

**Evaluation of the OHCHR Project:
*Strengthening the Capacity of Regional Actors to
Promote Human Rights, Accountability,
Democratic Space and Gender in the Asia-Pacific
Region***

Evaluation Report

External consultants have prepared this report. The views expressed herein are those of the consultants and therefore do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of OHCHR.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AICHR	ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
AIPP	Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact
APF	Asia-Pacific Forum for National Human Rights Institutions
APFSD	Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BHR	Business and Human Rights
CCA	Common Country Assessment
CSO	civil society organization
DEXREL	Donor and External Relations Section
DPO	Disabled Persons Organization
DTP	Diplomatic Training Programme
EHRD	Environmental and Human Rights Defender
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FOTCD	Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division
FA	Finance and Administration
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HRBA	Human Rights-based Approach
HRC	Human Rights Council
HRD	Human Rights Defender
HQ	Headquarters
ICJ	International Commission of Jurists
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
LNOB	leave no-one behind
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding

NGO	Non-governmental organization
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMP	OHCHR Management Plan
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PPMES	Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Service
RBM	Results-based management
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
PRO	Pacific Regional Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEARO	South-East Asia Regional Office
SERP	Socio-Economic Response Plan
SG	Secretary-General
Sida	Swedish International Development and Cooperation Agency
SOP	standard operating procedure
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SR	Special Rapporteur
TESPRDD	Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division
ToC	Theory of change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
UNW	UN Women

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation of OHCHR's Project "Strengthening the Capacity of Regional Actors to Promote Human Rights, Accountability, Democratic Space and Gender in the Asia-Pacific Region" took place between 1 November 2021 and 15 May 2022, beginning with an inception phase. Conducted by a team of two independent consultants, the evaluation consisted of a comprehensive document review and online interviews with 64 individuals from stakeholder institutions, organizations and networks; representatives of the donor; and senior management and programme staff from OHCHR Headquarters (HQ) in Geneva, the OHCHR South-East Asia Regional Office (SEARO) and the OHCHR Pacific Regional Office (PRO).

A mixed method qualitative/quantitative approach was followed, with use of semi-structured interview processes and triangulation of qualitative feedback and information gathered. At the same time (i) the thematic work areas supported by the project were part of a wider OHCHR programme in the region and work streams often intersected, and (ii) many interviewed stakeholders had multiple engagements with OHCHR, beyond the specific focus areas of the project. Where appropriate these wider dimensions and linkages are reflected, but generally the following analysis and recommendations focus in-depth on the workstreams directly related to the project itself.

Overview

Despite the challenges and constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic since early 2020, the resourcing provided by the Sida project made a measurable difference in enabling work to move forward in the thematic areas prioritized. These were (i) migration, trafficking and modern slavery; (ii) human rights and climate change; (iii) democratic/civic space; (iv) regional mechanisms to promote and protect human rights; and (v) mainstreaming human rights within the UN system at regional and country levels.

Without the resources provided by the project, the results reflected in this report in these critical and interconnected areas would not have occurred. Several enabling factors for the success of project implementation to date are examined in this report. A fundamental contributor in this regard was the availability enabled by the project of full-time, dedicated staff to engage in-depth in expanded outreach; strategic partnership development at regional and national levels (including within the UN system and regional intergovernmental architecture); extensive capacity development engagement through training and 'hands-on' mentoring; enhanced mapping and analytical work to create the basis of effective convening and advocacy interventions; and a strengthened engagement with and input into global OHCHR tools, publications and planning.

Each of the thematic areas prioritized by the project provided an important entry point for the mainstreaming of human rights into a plethora of regional frameworks, mechanisms, processes and fora, validating the original selection of priority areas for project support made jointly between OHCHR and Sida.

A number of key lessons have emerged from project implementation to date. These are elaborated in Section III and have relevance to future planning around the project workstreams, as well as the wider work of OHCHR in the region and globally.

Summary of key findings by criteria

Relevance: *Very satisfactory.* The relevance of each thematic focus area was validated by analysis of human rights developments and trends in the region, stakeholder interviews and documentation review, as well as by levels of participation and interest in events and other activities convened or facilitated by the project. The project results as described in planning documents link to Frontier issues outlined in OHCHR's Management Plan (OMP): climate change, digital space and emerging technologies, and people on the move. They are further well aligned with the priorities and programmes of other key regional actors (including UN counterparts at regional and national levels), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC).

OHCHR further demonstrated good adaptive and planning capacities in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling work in most areas to continue, albeit with constraints caused by lack of ability to travel and engage directly with partners and other stakeholders in their own contexts. At the same time, while the intensified use of online modalities enabled engagement with stakeholders otherwise unable to join direct meetings due to cost, distance and other factors, it was recognized that this can exclude those lacking access to the technology or in areas with connectivity challenges (e.g. grassroots human rights and environmental defenders and CSOs).

Effectiveness: *Very Satisfactory.* The implementation of outputs shows good overall progress and is generally on track for achievement within the extended project Top-Up period, despite the many and continuous challenges which had to be navigated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only two out of 19 outputs have seen limited or no progress, in both cases due to the impact of the pandemic. Given the normative mandate and role of OHCHR, the on-going work in all areas has a long-term trajectory that goes beyond one project cycle, as further elaborated in the following commentary on impact and sustainability. Impressive development and strengthening of partnerships in this context was observed in all areas, with prospects for continued development and expansion.

OHCHR comparative advantage was well demonstrated in project implementation and is recognized by stakeholders. The following '10 'C's lens is used to examine this area: Centered (in the global human rights mandate of the Office); Convening; Catalyzing; Capacitating; Constituency building; Contextualized (within regional priorities and architecture); Consensus building; and Clarifying issues (through strategic research and communications).

Efficiency. *Satisfactory.* The project employed available human and financial resources efficiently and transparently in demanding circumstances, including the pandemic and subsequent requirement to move most work online. The way in which OHCHR was able to deploy and tap into expertise at global and regional levels, including UN Special Procedures and OHCHR HQ specialists and tools, added value to work at regional and country levels.

Internal synergies are an important part of efficiency. While there would have been benefits from more structured linkages between the project workstreams (e.g. within a formalized thematic team or unit framework), such synergies tended to happen in practice overall due to the overall office leadership and staff orientation of both offices.

The additional thematic workstreams resourced by the project put pressure on internal management oversight and administrative capacities, highlighting the need for project planning and associated resourcing arrangements in such situations to explicitly take projected requirements in these areas into account from the beginning. One area that was identified for further attention from an efficiency perspective is the expeditious disbursement of grants to

CSOs. Such grants are an important complementary mechanism for project delivery and *inter alia* can bring important protection and credibility benefits to the partner.

Impact. *Satisfactory*, noting that this area is a work in progress within a very limited timeframe to date. Additionally, the above-noted normative and facilitative role of OHCHR brings particular challenges to the assessment of impact at regional and country levels (e.g. in areas covered by project outputs such long-term capacity development, constituency building, strategic research, networking building and increasing public awareness). There would be value in selecting a key strategic area of work initiated by the project for an in-depth impact assessment over a multi-year period, potentially in partnership with other key UN partners.

Overall, the evaluation finds that work undertaken under the project to date has laid important foundations for impact across the five results areas. The evidence of such impact will become increasingly clear in 2023 and will be reflected in the ongoing longer-term continuation of the work in the region. It is noted that the ultimate purpose and value of regional partnerships and activity is making a difference to the realization of human rights in the context of lives and prospects at country level. This should be an explicit driver of future institutional and programming design, with a pivotal focus on the ongoing strengthening of the national capacity of the UN system to integrate human rights into its engagement with governments and other local stakeholders.

Sustainability. *Satisfactory*, noting, as above, that (i) this area is also a work in progress within a limited timeframe to date and (ii) the close relationship between enabling factors for impact and for sustainability. The sustainability of project results, partnerships and ongoing work emerged as the overall main concern in stakeholder interviews and document review, particularly in light of the projectized finding model that was adopted.

A number of factors were identified in this context which are already demonstrating potential to contribute to project sustainability during the remaining implementation period and in the next phase of OHCHR work on the project's thematic focus areas. The mechanisms for sustainability are well-defined and embedded in project implementation. These include the strengthening of capacities for autonomous action, knowledge and mutually reinforcing institutional relationships in areas such as (i) the country-level work of RCOs and UNCTs, including in the context of the SDGs; (ii) the role of regional CSOs as human rights advocates and mobilizers of country-level constituencies; (iii) awareness of and engagement with UN human rights mechanisms and Special Procedures among CSOs and EHRDs; (iv) embedding human rights and climate change in legislation and international commitments; (v) the deliberations of key regional intergovernmental entities such as the Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); (vi) a growing constituency of business interests around human rights concerns and (vii) the development and dissemination of knowledge, training, analytical and other tools for use by OHCHR globally and regionally, as well as by the wider UN system and regional stakeholders.

To ensure that the value-added of the project investment to date is maximized, it is imperative that these and other promising developments with respect to project impact and sustainability are explicitly built into OHCHR regional strategic and programmatic planning for carrying forward the work in the project's thematic areas. Reinforcing the sustainability of project results further requires attention to the rebalancing of extra budgetary resourcing towards a greater proportion being made-up of core / whole-of-office or whole-of-project funding; along with the development of sustainability strategies for major donor engagements.

Gender and human rights (disability inclusion) integration. Gender mainstreaming and gender-specific engagements under the project are assessed as *very satisfactory*. There is solid evidence across all workstreams of consistent and well-targeted attention to gender equality

and women's empowerment. OHCHR's role in the UN Issue-based Coalition (IBC) for Human Rights, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment which supports human rights and gender mainstreaming within UN Country Teams, was universally highly valued and highly assessed by all interviewed UN country and regional stakeholders. At the activity level, training of women journalists was a successful intervention with good visibility at country and regional levels. The challenge now is to carry the regional engagement and network of participants forward into national level follow-up and expansion, through or with local institutions. The training of transborder authorities conducted in Thailand was effective and had a strong focus on issues facing women and girls, as well as LGBTI+ persons.

With respect to disability inclusion, it is noted that this area was not explicitly prioritized in the project design, although some efforts were made to engage with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in implementation of the project in the Pacific Region. Beyond the scope of the project per se, the wider work of OHCHR in the region includes a focus on the promotion and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), providing a basis that can be leveraged for a greater future focus in this regard in the project's thematic focus areas.

With respect to the project theory of change (ToC), there is scope for more explicit and detailed mainstreaming of gender equality, disability inclusion and LNOB considerations into the description of strategic interventions and risk assessments, beyond the current gender perspective summaries and the gender references in the main ToC narrative under each Result. Similarly, the five-year Project Results Framework (updated 30 October 2021), would have benefited from the addition of a more specific mainstreaming of gender equality, disability inclusion and LNOB at output, indicator and target level.

