

# UNAIDS

## **An Evaluation of UNAIDS Joint Programme Country Envelopes: 2018–2022**

*Briefing*





## The Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to:

- assess the Country Envelope (CE) as a mechanism to allocate and disburse funds mobilized by the UNAIDS Secretariat for Cosponsors' country work as part of Joint Teams on HIV/AIDS and Joint HIV/AIDS Plans
- assess how CE funds are being allocated and used; assess the results achieved; and
- consider how alternative approaches to allocating funds could inform recommendations. The evaluation covers the period 2018-2022.



## Approach and Methodology

The evaluation is retrospective in that it assesses the design, implementation and results of CE, and is formative in that it informs the continued implementation of the 2022-2026 Unified Budget Results and Accountability Framework (UBRAF) through evidence-based findings and learning.

The evaluation developed a theory of change (ToC), which has served as the overall analytical framework for the evaluation. The ToC informed the evaluation protocol and the development of ten evaluation questions focusing on the design, implementation and results of the CE. Evidence for the evaluation was generated principally through six country case studies – the Andean region (Peru, with two sub-case studies), Cote D'Ivoire, Kyrgyzstan, India, Iran, and Zambia. The evaluation methodology included a document review, key informant interviews at global, regional, and country levels, and a global survey for Joint Programme staff. Evidence was analysed and triangulated through a team analysis workshop in November 2022 and findings and recommendations were developed. These were discussed with the evaluation's Steering Committee and wider UNAIDS stakeholders in January 2023.



## 1

Funding to countries to support the priorities of national responses continues to make sense.

Overall, the evaluation is supportive of Joint Programme funds continuing to be targeted to countries, albeit with improvements to maximise the use of scarce resources. This requires evidence-based decision-making for the allocation and use of funds and stronger monitoring and follow up to improve the performance of funds.

## 2

CEs have provided a relatively regular source of funding for Joint Teams. This has helped galvanise Joint Team working and enabled HIV to remain a relevant area of work for the United Nations and kept HIV on the agenda for some smaller agencies and countries.

Evidence indicates that using funds to re-energize or maintain Joint Teams and planning processes is a model that can bring UN agencies together and support collaboration. There are some positive implementation experiences and examples where CE funds have been used in ways that have proved catalytic and are more aligned to the Joint Team's comparative advantages e.g., strategic information, laws, policies, advocacy, and have used UN convening power and Cosponsor expertise and technical assistance to positive effect.

## 3

CEs have been designed with multiple intentions and expectations, many of which are too big to address with the funds available and need to be scaled back.

Catalysing change, improving UN capacity, empowering countries, strengthening accountability, boosting joint programmes and coordination– the multitude of intentions and expectations makes it unclear what CE funds are trying to accomplish. This makes it difficult to understand whether funds are being used for what could be considered their correct purpose and their contribution and impact. Trying to solve these issues through the small amounts of CE funds available is unrealistic. Scaling back the intentions and expectations of CE and having very clear objectives for what UNAIDS wants to achieve with the CE is necessary.

## 4

The allocation model balances technical priorities (trying to match the epidemic) with political priorities (providing funds to maintain a global Joint Programme). This has spread CE funds thinly across many countries to an extent that countries are challenged to use the small amount of funds in the most strategic way.

Within countries, the starting point for the allocation of funds to Cosponsors appears to be by equality considerations and this fragments funds further and can undermine the impact of what can be achieved.

The CE funds are not designed or used as strategically as they could be across and within countries and, to achieve more impact, the priorities for allocating funds need to be revisited. This requires making difficult decisions about the allocation of future funding, including the trade-offs required. Ultimately this depends on what purpose the CE funds are intended to serve.

## 5

The use and quality of programming of CE funds depends on many factors such as the leadership capacity of the UNAIDS country office (UCO) and/or the UNAIDS Country Director (UCD) in setting the strategic direction of Joint Plans.

As well as the roles, responsibilities and voice of global and regional teams and Cosponsors vis-à-vis country voices, Cosponsor presence and capacities to engage in Joint Teams, and the extent to which close consultations with wider stakeholders is happening at planning stages can influence the use and quality of programming.

## 6

There is scope to increase the strategic orientation, relevance and results of the CE through ensuring that country needs and inclusive planning processes drive the prioritization of CE resources and determine Cosponsor involvement.

Bolder decision-making and more rigour regarding the allocation of funds is required for the development of stronger Joint Plans including for resource mobilization at the country level. This will enable a shift away from activity funding towards a more strategic, policy-focused work, where the Joint Programme can make a difference, based on its comparative advantage.

## 7

There is evidence from across the Joint Programme that changes to the CE are desired and that more impact could be achieved through rethinking the current model of the CE.

