



# United Nations Population Fund

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**UNFPA – Evaluation**

## United Nations Population Fund

### Formative evaluation of the UNFPA innovation initiative

*Summary*

The purpose of this evaluation was to conduct an evidence-based, consultative formative assessment of the UNFPA Innovation Initiative. The objectives were to inform the implementation of the first phase of the Innovation Initiative, the design of the second phase; and the development of the strategic plan, 2018-2021.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are UNFPA Executive Board members and senior management and staff at the global, regional and country levels, as well as other United Nations organizations implementing innovation initiatives and stakeholders vested in the area of innovation.

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## I. Background of UNFPA innovation initiative

1. The UNFPA strategic plan, 2014-2017 first introduced corporate approaches to innovation. The plan highlights the need to develop a “strong culture of experimenting with new ideas, failing, learning lessons, and trying again,” supported by the creation of an Opportunities Fund. UNFPA announced ‘innovation and creativity’ as a 2014 Corporate Priority Project, with the objective to encourage actions generating and rewarding innovation. UNFPA further endorsed the United Nations Open Innovation Principles in May 2015 and became a member of the United Nations Innovation Network (UNIN), an informal group of innovation staff from a number of United Nations organizations.

2. The Innovation Initiative, launched in 2014 with the drafting of the UNFPA Innovation concept paper, constitutes the institutional framework structuring innovation efforts in the organization. The Inter-divisional Working Group (IDWG) on innovation was then established to examine and develop ideas on how to foster and manage innovation within UNFPA. In 2015, the IDWG produced the ‘Updated Vision of Innovation at UNFPA for the period 2015-2017’, which guides a transition of the Innovation Initiative to a more systemic approach to innovation.

3. As the main implementation mechanism of the Innovation Initiative the Innovation Fund follows a two-stream approach. Stream one tests innovation projects sourced from country, regional and headquarter teams through regular calls for proposals. Stream two promotes a culture of innovation across UNFPA and supports country offices and business units in headquarters in hosting innovation days, developing internal and external communication platforms, networking activities and building partnerships.

## II. Objectives of the evaluation

4. The purpose of the evaluation was to conduct an evidence-based, consultative and participative formative assessment of the UNFPA Innovation Initiative. The objectives were to provide learning inputs to managers on implementing the first phase of the Innovation Initiative and designing the second phase; improving programme design, processes and systems; and informing the development of the strategic plan, 2018-2021 and UNFPA strategies in innovation.

5. This was the first formative evaluation conducted at UNFPA, an important pilot in terms of an innovative approach to evaluation. Formative evaluations are conducted either during programme development or at early stages of implementation, and focus on understanding how the intervention works, focusing on processes and learning, rather than on judgements about overall achievements. The evaluation was therefore responsive to the institutional context, allowing real-time feedback to programme staff and facilitating a continuous adaptive loop to decision-making needs. This evaluation has taken place at a strategic time for UNFPA in terms of defining the emerging role of innovation to address pressing development issues.

6. The evaluation covered UNFPA field offices and business units in headquarters. Its primary focus was the Innovation Fund, as a main funding mechanism of the Innovation Initiative. The scope of the exercise included the performance of the Innovation Fund, the links between the Fund and the Innovation Initiative as well as links between the Initiative and other innovation efforts in UNFPA. The approach to innovation by other United Nations organizations and their implementation practices were included in a comparative study of the status of innovation across 10 organizations — the first to be undertaken in the United Nations system — which was used to generate insights for UNFPA.

7. The UNFPA Innovation Fund Secretariat requested the independent formative evaluation and it was commissioned and managed by the Evaluation Office. It was conducted by an external evaluation team between June 2016 and August 2017 with the active participation of a Reference Group.

### III. Evaluation methodology

8. The methodology followed a mixed, multi-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data and methods of analysis. Jointly planned and designed by members of the Evaluation Reference Group and the IDWG on innovation, the evaluation was utilization-focused and conducted to ensure that real-time input informed ongoing decisions. The methodology made extensive use of comparative analysis, systematically comparing UNFPA with other United Nations organizations, and UNFPA offices with different degrees of involvement in the Innovation Fund.

9. Data collection methods included document and literature review, semi-structured individual interviews with key informants, face-to-face group discussions and online group consultations, an online survey for non-applicants to the Innovation Fund, and participant observation techniques applied during the UNFPA East and Southern Africa innovation workshop in Nairobi. The evaluation interacted directly with 72 of the 121 UNFPA field offices worldwide and, in total, consulted 238 people through interviews. Data analysis included qualitative and quantitative methods and featured content analysis, comparative analysis, descriptive statistics, inferential statistics and reconstruction of the implicit theory of change.

10. For quality assurance, the evaluation team used triangulation and internal and external validation mechanisms. Triangulation, used to ensure reliability, encompassed cross-checking pieces of evidence from different sources and cross-checking the results of applying different data analysis methods. Internal validation took place through internal revisions among evaluation team members and between the team and the UNFPA Evaluation Office. External validation consisted of presentations and discussions of preliminary findings in debriefings made at the East and Southern Africa Innovation Workshop and at UNFPA headquarters in working sessions with the Evaluation Reference Group and the IDWG on innovation.