Recommendations:

Drawing on the above findings, the following recommendations are proposed for action by OHCHR at global, regional and country levels. An elaborated set of recommendations with additional commentary, actions, timelines and designation of implementation responsibilities is set out in Section IV.

3.1: In sync and aligned with the preparation during 2023 of OHCHR's OMP and Regional Programme for 2024-2027, develop an overarching regional-level vision and strategy for the work of OHCHR in Asia and the Pacific in the context of (i) the OMP global theory of change and (ii) internal OHCHR developments with respect to the balance between global and regional roles and responsibilities.

Such an Asia-Pacific strategic framework is seen as providing the most conducive environment for the long-term integration of the thematic work initiated by the project so that it can sustainably continue and grow as part of broader regional programming. It will also provide a comprehensive framework for the systematic mobilization of core and programmatic resources to expand OHCHR's work in the region in the project focus areas as well as more broadly. The shared and distinct needs and dynamics of Asia and the Pacific subregions, and the respective OHCHR offices, would need to be well reflected in the strategic framework.

3.2: OHCHR should pursue the possibility with Sida of an expanded second phase to its funding. This should be based on (i) a core / whole-of-office approach with each of SEARO and PRO, (ii) a combination of overarching Asia-Pacific components and distinct SEARO and PRO components; and (iii) a clear sustainability strategy concerning the ongoing mobilization of the necessary resources by OHCHR (including through internal staff and resource

transfers) to continue and grow its engagement in Asia and the Pacific in the project thematic areas, as well as more broadly.

Shifting to a core-funding approach from the current project-based one, expanded to include the full office work programme, will both (i) further reinforce the integration of the current thematic workstreams initiated by the project and (ii) reduce OHCHR / Sida transaction costs and enable OHCHR to have the medium-term financial security and flexibility to ensure human and financial resources are used in most effective way possible to achieve agreed results.

3.3: Conduct internal human resources review to provide the basis for formulating an organizational development plan to support the regional-level vision and strategy and systemically embed the thematic focus areas of the Sida project.

Such review should be conducted in the context of the regionalization process discussions taking place within the Office. Key considerations of the review and resultant plan should include (i) reconfiguring SEARO and PRO as necessary to systemically embed and adequately resource the thematic areas supported by the Sida project; (ii) steps to upgrade the status of OHCHR and align to a level commensurate with that of other entities within the UN system in Asia and the Pacific; (iii) ensuring all role classifications are at suitable levels, are appropriately aligned and provide career pathways which will help to attract and retain staff. Specific proposals for enhanced staffing arrangements to take the work of the project forward in the context of the regional-level vision and strategy are set out in Section IV.

3.4: Within the context of the proposed development of a regional-level vision and strategy, review how OHCHR can best engage with the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, particularly with respect to the appropriate balance between global and regional roles for engagement in South Asia and East Asia.

In the context of the approaches proposed above, and noting current specifically-targeted but limited SEARO engagement with South Asia and East Asia, it would be further timely to consider what steps are required to strengthen OHCHR engagement in these two subregions, both with respect to the project thematic focus areas and more broadly. Such consideration should include attention from a results perspective of the most advantageous location of the relevant staff (i.e. at global or regional level).

3.5: Continue to strengthen links between regional and country-level engagement, results and impacts, with an overall 'driving' orientation towards increasing the enjoyment of human rights at country level.

Noting that 42 per cent of current project indicators include a specific national impact element (e.g. reference to government, ministries, NHRIs and other national-based actors), and on the understanding that this is the ultimate sphere in which OHCHR regional programming impacts need to be demonstrated in all substantive areas, it will be important to ensure that the regional /country nexus is an explicit driving element of future strategic and programme planning.

3.6: Further enhance strategic partnerships with regional CSOs by (i) leveraging OHCHR's convening power to further strengthen engagement with and among regional CSOs, and (ii) developing a partnership sub-strategy to further strengthen the basis for a holistic and integrated whole-of-region long term approach.

Building on partnerships and networks developed through the project, further increase opportunities in the post-COVID period for (i) regular OHCHR/CSO discussion at the strategic level (i.e. beyond practical project and activity cooperation); and (ii) wider/collective regional

CSO/OHCHR strategic discussion to enhance aggregated impact and cooperation around shared priorities.

Key areas for potential periodic discussion in both areas which were highlighted in CSO consultations included (i) longer-term human rights trends, challenges and priorities in the region; (ii) shared priorities in this context; (iii) respective roles of the OHCHR and regional CSOs; and (iv) arrangements for ongoing strengthening of CSO-CSO and CSO-OHCHR networking, mutual support, mutual learning and cooperation.

Taking account of (i) the critical contribution of strengthened and new partnerships to the success to date of project workstreams, and (ii) the number of partnerships which touch on several areas of OHCHR work at thematic and sub-regional levels, it is further proposed that a regional partnership sub-strategy be developed within the broader new regional vision and strategy.

3.7: Recalibrate OHCHR's approach to CSO grant funding in Asia and the Pacific towards smaller and strategically-targeted seed funding in high impact catalytic areas, supported by streamlined procedures and accountability requirements.

Taking account of challenges to date in ensuring expeditious and streamlined disbursements and the available CSO-friendly funding alternatives in the region, it is proposed that OHCHR (i) reorient its funding support in Asia and the Pacific towards strategic and streamlined short-term seed funding in areas which will add specific catalytic value to the advancement of OHCHR programming priorities (e.g. strategic research and particular high-impact short-term interventions, including in order to provide protection and credibility to the recipient); (ii) work with OHCHR HQ to develop and put in place appropriate criteria and streamlined, transparent and accelerated procedures for such funding in the region; (iii) prioritize working with and through network CSOs with capability to accountably manage grants as well as sub-grants to smaller CSOs; and (iv) seek opportunities to facilitate links between existing and new CSO partners and suitable alternative funding sources.

Recommendation 3.8: Conduct a longitudinal impact assessment in a selected thematic priority area supported by the project to provide in-depth feedback on impact, lessons and good practices to inform ongoing work in the area concerned as well as across the work of SEARO and PRO.

Such assessment would be conducted over a multi-year period in line with OHCHR METS guidelines on assessing impact of HR education and capacity building. Consideration should be given to the possibility that it be conducted jointly with other key UN partners working with OHCHR in the thematic area concerned. At the same time, the use of relevant online tools for training and other activity impact assessment purposes (e.g. six or 12 months after an activity) should be extended across all programme areas to the extent possible, drawing on the experience and lessons of the online follow-up assessment conducted with participants in the training for women journalists under Result 3.

3.9: Ensure gender equality, disability inclusion and other LNOB markers are specified in future results frameworks and other programme and project planning documents related to the project results areas (and beyond). This should be the case at all levels, including at output, indicator and target levels, and linked where possible and appropriate to relevant SDG and national indicators and targets.

Specific mainstreaming markers across the whole results framework beyond gender-specific activities would assist in further focusing planning, resourcing, delivery and reporting attention in the areas highlighted. Other LNOB markers should include children and youth, noting that

this is an OHCHR Spotlight focus and is already an area of engagement under project Results 1 and 2. To reinforce coherence with other key frameworks, as well as the ability to obtain relevant data through tapping into wider such processes, indicators and targets should be linked to relevant SDG and national equivalents where possible and appropriate.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Programme background

Regional overview

The Asia-Pacific region is the largest in the world, both in terms of its geography and population. Fewer than one quarter of countries in the region have ratified all the major international human rights instruments. All countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); the majority have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); about one third have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); and just over one quarter have ratified the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). Six countries in the region have ratified the International Convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and members of their families (ICRMW) and some 15 are party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

Current human rights trends and issues in selected areas

COVID-19 has hit societies and economies across Asia and the Pacific at their core, with deep and devastating social, economic and political impacts. It has exacerbated existing gaps in human rights protection, leading to increased poverty, exclusion and violence (particularly gender-based violence) and deepening inequalities. In many countries of the region it has led to increased restrictions on fundamental freedoms and democratic space. Overall, the pandemic has set back progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as key climate mitigation and adaptation goals and targets. In this broader context, the following overview highlights trends and developments pertinent in particular to the work of the project under Results 1-3.

Human rights issue related to migration

In 2019, more than 60 million international migrants lived in Asia and the Pacific. The region continues to host large numbers of refugees, including from Afghanistan and Myanmar (greatly increased since the Myanmar military coup and the fall of the government in Afghanistan in 2021). There are additionally large – albeit often uncounted – numbers of migrants in vulnerable situations, many of whom are in undocumented and precarious situations. Emerging challenges, in particular climate change and environmental degradation, added further complexities to the movement of people in the region.

The ratification of international human rights instruments relevant to migration, including international labour law and international refugee law across the region is not encouraging. There is a continued reluctance to recognize, in law, the protection of human rights of all migrants regardless of status. Additionally, there is a strong convergence on treating irregular migration as a security issue, focusing on enforcement and policing rather than protection. Migrants are often disproportionately exposed to human rights violations and concerns related to restrictive border and entry policies aimed at deterring irregular migration through criminalization, and the widespread use of immigration detention. However, in the absence of sufficient, affordable and safe alternative migration and asylum pathways, many migrants are compelled into situations of irregularity.

Migrants in irregular situations are denied access to public health, adequate housing, education, and essential social security, and are often excluded from the formal economy,

which can lead to precarious and exploitative working conditions. Women migrants face more restrictions of movement. Work traditionally performed by women, such as domestic work, is not considered part of the formal sector of the labour market. In such situations, women are compelled to resort to irregular – and often more precarious – ways of moving, living and working. Often linked to unregulated labour sectors, the Asia-Pacific is furthermore a major source and destination region for (cross-border) trafficking in persons and practices linked to modern slavery.

Human rights issues in the context of climate change

In 2019, the Asia-Pacific region continued to experience the impact of climate change, which included serious detrimental effects on the enjoyment of human rights. In 2019, Fiji, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Nepal, and Vanuatu experienced deadly floods and landslides and Vietnam and India were hit by severe tropical storms. These unpredictable weather patterns not only destroyed infrastructure, contaminated fresh water, crushed ecosystems, wiped out agricultural lands, but also subjected people to loss of life and displacement. Home to a number of Small Islands Developing States (SIDS), the Pacific region experienced rising sea levels, king tides, flooding, drought and extreme weather events, which threatened to overwhelm infrastructures, disrupt economies, displaced populations, and placed significant strains on governance. For most Pacific countries, these factors are threat multipliers, exacerbating existing social tensions related to pressure on land, rapid transitions and political instability, exacerbating human rights challenges in the region.