Given the set of findings and wider context of increased new HIV infections in some regions, commitments to progress the achievement of the Global AIDS Strategy targets, and less available funding for HIV, there is a strong case for course correction to strengthen the prioritization and focus of the CE and to revisit the principles, objectives and operations of the CE.







## Lessons Learned

### 1

Clearly communicating the scope of the evaluation with the Cosponsors from the design phase, when developing the terms of reference can help ensure the evaluation addresses the critical questions. It can help foster more clarity and buy-in to the findings, conclusions and recommendations. This is especially important when doing evaluations in highly dynamic contexts where institutional as well as broader sector funding changes are taking place.

### 2

Separating out and understanding the contribution of one funding stream (CE) in relation to wider UBRAF funds supporting the Joint Programme's work at country level presents a challenge. Although the evaluation aimed to look in detail at how UBRAF funding, allocated through CE, are working, the reporting systems do not differentiate funding when reporting to donors and to the Board. Future evaluation terms of reference that focus on specific funding streams or themes may wish to emphasise the need to explore the collective nature and impact of the Joint Programme's work and could also propose a specific methodology, such as contribution analysis, to address the complexity of the Joint Programme's work.

### 3

Given the inherently political nature of the Joint Programme's work the evaluation timeline should accommodate a co-creation workshop for recommendations, prior to the submission of the draft final report. This would ensure the report includes prior-discussed and agreed findings and recommendations which are then written up and validated through a final presentation at a later date. This should ideally be a face-to-face co-creation workshop which would enable time to discuss substantive issues arising and enable the evaluation team to explain and discuss findings and possible solutions with the client.





## Recommendations

### KEY RECOMMENDATION 1

Have a strategic discussion between Secretariat and Cosponsor staff regarding the positioning and support to CEs in the wider context of changing UBRAF budgets, funding and resource mobilization efforts. Discussions should focus on:

- Scenario planning and assessing support for the continuation of CE
- Determine a clear purpose for CE – essentially what does UNAIDS want to achieve with these funds?
- Assess the options presented to remodel CE in conjunction with the purpose.
- Determine next steps

### KEY RECOMMENDATION 2

#### Retain CE funding.

The evaluation team recommends keeping the CE in some form as findings suggest that:

- a) it is helping to reinvigorate Joint Team planning and working to some extent;
- b) having funding available for use at country levels is helping keep HIV on the political agenda in countries where other sources of funding are not available; and
- c) there is some evidence that CE-funded activities have been catalytic.

### KEY RECOMMENDATION 3

Determine a clear institutional home for CE.

The evaluation found no clear ownership for CE. Placing CE within a clear institutional home (e.g., under the direction of the Deputy Director of Programmes in the UNAIDS Secretariat) will help increase responsibility, transparency and accountability for the performance of such funds.

### KEY RECOMMENDATION 4

Ensure Joint Plans on HIV/AIDS are anchored in a theory of change (aligned with national strategic plans and local UNSDCF) and the UBRAF theory of change.

- In line with the 2022 guidance note on the New Generation of Joint Programmes, that Joint Plans develop a theory of change which is anchored in the wider UBRAF TOC and national frameworks. Within this context, the assumptions for how use of CE funds will bring about change should be made explicit.
- This responds to the need to increase the strategic intent of Joint Plans and use of CE and would help Joint Teams coalesce around a Joint Vision for the longer term, and enable Joint Teams to identify specific areas/ opportunities where they can work together to leverage their comparative advantage.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION 5

Lengthen the planning timeframe, continue to promote two-year planning, and accompany this with two-year disbursements.

- Lengthening the planning timeframe will promote a more meaningful analysis and more meaningful engagement with national partners on gaps and needs to be addressed.
- Aligning the disbursement period to the planning period (two years) will support longer-term, more strategic planning and implementation.
- The evaluation recognizes this recommendation will need to be discussed in the context of wider UNAIDS resource mobilization and funding strategies, for example, generating support for multi-year commitments.



## KEY RECOMMENDATION 6

Ensure guidance for the CE provides clear instructions and transparent information on how funds can be used.

- Definitions and examples of key principles and terms such as strategic, catalytic and tangible examples of the types of results expected from these funds should be included.
- Be clear how gender, human rights and community responses are expected to be addressed through these funds, including expectations for funds to address related structural causes.



## KEY RECOMMENDATION 7

Assign clear roles to support the allocation, oversight and learning resulting from CEs.