11. This evaluation, as any corporate UNFPA evaluations, adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards for evaluation on alignment to internationally agreed principles, goals and targets; utility; credibility; independence; impartiality; ethics; transparency; human rights and gender equality; national evaluation capacities; and professionalism.

### IV. Key conclusions of the evaluation

12. **Conclusion 1: The Innovation Initiative and the Innovation Fund have been key contributors to positioning innovation and generating a drive to innovate in UNFPA.** The Innovation Initiative and the Innovation Fund made significant contributions to generating a drive to innovate in UNFPA by creating awareness and jump-starting the process towards nurturing a culture of innovation. The Innovation Fund spurred motivation and excitement and enabled new spaces around innovation, prompting new dynamics and a sense that staff can think differently. Fifty-five per cent of UNFPA field offices submitted proposals to the Innovation Fund, with the number of applications increasing fourfold in less than two years from the first to the last call for proposals. Furthermore, it helped staff to reconnect and realign with the organization's mandate in a tangible way by offering opportunities to bring about change for and with adolescents and women.

13. The Innovation Fund has positioned innovation across the organization at the country, regional and headquarters levels. It has also helped lift the profile of innovation in the UNFPA corporate agenda and generated the perception among staff and external actors of a determined move towards innovation in the organization. The Innovation Fund led to internal recognition that future UNFPA relevance and success hinge on embracing innovation.

14. Furthermore, the original intent of the Innovation Fund was to establish a flexible mechanism for UNFPA to experiment with innovative approaches. The Innovation Fund fulfilled this role by fostering an exploratory process that generated meaningful institutional learning for a UNFPA approach to innovation.

15. **Conclusion 2: The Innovation Fund has shown a mixed performance, making modest contributions to developing a culture that nurtures innovation yet managing to deliver promising innovative solutions.** The Innovation Fund had the triple objectives of developing a culture that nurtures innovation, increasing organizational efficiency and effectiveness through business process improvements, and developing flexible and innovative solutions to respond to emerging development challenges. Nurturing a culture of innovation was the main goal, a unique feature of the UNFPA innovation approach when compared to other United Nations organizations.

16. The momentum generated by the Innovation Fund includes tangible progress in accepting new approaches and ideas. However, effects in terms of assuming and tolerating risk, accepting and assimilating failure and learning from success and failure have been modest. Explanatory factors include the Innovation Fund's project approach, the use of open calls for proposals and weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation systems. Other explanatory factors go beyond the Innovation Fund and are associated with difficulties in handling failure and risk aversion as inhibiting factors to innovation across the United Nations system and in the international development sector.

17. The Innovation Fund managed to deliver promising innovative solutions, some of which have had tangible effects on women and youth such as the portable mobile learning system in Tanzania and Ethiopia, the approach introduced in mobilizing young people for social cohesion in Syria, and the mobile health iloveLive.mobi platform in South Africa.

18. **Conclusion 3: The Innovation Initiative has provided an added impetus to the organizational uptake of innovation. However, despite some attempts it has not yet become a corporate vision for innovation in UNFPA.** The scope of the Initiative has always been broader than the Innovation Fund. In practice, however, the Initiative's implementation has mostly coincided with the projects supported by the Innovation Fund.

19. Attempts to move from a focus on funding individual projects to an overall corporate strategy to promote innovation have not fully prospered. Hindering factors include the lack of awareness of the 'Updated Vision of Innovation at UNFPA for 2015-2017' outside the IDWG, the IDWG operating model, the modest progress in implementing the Initiative's work plan for 2016 and the absence of a vision of innovation shared across business units.

20. Pivotal operational decisions need to be made in relation to the innovation model, such as the appropriateness of innovation labs, scope of the Innovation Fund, and approach to acceleration models. Making these decisions will be difficult without a clear, shared organization-wide strategic vision on innovation to guide the process.

21. **Conclusion 4: Despite the enthusiasm and impulse generated by the Innovation Fund, a series of hindering factors linked to staff incentives and policies hamper further progress towards a culture of innovation.** These obstacles, as perceived by UNFPA staff, are mostly related to incentives. The main ones are: insufficient time to innovate; innovation seen as an additional incidental task; inadequate capacity in terms of the innovation skill sets of staff; insufficient buy-in from senior management (in field offices and business units); and the current absence of reporting requirements on innovation. Another recurrent obstacle is the disincentives to assuming risks and embracing failure in a context where these extra efforts usually go unacknowledged and unrecognized by managers and supervisors.

22. Most of the obstacles hindering further progress in nurturing a culture of innovation are linked to staff incentives, innovation-friendly policies, and elements that constitute an enabling environment for innovation in UNFPA. The barriers identified by the evaluation are similar in offices that applied to the Innovation Fund and in offices that did not apply, and appear in all regions irrespective of their engagement with the Innovation Fund.