Countries in South-East Asia regularly rank amongst the highest in the world for killings of Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs). Despite the Human Rights Council's resolution on 21 March 2019 which recognized the contribution of environmental human rights defenders and the obligations of States to respect their fundamental rights, SEARO has continued to observe harassment, attacks, arrests, detention and criminalization for the important and courageous work they do to protect natural resources, wildlife and land.¹

The latest Human Rights Council's resolutions 48/13 and 48/14 adopted on 8 October 2021 recognized for the first time that having a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a human right and established a new Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change. These resolutions provide strategic entry points to engage with the relevant duty bearers in Asia and the Pacific. Business and human rights is further emerging as an issue which is beginning to engage multiple stakeholders in the region, linked as it is in many situations to rights related to the environment and indigenous peoples.

Human rights issues in the context of democratic space

As is true globally, the impact of digital technologies has profoundly changed the social and political landscape in the region. Opportunities for exercising fundamental rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and participation in public life have expanded in unparalleled ways. Yet, this expansion has brought with it new and significant threats to civic space and critical voices. As most of the online dialogue takes place on private platforms, global technology companies play a central role, including around the evolving legal frameworks regulating public forms of expression. Companies often establish parameters for moderating content and can be instrumental in the response to potential online attacks aimed at stifling freedom of expression. Yet, there are concerns regarding the level of transparency

¹ UN Human Rights Council resolution Recognizing the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development (A/HRC/40/L.22/Rev.1)

by companies in their response to government requests for private data and for blocking or removing online content.

The exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of peaceful assembly and association continued to be subjected to limitations undermining civic space and democratic governance across Asia. In a number of countries in the region, governments used security policies, including counter-terrorism strategies, as a pretext to restrict public freedoms and to curb the role of civil society. There has been an increase in authoritarianism and polarizing politics in parts of the region, coupled with a tendency towards religious extremism in some countries that have adversely impacted fundamental freedoms and civic space.

SEARO continued to observe restrictions of fundamental human rights extending into the online sphere, through the adoption of laws and regulations, such as cybercrime laws, “anti-fake news” laws, and the establishment of ‘fake news’ centres to monitor online and offline activities. This had a negative impact on the scope for media reporting, overall expression on issues of public concern and advocacy by human and environmental rights defenders (EHRDs), given the increasingly critical relevance of digital platforms for public discourse, advocacy and debate.

OHCHR in Asia and the Pacific

OHCHR established an Asia and the Pacific Regional Office in Bangkok in 2002, and in 2005 separated the office into one Regional Office for South-East Asia (SEARO) and another for the Pacific (PRO). SEARO covers all countries of ASEAN with the exception of Cambodia which has an OHCHR Country Office. OHCHR has Human Rights Advisors attached to offices of the Resident Coordinators and UNCTs for Myanmar (located in Bangkok), Philippines, Malaysia and Mongolia. Timor-Leste, while not officially an ASEAN Member State, also has a Human Rights Advisor. OHCHR further has a Myanmar Team based in Bangkok. This is hosted by SEARO, serves as a de facto Country Office and coordinates work with SEARO and the Human Rights Advisor for Myanmar.

The Pacific Regional Office (PRO) covers 16 countries of the Pacific region, including Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands Countries (PICs), Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. OHCHR also has a Human Rights Advisor in Papua New Guinea.

SEARO and PRO act as an expert resource and play a catalytic and convening role in the region, helping to bring human rights standards and mechanisms into discussions on political, social, economic and developmental issues amongst governmental and non-governmental actors. A combination of advocacy on human rights issues of concern and technical support and capacity building with key partners has formed the basis of the Regional Offices’ work, including with governments, national human rights institutions, regional organizations, civil society and the UN. SEARO and PRO also aim to integrate gender, disability and LNOB considerations into all areas of its work.

SEARO’s presence in Bangkok comes under the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific’s (ESCAP) host agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, whereas the work of the Regional Office of the Pacific is governed by the High Commissioner’s broad mandate to promote and protect human rights. Both SEARO and PRO engage across the six pillars of OHCHR’s Organizational Management Plan.

The Sida project

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) awarded OHCHR a five-year grant (2018-2022) to strengthen and build the capacity of the Regional Office in critical areas of specific thematic expertise, including migration, climate change and the environment, democratic space and human rights and development. The project, “Strengthening capacity of regional actors to promote human rights, accountability, democratic space and gender in the Asia-Pacific Region,” was in the amount of 79.5 million SEK (USD 8.36 million as of 22 April 2022). On 17 June 2021, Sida awarded SEARO a second grant in the form of a ‘top-up’ to the existing one in the Result areas 1, 2, 3 and 5 in relation to OHCHR’s work on COVID-19, thereby increasing the implementation timeline to June 2023 by way of a no-cost extension, and simultaneously providing an additional 26.5 million Swedish SEK to be implemented by the end of 2022 through its Drive for Democracy initiative.

For SEARO (and PRO for Result 2 and parts of Result 1), the project focuses on the following expected results:

- Expected result 1: Strengthened capacity of regional actors to address human rights issues related to migration, trafficking and modern slavery
- Expected result 2: Strengthened capacity of regional actors to promote human rights arising in the context of climate change, including economic, social and cultural rights, and environmental rights
- Expected result 3: Strengthened capacity of regional actors to promote and protect democratic space
- Expected result 4: Strengthened regional mechanisms to promote and protect human rights
- Expected result 5: Human rights mainstreamed within the UN system, including the UN Development Group for the Asia-Pacific

The project is in line with OHCHR’s Management Plan (OMP) 2018-2021, which in 2021 was extended to 2023 and was developed around the six main pillars of OHCHR’s core thematic areas of focus, namely: non-discrimination; participation; accountability; development; peace and security; and human rights mechanisms. This framework has remained relevant throughout the COVID-19 crisis and simultaneously provided the needed flexibility to respond to changing circumstances. Within the OHCHR Management Plan, particular areas (or ‘shift’ areas) of focus were identified for specific focus: supporting a global constituency for human rights; helping prevent conflict, violence and insecurity; working to protect and expand civic space; and promoting human rights in the context of new areas of OHCHR’s work, or ‘frontier’ areas such as people on the move, climate change, digital space and emerging technologies, corruption and inequalities. The latest OMP iteration includes a focus on areas such as inequalities (now a shift), ESCR, LNOB, and business and human rights, among others.

Human rights and the sustainable development goals

Human rights anchor the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda explicitly states that it is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties. The SDGs are closely linked to civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. They cover areas such as health, education, decent work, food, water and equality, as well as personal security, access to justice and fundamental freedoms. Many of the SDGs refer explicitly to human rights, such as ending all forms of discrimination, protecting sexual and reproductive health rights and labour rights, prohibiting torture and protecting fundamental freedoms (Goals 5, 8, 10 and 16). In addition, human rights principles, such as non-discrimination and equality, participation and accountability, cut across the 2030

Agenda and the SDGs, providing guidance on their implementation in the context of the underlying SDG principle to “leave no one behind”.

The integration of the SDGs and human rights is thus integral to the work of OHCHR and other UN counterparts at regional and national levels and is accordingly identified as a core element of one of the priority results areas for the Sida-funded project. The project in particular seeks to increase OHCHR’s focus in Asia and the Pacific on economic, social and cultural rights. A key question which arose from the desk review and stakeholder interviews during the evaluation is how best to integrate human rights and the economic development dimensions of the SDGs, particularly in the context of wider regional priorities and concerns about poverty reduction and inclusive economic development. It is noted in this context that SEARO has employed Sida Top-Up funding to strengthen its capacity in this regard through the recruitment of an economist who can substantively engage in this critical sphere.

1.2 Evaluation background

As per the amendment to the funding agreement with Sweden signed on 17 June 2021, the independent evaluation of the project was conducted in 2021-2022, with OHCHR due to submit the final report to the donor no later than 30 June 2022.

The primary users of this evaluation will be OHCHR and Sida. The main stakeholders engaged in the evaluation were both internal and external. Internal stakeholders included SEARO, PRO, the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division (FOTCD), the Donor and External Relations Section (DEXREL), the Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Service (PPMES), the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division (TESPRDD), as well as Finance and Administration.

External stakeholders included regional UN entities, UN Resident Coordinator’s Offices (RCOs), regional CSOs, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and their representatives and one academic institution.

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the project and produce recommendations in terms of the following valuation criteria:

- **Relevance and coherence** – the extent to which the project has been and is still relevant to the situation in the region and the needs of stakeholders (both duty bearers and right-holders), and that its focus is on the areas where it has comparative advantages.
- **Efficiency** – the extent to which the project has converted financial resources into substantive results, including synergies within the organization and with the efforts of stakeholders and partners.
- **Effectiveness** – the degree to which the project’s planned results and targets have been achieved, at outcome and output levels, including the identification of areas of intervention where results have not yet reached the expected targets.
- **Impact orientation** – the extent to which the strategic orientation of the project points toward making a significant contribution to broader, long-term, sustainable changes on human rights issues.
- **Sustainability** – the likelihood that the results of the project are durable and can be maintained by OHCHR and other stakeholders in the future.
- **Gender and human rights integration**– the degree to which a gender and human rights perspective (Human Rights Based Approach) has been integrated in the project, and the degree to which the results obtained have contributed to gender and human

rights principles of non-discrimination and equality, with specific emphasis on the rights of women and persons with disabilities.

The objectives of the evaluation are:

- To identify areas of strength and weakness in the planning and achievement of results, including in the area of gender and human rights integration.
- To produce useful lessons learned and good practices that illustrate successful and unsuccessful strategies in the achievement of results.
- To examine the current project response posture in light of the socio-political and security dynamics in the region, including the COVID-19 pandemic and/or conflicts that have increased over the past few months, and
- To produce clear and actionable recommendations identifying concrete actions and responsibilities for OHCHR to undertake towards these ends.

The evaluation took both a summative and a formative approach. It verified what results have or have not been achieved, to date (summative) with a view to inform OHCHR globally as well as the future work of SEARO and PRO (formative). This approach will therefore increase OHCHR's accountability and learning in line with OHCHR's Evaluation Policy, and contribute to strengthening effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability on an inclusive and equitable basis.

The evaluation followed the UNEG Norms and Standards² for Evaluation in the UN System, as well as the UNEG Handbook for Conducting Evaluations of Normative Work³ and the UNEG Guidance "Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations".

1.3 Methodology and approach

This evaluation was conducted between 1 November 2021 and 31 May 2022 by a team of two independent external consultants. The inception phase consisted of a documentation review, scoping interviews and submission of an inception report on December 10, 2021.

The evaluation's overall approach was guided by the principle of credibility – that is, ensuring that the best evidence available is harnessed, and that it is analyzed appropriately, to generate findings, conclusions and recommendations that management can feel confident acting upon.

The evaluation used the five DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact contribution and sustainability, and included a sixth one on gender, human rights and disability inclusion.

The evaluators used a mixed-methods approach, using the following interconnected methods: (i) desk review; (ii) secondary data analysis; (iii) interviews conducted via virtual platforms; and (iv) short case studies.

