country transitions to middle income status, high levels of inequality, complex geopolitical movements and relevant sensitive issues. Different experiences show the importance of academic support and partnerships with CSOs to support normative work.

Finding 4: The accelerators are **considered highly relevant by the countries** and have been formally included in the CPDs. UNFPA **thematic leadership and technical capability/expertise** are considered the most important enabling factors, while APRO and PSRO support is particularly valued in relation **to innovation and digitalization, partnerships and SSTC, and HDP nexus**. Externally, **government commitment and support** are valued as key enablers. However, acceleration is work in progress with **insufficient guidance to ensure shared meaning, understanding and operationalization** in programming. At the same time, **new accelerators are suggested** (e.g. knowledge management). In the context of a BANI future (brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible), there is a need to address other human-centred accelerators like “hope” and mental health.

Finding 5: While the **importance of integrating the megatrends in programming and interventions is widely recognized**, there is **little guidance for countries**. The core importance for UNFPA of the megatrend **“demographic shifts” is not captured in the current approach**, and the impact of inequalities requires more structured attention. In the meantime, some offices have been working on the impact of some megatrends on the 3TRs, developing innovative evidence-based approaches.

Finding 6: The capacity to respond to demographic shifts and migration and **focusing on population dynamics** is a natural niche and **comparative advantage for UNFPA**.

Finding 7: The **life-cycle approach** is a **promising concept** that connects the various stages of human life before and beyond reproduction. It should be further strengthened to **overcome a current ageing bias**. The National Transfer Accounts (NTAs) exemplify its successful implementation to understanding the link between population dynamics and economic growth. Its use can be expanded.

Finding 8: **Leave No One Behind (LNOB)** is a **cornerstone of UNFPA** strategy and positioning; while disability inclusion has received a strong boost in the region, inclusion of indigenous people is less strong. Overall, there is room for improvement towards: i) **a shared understanding** of its conceptual and operational implications; ii) systematic **evidence-based implementation and accountability**.

Finding 9: UNFPA has continued enhancing capacities for the provision of **SRH quality services**, but a **scaling up approach is not very clear**. Reduced budgeting influences the perception that **strong positioning is being lost**. The political and cultural push backs are challenging, while decentralization implies both challenges and opportunities. **A wider sexual rights approach is needed** to respond to the **needs of older and other marginalized people**. The work with **midwives** is widely recognized as a high-impact intervention.

Finding 10: GBV response has a clear strategic approach. Visionary leadership, supported with an increasing budget, is recognized as a key success factor to articulate efforts. Most countries recognize that GBV related targets are very unlikely to be achieved. Greater clarity on how to address GBV with LGBTQI+ and older women, as well as on positive masculinities, are needed.

Finding 11: UNFPA is regionally recognized for its humanitarian work on SRH and GBV, despite no global guidance on humanitarian work in situations other than acute crisis. UNFPA also needs a strategy to monitor effects of its humanitarian interventions. Moreover, UNFPA is not prepared to fully and systematically implement a Human Development and Peace (HDP) nexus approach.

Finding 12: Today, only around 40% of the COs in the region report having developed and implemented programming to address discriminatory social and gender norms. There are different challenges to the full understanding, strategic development and implementation.

Finding 13: The APRO team has notably moved forward in advancing the shift from funding to funding and financing. But this has not yet significantly permeated the countries, where pushbacks, lack of clarity, misconceptions, culture and operational limitations inhibit the transition, with some emerging opportunities in relation to blended financing and private sector engagement.

Finding 14: There is a generalized recognition of the importance of partnerships as a key accelerator that strongly influences other accelerators. Partnerships focusing on innovation and reach, two key modes of impact-oriented partnerships, are very limited. Also, a more structured and strategic approach to South to South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) could be beneficial.

Finding 15: Despite global and regional efforts to leverage the strategic role of communication, a traditional approach to communication prevails and has undermined its potential effectiveness.

Finding 16: More than half of the COs strongly consider that human and financial resources have been insufficient and that the profiles of allocation of human resources have not been adequate. The perceptions are more positive on the sufficiency and adequacy of the administrative resources and procedures, despite the burden of centralized bureaucracy and non-trust-based processes.

Finding 17: Knowledge management is not fully captured in its meaning, relevance and potential to catalyse organizational relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. KM, linked also to innovation, should be recognized as a key accelerator. While creating a learning culture and leading KM should be one of APRO's key strategies to boost innovation, anticipation, modelling and acceleration, it requires a vision, capacities and mechanisms that are not yet fully in place.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 1: UNFPA APRO is aware and mature about the need to boost its readiness towards the future to remain relevant and sustainable. The necessary conditions to and resources to implement a catalytic role need to be correspondingly determined and aligned.

The regional context presents diverse, complex and rapidly changing realities that share demographic challenges, threatening megatrends, inequality and rights issues. The current SP and RPAP limit UNFPA's relevance, response capacity and preparedness for the future. Furthermore, the regional leadership recognizes the need to revise the role and strategic contribution of APRO, while countries also expect enhanced support in relation to the strategic shifts and accelerators, SSTC, learning, innovation, strategic communication and knowledge management.

Conclusion 2: To ensure relevance and accelerate transformational changes, there is a need to expand the current scope and approach of the 3 TRs, taking into account demographic diversity in the region, the impact of the megatrends and a strengthened human-rights and LNOB perspective. There is a need to clarify conceptually and operationally the life-cycle approach as a framework applied across different areas of UNFPA work, not just to population ageing. APRO needs to strengthen its support to COs to enhance some key capacities and strategic thinking.

There is a need for a strong, clearly articulated population-based, human-rights focused umbrella framework and narrative for the next RPAP that integrates the individual megatrends. This framework should not only cover the 3 TRs, but also focus on the overall population and development context of the region, and expand to other SRHR issues of concern. UNFPA needs to recover its leadership role, uniqueness and clear niche in addressing key population issues.

There is a need to embed acceleration in the organizational culture. The evaluation has also evidenced the need to consider other accelerators like KM, hope and mental health. In general, there is room for improvement in APROs support to strengthen strategic thinking at country level.

Conclusion 3: UNFPA work takes place in challenging and rapidly changing contexts, including realities that demand increased attention from a HDP nexus approach. Normative work has been at the core of UNFPA work in the region, while the niches, priorities and definition of scaling-up for SRH and GBV information and service provision need to be fine-tuned to ensure value added given limited financial resources. In the case of social norm change, shared understanding of the meaning and implications for the organization are still in progress, facing important social and cultural pushbacks in various countries in the region

Despite some very challenging, restrictive contexts, UNFPA COs have maximized efforts to adapt to the situations and identify possibilities to play the normative role. On the other hand, UNFPA's humanitarian work is internally and externally widely recognized and valued. However, the organization needs to invest in developing a HDP nexus framework and expanding capacities.

In terms of both sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and gender-based violence (GBV) information and services, these are widely recognized and implemented as relevant, but the findings also evidence need to better define the niche in a competing and financially more restricted context. Social norm change is an important though long-term and complex strategic shift.

Conclusion 4: Partnerships are a key factor for UNFPA success in APRO, but their approach and management can be strengthened to ensure their strategic prioritization and catalytic contribution. Among these are partnerships within the Region, among the COs, with academia, with CSOs, with non-traditional donors, with the private sector. This is also linked to the needed change in mindsets, capacities, structures, processes and assumptions underlying the shift from funding to funding and financing, which is not yet fully in place.

Establishing partnerships is usual practice at regional and country level, with very important achievements. However, the global partnership strategy could be further operationalized, with special attention on private sector engagement to effectively move from funding to funding and financing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Revise UNFPA's value proposition for the region.

- Develop a "new demographic transition theory" for the Region.
- Develop a regional Theory of Change (ToC) with an updated and expanded approach to the 3 TRs.

- Expand the life-cycle and intergenerational approach, while generating responses to ageing.

Recommendation 2: Revise the role of APRO to align with the new value proposition and ToC, and the vision of being an accelerator, enabler and catalyst.

- In coordination with other regions, suggest the revision of the ToRs for the regional offices.
- Design and implement an organizational change roadmap.
- Propose to HQ and provide inputs to revise the SP results framework and definitions.
- Boost the development of impact-oriented inter-area and multi-disciplinary innovative responses.
- Analyse the potential value of country effective innovative responses and acceleration.

Recommendation 3: The next RPAP should be based on a nuanced approach to the 3 TRs, address demographic shifts, strengthen the HR, LNOB and life-cycle approaches, and include strengthened regional work strongly based on country learning and innovations.

- Articulate a focus on the sexual health aspect of SRHR from a life-cycle perspective.
- Serve a brokering role to connect countries in SSTC partnerships and strengthen KM strategies.
- Develop messaging to address the TR on unmet need for FP in countries with low fertility.
- In relevant countries, generate granular data to identify groups likely to be left behind.
- Continue regional work on the National Transfer Accounts and endeavour.

Recommendation 4: Unpack and urgently develop a programmatic response to the megatrends in the next RPAP.

- Address each megatrend individually in the next RPAP.
- Based on evidence, develop a stand on migration (especially labour migration).
- Develop a clear roadmap on how to incorporate climate change into programming.
- Encourage countries to analyse the emergence of digital technologies as a megatrend.
- Create a repository of knowledge on work and innovations in countries related to the megatrends.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen the positioning and value contribution of UNFPA to humanitarian action, with focus on the HDP nexus.

- Develop a clear conceptual and operational framework on the HDP nexus for APRO.
- Increase the capacity of the regional humanitarian team to move towards a nexus approach.
- Support relevant COs in updating the Common Operational Data Sets used by UNCT.
- Support a cross-country comparison of the effects of high male labour outmigration.

Recommendation 6: Provide differentiated support to countries transitioning to Middle Income Countries (MICs) and Upper Middle-Income Countries (UMICs), as well as to the Pacific Island Countries & Territories (PICTs), to ensure that UNFPA's mandate and priority areas are well positioned in the agenda and appropriately adapted to the new status and changing realities.

- Help countries transitioning to MIC or UMIC prepare a post-transition plan.
- Provide technical assistance on LNOB, HRs, inequality and gender and social norm change.
- Establish strong academic and innovation partnerships for best responses.
- Develop differentiated, context-relevant strategies and adaptations for normative work.

Recommendation 7: Strengthen the organizational preparedness and coherence to move forward from a funding structure and mindset, to financing enabling conditions.

- Increase resources to strengthen CO's transition to a funding and financing strategy.
- Map good practices and lessons learnt to further mobilize private funding.
- Further support COs in the development and use of investment cases and economic analyses.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1. The Regional Programme Evaluation for the Asia Pacific Region is part of the global formative evaluation of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025. This Strategic Plan (SP) is the second in a series of three successive strategic plans intended to build a foundation, accelerate progress towards achieving the three transformative results which UNFPA committed to supporting countries to attain by 2030¹ and ultimately, achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and acceleration of the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action. The three transformative results (3 TRs) are: (a) ending the unmet need for family planning; (b) ending preventable maternal deaths; and (c) ending gender-based violence and all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage. The first strategic plan (2018-2021) set the stage for achieving the 3 TRs. This second strategic plan 2022-2025 focuses on accelerating progress to achieve the three transformative results. The third strategic plan, for 2026-2029, will focus on filling the remaining gaps in the achievement of these results.²

2. The global evaluation focuses on UNFPA's organizational readiness and strategic positioning to accelerate progress towards the 3 TRs. Six regional programme evaluations are expected to feed into the SP evaluation by providing evidence from the regional and country contexts, while addressing their own Region-specific issues and generating their own evidence to aid the design of their respective regional plans for 2026-2029.

3. The primary intended users of the evaluation are: (i) UNFPA Asia and Pacific Regional Office; (ii) UNFPA Country Offices in the Asia and Pacific Region; and (iii) UNFPA business units at headquarters. The results of the evaluation should also be of interest to a wider group of stakeholders, such as UNFPA Executive Board members and other UN organizations.

1.2. Purpose, objective and scope of the evaluation

4. The **purpose** of this evaluation is to provide evidence to support UNFPA's learning related to what works (and what does not) in the ongoing implementation of the SP 2022-2025, to gather evidence that will inform the design of the third and final Strategic Plan of this series, whose stated intent is to fill the remaining gaps toward the achievement of the 3 TRs, as well as inform the design of the next Asia and Pacific Regional Programme Action Plan (RPAP). Being a formative evaluation, it does not focus on assessing the results of the implementation of SP 2022-2025 as such, but as inputs to expand the formative purpose and further understanding of cause-effect logic.

5. The **objective** of the evaluation is to assess UNFPA's organizational readiness and strategic positioning to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the three transformative results and the ICPD Plan of Action in the Asia and Pacific region and catalyse a discussion on the design of the next Regional Programme 2026-2029, focusing on understanding the enabling and inhibiting factors and the key lessons learnt.

6. The **scope** of the evaluation is the current Regional Programme Action Plan (RPAP) 2022-2025. All 36 countries (22 countries + 14 PICs) are included in the scope of this evaluation as the RPAP

¹ UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025 (DP/FPA/2021/8), Annex 2: Change story of accelerating the three transformative results.

² Ibid.

covers the entire region consisting of these countries, with the PICs being covered through the Pacific Sub-Regional Office (PSRO).

7. Furthermore, the evaluation also reflected on the broader functions and role of APRO beyond the limited scope of the RPAP. The period covered is the start of the implementation of the RPAP in 2022 until the end of data collection in early 2024. The scope of the evaluation are all accelerators, strategic shifts and key enablers as defined in the SP and ToR, as well as the APRO functions as defined in the ToR of the regional office. Under this approach, all outputs of the current RPAP are covered, with special attention given to the key challenges and priority areas identified during the mid-term review of the RPAP 2022-2025, namely:

- human rights-based approaches to population ageing and low fertility;
- improving the human rights-based understanding of and capacity of countries to transform gender and social norms;
- mainstreaming humanitarian preparedness and response and operationalization of the Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) nexus.

1.3. The Evaluation Questions

8. Based on desk review and interviews undertaken during the inception phase, feedback from the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) and a comparative analysis with the global evaluation questions, the evaluation questions proposed originally in the Terms of Reference were revised. The following table presents the evaluation questions adjusted from the ToR. To analyse the relation and alignment with the global questions, please see annex 6.

Table 1: Evaluation questions

Proposed adjustments and inclusions	Evaluation Criteria			
	Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness	Efficiency
<i>Forward-looking perspective</i>				
1. To what extent and how should UNFPA reconceptualize the next RPAP to stay relevant, keep its essence and enhance its impact orientation given the state of progress towards the SDGs and 3TRs in the region, as well as internal and external challenges and opportunities?	X			
2. How ready is the organization to face future challenges and changes, and fulfil its normative role, particularly in the context of increasingly complex conservative and polarized political and social contexts?	X			
<i>Accelerators</i>				
3. To what extent have each of the six accelerators been relevant, sufficient and clearly defined and operationalised in the RPAP and implemented to enhance programming towards the achievement of 3TRs and ICPD PoA priorities in countries within the region?		X	X	
4. What have been the enabling and inhibiting factors in the implementation of the accelerators, including technical and financial capacities, and how can the RPAP be further strengthened to accelerate progress on 3TRs and the ICPD PoA?		X	X	
<i>Strategic Shifts</i>				
5. To what extent are the effects of megatrends, particularly but not limited to ageing, low fertility and climate change, incorporated in the RPAP and country programming, and how can UNFPA boost strategic, human rights-based responses and adaptations to megatrends considering diverse realities?		X		

6. To what extent are the RPAP and country programmes applying a human-rights based approach, focusing systematically and coherently on “populations left behind” and emphasizing “reaching those furthest behind first” ³ , and how can this be strengthened?			X	
7. Have the regional and country programmes scaled up the provision of high-quality, human rights focused comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services, particularly in low fertility contexts, and multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence in the region, and how can UNFPA accelerate the scale-up based on its comparative advantages and opportunities?			X	
8. To what extent has the RPAP expanded humanitarian preparedness and response capacity and Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) nexus programming in the region, and how can the RPAP further respond to increasing humanitarian and HDP needs?			X	
9. To what extent are the discriminatory social and gender norms and structural and power inequalities, being addressed in the RPAP and how can social and gender norm transformation be further accelerated in countries to achieve 3TRs and the ICPD PoA?			X	
10. To what extent has the RPAP focus effectively shifted from funding to funding and financing 3TRs and the ICPD PoA in the region and at country level, what are current challenges and opportunities that APRO can address or tap into for increased financing of 3TRs and the ICPD PoA in the region?				X
11. To what extent and under which conditions have RPAP regional and country partnerships accelerated progress on 3TRs and the ICPD PoA in the region and at country level, and how can catalytic partnerships be expanded and diversified for a greater acceleration?		X	X	
Enablers				
12. To what extent has strategic communication facilitated the acceleration and strategic shifts foreseen in the Strategic Plan/RPAP, which have been the enabling and inhibiting factors, and what are the current opportunities to use strategic communication to address persisting and emerging challenges?			X	
13. To what extent have financial and human resources been sufficient and adequately allocated and managed to facilitate the effective, efficient and coherent implementation of the accelerators and strategic shifts foreseen in the Strategic Plan at regional level?		X	X	X
14. To what extent have knowledge management and innovation systematically and consistently been implemented to facilitate the effective, efficient and coherent implementation of the accelerators and strategic shifts foreseen in the Strategic Plan at regional level?		X	X	X

2. Context and background

2.1. Context

9. The Asia Pacific Region covers a land area of about 2.8 billion hectares, approximately 22 percent of the global land area. This vast land area is home to over half of the world’s 8 billion population. UNFPA maintains a presence in 36 countries and territories, 22 in Asia and 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs). APRO has the largest population coverage of all the UNFPA regional offices. Of the 10 countries with the highest population in the world, 5 are part of APRO⁴: But it also covers small island nations including the two smallest sovereign nations in the world⁵: Marshall Islands and Tuvalu.

10. Based on World Bank classification, the majority of the 22 countries are of lower middle-income status (15 of 22), two are low income and 5 are upper middle-income economies.⁶ Meanwhile, the 14 PICTs are evenly divided between lower middle and upper middle income status countries (5 in each category). One state, Nauru, has a high-income status. Based on the United

³ The Regional Programme focuses "especially on vulnerable, marginalized and disadvantaged populations, including the elderly, people with disabilities, key populations, ethnic minorities, displaced populations, migrants and others."

⁴ China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh.

⁵ Marshall Islands, Tuvalu.

⁶ World Bank Data Help Desk (<https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>)

Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)⁷, 8⁸ of the Asian countries and 3⁹ of the PICTs are classified as least developed countries.

11. Nations under the APRO umbrella are demographically diverse. Of the Asian nations, some countries have high fertility (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste) with Total Fertility Rates (TFR) of 3 or higher resulting in the lowest median ages indicative of a young population composition. Other countries are at replacement or below replacement fertility and thus have an older age composition with median age above 30. In the Pacific, the median age ranges from 19 to 36 years. Fertility level is relatively high, as none of the PICTs have reached replacement level fertility.

12. As fertility declines in countries in the Region, the short- and medium-term demographic impact is an increase in the proportion of the youth/working-age population to total population. This situation has the potential to boost a country's economic growth if the right conditions are present, namely long-term investment in health and education of the young and economic conditions that create employment opportunities –i.e. the potential to reap a demographic dividend.¹⁰ However, without these conditions, having a large working-age population can lead to high youth unemployment and can likely become a potential source of social and political instability – the potential for a demographic bomb.¹¹ The inability to locally absorb the large working-age population has been a major driver for large-scale labour migration in several countries in the region, such as Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. The reality of having a large working age population, in sheer numbers, if not in proportion to total population is a prevalent condition that many countries in the Region must contend with. Actions they undertake now will affect the future when they transition out of the youth bulge.

13. Over the long term, the consequence of prolonged fertility decline is population ageing. This megatrend is increasingly manifest in the Asia Pacific region, albeit at varying speed. A commonly used simple indicator of population ageing is the proportion of the population aged 65 and above.¹² Before 2022, 10 of the 22 countries were estimated to have already reached “ageing” status, with 7-14% of their population above age 65. Of these, two (China and Thailand) have further transitioned to aged societies. By 2030, 7 more countries are projected to reach ageing status. The projected transition time to becoming an aged society for ageing countries is short, as short as 13 years in Maldives, 20 years in Bangladesh and 21 years in Iran. In the Pacific, 5 countries have already reached ageing status by 2022. The variable speed of ageing means that some countries have more time to prepare but others face a more challenging scenario of adapting quickly to an altered population structure within one generation.

14. Still, despite the demographic diversity in the region most commonly manifest in differences in population (age-sex) structure, the aspirational core goals for all individuals in all populations remain the same – fully realizing their human rights, attaining gender equality, gaining full access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights, creating an enabling environment for the youth to realize their potential. Understanding these core goals as they apply in all stages of life is

⁷ <https://unctad.org/topic/least-developed-countries/list>

⁸ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Timor-Leste.

⁹ Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.

¹⁰ Bloom, D. Canning, D. and Sevilla J. (2003). *The Demographic Dividend: A New Perspective on the Economic Consequences of Population Change*. RAND.

¹¹ Durr-e-N. (2008). Demographic Dividend or Demographic Threat in Pakistan? *The Pakistan Development Review*, Vol. 47, No. 1, pp. 1-26.

¹² A population is considered ageing if this proportion is 7-14% and aged if it exceeds 14%. The speed of population ageing is the time it takes for a society to transition from ageing to aged status. *Ageing in Asia and the Pacific Overview* <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SDD%20Ageing%20Fact%20Sheet%20Overview.pdf>

an important aspect of the response to each country's demographic shifts. Already some countries threatened by the shift to low fertility have adopted policies that may undermine women's reproductive rights.

15. Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world, highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and natural hazards. In 2022, over 140 disasters struck the Asia-Pacific region, affecting over 64 million people and leading to over 7,500 deaths. Nearly 80 per cent of the world's climate-induced displacement happens in Asia and the Pacific, mostly triggered by climate-related and geological hazards such as monsoon rains, floods, tropical cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and landslides.¹³ The PICTs are additionally under threat from climate-change induced sea level rise, the same threat faced by Maldives.

16. In the World Risk Report's 2023 ranking of countries based on their exposure, vulnerability, susceptibility, lack of coping capacities and lack of adaptive capacities to natural and human-made disasters, 9 of the 15 top ranking countries in degree of risk are found in Asia Pacific: Bangladesh (9), China (10), India (3), Indonesia (2), Myanmar (6), Pakistan (11), Papua New Guinea (12), Philippines (1) and Viet Nam (15).¹⁴ The Asia-Pacific is also home to several conflicts and protracted crises. The region hosts the world's largest refugee settlement in the Cox's Bazar District of Bangladesh where one million Rohingya refugees continue to rely entirely on humanitarian assistance for their basic needs since 2017. The crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar continue to exert significant impacts on the humanitarian situation in both countries. Small-scale and localized conflicts also characterize some countries in the region, including the Philippines and Papua New Guinea.

17. Migration –both within and from/to other regions– is a dominant feature in the Asia Pacific Region. Ten of the 20 biggest migration corridors in Asia emanate from South Asia; four remain intra-regional (Bangladesh to India, Afghanistan to Iran, Afghanistan to Pakistan, India to Pakistan) and five lead from the region to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.¹⁵ By the end of 2019, countries in South Asia hosted nearly 3.6 million refugees and asylum-seekers.¹⁶ For South-East Asia, an estimated 23.6 million Southeast Asian migrants live outside their countries of origin. With more than six million emigrants, the Philippines is the country with the highest number of emigrants in the sub-region, as well as the ninth highest globally.¹⁷

18. Urbanization continues to be a defining megatrend in the Asia-Pacific region. Fifty-four per cent of the global urban population, more than 2.2 billion people, live in Asia. Cities in Asia and the Pacific are at the global forefront of economic opportunity but they face challenges related to environmental degradation, increasing impacts of natural and man-made disasters, the persistence of slums and social exclusion, lack of affordable housing and unemployment.¹⁸

19. In terms of progress towards the 3 TRs, the countries under APRO are similarly diverse, illustrating the need for a more nuanced country-specific response. The levels of unmet need for modern contraception is above 10% in 20 of the 22 countries. The relationship between unmet

¹³ Asia Pacific Humanitarian Update Situation Report Last updated: 12 Dec 2023.

<https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/asia-pacific/>

¹⁴ World Risk Report 2023 Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft / IFHV (2023): WeltRisikoBericht 2023. Berlin: Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft.

https://weltrisikobericht.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WRR_2023_english_online161023.pdf

¹⁵ IOM (2019). *World Migration Report 2020*. Geneva.

¹⁶ UNHCR (2020). *Refugee Data Finder*. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

¹⁷ UNDESA Op. Cit.

¹⁸ UN HABITAT (2020). *Asia and the Pacific Region*. <https://unhabitat.org/asia-and-the-pacific-region#:~:text=Urbanization%20continues%20to%20be%20a,an%20additional%201.2%20billion%20people.>

need level and total fertility rate is not always straightforward. Two countries with the highest levels of unmet need, Maldives at 35 % and Malaysia at 31%, have below replacement fertility. The level of unmet need is high in the PICTs, with the lowest level still a high 17.4%. The rest have a level of unmet need exceeding 20%, with the highest reported in Samoa at 44%.

20. Moreover, while total fertility rates are generally declining in majority of the countries in the Region, the adolescent birth rates have not necessarily followed the same trajectory. Aggregated into subregions, in Southeast Asia and the PICTs, adolescent birth rates are slightly (for Southeast Asia) or much (for PICTs) higher than the global average. Trend data on adolescent fertility in these two regions show a stagnating trajectory even as other regions are posting steady declines.¹⁹ Per country, the adolescent birth rates (births per thousand women 10-14 and 15-19) exceed the global average of 42.5 in 8 of the 22 Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea). Of 12 PICTs with data, 6 also have an adolescent birth rate that exceed the global average (Kiribati, Marshall Island, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Island, Vanuatu).

21. Based on the 2030 target for the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, the interagency estimates of MMR²⁰ indicate that as of 2022, 14 of the 22 countries have not reached this target, with some countries with MMR at extremely high levels. Examples are Afghanistan (MMR of 650), Cambodia (218) and Timor Leste (204). On the other hand, six countries (Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Iran and Malaysia) are estimated to have reached the MMR target. MMR estimates are available only for the Pacific countries of Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Of these, Samoa is the only country with MMR below 70 (59).

22. The prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) has high variability as well, and in no cases have reached zero levels. Among the 22 Asian countries, the highest period prevalence of intimate partner violence²¹ (happened in the 12 months before the survey) is in Papua New Guinea (48%), Timor-Leste and Afghanistan (46%), Bangladesh (27%) and India (24%). In the PICTs, IPV rates are highest in Vanuatu (44%), Kiribati (43%) and Solomon Islands (42%).²² In many Asian countries, alongside IPV, other significant forms of GBV such as technology facilitated violence and sexual violence need to be considered and require nuanced strategies. Evidently, of the 3 TRs, the target for elimination of GBV may be the furthest from being achieved by 2030.