23. Insufficient senior management buy-in and the absence of requirements to report are related to the limited role of innovation in the strategic plan, 2014-2017. Innovation is only featured in the plan as one of the three elements in Output 3 under organizational effectiveness and efficiency ("increased adaptability through innovation, partnership and communications")

and in two explicit mentions on the need to help create a culture of innovation. The fact that innovation is still a peripheral element in the strategic plan results shows innovation is not necessarily being seen as a priority in front of other competing priorities and pressures to deliver regular programmes.

24. **Conclusion 5: The Innovation Initiative and Innovation Fund are not well connected to the rest of the organization. This disconnect occurs with business units that play a role in the enabling environment for innovation and with other innovation activities beyond those supported by the Innovation Fund.** The Innovation Initiative and Fund have remained disconnected from the business units that play a role in developing the innovation-friendly policies and procedures that constitute the enabling environment for innovation in UNFPA. As a result, the internal enabling environment is less conducive to innovation than it could be.

25. This disconnect also affects the Innovation Initiative and Innovation Fund in relation to other innovation activities across UNFPA, and manifests in limited interactions at the headquarters and field levels. Regional innovation networks do not play a role in this regard, with the exception of the East and Southern Africa region, where there is an increasing degree of coordination between the Innovation Fund, the regional innovation network and the Innovation Accelerator programme (iAccelerator). This fragmented approach to innovation is detrimental to maximizing synergies and organizational learning.

26. **Conclusion 6: There are issues with the current approach of the Innovation Initiative to human resources.** The Innovation Fund's achievements are considerable given the limited number of staff fully dedicated to innovation. Staff constraints hinder the development of a sustainable model to foster innovation in UNFPA. Overall, there is a mismatch between the limited human resources and innovation being a corporate priority. UNFPA does not have an innovation unit, and innovation staffing levels in UNFPA are low when compared to other United Nations organizations - even to organizations at similar stages of development in terms of innovation.

27. The UNFPA approach relies on a volunteer-based model rooted in innovation focal points in country offices and the IDWG at the global level. The rationale for a volunteer-based model is coherent and follows good practice; the problem is the practical application of the model. Focal points' work is not reflected in job descriptions and often goes unacknowledged and unrecognized. Further, IDWG member efforts were put into time-consuming operational tasks (e.g. proposal selection and implementation monitoring), turning them into doers rather than innovation advocates and enablers. Therefore, the Innovation Fund's achievements are considerable given the limited number of staff fully dedicated to innovation. However, inadequate staff resource arrangements pose strategic risks to innovation.

28. **Conclusion 7: Innovation-focused partnerships have played a smaller role than expected, with implications for the UNFPA approach to innovation.** Innovation-focused partnerships, with the private sector in particular, were an explicit, intentional goal of the pursued corporate approach to innovation. However, the Innovation Initiative, including the Innovation Fund, has been characterized by traditional partnerships with implementing partners. Some projects supported by the Innovation Fund have partnered with the private sector, but these have been exceptions. Ties with innovation ecosystem players at the country, regional and headquarters levels have been modest. The factors explaining the moderate role of innovation-specific partnerships include low incentives to pursue non-traditional partnerships, insufficient time to develop partnerships, short time-frames for submitting proposals and preference for internal crowd-sourcing.

29. The Innovation Fund Secretariat made tangible efforts to link UNFPA with other United Nations organizations. Some occasional activity-based joint work has taken place. Networking translated into occasional activity-based partnerships, such as the participation of UNFPA in the United Nations Data Innovation Lab workshops. However, longer-term partnerships focusing on substantial technical areas of interest, such as innovation funds, labs, accelerators and M&E systems for innovation, have not occurred. This hinders economies of scope for

donors funding similar approaches (innovation funds, labs, accelerators) across United Nations organizations. The cross-fertilization potential of the UNIN is still untapped.

30. **Conclusion 8: Current monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, which have proved inadequate for innovation projects, are one of the ultimate causes behind limitations in accruing learning, limitations adopting fail-fast approaches and limited progress in building a UNFPA brand for innovation.** M&E mechanisms for Innovation Fund-supported projects have followed the same logic as M&E for regular projects; the mechanisms were based on logical frameworks that focused on intended outputs, data requirements that focused on progress reporting (such as reporting on inputs, activities and outputs), and outcome data that was collected only at the end of the intervention.

31. However, learning when testing innovative solutions is also linked to unexpected outputs and outcomes. Determining whether an innovation project is failing requires real-time outcome-level data. Similarly, brand-building on innovation hinges on demonstrating results, which requires data-driven success stories that flow from outcome-based M&E systems not yet in place. Scale-up decisions need evaluative assessments on what works, how, why, for whom and in what circumstances. This implies using evaluative tools beyond traditional monitoring and reporting. Real-time outcome-based monitoring and evaluation systems constitute a critical investment because performance, learning and branding depend on them. These investments, however, have yet to be made in the context of the Innovation Fund.