1.4 Gender, equality, disability inclusion and LNOB

Although the evaluation matrix included a separate section on 'gender equality and (disability inclusion) integration' in line with the Terms of Reference, such considerations were also

² <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1914>

³ <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1484>

integrated throughout all aspects of the evaluation through the addition of supplementary gender and other inclusion questions under all core lines of enquiry.

1.5 Data collection approaches

Desk Review

The list of documents reviewed for this Evaluation Report is contained in Annex V. This mainly consists of regional OHCHR and project planning and reporting documents covering the period being evaluated, and global documents such as the OHCHR Management Plan (OMP). The evaluation team also conducted secondary data analysis by drawing on other published reports which deal with relevant thematic issues and related trends and developments in the region. This included reports from UN, regional organization, CSO and academic research sources.

Stakeholder interviews

The evaluation team conducted one-to-one and cluster (two-three person) interviews with selected key informants and stakeholders. Due to the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online.

Taking into account the need to bridge geographic and time zone differences, a standard semi-structured interview form was used to guide interviews and gather information in a consistent format. While the core set of questions remained consistent, adjustments were made in light of sector, thematic/issue and institutional/organizational factors. Prompting questions on gender and other inclusion considerations were included in all cases as necessary. The full listing of OHCHR (internal) and international/regional and national stakeholders (external) is set out in Annex IV.

Short case studies

The evaluators used 'critical instance' short case study approach,⁴ as elaborated in the Data Collection Toolkit. The evaluation examined several strategically selected instances of unique interest to illustrate, understand and assess the dynamics and impacts of the project.

Stakeholders overview

Over the period covered by the evaluation, OHCHR has engaged with a diverse and evolving range of regional and national governmental, civil society, indigenous and other stakeholders. The Data Collection Toolkit sets out the core criteria for selection of stakeholders for interview. In brief (and subject to amendment), the key stakeholder categories are:

Duty-bearers: Regional intergovernmental organizations, ESCAP and other regional UN entities, UN RCOs, NHRIs and OHCHR (SEARO, PRO, FOTCD, DEXREL, PPMES, TESPRDD, finance/administration).

Rights-holders: Regional CSOs (including in the areas of indigenous peoples, EHRDs, youth and human rights advocacy).

⁴ Morra, Linda, G., Friedlander, Amy, C. (date). *Case Study Evaluations*. World Bank Operations Evaluation Department: Washington D.C.: USA. [www.worldbank.org/html/oed. Retrieved 2/03/2020].

Evaluation limitations

Although the evaluation process was able to engage with a large and diverse range of stakeholders, and OHCHR were unfailingly responsive and proactive in supporting the process through ensuring staff and documentation were available, there were certain limitations that also need to be highlighted. These were:

- The constraints on direct engagement with stakeholders, internal and external, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This limited interactions to pre-arranged online slots, without the same flexibility for follow-up and informal communications that is afforded by direct engagement.
- Challenges in arranging interviews in the Pacific in some cases, due to issues of connectivity and other pressing priorities of local stakeholders.
- Despite many efforts made, a lack of engagement with governments due to their generally low prioritization of human rights in Asia, in particular (intensified by the pandemic).
- No direct engagement with CSO networks with a specific women's focus.

II. MAIN FINDINGS PRESENTED ACCORDING TO EVALUATION CRITERIA

The findings summarized below follow the criteria set out in the evaluation Terms of Reference, as well as the evaluation questions (EQ) set out in the Inception Report.

2.1 Relevance

Overview: *Very satisfactory.* The relevance of each thematic focus area in the region was validated by analysis of human rights developments and trends in the region, stakeholder interviews and documentation review, as well as by levels of participation and interest in events and other activities convened or facilitated in the five results areas. The project results as described in planning documents are well anchored in the OMP, including the Frontier issues: climate change, digital space and emerging technologies, and people on the move (see further elaboration below). They are further well aligned with the priorities and programmes of other key regional actors, including UN counterparts at regional and national levels, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC).

OHCHR further demonstrated good adaptive management and planning capacities in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling work in most areas to continue, albeit with constraints caused by lack of ability to travel and engage directly with partners and other stakeholders in their own contexts. At the same time, while the intensified use of online modalities enabled engagement with stakeholders otherwise unable to join direct meetings due to cost, distance and other factors, challenges were also exposed for those with limited technology access and in areas with constrained connectivity (e.g. grassroots EHRDs and CSOs).

EQ R1: How relevant have the workstreams supported by the project in the region been to (i) the situation of human rights in the region, (ii) the OHCHR mandate and OMP and extension, (iii) the SDGs, and (iv) Sweden's regional strategy?

Strong relevance is evident across each of the areas highlighted, noting the interrelationships as well between each. The earlier overview of key human rights developments and trends in the region highlights challenges with respect to migration, human trafficking and modern slavery; climate change and democratic/civic space. These issues had been on the global and regional OHCHR agenda for some time, but it was only when the resources provided by the project became available that OHCHR was able to intensify the scale and depth of its engagement in these areas in Asia and the Pacific, with a particular focus on the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. The project results framework remained relevant throughout the COVID-19 crisis and simultaneously provided the necessary flexibility to respond to changing circumstances.

With respect to the OMP through to the end of 2023, the project directly addresses the following Pillars (1) advance sustainable development through human rights; (2) enhance equality and counter discrimination; (3) enhance participation and protect civic space. The

project further addresses the following OMP Shifts: (1) inequality; (2) frontier issues [climate change; corruption; digital space and emerging technologies; people on the move]; (3) global constituency for human rights; (5) protect and expand civic space; and (6) prevention of conflict, violence and insecurity. Each of the OMP 'spotlight populations' is a focus for the project; (1) persons with disabilities, (2) women and (3) young people.

With respect to the SDGs, the project particularly aligns to Goal 1 (no poverty); Goal 5 (gender equality); Goal 10 (reduced inequality); Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions); and Goal 17 (partnerships for the goals).

The conceptualization of the project by OHCHR and Sida from the beginning was grounded in the above factors, with a high degree of alignment between OHCHR priorities in this regard and the priorities of the Strategy for Sweden's regional development cooperation in Asia and the Pacific region 2016–2021. The latter aimed to contribute to sustainable development in Asia through mutual interaction between human rights, democracy, gender equality, environment and climate change. Priority focus areas in this context included human rights, democracy and gender equality; strengthened capacity of regional actors to promote greater accountability and increased democratic space; and strengthened capacity of regional actors to promote human rights and gender equality.

EQ R2: Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with the intended outcomes or impacts? Do they address the problems identified by applying a theory of change? How flexible or adaptive has the project been in responding to the rapidly evolving socio-political and human rights situation in the region?

The project **theory of change (ToC)** is focused at individual results level within the overall global OHCHR theory of change and OHCHR's global Pillars (and is thus perhaps better described as a series of ToCs). The ToC reflects the 'Frontier Issues' prioritized under the OMP 'Shifts' category and outlines links with the SDGs, key partners (national, regional and global), gender perspectives and key outputs (linked with 'shift' areas).

The evaluation found that at the individual results level, the updated ToC has in practice provided a useful and relevant guide to project planning and implementation, including the formulation of project outputs, indicators, targets and planned activities. Causal links are evident between these various levels, although there is scope for more explicit visibility of gender equality, disability inclusion and LNOB markers.

Recognizing that the leadership and team cultures within both SEARO and PRO ensured in practice that the individual results workstreams were generally well linked, it is suggested that including an overarching whole-of-project level to the ToC on the lines outlined in Annex I could have further reinforced such linkages, further enhancing coherence and overall impact. Such an overarching level could also have articulated the aggregated regional intended results of the project within the wider work of SEARO and PRO under the OMP.

Later commentary positively assesses the **adaptability of OHCHR** with respect to project implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current (updated) results framework simultaneously shows three levels of adaptation: (i) the original formulation), (ii) adaptations for 2019-2020 and (iii) a further adaptation for the Top-Up period. This indicates recognition of progress, experience and lessons learned (all of which are well described in annual reports to the donor). The approach taken to project design and implementation further facilitates an adaptive approach, with (i) a general opening of engagement through situational and stakeholder mapping followed by (ii) convening and participating in multi-stakeholders fora

which adds to understanding and analysis of the issues and develops collective momentum for change; (iii) strategic research to inform ongoing implementation and advocacy of OHCHR and other stakeholders and (iv) strengthening OHCHR and stakeholders' capacities and effectiveness through all these phases.

EQ R3: How does the project align with and support regional and/or national plans, programmes and priorities of regional stakeholders on issues considered human rights priorities, taking into account OHCHR's comparative advantages and other actors' interventions in this area?

The project was found to be aligned with the strategies and plans of regional and national UN counterparts in the thematic focus areas of the project, reinforced in the case of migration by the adoption in 2018 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (A/RES/73/195). It is observed however, that varying degrees of commitment are evident in practice across the UN system, particularly at national level, with respect to the integration and application of the full spectrum of human rights.

At the intergovernmental level, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) plays a lead among member States on issues related to migration and climate change, with a degree of overlap in priorities. However, human rights, including those related to democratic/civic space, do not feature explicitly in ESCAP policies and priorities, hence the focus under the project on working to lift the profile of human rights in ESCAP intergovernmental fora, particularly the Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD).

At national level, climate change and migration issues feature in the policy priorities of most governments, with the Global Compact on Migration further bolstering attention in this respect. As earlier noted however, the general trend at national level across the region has been one of increasing pressure on human rights and those who advocate for their realization, with a steady erosion of democratic/civic space which has been accelerated by restrictive measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. Herein lies a key driver of the project Result 3 on democratic/civic digital space.

Individual UN agencies active in the region work to the same global and regional agendas grounded in the SDGs and global policy frameworks, which has provided a strong foundation for OHCHR cooperation under the project with UNDP, UNEP, ILO, FAO, UN Women, UNESCO, UNICEF, IOM, and UNFPA in particular. The regional intergovernmental agendas of the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN), the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) all prioritize issues related to migration and climate change, although issues and rights related to democratic/civic space are not a priority and tend to be largely absent in intergovernmental discourse. Again this points to the project rationale for targeting such fora for human rights mainstreaming efforts in the thematic areas concerned.

With respect to regional CSOs and other civil society entities, the project (as part of wider SEARO and PRO programming) targeted and developed good working relations with an increasing number in the particular fields covered by the project's thematic results. This included funding and /or collaborative arrangements with Article 19, International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Alliance for Future Generations, Asia-Pacific Forum for National Human Rights Institutions (APF), Diplomacy Training Program (DTP), Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, International Detention Coalition, Asia Indigenous Peoples PACT (AIPP), Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders (APNED), Earth Rights International, the Institute for Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP), Mahidol University in Thailand, and three national NGOs.

Stakeholder feedback from all the above categories reported strong, transparent and interactive and mutually beneficial relations with OHCHR. Stakeholders further indicated a clear understanding and appreciation of the comparative advantage of OHCHR in the region vis-a-vis other UN and international agencies. A number of common themes emerged in such feedback, as summarized below.