23. Child marriage is a human rights violation but a practice that remains highly prevalent in a number of the Asia Pacific countries.²³ Of the 22 countries only two, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Maldives, have reached zero prevalence in this indicator although a number of countries have close to zero prevalence (China, Mongolia and Sri Lanka). Bangladesh has the highest child marriage prevalence of 16%.²⁴ In the 9 PICTs with available data, only Tuvalu has zero prevalence, while Fiji and Tonga are close to zero. The highest prevalence of child marriage is recorded in the Solomon Islands at 6%. Although progress has been made much remains to be done in getting all the countries to zero child marriage but there is encouraging evidence that the goal is attainable.

¹⁹ https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/asrh_factsheet_3_adolescent_pregnancy.pdf

²⁰ Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2017: estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and the United Nations Population Division (2019). Geneva: World Health Organization.

²¹ Physical and/or sexual violence.

²² UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Office. 2023. Violence against Women Regional Snapshot - kNowVAWdata. <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/resources/violence-against-women-regional-snapshot-2023-knowvawdata>

²³ UNFPA Population Data Portal.

²⁴ Child marriage before age 15 (%).

24. Gender-biased sex selection resulting in an imbalanced sex ratio at birth highly favouring males, has been documented to be high in China, India, South Korea, Vietnam and more recently in Nepal and Bangladesh.²⁵

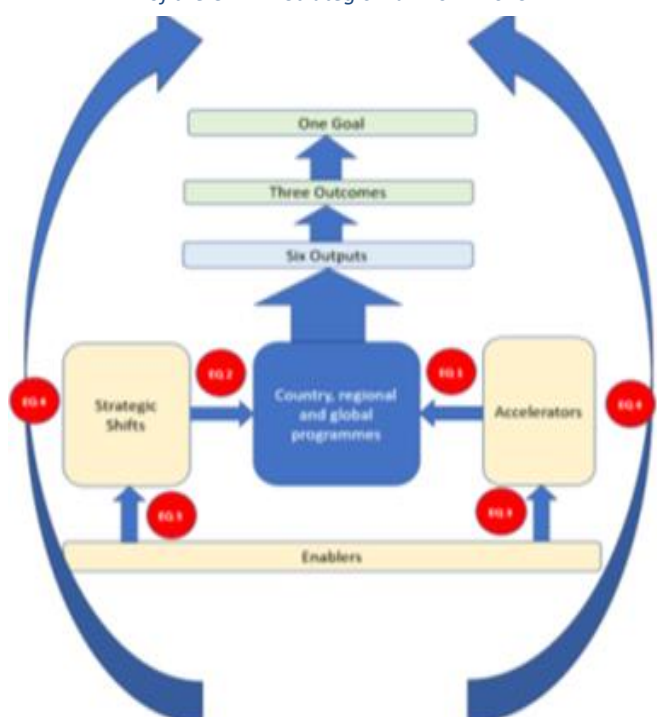
25. Finally, the practice of female genital mutilation has been documented in some Muslim countries in Southeast Asia, notably Indonesia and Malaysia and minority Muslim populations in South Thailand and the Philippines, but there is no reliable data base to establish its true prevalence. Nevertheless, as one of the harmful practices against women and girls, it is of concern in areas in the Asia Pacific Region where the practice may be prevalent.²⁶

2.2. The UNFPA response

The global Strategic Plan

26. The UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 is the second in a series of three strategic plans intended to build a foundation, accelerate then ultimately achieve the three transformative results: (a) ending the unmet need for family planning; (b) ending preventable maternal deaths; and (c) ending gender-based violence and all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage, ultimately, achieving the goal of universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and acceleration of the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action. UNFPA will contribute to achieving the 3 TRs by working on six interconnected outputs: (a) policy and accountability; (b) quality of care and services; (c) gender and social norms; (d) population change and data; (e) humanitarian action; and (f) adolescents and youth.

Figure 1: The overall conceptual framework for the evaluation of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025



Source: Formative evaluation of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 Inception Report (Draft 1.2: Friday 8 December).

27. To adapt to a constantly evolving landscape, the UNFPA SP has included three organizational effectiveness and efficiency (OEE) outputs: improved programming for results, optimized management of resources, and expanded partnerships for impact.

28. In support of the goal of acceleration the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 pursues key shifts in its ways of doing business. Specifically, the Plan adopts 12 strategic shifts, 6 accelerators; additionally, the ToRs and later the Inception Report of the Strategic Plan Evaluation (SPE) identify a number of enablers that would allow the operationalization of the strategic shifts and accelerators. Accelerators, strategic shifts and enablers are expected to work in synergy to accelerate achievement of the three TRs.

²⁵ Global programme on addressing gender-biased sex selection and related harmful Practices in Asia 2020-2023: Programme Report, UNFPA.

²⁶ Y. Iguchi, A. Rashid and SN Afiah (2023). Female Genital Cutting and the "Medical Gaze" in Southeast Asia. In K. Nakamura, et.al. (eds) Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Global Zero Tolerance Policy and Diverse Responses from African and Asian Local Communities. Springer 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-6723-8>

Strategic Shifts. The 12 key strategic shifts are:

- a) Aligning the organizational focus on achieving the three transformative results.
- b) Integrating the effects of megatrends, such as climate change, demographic shifts, inequalities and digitalization, into programming.
- c) Increasing the focus on “populations left behind”, and emphasizing “reaching those furthest behind first”.
- d) Scaling up the provision of high-quality comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services, as part of universal health coverage plans.
- e) Expanding the humanitarian response capacity to better safeguard the lives of women, adolescents and youth, especially adolescent girls, while also addressing mental health and psychosocial issues.
- f) Mainstreaming resilience, prevention, preparedness and early action, and emphasizing the complementarity between humanitarian, development and peace-responsive interventions.
- g) Incorporating the multisectoral needs of women, adolescents and youth, and addressing structural inequalities, such as discriminatory gender and social norms that hinder the achievement of transformative results.
- h) Tailoring programmatic and technical assistance to better respond to local contexts through a country office-led process.
- i) Strengthening the UNFPA normative role in all countries where UNFPA is present.
- j) Shifting the focus from funding the ICPD agenda to financing the ICPD agenda.
- k) Reinvigorating and expanding partnerships, including those with the private sector, civil society organizations, international financial institutions, academia and media, as well as partnerships through South-South and triangular cooperation.
- l) Increasing the focus on joint accountability, in line with United Nations reforms, principles and practices.

The accelerators are:

- a) Human rights based and gender transformative approaches.
- b) Innovation and digitalization.
- c) Partnership, South-South and Triangular Cooperation, and financing.
- d) Data and evidence.
- e) Leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest left behind first.
- f) Resilience, adaptation, and complementarity among development, humanitarian, and peace-responsive efforts.

29. The strategic shifts are a mix of different types of actions some of which overlap with the accelerators. A number of strategic shifts are actually not at the strategic level while others are not shifts in the sense that they are already an important part of UNFPA’s work.

30. **Enablers.** Based on the SPE, the ToR for the Regional Program evaluation identified two enablers: strategic communication and human resource management that would enable operationalization of the strategic shifts and accelerators. During the inception phase one more combined enabler was added, “knowledge management and innovation”, although innovation is also an accelerator, but the focus on internal, organizational innovation was considered important to address.

The Asia Pacific Regional Programme

31. The Asia Pacific Regional Programme Action Plan (RPAP) 2022-2025 is the regional adaptation of the Strategic Plan (SP) for the specific context and needs of the Asia Pacific region. Under the RPAP, APRO is tasked to strengthen national capacities and systems through technical, policy and programme support and quality assurance to country offices, and acts as a convener and advocate at the regional level to accelerate achievement of the transformative results at the country level. The RPAP offers tailored support to country and subregional offices to provide comprehensive SRH and reproductive rights in order to:

Table 1: Support provided by the Regional Programme to Country and Multi-Country Programmes towards transformative change

1. Reduce maternal mortality	by building on inequity analyses, policy advice and capacity building for quality midwifery and comprehensive emergency obstetric care.
2. Reduce unmet need for family planning	by scaling up use of innovative methods for rights-based, high quality family planning, adolescent SRH services and information, improved supply chain management, and evidence for domestic financing, while providing support for responses to low fertility.
3. Ensure strong focus on reducing GBV and harmful practices	by advocating for increased investments in gender transformative policies and programming for prevention and response across humanitarian, development, conflict and post-conflict contexts.

32. As a UNFPA Regional Office, APRO performs other key functions outside of providing support to COs through the RPAP.²⁷ Many of these functions actually align closely with a number of the accelerators and enablers. APRO performs functions on knowledge management, communication and human resources – all enablers under the SP/RPAP. Additionally, it performs resource mobilization and technical support (aligns with the accelerator partnerships, SSTC and financing), evaluation (aligns with data and evidence), and humanitarian functions (aligns with resilience, adaptation and the HDP nexus). These functions, defined in the regional office ToR, collectively offer such a broad network of direct and indirect support to COs that the APRO itself may well qualify to be an accelerator and enabler in its own right, as will be discussed later.

33. The indicative resources for the transformative results in the RPAP 2022-2025, are as follows:

Table 2: Indicative resources for the transformative results of the RPAP 2022-2025

Outcome	Indicative resource
1. Reduction of preventable maternal deaths	\$16 million (\$10 million from regular resources and \$6 million from other resources)
2. Reduction of unmet need for FP	\$9.4 million (\$7.4 million from regular resources and \$2 million from other resources)
3. Reduction of GBV and harmful practices	\$15.4 million (\$7.4 million from regular resources and \$8 million from other resources)

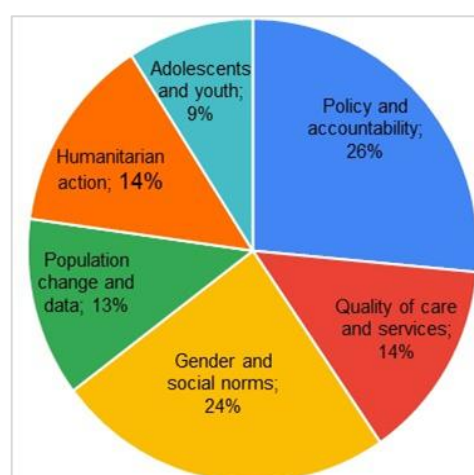
Source: RPAP 2022-2025.

34. Of the 3TRs, reduction of unmet need for FP has the lowest allocation, while reduction of preventable maternal death and reduction of GBV have almost equal allocations.

35. For the six Outputs, the total indicative resource is \$41 million, \$25 million (61%) of which consists of regular UNFPA resources and \$16 million (39%) from other sources.

36. Graphic 2 breaks down budget allocation according to source of funds. From regular resources, the largest allocation goes to policy and accountability at 29%, followed by gender and social norms at 24%. Humanitarian action has the smallest share at 6%. From other

Graphic 1: APRO budget distribution by Output (%)



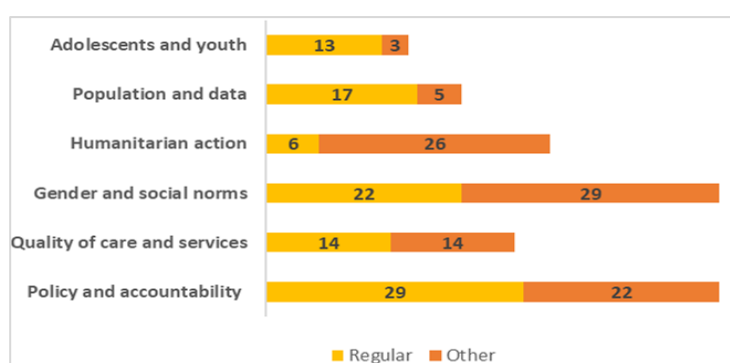
Source: Own elaboration with information from the RPAP 2022-2025.

²⁷ UNFPA Regional Office ToRs, April 2015.

resources, gender and social norms has the largest share at 29%, followed by humanitarian action at 26%. Population and data, and adolescents and youth have the least share, of 5% and 3% respectively.

37. The indicative resource for the three OEE outputs is \$3.9 million, all from regular resources. Of these \$2.9 million is allocated to improved programming for results, \$0.8 million to optimized management of resources, and \$0.9 million to expanded partnerships for impact.

Graphic 2: APRO budget by output and source (%)



Source: Own elaboration with information from the RPAP 2022-2025.

3. Methodology and Approach

38. This chapter sets out the overall approach to the design of the evaluation. It provides information about country selection rationale, sets out the data collection and analysis strategy and identifies the risks and possible limitations of the evaluation, ethical and quality issues.

3.1. Evaluability assessment

39. This formative evaluation benefited from aspects of the data collection carried out as part of the mid-term review of the SP 2022-2025 and RPAP 2022-2025. These included results from a survey of staff perceptions on the current Strategic Plan with detailed findings from the Asia and Pacific region, survey on the RPAP 2022-2025 support to Country Offices in the region and strategic priorities reflected in the RPAP mid-term review for the SP.

40. As the RPAP 2022-2025 was only implemented for two years when data collection for this evaluation started, there was an increased emphasis on collecting primary data. The secondary sources reviewed included all documentation prepared to aid implementation of the Strategic Plan/RPAP/Country Programmes, ICPD PoA progress reports prepared for the Asia and Pacific Population Conference and the conference reports. To avoid duplication of efforts with the SPE team, Country Programme Documents were not analysed separately.

41. **Stakeholder demand and utility of the evaluation.** The evaluation is included in the UNFPA quadrennial Budgeted Evaluation Plan 2022-2025. The main interest is to provide evidence to influence the design of the next UNFPA Strategic Plan 2026 – 2029 and the Asia Pacific Regional Programme Action Plan for the same period, with a clear understanding that the evaluation could offer additional value to the MTR, not only for its independent, external nature but also for the opportunity to go deeper into critical issues identified in the MTR.

3.2. Overall approach to evaluation design

42. The regional evaluation is aligned and contributes to the global SP evaluation, but is at the same time an independent piece that will respond to the particular realities, interests and challenges of the regional programme, and diverse subregional and country contexts, based on the Terms of Reference (ToR) and the revised evaluation questions. Furthermore, taking advantage of

its formative nature, during the evaluation the scope expanded to integrate a wider, more strategic vision about regional work and the role of APRO, with the aim to provide more meaningful and useful contributions.

43. As a formative evaluation, it focused on experience-based learning and strategic analysis, to provide valuable, in-depth insights to boost the capacity of the organization to remain relevant, increase effectiveness and impact orientation, maximize efficiency, be coherent and consistent, adapt to changes, learn and innovate to enhance its readiness for the future.

44. Using the RPAP Theory of Change as an evaluation framework was reconsidered during the evaluation process, mainly due to its limited utilization and relevance as a management and M&E tool, and since it does not capture all the APRO functions and strategic roles it performs (e.g. oversight function, some regional initiatives etc.). The APRO Terms of Reference were revised and actual practice and ways of doing were reality-based inputs to nourish reflection, learning and forward-looking thinking, with the same aim to enrich knowledge and understanding around change logics, what works/doesn't work, under which conditions and why, and the validity of underlying assumptions.

3.3. The analytical framework

45. The analytical framework is based on the framework defined in the global SPE design report and is related to questions that assess the effective operationalization of strategic shifts and accelerators. In general, the framework establishes the following three lines of inquiry applied to the evaluation of accelerators and strategic shifts.

46. **Relevance of strategic shifts and accelerators.** When assessing the relevance of the strategic shifts and accelerators, the following lines of inquiry are followed: 1) whether the strategic shifts and accelerators are the right approaches to achieve the 3TRs and other goals of the SP, 2) whether some accelerators and strategic shifts are more relevant than others, and 3) whether strategic shifts and accelerators set out in the SP are enough or whether some potential shifts and accelerators have been left out.

47. **Operationalization of Strategic Shifts and Accelerators with three dimensions:**

- Readiness for change and implementation (including timing).
- Efficiency of the process of operationalising the strategic shifts and accelerators.
- Integration and coherence across strategic shifts /accelerators (internal coherence); integration and coherence of strategic shifts/accelerators with UN system wide approaches (external coherence).

48. **Enhanced programming through implementation of strategic shifts and accelerators:** The evaluation does not examine whether enhanced programming led to better results or a greater contribution to the 3TRs. This will be the role of a future summative evaluation. In this evaluation the assumption is that simply incorporating strategic shifts or accelerators enhances programming that will strengthen UNFPA's contribution to the 3TRs.

49. **Enablers:** Focuses on the extent to which the enablers identified in the SPE ToR and subsequently during the inception mission of the RPAP evaluation, are facilitating the operationalisation of the accelerators and shifts.

3.4. Country selection

50. To gain a deeper appreciation of the issues related to the evaluation at the country level, two states - Bangladesh and Samoa were purposively selected for a more in-depth investigation. These countries join two others selected by the Global SPE Team to represent the Asia Pacific Region – Nepal and Thailand. Bangladesh and Samoa represent two contrasting country situations. While Bangladesh has a large population with high population density, Samoa is at the opposite end in size and concentration. The two countries also are at divergent levels with regard to the 3 TRs, low fertility and population ageing. Nepal was chosen for further study by the Global SPE Team to look into the effects of federalization/decentralization on UNFPA work on the ground while Thailand was chosen as a case study on low fertility and population ageing in the Region, though the approach expanded to address issues related to relevance in middle income countries and to innovation.

51. In addition to the country-level analysis, the evaluation also conducted a specific analysis into partnerships in the Pacific subregion. The issue of partnerships is deemed of particular significance in the subregion which is composed of geographically isolated small island states with relatively small populations and limited resources. While analysis of partnerships is not restricted to the subregion, the strategic approach, meaning and implications were considered to deserve special attention in relation to issues (of general relevance) like regional-subregional roles and relations, internal and external positioning, strategic vision, value added and response capacity.

52. Annex 3 provides detailed comparative information of characteristics of the states in the Asia Pacific Region, including the selected states, while annex 4 gives an overview of main country programme characteristics, results achieved and challenges for the selected states.

3.5. Data collection and analysis strategy

53. The evaluation matrix used to operationalise the evaluation questions and identify the specific tools for answering each evaluation question is presented in Annex 7. The qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis tools developed for this evaluation are presented in annex 8.

Table 3: Five clusters of evidence

Desk review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key documents related to the RPAP 2022-2025 • Key documents related to the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 • Regional, sub-regional and country-level annual and quarterly reports • Documents of the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference • Evaluations • M&E data • SP 2022-2025 and RPAP 2022-2025 MTR data • Documentation from comparator agencies • Relevant regional and country publications
Key informant interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNFPA key informants at the regional level • Key informants at country level • UNFPA key informants at headquarters • Key informants in comparator UN entities • Partners and other strategic external stakeholders, including IPs and other CSOs
Deep Dives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 critical subjects identified by the MTR as challenges: i) HR and transformation of social and gender norms; ii) humanitarian preparedness and response and HDP; iii) HR approaches to ageing and low fertility • Partnerships (in the Pacific Subregional Office)
Country and subregional level studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 country missions (1 full country assessment and 2 complementary in coordination with global SPE team) • 2 remote assessments (1 country and 1 subregional) with some interviews • Additional country and sub-regional level evidence gathered

54. **Desk review.** More than 390 documents have been reviewed, including key documents related to the previous and current Strategic Plan and RPAP, strategic, corporate and programmatic documents, guidelines, reports and other relevant documents from the mid-term review of the SP and the RPAP, and synthesis of evaluative evidence from corporate, regional and country evaluations. Web search was done to complement some evidence.

55. **Key informant interviews, focus group discussions or group interviews, and technical workshops and meetings.** An initial mapping of stakeholders was done at the inception phase of the evaluation, based on the strategic and formative nature of the evaluation. A list of potential interviewees representing various stakeholder groups was prepared, according to the following stakeholder groups²⁸:

1. Selected UNFPA key HQ informants (in coordination with the global evaluation team)
2. Staff in regional and subregional offices
3. Staff in country offices, mainly but not limited to selected sites for the case studies
4. Relevant national and subnational stakeholders, identified jointly with country and subregional offices (selected case study sites)
5. “Comparator” UN entities in the region (and some in selected case study sites)
6. Selected APRO implementing partners
7. Other strategic partners and external stakeholders, including CSOs

56. During the data collection process, the team successfully interviewed representatives from all seven stakeholder groups identified during the inception phase. Close collaboration with the regional advisors was key to ensure that all relevant stakeholders were considered. Additionally, a group consisting of donors was added to the list during the data collection. Initially, it was planned to include country representatives from most of the APRO-covered states under group 3. However, in addition to time constraints, the availability of country programme reports, and the implementation of the CO Survey for the APRO RPE, provided the necessary data, so that the actual interviews to representatives were limited to the Country Office Representatives of Bangladesh, Nepal and, Thailand, and the PSRO Representative.

57. The internal and external interviews were conducted using guiding questions based on the evaluation matrix. More in-depth individual and group discussions and analysis took place during the visits to the Regional Office in Bangkok and the Bangladesh and Thailand COs. Remote interviews were conducted for Samoa and the Pacific Subregional Office as well as many UN agencies, donors, CSOs and other stakeholders.

58. The total reach was 194 stakeholders (20% more stakeholders than initially planned²⁹), of which 64 (33%) are regional level stakeholders (55 interviewed and 29 were participants to the consultative workshop³⁰), 10 (5%) are subregional level stakeholders (Pacific SRO) and 120 national/country level stakeholders (see Table 5).

²⁸ Source: Formative Evaluation of the Asia and Pacific Regional Programme Action Plan 2022-2025 Inception Report

²⁹ See inception report.

³⁰ Several UNFPA officials were reached more than once during the process, either for the preparation of the inception report or during field work.

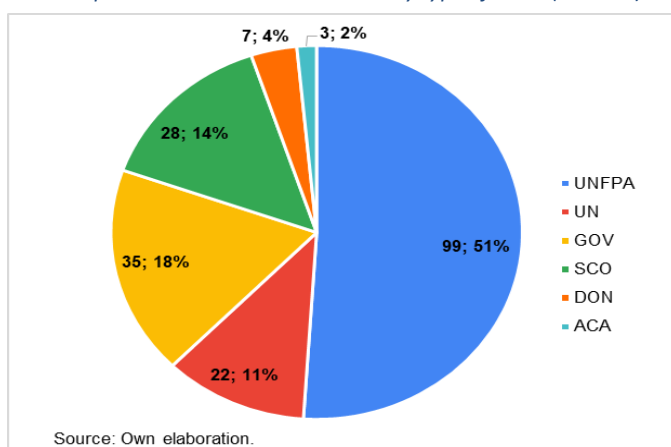
Table 5: Stakeholders consulted by region and type of actor

LEVEL	UNFPA	UN	GOV	CSO	DON	ACA	TOTAL	Women	Men
Regional level	43	12	3	4	1	1	64	41	23
Subregional level (Pacific SRO)	1	-	2	7	-	-	10	9	1
National / Country level (Case studies)	Bangladesh							27	33
	32	3	9	10	6	-	60		
	Nepal							19	22
	16	4	17	4	-	-	41		
	Samoa							9	2
Thailand	3	3	3	2	-	-	11		
								7	1
	4	-	1	1	-	2	8		
TOTAL	99	22	35	28	7	3	194	112	82

Source: Own elaboration.

Note: UN (United Nations); GOV (Government); CSO (Civil society organization); DON (Donor); ACA (Academy).

Graphic 3: Stakeholders consulted by type of actor (# and %)



59. Graphic 3 presents a breakdown of the type of actors that were consulted. The highest percentage are from UNFPA –regional, subregional, and country offices– followed, in descending order, by the government sector (GOV), civil society organizations (CSO), United Nations agencies (UN), donors (DON) and academia (ACA). Disaggregated by sex, of the 194 stakeholders interviewed/consulted 58% were women and 42% men. It was not possible to collect information about other genders.

60. **Country level survey.** To gather information on the country level experiences with the RPAP in their respective country programmes a survey was conducted with the 22 Country Offices, the Pacific sub-Regional Office and the Samoa Multi-country Office³¹ as respondents³². The survey instrument translates into survey questions elements of the evaluation matrix (in particular the evaluation questions) and directly asks the country/subregional/multi-country offices about their experiences, assessments, perceptions, and recommendations related to the implementation of their respective Country Programmes within the ambit of the SP/RPAP. The instrument consisted of a mix of closed- and open- ended questions. The results of the survey are in Annex 9.

3.6. Data analysis and synthesis

61. The evaluation matrix was the framework for analysis and synthesis of the data collected. Based on the format used by the global SPE team, the evaluation matrix contains the 14 evaluation questions (EQs). For each EQ, areas of investigation and main lines of inquiry are identified, as are the sources, methods and tools. Relevant data is analysed for each defined item, and triangulation is used to cross-check data and to ensure the robustness and validity of data from diverse sources.

³¹ While Samoa is now officially a MCO, the way that UNFPA functions is still very much as a Pacific subregional office, with the core senior management in Fiji, supporting 14 PICTs and with presence in 8 CO's, including Samoa.

³² Hereafter referred to as the CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

62. Qualitative data analysis included content analysis –with thematic analysis– to discover underlying patterns, and discourse analysis where applicable to gain an understanding of the political, cultural and power dynamics that exist in specific situations and how they manifest. Patterns and connections were identified to nourish interpretation and conclusions. Qualitative data complemented and supported the understanding and interpretation of quantitative data, mainly based on the CO Survey for the APRO RPE. Survey analysis consisted of simple cross tabulations and frequency counts and systematization of qualitative responses.

63. The conclusions summarize the findings and are the basis for the recommendations. The linkages between findings, conclusions and recommendations are explicitly reflected to evidence the underlying logic and ensure consistency and coherence. Important to highlight the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in the validation of the findings and development of the recommendations. Key activities include a workshop in Bangkok with the APRO team upon finalization of the field mission, presentations to both the regional team and the ERG, and in-depth feedback provided by members of both stances, which was organized and responded by the evaluation team in an audit trail.

3.7. Risks, limitations and mitigating actions

64. Table 4 sets out the risks that could result in delays and/or possible limitations if no mitigation actions are taken.