## V. Recommendations

32. **Recommendation 1: UNFPA should make critical strategic decisions in order to frame the foundations for its corporate approach to innovation.** UNFPA should prioritize making a series of strategic decisions in order to set the framework for and bring strategic clarity and focus to its corporate approach to innovation. These critical decisions include determining: (a) the specific areas innovation should prioritize and focus upon; (b) how innovation should be positioned inside the organization; (c) how UNFPA wants to position itself within the innovation ecosystem (in the mandate areas); (d) what forms of innovation (e.g. products, services, processes) UNFPA should focus on (and how); and (e) what stages of innovation (ideation, testing, scale up) UNFPA wants to support (and how).

33. UNFPA should adapt the model for innovation and address these critical decisions with two sets of considerations in mind. First, consider the specific characteristics of the organization: a relatively small agency compared to other United Nations organizations, a complex mandate and funding constraints. Second, take stock of what UNFPA has proven to be good at by looking at its comparative advantages and strengths as an organization. UNFPA could use these assets to position itself within innovation ecosystems to address the core problems UNFPA decides to innovate for.

34. A first consideration is to determine the specific areas that innovation should prioritize and focus on. This strategic decision should answer the questions: What is innovation for at UNFPA? This question is related to why to innovate and to the use of innovation. It should also answer the question: In what areas (thematic, operational) should innovation focus on? This would determine the scope of innovation. Good candidates for focus areas would be areas that emerge as a response to the question: For which problems does UNFPA needs an innovative solution? This would point at areas where outcomes are stagnant or reversing, at areas where business as usual has not worked so far, or at areas suffering from setbacks in delivering the mandate (areas where successes are smaller than expected). The comparative analysis with other United Nations organizations shows that innovation agendas tend to work around a specific problem. The clearer the focus of innovation, the higher the chances of generating innovative solutions that make a difference. UNFPA should identify the core problems it wants innovation to focus on, moving away from the 360-degree approach followed in the first phase of the Innovation Initiative.

35. A second consideration is to determine how innovation should be positioned inside the organization: When determining the positioning of innovation in UNFPA, it would be advisable

to differentiate between three domains: innovation in terms of innovative impact solutions (addressing challenges in mandate areas); innovation in terms of innovative organizational processes and policies (systems), which refers to improvements in business processes; and innovation in terms of culture, that is, staff's innovative approaches at work (staff mindsets). The different domains require different types of support and respond to different drivers. Developing innovative solutions is more intensive in external funding and partnerships with innovation ecosystem actors, whereas a lot may be accomplished on innovation in business processes with core resources. Similarly, a lot could be achieved on innovative approaches to open staff mindsets with existing resources. How UNFPA positions these three innovation domains in the organization should be reflected in the strategic plan, 2018-2021 (see Recommendation 5). The implementation of exchange mechanisms to link innovation with other business units and to ensure an enabling environment for innovation (Recommendation 6) will reflect how innovation should be positioned inside the organization.

36. A third consideration is to determine how/where UNFPA wants to be positioned within the innovation ecosystem. UNFPA has not yet incorporated an ecosystem-based view to its innovation approach. The implicit model to date was positioning UNFPA (through increased staff creativity) as a producer of innovative solutions (together with implementing partners). It would be highly advisable to explore the possibility of UNFPA becoming a thought leader, ecosystem convener and facilitator of those innovation processes that aim at solving the core problems UNFPA has decided innovation should focus on.

37. A fourth consideration is to determine the forms of innovation to focus on and how – innovation in products, in services, in processes. It would be advisable to identify the sequence product — services — processes linked to the core problems selected and use that sequence to determine how each form of innovation will be supported e.g. if the chosen core problem was adolescent pregnancy and UNFPA wanted to focus innovation on products (e.g. contraceptives), processes and services would correspond to those business processes (procurement, logistics) and modes of engagement (services e.g. policy dialogue) associated to the delivery of the new product.

38. A fifth consideration is to determine what stages of innovation (ideation, testing, scale-up) UNFPA wants to support and how. The Innovation Fund has essentially focused on funding the implementation of in-house generated proofs of concept. The focus of the Innovation Fund is now moving to scaling up tested innovations that proved successful. This is one of multiple pathways; there are many others that have yet to be explored. In this context, and in order to develop a well-fitted model for innovation at UNFPA, it would be advisable to explore possibilities for other combinations e.g. supporting the testing of an idea through the Innovation Fund to then scale up through partnerships and advocacy; supporting the scale-up of solutions implemented by others outside UNFPA (either with co-funding or through facilitation and advocacy); or by open crowdsourcing of ideas around core problems to external actors and internal staff.