Box 1: 10 'C's of OHCHR comparative advantage

1. **Centered** in a unique human rights mandate, role and expertise, with international standing as an impartial normative agency working with governments, CSOs and other stakeholders. Mandate holder and leadership role in implementing the UN Secretary-General's Call to Action in context of country-level UNDS reform processes.

2. **Convening / co-convening** of regional events and processes to bring stakeholders together (for the first time in some cases at a regional level) contributing to ongoing regional networking and cooperation and strengthening the basis for longer-term collective impact. Particularly important for results 1, 2 and 3.

3. **Connecting** - linking stakeholders, particularly CSOs and human rights and environmental defenders with international human rights mechanisms and UN Special Procedures, including bringing cases to the attention of Special Rapporteurs and supporting wider stakeholder engagement in UPR processes and Treaty Committee processes and follow-up.

4. **Capacitating** - strong technical expertise and ability to tap into and effectively deploy expertise from Global HQ, other parts of the UN system, UN Special Procedures, regional CSOs and other countries in the region. Institutional and technical capacity development role based on global mandate and expertise for government, UN system CSOs and other stakeholders. Technical advisory expertise and role on request for the development of national legislation and policies and strategies.

5. **Constituency building** - expanding the human rights constituencies within and between each of the results areas, with the progress in moving the BHR agenda forward as one example of expanding the pool of human rights-aware actors in the region.

6. **Communicating** and outreach - greatly enhanced by the work of the expanded communications unit which has strengthened visibility and outreach for the work of OHCHR in the prioritized thematic areas and beyond, through provision of resources (e.g. videos for relevant International UN Days), enhanced human rights messaging to support OHCHR activities, and increased information sharing between OHCHR and stakeholders across the region.

7. **Contextualized** - grounded and well attuned to regional and national contexts, strengthened *inter alia* by the SEARO country focal point system, working relationships with Human Rights Advisors where they are in place within UN RCOs; relationships which have been developed with UNRCs, UN RCOs and UNCTs through work under Result 5.

8. **Consensus building** - about the centrality of human rights in the prioritized thematic areas as well as to the UN mandate as a whole at regional and national levels, as an important basis for enhanced collective action.

9. **Clarifying issues** - through conducting/commissioning and disseminating strategic research and mapping findings, e.g. with respect to enhancing the profile and shared understanding among relevant actors in the region on the nature of threats to digital democratic space and generating a stronger base for collective action involving UN, CSO business ('big tech') and other actors.

10. **Catalyzing** - drawing on the above areas of comparative advantage to initiate collective actions and enhanced collaboration by diverse stakeholders in addressing issues and priorities in the thematic areas prioritized by the project.

Table 1: Stakeholder comments on OHCHR comparative advantage

<i>the UN's "go to" agency on human rights</i>	<i>clear about its normative role</i>	<i>superb technical expertise - sound in every way</i>
<i>show good leadership - strategic and focused</i>	<i>produces high quality research which adds value</i>	<i>strong convening role – provides space for others to do their job</i>
<i>good facilitators - honest broker</i>	<i>results focused - practical and grounded, will help find solutions</i>	<i>make human rights easy to understand and relevant to the context</i>
<i>highly responsive</i>	<i>very good and proactive in sharing information</i>	<i>if they don't have the information, they will find it</i>
<i>go the extra mile to provide technical expertise</i>	<i>taps effectively into and shares experience of other countries</i>	<i>good at complementarity</i>
<i>provide hands on support and mentoring</i>	<i>very good, trusted and flexible partner - open and flexible</i>	<i>follows through on commitments as part of collective efforts</i>

EQ R4: Have the strategies used to achieve results been effective and appropriate for the regional/national context and stakeholders and were they based on a context analysis where risks and assumptions were considered?

Strategy development and relevance: As elaborated in Sections III and IV on impact and sustainability, as well as in case studies presented in this report, a number of key strategies were effectively applied by OHCHR to leverage limited human and financial resources to achieve positive results. These reflected OHCHR's comparative advantage as a normative agency, as well as OHCHR's non-resident status (apart from in Fiji and Thailand). They also drew on the wider experience and lessons of existing strategies and approaches developed and applied by OHCHR in the region and internationally. The progress made across the results areas and demonstrated engagement and commitment of multiple partners is indicative of the relevance of the strategies and approaches applied, as later elaborated.

With respect to the engagement of stakeholders in strategy development and implementation, this was an integral and essential factor in both the relevance of the adopted strategies to the regional and national context, and their effective implementation in practice. In the UN context, it was evident that strategies and plans for work at regional and national levels were jointly developed and implemented with UN partners, with each working within their respective mandates. OHCHR's active participation in the UN regional architecture (particularly the IBC system and regional human rights and migration networks) provided a key platform for such joint work. A key example in this respect was the planning the delivery of HRBA training to UNCTs.

CSO partners indicated that plans for their cooperation with OHCHR (including in cases where funding was provided) were both jointly developed and involved ongoing regular interaction. UN and CSO partner feedback highlighted OHCHR's open and interactive "way of working" as important elements of the agency's comparative advantage.

Risk analysis and mitigation: The updated project theory of change and original project documentation include contextual analysis to underpin the prioritization of the thematic focus areas of the project. On this basis, several risks are identified at a 'higher level in each case and have clearly been taken into account in project design and implementation within the larger context of the work of SEARO and PRO.

The two higher level sets of risks only partially align but taken together they provide a reasonably comprehensive risk overview and are elaborated further at the outputs/operational level in the results framework. There would have been value in the ToC set of risks (which came later) incorporating and building on the original risks set out in the project document to provide a more unified approach.

The risks identified in the ToC concern (i) the challenge of adding value within a multitude of actors in particular thematic areas (ii) the impact of human rights protection issues on SEARO's ability to engage with partners; (iii) lack of political will among ASEAN Member States or AICHR representatives, along with the scope for robust collaboration with AICHR being constrained by ASEAN's principle of non-interference in domestic affairs of member States; (iv) lack of interest among UNCTs to integrate HRBA into their work and (v) lack of political will among countries in the region to implement the SDGs in a manner that fully respects international human rights commitments.

The mitigating strategies across these risks are to (i) ensure OHCHR interventions add value and utilize the specificity of the international human rights framework; (ii) take all necessary steps to mitigate any potential protection concerns; (iii) work closely with those AICHR representatives who are open to engagement, as well as directly with the AICHR Secretariat; and (iv) work through the regional UN SDG Peer Support Group and associated systems (e.g. the IBCs) and the Regional UN Human Rights Network.

Each of these strategies was applied in practice (e.g. by working closely to OHCHR's comparative advantage and strengthening protection through the use of online modalities and security awareness training, as well strengthening the awareness of CSOs, EHRDs and other actors of UN Special Procedures and how to access these). In the case of integrating HRBA into the work of UNCTs, the degree of proactive commitment shown by UN Resident Coordinators (UNRCs) was identified as a critical factor. In the case of AICHR, progress has been slower due to COVID-19 impacts, but the stated strategy remains valid and in progress.

Additional to these risks, the original project document also identifies (i) the possibility of a challenge by the Thailand government to SEARO's ongoing presence in Bangkok, although it is assessed as a very low risk (and has not been subsequently realized); (ii) the time it will take (as borne out in practice in the first year of the project) to recruit staff into the newly created posts; and (iii) the sustainability of these posts beyond the end of the project term (also highlighted as a key remaining risk by this evaluation).

The identified mitigating strategies in the latter case include the fact that technical cooperation activities under the project derive from requests made by regional mechanisms and countries (as demonstrated by both RCOs/UNCTs and governments at country level); taking a fast track approach to recruitment by posting fixed-term and temporary vacancies at

the same time (applied in practice); and taking a strategic approach to the retention of the posts that show the most relevance in five years' time (a major focus of the findings and recommendations of this evaluation).

The risk of a pandemic to project implementation could not have been anticipated, although risks could have plausibly included a general reference (beyond Thailand) to political developments and instability in the region causing potential challenges, as was later revealed through the military coup in Myanmar.

2.2 Effectiveness

Evaluation assessment: *Very satisfactory.* Given the mandate and role of OHCHR (encompassing normative influence, capacity development, constituency building, strategic research, networking building, etc.), the on-going work across all project areas has a long-term perspective transcending one multi-year project cycle. Apart from three time-bound cases related to publications and a regional mapping, this is reflected in the formulation of project outputs.

Good progress is demonstrated in delivering against the project outputs, with the majority well on track for achievement within the extended project timeframe. The development in this context of substantive partnerships with UN regional and national counterparts, regional and national CSOs, some governments and NHRIs, business actors, EHRDs and other relevant stakeholders has been impressive, validating the selection of the priority thematic focus areas.

OHCHR comparative advantage, which is covered as a key element of relevance in the previous section, is also highly pertinent to considerations of effectiveness.

EQ E1: What have been the main results achieved so far in the different areas of the project during the period assessed, if any? What is the likelihood that expected results will be achieved?

As Annex II elaborates, 90 per cent of the project results and outputs as set out in the ToC have been completed or are demonstrating good progress and are on track for achievement within the extended project Top-Up period.

Only two outputs have not been able to proceed as planned, in both cases due to the impacts of COVID-19. These are Output 2.6 (scoping study on climate change and human rights in the Pacific, where the pandemic caused all country visits to be postponed) and Output 4.1 (strengthen capacity of AICHR on international human rights law and mechanisms). Although 2018 and 2019 saw developments to this end as summarized in Annex II, progress slowed during 2020 and 2021 due to AICHR functioning at a decreased level during the pandemic period. Work will be intensified during 2022 and 2023, putting implementation of both Outputs back on track. In the case of Output 2.6, for example, the postponed scoping study will be a deliverable for an international climate change consultant who is currently under recruitment.

EQ E2: Where positive results of the project were identified, what were the enabling factors and processes?

Key **enabling factors and processes** for the progress made to date by SEARO and PRO in implementing the project have included:

(i) The availability of dedicated staff positions in the region to directly engage in outreach, partnership development, constituency building and the planning and implementation of activities in the project results areas.

(ii) Working diligently to the 10 'C's of OHCHR's comparative advantage in order to maximize the added value of the agency's unique global mandate vis-a-vis human rights and the effective application of limited human and financial resources.

(iii) Sufficiently clear theories of change at individual results level to guide planning and implementation.

(iv) Being well grounded in core regional concerns, issues, responses and frameworks in line with the contextual analysis in the theory of change.

(v) Applying strategies which are relevant to the diverse and rapidly evolving contexts and dynamics of the region (refer to section on sustainability for elaboration).

(vi) The effective development of and investment in substantive results-focused partnerships based on shared priorities and complementary constituencies and approaches at regional and national levels.