Table 4: Evaluation risks, limitations and mitigating actions

Strategic and Implementation Risks	Mitigating Actions
Coordination with the global team undertaking the Strategic Plan evaluation was identified as an implementing risk since both evaluations are conducted in parallel and to a great extent with the same stakeholders, particularly at regional level, and to a lesser extent at HQ. Three associated risks were identified: a) the timeline and workload of each evaluation could inhibit timely conversations and coordination; b) the process could cause unnecessary burden on some stakeholders; b) there could be some confusion about the specificities, interrelation, limits and contributions of each evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The regional evaluation team and evaluation manager maintained close contact with the global evaluation team, including the global evaluation manager and the person responsible for coordination with the regional processes. Periodic meetings were held in relation to key milestones. Information including lists of people planned to be interviewed, logbooks and alignment and contribution tools were timely shared to ensure no repetitions, avoid overburden and enable feedback and cross fertilization. Furthermore, preliminary findings, the survey report and the regional draft evaluation report were shared in a timely manner to nourish the SPE analysis. Communication and coordination received high attention.
The regional evaluation is at the same time part of the global evaluation and thus aligned to it, and an independent assessment in itself. Intersections with the global process also include participation in a country mission and contribution to a remote assessment in two countries of the region. Associated risks included: a) lack of clarity of expected roles and contributions; b) duplication of efforts; c) mismatch in terms of inputs and contributions to the global evaluation and report; d) inefficient and or out of time coordination to address the previous risks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The revision of the evaluation questions of the ToRs was based on a comparison and further alignment with the global evaluation questions to avoid overlaps and duplication Specific coordination efforts took place before the mission to Nepal to ensure clarity about the role and expected objective for the accompanying regional evaluation team member. For Thailand, the regional evaluation team shared its notes and preliminary findings with the SPE team to ensure a complementary assessment on their side. SPE team conducted document analyses, which was used in complementarity with the CO Survey for the APRO RPE, without duplicating efforts. A tool was defined and validated to provide the needed evidence and inputs timely in terms of preliminary findings and strength of the evidence. Communication and coordination mechanisms were established early on in the process. The evaluation findings were shared with the SPE team before their analysis meeting.
The regional evaluation team assumed that the RPAP was a well-known and well-owned by COs. The participatory nature of the process, including	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evaluation team reacted proactively moving from a focus on the RPAP to a broader regional approach, based on APRO's ToRs as

the design of the survey, was based on this assumption. During the field mission of the team, it became apparent that this was not the case and that COs to a large extent were not aware of the RPAP, or at least did not use it as a key reference tool, although there was familiarity with the SP.	<p>the framework to analyses the different levels and types of regional interventions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This broader approach was also used in the implementation of the in-person and remote case studies. • A specific question assessing the perception of COs/PSRO/MOC in relation to APRO support in the implementation of strategic shifts, accelerators and enablers was added to the survey questionnaire.
During the process it became clear that the exclusive focus on the RPAP limited the strategic scope and relevance of the evaluation and its potential contribution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broader approach to all the APRO functions, the regional and subregional work, the country programmes, and the different interconnections, was adopted in the process by the evaluation team to facilitate more strategic, high-level conversations and recommendations. • The formative nature of the evaluation was also adopted in relation to the evaluation process as such, enabling adaptations that would benefit the purpose of the evaluation. This change in focus was positively accepted by the evaluation manager and also shared with the SPE team. • A consultative workshop with the APRO team was implemented to boost strategic discussions, build ownership of the evaluation and related discussions and promote a proactive, proposing attitude.

Source: Own elaboration.

3.8. Ethical issues, coordination and quality assurance

65. The evaluation adhered to the basic ethical principles of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent in the conduct of the stakeholder interviews. It observed the comprehensive framework of seven criteria and specific sub-criteria that operationalise the three quality principles of an evaluation: i) independence and impartiality; ii) credibility and iii) utility. The evaluation also responds to accountability criteria. Additionally, close coordination and collaboration with the SPE team, was a crucial factor to ensure quality.

66. Quality assurance occurred throughout the evaluation, beginning with the evaluation's terms of reference, the data collection phase, analysis and triangulation, and ending with the draft final evaluation report. The evaluation manager (EM) played the overall quality assurance role as per UNEG/UNFPA evaluation norms and standards and EQAA grid³³. A quality assessment will also take place after the evaluation is completed, with the final evaluation report quality assessed by an external independent assessor.

Box 1: Quality assurance elements built into the design

The evaluation team met regularly to review progress and was in permanent contact with the EM for guidance and clarification.

The evaluation team also met regularly with the global evaluation team to ensure alignment, high quality inputs, assess any relevant issues and concerns, and mainstream constant learning into the process as a quality factor.

The evaluation team and EM ensured that sufficient time has been allocated for review of key outputs.

67. In an effort to ensure the basis for a high-quality evaluation, UNFPA management needs and expectations were clarified during the inception phase of the evaluation process. In addition, the evaluation also had a number of quality assurance elements built into the design (see Box 1).

³³ Guidance on evaluation quality assurance and assessment (updated on March 22, 2024).
<https://www.unfpa.org/admin-resource/evaluation-quality-assurance-and-assessment-tools-and-guidance>

4. Findings

6.1. Forward-looking perspective

<i>EQ1: To what extent and how should UNFPA reconceptualize the next RPAP to stay relevant, keep its essence and enhance its impact orientation given the state of progress towards the SDGs and 3TRs in the region, as well as internal and external challenges and opportunities?</i>	Evaluation criteria RELEVANCE
<i>EQ2: How ready is the organization to face future challenges and changes, and fulfil its normative role, particularly in the context of increasingly complex conservative and polarised political and social contexts?</i>	
Finding 1: In the context of great regional diversity, countries are requesting a clear articulation of UNFPA’s position on the demographic shift toward low fertility, which all nations are expected to transition to. Specifically, COs as well as external stakeholders, would like UNFPA to pivot back to the bigger framework on population, ensuring agile but root-focused responses to the complex realities and rapid demographic transitions beyond the 3 TRs. Putting population and comprehensive SRHR issues at the core would further position UNFPA as a forward-looking agency, uniquely equipped to contribute to anticipating changes and better prepare the region to respond innovatively to future population and human rights concerns.	

Embracing regional diversity

68. The Asia Pacific Region is exceptionally diverse in a myriad of factors. Beyond variations in fertility rates, population size and composition, countries in the Region differ significantly across their stage in the demographic transition, level of economic development, degree of political stability, vulnerability to natural and human-induced disasters, as well as their social and cultural profiles. Moreover, many are undergoing profound changes across these factors and other megatrends, with opportunities and threat that significantly influence UNFPA's work within the nations and in the Region as a whole.

69. The democratic trends in the Asia and Pacific region are characterised by extraordinary diversity in terms of country size, traditions, development but also of regime types and performances. These range from some of the most enduring autocratic regimes to some of the best performing democracies in the world, but in terms of trends, in the past years the region has registered some dramatic democratic reversals and a worrying decline in the quality of existing democracies in terms of checks on the government and fundamental rights, impacting negatively on people's SRHR and the lives of women and girls. A severe erosion of the effectiveness of parliaments, independent judiciary and media integrity together with the deliberate shrinking of civil liberties and a rise of institutionalised polarisation and ethnonationalism have been observed in several countries.³⁴

70. Given these realities, UNFPA faces three main challenges: i) to address the specificities and complexities of the countries; ii) to generate (sub)regional initiatives that respond to challenges being experienced by more than one country; and iii) to anticipate responses to emerging and upcoming trends and challenges, strongly focusing on the demographic transitions.

71. The current RPAP has the primary goal of accelerating the achievement of the 3 TRs by 2025, with countries in the Region at varying stages of meeting the 3 TRs targets by 2030.

³⁴ <https://www.idea.int/news/how-does-civil-society-asia-pacific-view-eus-external-democracy-policy-region>

Table 5: Percent distribution of countries' perceived likelihood of meeting the targets for the 3 TRs by 2030

	Highly unlikely (%)	Somewhat likely	Very likely	Target met	Not applicable	N
Unmet need for FP	54.2	16.7	16.7	8.3	4.2 ³⁵	24
Maternal mortality	50.0	12.5	16.7	16.7	4.2 ³⁶	24
GBV	75.0	20.8	4.2	-	-	24
Child marriage ³⁷	77.8	11.1	5.6	5.6		16
GBSS	71.4	14.3	14.3	-		7 ³⁸
FGM	75.0	25.0	-	-		4 ³⁹

Source: CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

72. Primarily because the targets are unlikely to be achieved globally by 2030, there is a general agreement to recommend retaining the three transformative results in the next RPAP, especially for GBV and maternal mortality albeit slightly less so for unmet need for FP. All respondents likewise recommend broadening the focus areas to accommodate other concerns, particularly related to population dynamics and the megatrends. On the other hand, there is less support for retaining the harmful practices of child marriage, Gender-biased Sex Selection (GBSS) and Female genital mutilation (FGM) as focus areas for the next RPAP, especially GBSS (only 38% will recommend) and FGM (only 25% will recommend), possibly because these concerns affect only a few countries in the region.⁴⁰

Building a leading role in responding to the demographic shifts

73. The COs responses to the CO Survey for the APRO RPE advocate for a clear articulation of UNFPA's stance on the global demographic shift towards low fertility, a transition that all nations are anticipated to undergo. Specifically, COs urge UNFPA to realign with the overarching framework of population and development, perhaps formulating a "new demographic transition theory" that responds holistically to the multiple underlying issues that need to be deeply understood and strategically addressed to ensure meaningful and effective responses to priority target issues. There is a prevailing sentiment that UNFPA is diverging from its traditional domain. Where lies the essence of "population" within UNFPA's trajectory under the current RPAP? This call for UNFPA to re-engage with its foundational principles in population and development emerged also consistently in stakeholder interviews, as evidenced in the selected quotes below:⁴¹

- "We are not sure where our mandate is going, at the same time new forms of everything are arising that we need bring in."
- "Slowly our agenda is eroding."
- "The UNFPA branding as the SRH agency is confusing. It must retain the 'population' aspect of its name."
- "Our mandate for reproductive health doesn't stop when a woman reaches menopause."
- "Support(ing) countries to navigate their demographic shifts and to maximize the opportunities these shifts provide."

³⁵ Iran.

³⁶ Respondent is PSRO covering 14 island states. Unmet need and MMR vary widely across the states with no stable MMR estimates in a number of the smaller states.

³⁷ Harmful practices of child marriage, gender biased sex selection and female genital mutilation are a concern only for a subset of the 24 respondents as indicated in the N of cases column. The percent distribution is based on the number of responding offices where the practice is prevalent.

³⁸ India, Bangladesh, Samoa, Nepal, China, Myanmar and Vietnam.

³⁹ Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Sri Lanka.

⁴⁰ CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

⁴¹ KIs with UNFPA staff and diverse external stakeholders.

74. Indeed, this redirection is not inherently incompatible with the goal of meeting the 3 TRs. By embracing a population-focused approach, UNFPA can effectively address demographic shifts while simultaneously advancing the TRs, which do intersect with population dynamics in various ways. Therefore, by realigning with its foundational principles in population and development, UNFPA can enhance its impact across all three TRs, focusing systemically on the root causes and remaining responsive to evolving global demographic shifts across Asia and Pacific. The question whether UNFPA wants to work on demographic change holistically or only the part intersecting with fertility remains open for discussion.

KEY MESSAGE

UNFPA must address population "anxiety" of governments- of too high population growth and large population size like the case of Pakistan by framing the population issue not in terms of population numbers but of creating opportunities for the individuals in the population by investing in human capital formation-education, skills training, good health so that everyone may have the chance to develop their full potential-under a human rights based approach that sees all human as having the same basic rights. The size of the population matters less than its quality. For UNFPA, investing in women and girls is its answer to improving quality of the population. Other UN agencies have their own roles to play in this overall goal.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmYt3013qR>

75. While the previous approach presents a solution to managing diversity and staying relevant in the region today, it is important to note that the ageing and low fertility trends are not “new” to UNFPA, even if several UNFPA staff shared the sentiment of having been caught “flat footed” in the region.⁴² UNFPA could have been uniquely positioned to anticipate demographic changes and be ready to play a leading role in responding to them.



76. As an example, in 2011 –13 years ago– UNFPA Thailand published a document titled *Impact of Demographic Change in Thailand*, which emphasised that “while there has been increasing awareness and policy response to rapid demographic change in developed countries in the past decades, similar timely response to address this emerging concern in developing countries has been missing”. Addressing ageing as a new phenomenon for UNFPA reflects the limited capacity of the organization to “listen to the countries”. Further capturing of key data for decision-making would enable UNFPA to better anticipate realities and to generate innovative, timely responses that will prepare countries for changes that affect the rights and wellbeing of their populations. This seems a persistent problem.⁴³

77. In September 2023, the 2030 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) entitled “Times of Crisis, Times of Change: Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development,” was published, presenting six “transformative entry points - or key transitions - that can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the SDGs and an outsized determinant impact for achieving the Goals”. These include: (1) food systems; (2) energy access and affordability; (3) digital connectivity; (4) education; (5) jobs and social protection; and (6) climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Surprisingly demographic changes were not included. From the evaluation perspective, there is enough evidence to justify the relevance of considering population issues – including ageing and low fertility- as a further key transitional factor towards ensuring and

"What countries in the region decide to do to advance the population and development agenda will leave its imprint on any future development agenda."

Asia-Pacific Population and Development Agenda 2023

⁴² KIIs with UNFPA staff.

⁴³ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

accelerating the achievement of the SDGs. Furthermore, demographic change is a key overarching element that highly influences all of the key transitions listed above. As the Asia-Pacific Population and Development Report of 2023 highlights, “a major feature of the ICPD Programme of Action is placing people at the centre of sustainable development (principle 2). Hence, the full economic and social flourishing of all people should be in symbiotic relationship with sustainable and inclusive economic development. In other words, population dynamics are both drivers and outcomes of sustainable development.”

78. UNFPA is uniquely positioned to play a determining role in the future of the region and the capacities of countries to address their complex and rapidly changing realities. The combination of UNFPA’s agenda, its population focus and its competitive advantage in data production and analysis, make it a potentially key, influential player in the region, as recognised by several partners: “We want them (UNFPA) to succeed, we need them here” (partner). Furthermore, relevant approaches and good practices, like the use of the National Transfer Accounts (NTA) methodology, including providing technical brokering to bring in users and producers to work together on evidence-based population policy guidance to support governments “to plan and develop policies that better prepare a country for an ageing population”⁴⁴, contribute to UNFPA’s comparative advantage. However, internal and external stakeholders identify that UNFPA is not ready to take this role:

“We are not up in the game. We are approaching the same as in 10 years ago” (UNFPA leader).
“UNFPA needs to be ahead of the ball, ahead of the game” (donor).

Positioning UNFPA as a rights-based forward-looking organization

79. While having to respond to such a diverse region where population growth and decrease closely coexist is certainly a challenge for programming, it can also be addressed as a unique opportunity to embrace diversity systemically, with a focus on learning, anticipation, innovation and cross-fertilization. As the regional 2023 Population and Development Report emphasises, “rather than simplistic ‘demographic fixes’ to all of the trends and issues... the ongoing demographic changes in the region require proactive responses to achieve sustainable development, the promotion and protection of the dignity and rights of all people, and a higher quality of life for all, without compromising the needs of future generations.” UNFPA’s population agenda positions it in the forefront as an agency that is holistically human-centred, inclusive, humanitarian as well as development-oriented.

80. In Samoa, for example, UNFPA is much appreciated for being the only UN agency to tackle sensitive issues on SRH and GBV and for making direct investment on youth, through its Family Life Education programme, now adopted in the schools with a version also for out of school youth.⁴⁵

81. UNFPA is considered and expected to be an agency that can anticipate demographic shifts and analyse trends, be responsive and resilient in a highly complex and rapidly changing world. UNFPA is seen as a people-centred organization with a comprehensive, human-rights based approach. UNFPA creates evidence-based policy and financial solutions for governments to respond to their demographic, humanitarian, development and sustainability challenges. This includes addressing inequalities as a factor that can result from and at the same time negatively influence economic development and demographic transitions.⁴⁶

Retaining and mobilizing investment in the 3 TRs with important nuances

⁴⁴ National Transfer Accounts e-booklet.

⁴⁵ KIIs with UNFPA staff and external stakeholders.

⁴⁶ Source: CO survey for APRO RPE, KII with UNFPA staff and external stakeholders.

82. The 3 TRs have enabled organizational focus – alignment to the 3 TRs scored the highest in the SP MTR survey, in terms of COs feeling knowledgeable about them. However, the focus on the 3 TRs can be quite limiting as they do not fully resonate with countries: i) that have achieved or are likely to achieve the targets soon; ii) with ageing and low fertility trends; and iii) with social and cultural pushbacks. While the majority of COs support retaining the 3 TRs in the next RPAP - primarily because the TRs targets are unlikely to be achieved by 2030, all COs and many external stakeholders recommended that the focus areas be broadened to accommodate other concerns. A broader approach, interlinking human rights and inequalities, while acknowledging current or upcoming demographic shifts and other key megatrends, would resonate more in the diverse regional context. In relation to harmful practices, opinions of COs are more dispersed, particularly in relation to GBSS and FGM where such practices are not prevalent.⁴⁷

Table 6: Percent distribution of COs/SRO/MCO that will recommend retaining each harmful practice as focus area in the next RPAP

	Will recommend	Will not recommend	No response
Child marriage	75.0	16.7	8.3
GBSS	37.5	50.0	12.5
FGM	25.0	45.8	29.2

Source: CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

83. The importance of addressing harmful practices needs to be approached strategically and contextually, with a strong focus on learning from past experience, as well as providing evidence on the costs for governments and societies of not addressing these harmful practices, particularly related to GBSS (which has an impact on population) and FGM. Among others, the already existing regional investment case on adolescents and child marriage (for five Southeast countries), and the planned cases for Bangladesh, India on the same topics, for Nepal on family planning and for Sri Lanka (topic still to be defined), serve as an important, evidence-informed framework for UNFPA's advocacy and rights-based programming, demonstrate the health and economic benefits accrued from targeted, multi-sectoral investments for girls (and the flipside, the health and economic costs of not doing so).⁴⁸ As also expressed by one of the regional UNFPA leaders and endorsed by other staff members, there is a need to further strengthen and integrate an economic analysis in advocating for UNFPA's agenda.⁴⁹ Data and figures like the ones included in the 2022 publication *"Investing in three transformative results: Realizing Powerful Returns"*, can be highly relevant to boost the effectiveness of UNFPA advocacy and political dialogue, particularly in more challenging contexts:

Figure 2: Investing in three transformative results



Source: UNFPA. 2022. *Investing in three transformative results: Realizing Powerful Returns*.

84. Furthermore, as declared in relation to the achievements of the joint UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, "while progress is evident in success stories from Bangladesh to

⁴⁷ CO Survey for APRO RPE

⁴⁸ APRO Investment case inventory (last updated March 2024).

⁴⁹ KILs with UNFPA stakeholders.

Nepal and India, the road ahead demands sustained efforts, collaboration, and innovative solutions.”⁵⁰

Changing and communicating a new theory-based narrative focused on “rights and choices”

85. During the consultative workshop with APRO staff on March 5th (see Annex 10), a change in narrative was proposed to reposition UNFPA in the region, maintaining though updating and expanding its focus beyond the 3 TRs. Based on this proposal, some preliminary additional suggestions (in red) to further ensure some key aspects that contribute to UNFPA

At every age:	At every age and under any circumstance:
<input type="checkbox"/> every reproductive act is a choice.	<input type="checkbox"/> every reproductive and sexual act is a choice.
<input type="checkbox"/> every childbirth is safe.	<input type="checkbox"/> every childbirth is safe.
<input type="checkbox"/> every woman and girl lives a life free from violence.	<input type="checkbox"/> every person enjoys a life free from gender-based violence.

uniqueness and comparative advantage on comprehensive SRHR: i) integrating an umbrella population framework and intersectional perspective; ii) expand the focus to encompass sexual health and rights, including supporting the SRHR needs and realities of LGBTIQ+ populations, thus creating a more inclusive framework for younger and older population groups; iii) emphasise the diverse contexts and situations, including humanitarian crises, climate change, migration, urbanization etc; iv) further align the narrative to a human-rights language; v) highlight an inclusive approach to addressing inequality; v) expand the GBV mandate to include violence against people of diverse genders.

86. The proposed narrative is coherent with the following suggestions of the SP MTR to address the difficulties faced by COs to anchor the 3 TRs in the changing development contexts, particularly in M/HICs characterized by low fertility and rapid ageing, and considering the impacts of megatrends:

- Strengthen the evidence-base of the relevance of the 3 TRs in diverse development contexts
- Build a better understanding of the links between the 3 TRs and low fertility/ageing and demographic resilience
- A stronger focus on **“rights and choices” as the basis for the centrality of the 3 TRs** and broader SRHR for sustainable development.

87. The proposed refocusing of the next RPAP will require a new Theory of Change that recaptures the population and development essence of UNFPA’s work and the expanded 3 TRs approach, articulating the change logic based on a combination of technical expertise or thematic focus, with the strategic shifts and accelerators. The new ToC needs to be widely communicated and also utilization focused, while linkages with the Country Programmes and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF), need to be transparent and well-defined.

88. On the other hand, strategic communication will certainly convey a narrative that is at the same time clear though not necessarily fully explicit, transformational, culturally responsive and politically sensitive, and that contributes to position UNFPA effectively based on its uniqueness and comparative advantage. Based on the Objectives outlined in APRO Communications Strategy, strategic communications will help to strengthen UNFPA’s voice, audience reach and engagement

⁵⁰ <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/news/action-leads-and-hope-prevails-success-ending-child-marriage>

to increase awareness and garner support for the mandate, while positioning UNFPA as a thought-leader and trusted organization for partnerships, alliances, and mobilizing resources.⁵¹

89. Along with the communication strategy, the process and ways of engaging and helping others is equally important, especially to position UNFPA as a thought-leader and trusted organization. Communication tactics in detached form will be a one-time effort, whereas UNFPA needs that strong engagement and communication strategy go hand in hand.⁵²

90. Furthermore, the narrative for communicating UNFPA's priorities and approaches in a clear, coherent and consistent manner needs to strengthen its positioning based on uniqueness and relevance. The narrative will influence (or hinder) the creation of enabling conditions for UNFPA going forward, particularly to fulfil its normative function, and contribute to mitigating any political and reputational risks UNFPA may face.⁵³

Finding 2: In the context of major changes expected in and for the organization, it can be too narrow to focus only on changes in the next RPAP, while the need for a new organizational mindset and systems thinking is the main challenge for APRO, including enhanced catalytic, connecting, harvesting and accelerating competencies. There is a lot of learning based on review of good and poor practices that is already nourishing some reshaping of regional work. In this context, the accelerators, strategic shifts and enablers are not necessarily something new to APRO, but they need to be revised for clarity, consistency, operationalization, proven utility and effectiveness.

Unleashing the catalytic role of APRO

91. Enhancing its future readiness does not only imply the need for APRO to revisit its focus and ways of working, but also review of the organizational architecture that supports this. This includes rethinking APRO's role, and maybe in general, the role of all regional offices worldwide. Changing the role of APRO is an idea already installed in the vision of regional leadership. As mentioned during the APRO Programming Retreat last November 2023⁵⁴, and reinforced during the interviews, two interrelated ideas guide the envisioned change:

- APRO to move closer to the country offices.
- APRO to change from "programmer" to "catalyst" or "key accelerator".

92. Being catalytic can imply several functions, levels and directions, including: i) catalysing country and inter-country processes; ii) catalysing (sub-)regional initiatives; iii) catalysing inter-regional exchange, learning and replications; iv) catalysing the adaptation and implementation of global strategies; and v) scaling up country and regional contributions to nourish and influence global/HQ level. Facilitation and brokering are key functions embedded in catalysing, but a more detailed vision of the catalytic role and its operationalization are needed. In a context of increasing contextual challenges and complexities on the one hand, and scarce resources on the other, the ambition is high but also timely and endorsed by UNFPA leadership and staff.⁵⁵

93. While noticeable improvements were evidenced in terms of inter-area and multidisciplinary programming and enhanced country involvement in regional decisions, the question is to what extent these correspond to a "systematic approach" that will bring APRO to its desired vision. Additionally, key UNFPA informants highlighted some important issues that relate to the expected

⁵¹ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

⁵² KIIs with and written feedback from partners.

⁵³ KIIs with UNFPA staff and partners.

⁵⁴ Taken from the retreat report.

⁵⁵ KIIs with UNFPA staff; retreat report.

organizational mindset, composition and required competencies for the APRO team, the operationalisation, monitoring and evaluation of APRO's catalytic function, and its alignment and implications for HQ and COs.

94. The evaluation has captured the needs and expectations at country level that further justify making an important strategic shift in APRO's role. Diverse inputs⁵⁶ ultimately point in the same direction: a more substantive and value-added contribution to country responses, combined with regional strategic facilitation, knowledge management and innovation. The CO Survey for the APRO RPE captures this sentiment:

- *"The Regional Programme Action Plan (RPAP) should serve as a platform for Country Offices (COs) to access expertise and skills support, crucial for delivering tangible results on the ground. It should facilitate the connection of countries in the region by sharing good practices, lessons learned, and identifying country-level champions with promising experiences or positive lessons that can influence others."*
- *"Broker regional-level joint partnerships/programmes that attract funding/financing that can be rolled out multi-country."*
- *"Establish a Regional Data Innovation Hub to re-position UNFPA's comparative advantage on Population Data. The purpose of this hub could be to centralize and streamline data collection, analysis, and dissemination efforts across the countries in the Asia and the Pacific region."*
- *"Facilitate regional dialogue and network on climate change impact on SRH and GBV and form an advisory group or learning hub for climate change, including brokering for required technical expertise to support the CO needs."*

95. These findings are supported by the findings for the Region of the SP MTR undertaken in 2023. The general priorities identified then, can be absolutely connected to the country perceptions and expectations, and also to the regional analysis and vision.

Boosting ownership and implementation of strategic shifts and accelerators

96. The evaluation also reconfirms the persistence of knowledge and implementation gaps with respect to the 12 strategic shifts and the six accelerators of the SP. Further discussion about the clarity, ownership, quality, relevance and value add of particular strategic shifts and accelerators is to be found under the corresponding findings. Here the main point is to highlight more general issues and bottlenecks.

97. The survey of the SP MTR showed that for 8 out of the 12 strategic shifts, 75% of the country offices in the Asia and Pacific Region felt only slightly or not knowledgeable about them. Furthermore, for some of the key strategic shifts prioritized in this evaluation like the HDP nexus, the integration of the megatrends into programming and the shifting from funding to funding and financing, the percentages of offices that felt had "no" or "very little knowledge", ranged between 86% and 95%.

Table 7: Proportion of country offices rating themselves as very knowledgeable about specific SP Strategic shifts

SP Strategic shifts	Very knowledgeable	
	UNFPA	Asia & Pacific
Shifting from funding to financing	14%	5%
Integrating the effects of megatrends into programming	14%	10%
The "many-to-many" relationship between SP outcomes and outputs	25%	10%
Mainstreaming resilience, prevention, preparedness and early action, and emphasizing the humanitarian, development and peace nexus	18%	14%
Tailoring prog and tech assistance to better respond to local contexts through a UNFPA office-led process, "within the UN family on the ground"	31%	19%
Increasingly taking a multisectoral approach	36%	24%

⁵⁶ KIs with UNFPA staff in COs.