The following roles could be envisaged for Joint Teams, a regional Joint Team, global coordinators and UNAIDS global thematic leads:

- **Joint Team role:** strategic oversight of the development of plans to use the funds.
- **Joint Programme regional team role:** technical advisory support to country Joint Teams, quality assurance of reports, and identification of strategic learning, proactive dissemination of learning as needed.
- **Global coordinator's role:** work with the regions to determine which countries would be best placed to receive CE funds. Perform quality assurance of Joint Team reports for performance and accountability purposes.
- **UNAIDS Secretariat global thematic lead role:** lead discussion around how CE funds should be used and in which thematic areas, based on knowledge of key gaps in global targets and areas of Joint Programme comparative advantage; review implementation reports to identify learning themes and innovative examples that can be shared across countries and regions to promote learning and adaptation; and commission evaluations of CE funds, as appropriate.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION 8

Update the JPMS to improve results reporting and strengthen accountability and learning.

- Being able to identify how CE funds are contributing to the wider Joint Programme and UBRAF results chains is important if these funds are to be results-oriented.
- In addition to the current country joint reports, there is an opportunity for the reporting format to capture specific results achieved (as opposed to activities/deliverables) that can be tagged to the UBRAF Results Framework 2022-2026 for the Joint Programme, at output and outcome levels.
- Planning and reporting should also allow Joint Teams to tag each entry (whether activity or deliverable) to several strategic results areas if relevant. A proportional allocation would be required to avoid the double counting of budget amounts.





## KEY RECOMMENDATION 9

### Establish a Country Results Fund.

- There is no perfect way to allocate scarce resources to improve impact. Demonstrating results is increasingly needed to mobilize funds and to make visible UNAIDS' value proposition. Building on the findings, the evaluation team recommends recalibrating the CE through the development of a **Country Results Fund**. This model builds on the existing structures, processes and guidance to minimize the burden associated with adapting the CE. It assumes the same level of CE funding available in 2022-2023.
- **The purpose of the Country Results Fund** is to demonstrate results to support the achievement of the Global AIDS Strategy and country priorities, through the comparative advantage of the Joint Programme. The design features reflect this purpose.
- The Country Results Fund will have **two pillars of financial support:**

**Pillar 1: Provide a fixed amount to all Joint Programme countries on a “no regrets” basis to strengthen Joint Team working and the strategic intention of Joint Plans and enable HIV to remain on the agenda of Cosponsor agencies and countries** (up to an indicative aggregate amount of US\$ 10 million).

- These funds would be used to galvanise Joint Team working and support the development of stronger Joint Plans including situational assessments as appropriate, participatory planning meetings, the development of the Joint Plan, and high-level policy and advocacy work.
- An indicative amount per country could be US\$ 100 000 over two years, which would total approximately US\$ 9.1 million over 91 countries.
- The current disbursement mechanism could be retained or UNAIDS could identify the most efficient way that would allow all Cosponsors to receive an equal amount.



**Pillar 2 provide fund to accelerate results.** Key features of the Pillar 2 grants include:

- a) **Support results-based proposals developed by country Joint Teams** with a floor of US\$ 1 million and ceiling of US\$ 3 million over two years. Using an estimated pot of US\$ 32.5 million envisaged for CE funds this would allow between 11-32 country grants over two years.
- b) **Focus proposals on one theme every two years to focus the achievement of results in specific/target areas.** The need to enhance results in a thematic area would be based on evidence and learning and would be identified and criteria defined by UNAIDS Secretariat global thematic leads, global coordinators and regional Joint Teams and other experts and networks as appropriate.
- c) **Enable flexibility in how funding can be used in proposals.** This would mean that countries could propose use funds for additional human resources if there is a strong rationale for doing so. Proposals would also be able to reprogramme funds easily, for maximum flexibility. Funds would be disbursed for a two-year period to align with two-year plans.
- d) **Establish a small independent panel to review and endorse proposals** based on clear and transparent criteria and guidance. The independent panel would comprise a select number of independent experts and draw on the technical expertise of the UNAIDS global thematic leads, regional teams and global coordinators.
- e) **Define roles to support the independent panel and the operationalization of Pillar 2** for the Joint and regional teams, global coordinator's role and UNAIDS Secretariat global thematic lead roles but would essentially build on existing roles and expertise (see full report recommendations for details).
- f) **Update the JPMS to improve results reporting and strengthen accountability and learning.** This would mean:
  - **Providing clear guidance on process steps required to ensure the annual joint reporting and reporting process is meaningful.** The JPMS could include questions that probe, for example, how the reports have been developed, how learning around successes and challenges has been compiled and shared, and the extent to which the gender equality/human rights/community response intention was achieved, in addition to output and outcomes reporting. This would incentivize joint analysis of implementation and encourage reflection and learning within Joint Teams.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATION 10

Establish a temporary technical working group to fully scope the design of the Country Results Fund.

Draw on and align with UNAIDS Joint Programme thinking to ensure complementarity.