



**unitar**

United Nations Institute for Training and Research

# Lessons learned from evaluations

## Series 3

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Planning, Performance Monitoring, and Evaluation Unit

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
IP	Implementing partners
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
PPME	Planning, Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Unit
REA	Rapid Evidence Assessment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SFF	Strategic Framework Fund
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNSPN	United Nations Strategic Planning Network

## Executive Summary

The Planning, Performance Monitoring, and Evaluation Unit (PPME) has developed these lessons learned series to provide valuable insights for learning and improved decision-making related to future programming. This paper uses the rapid evidence assessment (REA) methodology to analyse and synthesize lessons learned from past UNITAR independent and self-evaluations undertaken since 2016.

This third edition focuses on lessons related to building partnerships, engagement with the private sector, funding and budgeting, strategy development, and accountability and transparency. Fifty-two lessons were analysed, resulting in eleven meta-lessons.

The following meta-lessons were derived:

### **Building partnerships**

- 1. Effective collaboration requires an early and clear partnership design with definition of partners' roles and responsibilities.**
- 2. Understanding of the context is essential for a well-functioning partnership.**
- 3. Sustaining partnerships requires time and continuous communication.**
- 4. Strong partnerships can lead to better delivery of results and greater beneficiary outreach.**

### **Funding and budgeting**

- 1. A profound skillset of fellows and contact with donors can be an incentive to fund projects developed by fellows of a UNITAR training programme.**
- 2. Planning and budgeting are closely intertwined. When insecurities appear in the planning of the project, this will have consequences on the budget spending and vice versa.**

- 3. Organising online training instead of face-to-face training significantly reduces the cost per participant and allows UNITAR to reach a higher number of participants.**

#### Strategy development

- 1. Strategic planning is key for the achievement of objectives.**
- 2. Exit and sustainability strategies are key to sustain capacities and project results in the long-term.**
- 3. Strategic thinking is needed in a variety of areas, including when considering working with new technologies, when selecting partners, when mitigating risks, when optimizing resources or for identifying stakeholders.**

#### Accountability and transparency

- 1. Knowledge sharing and communication with partners is of key importance to achieve the desired outputs and outcomes of a project.**

## Introduction

The purpose of evaluations, as defined by OECD/DAC (2010), is to produce credible information that enables the incorporation of lessons learned from project implementation and the evaluation into the decision-making process. This suggests that evaluation should be utilization-focused and should contribute to broader organizational learning and decision-making. Consistent with this perspective, this paper series aims to contribute to the management and disseminate knowledge generated from previous evaluations informing future programming. This paper shall provide valuable insights for improved decision-making and better development results.

In 2022, PPME administered a survey on use of PPME materials and found that the Lessons Learned database has been used by 43 per cent of respondents but was unknown or had never been used by 43 per cent of the survey respondents (the remaining have indicated NA). Similarly, the lessons learned paper series (one and two) were used by 47 per cent, but never used by 37 per cent of respondents (the remaining have indicated NA). The results highlight that while there is some interest and use, it is important to continue synthesizing and promoting the use of lessons learned that can contribute to divisional and organizational learning.

Using the REA methodology, the series looks into the past and captures lessons learned from UNITAR's evaluations (independent and self-evaluations) across its programmes from 2017-2022. Each issue of the series contains lessons from different categories. This third issue focuses on lessons related to building partnerships, engagement with the private sector, funding and budgeting, strategy development, and accountability and transparency. Fifty-two<sup>1</sup> lessons were analysed, resulting in eleven meta-lessons.

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<sup>1</sup> Seven lessons were excluded due to duplications or miscategorization resulting in a total of 52 lessons analysed out of 59 lessons in the database.

Following this section, the methodology used for analysis is presented. Findings, take-away messages and the next steps are presented afterwards.

## Methodology

The guiding questions of this study are the following:

- What can we learn from past programming to guide future design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases?
- What factors can be identified as drivers of success or reinforcing challenges towards the achievement of project/programme goals?

To answer these questions, this study analyses lessons learned from independent and self-evaluations available in the [UNITAR repository of lessons learned](#) as of January 2023, covering the period 2016-2022. For this exercise, lessons learned are understood as “*Generalizations based on evaluation experiences with projects, programs, or policies that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths or weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that affect performance, outcome, and impact.*” (OECD/DAC, 2010, p.26).

The analysis follows the REA methodology, which provides a balanced assessment of what is known (and not known) from evaluations about an intervention/programme/project by using a systematic methodology to search and critically appraise evidence (Barends, Rousseau & Briner, 2017). A two-step procedure was applied: first, lessons under each category were reclassified in sub-categories; and second, meta-lessons are derived from their respective subcategory.

Excluding duplicated or miscategorised lessons, 52 lessons were analysed for this paper. The category “engaging with the private sector” was analysed under the building partnerships category. Table 1 presents the number of lessons per category. The full list of lessons with their respective categories and sub-categories is provided under Annex 1.

Table 1: Number of lessons per category

Category	Number of lessons
Building partnerships	28
Funding and budgeting	9
Strategy Development	13
Accountability and transparency	2
Total	52

## Limitations

Two main limitations were encountered during the exercise. In order to be ‘rapid’, an REA necessarily needs to compromise on the breadth, depth and comprehensiveness of the search and, in this case, it does not allow for an in-depth study of the context of each project in which a lesson learned was formulated (Barends, Rousseau, & Briner, 2017). However, the evaluation reports served as background documents for understanding the interventions.