39. **Recommendation 2: Further develop the Innovation Business Case into an Innovation Corporate Framework for the next four years and revisit and reactivate the Inter-divisional Working Group on innovation.** The Innovation Business Case drawn by the Technical Division with support from IDWG members should further evolve into a corporate framework for innovation in UNFPA, becoming the strategic and operational frame for the Innovation Initiative. The corporate framework on innovation should have the buy-in of the technical, the programme and management divisions and should concisely present the results of the critical decisions called for in Recommendation 1. Once endorsed by the UNFPA Executive Committee, it should reflect an organization-wide basis for a common understanding of the innovation model for the next four years, alongside the strategic plan.

40. The corporate framework should include a brief theory of change and a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to capture learning and to allow an evaluation of the Innovation Initiative by 2021. UNFPA should also revisit the scope, roles and composition of the IDWG, ensuring



that incentives are in place to improve the performance of the IDWG in accompanying the implementation of the Business Case.

41. The roles and functions of the IDWG should be adjusted so that there is a shift from being doers to becoming advocates of the Initiative, both within their business units and outside. IDWG members should be given a clear mandate and explicit senior management endorsement to oversee the implementation of the Business Case/Innovation Corporate Framework. The role of the IDWG should move away from the current focus on activities to a focus on advocacy. IDWG members should advocate for a proper enabling environment for innovation in UNFPA.

42. UNFPA should validate the eight-prong vision developed in April 2015, retaining relevant elements and integrating them in the current UNFPA Innovation Business Case. The scope of the Innovation Business Case should incorporate coordination mechanisms between the currently fragmented elements of the UNFPA innovation model (i.e. the Innovation Fund, iAccelerators and innovation projects not supported by the Innovation Fund).

43. The theory of change should reflect the main outcomes pursued and should make assumptions in the Business Case explicit. As shown by the formative evaluation, the absence of a theory of change during the first phase of the Innovative Initiative led to different interpretations of the logic of the Initiative and the Innovation Fund. Moreover, making assumptions explicit will enable the 2021 evaluation to examine whether they hold true and the reasons why, generating insights for refining the innovation model.

44. The monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the Initiative should reflect outputs and outcomes in the Business Case. It should include indicators that provide information on the strategic plan's innovation indicators. Regional networks should play a key role in collecting data on output and outcome indicators for the Initiative (reflected in the Business Case/Corporate Framework).

45. UNFPA should include the replication of the East and Southern Africa innovation network model in other geographical regions as an item in the Business Case/Corporate Framework. Establish a replication task force to start exploring possible pathways to adapt the regional network model and the preconditions that should be in place to start the replication.

46. **Recommendation 3: Make the critical investments in human resources to ensure a feasible and credible business case for innovation.** UNFPA should undertake the minimum critical investments necessary to making the case for innovation credible and feasible for external funding. Two types of investments are required; those involving direct funding and those involving resource allocations but no additional funds. Priorities within the first type include ensuring the minimum human resource capacities at the Innovation Fund Secretariat and ensuring well-resourced regional innovation networks. The second type of investment requires investing in one fully dedicated innovation person in each region. Priorities for resources not necessitating additional funding include securing the necessary time allocations for the Innovation Fund Manager function at the Secretariat and identifying innovation champions in country offices (and providing them with adequate time, responsibility allocations and recognition).

47. The human resource base at the Innovation Fund Secretariat should aim at including a full-time senior manager; a technical specialist (already in place); a technical assistant; and an administrative assistant. In the event that this level of staffing is not feasible, at least ensure that a position for administrative support staff is filled at the Secretariat in order to allow the innovation technical specialist to devote time to substantive innovation-related tasks. The Innovation Fund manager should be able to allocate at least 50 per cent of her or his time to Innovation Fund-related tasks i.e. partnership development and resource mobilization through leveraging the Innovation Fund.

48. At regional and country offices, UNFPA should consider changing the innovation focal point designation. Some options would be 'innovation catalyst', 'innovation lead', 'innovation ambassador' or 'innovation champion' (the term used from hereon). Each regional office should have a full-time regional innovation champion. Preferably, people with the ability,

knowledge and networking skills to link UNFPA with the innovation ecosystems in the region should fill these positions.

49. UNFPA should establish networks of innovation champions in the regions where there are no networks yet. Regional innovation networks do not necessarily have to rely on an innovation champions in every country. Other approaches such as innovation task teams or innovation task forces around specific innovation issues could also work in regions with staff constraints. Moreover, it would be advisable to set up innovation teams — including the innovation champion — in country offices as opposed to only having innovation champions. This would avoid the adverse effects of turnover in staff and offices directing all innovation responsibilities to one person. UNFPA should establish country office innovation task forces, including staff across technical and operational areas to avoid innovation champions working in isolation and to maximize innovation buy-in.

50. **Recommendation 4: Consolidate, redesign and reposition the Innovation Fund.** UNFPA should re-think the Innovation Fund's scope and restructure its operation, adapting it to the forthcoming second phase of the Innovation Initiative. UNFPA should reposition the Innovation Fund with a view to focusing and rationalizing financial support. The Innovation Fund should evolve from the current internal 360-degree experimental fund focusing on creativity and on nurturing a culture of innovation, to a selective, co-funding based, leverage-driven mechanism focusing on solutions aimed at solving the core problems UNFPA has decided to innovate for. UNFPA should also prioritize consolidating the results, culminating the first phase sharing lessons and launching the second phase in a communicative and engaging fashion.