(vii) Promoting and leveraging the links between relevant issues and developments (human rights, economic development, climate change, the environment, gender and LNOB, among others).

(viii) Ensuring that women's, indigenous and community voices are heard in relevant fora to bring profile in regional deliberations to their lived experience and issues.

(ix) Having practical follow-up measures 'on the table' to create a basis for ongoing cooperation, support and momentum - e.g. the development of National Action Plans in the case of human rights and business.

(x) Generating momentum by building on previous and ongoing convening, training and other initiatives, creating continuity within the results areas rather than piece-meal or once-off approaches.

(xi) The quality of office leadership as well as professional and support staff supporting project implementation.

A key common thread through the above is the demonstrated ability of OHCHR in the region to identify and leverage **strategic opportunities** for advancement of the project's thematic agendas. Such opportunities which have been effectively leveraged include:

(i) OHCHR's distinctive mandate in the thematic focus areas of the project, including with respect to economic, social and cultural rights – e.g. the agency's broad mandate on migration, including but going beyond the labour migration focus of many other regional actors. This has opened partnership opportunities with a broad array of actors including the ICRC and IFRC, humanitarian NGOs, businesses and media entities. The publication of the OHCHR toolkit "Seven key elements for building human rights-based narratives on migrants and migration" provided further impetus in this regard.

(ii) OHCHR's unique access to UN Special Procedures and international human rights mechanism, and related ability to link these with stakeholders within the project's thematic focus areas.

(iii) Global MoUs signed with UNEP and UNESCO during the project period which add weight to cooperation at regional levels in areas including protection for EHRDs and the digital security of women journalists.

(iv) The considerable UN work already underway in the project's thematic areas to which OHCHR can add value in line with its comparative advantage, particularly in collaboration with UNEP and UN Women (climate change, gender), UNDP (business and human rights, the integration of human rights and the SDGs), UNESCO (democratic/civic space and the media), DPA (working with ASEAN and AICHR) and FAO (indigenous peoples and climate change).

(v) The UN Development System (UNDS) reform agenda and the UN SG's Call to Action and Human Rights Up Front agendas, which have opened space for substantive OHCHR engagement with UNRCOs and UNCTs to accelerate the mainstreaming of human rights and link the updating of CCAs to the scanning of human rights risks. Likewise, the Global Compact for Migration provides a key framework for OHCHR engagement on migration and human rights in the region.

(vi) Also within the framework of UN reform, the development of the new regional UN IBC and working group architecture, which provides opportunities for expanded OHCHR influence and visibility, including through contributing to the capacities of UN counterparts to mainstream human rights in the work of which they are jointly part. The recent addition of a new IBC on economic recovery and COVID-19 is noted (co-led by UNICEF and ILO), which offers further opportunities for OHCHR influence.

(vii) The establishment in Bangkok of a regional UN Development Cooperation Office (DCO) in Bangkok, which has provided further entry points for efforts to mainstream human rights within the UN's development agenda in the region.

(viii) The opportunity (although balanced by challenges, as elsewhere elaborated) triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic to rapidly accelerate the use of online communication modalities, increase OHCHR's digital presence and rapidly upskill staff in this regard.

(ix) Investment (assisted by geographic proximity) in the development of close relationships with the previous Thailand Chair of AICHR Chair, and with the current Thai representative, offering opportunities for jointly exploring how best OHCHR can add value to the work of AICHR as it comes out of the pandemic period.

EQ E3: Are there areas where it is not possible to identify positive results on human rights issues in the region? What prevented the project from achieving results in those areas?

As elsewhere noted, only two outputs showed slower than anticipated progress in terms of implementation at this point in the project cycle. In both cases this was due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite challenges experienced in these areas, no major adjustments to the ToC, results framework and workplan were needed (apart from the updating and adjustments required in the context of negotiation of the Top-Up phase).

One question which remains to be further clarified in the context of the project results areas, and also more widely within OHCHR's work in Asia and the Pacific, is how best to engage in South Asia and East Asia in terms of the respective roles of SEARO and OHCHR HQ. In the latter case, there has been an increase in engagement by SEARO thematic teams, including with the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) and Ministry of Justice in the Republic of

Korea on human rights and borders training, as well as the provision of a JPO from Japan to the SEARO migration work.

In South Asia, examples of project-supported linkages included a postponed SEARO mission to Nepal (due to the pandemic); OHCHR/SEARO's role in Nepal as one of only two invited regional UN entities to be a member of the support team piloting the UN's interim guidance on the operationalization of LNOB in that country; the involvement of the Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission in a regional training event for NHRIs; the provision of technical advice on COVID-related migrant labour matters to UNCTs in Bangladesh, India and the Maldives; the initiation of research to assess the human rights impact of COVID-19 return and reintegration policies on migrant workers; and the engagement (with the APF) of NHRIs from Bangladesh and Nepal in a consultation to prepare for the Asia-Pacific consultation with NHRIs on advancing implementation of the Global Compact on Migration in November 2021. It is important to also note that the migration workstream under the project covers the broader Asia-Pacific region, from South Asia to New Zealand in the far reaches of the South Pacific.

Case study 1: Building momentum to address Business and Human Rights (BHR) issues in the Pacific

Background and actions taken: The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) provide the authoritative global framework for the respective duties and responsibilities of States and business enterprises to prevent and address business-related human rights abuses. Work in this area has emerged as a major focus of OHCHR engagement under the project in the Pacific (as well as Asia), linking into the intensifying high profile issues around climate change in the region and thus fitting under Result 2. At the core of engagement by PRO have been two regional forums in 2020 and 2021, convened in collaboration with the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights (UNWG). The Forums brought together representatives of a diverse range of stakeholders including member States, NHRIs, business leaders, UN agencies, academia, affected communities, EHRDs and regional, national and local CSOs. The 1st UN Pacific Forum on Business and Human Rights was held from 1 – 2 December 2020 and the second was held from 22-24 November 2021.

Results to date: The two Forums (i) raised awareness and visibility of issues related to business and human rights in the region; (ii) strengthened knowledge of participants about BHR, related good practices and available remedies when negative consequences of business activities lead to human rights violations; (iii) linked regional actors, processes and issues with those at global level; (iv) engaged Pacific governments on the role of states in regulating and ensuring accountability for actions which have harmful environmental impacts; and (v) strengthened linkages between businesses interested in contributing to stronger green and blue economies in the Pacific. The Forums further catalyzed wider debate in the region on human rights, climate change and business and encouraged Pacific countries to consider developing a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights.

Lessons and success factors: These included the importance of (i) having a dedicated staff role in the region to directly engage in outreach and partnership and constituency building; (ii) developing partnerships with key Pacific-based UN and CSO counterparts; (iii) generating momentum by building on previous and ongoing convening, training and other initiatives; (iv) being well grounded in core regional concerns, issues, responses and frameworks; (v) leveraging the links between issues and developments; (vi) ensuring that women's, indigenous and community voices are heard; and (vii) having practical follow-up measures 'on the table,' such as the development of National Action

Plans.

Clearly, the thematic areas which are the focus of the current project have great salience in both subregions, with migration, climate change and shrinking civic/democratic space all major challenges with profound human rights implications.

Other UN entities based in Asia-Pacific have extensive engagement in both subregions through subregional and/or regional offices. Currently, OHCHR engagement in both subregions is largely handled from OHCHR HQ, with supplementation in specific areas from SEARO. The future options would appear to be: (i) continue with the status quo arrangements with necessary improvements; (ii) a reconfigured, enlarged and suitably resourced SEARO; (iii) the development of OHCHR regional hub(s), at least in South Asia; or (iv) a combination of these approaches.

It is noted in this context that the rationale for the establishment of SEARO and PRO would also appear to apply to South Asia, at least. It is proposed that this issue be reviewed from value-addition and resourcing perspectives as part of preparing a the proposal new regional-level vision and strategy, with due consideration to (i) anticipated new HQ directions on the balance between global and regional roles and responsibilities, and (ii) the inclusion of the thematic focus areas of the current project.

2.3 Efficiency

Overview: *Satisfactory*, with recognition that there are systemic internal systems and procedural challenges requiring attention at a level that goes beyond the reach and implementation of the project or SEARO and PRO, per se.

A striking feature of project implementation to date, as evidenced by stakeholder feedback and documentation review, has been the degree of progress achieved in a relatively short timeframe with a limited human resource base (which has been the major expenditure area within the project budget). This has been demonstrated by the number and scale of regional and national level activities convened or co-convened; the outreach to multiple stakeholders and initiation and strengthening of partnerships; and the foundations put in place by these and other means for longer-term impact and sustaining of project results.

The following commentary examines the various ways that SEARO and PRO, with OHCHR HQ guidance and support, have leveraged the available resources for good results, despite the slow start to the project due to the recruitment challenges elaborated below, within a complex and rapidly evolving regional environment.

EQ E1: Have the organizational arrangements and staff capacity within the Regional Office been adequate to the project priorities, context and stakeholders? How has the support been received by the project from Headquarters units in programmatic, financial and administrative issues?

Overall management across the two participating OHCHR offices

The project encompasses two offices of similar status in two subregions of Asia-Pacific, with the larger and more comprehensive focus being through SEARO, mainly in South-East Asia. The need for overall project coordination in this context was identified early on, with the conversion of the originally planned resource mobilization post into a project coordination role

(which also has responsibility for implementation of Result 3, so is thus not focused full-time on project coordination). At the same time, the overarching management arrangement for the project - i.e. “where does the buck stop” for resource allocations and staff supervision, for example - is not clear to an outside eye. This area is thus highlighted for attention in a follow-up and potentially expanded core-funded phase of Sida resourcing which encompasses but reaches beyond the scope of the current project. It is also proposed in this context that the planning of any new resourcing phase engage directly with both SEARO and PRO about their needs in terms of adequate staffing to ensure effective and impactful implementation in their respective geographic areas in the context of the overarching regional approach.

Project staffing capacity

The level of programme staffing provided to cover the thematic focus areas of the project has been at a bare minimum level, given the scale and long-term dynamics of the thematic results areas being prioritized. In this context the evaluation notes (i) the above-mentioned establishment of the project coordinator role; (ii) the fact that that no dedicated staff position exists for Results 3 and 4 (in the case of Result 3, the project funded position is also responsible for overall project coordination, as earlier noted); (iii) the expansion of the communications team which supports the project in the context of SEARO’s wider regional work, as well as the establishment of a consultancy-based communications role in PRO as part of the Top-Up phase; and (iv) the transfer of a resource mobilization post from DEXREL/HQ to SEARO in early 2022, with a broader whole-of-programme focus which includes the project’s thematic focus areas.

Taking into account current OHCHR global deliberations with respect to (i) the balance of global and regional roles and (ii) the standardization of staff competencies in regional offices, it is proposed that the effective implementation of the project thematic workstreams beyond 2023, within the context of the proposed regional-level vision and strategy, requires the following minimum staffing levels. Consideration of these staffing enhancements should be part of a comprehensive human resources review as proposed in Recommendation 3.3.