Another limitation is the unequal distribution of lessons learned by UNITAR division and project in some of the meta-lessons. For the “funding and budgeting” category only three UNITAR

divisions contributed. For a total of ten lessons, three meta-lessons were drafted each divided per contributing division (the Prosperity division, the division for Peace, and the division for Satellite Analysis and Applied Research). Therefore, it is difficult to generalise across the Institute as a whole. Similarly, the “accountability and transparency” category is drawn up by two lessons from two divisions (Peace and Prosperity). For the “Strategy Development” category, ten out of 13 lessons were formulated as part of independent evaluations and only three by self-evaluations. Due to the limited number of lessons, one could argue that the meta-lesson is not generalisable for UNITAR as an organisation. However, the timing, the format and the topic of the projects are considered very different, which could lead one to conclude that a lack of generalisability is no issue for this category.

Tables 2 and 3 present the distribution of lessons by division and by type of evaluation.

Table 2: Lessons per Division

Division	Number of lessons
Prosperity	17
Peace	10
Multiple	7
Satellite Analysis and Applied Research	7
Planet	6
People	4
Multilateral Diplomacy	1
Total	52

Table 3: Lessons by type of evaluation

Evaluation type	Number of lessons
Independent Evaluation	29
Self-Evaluation	23
Total	52

# Findings: Lessons Learned

## Building Partnerships

Under building partnerships, the 28 lessons of the category and one lesson of the category of engaging with the private sector are divided in five sub-categories, which led to the formulation of the three main lessons.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Quality Assurance Standards were not included in this paper given that the focus of this paper is not directly on training development.





## 1. Effective collaboration requires an early and clear partnership design with definition of partners' roles and responsibilities

The expected value-added of partnerships towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) can only be materialized if these partnership arrangements are effective in delivering planned results and in leveraging the partners' resources and expertise. Previous engagement of UNITAR in multistakeholder partnerships has taught us that effective collaboration largely relies on the clarity of both the *purpose of the partnership* and *partners' roles and responsibilities*.

An intentional design of the partnership arrangement oriented to serve the project's objectives and that brings the "right partners" into the table is key for effective partnership results. This includes being knowledgeable and strategic about the comparative advantage of partners, setting a partnership type that fits within the project landscape, i.e., leverage or exchange, combine or integrate, and transform;<sup>3</sup> and intentional design to encourage synergies and coherence with other partners' projects. More specifically, for engagement with the business sector,<sup>4</sup> UNITAR's focus on technical training is key for tangible benefits perceived by the partner.

*"The course content and technical expertise of FAO and the methodological and technical support by UNITAR were complementary strengths of the organizers that formed the basis of a strong partnership."*

Intentionality of the partnership arrangement includes strategic engagement of diverse partners in the collaboration. Characteristics of the partner organisations, such as the size of the collaborating agencies and the commitment and seniority of the partners' representatives,

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<sup>3</sup> The typologies of partnerships for the SDGs are provided by Stibbe, Reid, and Gilbert (2019).

<sup>4</sup> A [checklist for proposed partnerships with business](#) and [guidelines on cooperation between the UN and businesses](#) are provided on UNITARnet, which can be read along with the [Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact](#).

can produce effective collaboration. Smaller organizations, for example, can have less bureaucratic processes and be more flexible in adopting innovation. On the other hand, the partnership can benefit from larger organisations' networks and resources. Similarly, participation of high-level officers in the partnership can accelerate smooth implementation of activities assigned to their respective partnerships.

*“Engaging high-level national leaders, policy makers, and senior officials through specific activities such as tailored capacity building and learning events seem effective to gain buy-in and accelerate project implementation.”*

An “adequate” mix of partners in the initiative and assignment of roles and responsibilities based on their characteristics can be key for effective collaboration. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners can help to set expectations from the partnership and may also enable partner’s ownership of the ultimate mission through a better understanding and performance of their functions.

*“A lack of clarity in the ToT partnership concept or the roles of any of these stakeholders can compromise the success of the engagement.”*

## **2. Understanding of the context is essential for a well-functioning partnership**

Lessons reviewed under the [previous series](#), indicate that reflections on the local needs and priorities and incorporation of local insights can lead to improved local ownership. Similarly, knowledge and awareness of the local context in which the partnership operates are key for establishing a well-functioning partnership that can achieve its objectives. OECD (n.d.) suggests carrying out the necessary research and building an understanding of the context in which the partnership will function during the preparation phase, even before the contract is being signed.

*“Approaches that rely on collaboration across regions subject to disaster, conflict and political change are likely to face obstacles to progress. These should be anticipated and planned for.”*

## **3. Sustaining partnerships requires time and continuous communication**

Successful partnerships depend not only on a well-thought design, but also on the partner’s commitment to maintain it. Considering the bureaucratic burden and requirements that a multi-stakeholder collaboration can carry, some actions that can help ease the workload and avoid miscommunication include the scheduling of regular meetings and conversations with partners, ongoing communication, e.g., via distribution list, and engagement with focal points, and putting in place a common platform to exchange information that facilitate the planning and monitoring of the activities implemented.

Engagement with implementing partners (IP) can also benefit the organization in terms of outreach, understanding of the local context, and impact; however, it may require building capacity of the implementing partners and allocating a significant amount of time for the monitoring of activities, especially if technical capacity of the IP is lacking. The Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations (JIU) has identified three considerations for the management of IPs, as summarized in Box 1.