Reinvigorating and expanding partnerships, including with private sector, CSOs, IFIs, academia, media, and through SSTC	30%	24%
Increasing the focus on joint accountability, in line with United Nations reforms, principles and practices	28%	24%
Expanding the humanitarian response capacity, while also addressing mental health and psychosocial issues	31%	29%
Increasing the focus on leaving no one behind	54%	33%
Scaling up the provision of high-quality comprehensive SRH information and services, as part of universal health coverage plans	44%	33%
Strengthening the UNFPA normative role	36%	38%

Source: MTR of the Strategic Plan 2023.

98. The evaluation found that the megatrends were not clearly elaborated in the SP and RPAP, thus providing little guidance to country programming on how to operationalise them into CPs.

99. The SP MTR survey also included a question on the implementation of the accelerators. Regional data reported limited use with the exception of “data and evidence”, and almost no implementation of the partnerships, SSTC and financing accelerator.

Table 8: Proportion of offices replying to have used in most interventions the strategic plan accelerators to boost programme interventions

SP accelerators	Used in most interventions	
	UNFPA	Asia and the Pacific
Data and evidence	48%	57%
Human rights-based and gender-transformative approaches	47%	33%
Leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first	48%	33%
Innovation and digitalization	13%	19%
Resilience and adaptation, and complementarity among humanitarian, development and peace-responsive efforts	19%	10%
Partnerships, South-South and triangular cooperation, and financing	13%	5%

Source: MTR of the Strategic Plan 2023.

100. APRO could have been expected to further boost the implementation of the strategic shifts and accelerators since the MTR. The CO Survey for the APRO RPE also asked about the perception of COs/SRO/MCO regarding APRO support for the implementation of the accelerators, strategic shifts and enablers, with the following results that evidence important variations but that with important variations, in general there is room for improvement in APROs support for implementation of the accelerators, strategic shifts and enablers. A positive note on the support provided by the regional strategic communication and gender teams, that can share strategies, good practices and lessons learnt.

Table 9: Percent distribution of the assessment of COs/SRO/MCO of the extent of APRO support to the Country Office in the implementation of the accelerators, strategic shifts and enablers of the Regional Plan 2022-2025

	Not significantly	To some extent	Very much	No response	Relevant EQ
ACCELERATORS					
The strengthening of HRB and gender transformative approaches, including social and gender norm change, in all the areas	8.3	50.0	33.3	8.3	
Innovation and digitalization	12.5	58.3	25.0	4.2	3
Establishing catalytic partnerships	37.5	50.0	8.3	4.2	3
Moving from funding to funding and financing	29.2	50.0	12.5	12.5	3
Promoting SSTC	41.7	41.7	4.2	12.5	3
Consistently apply the LNOB and “reaching the furthest left behind first” approach	20.8	45.8	29.2	75.0	3

STRATEGIC SHIFTS					
The implementation of its normative role	33.3	33.3	33.3	-	2
Boosting strategic, human rights-based approaches to the megatrends					5
- Ageing and low fertility	37.5	33.3	25.0	4.2	5
- Climate change	50.0	33.3	8.3	8.3	5
- Migration	66.7	25.0	4.2	4.2	5
- Inequalities	20.8	50.0	20.8	8.3	5
- Technological innovation	45.8	37.5	12.5	4.2	5
The provision of high-quality, human rights-focused comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services	16.7	33.3	33.3	16.7	7
The provision of a multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence resilience, adaptation and HDP	16.7	33.3	41.7	8.3	7
The expansion of humanitarian preparedness and response capacity and humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) nexus programming	25.0	33.3	33.3	8.3	8
ENABLERS					
Implementing strategic communication	20.8	25.0	45.8	8.3	12
Strengthening knowledge management	25.0	54.2	20.8	-	14

Source: Own elaboration based on information from the CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

Strengthening regional articulation, complementarity and systems-thinking

101. While countries expect not only greater but a different kind of strategic support, there is also the expectation of a more regional articulated approach, which implies systems thinking and embracing complexity. Systems-thinking “includes the willingness to see a situation more fully, to recognize that we are interrelated, to acknowledge that there are often multiple interventions to a problem, and to champion interventions that may not be popular”.⁵⁷ Complexity, on the other hand, can be summarised in one term currently used to define the world today: BANI (brittle, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible).⁵⁸ In action “system orchestrated” effort is needed and it should go together to bring in various contributing and engaging actors together with nuanced and complementing roles. UNFPA, a recognised convener, can play that role at regional and country levels.⁵⁹

102. Given the complex and adverse country realities for the fulfilment of the ICPD PoA, in 2022 APRO initiated the development of an “Interlinkages Framework on Political Scanning, Financing and Investment on SRHR Issues, Value-based Dialogues, and Human Rights for Advancement of the ICPD Programme of Action in Asia-Pacific.”⁶⁰ The framework is country-anchored and one of its assumptions is that “people-centred policies with strong political will can boost a country's development.”⁶¹ Although this framework is currently not being implemented given a new focus on interdisciplinary work, it presents interesting inputs for the future strategic approach and catalytic role of APRO.

⁵⁷ <https://thesystemsthinker.com/systems-thinking-what-why-when-where-and-how/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.impactinternational.com/insights/bani-what-it-and-how-can-it-help-us>

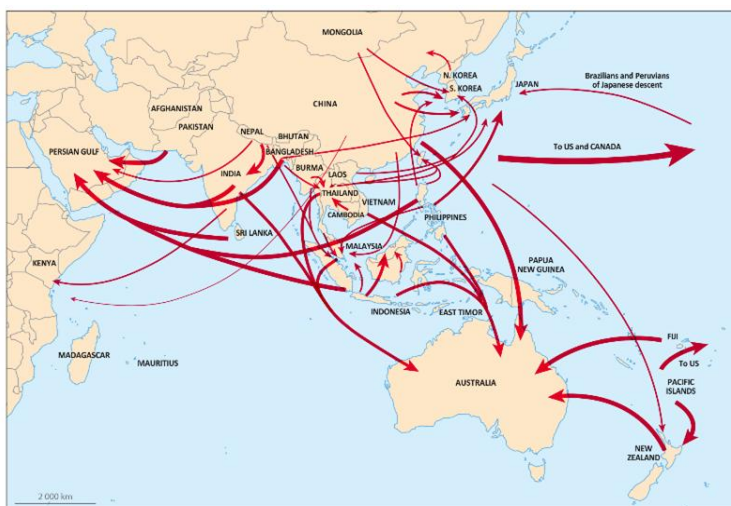
⁵⁹ KIIs with UNFPA staff and partners; ERG feedback.

⁶⁰ Draft Concept note, August 26 August, 2024.

⁶¹: “Interlinkages Framework on Political Scanning, Financing, and Value-based Dialogues for the Advancement of the ICPD PoA in Asia-Pacific”.

103. One other issue for APRO is about how to manage regional diversity. The 2022-2025 Strategic Plan categorizes the countries in 3 Tiers and defines its business model and country support correspondingly. However, given geopolitics, economic interdependence and current population dynamics that create complex relations and interactions between nations, addressing countries as a sum of independent, diverse units does not seem to be the only and necessarily the most strategic response, as highlighted in various KIIs with UNFPA staff and particularly discussed during the Thailand CO interviews. Analysing complementarities and interdependence is important to provide a more integrated and effective response, that can further tackle the cause-effect relations from a systems perspective. A recent example of regional interdependence and shared interests between

Graphic 4: Contemporary migrations within and from the Asia Pacific region



Source: Castles Stephen, de Haas Hein y Miller Mark J. (2014) *La era de la migración*, Red Globe Press, 420 p. Diseño: E. Opigez (IRD/CEPED).

countries with very different economic realities, is “on 15 November 2020, 15 countries signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a regional trade agreement between Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, as well as the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries”.⁶²

104. Migration, one of the megatrends, also illustrates inter-country mobility and interdependence, as can be visually appreciated in the map. The specific relevance of

considering migratory movements and the implications, will be further expanded under the specific finding concerning the megatrends.

Strengthening theory-based strategic, agile and adaptive management

105. To summarise, APRO needs a new Theory of Change to structure and implement a logical, effective and efficient change process that brings the regional office to its highest catalytic potential. There is a need to further rethink the actual RPAP Theory of Change (ToC) model and its usefulness to guide management and decision-making. This would boost agility and adaptive management to ensure timely reactions to the megatrends and continuous relevance in rapid changing contexts. Evidence gathered during the evaluation shows that the ToC is a formal exercise to guide the RPAP development. The document as such is dense and not easy to navigate. Once prepared, it is never used to revise performance, to discuss the validity of its logic and/or guide strategic management decisions. It is also limited to activities, output and outcome cause-effect relations, with accelerators, strategic shifts and enablers not fully and not sufficiently integrated across various outputs, as key elements to influence transformative change. The definition of “assumptions” used, as needed external conditions for the logic to function, or the changes to happen (usually applied in for Logical Frameworks), is not as interesting as the alternative one that uses assumptions to make the underlying hypothesis of the ToC explicit.⁶³

⁶² <https://hillnotes.ca/2021/04/07/overview-of-the-regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership/>

⁶³ KIIs with UNFPA staff; critical analysis of the ToC document.

106. The ToC needs to guide strategic and adaptive management and decisions, allow revising periodically the underlying logic and assumptions, adjusting actions and paths to ensure staying in the right direction despite changes in contexts, ensuring results-orientation and motivating a learning and reflective organization. It needs to focus on how specifically APRO will implement its envisioned catalytic role in the region, including the PSRO strategic role and contribution.⁶⁴

Finding 3: UNFPA is recognized for its capability to engage with governments, to advocate for policy in its mandate areas, to influence policy approaches, to tackle sensitive issues and deal with backlash against gender, human rights and SRHR agendas. Nevertheless, the normative function of UNFPA is not yet fully defined, particularly to address decentralized systems of government, country transitions to middle income status, high levels of inequality in middle income countries, complex geopolitical movements and relevant sensitive issues (e.g. migration including forced migration as a result of conflict) that influence the achievement of the 3 TRs and where UNFPA has limited experience. Experiences in different countries have shown the importance of solid academic support and partnerships with CSOs to nourish and support normative work.

Advancing the normative role in changing and challenging contexts

107. Normative work is a core function for UNFPA but lacks sufficient conceptual and operational clarity in the Strategic Plan; the clearest though operationally insufficient description is probably the one in the business model annex of the SP, noting that “UNFPA normative work centres around policy advocacy and dialogue, supported by knowledge management, including data analysis, and partnership and South-South and triangular cooperation.” It is not surprising that the survey undertaken during the MTR of the SP in 2023, resulted in only 38% of the COs in the Region feeling “very knowledgeable” about applying normative guidance. In relation to actions taken to boost UNFPA normative role, the SP MTR survey showed that the region scored higher than the global average in the case of media campaigns to change attitudes and build momentum, and in relation to catalysing funding to influence government budgets.

Table 10: Proportion of offices replying to have taken actions to strengthen the UNFPA normative role

Actions taken	UNFPA	Asia and Pacific
Advocated for the 3TRs and ICPD PoA during government and public discussions.	95%	86%
Supported media campaigns to change the public's attitudes and build momentum for positive social norms.	72%	86%
Catalyzed financing to get new or increased government budgets, and increase funding from domestic and/or international sources.	64%	71%
Empowered youth and women-led organizations and the left behind populations to engage in policy-making and implementation monitoring process to challenge harmful social norms and gender stereotypes.	80%	71%
Analyzed gaps in achieving the 3TRs, including root causes, to inform policy and decision-making of stakeholders.	60%	52%
Advised target audiences to understand and take ownership of the 3TRs and ICPD PoA.	58%	52%
Other.	6%	5%

Source: MTR of the Strategic Plan 2023.

⁶⁴ The evaluation team requested the ToRs of the PSRO but these could not be found.

108. The percentage of COs in the Region feeling knowledgeable about applying normative standards (38%) reported in the MTR is close to the percentage that felt very much supported by APRO to implement its normative role (33%), as reported in the CO Survey for the APRO RPE.⁶⁵ This suggests a significant link between COs performance of their normative role and APRO support in this area.

109. Nevertheless, UNFPA is highly recognized by other UN agencies for its capability to work with governments even under the most challenging circumstances related among others to cultural, religious and political sensitivities, gender and human rights pushbacks, political instability, internal confrontations and diverse humanitarian crises⁶⁶. Additional challenges include decentralized systems of government, country transitions to middle income status and high levels of inequality in middle income countries.⁶⁷

110. The percentage of COs in the Region feeling knowledgeable about applying normative standards (38%) reported in the MTR is close to the percentage that felt very much supported by APRO to implement its normative role (33%) as reported in the CO Survey suggesting a significant link between COs performance of their normative role and APRO support in this area.

111. The CO Survey for the APRO RPE captured challenges COs face today in fulfilling the UNFPA normative role. The results show that these challenges emanate almost exclusively from what the SP 2022-2025 labelled as operational environment risk. Specifically, the challenges fall within the following categories:

- a. Cultural, religious and political sensitivity to UNFPA mandate areas, especially SRHR and Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment (GEWE).
- b. Pushbacks from some countries as a result of the perceived negative repercussions of prolonged low fertility
- c. Limited/shrinking space for UNFPA to fulfil its normative role.
- d. Political instability and shifts in government priorities, high turnover of government officials/staff.
- e. Lack of government openness to sharing of data.
- f. Insufficient national and subnational institutional capacity.
- g. The effects of the anticipated demographic shifts to low fertility and population ageing, urbanization, climate change economic transition into middle income status on government actions and priorities related to UNFPA's mandate areas.

112. The COs demonstrate resilience and proactivity under these, sometimes extreme situations, identifying the spaces where they can be allowed to carry out some of their core functions. Trust and innovative perspectives, strategic communication, combined with strong economic and value-for money data, can open spaces for continuous advocacy and political dialogue.⁶⁸ This adaptability and commitment to fulfil their mandate even in difficult circumstances highlights the importance of UNFPA's work in advancing the rights and well-being of women and girls in the Region, and of society in general, as also emphasised by other partners and CSOs.

⁶⁵ To operationalise the definition of the normative role in the CO survey for the APRO RPE, the three categories considered by the UNEG Evaluation Group were used: i) development of norms and standards; ii) support to governments and others to integrate these norms and standards into legislation, policies and development plans; and iii) implementing legislation, policies and development plans based on international norms, standards and conventions. Source: UNEG Handbook for Conducting Evaluations of Normative Work in the UN System. November 2013: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/uneg-handbook-conducting-evaluations-normative-work-un-system>

⁶⁶ KIIs with representatives of various UN agencies.

⁶⁷ KIIs with government representatives, other partners and UNFPA staff in selected APRO countries.

⁶⁸ KIIs with staff in COs.

113. Field visits in Bangladesh illustrated how well-positioned UNFPA is to engage in high-level political dialogue and implement its normative role. One of the important achievements is UNFPA's contribution to revisiting Bangladesh's Population Policy of 2012, which included a paradigm shift from a population control (fertility) to a human-rights focused population approach, including life-cycle and gender equality approaches.⁶⁹ In Bangladesh the convening role of UNFPA has added value to its normative role and has also contributed to highly valued inter-sectoral dialogue and coordination. The convening role is a key enabler and complement to the normative role and has also facilitated dialogues between civil society organizations and governments, as highlighted during many KIIs with external stakeholders⁷⁰.

114. In Thailand, a middle-income country, the CO has active engagement with the government in terms of providing the research needed to guide policies in an ageing society. The partnership is long running and began in 2010 with studies on ageing undertaken with UNFPA support by reputable academic institutions in partnership with other researchers outside the country. UNFPA Thailand also introduced the National Transfer Accounts (NTA) methodology to the Thai government and it is now used for policy action and planning. The experience in Thailand shows that playing a significant normative role in a middle-income country will demand solid academic support – and UNFPA strategic partnerships with the academia have not been fully explored or developed – and innovative approaches and solutions.⁷¹

115. The Thai experience also demonstrates that advocating for UNFPA's agenda, like the LNOB principle in all areas of programming, may be challenging when the issue is not among the government priorities, even if the problem is "real", like in this case the populations left behind in Thailand, including ethnic minorities, labour migrant workers and refugees from internal conflict in Myanmar. Investment cases are a key tool to address rights issues that have a demonstrable negative economic impact but are overseen or neglected by governments.⁷²

116. The impact of decentralization processes on UNFPA's normative role varies, not only from country to country, but also depending on the sector. Under a decentralized system, policies that are successfully advocated for by UNFPA at the national level may not necessarily be implemented at the local levels. For example, in Nepal decentralization negatively impacted UNFPA's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment. Under the federal system, the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, UNFPA's counterpart since the 1990's, is no longer an implementing agency. While new opportunities may be identified, an immediate consequence is that local governments may choose not to implement GEWE programs in their own jurisdictions.⁷³ But in India, decentralization is considered a positive force as it allows for decentralized implementation by states based on their own specific needs and contexts.⁷⁴ These examples highlight the importance of ensuring contextualized responses to decentralization processes considering their particular nature and the opportunities and threats they represent; such agility and adaptability in UNFPA's future strategy is a must.

117. According to the SP MTR, 71% of the COs in the Region "empowered youth and women-led organizations and the left behind populations to engage in policy-making and implementation monitoring process, to challenge harmful social norms and gender stereotypes". The results of the CO Survey for the APRO RPE and interviews with civil society partners, reinforce the idea that CSOs play a key transformative role and are strategic partners to nourish and support normative work.

⁶⁹ KII with Bangladesh CO staff and partners; 2023 Annual Report- Bangladesh.

⁷⁰ KIIs with Bangladesh CO staff, UN partners and CSOs.

⁷¹ KIIs with Thailand CO staff and partners.

⁷² KIIs with Thailand CO staff.

⁷³ KIIs with Nepal government stakeholders.

⁷⁴ India response to the CO survey for the APRO RPE.

118. Thus, despite the manifold challenges, there are also opportunities to fulfil the UNFPA normative role, including a conducive political environment in some countries with avowed government commitment to the ICPD goals and UNFPA mandate areas. Furthermore, opportunities are also closely linked to UNFPA's technical competitiveness, South-South collaborations, and the capacity to respond to specific contexts adopting culturally sensitive terminology.

Using regional frameworks to align and strengthen the normative work

119. In 2013, ESCAP member States adopted the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development (APMD). It promotes a people-centred, rights-based, gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory approach. It is closely aligned with the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The regional report prepared in advance for the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference in 2023, which also covers results from a voluntary national survey with particular focus on SDG indicators, highlights the inclusion of the priority actions of the 2013 Declaration in the national development plans of Asia-Pacific countries. This is an opportunity for UNFPA to further align its normative and programmatic work (and storytelling) to this regional framework, ensuring the continuity of the advancements, and identifying areas where it can make substantial contributions based on its current strengths like in CSE, adolescents and youth, SRH, data and statistics, and new strategic areas like migration.

120. In the case of the Pacific, the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent also represents an opportunity for UNFPA to boost its recognised unique contribution and normative work under this shared framework and vision.

4.2. Accelerators

EQ3: *To what extent have each of the six accelerators been relevant, sufficient and clearly defined and operationalised in the RPAP and implemented to enhance programming towards the achievement of 3TRs and ICPD PoA priorities in countries within the region?*

EQ4: *What have been the enabling and inhibiting factors in the implementation of the accelerators, including technical and financial capacities, and how can the RPAP be further strengthened to accelerate progress on 3TRs and the ICPD PoA?*

Evaluation criteria

**COHERENCE
EFFECTIVENESS**

Finding 4: The accelerators are considered highly relevant by the countries and have been formally included in the CPDs. UNFPA thematic leadership and technical capability/expertise are considered the most important enabling factors that influence almost all the accelerator, while APRO and PSRO support is particularly valued in relation to innovation and digitalization, partnerships and SSTC, and HDP nexus. Externally, government commitment and support are valued as key enablers. However, acceleration is work in progress with limited shared meaning, understanding and operationalization. Existing strategic, programmatic and operational guidance is insufficient to ensure systematic integration into programming. Challenges in operationalization include overlaps with the strategic shifts and insufficient clarity on how to implement and measure. In some cases, the accelerating nature or contextual relevance are debated (e.g. LNOB). At the same time, new accelerators are suggested (e.g. knowledge management). In the context of a BANI future (brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible), the need to address other human-centred accelerators like “hope” and mental health is observed and some countries have some related experiences.

Assessing the relevance and implementation of the accelerators

121. According to the SPE analysis of CPDs, the accelerators of the SP have been fully operationalized⁷⁵ in the CPDs of the region.⁷⁶ The evidence speaks to the formal inclusion of the accelerators in the CPDs, based on definitions provided by the SPE team, but does not inform about clear and shared understanding, ownership and implementation.

122. Results from the CO survey for the APRO RPE indicate that a high majority (88 to 100%) of COs find 5 of the 6 accelerators as highly relevant. The exception is the accelerator related to the HDP nexus which only 66% consider as highly relevant. Despite the perception of high relevance, not all accelerators have been incorporated and operationalized. The accelerators that have the lowest percentage of having been incorporated and operationalised are partnerships, SSTC and financing, LNOB and the HDP nexus accelerators.

Table 11: Percent distribution of CO/SRO/MCO by rating of the relevance of the accelerators to the country context and by manner of incorporation of each accelerator

Accelerators	Relevance to the context			Manner of incorporation			
	Somewhat relevant	Highly relevant	No response	Incorporated and operationalised	Incorporated not operationalised	Neither incorporated nor operationalised	No response
HRB and gender transformative approaches	12.5	87.5	-	83.3	12.5	4.2	-
Innovation and digitalization	4.2	95.8	-	83.3	12.5	-	4.2
Partnerships, SSTC and financing	4.2	95.8	-	66.7	12.5	20.8	-
Data and evidence	-	100.0	-	87.5	12.5	-	-
Leaving no one behind	4.2	91.7	4.2	79.2	20.8	-	-
Resilience and adaptation and complementarity among development, humanitarian and peace-responsive efforts	33.3	66.7	-	54.2	29.2	16.7	-

Source: CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

123. The results of the CO Survey for the APRO RPE indicate a much higher degree of ownership and use of the accelerators by the APRO respondents compared to the SP MTR survey, which found the use of each accelerator in most interventions to be in general very low (between 5-57%) and below the UNFPA global average, with the exception of “data and evidence” that scored 57%.

124. The overlaps of the accelerators with the strategic shifts, often using slightly different language, create not only technical inconsistency and incoherence, but further confusion. The SP does not provide a clear conceptual framework to build a shared understanding for operationalization (accelerators were very frequently identified in the KIs as “buzzwords”), which results in different interpretations and implementation patterns that are not necessarily explicit. The fact that most accelerators are not really new to UNFPA does not facilitate a “renewed

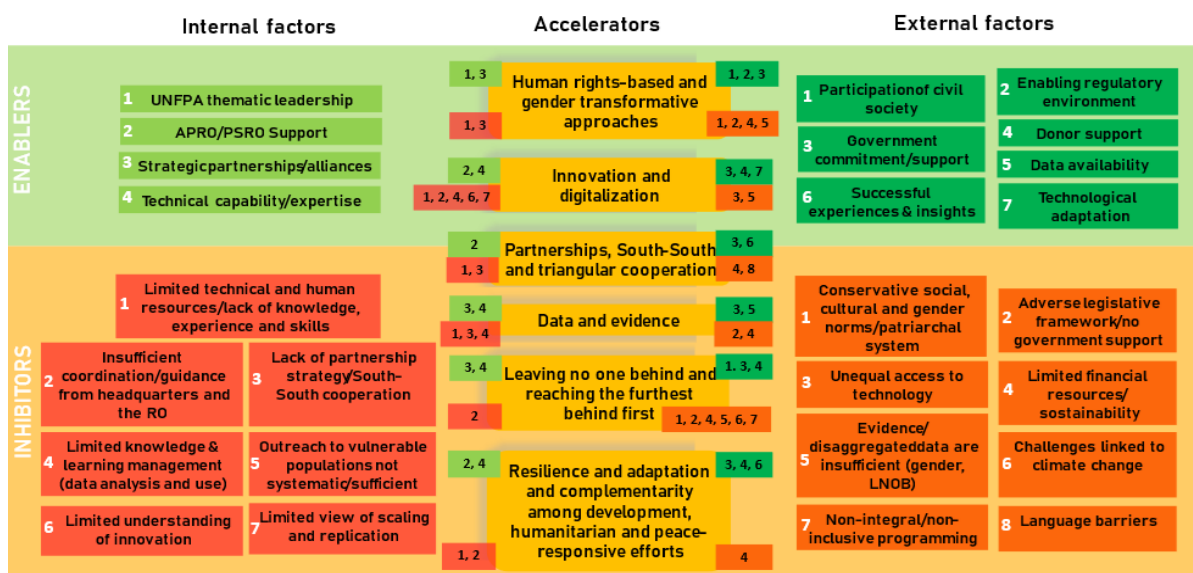
⁷⁵ While the source talks about operationalization, the regional evaluation team considers that the more precise term is “integrated” since effective operationalization is indeed one of the key challenges.

⁷⁶ The SPE utilized an externally commissioned AI-tool (Ailze) to compare 72 CPDs across two CP cycles. For each country, the AI tool generated a comparison of the previous and current CPDs for each of the six accelerators and eight shifts defined in the UNFPA 2022-25 Strategic Plan. Some shifts/ accelerators consisted of multiple facets, so they were broken down into 30 sub-variables. One of the questions for the AI-generated analysis was: Has this accelerator or shift been operationalised in each of the CPDs?

ownership with expanded strategic possibilities”, and business has to a great extent remained as usual.⁷⁷

125. Based on the qualitative CO Survey for the APRO RPE results, the following illustration reflects the internal and external enabling and inhibiting factors that influence the implementation of the accelerators to boost progress towards the 3 TRs and the ICPD PoA. They reflect interactions and interdependence and the need for a systemic approach.

Figure 3: Enabling and inhibiting factors to accelerate progress towards the 3 TRs and the ICPD PoA⁷⁸



Source: CO survey for the APRO RPE.

126. Some notes that derive from this analysis:

- UNFPA thematic leadership and technical capability/expertise are considered the most important enabling factors that influence almost all the accelerators.
- APRO and PSRO support is particularly valued in relation to: i) innovation and digitalization; ii) partnerships and SSTC; and iii) HDP nexus, but the limits of this support in terms of influencing effective operationalization are reflected in the quantitative data.
- Strategic partnerships are “an accelerator of accelerators”, particularly in relation to: i) the human-rights based and gender transformative approaches; ii) the LNOB principle; iii) data and evidence.
- Externally, government commitment and support are valued as key enablers.
- Civil society participation is considered to have a positive influence on human rights, gender transformative approaches and LNOB principle. This is aligned with the SP MTR survey results that also highlighted the important role of CSOs.
- Data availability is also important for the HDP full expansion.
- Out of the eight external inhibiting factors identified, only “unequal access to technology” and “language barriers” are not perceived as negatively influencing the LNOB approach, and the human rights and gender transformative approaches.
- Limited financial resources inhibit all the accelerators, with the exception of “innovation and decentralization”.