(i) The establishment of the following core programme teams: Four specifically dedicated professional staff (two in SEARO and two in PRO) in the area of climate and human rights, including business and human rights (thus retaining PRO’s current staffing level); and three specifically dedicated professional staff (two in SEARO and one in PRO) in the areas of (i) migration and human rights; and (ii) development/SDGs and human rights. The latter roles would work closely with the newly established development economist role at SEARO under the Top-Up funding arrangement (see further below). As well as focusing on OHCHR’s core human rights mainstreaming agenda within the UN system at regional (ESCAP and APFSD) and country levels; they would engage with regional intergovernmental bodies such as ASEAN and AICHR, the South Pacific Forum Secretariat and the Secretariat for the Pacific Community.

(ii) Two in-house technical/specialist positions to mainstream and support and work initiated in the area of democratic/civic space under the project. It is proposed that consideration should be given to one such position being based in SEARO and one in PRO. This option recognizes that each subregion has its own particular challenges and dynamics in this regard. It is further noted that the need to mainstream this critical area across other workstreams is already reflected in the project theory of change through specific references under other results areas. This points to the need for internal technical and mainstreaming expertise on the issue, including with respect to the security of civic communications. Stakeholder feedback reinforced the criticality of increased OHCHR attention in this area, described by one interlocutor as an “exploding” issue in the region.

(iii) Continuation of the aspects of the work of the SEARO-based Communications Team in support of the project's thematic workstreams, supplemented by the addition of a communications/outreach post in PRO to serve such needs, as well as communications requirements more broadly, in the Pacific. The Communications Team has added to OHCHR's profile, visibility, outreach, clarity of messaging and quality of training resources and activities with respect to the project's thematic focus areas, as well as more broadly across SEARO's work. RCOs interviewed by the evaluation strongly affirmed the value-added of the services provided by the team. Examples given included the revamped SEARO website and the messaging and video material for International Human Rights Day and other key international days related to project themes. PRO in the meantime has established a YouTube site for communications on work in the Pacific around climate change, business and human rights.

(iv) The relevance and value addition of the above-mentioned new economist role in the SEARO team is further noted with respect to enhancing OHCHR's ongoing contribution to strengthening human rights/development/SDG linkages under project Result 5 at country level. Thus ensuring that the requisite resourcing is available to sustain this role within the next phase of OHCHR's work in the region is also proposed beyond the current Top-Up period.

(v) Another critical cross-cutting area of expertise of relevance to the projects' results areas which was observed by the evaluation as requiring bolstering (particularly in the Asia context) is rule of law. The establishment of a rule of law technical/ specialist post in SEARO to advise and support work in this respect across all workstreams is thus proposed, with consideration to be given the need for a similar role in PRO.

In the above context, the recommended HR review should further consider (i) the value-addition and rationale of roles located at global HQ vis-a-vis roles at regional level, (ii) whether there should be a rebalancing of relevant roles towards the region, with selected positions being transferred accordingly (whether agreed on a region-specific basis or as part of the broader global /rebalancing considerations currently on the table at OHCHR HQ); (iii) the need to consider that in the long-term and across OHCHR Regional Offices there is an equitable distribution of thematic capacity, irrespective of the availability of earmarked funding to bolster such capacity; and (iv) the SEARO and PRO management and administrative requirements of all staffing increases and internal structural changes, to ensure these are part of human and financial resourcing planning from the beginning.

Status of SEARO and PRO with the UN system

Related to staffing capacity is the issue of staff role classifications and alignment between these. The current status of SEARO and PRO in terms of the classification of roles (i.e. P5 levels for heads of office) does not reflect either their strategic and substantive responsibilities or place within the UN system in the region. Recognizing that there is a case in this context for increasing the head of office status in both SEARO and PRO to a level commensurate with that of other UN entities in the region, such a shift (at least in the case of SEARO) would strengthen the weight and profile of OHCHR alongside other UN counterparts. The wider reach of SEARO to South Asia and East Asia, in collaboration with OHCHR HQ, is noted in this respect. An increased OHCHR status within the UN system in the region would also flow into relations with governmental entities, strengthening the application by OHCHR of its unique mandate and role. Determining whether and how such a change in head of office status should be pursued should be among the considerations of the **human resources review** recommended by this evaluation.

It is further observed that an overall review of all classifications across and within the two regional offices would be timely to ensure appropriate alignments and reflection of

responsibilities between all roles, particularly if the expansion of resources in the focus areas of the project proceed as proposed by this evaluation. In this context, discrepancies in classifications are noted between the various roles established to carry forward the work of the project. One example is the NOA and P3 classification of the respective SEARO and PRO posts supporting work on climate change and human rights, despite the performance of similar roles; and the fact that both these roles lead work on business and human rights which is usually led at P4 level or above globally.

Organizational arrangements and approaches

At the same time, stakeholder interviews and documentation review indicated the following internal organizational bottlenecks as requiring further attention at the appropriate level within OHCHR:

Lengthy recruitment procedures: As noted, the time it takes to recruit new staff was identified as a risk from the beginning in the original project document. This risk was borne out in practice through the significant delays for the project posts to be filled, despite efforts to streamline the process. This delayed the start of the project implementation and required SEARO to cover some of the preparatory work required in the areas of climate change (Result 2), engagement with AICHR (Result 4) and mainstreaming (Result 5). The inclusion of an agreed inception period of 6-12 months for recruitment of staff and carrying out the necessary preparatory work, including stakeholder mappings, would have been helpful to ensure expectations were realistic and allow a measured and planned approach.

Management and administrative support: The addition of new staff positions, particularly in SEARO, was found to have been not sufficiently balanced by adequate resourcing for the enhanced management oversight and administrative support that was required in an already fully stretched office. This has led to some increased workloads and internal pressures, despite some recognition of administrative needs under the project Top-Up arrangements. This is clearly an area for attention in the negotiation of future funding arrangements for both the work under the current project and more generally.

Role of OHCHR in grant-making and administration: CSO grant funding has been an important complementary modality for OHCHR work, particularly under Result 3 (democratic/civic space). As well as contributing to partners' capacities and effectiveness, such funding can also afford protection to partners at country level and cover resourcing gaps when CSOs are not able to receive funding bilaterally from other sources - e.g. for legal or political reasons. At the same time, it is evident that OHCHR is not yet well set up in terms of capacity for the efficient and expeditious disbursement of funds, with some concerns about delays in this regard raised during CSO interviews. An initiative is already underway to improve systems and procedures in this regard at OHCHR HQ, with plans for role adjustments and staff training already in place.

At the same time it is recognized that there are bilateral and international NGO donors (including Sida) in the region with well-established CSO partnerships and efficient funding mechanisms within the sphere of interest of OHCHR. It is also noted that some regional CSOs have the capability to receive funds and accountability manage sub-grant disbursements to small CSOs, particularly within their own network.

In this wider context, it is timely to look again at OHCHR's role and comparative advantage vis-a-vis CSO funding and the niche it is best able to fill alongside others. Taking account of challenges to date in ensuring expeditious and streamlined disbursements and the available alternatives, it is proposed that OHCHR (i) reorient its funding support in Asia and the Pacific towards strategic and streamlined short-term seed funding in areas which will add specific catalytic value to the advancement of OHCHR programming priorities (e.g. strategic research

and particular high-impact short-term interventions, including in order to provide protection and credibility to the recipient); (ii) work with OHCHR HQ to develop and put in place appropriate criteria and streamlined, transparent and accelerated procedures for such funding in the region; (iii) prioritize working with and through network CSOs with proven and accountable capability to manage grants and sub-grants to smaller CSOs; and (iv) seek opportunities to facilitate links where possible between existing and new CSO partners and suitable larger and/or longer term funding sources.

As well as providing a targeted modality for accelerating the implementation of OHCHR's objectives in the region, such an arrangement would allow OHCHR to have a seat at wider donor coordination tables, thus providing opportunities to influence donor priorities from a human rights perspective.

Support received by the project from OHCHR HQ

With respect to HQ support received by SEARO and PRO for programmatic, financial and administrative issues and purposes, the evidence indicates that this has generally been timely and responsive. In turn, a strong appreciation was indicated from HQ of the importance of the project's work in terms of enhancing attention in the region (and also globally) to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. On the programmatic side, the ability of SEARO and PRO to tap into HQ expertise and guidance was cited by some stakeholders as part of OHCHR's comparative advantage. For example, the participation by HQ specialists in training and planning sessions with the UNCT in Lao PDR added value and weight to the overall OHCHR engagement and was valued by UN in-country counterparts.

It is observed that one aspect of OHCHR/SEARO/PRO relations that needs ongoing monitoring is the arrangement for internal cost recovery for services provided by HQ staff to regional work. With the renewed emphasis on resource mobilization now gaining traction in SEARO, ensuring transparency around the reasonable and proportionate allocation of costs will be important as part of the overall presentation of the real costs of OHCHR engagement in the region, including to donors. Potential criteria that could be used in his regard include ensuring that the direct contribution that a staff member at HQ makes to the implementation of the regional programme or project is calculated, costed and charged on a pro rata basis. The case of global policy advisors could be approached on a regional pro rata basis (i.e. each region contributing 20 percent of the global advisor salary).

EQ E2: What has been the strategy and methodology used to work together, communicate and disseminate results among the regional, national and local stakeholders, donors, partners, regional UN entities and UN Country Teams?

Work under the project has demonstrated a variety of intersecting approaches for stakeholder cooperation and communication, including the dissemination of results. Key approaches have included:

- (i) Joint strategizing, planning and implementation through formal UN peer support structures such as the IBC system in the region (with OHCHR co-leading the work of the IBC on Human Rights, Gender and Women's Empowerment with UN Women and UNFPA, for example).
- (ii) Numerous jointly planned and implemented regional and subregional activities such as forums and workshops, with co-convenors including both UN counterparts and regional CSOs (refer to Annex II for elaboration). This included the use of jointly convened side events as an influencing strategy for regional events such as the annual meetings of the APSDF.

- (iii) Virtual ‘hands-on’ engagement as a non-resident agency in human rights mainstreaming training and planning, working directly and intensely with UNRCOs and UNCTs at country level.
- (iv) Funding support for selected regional CSOs in the area of digital democratic/civic space, supplemented by smaller targeted funding in areas ranging from research to supporting a UN Volunteer in the office of the Lao PDR UNRC.
- (v) Strategic research projects which engage with UN regional and country counterparts, as well as CSOs and academic institutions.
- (vi) The proactive sharing of information and analysis by project staff with colleagues and external stakeholders (validated by stakeholder feedback).

Such approaches have included a proactive monitoring and assessment of jointly achieved results, as well as joint strategizing and planning for follow-up. In aggregate, they have contributed to developing OHCHR’s profile, credibility and outreach in the thematic areas supported by the project.