**Box 1. Consideration for the management of IPs issued by JIU (Bartsiotas & Prom-Jackson, 2013)**

- *“Effective monitoring and reporting of IP work is essential in assuring that funds are being spent as intended and that results are achieved.” (p.v).*
- *“In line with Results Based Management principles, key performance indicators and other performance measurements are needed to determine individual performance of IPs and assessing results achieved by programmes/projects implemented by IPs.” (p.v.).*
- *“Effective United Nations action through IPs requires better training of both IP and United Nations staff in such areas as financial management, accounting, procurement and human resources management.” (p. vi.).*

A value added of continuous exchange with partners is the opportunity to build longer-term monitoring tools, such as key performance indicators, which can foster results-oriented partnerships models.

*“The long-standing partnership between the two institutions along with regular interactions allowed WAIFEM and UNITAR to focus on the key performance indicators in the delivery of this course.”*

#### **4. Strong partnerships can lead to better delivery of results and greater beneficiary outreach**

The comparative advantage and contributions<sup>5</sup> offered by each of the partners allows for better delivery of results, especially at the output level, by ensuring action coherence and leverage of resources. Projects delivered in partnership can increase beneficiary outreach, especially for those audiences that UNITAR does not normally reach, geographical scope, and improve articulation of local stakeholders.

Over 2019, 2020 and 2021, the percentage of beneficiaries reached through events organized in partnership at UNITAR have been 93 per cent, 88 per cent, and 78 per cent, respectively (UNITAR, 2020, 2021b, 2022).

*“UNITAR, as a small agency, cannot easily directly reach the most vulnerable populations in its countries of operation. Yet, UNITAR’s partnerships with relevant institutions that support the most vulnerable enable UNITAR to influence sustainable solutions without direct intervention”.*

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<sup>5</sup> Including financial, in-kind and other type of contributions.

## Funding and budgeting



Under funding and budgeting, the nine lessons are divided in three sub-categories: contact with donors and donor funding, planning, and benefits from online trainings and projects, which led to the formulation of the three main lessons for this category.

### **1. A profound skillset of fellows and contact with donors can be an incentive to fund projects developed by fellows of a UNITAR training programme**

Fellows of a UNITAR fellowship training programme repeatedly felt that it was very hard to find donors that were willing to fund their capstone projects. The most recurrent problems the fellows encountered were a mismatch between supply and demand, not a sufficiently large network, and not enough trust between the donor and the fellow.

*"Fellows sometimes encountered challenges to implementing their projects, specifically when it came to finding donors to support them. There are a number of possible explanations for this, such as a mismatch of supply and demand or insufficient trust between Fellows and potential donors."*

However, UNITAR proposes multiple solutions to tackle this challenge. The solution is two-folded, on the one hand, UNITAR will adapt its training courses to strengthen the capabilities of the fellows in writing clear proposals, in which a thorough budget and risk mitigation and monitoring and evaluation sections are included. Furthermore, there will be focus on presentation skills to be able to create trust between the fellow and the possible donor. On the other hand, UNITAR will also ask champions with sufficient credibility and authority to promote the projects and strengthen ties between potential donors and fellows.

At a later stage, the fellowship training programmes designed included course modules around techniques for obtaining funding. It appeared to be important to have good presentation skills which helped the fellows to give a more impactful pitch to potential donors. However, participants still felt the need for more training in order to be more confident when pitching to obtain funding.

### **2. Planning and budgeting are closely intertwined. When insecurities appear in the planning of the project, this will have consequences on the budget spending and vice versa.**

High transaction costs are linked to a rotation in personnel of the project. A staff turnover can create instability in the management of the project. As a consequence, this may create inefficiencies, delays, and even compromise the achievement of outcomes.

Furthermore, when the funding of a project is not sufficiently planned beforehand, this can create challenges when delivering results. The financial business plan creates stability within the project when funding needs to be completed and when activities need to take place.

*“The project’s financial business model can present risks for efficient delivery of results.”*

Lastly, when the financial business model is not clearly defined, this can indicate that there is no clear end date of the project which consequently can cause spending imbalances which then can result in planning insecurities and uncertainties in implementation.

*“Uncertainty about the end date of a project leads to planning insecurity, implementation and spending imbalances.”*

However, planning insecurities of one project that produced the above lesson learned are largely caused by the disruption caused by COVID-19<sup>6</sup>. The planning made up at the start of the project could not be followed, and this also generated shifts and changes in the project budget. Although this lesson might come across as not representative due to the unprecedented situation, it is believed that when unforeseeable circumstances influence the project, it will influence both planning and budget since they are so closely aligned. Therefore, project management should anticipate these two inherent linkages.

### **3. Organising online training instead of face-to-face training significantly reduces the cost per participant and allows UNITAR to reach a higher number of participants.**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most trainings had to be postponed or adapted to an online format. For many divisions and programmes online trainings were not something they were accustomed to. In the [first lessons learned series](#), the lessons learned from COVID-19 were explored more in-depth. COVID-19 was perceived as an opportunity to strengthen online learning delivery methods. Moreover, it pushed programmes to discover the advantages of online training. These are described below.

First, the reach of an online training compared to a face-to-face workshop is much larger. Participants from all over the world can be reached by using live webinars, which does not require a trainer or participant to be present in one specific place. The project which generated this lesson was able to reach participants across the African continent, who would otherwise not be able to join the course. More so, longer duration online training courses can be translated in various languages to reach participants that are not comfortable in the original language of the instructor and can follow the courses at their own pace.