⁷⁷ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

⁷⁸ Internal and external inhibitors and facilitators are numbered and coloured. The numbers around each accelerator represent the enablers and inhibitors relevant to it.

- i. With the exception of “lack of a partnerships strategy” and “non-systematic outreach to vulnerable populations”, all other internal inhibitors are identified as having a negative influence on the accelerator “innovation and digitalization”.
- j. Greater coordination and guidance from HQ and APRO are considered necessary, particularly to boost the accelerators on HDP, LNOB and innovation and digitalization.

127. Good practices from past experiences reflect the use of a combination of accelerators to speed-up change. On the other hand, there is a question about the need to have a set of globally defined accelerators, versus contextual strategizing making use of different accelerators.

Fine-tuning and boosting acceleration

128. In terms of the regional programme, the shared vision is that it should focus on being an “accelerator” for the country programmes, playing a more robust, avant-garde strategic and technical support role to the COs. The ultimate aim is to galvanize change, “to push back the push back”, and to boost enabling conditions for the UNFPA mandate.⁷⁹

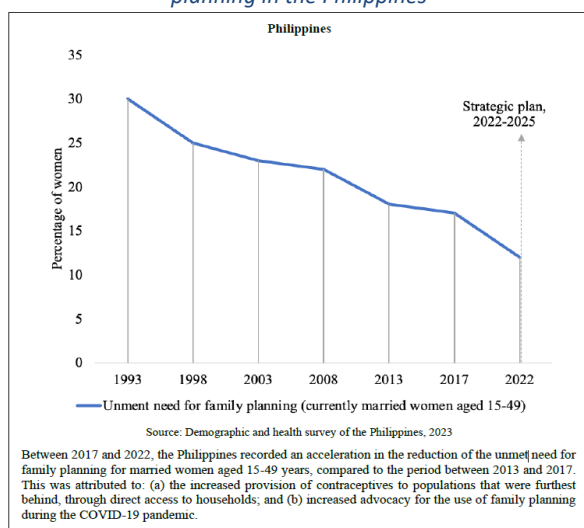
129. During the APRO consultation workshop, the following key changes were suggested for APRO to become a regional accelerator. This very rich list is fully aligned with the spirit and ideas gathered by the evaluation.

Box 2: Key changes suggested for APRO

- to be more client-oriented,
- to focus on knowledge sharing and generation,
- to use data for evidence-based behaviour change,
- to explore new entry points like ageing and climate change,
- to conduct client satisfaction surveys,
- to foster collaboration among country offices,
- to increase visibility, and
- to broker intellectual partnerships.

Source: APRO consultation Meeting.

Graphic 5: Acceleration in reducing the unmet need for family planning in the Philippines



Source: United Nations Population Fund Integrated midterm review and progress report on the implementation of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025 Report of the Executive

130. The SP Midterm Review proposed some solutions that this evaluation fully endorses:⁸⁰ i) unpack the concept of acceleration with clarity, guidance and measurements; ii) translate the many-to-many⁸¹ concept into practical solutions; iii) deep dive into the driving factors to identify most impactful strategies not limited to the current accelerators. To move forward, these solutions need to be operationalised at all levels. One important pending reflection relates to the need/utility of having a set of general/global accelerators, vis a vis issue- and context-related accelerators based on global evidences of high impact strategies. The SP MTR highlighted acceleration cases from countries, including the one from the Philippines on the reduction of unmet need

⁷⁹ KIIs with UNFPA staff at regional and country level; report of the 2023 retreat.

⁸⁰ Based on KIIs with UNFPA staff.

⁸¹ “UNFPA will contribute to these three interconnected outcomes by achieving six interconnected outputs. These outputs are (a) policy and accountability; (b) quality of care and services; (c) gender and social norms; (d) population change and data; (e) humanitarian action; and (f) adolescents and youth. All the outputs contribute to the achievement of each outcome; they have a multidimensional, ‘many-to-many’ relationship with these outcomes.” UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

for family planning. The SP MTR identified accelerating factors that differ from country to country and do not necessarily reflect the 6 accelerators defined in the SP.

131. The next paragraphs use some examples of actions that can be interpreted in terms of “unleashing the accelerating potential of the accelerators”. The idea is to generate evidence that shows that accelerating is less about formulas and more about strategizing. Another important note refers to the combined accelerators: partnerships are not the same as SSTC, and innovation is not necessarily linked or limited to digitalization.

132. **Human Rights-Based and Gender Transformative Approaches:** Under the Issue Based Coalition (IBC) on Gender and Human Rights, APRO has continued its collaboration with the UN Women RO in Asia and Pacific to develop joint UNCT capacities, including on the UNCT UN-SWAP requirements. Since the first convening, three UNCTs in the region have been capacitated to complete their UNCT-SWAP comprehensive assessment and out of 25 UNCTs in the region, only three are yet to have carried out theirs (2023 Annual Report - Asia and Pacific Regional Office).

Table 12: Human Rights-Based and Gender Transformative Approaches

ACTION(S) TO UNLEASH THE ACCELERATING POTENTIAL	EXPECTED ACCELERATION
Type: Partnerships; capacity building; institutionalisation Interagency coordination and capacity building.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expanded ownership and implementation of HR and gender transformative approaches throughout the UN system (coherence). - Coordinated, complementary interventions. - Increased outreach in less time (efficiency). - Increased impact (impact).

Source: Own elaboration based on 2023 Annual Report - Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

133. **Innovation and Digitalization:** In 2023 APRO had one brainpower partnership with the Global Disability Innovation (GDI) Hub to develop programmes and products to effectively implement the UNFPA We Decide Strategy in the region.

Table 13: Innovation and Digitalization

ACTION(S) TO UNLEASH THE ACCELERATING POTENTIAL	EXPECTED ACCELERATION
Type: Partnerships; learning, co-creation. Product and programme development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take advantage of specialised knowledge (effectiveness) - Shorten the response and implementation times (efficiency). - Be “ahead of the game” (relevance)

Source: Own elaboration based on KIIs with UNFPA staff and partner.

134. **Partnerships, SSTC:** In general, regional experience has evidenced the key importance of strategic partnerships to accelerate impact, and from the perspective of many partners, particularly CSOs, this is also closely linked to its convening function and power. It is also relevant to distinguish between “common” partnerships and “strategic” partnerships, which are in essence catalytic. Also, not all partnerships are automatically positive, partnerships can take energy and even cause harm to an organization. Partnerships demand time to be effective, and this implies work overload for the small regional teams.⁸²

135. The relevance of partnerships as an accelerator for the Pacific Subregion deserves a special mention. Moving to diversified and more strategic partnerships has enhanced UNFPA’s capacity, reputation and positioning (at different levels), and its recognition as a respected partner and valid political interlocutor. Challenges to enhance coordination and collaboration with other UN agencies in the Subregion remain and do not favour a positive perception of the UN system.⁸³

⁸² “Art and power of strategic alliances”, unpublished paper written by Dirk Arts and Silvia Salinas for SNV in 2006.

⁸³ Source: KIIs with UNFPA Pacific staff and partners.

136. While it is linked to partnerships in the definition of the accelerators, a special mention is important in relation to SSTC. During the evaluation mission in Bangladesh a visit from Nepal CO and partners took place to learn from the midwifery experience. It is important to highlight that SSTC and knowledge management (which are very closely related) are under the highest expectations of CO in relation to APRO's role. One of the survey responses highlights the absence "of a comprehensive and systematic CO SSTC strategy where SSTC is employed not as a stand-alone intervention but one that is integrated and made complementary to other interventions contributing to common CP outputs". As a positive example, in Bangladesh other interventions to strengthen midwifery included education and formulation of national policies and strategies.⁸⁴



UNFPA Nepal team and partners visiting Bangladesh to learn about the midwifery work. February, 2024.

137. It is relevant to note that the accelerators are not only interrelated but also of different nature. Partnerships are key to expand the universe and opportunities for innovation, digitalization, data and evidence, as "tools" or means which potentially influence the accelerating power of HR and gender transformative approaches and the LNOB principle.⁸⁵

138. **Data and evidence** Quit.AI, in partnership with the UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Office, conducted a digital research study on harmful practices, specifically child marriage and GBSS, in chosen geographies including Bangladesh, China, India, Nepal and Vietnam. The research includes a digital ecosystem analysis to understand people's perceptions, attitudes and behaviours around harmful practices; an influencer mapping to identify emerging online voices, leaders and related campaigns; and a digital footprint analysis for stakeholders to provide recommendations that they are reaching the target audience in providing support or information about harmful practices.⁸⁶

139. **LNOB and reaching the Furthest Behind:** Its definition as an accelerator is not clear for the evaluation team. While the focus on most disadvantaged populations is at the heart of UNFPA mandate, reaching the furthest behind is usually more costly and thus the cost-efficiency analysis can be one reason to question its accelerating nature *per se*. UNFPA has done an extraordinary work integrating disability inclusion in all its programmatic work, but from the evaluation perspective, the key accelerator has been a partnership with a leading global organization specialized in inclusion of people with disabilities.⁸⁷

140. **HDP nexus:** Global experience and evaluations have validated that an integrated approach can lead to better results for the affected population, but despite the fact that APRO's support in humanitarian work is very highly valued by COs, and large efforts have been dedicated to strengthen internal capacities, the nexus approach is not fully understood and operationalized to have an accelerating effect in many countries.⁸⁸ A major reason for the lack of integration of nexus programming is the perception that not all three pillars of the nexus are a prominent concern in the

⁸⁴ <https://bangladesh.unfpa.org/en/news/celebrating-decade-midwifery-bangladesh>

⁸⁵ Sources: KIIs with UNFPA staff and external stakeholders.

⁸⁶ <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/publications/digital-research-harmful-practices-asia>

⁸⁷ Source: KIIs with UNFPA staff and partner, key documents and data sources on disability inclusion.

⁸⁸ The Nexus Working Group led by HQ has been working on a corporate HDP Nexus Operational Framework since 2021, but has not finalised it yet (according to available information).

country, specifically humanitarian and peace building.⁸⁹ It can be said, however, that **APRO's leadership** has been an accelerator in relation to humanitarian preparedness, in combination with data and partnerships. In 2023, APRO responded to all requests from COs to enhance interagency coordination mechanisms on SRHR in emergencies, positioning itself as a leading organization: “The primary focus of MISP Readiness Assessment (MRA), encompassing leadership and coordination mechanisms for SRH in emergencies, has been instrumental in advocating for and engaging government agencies in this critical area” (2023 Annual Report - Asia and Pacific Regional Office).

141. The evaluation also captured new accelerators, on one hand “**knowledge management**”, closely linked to the vision of APRO as a catalyst, and on the other hand accelerators of a different kind, like “**hope**” and “**mental health**”.⁹⁰ This last two are very people-centred, tackle humanity and are cross-cutting to the 3 TRs. They are also interrelated. UNFPA has advocated for increased, human rights based and gender-sensitive attention to mental health: “*In this, we will contribute to fulfil both the vision of the ICPD Programme of Action, in strengthening rights and choices for all, and that of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals - leaving no one behind.*”⁹¹ Hope is seen as contributing to mental health and a particularly relevant factor for adolescents and youth, determinant to unleash the will and action of the younger population.

142. Under the BANI reality, mental health and hope are very relevant to ensure people's wellbeing, productive capacity, resilience, decision-making capacity and human rights. And their importance is of course central in humanitarian contexts. In 2022 UNFPA Bangladesh and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) launched a new community-based mental health and psychosocial support project in Cox's Bazar. In 2023 APRO also launched its perinatal mental health course on World Continuing Education Alliance (WCEA) platform. Mental health is also perceived as a key determinant to influence willingness to change.⁹²

“We need to harness hope and to translate it into action”.

Country representative

143. Finally, to be “ahead of the game”, then the core of “acceleration” needs to be related to enhancing uniqueness and competitiveness in terms of **anticipation** –being the first; **innovation and technology use**– solving the unsolved and developing more efficient, efficient and sustainable solutions (e.g. customized responses to climate change and emergencies); **data and evidence**–knowing what others don't know and don't see (e.g. generating and using geospatial data in humanitarian contexts; emerging forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence in Asia; human rights data bases); **knowledge management** – minimizing failure, optimizing results; **replication** –increasing the scope and the outreach of already proven solutions; and **scaling-up**–influencing normative and policy work for large-scale influence and impact.

4.3. Strategic Shifts

General findings about the strategic shifts

144. The next pages are dedicated to the evaluation findings for each of the strategic shifts. However, it is important to consider preliminarily an overall analysis of the shifts resulting from the evaluation, which reflects that: i) the strategic shifts are not considered necessarily something new to the organization, so not always perceived as “shifts”; ii) the substantive distinction from accelerators is not clear in all cases, particularly in those cases where they are quite the same; iii)

⁸⁹ KII with donor

⁹⁰ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

⁹¹ <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/news/mental-health-gender-equality-and-human-rights-essential-convergence>

⁹² KII With UNFPA staff.

the combination of distinct elements under one shift, for example all the megatrends in one, or the shift that addresses SRH and GBV services, makes assessment difficult; iv) there is insufficient shared understanding, ownership and operationalization at country level.

145. In relation to this last point, it is important to highlight feedback received during the evaluation on how the organization introduces changes, apparently lacking a clear change management strategy: i) too much information (webinars), leaving people to decide what is “more important”; ii) delayed production of concrete strategies and guidelines for operationalization, that frequently try to bring alignment and order to what people have been already doing in their best understanding and own interpretation, so expecting “unlearning and relearning”, which is not only challenging but inefficient.⁹³

EQ5: *To what extent are the effects of megatrends, particularly but not limited to ageing, low fertility and climate change, incorporated in the RPAP and country programming, and how can UNFPA boost strategic, human rights-based responses and adaptations to megatrends considering diverse realities?*

Evaluation criteria

COHERENCE

Finding 5: While the importance of integrating the megatrends in programming and interventions is widely recognized, there is little guidance for countries on how this should be done in relation to the 3TRs and for each of the megatrends considering their uniqueness. The core importance for UNFPA of the megatrend “demographic shifts” is not captured in the current approach, and the impact of inequalities requires more structured and systematic attention, also ensuring interconnectedness to the UNFPA mandate. In the meantime, some offices have been working on the impact of some megatrends on the 3TRs (e.g. of climate change on SRHR) developing innovative evidence-based approaches that could permeate and broadly benefit the organization, revealing the lack of KM of country-level innovative efforts and concepts.

Analysing the relevance-operationalization gap in addressing the megatrends

146. The SPE analysis of the regional CPDs shows how many CPDs out of 17 have included each strategic shift. The results range between 14 and 17 CPDs, with the one on “aligning organizational focus on the 3 TRs” being operationalized in the least number of countries (14).

147. The results of the CO Survey for the APRO RPE illustrate that inequalities, technological innovation and climate change are considered “highly relevant” by most of the COs, with inequalities ranking first with 91.7% of the responses. There is, however, a general gap between the perceived relevance of the different megatrends and their full incorporation in programming. For example, in the case of climate change, while recognized as “highly relevant” by 79.2% of the COs, it has only been fully implemented in 29.6% of the countries. In comparison to inequalities, climate change is a newer megatrend, but it is not enough to have expected a timely corporate reaction (“*ahead of the ball*”), with corresponding guidance and support for countries and regions. In the case of low fertility, ageing and urbanisation, there is a significant number of offices that consider these issues highly or somewhat relevant, but that have not incorporated them at all.

Table 14: Percent distribution of COs/SRO/MCO by rating of the relevance of the megatrends and by degree of incorporation in the current Country Programme

Megatrends	Relevance				Degree of incorporation			
	Not relevant	Somewhat relevant	Highly relevant	No response	Not incorporated	Somewhat incorporated	Fully incorporated	No response
Demographic shifts: Low fertility	29.2	25.0	41.7	4.2	45.8	20.8	29.2	4.2

⁹³ KII with UNFPA staff and CO survey for the APRO RPE.

Demographic shifts: Population ageing	16.7	29.2	45.8	8.3	29.2	33.3	33.3	4.2
Urbanization	4.2	41.7	50.0	4.2	45.8	41.7	8.3	4.2
Climate change	-	16.7	79.2	4.2	8.3	58.3	29.2	4.2
Technological innovation	-	20.8	75.0	4.2	8.3	37.5	50.0	4.2
Inequalities	-	4.2	91.7	4.2	-	20.8	75.0	4.2

Source: Own elaboration based on information from the CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

148. Clearly, low fertility, population ageing, climate change and urbanization are the four megatrends that require more comprehensive and explicit incorporation in the next RPAP. But at the same time, the current demographic diversity of the region necessitates maintaining a focus on the 3 TRs. The CO survey for the APRO RPE, which will feed into the SPE, can provide an evidence base for the next SP in this regard. It is also important to have clear guidance on how to incorporate country-level demographic trends into the CPs to ensure a focused direction and prevent disperse, non-strategic and disconnected country-level responses from diluting the niche.⁹⁴

Assessing the impact of inequalities on the achievement of the 3 TRs

149. The regional results of the survey undertaken during the SP MTR in 2023 position socio-economic inequalities as the main threat for the achievement of the 3 TRs by 95% of the COs. The CO survey undertaken for this evaluation confirms such

“An overarching theme of this report is that progress in implementing APMD and the ICPD Programme of Action in Asia and the Pacific is highly uneven — across indicators, across countries and among populations.”

Asia Pacific Population and Development Report 2023.

priority. Intersectional vulnerabilities such as age, disability, gender identity and belonging to a minority ethnic group deepen inequality gaps. In the case of countries reaching middle-income status, sometimes the new status does not imply closing the economic gaps, while at the same time, the persistence of inequalities will erode economic development and the full exercise of human rights. This is frequently overseen, even the UNFPA business model does not seem to acknowledge and respond to the more complex relationship between income status and inequalities, and their implications for the 3 TRs, emphasising a human rights approach. Considering the significant number of countries moving towards middle-income status, UNFPA could benefit from learning from countries like Thailand and be ready to address the interrelationship between inequalities, economic development, human rights and the (expanded) 3 TRs.

150. Despite its relevance, there is no clarity about UNFPA's strategy to systematically map, analyse and address multiple, interconnected inequalities. Additionally, UNFPA needs to address the relationship between the approach to inequalities, human rights and the LNOB principle, the level of accountability in relation to its contribution to reducing inequalities and the impact of economic development and of decentralization on inequalities.⁹⁵

Learning and boosting country-level initiatives and innovations on climate change

151. In the meantime, some COs like Bangladesh are moving forward addressing the impacts of climate change on SRH of women in remote communities,⁹⁶ while further investigating other potential impacts of climate change on gender and sexual and reproductive health and rights:

⁹⁴ KII with UNFPA staff and CO survey for the APRO RPE.

⁹⁵ KIIs with UNFPA staff at regional and country level.

⁹⁶ <https://bangladesh.unfpa.org/en/news/%E2%80%98women-do-not-stop-giving-birth%E2%80%99-securing-srh-services-women-through-flash-flooding-remote>

“At UNFPA Bangladesh, we are constantly hearing stories from women - about increasing hypertension and pre-eclampsia during pregnancy because of water salinity, about more frequent miscarriages due to extreme heat, about women who can’t get to their antenatal checkups because of climate change related natural disasters. And they also tell us that they see violence against women increasing as crops and livelihoods fail and financial pressures crush poor families. And families having to leave their farms and move to the slums where no real health services are available. And families marrying off their daughters too young, not because they don’t realize it’s the wrong thing to do, but because they can’t afford to feed them anymore.”

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/kristine-blokhuis-025386_women-do-not-stop-giving-birth-securing-activity-7165712079545458688-4Wbx/

152. For example, while climate change is mentioned in all 17 CPD's reviewed by the SPE, this does not necessarily mean that adaptation was operationalized. Furthermore, the 2022 Annual Report - Asia and Pacific Regional Office, informs that no support was requested by COs for reviewing national climate change related documents and strategies, which could indicate a lack of demand due to timing or insufficient advocacy efforts. The 2023 Annual Report highlights that COs demand for support in building evidence related to climate change and its impact on SRH/GBV was on the rise. However, due to the absence of corporate guidance, limited research funding, and the cross-cutting nature of this topic, practical assistance remained constrained. The narrative report of the MTR of the Asia Pacific RPAP of last October 2023 confirms the need to mobilize resources to ensure specialised expertise in APRO, improve capacities of COs on how to engage with governments on development and revision process on climate and disaster risk reduction plans, and to collaborate with the Humanitarian Response Division on evidence-based operational guidance and capacity development on nexus and climate change programming.

Finding 6: The capacity to respond to the megatrends, particularly two that impact directly on the essence of UNFPA mandate –demographic shifts and migration– will be a key competitiveness factor for the organization in the very near future. Focusing on demographic shifts and population dynamics is a natural niche and comparative advantage for UNFPA.

Acknowledging the urgency to enhance responsiveness to the megatrends

153. Output 4 of the RPAP on population change and data states that....

“By 2025, strengthened data systems and evidence to account for population changes and megatrends including ageing and climate change, in development policies and programmes, especially those related to sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights”.

154. The five megatrends —demographic shifts (low fertility, ageing), urbanization, climate change, technological innovation, and inequality— encompass a diverse array of concerns, each with its own drivers and both global and local impacts. Among these, demographic shifts and urbanization are directly linked to UNFPA's foundational roots in population and development as both are conceptually a form of population change – in structure, composition and distribution. According to the CO Survey for the APRO RPE, KIIs and document review, a significant number of COs/SRO have not incorporated the demographic shifts and urbanization to their programming.

155. The RPAP has no clear framework about how the megatrends are to be incorporated in country programming through strengthened data systems. In general, there is a lack of conceptual clarity about megatrends in the SP and, consequently, in the RPAP - i.e. why they should be incorporated in the Country Programme (CP) and why do they fall under the Population data Output.

156. It is interesting to note that according to the SPE analysis of the CPDs, the proportion of COs/SRO that did not incorporate low fertility, population ageing, and/or urbanization does not

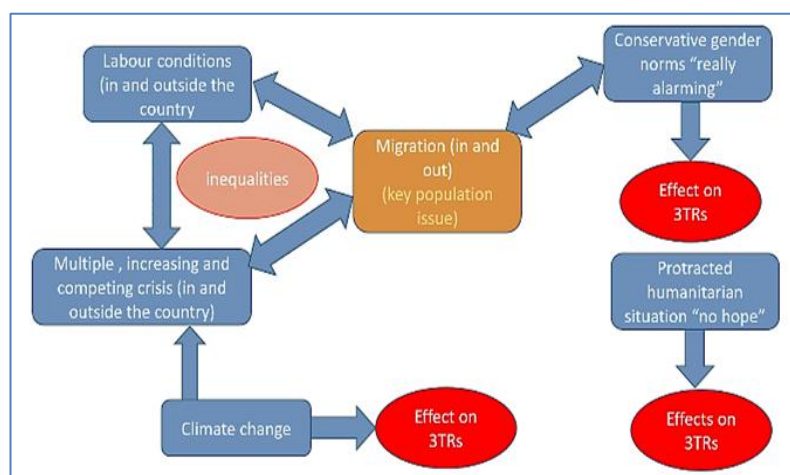
vary much between those whose current CP cycle predates the RPAP and those clearly implemented after its release. The SP 2018-2021 had a specific outcome on P&D and CPs followed this structure. Even if the SP 2022-2025 has less emphasis on P&D, the CPs continue to incorporate P&D based on the country needs.

157. Both the CO Survey for the APRO RPE and the SP MTR Survey found that a comprehensive approach to the megatrends is lacking thus Output 4 in the RPAP has not been sufficiently addressed in CPs. In the meantime, other UN agencies are moving ahead and UNFPA stands to lose its comparative advantage in population and development by not being more proactive in PD concerns, such as the megatrends. As the Global Communications Vision, Strategy & 2023 Priorities presentation show global awareness of UNFPA currently sits below other UN organizations – ranking in position 7 among 11 agencies, with 46% of familiarity versus 95% for WHO, 92% for UNICEF and 60% for UN Women. This is related to the analysis under Finding 1 about the absence of UNFPA related issues in the “six transformative entry points” of the 2030 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) published in 2023.

Surfacing the relevance of migration

158. Another form of demographic shift that is prominent in the Asia Pacific Region is migration, especially labour migration, both internal and international. The relevance of migration in the region was already discussed earlier in the section. Youth labour migration is a key issue for the Pacific and other countries, including a country like Bhutan with a small population; male labour migration also determines that victims of climate and humanitarian crisis are mainly women; in the case of Thailand, emigration has a strong gender bias and it is mainly women who leave the country. Finally, the Bangladesh case study revealed that male labour migration has a series of wider, interconnected implications that negatively influence the achievement of the 3 TRs. This is related to the need for systems-thinking discussed before. Current gender pushbacks in the country can potentially be explained by male labour migration to conservative countries. Culture, beliefs are dynamic constructs influenced by people's experiences and their interactions. The importance of addressing migration is manifold and not limited to the demographic dimension.⁹⁷

Figure 4: Bangladesh: Influence of migration on the achievement of the 3TRs



Source: Evaluation debrief.

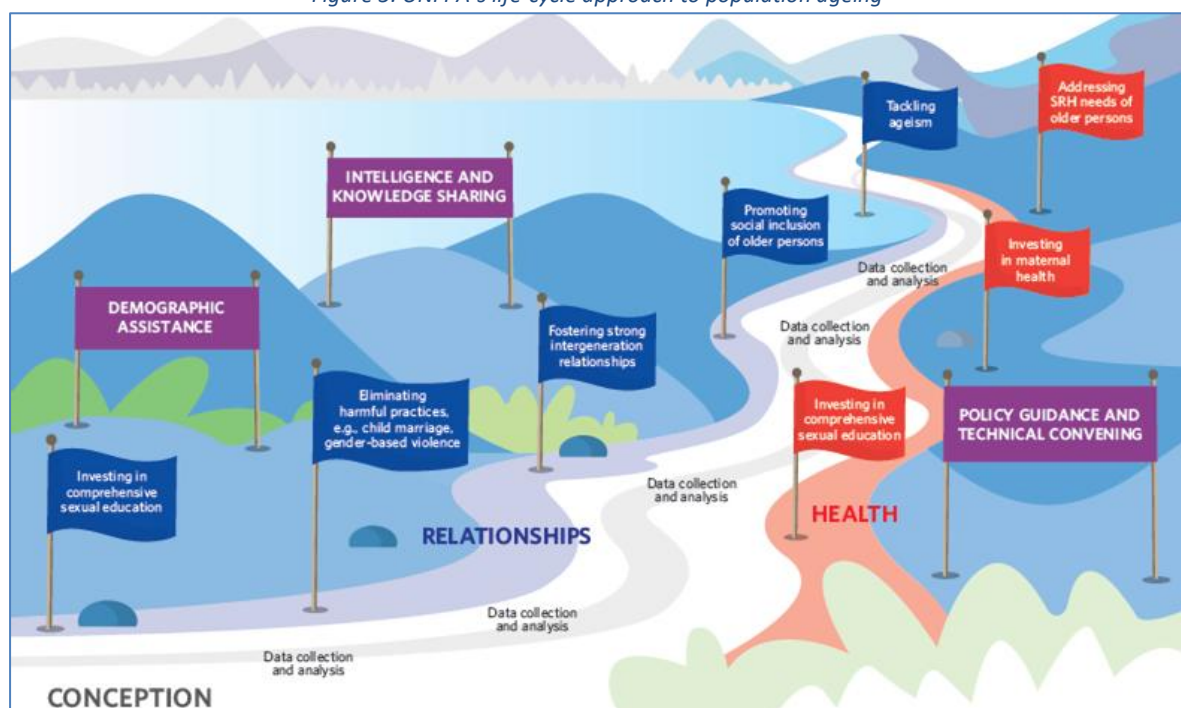
Finding 7: The life-cycle approach is a promising concept that connects the various stages of human life before and beyond reproduction, that can be enhanced with an intersectional, intergenerational and human rights focused approach. The National Transfer Accounts approach and methodology is one example of a successful application of the life-cycle approach to understanding the link between population dynamics and economic growth. This should be developed further as a unique UNFPA contribution to the population and development tool kit. Its use can be expanded beyond its current application mostly for population ageing.