51. UNFPA should launch the next phase of the Innovation Fund with an event to convey key messages in terms of what has been achieved and the way forward for UNFPA and the innovation Business case/Corporate framework. Capture the most relevant insights of the first phase with a focus on implemented projects (including those discontinued) and share them across the organization. Optimize the currently unused knowledge base generated by the Innovation Fund (Innovation Hub, blogs in My Voices) by making the wealth of data generated by the five rounds of calls for proposals readily and easily available. In addition, the evaluation recommends re-designing and updating the external innovation website so that it becomes a showcasing platform as well as a means to communicate to the outside world.

52. UNFPA should move to a selective, co-funding based, leverage driven approach for innovation. First, by focusing on innovative solutions aimed at solving the core problems UNFPA has decided to innovate for priority technical thematic areas. Consider funding innovations in business processes and in culture with existing resources, using the Innovation Fund only as a complementary leverage instrument. Second, by introducing a grading system to innovative solutions when allocating funds; differentiating between those new to the country, those new to the organization and those new to the sector (innovative for the ecosystem). Move the Innovation Fund to a co-funding mechanism for the transition to scale of supported innovation solutions that have succeeded in the testing/proof of concept phase. A co-funding approach would enhance ownership, commitment and engagement. Use the Innovation Fund to leverage external funding (at the headquarters and country/regional levels) when testing solutions aimed at solving core problems. The Innovation Fund could be used as a lever to bring into play other relevant actors and to facilitate the UNFPA convening and advocating roles in the innovation ecosystem. This leverage function can also foster partnerships and is better fitted for an ecosystem-driven approach to innovation.

53. If UNFPA decides to continue using the Innovation Fund to support additional rounds of early-stage innovations, ensure that the approach evolves from implementing projects to testing priority solutions — from the ideation to transition to scale. This implies a higher role for management in priority setting, and for innovation networks playing a role in pre-scanning and preparation of pitches. Continue the current evolution towards brief pitches and concept notes and minimize the requirement to submit written project proposals. Discontinue open calls for proposals. If open calls are still deemed relevant, approach them as calls for solutions.

Ensure that calls are communicated well in advance to allow ideation work, environment/horizon scanning (identification) and provision of technical assistance. This will increase the likelihood of good quality solution designs. In addition, favour unique partnerships in proposals (e.g. with the private sector or academia). Use funding caps when allocating seed and early stage funding. Consider putting in place peer-review mechanisms in the implementation of innovation projects in order to validate approaches and increase replicability.

54. UNFPA should diversify Innovation Fund resources beyond direct investments on impact solutions by exploring the possibilities of the Innovation Fund operating as an innovation facility, featuring several funding windows e.g. transition to scale, testing of new solutions (if more calls are envisaged), partnerships (lever funds), M&E for innovation and learning. It would be advisable to keep a share of the Innovation Fund for strategic experimentation, that is, to test the feasibility and appropriateness of new features aiming at developing an innovation model suited to the characteristics of UNFPA e.g. testing of innovation labs approaches (alone or in partnerships); testing innovation challenges involving external stakeholders; supporting accelerator graduated solutions in transitions to scale.

55. UNFPA should examine the feasibility of establishing a UNFPA innovation lab. Although the Innovation Fund could provide initial co-funding, resource mobilization and establishment for a lab could go beyond the Innovation Fund. At the present stage of development of innovation in UNFPA, innovation labs could be appropriate because they offer a protected environment that permits higher levels of risk, minimizing trade-offs and disincentives to innovate. Moreover, a lab could be suitable for UNFPA to test elements of the innovation model. For example, by providing a space with different risk assessment requirements and internal policy frameworks, whereby innovative and unique partnerships could be explored, including partnerships to develop M&E systems adapted to innovation solutions.

56. **Recommendation 5: Shift the main focus to impact solutions while continuing work on nurturing a culture of innovation.** In order to accelerate demonstrating results, UNFPA should shift the main focus from culture to scalable impact solutions, that is, innovative solutions with a direct impact on the lives of women and young people. This entails using innovation resources to solving current bottlenecks to expedite change in stagnant areas. UNFPA should continue working on developing a culture that nurtures innovation, but not as the main thrust of the innovation model or by using external resources. UNFPA can utilize existing internal resources to promote a culture of innovation.

57. Innovation Fund projects and accelerator-based solutions should focus mostly on scalable impact solutions aimed at solving the core problems identified in Recommendation 1. Ideally, allocations of Innovation Fund resources to business process improvements and culture-related activities should be linked to impact solutions. UNFPA should introduce environment scanning prior to testing impact solutions in order to avoid unnecessary duplications and to optimize the limited resources for innovation.