*“The availability of the course across different countries delivered in their language and the flexibility accorded to the participants ensured that the online training can be offered to a greater number of participants which they can follow at their own pace.”*

Second, monitoring the results and progress of participants can be followed more closely. This allowed the project team to assess on a weekly basis the progress of the participants, to support participants that are getting behind and to optimise the available slots for the course.

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<sup>6</sup> The first paper of these series discusses more in depth COVID-19-related lessons.

Lastly, the cost per participant is largely reduced when organising an e-Learning course. On top of that, a side-effect of the increase in online training, is the reduction of UNITAR's carbon footprint.

*“Conducting a course via e-Learning resulted in a significant reduction of the cost per participant and the carbon footprint of a widely dispersed audience compared with traditional face-to-face training.”*

## Strategy development



The thirteen lessons under this category can be categorized under three sub-categories with a focus on strategic planning, exit and sustainability strategies and other types of strategic thinking. Three main lessons are identified.

### 1. Strategic planning is key for the achievement of objectives

UNITAR's strategic framework provides the overall strategic direction to UNITAR's programmes and comprises a vision and mission statement, values, core functions, a set of objectives and sub-objectives, strategic enablers and risks and assumptions. Moreover, since 2018 it is closely aligned with the 2030 Agenda pillars of peace, people, planet and prosperity. This alignment is considered powerful as it is recognized both at the global level and by UN partners as well as at the country and local levels according to findings from an independent midterm evaluation of the 2018-2021 strategic framework.

*“The Strategic Framework aligned to the 2030 Agenda is powerful on the global stage and is also recognised at the local level so is an effective framework to adopt and continue.”*

A JIU report on “Strategic Planning in the United Nations System” (Inomata, 2012) revealed a variety of emerging practices within the system. According to JIU (Inomata, 2012), specific areas, in particular for operational activities for development, progress towards consistency and harmonization of planning processes has been made over the last few years.

The JIU report also refers to an informal network, the United Nations Strategic Planning Network (UNSPN), involving more than 30 organizations of the United Nations system that have set up regular exchanges of information and joint brainstorming around common issues



of interest and challenges in their respective organizations with the aim of strengthening strategic planning methods, tools and impact across the system. UNITAR serves as a member of this network.

The report further found that while corporate strategic plans are being increasingly defined through the systematized use of results-based management, their linkage with resource allocation should be much clearer. It recommends that while such linkage needs to be clarified, a strategic plan should not be budget-driven, but rather mandate-driven.

Strategic planning is undertaken on different levels, including the institutional, programme and project levels. As part of an independent evaluation of the CIFAL Global Network, the importance of strategies for achieving collective objectives for networks was highlighted. The strategy does not only help achieve objectives but also helps to structure work and activities of the centres that are situated in different continents, and work in different languages and on different subjects. As the network as such does not have a Results Framework, it requires a detailed strategy to outline the pathway to impact to avoid getting sidetracked by activities that may be interesting but not contribute to the network's or UNITAR's goals.

*“Strategies are key elements for networks to be able to structure work and focus on achievement of collective objectives. Without strategy, it is difficult for a network to focus on activities that provide pathway to impacts, and it can be easily side stepped into activities that may not necessarily be coherent.”*

## **2. Exit and sustainability strategies are key to sustain capacities and project results in the long-term**

Exit and sustainability strategies are often included as part of the project document or developed at later stages during the project as part of the project's planned deliverable.

*“Measures to ensure sustainability need to be front-loaded. The more measures to promote sustainability of results are front-loaded, the more the likelihood that such measures will become part of the process of delivering outputs and ensure sustainability of outcomes.”*

Particularly when it comes to strengthening institutional capacity or training of trainers related programming, these strategies are key. Indeed, laying the foundations for the moment donor funding ceases is important for ensuring that project results last beyond the project implementation time.

*“Sustaining national capacities in the long term requires a well-defined exit strategy. Affiliation of trained trainers with institutions is key.”*

The evaluation recommended to strengthen capacities of national training centres through a more targeted approach and identify an exit strategy by compiling best practices for training participants' and trainers' candidates recruitment with the long-term objective to contribute to national standards for professional trainers and training centres and a clear exit strategy for UNITAR support.

A programme “exit” refers to the withdrawal of all externally provided programme resources from an entire programme area (Rogers & Macías, 2004). In the UNITAR context, a programme exit may refer to the withdrawal of donor support from an entire programme area, or it may address the withdrawal of support from a specific project or partner institution. It could also refer to the end of a programme funding cycle.

A programme exit strategy is a plan describing how the programme intends to withdraw its resources while ensuring that achievement of the programme goals (relief or development) is

not jeopardized and that progress towards these goals will continue (Rogers & Macías, 2004). The goal of such a strategy is to ensure the sustainability of impacts after a programme ends. It is also sometimes referred to as a 'sustainability strategy'.

In the context of the independent evaluation of the Strategic Framework Fund (SFF),<sup>7</sup> a lesson was drawn on the importance of including exit strategies right at the project design given that the funding is considered to be rather seed funding and that projects are having a clear end date. Furthermore, piggybacking on other larger projects has proven useful.