⁹⁷ KIs with UNFPA CO and key stakeholders in Bangladesh.

Understanding the relevance and potential of the life-cycle approach

159. In 2020 APRO, in collaboration with a set of partners, published a document on the life-cycle approach as a way of addressing the ageing population. The document mentions that UNFPA should be: 1) revising existing programmes from a life-cycle approach; 2) promoting right-based intergenerational approach to tackle ageism and to promote quality social care for older persons to ensure their choices; 3) promoting life-long choice of pregnancy, childbirth, education, work, and care in the context of both high and low fertility by i) demographic intelligence and availability of demographic data, including age disaggregated data that can be used also for analyses within the context of the demographic dividend and national transfer accounts, ii) convening and sharing knowledge including south-south triangular cooperation, and iii) policy dialogue and technical assistance. In addition to these key points, current perspectives highlight the importance of working with adolescents to influence norms change and prepare individuals for healthy ageing.⁹⁸ In summary, under the perspective of a continuum, “the life cycle approach really allows us to cover the needs of everyone at any stage in life.”⁹⁹

Figure 5: UNFPA’s life-cycle approach to population ageing



Source: UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office (2020). *Addressing Population Ageing in Asia and the Pacific Region a Life-Cycle Approach*.

160. One concrete operationalization of a life-cycle approach to population dynamics is the National Transfer Accounts (NTA). NTA explores the interlinkages between a country’s population age structures and its economic growth with a tool that provides insights on how populations at each age produce, consume, save and share resources, which is crucial for nations to address economic inequality.¹⁰⁰ APRO has been promoting this approach to governments in the Region through training, workshops and virtual meetings. The 2023 Annual Report of APRO shared that the NTA has gained the interest and received buy-in from many government agencies in the Region, but not yet from all. The electronic booklet on NTAs refers to “generational economy of population ageing” and demonstrates how the NTA tool can be used to plan and develop policies that better

⁹⁸ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

⁹⁹ UNFPA advisor.

¹⁰⁰ <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/news/using-national-transfer-accounts-policy-advancement-across-asia-pacific>

prepare a country for an ageing population. Thailand, with initial support from APRO has adopted the NTA as a planning tool.¹⁰¹

161. It is also important to note that the life-cycle approach is not static and homogeneous; for example, puberty is happening earlier across the world and this phenomenon needs agile and innovative responses to avoid a missed opportunity.¹⁰²

Recognizing the limitations of an ageing-biased life-cycle approach

162. In the absence of applications of a life-cycle approach by COs outside of the NTAs, the evaluation gathered perceptions from UNFPA staff regarding the life-cycle approach and storytelling as being too biased towards ageing which they find to be too limiting.

“If we only focus on ageing, it is not the whole of the life cycle approach; only ageing is not very sexy, old people are seen as a burden.” (UNFPA staff).

163. Furthermore, the approach to ageing is also limited in terms of application of an intersectional approach and focus on sexual health and rights in older people, including support for menopause and other reproductive health conditions that occur in older age.¹⁰³

164. The evaluation team also found little evidence on the understanding and operationalization of the intergenerational approach.

165. The RPAP includes the life-cycle approach under Output 4 on Population Change and Data, focusing on the understanding of the drivers of low fertility, promoting the adoption of a life-cycle approach to ageing, and working with researchers and policy planners for multisectoral policy approaches. It is not found in relation to the other outputs. This implies several missed opportunities, for example linkage with the Adolescents and Youth output 6, linkage with policies and services and as a key approach to boost effectiveness of gender and social norms change.¹⁰⁴

166. A review of the UNICEF framework and approaches highlights the importance of identifying UNFPA uniqueness in relation to the life-cycle approach, for example in comparison to the following statement: “In all of its work, UNICEF takes a life-cycle based approach, recognizing the particular importance of early childhood development and adolescence”.¹⁰⁵ Other stakeholders including NGOs and women rights organizations, have country-level experiences in addressing the life-cycle approach from a wider intersectional approach and should be considered as partners and sources of knowledge.¹⁰⁶

EQ6: *To what extent are the RPAP and country programmes applying a human-rights based approach, focusing systematically and coherently on “populations left behind” and emphasizing “reaching those furthest behind first”, and how can this be strengthened?*

Evaluation criteria

EFFECTIVENESS

Finding 8: LNOB is a cornerstone of UNFPA strategy and positioning. While disability inclusion has received a strong boost in the region in the last years, inclusion of indigenous populations is less consistent and strong. In general terms, there is room for improvement towards: i) a shared understanding of its conceptual and operational implications, including interlinkages with the human

¹⁰¹ KII with Thailand CO staff and partners.

¹⁰² KII with UNFPA staff.

¹⁰³ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

¹⁰⁴ Document reviews.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/about-unicef>

¹⁰⁶ ERG feedback.

rights, intersectional and inequality approaches (this last one relevant even for middle income countries); ii) systematic evidence-based implementation and related accountability and evidence (also to support its definition as an accelerator). Furthermore, there is a need to anticipate a strong argument to the increasing donor concern on value for money.

Balancing the results: main advancements in disability inclusion but limitations in addressing indigenous groups

167. A human rights-based approach means that all forms of discrimination in the realization of rights must be prohibited, prevented and eliminated. It also means that priority should be given to people in the most marginalized or vulnerable situations who face the biggest barriers to realizing their rights. In the ICPD Plan of Action, persons with disabilities (PWD) and indigenous groups are identified as vulnerable groups who need special attention and protection. Survey results show that 83% of COs/SRO/MCO have interventions for persons with disabilities in their programming but only 42% have interventions for indigenous peoples, perhaps because there are no indigenous peoples in the country.

168. In general, disability inclusion has received a strong boost in the last years (articulating different accelerators, as previously mentioned) and has positioned the region as a recognised leader in addressing it. In general, disability inclusion is incorporated into the CPDs via targeted interventions for FP and SRH services. Examples of interventions for PWD are¹⁰⁷:

- a. Development of training packages on disability-inclusive FP and SRH services for women and young people and capacity building for training of service providers to provide disability-inclusive FP & SRH services.
- a. Digital interventions
- b. CSE programming for PWDs.
- c. Inclusion of PWD in CO's targets including in the emergency response.

169. In terms of integration into programming, since 2022 APRO has worked to address gaps in disability inclusion in all areas and operations but some strengthened aligning with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities of 2006 and the UN Disability Strategy, may be required¹⁰⁸. Significant progress has been made particularly in the GBV, data and human rights/family planning areas of work. For example, APRO developed a disability data curriculum to support countries in collecting disability data to inform GBV policies and programmes, and continued to provide technical support to COs in applying APRO tools on disability inclusion.¹⁰⁹

170. On the other hand, interventions for indigenous peoples typically consist of SRH, FP and maternal health services and CSE delivered in selected places in the country where there are indigenous populations. Indigenous people's inclusion has not been positioned as a key component of UNFPA branding.¹¹⁰

171. Some donors raised concerns about the practical considerations, from a donor funding perspective, regarding the relative cost of providing services to a small group of marginalized individuals compared to addressing the competing needs of a larger majority.¹¹¹

Identifying emerging challenges and opportunities

¹⁰⁷ CO Survey for APRO RPE

¹⁰⁸ KIIs with UNFPA staff, partners; ERG feedback.

¹⁰⁹ KIIs with UNFPA staff and partner.

¹¹⁰ CO Survey for APRO RPE, KIIs with UNFPA staff.

¹¹¹ KII with country donors

172. In terms of emerging challenges to the human-rights based approach that must be addressed in the next SP/RPAP, in the CO survey for APRO RPE a high 75% reported that such challenges exist in the country. The identified challenges are also operational environment risks and similar to the challenges in fulfilling UNFPA's normative role.

- a. Political landscapes: The contradiction between human rights-based approaches and some government policies, legislations and interpretation of human rights, the erosion of democracy, as well as rising fundamentalism.
- b. Socio-cultural norms: Deep-rooted socio- cultural norms and practices that hinder and challenge the HRBA, and the "culturally sensitive approach" narrative, which is often used for the non-adoption of human rights-based approaches.
- c. Climate change: Its effects that can disproportionately impact on vulnerable groups.
- d. Low fertility: As a rising concern that can erode gains on access to FP and reproductive rights.

"Our focus is on recognizing transformative changes and results that contribute to the sustainable and effective implementation of plans and policies in Thailand."

[HTTPS://X.COM/UNFPA_THAILAND/STATUS/1737053767256990153?MX=2](https://x.com/UNFPA_THAILAND/STATUS/1737053767256990153?MX=2)

173. As a potential opportunity for replication and scaling-up, UNFPA Thailand is one of the countries that has been working to boost its impact

orientation through strengthening its capacities and the institutionalization of the Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis framework in its work. SROI is "a measure of change for individuals and their experiences by representing them as a monetary value". It can be a very valuable framework to articulate with the LNOB approach.¹¹²

174. Despite important advancements, there is room for improvement towards a shared understanding of the conceptual and operational implications of a LNOB approach, including interlinkages with the human rights, intersectional and inequality approaches in diverse contexts, systematic evidence-based implementation and related accountability.¹¹³ The ongoing LNOB evaluation will certainly provide in-depth insights and analysis on how to move forward.

EQ7: *Have the regional and country programmes scaled up the provision of high-quality, human rights focused comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services, particularly in low fertility contexts, and multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence in the region, and how can UNFPA accelerate the scale-up based on its comparative advantages and opportunities?*

Evaluation criteria

EFFECTIVENESS

Finding 9: While UNFPA has continued providing and enhancing capacities for the provision of SRH quality services in a number of countries and addressing humanitarian situations, a scaling up approach is not very clear. Reduced budgeting also influences the perception that focus and strong positioning is being lost. In relation to the human rights approach, the political and cultural push backs in some countries are challenging, while decentralization trends imply both challenges and opportunities. While some vulnerable populations were targeted, a wider LNOB and rights-based approach is needed to embrace sexual rights and ensure that the services respond to the needs of older people and other marginalized groups. The work with midwives is recognized as a unique UNFPA contribution, with some counties focusing on generating evidence on its effectiveness (return on social investment analysis), promoting learning and including a scalability perspective in terms of institutionalization.

¹¹² KIIs with CO staff and document reviews.

¹¹³ KIIs with UNFPA staff and document reviews.

Implementing SRH information and services and influencing factors

175. Today, according to the CO Survey for the APRO RPE, 87.5% of the COs reported having high quality comprehensive SRH information and services in country programmes. It should be noted that in the absence of a clear definition of what it means to “scale up” these interventions, the survey did not ask for supporting evidence. The table below identifies the facilitators and the inhibitors for comprehensive SRH information and services, based on the survey responses:

Table 15: Facilitators and inhibitors for the provision of high-quality SRH information and services

FACILITATORS	INHIBITORS
1. Government commitment to SRH goals and high priority for maternal and child health.	1. Limited government resources, weak accountability mechanisms, weak coordination within health ministries.
2. Government basic capacity in terms of infrastructure and human resource with norms and standards for practice in place.	2. Limited acceptance of CSE because of religious and cultural sensitivity.
3. CSE/FLE implementation.	3. Poor health worker-population ratio and challenges in deployment/retention of trained health workers including midwives.
4. Strong support from CSOs.	4. Restrictive government policy about provision of SRH services.

Source: CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

176. A decentralized form of government appears to be both a facilitator and an inhibitor, depending on the country, the manner of implementation of this type of governance, the UNFPA programme and capacity, and some specificities like the economic implications for the acquisition of family planning commodities since negotiations are usually based on volume.

177. While partnerships around midwifery certainly recognize UNFPA’s role and unique contribution, there is less evidence about stakeholders recognizing UNFPA as an overall, well positioned leader in the area of SRH information and service provision.

Revising the FP focus and deepening a rights-based approach in challenging contexts

178. In relation to FP, the CO Survey for the APRO RPE reveals that in some countries the target for unmet need for FP has either already been achieved¹¹⁴ or very likely to be achieved¹¹⁵. However, for other countries like Samoa in the Pacific, unmet need for FP is still a major concern and the 2030 target is unlikely to be achieved.¹¹⁶ Many countries reported the need for focused interventions and sustained investments to increase access to human rights-based family planning services among women, adolescents, people with disabilities, and LGBTQs who might be vulnerable to maternal health risks and gender-based violence (in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, India, and Bhutan).

179. UNFPA priorities during 2022 included supporting the revision/update of FP policies to integrate global standards and guidelines for quality of care. In order to revive the policy focus on FP in the post-COVID-19 scenario, APRO also facilitated the development of country specific roadmaps for achieving Zero Unmet Need for Family Planning by 2030. During 2022 APRO successfully supported the development of Roadmaps for five countries in the region (Bhutan; Indonesia; Maldives; Philippines and Sri Lanka).¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ In China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

¹¹⁵ In India, Mongolia, Thailand, Vietnam

¹¹⁶ KII with UNFPA staff and partners in Samoa.

¹¹⁷ 2022 Annual Report – Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

180. The 2023 Annual Report- Asia and Pacific Regional Office, provides limited specific information related to FP, focusing on the challenging situations. It highlights that the budgetary allocation for health in general and FP in particular, continues to be below the global average, and that most departments of health are not able to utilize/implement even the meagre amounts of funds provided to the FP programmes. Furthermore, number of countries in the region have not been prioritizing in-service training, programmes for health staff and this adversely affects the quality of care.

181. In terms of the rights-based approach and intersection with LNOB, interventions targeted at PWDs for FP and SRH services were implemented, including the development of training packages on disability-inclusive FP and SRH services for women and young people and capacity building of service providers to provide disability-inclusive FP & SRH services.¹¹⁸

182. The current SP makes little emphasis on structural inequalities, an absence also reflected in the RPAP and CPDs. However, existing and in some cases even expanding inequality gaps¹¹⁹ strongly influence effective access to quality SRH information and services. Furthermore, attention is needed to address inequalities related to ageing and the megatrends (including the digital divide), to anticipate their impact in the future.

183. Many COs have recommended that the next RPAP explicitly tackles the demographic shifts being experienced/projected to be experienced in the Region, namely low fertility, population ageing, migration, the youth/youth bulge and the demographic dividend. The COs highlight the importance of addressing emerging SRH issues under low fertility, aiming for “zero unmet fertility aspiration” to broaden the concept of unmet need for FP.¹²⁰

184. From interviews with UNFPA regional and country office staff there is also the perception – aligned with the APRO consultation workshop results - that highlights the need to focus more on a life-cycle and rights approach, expanding to sexual health issues particularly relevant for ageing and low fertility contexts, and that UNFPA needs assuage ‘low fertility panic’ from some countries in the Region. This implies adopting a narrative that expands to sexual health and focuses on women’s rights, desires and decisions.

185. Additionally, interviews with UNFPA staff shared a feeling that with limited resources, SRH work is somehow random and dispersed, “playing catch-up”, while the strategic focus (not included in the shift) should be on strengthening health services. Moreover, declining fertility has led to some questions from governments about the continuous promotion of FP commodities and services.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Idem.

¹¹⁹

https://kidb.adb.org/explore?filter%5Bindicator_id%5D=2100020&filter%5Beconomy_code%5D=AFG%2CARM%2CAUS%2CAZE%2CBAN%2CBHU%2CBRU%2CCAM%2CCOO%2CFIJ%2CFSM%2CGEO%2CHKG%2CIND%2CINO%2CJPN%2CKAZ%2CKGZ%2CKIR%2CKOR%2CLAO%2CMAL%2CMLD%2CMON%2CMYA%2CNAU%2CNEP%2CNIU%2CNZL%2CPAK%2CPHI%2CPLW%2CPNG%2CPRC%2CRM%2CSAM%2CSIN%2CSOL%2CSRI%2CTAJ%2CTAP%2CTHA%2CTIM%2CTKM%2CTON%2CTUV%2CUZB%2CVAN%2CVIE&filter%5Byear%5D=2000%2C2001%2C2002%2C2003%2C2004%2C2005%2C2006%2C2007%2C2008%2C2009%2C2010%2C2011%2C2012%2C2013%2C2014%2C2015%2C2016%2C2017%2C2018%2C2019%2C2020%2C2021%2C2022%2C2023%2C2024&grouping=indicators&showRegions=1

¹²⁰ CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

¹²¹ KIIs with UNFPA CO and APRO staff

“There are 46.7 million women of reproductive age in Bangladesh and not nearly enough midwives to meet the need for everyone to have a safe birth with only 53% births attended by a skilled birth attendant. Training more midwives to meet the current and forecast needs in 2030 is a top priority for the government of Bangladesh. Research shows that births are increasing nationally at health facilities where government diploma midwives are deployed.”

<https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/midwives-an-investment-that-saves-lives>

Scaling-up the midwifery programme

186. One important highlight concerning UNFPA contribution to SRH and comparative advantages relates to the midwifery programme. During 2023 APRO conducted a review of the Midwifery Faculty development support and found the

programme to be highly impactful in reaching and building the capacity of midwifery education for educators from 19 countries in the region and suggested scale up with some country and cultural contextualization (2023 Annual Report - Asia and Pacific Regional Office). The interventions related to midwifery though not exclusive of UNFPA, are strongly linked to UNFPA core mandate, and represent an inclusive, culturally sensitive, cost-efficient and effective approach to address maternal mortality and unmet need for FP, with focus on populations left furthest behind.

Finding 10: GBV response has a clear strategic approach. Strong and visionary leadership, supported with an increasing budget, is recognized as a key success factor to articulate efforts, in a highly challenging general regional context, despite overlapping agendas with other UN agencies. Most countries recognize that GBV related targets are very unlikely to be achieved, which can influence the achievement of the maternal mortality and family planning targets and a fully integrated human rights approach. Greater clarity on how to address GBV with LGBTIQ+ populations and women beyond reproductive age, and how to embrace intersectionality, can be strengthened, while systematic work and strategic consistency in relation to positive masculinities can also be enhanced, to fully expand the potential and uniqueness of GBV response.

Implementing GBV response and addressing influencing factors

187. The responses of the CO Survey for the APRO RPE also reflect that the majority of the COs (83.3%) implement a multisectoral GBV response, with 16.7% not implementing. Main facilitators and inhibitors include:

Table 16: Facilitators and inhibitors for the implementation of multisectoral GBV response

FACILITATORS	INHIBITORS
1. High commitment of government and high priority for GBV concerns.	1. High degree of cultural sensitivity to the GBV and child marriage agenda.
2. UNFPA well positioned to push the GBV agenda.	2. Lack of reliable data on prevalence of GBV and harmful practices.
3. One Stop Crisis Management Centres with technical assistance from UNFPA.	3. Poor intra-government coordination.
4. Capacity of NGO service providers.	4. Financial and human resource constraints.
5. Existing multisectoral mechanisms on GBV.	5. Weak implementation of laws.
6. Communications campaigns.	6. Cumbersome processes for survivors to seek justice.
7. Donor support.	

Source: CO survey for the APRO RPE.

188. In the Pacific, the Spotlight Initiative, a major global collaboration to end all forms of violence against women and girls, created specifically a new space for greater awareness of UNFPA’s GBV related capacity and role (though still limited primarily to health sector response and data).¹²² In 2022 the Spotlight programme in Samoa won the “Global Leave No One Behind Spotlight Initiative

¹²² KIIs with UNFPA staff and partners in the Pacific.

Award”, for its work in remote and hard-to-reach areas, with life-saving sexual and reproductive health services and gender-based violence prevention and response interventions.¹²³

189. From a systems-thinking perspective, it is important to highlight that GBV can negatively influence the achievement of the maternal mortality and family planning targets and a full integrated human rights approach. For example, the results of a study showed the negative impact of domestic violence on contraception use in rural India.¹²⁴ Also, data from 193 countries gathered and analysed in 2022, showed that gender equality does affect maternal mortality.¹²⁵

Boosting strategic leadership and partnerships

190. During the interviews with external actors, UNFPA regional work on GBV (including harmful practices) was particularly valued in terms of strategic leadership, capacity to articulate visions and actions, solving problems, willingness to work with others, openness to learn and capacity to convene actors, particularly CSOs and governments. This is an important note to reflect about the needed competencies to build regional leaderships. Technical solvency is important though not sufficient, and while the SP is focused on acceleration factors, the APRO office also needs to focus on “accelerating people”.

191. GBV work is also recognised for being forward-looking (addressing technology-facilitated gender violence), innovative and inter-area (GBV in humanitarian contexts), and for its particular concern with prevention of harmful practices. During 2023 APRO established a strategic partnership with Prevention Collaborative, a global network of feminist inspired practitioners, activists, and researchers, to kick-start a first ever GBV prevention capacity building initiative.¹²⁶

Defining what is the specific niche

192. However, while comparatively the regional budget for GBV is larger, the capacity is limited and there is need to prioritise investment in the most transformative strategies and actions. But there is also a need for enhanced clarity about “where UNFPA space is to remain fit for purpose within the broader UN System” to make the best strategic decisions.¹²⁷

What bodily autonomy means...

Bodily autonomy for adolescent girls and women means they can exercise choice about what happens to their bodies. In matters related to reproduction and sexuality, bodily autonomy means women and adolescent girls determine their lives and their future, and have the information, services and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion and violence.

193. The new *AGENCY, CHOICE AND ACCESS: UNFPA Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality and the Rights of Women and Adolescent Girls* (2023)

is the framework that APRO needs to adopt and adapt and be aligned with organizational approach and guidance, including interlinkages with megatrends. While very ambitious in terms of what it expects to do to, the focus of the strategy on acceleration and the framework of “bodily autonomy”, seem to create an opportunity for the region to capitalise its strengths and further fine tune its investments to generate transformational gender change. Bodily autonomy is a concept also in line with the recommendations to expand the approach and narrative of the 3 TRs and consider ageing populations. Furthermore, the strategy also provides guidance on how to address intersectionality, integrate LGBTQ+ work (not owned by any other agency) –from a LNOB perspective and only

¹²³ <https://pacific.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-supported-eu-un-joint-spotlight-initiative-samoa-against-gender-based-violence-won-global>

¹²⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5629904/>

¹²⁵ <https://bmcpregnancychildbirth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12884-022-05225-6>

¹²⁶ 2023 Annual Report - Asia and Pacific Regional Office

¹²⁷ KIIs with APRO staff.

mentioned in relation to work with adolescent and young people and humanitarian response– and address positive masculinities, as one of the key enablers to change patriarchal norms. These areas were identified as pending challenges during the evaluation.

<i>EQ8: To what extent has the RPAP expanded humanitarian preparedness and response capacity and humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus programming in the region, and how can the RPAP further respond to increasing humanitarian and HDP needs?</i>	Evaluation criteria
	EFFECTIVENESS

Finding 11: UNFPA is regionally recognized for its humanitarian work on SRH and GBV, but there is no global guidance on how to organize humanitarian work in situations other than acute crisis, such as slow-onset disasters and prolonged crisis (e.g. the Rohingya refugee situation). UNFPA also needs a strategy to monitor short- and long-term effects of its humanitarian interventions in all situations. Moreover, UNFPA is not prepared to fully and systematically implement a HDP nexus approach where such programming is appropriate.

Implementing highlights

194. According to the CO Survey for APRO RPE, a total of 18¹²⁸ (75%) of the 24 COs/SRO/MCO have humanitarian interventions in their current country programmes. Response is the most common intervention (61%), followed by preparedness (56%), and with only 28% reporting recovery interventions. The remaining countries either have humanitarian initiatives that are still under development or lack existing programmes but have plans to develop them in the future.

195. The major external facilitators and inhibitors to having a humanitarian preparedness, response and/or recovery capacity in place in the CPs arise from the working environment of the CO (e.g. government, other stakeholders, funding, the country situation in general). Internal facilitators include a strong leadership role of UNFPA in SRH and GBV in emergency response that has built its credibility with governments.¹²⁹ This is related to mainstreaming humanitarian preparedness and response in all thematic areas, and the capacity to take advantage of available funding within UNFPA. Internal inhibitors include high turnover of UNFPA staff, limitations related to availability of financial resources for ensuring supplies, for the development of a preparedness and resilience programme and for investing in piloting innovative forecast based anticipatory action (Bangladesh case study¹³⁰).

Addressing the need for organizational clarity and strategic decisions

196. HDP nexus programming is not yet commonly implemented as a fully developed programme, and part of the reasons may have to do with the challenges in clearly delineating the peacebuilding (conflict) aspect of the nexus as it applies to a specific country setting. One country additionally reports as inhibitors a lack of global operational guidelines on nexus implementation and the structural and thematic organisation of UNFPA. Yet, the Philippines, the only country that reported a fully developed nexus programming, credits this achievement to targeted technical assistance from APRO in the preparation of its current CP in 2023. Going forward, there is room to reconcile such contrasting experiences. Moreover, specific efforts to advance the HDP agenda are reported by many countries in the Region in the MTR, in areas like human resource capacity development, advocating with donors for support to nexus programming and ensuring that collective outcomes

¹²⁸ The countries where COs report no humanitarian interventions in the CP are Bhutan, China, Maldives, Thailand, Timor Leste, Vietnam.