58. UNFPA should explore ways to continue working on nurturing a culture of innovation without requiring external funds by leveraging regional innovation networks. The *Openmind* project and the Innovation Toolkit, both developed by the East and Southern Africa innovation network, provide useful ideas and resources in this area. It is advisable that regional offices, under guidance from the headquarters: (a) promote the implementation of the menu of ideas offered by *Openmind*, which includes a series of trust-building activities to generate spaces to innovate; (b) encourage the use of the Innovation Toolkit, which offers innovation tools for UNFPA staff to feel confident when taking part in innovation processes; (c) advocate for the use of innovation days, which have proven to be a cost-effective way to generate spaces that nurture innovation attitudes; (d) foster the establishment of innovation task forces in country and regional offices which would be responsible for collectively introducing and promoting innovation within the office; and (e) conduct an innovation day prior to annual planning

meetings at country offices, so that ideas for testing of solutions or innovative projects can be incorporated into country programmes.

59. The Human Resources Division could make key contributions to the enabling environment for a culture that nurtures innovation including: (a) examine the feasibility of incorporating innovation-related elements in recruitment, career management and staff development and learning. In particular, look into possibilities of incorporating innovation in the UNFPA Competency Framework. Systematically, (a) include innovation as a key competency in interviews and recruitment processes for representatives; (b) explore ways to promote the inclusion of innovation in the UNFPA performance appraisal and development system; and (c) examine how to incorporate innovation in the UNFPA Recognition Toolkit.

60. **Recommendation 6: Readjust the innovation model towards a more outward-looking approach based on partnerships.** UNFPA should re-calibrate the focus of its innovation approach, from the current inward-looking model to a more outward-looking approach based on partnerships with innovation ecosystem actors. In practice, this means incorporating environmental scanning, bringing the views of ecosystem actors into strategic and technical discussions; activating links; and cross-sharing knowledge and experiences with other UNIN organizations in areas of interest (such as M&E systems for innovation, accelerators, labs and innovation fund management). UNFPA should incorporate an innovation ecosystem perspective and seek partnerships and alliances with relevant players in the ecosystem e.g. universities, research institutes and foundations and private firms.

61. UNFPA should conduct a mapping exercise of the innovation ecosystems UNFPA is inserted in (i.e. adolescent sexual and reproductive health, mobile health, population data). Job descriptions of regional innovation technical specialists (innovation champions) should include an explicit role to link UNFPA with regional innovation ecosystems.

62. UNFPA should activate peer exchanges with other organizations within the UNIN which could include direct transfer of capacity and cross-fertilization of ideas and practical knowledge (e.g. sharing experiences on innovation fund management and knowledge on implementing acceleration programmes). Explore the possibilities of joint work with other United Nations organizations in areas of common interest, such as developing an M&E framework suitable for innovation. Bring the experience of other UNIN organizations into the currently internal debate on using innovation labs.

63. UNFPA should foster the use of mentorship programmes with private-sector and United Nations organizations. Expanding mentorship and coaching programmes could have important effects on corporate culture through strengthening staff leadership and risk-taking attitudes. Establish an Innovation Fund Advisory Board that includes external members (e.g. from academia and the private sector).

64. UNFPA should explore hybrid models for crowd-sourcing innovative ideas. These models could include ideas coming from outside the organization and from internal staff. Prioritize models that imply facilitating and procuring channels for young people to innovate for young people, both as partners and as co-design users.

65. **Recommendation 7: Anchor innovation in the strategic plan, 2018-2021.** UNFPA should include innovation as a substantive element of the strategic plan, 2018-2021. Optimally, the Plan should reflect the strategic importance of innovation. If possible, it should also reflect the results of the five critical strategic decisions presented in Recommendation 1 (the focus, positioning inside, positioning outside, forms of innovation and stages of innovation). The strategic plan should include corporate indicators reflecting the extent to which UNFPA is adopting innovation approaches.

66. When incorporating innovation in the strategic plan, it would be advisable to distinguish between the three domains of innovation described in Recommendation 1: impact solutions, business processes and culture. It would not be advisable to incorporate innovation as a mode of engagement at this time. Innovation is still at an incipient stage and this requirement would exert high pressure on field offices and divisions that are either not ready or do not have the

appropriate incentives to innovate. Moreover, innovation cuts across the current modes of engagement in UNFPA. Incorporate the requirement to report on innovation in reporting mechanisms associated to the strategic plan. Reporting on innovation should ideally include the three domains — innovations in impact solutions, innovations in business processes and developing a culture that nurtures innovation.

67. **Recommendation 8: Activate a functional feedback exchange mechanism between the Innovation Initiative and relevant UNFPA business units.** This mechanism, which should ideally be endorsed by senior management, should bridge insights on innovation — channelled through the Innovation Initiative — with relevant business units to ensure that policies are innovation friendly and that business units harness the opportunities offered by innovation. This mechanism should generate an ongoing dialogue between the Innovation Initiative and business units in human resources, strategic planning, partnerships, South-South cooperation, resource mobilizations, knowledge management, procurement services, media and communication, and monitoring and evaluation.