*“For SFF projects with modest funding (average of approximately \$60,000 in 2019/2020), sustainability can be challenging. To help ensure sustainability of results and scalability, it is important to include exit strategies right at the project design. Besides, linkages to complementary programming either in UNITAR or partners agencies need to be established as early as during the project design.”*

Gardner, Greenblott, and Joubert (2005) introduce three basic approaches to exit strategies: i) phasing down; ii) phasing out; and iii) phasing over.

i. Phasing Down

Phasing down is a gradual reduction of programme activities, utilising local organisations to sustain programme benefits while the original donor (or implementing agency) deploys fewer resources. Phasing down is often a preliminary stage to phasing over and/or phasing out.

ii. Phasing Out

Most programmes are designed with sustainability and exiting in mind. On completion of the project, the partner institution will have some level of self-reliance. This refers to a donor's withdrawal of involvement in a programme without turning it over to another institution for continued implementation.

iii. Phasing Over

In this case, a donor transfers programme activities to local institutions or communities. During programme design and implementation, emphasis is placed on institutional capacity building so that the services provided can continue through local organizations.

Gardner et al. (2005) further recommend considering several questions when developing phase over exit strategies. These are presented in Box 2.

**Box 2. Questions to consider when developing phase over Exit Strategies**

- *How strong is the community's sense of ownership/commitment to continue programme activities?*
- *To what extent does the community value programme activities? What is the level of demand for the “phased over” services?*
- *Do community members, groups and service providers have the knowledge and skills needed to implement the programme activities?*
- *Do the local organizations implementing the phased over activities have sufficient institutional and human resource capacity?*
- *Are the organizations responsible for implementing phased over programmes resilient to shocks and changes in the political and social environment?*
- *Is there a viable plan to generate the consumable supplies (such as the food or agricultural inputs) that are required to implement activities?*

<sup>7</sup> The SFF is a pooled funding instrument created by the Institute's Board of Trustees to help UNITAR deliver on its mandate and achieve its strategic objectives. The SFF provides UNITAR with increased flexibility and leverage to meet learning and other capacity development needs under the objectives of the strategic framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is now called the Leave No One Behind Fund.



### 3. Strategic thinking is needed in a variety of areas, including when considering working with new technologies, when selecting partners, when mitigating risks, when optimizing resources or for identifying stakeholders

Strategies are in general plans of action designed to achieve long-term or overall aims. Strategic options can be identified for a variety of areas of work and levels and indicate how resources will be allocated to achieve the objectives. The lessons under this sub-category suggest that strategy development can lead to high quality when e.g., working with new technologies, selecting partners strategically, optimizing resources or identifying stakeholders. There are obviously additional areas that can benefit from strategy development.

*“In addition to a rigorous results framework, a coherent strategy and the selection of events that can influence decision-makers are key priorities to optimize resources.”*

One of these is risk management which is performed at the UNITAR institutional level and risks are identified in UNITAR’s strategic framework. In addition, risks and assumptions should be part of all project planning and an inventory of risks and mitigation measures is required for all projects budgeted at \$1 million and above, and for all projects to be delivered in war-torn or fragile states. For all other projects below the \$1 million threshold, this requirement is discretionary (although recommended). When identifying risks, it is key to also develop a mitigation strategy as the following lesson highlights:

*“Following the COVID-19 pandemic, strategize other potential shocks and outline mitigatory measures.”*

It is useful to build new projects based on previous projects’ lessons learned.

## Accountability and transparency



From the two lessons under this category, one meta-lesson was formulated.

### 1. Knowledge sharing and communication with partners and with participants is of key importance to achieve the desired outputs and outcomes of a project.

When working together in a joint project, it goes without saying that **communication between partners is essential**. However, when the partners have diverse fields of expertise it can be challenging to communicate in an efficient way. When partners construct good lines of communication, the project will run more smoothly.

*“Constant coordination by the organisers and Mentors allowed the course to run seamlessly over a 4-week period.”*

Furthermore, results from a self-evaluation point out that when a good communication between the partners is established, this can make the complementarity of the partners flourish and make participants feel comfortable and experience a positive learning experience.

Moreover, clear **communication and knowledge sharing with participants** are also of key importance to accomplish the intended outputs and outcomes of the project. The project made a needs assessment of the participants before the start of the programme and shared the results at the start of the project. It appeared that there was a mismatch or knowledge gap between project participants and content. Project management initiated some extra introductory sessions to reduce this gap.

*“The results of the assessment indicated the need for more focused training on the project management cycle. [...] To fill the gap, introductory sessions were incorporated to outline the concepts of the project management cycle and sessions examining Organizational Needs Assessment, in order to provide all Fellows with baseline knowledge, along with that on proposal writing and action plan development.”*

Transparency is facilitated by good communication between partners, and between partners and participants. To understand and incorporate this, is important to achieve intended outputs and outcomes of a project.

## Key Take-Aways

The rapid evidence assessment has led to the following take-away messages:

- Lessons learned vary by division. While some divisions are champions in formulating lessons learned in evaluation reports, others have less incorporated this practice. The difference of number of lessons by division can also be explained by the fact that the number of self-evaluation reports differs by division due to different reporting requirements and budgetary thresholds.
- Building partnerships is of extreme importance to UNITAR as almost all its recent events are organized with partners. Important elements for successful partnerships include a clear partnership design and assignment of roles and responsibilities at early stages, awareness of the context in which the partnership is being developed, and continuous communication among partners.
- While this lessons learned paper focusses on the theme of partnerships, strategy and funding, it is closely related to other themes such as communication.
- Though COVID-19 related lessons were analysed as part of an earlier lessons learned series, lessons falling under categories part of this series were also related to COVID-19. It appears that major emergencies result in much lesson learning.

# The Way Forward

As next steps, the following actions are foreseen:

- This paper series will be continued and future editions will focus on different categories of lessons learned.
- The Lessons Learned database and this assessment shall inform new programming development.