¹²⁹ CO Survey for the APRO RPE

¹³⁰ KIIs with UNFPA staff and external stakeholders.

among HDP actors include SRH, GBV, youth and data, but only a few conducted a joint analysis between HDP actors on the root causes and drivers of fragility and risks.¹³¹



197. In general, the perception is that despite regional achievements and recognition¹³², globally UNFPA positioning and decisions related to the humanitarian agenda are not sufficiently strong, clear and also coherent in terms of investments. Given donor expectations to gather more information about the impact of their investments in humanitarian and HDP interventions¹³³, this needs priority attention in terms of strengthening monitoring and evaluation capacities for accountability and learning purposes. Furthermore, current communications and partnerships capacities and resources allocated to these areas, especially in the COs, are not sufficient.¹³⁴

198. Furthermore, there is a need for a more nuanced approach to the humanitarian output, as the need for this type of programming varies considerably across the Asia Pacific region –some do not need it at all, some need it desperately– and the characteristics of the crisis also require very particular responses. For example, in Afghanistan, the absence of a formally recognized government necessitates a purely humanitarian response as UNFPA under the circumstances cannot carry out their normative functions. On the other hand, the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh is a protracted humanitarian situation that, due to its scale and complexity, requires a focused and targeted approach beyond the routine operations of the CO.¹³⁵

EQ9: *To what extent are the discriminatory social and gender norms and structural and power inequalities, being addressed in the RPAP and how can social and gender norm transformation be further accelerated in countries to achieve 3TRs and the ICPD PoA?*

Evaluation criteria

EFFECTIVENESS

Finding 12: Under Output 3, the RPAP includes priority actions to address discriminatory social and gender norms, focusing on strengthening CO capacities, global policy roll-out, building evidence, promoting knowledge exchange and providing advice. Today, only around 40% of the COs in the region report having developed and implemented programming to address discriminatory social and gender norms. There are different challenges to the full understanding, strategic development and implementation, including shared meaning, scope and crosscutting implementation vis a vis the definition and targets related to GBV and the intersectional and LNOB approaches. Other more complex challenges refer to the need for structural, long-term multi-sector and multi-actor interventions to effectively transform norms and power relations in increasingly conservative contexts, and how this relates also to a strategic focus on adolescents and youth.

Assessing implementation, strengths and weaknesses

199. The RPAP presents a comprehensive approach to address discriminatory social and gender norms, which has resulted in some advancements, but which has not been fully unleashed yet. As mentioned in the 2023 Annual Report - Asia and Pacific Regional Office, “GBV prevention and social norms change are increasingly priorities and key areas of investment for UNFPA country offices in Asia and the Pacific, which often have standalone outcomes on this in their country programmes.”

¹³¹ CO Survey and SP MTR survey.

¹³² KIIs with APRO staff and external stakeholders.

¹³³ KII with donor.

¹³⁴ KIIs with APRO staff.

¹³⁵ KIIs with APRO staff.

According to the survey, ten of the 24 CO/SRO/MCOs (42%) report that they have a fully developed programme in the CP to address discriminatory social and gender norms and structural and power inequalities, while seven (29%) have an intervention that is still to be fully developed. Four COs (17%) have no interventions in their CP to address discriminatory social and gender norms and structural and power inequalities at all.

200. Beyond implementation data, COs' capacity is not consistent across the region and much investment is needed to strengthen internal and stakeholders' capacity on evidence-based interventions that can transform norms behaviours and prevent GBV. Furthermore, for APRO it is important to map and systematise the CO's approaches to ensure a shared understanding, for example about the difference between social and gender norms, the role of strategic communication, the use of behavioural change approaches, positive masculinities strategies, age-relevant approaches and strategies with adolescents and youth, innovations, etc.¹³⁶ The CO Survey for APRO RPE results do not reflect the extent to which the understanding and operationalization of this strategic shift is based on a shared framework. Furthermore, it is important to capture and analyse non-conventional innovative responses taking advantage of unexpected opportunities and strengthen efforts to establish partnerships to build the evidence base:

"Crises and emergency situations provided an opportunity to initiate interventions through women and girls' friendly spaces in addressing and mitigating the risks of GBV and child marriage." CO response to the CO survey for APRO RPE.

Capturing specific lessons learnt

201. While facilitators and inhibitors identified by the COs resemble very much the ones for HR, SRH and GBV, the CO survey for APRO RPE captures very relevant lessons learnt that should create the basis for further reflection and knowledge management to strengthen the next RPAP and APRO role regarding changing discriminatory social and gender norms:

- a. The need for context-specific and tailored interventions as these will ensure that the programmes are relevant to the communities and promote ownership and sustainability of the results.
- b. The need for evidence-based interventions and data-driven insights.
- c. Addressing deeply-rooted discriminatory social and gender norms requires long-term planning and sustained efforts over multiple programme cycles.
- d. Multi-stakeholder collaboration and community engagement involving diverse stakeholders, including government, civil society, and communities, in addressing discriminatory norms ensures a comprehensive and integrated response to the complex issue.
- e. The provision of training, skills and knowledge to individuals and communities empower them to advocate for their rights and challenge harmful norms and practices.
- f. Finding and developing champions among the major influencers or actors is important to be able to engage the groups they influence.
- g. Engaging men and boys is essential.
- h. Interventions must target multi-generational audiences.

Developing future perspectives and alerts

202. Norms change as a specific strategic shift requires a solid conceptual, strategic and operational framework, otherwise there is the risk of just another "buzzword" to continue with business as usual, and, even worse, to result in a confusing and inconsistent blend of various approaches without a clear definition and understanding of their meaning, their value add, their interrelation with the other approaches, their operationalization vis a vis SRH and GBV, and the lack

¹³⁶ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

of measurement and accountability of their effectiveness. Under very challenging conservative contexts in some countries, it is difficult to envision change and long-term multi-sector and multi-actor interventions to effectively transform underlying norms and power relations. On the other hand, systematically implement strategies focusing on adolescents and youth and on positive masculinities, may be highly important to complement and boost transformational change.¹³⁷

In Lao (People's Democratic Republic) a Male Engagement Manual was developed and implemented in communities. Lessons learnt:

1. Master trainers should be senior and well-respected in the village – buy-in from respected male senior village authorities fostered an environment where other men felt like it was also their duty/obligation to model their behaviour.

2. Revised the intervention to also include after Government IP reported that targeting men exclusively created a challenging atmosphere, and when women were involved, they were also sensitised to their rights and their capacity to claim them increased.

CO Survey for the APRO RPE

203. The technical note to inform the design of Phase II of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage, produced jointly with UNICEF by HQ offices, is a very solid framework to further adapt for regional work. Furthermore, the publication of 2023 on *Gender-transformative approaches to achieve gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights* is also an excellent reference document to enhance the capacity in the region to make evidence-based clearer distinctions and strategize for transformative gender and social norm change.

EQ10: *To what extent has the RPAP focus effectively shifted from funding to funding and financing 3TRs and the ICPD PoA in the region and at country level, what are current challenges and opportunities that APRO can address or tap into for increased financing of 3TRs and the ICPD PoA in the region?*

Evaluation criteria

EFFICIENCY

Finding 13: The APRO team has notably moved forward in clarifying the nature and implications of advancing the shift from funding to funding and financing. But with some exceptions, this has not yet significantly permeated the countries, where lack of clarity, misconceptions, organizational culture, systems and operational limitations inhibit the transition. Given that the main focus of this shift relates to influencing increased government investments to accelerate the 3 TRs, political pushbacks and competing priorities challenge the effective implementation of the shift, but so do internal factors that reflect an organization based on donor funding, with a lack of experience and established procedures for private sector engagement, and an extremely centralized bureaucracy that has moved little towards expected agility.

Assessing implementation and key influential factors

204. In asking about the shift from funding to funding and financing, the CO Survey for the APRO RPE addressed each of the transformative results separately. In all, 20 out of the 24 COs/SRO/MCO report that they have interventions following this shift on each of the 3 TRs. Of the 3 TRs, unmet need for FP has the highest proportion of COs that have made a shift from funding to funding and financing, with half of the COs that made a shift in some interventions and 25% in most interventions. LDC graduation, strong partnership relationships with governments and other key private and public stakeholders to leverage their resources and expertise, and the role of parliamentarian and CSO champions to increase the fiscal space for SRHR, are among the key enabling factors highlighted by the COs.¹³⁸ These shifts predominantly entail governments assuming greater responsibility for financing family planning programs previously funded, either fully or partially, by UNFPA. Of the 3 TRs interventions to reduce gender-based violence interventions have seen the least movement from funding to funding and financing.

¹³⁷ KIIs with UNFPA staff and external stakeholders.

¹³⁸ COs Survey for the APRO RPE.

Table 17: Number of COs/SRO/MCO by type of shift from funding to funding and financing of the 3 Transformative Results¹³⁹

	With interventions			Others		
	No shift	Shift in some interventions	Shift in most interventions	No intervention	Not applicable	No response
Unmet need for FP	5	10	5	-	4 ¹⁴⁰	-
Maternal mortality	8	8	4	-	4 ¹⁴¹	-
Gender-based violence	10	8	2	4 ¹⁴²	-	-
Child marriage	7	6	1	1	9 ¹⁴³	-
Gender biased sex selection	-	1	2	3	17 ¹⁴⁴	1
Female genital mutilation	1	1	2	-	20 ¹⁴⁵	-
ICPD PoA	17	3	1	1	2	2

Source: CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

205. Despite the achievements, the shift from funding to funding and financing has not deeply and sustainably permeated the countries. Lack of clarity, misconceptions (e.g. that traditional donor funding needs to be substituted with donations from private foundations), organizational culture (success indicators related to mobilising resources from donors), systems and operational limitations inhibit the transition, in addition to challenges that derive from the nature of the organization, ethical frameworks and accountability mechanisms.¹⁴⁶

206. Government commitment, strong partnerships with diverse stakeholders, and evidence-based advocacy, count among the most relevant facilitators to move from funding to financing¹⁴⁷.

- *"LDC graduation is a key facilitator – government is aware they need to finance."* (Cambodia).
- *"Building strong relationships with various stakeholders like governments, private companies, and other UN agencies allows UNFPA to leverage their resources and expertise."* (Indonesia).
- *"Strong CSO and Parliamentary champions to increase the fiscal space for SRHR."* (Philippines).

Inhibitors include:

1. Limited government capacity and resources amidst competing needs for the same resources.
2. Insufficient technical capacity and expertise within UNFPA to advocate to governments.
3. Lack of alignment of UNFPA mandate areas with government budgetary priorities.
4. Limited alternative funding and financing sources outside government.
5. Political pushbacks from conservative political groups in certain countries.

Enhancing readiness towards the future

207. The APRO team is focusing on three strategic objectives: i) better investment (regardless who the investor is); ii) universal coverage, to ensure inclusion, accessibility and quality for all; iii) extended partnerships, with a particular focus on yet not fully addressed partnerships with the private sectors. In terms of regional contribution to country efforts, it is worthwhile mentioning

¹³⁹ Due to the varying number of relevant cases for the TRs, we present the number of cases instead of percentages.

¹⁴⁰ Not applicable because the target has been met (China, DPRK), there is no recognized government (Afghanistan), the FP program is not a priority of government hence no UNFPA intervention in this area (Iran)

¹⁴¹ Not applicable because the target has been met (China, DPRK, Thailand) and no recognized government (Afghanistan)

¹⁴² Afghanistan, China, DPRK, Iran.

¹⁴³ Not applicable because the practice is not prevalent in the country.

¹⁴⁴ Not applicable because the practice is not prevalent in the country.

¹⁴⁵ Not applicable because the practice is not prevalent in the country.

¹⁴⁶ KIIs with UNFPA staff at regional and country level.

¹⁴⁷ CO survey for the APRO RPE.

that in 2023, APRO successfully supported the development and completion of four new investment cases. However, the evaluation also evidenced that the use of investment cases by COs to advocate for an engage at budgetary decision is still challenging and an opportunity to be pursued.¹⁴⁸

208. Reflections about UNFPA readiness and conditions to move forward, particularly with the private sector, highlight adversity to risks, bureaucratic barriers and systems not fit for purpose to engage with the private sector, not sufficient/adequate data and inputs to understand the market and the diversity of institutions that compose the private sector.¹⁴⁹

209. Furthermore, examining the extent to which shifting from funding to funding and financing has been effectively achieved, and developing financing strategies, needs a more nuanced understanding of the country situations, especially as more countries transition into upper middle-income status in the region while some remain lagging behind.¹⁵⁰

210. On a final note, APRO will play an important role in implementing the new collaboration agreement between UNFPA and the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents (GFF), aimed at transforming the financing landscape for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including family planning.¹⁵¹ In addition to GFF, other opportunities for increasing financing include blended finance to attract SRHR investments from the private sector.

EQ11: *To what extent and under which conditions have RPAP regional and country partnerships accelerated progress on 3TRs and the ICPD PoA in the region and at country level, and how can catalytic partnerships be expanded and diversified for a greater acceleration?*

Evaluation criteria

**COHERENCE
EFFECTIVENESS**

Finding 14: Partnerships have contributed to the advancements towards the 3 TRs and the implementation of the ICPD PoA at regional and country level, and there is a generalized recognition of the importance of partnerships as a key accelerator and at the same time a catalytic factor that strongly influences other accelerators. In relation to the four global partnership models (resource mobilization, innovation, reach and alliances), the least utilized models are innovation and reach, two key modes of impact-oriented partnerships. Also, while SSTC has some fruitful experiences, a more structured and strategic approach could be beneficial. Furthermore, there are some types of partners like the academia and international financing institutions that require a clearer, strategic and more constant approach.

Assessing achievements and challenges

211. The RPAP emphasizes the importance of leveraging broad-based partnerships and linking research and innovation to policy and programming. It explicitly states that it will “reinvigorate and expand partnerships and build alliances for accelerated implementation of the ICPD agenda, including with civil society, academia, international financial institutions, parliamentarians, United Nations organizations and the private sector.” The power of partnerships is broadly recognised by APRO, and regional partnerships with different stakeholders, including other UN agencies, have delivered significant contributions to the achievement of the 3 TRs as evidenced earlier in the report.

¹⁴⁸ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

¹⁴⁹ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

¹⁵⁰ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

¹⁵¹ <https://www.globalfinancingfacility.org/news/announcement/catalytic-new-partnership-will-accelerate-country-support-advance-sustainable>

212. APRO has also contributed to strengthen the capacities of COs to plan for and develop partnerships. For example, the 2023 Annual Report - Asia and Pacific Regional Office informs about the support to four country offices (PNG, Philippines, Cambodia and Bhutan) on the development of the Integrated RM and Partnerships plans.

213. The CO survey asked for a global assessment of the overall impact of CP partnerships on accelerating progress towards the three TRs and the ICPD PoA within their respective countries, based on the four modes of UNFPA strategic partnerships, namely resource mobilization, innovation, reach, and alliances.¹⁵² Results show that partnerships for resource mobilization and to expand the reach of UNFPA supported interventions are assessed to have had major effects by over two thirds of respondents. However, partnerships with international financing institutions and private sector are still to be further explored.¹⁵³ Of the four types of partnerships, brainpower partnerships to design, test and scale up innovative solutions is perceived as either having very limited or only minor effects by half of the CO/SRO/MCO respondents; three COs do not have this kind of partnership at all, which refers to the in general limited relationship with academic and knowledge centres.¹⁵⁴ This limits the forward-looking potential of UNFPA and the expansion of knowledge-based, innovative interventions.

Table 18: Percent distribution of types of partnership by perceived effect on accelerating progress on the 3 TRs

	No partnerships of this type	Very limited effect	Minor effect	Major effect	No response
Partnerships to expand reach of UNFPA-supported interventions	4.2	12.5	12.5	66.7	4.2
Resource mobilization partnerships		4.2	20.8	70.8	4.2
Brainpower partnerships to design, test and scale up innovative solutions	12.5	20.8	33.3	29.2	4.2
Alliance partnerships to expand government and public support, in conducive and non-conducive environments for the ICPD Programme of Action.	8.3	8.3	37.5	41.7	4.2

Source: CO Survey for the APRO RPE.

Boosting and focalizing on strategic partnerships

214. Despite very powerful partnerships, a systematic, comprehensive, interlinked approach to identify and develop partnerships seems to be missing at regional level. As mentioned before, there are some types of partners like the academia and international financing institutions that require a clearer, strategic and more constant approach. However, the challenge is more general and refers to the capacity to differentiate and focus on developing strategic partnerships. For example, as to SSTC partnerships, 75% of the respondents to the CO Survey for the APRO RPE report having SSTC initiatives in their current CPs either being implemented or yet to be implemented but 42% were not significantly supported by APRO in SSTC partnerships. Regardless of the current status of SSTC activities, the majority (58%) would highly recommend the expansion or initiation of SSTC interventions in the next RPAP, giving SSTC a more prominent, strategic and comprehensive role than it currently has: “where SSTC is employed not as a stand-alone intervention but one that is integrated and made complementary to other interventions contributing to common CP outputs”.

215. As discussed under Finding 5, the distinction between “normal” and “catalytic” partnerships is not always very evident, requires strategic vision and being capable of selecting the best possible

¹⁵² <https://www.unfpa.org/strategic-partnerships>

¹⁵³ KIIs with APRO staff.

¹⁵⁴ KIIs with UNFPA staff.

partners to boost transformational change in a specific context.¹⁵⁵ This is also consequence of a strong positioning and entails a dynamic nature that needs to be monitored. The next RPAP should contribute to strengthen regional and national capacities around a shared understanding, methodology and systematic approach to identify, manage, monitor and evaluate strategic partnerships in relation to the four global models (resource mobilization, innovation, reach and alliances).

216. It is important highlight the UNFPA Pacific Integrated Partnership, Resource Mobilisation and South-South Strategy for MCP7 (2023-2027), which provides an overall vision and direction for mobilizing resources to sustain and scale up the institutional capacity and programme delivery. The strategy focuses on strengthening partnerships with traditional donors like Australia and New Zealand, while expanding ties with emerging donors, private sector entities, and institutions such as the Asian Development Bank and World Bank. It also emphasises that the understanding of partnerships “goes beyond financial arrangements”. Efforts include SSTC, joint programmes/programming with other UN agencies, expanding strategic engagements with regional partners and enhancing UNFPA’s profile through further developing in-house capacities

217. In summary, the evaluation considers that a shared, institutionalised and operationalised strategic partnership approach would favour a focus on most catalytic partnerships, and greater clarity about the implications and the expectations (what is to be invested, what is to be expected).¹⁵⁶ Bad experiences with partnerships reinforce the idea that “not everything that shines is gold”, and successful partnerships also evidence the importance of investing and managing partnerships for success. The global partnerships framework and strategy should guide a systematic approach to identify, manage, monitor and evaluate strategic partnerships.

4.4. Enablers

EQ12: <i>To what extent has strategic communication facilitated the acceleration and strategic shifts foreseen in the Strategic Plan/RPAP, which have been the enabling and inhibiting factors, and what are the current opportunities to use strategic communication to address persisting and emerging challenges?</i>	Evaluation criteria EFFECTIVENESS
Finding 15: Global and regional efforts to enhance clarity and leverage the strategic role of communication, including the development of a regional communication strategy for Asia Pacific and acknowledged APRO support, have provided the region and countries with orientations for implementation based on four key functions and guided towards enabling the strategic shifts and accelerators. However, even in countries that report implementing strategic communication, a traditional approach to communication prevails. Furthermore, the absence of more in-depth changes in the organization to strengthen the strategic contribution of communication to become a true enabler has undermined its potential effectiveness.	

Moving towards “strategic” communication

218. In the Strategic Plan, communication is conceived of as “critical to accelerating the achievement of the three transformative results”. The RPAP closely links the development of a regional communication strategy to expanded partnerships for impact. The regional strategy explains the shift from traditional to strategic communication and includes indicators for RO and COs to adapt. On the other hand, the 2023 Annual Report - Asia and Pacific Regional Office highlights three regional advocacy campaigns used as strategic communications entry points to

¹⁵⁵ Unpublished document by Dirk Arts and Silvia Salinas: “Art and Power of Strategic Alliances”. SNV, 2006.

¹⁵⁶ KIIs with UNFPA staff and external stakeholders and CO survey.

highlight key advocacy messages. These variations entail important nuances and biases in relation to the understanding of strategic communication.

219. To-date 5 COs in the region have developed communications strategies, which outline how strategic communications will be implemented. In the survey the COs/SRO/MCO were asked to self-assess to what extent communication is understood and operationalised as strategic communication in their own country programme based on the four functions defined at corporate level:

Table 19: Percent distribution of CO/SRO/MCO assessment of the extent to which communication is understood and operationalized as “strategic communication”, in five dimensions

	Not at all	Moderately	Fully
Managing reputation, managing risk	8.7	30.4	60.9
Shaping the environment, shifting social norms, changing behaviour	8.7	56.5	34.8
Positioning, building trust, inspiring, motivating	8.7	39.1	52.2
Moving neutrals to allies, finding new supporters	13.0	43.5	43.5
Driving funding and partnerships	17.4	52.2	30.4

Source: CO survey for the APRO RPE.

220. Important to highlight the focus on managing reputation and risk, while in the other categories the countries self-assessment was more moderate. Given the emphasis on partnerships and funding as accelerators and strategic shifts, the rather moderate results call for attention. Also, as mentioned previously, the engagement and responsibility of communication in relation to shifting social norms and changing behaviour is not unanimously perceived by different COs. In general, a more traditional approach to communication focused on branding, reputation and positioning prevails, while new strategic functions are yet to be fully unleashed, understood, owned and operationalised.

Identifying facilitators, inhibitors and opportunities

221. A regional communication strategy is an important milestone and creates opportunities for APRO to continue strengthening the communication capacities of COs. COs have also strongly recognised the support of APRO communication team as a key asset. Important to mention that while alignment of the regional communication strategy with the global communication strategy is mentioned, the regional strategy does not include all functions of the global strategy, which can translate into a limitation towards the full implementation of the comprehensive global framework.

222. Resource constraints and the lack of dedicated professionals are highlighted by COs as a key barrier to boost the potential of communication. However, other more structural issues captured during the evaluation include limited ownership and leverage of communication to a strategic level to join strategic decision-making, and the lack of integration and coordination between communications and programming.¹⁵⁷

EQ13: *To what extent have financial and human resources been sufficient and adequately allocated and managed to facilitate the effective, efficient and coherent implementation of the accelerators and strategic shifts foreseen in the Strategic Plan at regional level?*

Evaluation criteria
COHERENCE
EFFECTIVENESS
EFFICIENCY

Finding 16: More than half of the COs strongly consider that human and financial resources have been insufficient and that the profiles of allocation of human resources have not been adequate.

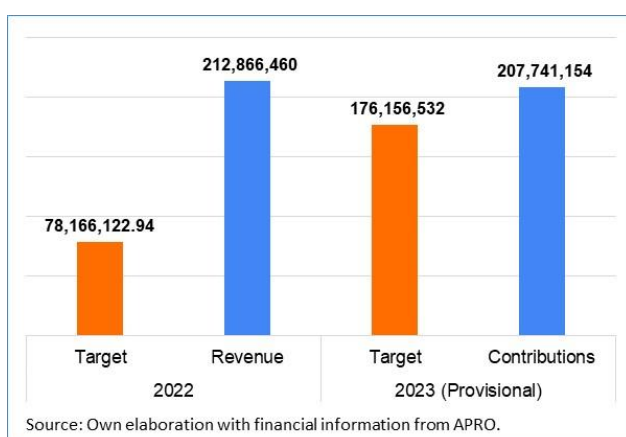
¹⁵⁷ KII with UNFPA staff and CO survey.

The perceptions are more positive on the sufficiency and adequacy of the administrative resources and procedures. However, a centralized bureaucracy and non-trust-based processes create a tremendous burden and influence the agility, responsiveness and partnerships of the organization, negatively impacting on the implementation of the accelerators and strategic shifts. Regionally, efforts have been made towards a more coordinated, integrated and bottom-up planning and response, also promoting a change in mindsets towards the role of APRO, but there is still room to rethink the strategic profile, composition and ways of working of the regional team to respond to the idea of being “the key accelerator” for UNFPA’s work in the region.

Managing resources: a balance

223. To address this EQ the CO Survey for the APRO RPE asked about the perception of the COs/SRO/MCO of the adequacy and effective management of financial and human resources, using a Likert-type attitude scale. Results show positive perceptions on the sufficiency and adequacy of administrative resources and procedures but critical issues related to expertise and allocation of human and financial resources. Capacity gaps in terms of the size of teams relative to expected performance, but also in relation to the required capacities, were also pointed out. KIIs with internal stakeholders have corroborated the survey findings about the size of teams relative to the expected outputs, as well as the gaps between financial resources and ideal outputs. Moreover, KIIs also

Graphic 6: Asia and Pacific - Co-financing Contribution Targets and Recorded Revenue 2022-2023 (USD)



revealed organizational practices and procedures such as centralised hiring, which result in very long periods to fill a position.

224. Existing evidence is not enough and adequate to analyse the sufficiency and adequate allocation of financial resources vis á vis the accelerators and strategic shifts. Based on funding evidence provided by APRO for 2022 and 2023 (preliminary), the evaluation can highlight the high achievements in terms of revenues obtained, vastly exceeding the goals.

Changing the ways of working

225. As mentioned earlier in the report, the vision of APRO as a catalyst precedes the evaluation. Regional leaders have already began changing the ways of working in APRO to boost the catalytic potential of inter-area synergies and complementarities, and have also organised increased participation of COs in regional analysis, planning and decision-making, based on country evidence. While advancements in these directions are recognised, there is still room to rethink the organisational mindset in-depth, design APRO as an agile organization and identify the needed strategic profiles, composition and ways of working of the regional team to boot APRO’s catalytic power. All these changes will be impacted by the financial situation of UNFPA that might restrict some possibilities, while at the same time calling for enhanced efficiency in managing the resources and focus on sustainable, scalable solutions. As mentioned earlier, it is important for the RPAP to consider defining what “scaling-up” means to contribute to impactful change.¹⁵⁸

EQ14: *To what extent have knowledge management and innovation systematically and consistently been implemented to facilitate the effective, efficient and coherent*

Evaluation criteria
COHERENCE

¹⁵⁸ KIIs with UNFPA staff; RPE consultation workshop.

Finding 17: Knowledge management is not fully captured in its meaning, relevance and potential to catalyse organizational relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. Its identification as an enabler for the operationalization of the strategic shifts and accelerators undermines its transformational potential. Knowledge management, linked also to innovation, should be recognized as a key accelerator towards the achievement of the 3TRs. Furthermore, organisations that integrate learning and knowledge management in their DNA are more innovative and better equipped towards the future. The multi-level and multi-country presence of UNFPA creates favourable conditions to dynamize systematic knowledge development, vertical and horizontal sharing, utilisation, replication and scaling-up. While creating a learning culture and leading knowledge management should be one of APRO's key strategies to boost innovation, anticipation, modelling and acceleration, it requires a vision, capacities, spaces, mechanisms and responsibilities that are not yet fully in place.