68. The exchange mechanism could take the form of *ad hoc* meetings called by the Secretariat of the Innovation Fund. These meetings could be called after collecting a critical mass of innovation insights (learning) that have implications on business units. Insights could then be discussed in the meetings and appropriate actions agreed upon by the business units. Regional innovation networks and the IDWG could play a key role in this process. The IDWG could advocate for discussing the insights and taking appropriate actions. Regional innovation networks could scan, identify and collect relevant innovation insights and issues (e.g. challenges in partnerships, bottlenecks in procurement, and opportunities for South-South cooperation or resource mobilization) and bring them to the attention of the regional office first and, through the IDWG, to the headquarters.

69. The IDWG currently follows a three-tier interdivisional structure (headquarter, regional, country), enabling it to play a role linking insights to the respective areas at all levels of the organization. It is important that the IDWG is given the mandate to push this through and that IDWG members across the three tiers take the advocating role, making the case to debate and discuss challenges and opportunities, ultimately ensuring that innovation benefits from an appropriate enabling environment across the organization.

70. South-South Cooperation exchanges should start as soon as possible. The transition to scale of the solutions tested to date is linked to national partners adopting these solutions by integrating them into their systems, replicating them, sustaining them or expanding them to other countries in the region. This setting makes dialogue between innovation and South-South teams of the essence at the country, regional and headquarters levels.

71. Exchanges with the Knowledge Management Unit should start as soon as possible in order to establish formal coordination between the Innovation Fund and the Knowledge Management Unit at headquarters, to link the good practice competition and knowledge management databases with the Innovation Fund, and to explore the links between insights from implementing innovation solutions and knowledge products (including how to utilize knowledge that comes from innovation insights).

72. The Strategic Partnerships Branch is an important partner in this exchange mechanism. The Innovation Initiative and the Strategic Partnerships Branch should develop a protocol to support the practical implications of working on innovation i.e. identification of suitable private-sector partners (once core problems to be targeted by innovation have been set); negotiation of partnerships; and adapt mechanisms that comply with due diligence while fostering innovation.

73. **Recommendation 9: Develop a learning-for-impact framework.** UNFPA should develop a simple frame that turns organizational learning into solutions that have an impact on the lives of women and young people. This frame should have at least three elements: innovation specific M&E systems, functioning knowledge sharing mechanisms and a scaling-up framework for successfully tested impact solutions.

74. UNFPA should start working on the development of an innovation-specific M&E system for impact solutions. This system should include real-time monitoring on outcomes and should capture lessons learned from unexpected outputs and outcomes. To incorporate real-time outcome monitoring in implementing innovative solutions, options for real-time data collection and analysis should be explored including: (a) partner with UNIN organizations with experience in real-time monitoring to explore approaches that could be adapted and incorporated into the UNFPA innovation model; (b) explore the potential offered by lean data methodologies for impact measurement, as they offer affordable and meaningful ways to collect and analyse outcome data; and (c) examine the possibility of starting a pilot project to test innovation-specific M&E systems.

75. To capture lessons from unexpected outputs and outcomes, UNFPA should explore outcome mapping techniques such as outcome journals, user journeys and Behavioural Communication Change Processes to identify indicators and proxies of change.

76. Whenever new impact solutions are tested, budgets should include allocations to develop M&E systems that are outcome-based and fed by real-time data. Accelerators should develop appropriate M&E systems for innovation. These systems should be linked to the M&E systems of the impact solutions they accelerate and to the M&E framework of the Innovation Initiative.

77. UNFPA should activate results-sharing and learning mechanisms around innovation solutions. The comparative analysis with other United Nations organizations reveals that when tangible results from innovation are displayed and communicated across the organization, they inspire and trigger openness to innovation and stimulate the uptake of innovation approaches. A culture of demonstrating innovation results nurtures a culture of innovation. Some suggestions are: (a) expand the scope of the Innovation Talk Series from informational sessions to practical discussions on testing, replication and scaling up; and (b) share insights and learning by incorporating question-and-answer sessions and practical debates on aspects of particular interest, such as how to engage in partnerships with the private sector, challenges and successes when collecting data on outcomes, projects with unexpected results and solutions that were discontinued.

78. UNFPA should move from failure reports to insight briefs (learning reports). These reports should specify the assumptions that were being tested with the pilot/proof of concept and what insights accrued from the testing.

79. UNFPA should develop a scaling-up framework for successful innovative solutions, adjusted to UNFPA needs and characteristics. This framework should include a description of the scaling-up phases, including a transition-to-scale phase for completed projects funded by the Innovation Fund that have successfully implemented a proof of concept but still require iterations and further refinements in order to ensure that the solution is ready for scale. The scaling-up framework should also include specifications on scalability criteria (e.g. through a scalability assessment tool).