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# Annexes

## Annex 1. Lessons compilation

Lessons	Category	Sub-category
<p>Identifying, building and maintaining partnerships requires time and perseverance. It is difficult to maintain partnerships in the absence of regularly-scheduled meetings and conversations.</p>	Building partnerships	Time investment for sustaining partnership
<p>Parterships are instrumental in delivering results. The positive findings on relevance, effectiveness and efficiency highlight the extent to which the vast array of partnerships is important in delivering results. In addition to partnerships with users and providers of the Rapid Mapping Service, including UN, non-governmental, private sector and other entities, the partnership with CERN which provides in-kind support for UNOSAT's office premises and access to high-speed Internet is not to be underestimated. In fact, it is unlikely that UNOSAT would be able to provide the Service in its present form in the absence of the CERN partnership.</p>	Building partnerships	Partnerships for delivering/achieving results
<p>Broad-based partnerships are instrumental to the achievement of development results. The approaches that partnerships take, and the terminology used to describe them, can vary, and expectations amongst donors, implementing agencies, beneficiaries and other partnership stakeholders can understandably differ. For example, this evaluation has noted that while UN CC:Learn is openly described as a 'partnership', the programme's operating model is not representative of a 'partnership' as that term is commonly understood. Consequently, there is a risk that the expectations established through use of the term 'partnerships' are not met. It is therefore important that appropriate effort and focus are placed on working towards meeting those expectations. The well-regarded example of UN CC:Learn's work at the COPs illustrates one channel through which the programme's partnership approach can be consolidated and deepened across 34 diverse organizations.</p>	Building partnerships	Partnership arrangement
<p>The combination of UNITAR training experience with World Heritage expertise offered a basis for adaptive approaches, yet also triggered specific requirements in terms of maintaining up-to-date knowledge and institutional cooperation.</p>	Building partnerships	Partnership arrangement
<p>The long-standing partnership between the two institutions along with regular interactions allowed WAIFEM and UNITAR to focus on the key performance indicators in the delivery of this course.</p>	Building partnerships	Time investment for sustaining partnership

Cooperation with the Austrian Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs proved once again particularly conducive to the success of the Vienna-based events.

Building partnerships

Partnership arrangement

There is value in UNITAR engaging in training delivery indirectly, working in partnership with training institutions from the region. This involves partnerships that provide technical support, sharing of ideas and the transfer of financial resources.

Building partnerships

Partnership arrangement

Ongoing communications and engagement with focal points is critical. While it might sound obvious, coordination and communication with PCCs' focal points and key stakeholders in the MINUSMA for instance are critical to be ensure timely planning, understand the needs of the beneficiary and adapt to the delays in logistics and administrative requirements, if needed. It is also critical for EMPABB to keep all contact details of PCCs and relevant authorities up to date.

Building partnerships

Time investment for sustaining partnership

Smaller UN agencies and projects can be more agile  
UN CC:Learn has benefitted from UNITAR's relatively smaller size as a UN agency, enabling the project to avoid bureaucracy and to be innovative and flexible.

Smaller UN agencies and projects can have substantial impacts in ways that larger UN agencies would struggle to, through having the flexibility to be more agile and fewer organisational restrictions which enable them to be more innovative and adaptive in their ways of working.

Flat organisational structure, and intentional project design and recruitment, to encourage collaborative innovation, enables new approaches to be identified, tested and incubated - such as UN CC:Learn's country methodology; Youth Climate Dialogues and Climate Classrooms.

Building partnerships

Partnership arrangement



Effective collaboration requires contextual understanding, written agreements and relationship UNITAR can learn from UN CC:Learn's effective collaboration between a large number of diverse partners, and build on this learning to ensure the success of and synergies between its other projects: Projects requiring collaboration between 36 global organisations, are complex. Effective collaboration requires more than annual meetings and MoUs identifying one-off collaboration. Opportunities for growing sustainable synergetic partnerships jointly working towards global change are possible through developing overarching agreements with all or a small number of core partners, together with intentionally taking time to get to know each other's mandates, activities and culture, building trust to ensure joint success.

Approaches that rely on collaboration across regions subject to disaster, conflict and political change are likely to face obstacles to progress. These should be anticipated and planned for. Achieving national cross government, cross sectoral collaboration is a substantial task, requiring different approaches in different contexts, and requiring a country presence.

MoUs between partner agencies should clarify roles and decision-making responsibilities, including responsibilities for technical contribution and technical sign off, before project activities start.

Building partnerships

Partnership arrangement

Partner ownership, buy-in and clarity in roles. Successful ToT requires a spirit of multi-stakeholder partnership, buy-in and clarity in roles by the ToT service provider, the beneficiary institution/client, the donor (if applicable) and the individual trainers to be trained. A lack of clarity in the ToT partnership concept or the roles of any of these stakeholders can compromise the success of the engagement.

Building partnerships

Partnership arrangement

Inter-agency collaboration: There are good reasons why UN and other multilateral agencies should work together more closely to achieve the SDGs. In practice inter-agency collaboration is made difficult by bureaucratic requirements established to ensure tight accountability for funds provided.

Building partnerships

Time investment for sustaining partnership

Engaging high-level national leaders, policy makers, and senior officials through specific activities such as tailored capacity building and learning events seem effective to gain buy-in and accelerate project implementation.

Building partnerships

Partnership arrangement

A governance system based on co-leadership is complex and requires frequent interactions and exchanges.