Understanding and unleashing KM to its full accelerating potential

226. Knowledge management is a frequently used concept at regional and country level, but in general its understanding and approach only partially reflect its different elements and full potential. Knowledge management is frequently limited to systematization, knowledge exchange, dissemination and access, learning and/or capturing good practices. Very seldom the focus and success are concentrated on the strategic use of this knowledge i) to guide decision-making; ii) promote replications iii) for scaling up (a concept not clearly defined, as explained earlier); iv) to strengthen anticipation and modelling; v) to inform and boost innovation. This implies frequently a focus on “knowledge management activities” instead of the implementation of a comprehensive KM strategy, embedded in programmatic work and linked to boosting systematic organizational learning to enhance impact.

227. Thus, despite this advancements and innovative approaches, the mechanisms for countries to nourish corporate learning and knowledge management are not in place, and this can cost the organization to miss opportunities to play a leading knowledge management role. For example, APRO can be a strategic broker, mapping and analysing country initiatives with a particular emphasis on human rights and the LNOB principle as applied to SRH-related concerns, and then bringing country innovations and knowledge production to corporate attention.

228. Also, the 2023 Annual Report of APRO mentions that 2023 *“Despite growing global evidence on what works to prevent GBV, there continues a major knowledge gap on whether the same interventions would be equally effective in the context of Asia and the Pacific.”* In a rapidly changing complex context, ensuring a learning culture is fundamental to ensure rapid response to changes, easy detachment from ways of doing no longer valid, data and evidence focused and openness and proactivity to generate and use innovations.

229. The next RPAP should provide definitions, roadmaps, methodologies and strategies to translate experience into shareable knowledge and systematically integrate KM and learning at regional and country level. Furthermore, under a defined agile methodology, systematization of experiences should be integrated into programmatic implementation from the beginning, motivating regular registration, analysis and learning from experience.

230. The recently launched Knowledge Management Strategy 2024-2030¹⁵⁹ is a milestone for organizational guidance to more consistently and systematically move beyond knowledge products – which is step 1 - to become a strategic knowledge manager. The strategy, however, does not include “knowledge utilization” under its four objectives:

1. To enhance knowledge availability and accessibility;
2. To boost knowledge generation and dissemination;
3. To strengthen internal institutional arrangements; and
4. To leverage technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence, to transform the world for women and girls.

Capitalizing the power of convening

231. Knowledge management is not only linked to evidence-based work, it is also closely related to UNFPAs convening function, positioning and trust-based relations it is able to develop. For example, in 2023 APRO and UNICEF ESARO organized a webinar to create a Southeast Asian community of practice on Addressing Child, Early and Forced Unions and planned and hosted the “Southeast Asia Regional Partners Roundtable on Child Early and Forced Marriage”. The Humanitarian 'fika' sessions also proved particularly instrumental, not only in sharing experiences and knowledge but also in building a strong sense of community among participants. The Humanitarian Community of Practice serves as a safe space and platform where everyone can ask questions and access relevant documents.¹⁶⁰

Assessing KM and innovation capacities at country level

232. The responses of the CO Survey for the APRO RPE show that only about half of the respondents agree with the statements that indicate a culture of learning and sound knowledge management is in place in the COs/SRO/MCO. Overall, the results show that there is much room for improvement in knowledge management based on these self- assessments.

233. In terms of innovations to boost achievement towards fulfilling the three TRs, 17 of the 24 respondents (71%) report that they had indeed implemented innovative practices in their programming. These practices can be grouped into innovations that:

- a. Utilize digital technologies such as dashboards, chatbots, and mobile apps which enable COs to reach young people, to disseminate SRHR information, to gather real-time data on SRHR-related services and to respond to GBV more effectively.
- b. Enhance accessibility and expand reach of SRH services like telehealth, call centres and mobile health clinics.
- c. Promote innovative financing like Islamic financing initiatives.

234. During the mission in Bangladesh, the evaluation team also learnt about the CO research on the effect of salinity on the risk of eclampsia -higher water salinity being associated with climate change¹⁶¹.

235. Countries have the capacities and are doing innovative research and implementing innovative practices. However, the organizational KM and innovation capacities are limited to

¹⁵⁹ UNFPA Knowledge Management Strategy 2024-2030: Leveraging the Power of Knowledge to Transform the world for women and girls. 2024 update.

¹⁶⁰ KIIs with UNFPA staff and partners.

¹⁶¹ KII with UNFPA CO staff

capitalize, replicate and scale-up innovations and irradiate good practices and lessons learnt that can boost performance and achievements.¹⁶²

6. Conclusions

Conclusion 1: UNFPA APRO is aware and mature about the need to boost its readiness towards the future to remain relevant and sustainable. The necessary conditions to and resources to implement a catalytic role need to be correspondingly determined and aligned.

Related findings: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17

Linked to recommendations: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

236. The regional context presents very diverse, complex and rapidly changing realities that share demographic challenges, threatening megatrends, inequality and rights issues. The current SP and RPAP limit UNFPA's relevance, response capacity and preparedness for the future.

237. The regional leadership recognises the need to revise the role and strategic contribution of APRO. Countries, on the other hand, also expect enhanced support particularly in relation to the alignment and implementation of the new strategic shifts and accelerators, and the missed opportunities for greater regional facilitation to strengthen SSTC, learning, innovation and KM.

238. Availability, allocation and management of human and financial resources to boost catalytic changes is difficult to measure, but despite this limitation, the evidence is sufficient to highlight gaps in terms of competencies and number of people needed at country and regional level. There is a shared opinion about the need to further align human resources with the priorities of the organization at country and regional level, while a lack of clarity about these priorities is also reflected in gaps in terms of competencies required to fulfil a certain task or complete a result (e.g. HDP nexus). The development of the next RPAP, and the revision of APRO's role and vision as a catalyst, will certainly guide decisions regarding needed competencies and team composition.

239. On the other hand, strategic communication, knowledge management and innovation are not only enablers for the strategic shifts and accelerators. If fully understood and implemented, they have a very high potential to catalyse change. Today their potential has not been fully unleashed, although strategic communications has made significant advancements at regional and country level. The existence of a global strategy for knowledge management and the upcoming release of an innovation strategy, create an opportunity to strengthen a shared conceptual and strategic understanding and ownership, as the basis for their APRO role and operationalization.

Conclusion 2: To ensure relevance and accelerate transformational changes, there is a need to expand the current scope and approach of the 3 TRs, taking into account demographic diversity in the region, the impact of the megatrends and a strengthened human-rights and LNOB perspective. There is a need to clarify conceptually and operationally the life-cycle approach as a framework applied across different areas of UNFPA work, not just to population ageing. APRO needs to strengthen its support to COs to enhance some key capacities and strategic thinking.

Related findings: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Linked to recommendations: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

¹⁶² KII with UNFPA staff.

240. There is a need for a strong, clearly articulated population-based, human-rights focused umbrella framework and narrative for the next RPAP that presents evolved and contextualized thinking. This framework should not only cover the 3 TRs, but also focus on the overall population and development context of the region, and expand to other SRHR issues of concern. Putting population and comprehensive SRHR issues at the core, in a region with countries at very diverse development stages, would further position UNFPA as a forward-looking agency. It would enable UNFPA to contribute to anticipating changes and better prepare the region to respond innovatively to future population and human rights concerns.

241. UNFPA needs to recover its leadership role, uniqueness and clear niche in addressing key population issues, a highly relevant agenda for the region, aligned to the ICPD PoA, regional and subregional population and development frameworks, and future human-centred approaches in the context of a BANI (brittle, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible) world. Furthermore, moving towards an expanded, life-cycle and human rights-based formulation of the 3 TRs will enhance wider ownership and opportunities for UNFPA to make significant contributions, particularly in ageing and low-fertility contexts.

242. There is general agreement about the importance of the megatrends and the need to integrate them individually in regional and country programming, with focus on those related to demographic issues and a systemic, articulated approach. Country-led initiatives can guide regional megatrends approach.

243. Acceleration is crucial and in progress, but the SP framework for accelerators and strategic shifts presents technical inconsistencies and pitfalls that limit their effective, systematic and measurable implementation. This includes lack of clarity on the meaning, overlaps and limited contextualization. There is a need to embed acceleration in the organizational culture and ways of doing, to ensure relevance, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness. The evaluation has also evidenced the need to consider other accelerators like KM, hope and mental health.

244. In general, there is room for improvement in APROs support for implementation of the accelerators, strategic shifts and enablers, and opportunity to contribute to strengthen strategic thinking at country level. While capacity including size of the teams is one important factor, some strategies, good practices and lessons learnt can be captured, including: i) regionalization of global guidelines (the example of communication is a good practice that can be replicated now to contextualize new global guidance on gender, KM and others); ii) the development of methodologies and tools to further strengthen context-analysis and decision-making under similar criteria, standards and logic; iii) guidelines to strengthen the development of ToCs, particularly focusing on the identification and analysis of assumptions and how to use them as management and decision-making tools in complex, rapid-changing contexts; iv) orientations to boost agility; and v) support to strengthen and integrate risk assessment in programme and project management and implementation, to boost anticipation and mitigation measures.

245. Human Rights and LNOB approaches are deeply owned, but there is room to strengthen a shared, interlinked conceptual, operational and monitoring framework. Particularly in countries with higher economic/development status, it is not easy to maintain these agendas, while they may be particularly relevant to narrow the gaps that may result from economic development and that may, at the same time, hinder it. The findings also suggest the need to expand the definition and strengthen the use of the life-cycle approach beyond the ageing agenda, linking it with other important areas of UNFPA mandate, including SRHR, GBV, youth development etc.

Conclusion 3: UNFPA work takes place in challenging and rapidly changing contexts, including realities that demand increased attention from a HDP nexus approach. Normative work has been at the core of UNFPA work in the region, while the niches, priorities and definition of scaling-up for SRH and GBV information and service provision need to be fine-tuned to ensure value added given limited financial resources. In the case of social norm change, shared understanding of the meaning and implications for the organization are still in progress, facing important social and cultural pushbacks in various countries in the region.

Related findings: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12

Linked to recommendations: 2, 3, 6

246. Despite some very challenging, restrictive contexts, UNFPA COs have maximised efforts to adapt to the situations and identify possibilities to play their normative role. This has translated into stakeholders recognizing UNFPA's legitimacy and commitment. It has also resulted in important lessons learnt to nourish regional learning led by APRO and provide further guidance to countries facing contextual challenges that inhibit normative work. Some particular governance situations like decentralization processes, and country transitioning to MICs and UPMICs, represent new challenges to fulfil normative work that the new RPAP must address.

247. UNFPA's humanitarian work is internally and externally widely recognized and valued, despite limitations given the small size of the regional team and lack of continuity in funding. However, the organization needs to make a serious decision to invest in developing a framework defining and strategizing HDP nexus, and building regional and country capacities for its implementation.

248. In terms of both SRH and GBV information and services, these are widely recognized and implemented as relevant in the countries and humanitarian settings, although the findings also suggest that SRH is not a priority in some countries and that UNFPA's value proposition in SRHR may vary in different contexts. There is evidence for a shared need to better define the niche in a competing and financially more restricted context, to prioritize and narrow the gap between expectations (own and external) and capacities. The focus to be on unique, transformational contributions, linked to the megatrends and that particularly respond to the demographic shifts from a HR, LNOB and life-cycle approach while at the same time retaining focus on the 3 TRs in contexts where they remain as a major concern.

249. The intersection between gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) requires further definition and analysis. Emerging forms of GBV and their connections with mental health should be comprehensively analysed. Moreover, the interlinkages between GBV and humanitarian crises need to be carefully examined and addressed.

250. Gender and social norm change is an important though complex, long-term strategic shift, and it is not clear to which extent this is captured by country teams. Changing gender and social norms requires sustained efforts and interventions at various levels, demanding significant time and investment. Therefore, more strategic and long-term interventions are necessary and UNFPA needs to enhance collaboration with national governments to integrate gender transformative initiatives and strategies for more structural long-term interventions for sustainability. It seems that norm change could very much resemble traditional gender work if transformational mid- to long-term strategies – that require specific competencies- are not in place, as well as monitoring and accountability systems.

Conclusion 4: Partnerships are a key factor for UNFPA success in APRO, but their approach and management can be strengthened to ensure their strategic prioritization and catalytic contribution. Among these are partnerships within the Region, among the COs, with academia with CSOs, with non-traditional donors, with the private sector. This is also linked to the needed change in mindsets, capacities, structures, processes and assumptions underlying the shift from funding to funding and financing, which is not yet in place.

Related findings: 13, 14, 16

Linked to recommendations: 2, 7

251. Establishing partnerships is usual practice at regional and country level, with very important achievements and success stories, that also exemplify horizontal and agile relations that have focused on bringing the strength together. However, the global partnership strategy could be further operationalized as a tool to guide decision-making and management of partnerships. It is also important to clearly distinguish catalytic partnerships from traditional partnerships, and to identify key pending alliances with stakeholders like the academia and international financing institutions that need to be developed.

252. While UNFPA has decided to move from funding to funding and financing, the organization has not yet implemented the necessary changes to fully implement this decision, particularly at country level, where a more nuanced understanding of the diverse realities is also needed for more tailor-made responses and APRO support. The shift from funding to funding and financing will also determine the nature of partnerships. Particular challenges relate to engaging the private sector.

253. Needs a more nuanced understanding of the country situations, especially as more countries transition into upper middle-income status in the region while some remain lagging behind.

7. Key lessons learnt

254. Relevance, uniqueness and competitiveness are very volatile and require alert, agile and rapid response. UNFPA needs to move fast to a more agile organisation and implement adaptive management that: i) uses the ToC not as a document to develop a new programme only, but as a management tool to guide decisions and ensure periodically the validity of the change logic and impact-orientation; ii) implements risks assessments regularly; iii) ensures effective vertical and horizontal communication channels to be “ahead of the ball”.

255. Organisational change and the implementation of strategic and operational changes (like the accelerators and the strategic shifts), require a change management strategy, including methodological guidelines on how to implement and/or adapt for operationalisation. A series of competing webinars is not the best way.

256. Acceleration is less linked to a list of specific “universal” factors –as currently proposed in the SP– than to a combination of factors that under certain circumstances, accelerate transformational changes. There is a need for strategists that can visualise and operationalise these combinations for the next RPAP. Coming closer to the countries is fundamental, to better learn and also to better respond to their needs and opportunities. Furthermore, it will create opportunities to bring ideas, products, concerns, to nourish global level agenda and decision-making.

257. A successful partnerships strategy requires investing in a robust UNFPA profile, a strong strategic vision and a clear framework that defines shared expectations, assumptions, contributions and success indicators. Partnerships are crucial to remain relevant, seize emerging opportunities and effectively respond to dynamic challenges.

258. Regional work strongly focused on providing individual responses to country needs, limits the effectiveness and potential impact of UNFPA, more in a very interconnected and interdependent context. Managing country diversity in terms of complementarities and cross-fertilisation is highly effective to boost changes and to tend impact links between more and less advanced countries.

259. The RPAP is not necessarily known by programmatic teams in COs. Whether this is necessary or not under current circumstances can be discussed, but regional programming needs to go beyond to participatively develop an overarching programming umbrella that “connects the dots”, gives meaning and adds value to all the involved actors and levels. This is linked to boosting the APRO catalytic role, strengthening a systemic approach, expanding the regional and multi-country work included in the RPAP and enhancing knowledge management and SSTC.

260. There is a need to further define “scaling-up”, conceptually and in terms of methodologies, processes and indicators to measure effectiveness. Documenting and scaling-up of high-impact interventions as midwifery education can inform normative work.

261. Megatrends are not something “additional” or separate from UNFPA’s core business and priority issues; however, they require special technical expertise and knowledge, which cannot be addressed by existing staff and/or partners who don't have this background. The challenge and art is for APRO and COs in the region to investigate and generate evidence and knowledge as to how megatrends influence and are influenced by SRHR, GBV etc. (e.g. effects of climate change on SRHR, effects of labour migration on women’s role in risk prevention, effects of labour migration on gender norms).

262. The NTA methodology, investment cases, and social return on investment (SROI) analysis are powerful tools to nourish advocacy and political dialogue, and are less dependent on commitment, interest or affinity with the UNFPA agenda.

8. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Revise UNFPA’s value proposition for the region.

Links to Conclusion(s): 1, 2	Priority: High	Timeframe: 12 months
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Operational implications:

- Provide regional evidence to HQ about the need to revise the formulation of the 3 TRS to embrace demographic diversity, ageing and a clearer human-rights/LNOB focus aligned with latest HQ guidance.
- Develop a “new demographic transition theory” for the region.
- Develop and monitor a regional Theory of Change (ToC) with an updated approach to the 3 TRs, more cognizant of the demographic diversity and demographic shifts in the Region.
- Further develop the life-cycle approach to include all life stages, respond to ageing and expand on an intergenerational perspective. Restore the focus on adolescents and youth – a recognized niche of UNFPA, not just from the 3 TR perspective (adolescent pregnancy and GBV and harmful practice) but a more holistic focus on developing human capital. In the context of demographic transition, the focus is on demographic dividend and youth potential, from an intergenerational perspective, and in terms of effectiveness in social and gender norm change.
- Improve staffing by opening up more long-term staff positions in addition to or in place of temporary service contract positions for gender/human rights, communication, humanitarian

response, financing; align the profiles to the needs and vision to boost competitiveness in a context of overlapping mandates and other stronger and better positioned agencies.

- APRO may then establish mechanisms for periodic review of the validity of the ToC assumptions, the cause-effect paths and the importance to be context-responsive and redirect efforts and/or reformulate the change logic when needed.
- Boost the use of the existing regional communications strategy (2023-2025), which includes positioning of UNFPA as a thought-leader on population and development in the AP region.

Recommendation 2: Revise the role of APRO to align with the new value proposition and ToC, and the vision of being an accelerator, enabler and catalyst

Links to Conclusion(s): 1, 2, 3, 4	Priority: High	Timeframe: 12 months
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Operational implications:

- For APRO and in agreement with the other regional offices, to suggest to HQ a revision of the ToRs for the regional offices, with particular emphasis on strengthening its support and facilitating role as a capacity enabler towards SSTC, regional learning and knowledge management, innovation, strategic communication, replication and scaling-up.
- Design and implement an organizational change process to have a structured roadmap to implement changes and strengthen a new culture and organizational mindset at regional and country levels, including a strengthened approach and strategy towards catalytic partnerships.
- Propose to HQ and provide inputs to revise the SP results framework and definitions, and include indicators to monitor the catalysing function.
- Further boost the development of inter-area and multi-disciplinary innovative responses to enhance impact and strengthen UNFPA's value add.
- Map, systematize and analyse the potential value of country effective innovative responses, based on detailed evidence on how acceleration has occurred, the enabling and inhibiting factors.
- In collaboration with HQ, develop adaptation and operationalization guidelines to facilitate alignment through contextualized implementation of the global and regional guidelines at country level (e.g. LNOB, social and gender norms change, partnerships).
- Boost normative work, advocacy and convening power, externally recognised as UNFPA value adds and strengths, by creating mechanisms in APRO to bring together countries in similar situations of facing challenges to normative work (e.g. facing pushbacks from government, with low fertility but high unmet need for FP, with high levels of GBV, transitioning out of low middle income status but with high levels of inequality) for shared problem-solving, learning from one another and boosted by an effective innovation and knowledge management strategy to retain lessons from both successes and failures – all in support of normative work. Other suggestions to strengthen UNFPA normative role in the Region include: i) boosting strategic communication; ii) strengthening of context sensitive advocacy and gender mainstreaming interventions; and ii) innovative approaches/methods in generating and analysing population data.
- Leveraging gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) can effectively strengthen UNFPA's normative role by ensuring that gender equality and reproductive health priorities are integrated into government budgets, thereby increasing resource allocation and financing towards achieving the goals of the ICPD agenda.

Recommendation 3: The next RPAP should be based on a nuanced approach to the 3 TRs, address demographic shifts, strengthen the HR, LNOB and life-cycle approaches, and include strengthened regional work based on country learning and innovations.

Links to Conclusion(s): 1, 2, 3	Priority: High	Timeframe: 12 months
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Operational implications:

- The next RPAP should have a clearer articulation of a focus on the sexual health aspect of SRHR embracing all ages and should be more explicitly inclusive of other genders, while also reflecting a strengthened conceptual and operational approach to HR, LNOB and life-cycle approaches.
- The next RPAP should not be limited to programmatic bilateral support to countries, but should include all regional work by APRO. Develop a strong regional programme that includes multi-country responses considering economic interdependence and population mobility.
- APRO should serve a brokering role to connect countries under its coverage in SSTC type partnerships and to adopt appropriate knowledge management strategies to fully document and share lessons learned from intercountry partnerships in the Region.
- RPAP must recognize the demographic diversity in the region and respond accordingly, also generating integrated responses from a complementarity, learning and innovation approach (e.g. UMICs can become “learning, innovation and modelling hubs”).
- Develop anticipatory demographic scenarios to nourish the next RPAP: High, unmet need for family planning and maternal mortality are relevant at pre-transition (high fertility, high mortality) and transition (high fertility, low mortality) stages, but what to do post transition (low fertility, low mortality), which is where many APRO countries are in now.
- Develop effective messaging for programmes to address the TR on unmet need for FP in countries that are increasingly becoming concerned about low fertility. This phenomenon should be understood via empirical investigation using comparative DHS data from APRO countries. Qualitative research should be conducted at the same time to get a country-specific perspective.
- APRO should continue regional work on the National Transfer Accounts and endeavour to bring all countries in the Region into a network of users of the NTA methodology, organize meetings/conferences/workshops to share findings, mentor countries that have not yet adopted/used this methodology. APRO should work with the COs in countries where data for the NTA calculations may be lacking/inadequate, support COs to advocate for the collection of the appropriate data by providing technical support and guidance.
- In countries with newly generated census data and DHS, APRO can move into small area estimation techniques to generate disaggregated granular data to produce estimates of UNFPA-relevant indicators at lower levels of aggregation for better identification of groups that are likely to be left behind. The role of APRO is to promote this methodology to COs, broker SSTC partnerships between countries that have used the methodology more extensively (e.g. Philippines¹⁶³) and countries that have not.

Recommendation 4: Unpack and urgently develop a programmatic response to the megatrends in the next RPAP.

Links to Conclusion(s): 1, 2	Priority: Medium	Timeframe: 24 months
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Operational implications:

- The next RPAP must not treat the megatrends as one, each megatrend requires individual attention and clarity on how it is going to be addressed.
- APRO should develop a stand on migration (especially labour migration), which is a major demographic shift in a number of countries (Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Samoa), specifically on its implication on UNFPA’s mandate areas by sponsoring studies, convening stakeholders to discuss around the implications of labour migration on gender and social norms, family and household dynamics among the left behind in relation mainly to SRHR and GBV.
- Develop a clear roadmap on how to incorporate climate change into UNFPA programming in the Region, recognizing country differences in exposure to climate risks, as well as the differential

¹⁶³ Introduction to small area estimation techniques: a practical guide for National Statistics Offices (2020). Asian Development Bank DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22617/TIM200160-2>

impact on women, girls and youth. Clarify the pathways by which climate change may impact women, girls and youth on areas that are within the UNFPA mandate.

- APRO should encourage and provide technical advice to countries for them to analyse the emergence of digital technologies as a megatrend from a SRHR/ gender/rights and GBV lens, to identify the potential role of UNFPA and the relevance of its involvement and contribution.
- APRO can create a repository of knowledge on work and innovations in countries related to the megatrends (and other issues) in the Region for regular sharing among APRO countries and potential replication and scaling-up. This could include a mechanism for COs to share out-of-the-box research ideas with other COs and pursue collaboratively under APRO guidance

Recommendation 5: Strengthen the positioning and value contribution of UNFPA to humanitarian action, with focus on the HDP nexus.

Links to Conclusion(s): 1, 2	Priority: High	Timeframe: 6 months
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Operational implications:

- Develop a clear conceptual and operational framework on the HDP nexus for APRO, ensuring alignment with the broader UN system and key stakeholders' priorities.
- Increase the capacity of the regional humanitarian team to strengthen the role of UNFPA.
- Continue supporting geospatial data generation and other relevant data to fine-tune humanitarian interventions and move towards a nexus approach.
- In countries that have newly generated census and DHS data, support COs in updating the Common Operational Data Sets used by UNCT for humanitarian response.
- Support a cross-country comparison of the effects of high male labour outmigration on the disaster response in communities.

Recommendation 6: Provide differentiated support to countries transitioning to MICs and UMICs, as well as to the PICTs, to ensure that UNFPA's mandate and priority areas are well positioned in the agenda and appropriately adapted to the new status and changing realities.

Links to Conclusion(s): 3	Priority: Medium	Timeframe: 24 months
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Operational implications:

- Based on UNFPA's mandate and priority areas, APRO to provide technical assistance to COs to support governments to develop a roadmap to transition from Least Developed Country (LDC) to Developing country status (UNCTAD) – Bangladesh and Nepal, and from lower middle income to upper middle income (World Bank) – Philippines, Vietnam for and with the government, preferably in cooperation with other UN agencies for a unified approach.
- Help COs prepare a post transition plan for countries transitioning to MIC or UMIC status for UNFPA presence that is well defined
- Provide technical assistance to COs in MICs and UMICs to ensure a consistent focus on LNOB, HRs, inequality and gender and social norm change; establish strong regional academic and innovation partnerships for best responses.
- In the PICTs, promote and support joint/integrated initiatives especially in areas of overlapping mandates (e.g. GBV, SRHR) to contribute to complementarity and better results.
- Develop differentiated, context-relevant strategies and adaptations for normative work.
- Generate knowledge based on experiences and lessons learnt in countries with different development status.

Recommendation 7: Strengthen the organizational preparedness and coherence to move forward from a funding structure and mindset, to financing enabling conditions.

Links to Conclusion(s): 4	Priority: High	Timeframe: 12 months
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Operational implications:

- The next RPAP needs to enhance efforts to strengthen internal capacities of COs to ensure a shared understanding and strategic vision of financing and the utilization of the investment cases for effective advocacy and private sector engagement.
- Ensure sufficient resources and a plan to fully roll out in the region the already approved UNFPA Financing Strategy for the operationalization of the shift from funding to funding and financing.
- While acknowledging the diversity of organizations under the “private sector” umbrella, APRO should map good practices and lessons learnt from countries in the Region and other Regions to guide a specific strategy to further mobilize private funding to benefit the UNFPA mandate at large (i.e. using innovative and blended finance workplace programmes), yet considering all ethical and no harm prevention measures. APRO should provide technical advice to COs exploring strategies to transition into funding and financing.
- Further promote and support COs in the development and systematic use of investment cases and economic analyses to inform proposals, report on results and advocate to influence government budgetary decisions. APRO should convene meetings/workshops/conferences in the Region for knowledge sharing on the generation and utilization of investment cases in different government settings so that COs can learn from one another.
- APRO should invest in having sufficient human resources on long-term contracts at the regional office to provide the technical guidance to COs in their efforts to shift from funding to funding and financing.