Building partnerships

Time investment for sustaining partnership

UNITAR, as a small agency, cannot easily directly reach the most vulnerable populations in its countries of operation. Yet, UNITAR's partnerships with relevant institutions that support the most vulnerable enable UNITAR to influence sustainable solutions without direct intervention. Working at the institutional level does lead to positive benefits for vulnerable people

Building partnerships

Partnerships for delivering/achieving results

Partnerships and alliances with other donors and development actors working with youth and communities in conflict-afflicted areas contribute to broaden outreach of beneficiaries, extend geographical scope and increase strategic value of activities by articulating other stakeholders locally	Building partnerships	Partnerships for delivering/achieving results
Because of the two-year project lifespan, long-term relationships with partners are essential to ensure sustainability after the project closes.	Building partnerships	Partnership for sustainability
The partnership model, built on respective comparative advantages of FAO and UNITAR, leveraged the best of both institutions (i.e., FAO providing content and content-related expertise, while UNITAR providing the e-Learning pedagogy and technology) and continues to be an effective partnership model.	Building partnerships	Partnership arrangement
Regular discussions and coordination allowed for smooth implementation and roll-out of the course.	Building partnerships	Time investment for sustaining partnership
The continuing commitment by the top management of both FAO and UNITAR has been greatly appreciated and a great example of inter-agency cooperation	Building partnerships	Time investment for sustaining partnership
The commitment of both parties' top management to the partnership was also greatly appreciated in continuing the inter-agency collaboration and benefitting from the synergies of both institutions	Building partnerships	Time investment for sustaining partnership
The partnership model – built on AGFUND and UNITAR's respective comparative advantages – leveraged the best of both institutions. Regular discussions and coordination allowed for smooth conduct and roll-out of the joint programme. The commitment of both parties' top management to the partnership was also greatly appreciated in the smooth implementation while benefitting from synergies of both institutions.	Building partnerships	Partnership arrangement; time investment for sustaining partnership
The SFF serves as a modality for cross-divisional engagement. While Directors are fully aware of this opportunity in a context of a silo culture rooted in UNITAR's funding system, at staff level awareness raising is still required. The SFF evaluation shows that cross-programmatic collaboration can help overcome silo cultures, but needs to be unambiguously communicated to all staff. It also requires a long-term focus and at sufficient scale for meaningful collaboration.	Building partnerships	Partnership for sustainability

Government and Civil Society Organisations continue to have differing interests, priorities, schedules, and activities, which hinder effective communication and collaboration.

Linked to this is a lack of funding, or finance-related stability; equality among and between organisations; and trust between actors. While some of this is caused by geographical issues – outer islands in many of these countries being isolated, for example – there were also comments made regarding the relative disparity of fund availability between government and Civil Society Organisations. This is exacerbated by both a misconception that DRR planning and response is the sole responsibility of government, as well as an unwillingness to share information between entities.

Building partnerships

Collaboration between partners

In the area of peacekeeping where many different actors have diverse mandates, close collaboration between them is required for an effective and coherent action. In the long run, coherence with actors and their respective initiatives can also lead to resource efficiencies and contribute to stronger impacts

Building partnerships

Partnerships for delivering/achieving results

The course content and technical expertise of FAO and the methodological and technical support by UNITAR were complementary strengths of the organizers that formed the basis of a strong partnership

Building partnerships

Partnership arrangement

Engagement with implementing partners can lead to significant resource efficiencies, but time and dedicated resources are required for monitoring and reporting of implementing partners' work

Building partnerships

Time investment for sustaining partnership

FAO and UNITAR's partnership provide a neutral space for officials from different countries and level of development to discuss and share views and solutions to common challenges. In addition, UNITAR's extensive experience in the training implementation ensures customized solution to FAO's work in the region

Building partnerships

Partnership arrangement

Sharing the needs assessment with the Fellows allowed the Fellows to identify common issues among themselves and the results functioned as discussion points when examining lessons learned.

Accountability and transparency

Knowledge sharing with participants

Constant communication between FAO and UNITAR allowed the course to run smoothly, without major inaccuracies or misunderstandings. All issues arising were resolved in a short time and in a way that made course participants feel comfortable and deliver a positive learning experience

Accountability and transparency

Knowledge sharing / communication

Strategies are key elements for networks to be able to structure work and focus on achievement of collective objectives. Without strategy, it is difficult for a network to focus on activities that provide pathway to impacts, and it can be easily side stepped into activities that may not necessarily be coherent

Strategy development

Strategic planning

<p>The Strategic Framework aligned to the 2030 Agenda is powerful on the global stage and is also recognised at the local level so is an effective framework to adopt and continue</p>	<p>Strategy development</p>	<p>Strategic planning</p>
<p>UNITAR's work on frontier technologies is highly valued and has a large potential to influence all areas of UNITAR's work. UNITAR has a natural inclination towards innovation and technology which should be nurtured but not forced where it is likely to be resource intensive without sufficient return</p>	<p>Strategy development</p>	<p>Strategic thinking</p>
<p>While UNITAR is more expensive compared to some other capacity building actors the quality of their activities is high enough to warrant the extra pricing and strategic partners appreciate the quality of activities.</p>	<p>Strategy development</p>	<p>Strategic thinking</p>
<p>Following the COVID-19 pandemic, strategize other potential shocks and outline mitigatory measures.</p>	<p>Strategy development</p>	<p>Strategic thinking</p>
<p>In addition to a rigorous results framework, a coherent strategy and the selection of events that can influence decision-makers are key priorities to optimize resources.</p>	<p>Strategy development</p>	<p>Strategic thinking</p>
<p>Measures to ensure sustainability need to be front-loaded. The more measures to promote sustainability of results are front-loaded, the more the likelihood that such measures will become part of the process of delivering outputs and ensure sustainability of outcomes.</p>	<p>Strategy development</p>	<p>Exit and sustainability strategies</p>
<p>For SFF projects with modest funding (average of approximately \$60,000 in 2019/2020), sustainability can be challenging. To help ensure sustainability of results and scalability, it is important to include exit strategies right at the project design. Besides, linkages to complementary programming either in UNITAR or partners agencies need to be established as early as during the project design.</p>	<p>Strategy development</p>	<p>Exit and sustainability strategies</p>
<p><b>VARIOUS TYPES OF DISASTERS</b>  The Programme specifically focused on tsunami-based disaster risk management and reduction, as casualties from tsunamis are usually significantly more compared to those from other disasters. However, the population of SIDS also frequently encounter other types of disasters, such as cyclones, sea level surges, flooding, earthquakes, and mud slides. These other types of disasters therefore could be beneficial and relevant to touch upon during the Programme.</p>	<p>Strategy development</p>	<p>NA</p>

<p>Focusing on the link between preparedness and recovery  This link, reinforced by the incorporation of lessons learned both in policy and practice and implemented by both government and civil society actors, was a theme that participants encountered a number of times during the Programme. The ensuing discussion among and between participants examined ways and means that such a link could be highlighted within their own planning processes</p>	Strategy development	NA
<p>Change Management: The need for more structured, process-driven stakeholder identification processes, linked with role allocation which aligns with relative strength and focus of each stakeholder  Building on the change management presentations, discussion focused on the need for more structured processes for stakeholder identification and any related role allocation. The added legitimacy and perceived results from such a focus were outlined as were methodologies participants could use to realise this, particularly with regard to transition modelling</p>	Strategy development	NA
<p>Sustaining national capacities in the long term requires a well-defined exit strategy.  Affiliation of trained trainers with institutions is key.</p>	Strategy development	Exit and sustainability strategies
<p>It is useful to build new projects based on previous projects' lessons learned.</p>	Strategy development	NA
<p>Fellows sometimes encounter challenges to implementing their projects, specifically when it comes to finding donors to support them. These challenges can be overcome through finding champions with credibility and authority to promote projects and strengthen ties between Fellows and donors.</p>	Funding and budgeting	Contact with donors/ donor funding
<p>Fellows sometimes faced challenges obtaining funding for their projects. In order for Fellows to be able to secure funding, future programme cycles should provide more training on finding project champions.</p>	Funding and budgeting	Contact with donors/ donor funding
<p>High transaction costs are associated with turnover in personnel of project delivery and beneficiary partners . Turnover of staff of delivery and beneficiary partners can produce delays in implementation and reverberate and create inefficiencies by delaying output delivery and compromising achievement of outcomes.</p>	Funding and budgeting	Planning
<p>The project's financial business model can present risks for efficient delivery of results. The absence of advance-funding creates challenges in financial management that may affect and present risks related to project planning, spending and ultimately delivery of results.</p>	Funding and budgeting	Planning

Uncertainty about the end date of a project leads to planning insecurity, implementation and spending imbalances.

Funding and budgeting

Planning

Conducting a course via e-Learning resulted in a significant reduction of the cost per participant and the carbon footprint of a widely dispersed audience compared with traditional face-to-face training. Besides, face-to-face training delivery is not a practical option in the current circumstances.

Funding and budgeting

Online benefits

Access to knowledge and skills development delivered online resulted in a significant reduction of the cost per participant and the carbon footprint of a widely dispersed learners compared with traditional face-to-face training. As a result, the programme was able to accommodate greater number of beneficiaries. The app-based mobile-ready course delivery enhanced the learning experience through greater engagement, easy access of the courses, while ensuring that each participant has opportunity to interact Experts to support their learning journey.

Funding and budgeting

Online benefits

#### PARTICIPANTS SOMETIME FIND IT DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN FUNDING FOR THEIR PROJECTS

Following the programme's completion, participants sometimes faced challenges obtaining funding for the projects they had developed throughout the programme. Reasons for this may include mismatches between supply and demand or insufficient networking and trust between participants and potential investors.

In order for participants to be able to secure funding for their projects, the 2019 programme provided deeper training on project champions, investors, and building network and other relevant topics that can help participants implement their business projects.

Building the relationships and trust necessary to receive honest feedback takes time and patience. In future iterations of the programme, UNITAR Staff and Resource Persons will make sure participants understand the time required to thoroughly carry out data collection, as well as provide advice for building relationships with a target community.

Funding and budgeting

Contact with donors/ donor funding



KNOWLEDGE AROUND OBTAINING FUNDING AND TECHNIQUES WAS INCLUDED IN THE PROGRAMME

Participants sometimes encountered challenges to implementing their projects, specifically when it came to finding donors to support them. There are several possible explanations for this, such as a mismatch of supply and demand or insufficient trust between Participants and potential donors. However, these challenges can be overcome through finding champions with credibility and authority to promote projects and strengthen ties between Participants and donors. Participants can also aim for success by writing clear, comprehensive proposals, which are based on objective needs assessments. Proposals should clearly define said needs and be supported by data, sound budget, risk mitigation, and monitoring and evaluation sections. Additionally, Participants's presentation skills contribute to finding funding and they should attempt to give an impactful pitch to potential donors. These are all elements of UNITAR's current programme, but UNITAR plans to augment and deepen these lessons based on the experiences of former Participants.

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Funding and budgeting

Contact with donors/ donor funding