EQ E3: How has the project complemented other existing projects and/or programmes?

There are currently two other Sida-funded projects supporting the work of OHCHR in the region.⁵ The first is the Access to Justice project, within which UN Women is also a partner. The close links between the two projects is reflected in day-to-day work (e.g. in advice and support for human rights and gender mainstreaming within country-level UN systems) and as well as in the work of the UN IBC on Human Rights, Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. The second is a project on enhancing digital safety for environmental activists, human rights defenders and journalists, which links closely with work under the project on Result 3. More broadly, the progress made by the current project in mainstreaming human rights within the UN system at regional and national levels enhances ongoing OHCHR work across all areas.

In the Pacific subregion, important synergies exist between the project-supported work on climate change and human rights and a longstanding multi-agency regional project on *Enhancing Protection and Empowerment of Migrants and Communities Affected by Climate Change and Disasters in the Pacific region*. This brings OHCHR together with ESCAP, ILO, IOM, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Platform on Disaster Displacement. The close linkages in practice between the two projects has been reflected in the provision of Sida Top-Up funding for the role of coordinator of the multi-stakeholder project. There is scope to further deepen these synergies and collaboration. Synergies also exist in the Pacific with the global OHCHR Youth and Human Rights project, funded by Norway. This supports the deployment of Youth Officers in some field presences including PRO, where there is a strong working relationship with regional and national youth networks, including in the context of the project.

Similarly, very active linkages and mutual support are evident with the OHCHR Human Rights Advisors (HRA) in Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Timor Leste.⁶ Although these roles have a technical cooperation mandate (rather than a monitoring and protection mandate) and report directly to the UNRC and to OHCHR HQ (or to

⁵ Sida. (24 March 2022). Regional Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific region. Available at <https://www.sida.se/en/sidas-international-work/asia-and-the-pacific-region>

⁶ Human Advisors are based in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste.

the Regional OHCHR Representative in PRO in the case of PNG), active communications, information sharing and cooperation are maintained with SEARO and PRO in the project results areas. In the countries where Human Rights Advisors are based, these roles play a critical role in human rights mainstreaming within RCOs and UNCTs and have collaborated actively with the SEARO post established in this area by the project. Cooperation in this context has particularly focused on HRBA training, mainstreaming human rights within CCAs and UNSDCFs, and UNCT internal planning and beginning to introduce internal human rights dialogues in line with the UN SG's Call to Action.'

Active collaboration with Human Rights Advisors, with good results, has also been demonstrated in other project results areas, including the promotion and use of resources provided by the SEARO Communications Unit. In the Philippines case, effective cooperation was highlighted on the training of women journalists (with interest indicated in supporting such training at national level), as well as training on digital and data protection. In Malaysia, support provided through the post established by the project was important in the area of labour migration (including in the context of successfully advocating for the vaccination of undocumented migrant workers); business and human rights (with advocacy for the development of a National Action Plan a key focus); and digital space in the context of human rights legislative restrictions being proposed in the context of COVID-19.

2.4 Impact

Overview: *Satisfactory*, noting that (i) this area is very much work in progress within a limited timeframe to date and (ii) the close links between progress with respect to impact and enhanced sustainability of project results and work. The above-noted normative and facilitative role of OHCHR brings particular challenges to the assessment of impact at regional and country levels (e.g. in areas covered by project outputs such long-term capacity development, constituency building, strategic research, networking building and increasing public awareness).

Overall, the evaluation finds that work undertaken under the project to date has laid important foundations for impact across the five results areas, and that evidence of such impact will become increasingly clear in 2023 as well as in the ongoing longer-term continuation of the work in the region. It is noted that the ultimate value of regional partnerships and activity is making a difference to the realization of human rights in the context of lives and prospects at country level. This should be an explicit driver of future institutional and programming design.

EQ I1: To what extent is the project making a significant contribution to broader and longer-term enjoyment of rights? Or how likely is it that it will eventually make this contribution?

As noted, assessing impact in the project results areas is challenging in light of the agency's normative and long-term constituency building role. Ways of addressing this challenge are elaborated under EQ I4 below.

A key factor in this context is the reality that although the overall orientation of the project design is at regional level, it is ultimately at country level that impact is demonstrated in terms of the broader and longer-term enjoyment of rights. This is recognized in the project outputs, 42 per cent of which fully or partly have a specific focus towards making a difference at country level through reference to national results and/or to national stakeholders including governments, NHRIs, UNCTs (which work at national level with governments and local CSOs, among others), businesses, CSOs and locally based EHRDs.

The remaining outputs are designed to strengthen regional policies, mechanisms, processes and cooperation to ultimately bring benefits at national levels through enhanced government legal and policy frameworks, increased public awareness and enhanced capacities of human and environmental rights actors “ on the ground.”

Despite the relatively short project implementation period to date, indications can be identified at regional and national levels of developments which are already providing a basis for longer -term impact with respect to increasing the enjoyment by national populations of human rights. These include:

(i) Enhanced institutional and individual awareness and capacities of hundreds of critical actors through training, mentoring and mutual, including: EHRDs who are now increasingly engaging with international human rights mechanisms and special procedures (PRO has worked with the Diplomacy Training Programme (DTP), for example, to train 400 EHRDs in the Pacific); a core group of judges and lawyers in the Pacific capacitated on litigation related to human rights and environmental law; women journalists in South-East Asia who are applying human rights knowledge gained in their work at country level; and border authorities in Thailand who have been capacitated to integrate human rights (including with respect to gender and LGBTI+ rights) into their work.

(ii) Enhanced capacities of UNRCO and UNCT staff who have received HRBA, risk analysis and other training, as well as mentoring, on integrating human rights into CCAs, UNCFs and UN Joint Work Plans. An interagency assessment conducted by OHCHR HQ further concluded that the strongest integration of human rights in UN COVID-19 response plans (SERPs) in Asia were in countries served by SEARO (Lao PDR, Myanmar and Malaysia).

(iii) Increased visibility for human rights at the annual APFSD, the UN's preeminent regional intergovernmental forum on sustainable development. This links to the global High-Level Policy Forum (HLPF) and engages governments and CSOs of the region. The 2020 APFSD included participation for the first time of a UN Special Rapporteur (on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons) as part of the main programme. In 2022, OHCHR made a presentation on international treaty bodies to the pre-APFSD workshop and co-organized a side event on indigenous peoples, the right to food and climate change, with FAO, AIPP and others. The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples joined online. OHCHR has also contributed to the annual drafting of SDG profiles. These have a wide circulation to the region's governments and CSOs and now include a dedicated space on human rights. As well as standing as official APFSD background documents, the profiles serve as the basis for discussion in roundtable discussions. Recommendations from such discussions, once endorsed by the APFSD, are conveyed to the HLPF as regional inputs. Through SEARO's engagement since 2021, the regional inputs have included recommendations on human rights-related SDG implementation.

(iv) The enhanced embedding of human rights in the joint UN/ASEAN Plan of Action to implement the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between ASEAN and the UN (2021-2025).

(iv) Increased awareness, knowledge and engagement by a growing number of private sector entities from both regions on human rights and climate change linkages. PRO is currently working on promoting an “early mover” to develop a BHR National Action Plan in the Pacific and provide a model and encouragement for others in the region, with Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu, New Zealand and Australia as target countries.

(v) Stronger presence of and profile for marginalized voices, (including women, indigenous peoples, migrant workers, youth and EHRDs) in regional human rights fora such as workshops, webinars and training courses which contribute to the project results areas across the region.

(vi) Strengthened networking and regularity of engagement around shared priorities and concerns among human rights actors in the region in the project results areas (involving governments, CSOs, business entities, NHRIs, human rights and environmental defenders, UN agencies and other stakeholders).

(vii) Enhanced voice and capacities of Pacific small island states on climate change and human rights in international fora including COP 26 and the UN Human Rights Council. OHCHR is building on this in 2022 by supporting a resolution to the Human Rights Council on sea level rise, with Pacific countries in the lead.

(viii) The establishment of a new global norm through the adoption by the Human Rights Council of the resolution on the right to a healthy environment, with Pacific countries contributing to this outcome with OHCHR support. In this context, Fiji has developed a Climate Change Act with PRO support which already includes references to the new right. The draft Kiribati Act on the Environment and Disasters includes similar references.

(ix) The strengthening of global monitoring and advocacy capacities on climate change and human rights through the establishment by the Human Rights Council in October 2021 of a new Special Rapporteur position for the Protection of Human Rights in the Context of Climate Change. OHCHR connected and supported the voices of atoll nations in advocating for this resolution, linking Pacific countries, Maldives and Caribbean counterparts, for example. This will flow back into Asia and the Pacific in support of ongoing OHCHR work in this area.

(x) Increased attention given by UN Special procedures (reflected in reports produced), to EHRD cases that came into the international human rights system as a result of enhanced capacities (awareness, knowledge and connections) of grassroots human rights and environmental CSOs.

(xi) Production, dissemination and use of knowledge, communications and analytical tools at regional level to support implementation of project outputs (e.g. on climate change and human rights, business and human rights and climate change and the right to food). The project also contributed to the development, dissemination and use of global OHCHR and wider UN tools in areas such as climate change and human rights; positive migration narratives, with focus on women; the UN SG's Call to Action on Human Rights and the Checklist for UNCTs on HRBA and COVID-19 UN SERPs. These have contributed to the wider impact of OHCHR in these and other areas. Such tools at regional and global levels have further contributed to sustainability by providing a resource for ongoing wider use and reference.

(xii) Linked to the above, the publication of knowledge products which strengthen the evidence and knowledge base in the region for advocacy and programming in project Result areas 1-3. For example, research commissioned under the project on migration developments, issues and narratives: e.g. in Malaysia and Australia, provides a basis for campaigning in 2022. India is also on the agenda for such research. Research is also underway on human rights aspects of short-term labour migration programmes, including in the Pacific (Australia and NZ), following an expert meeting convened in November 2021.

Translating regional results into country level impacts

Member States, NHRIs, the national constituencies of regional CSOs and national CSOs are all critical actors in terms of increasing the enjoyment of human rights by national populations, as specifically reflected in outputs of the project. Noting that the work of UN RCOs and UNCTs

provides a critical vehicle for human rights engagement with these and other national actors, it is clear that mainstreaming human rights within CCAs, UNSDCFs and associated UNCT plans will continue to be a cornerstone for OHCHR impact in this regard.

To consolidate and expand progress to date in a context of limited human resources, it will be necessary to (i) continue to enhance the efficacy and accessibility of online resources to support UNCT human rights mainstreaming efforts; (ii) continue to strengthen the human rights training capacities and available tools of the relevant UN Issue-Based Coalitions; (iii) continue deepening the links between all regional office work in this respect and the roles of in-country Human Rights Advisors where they exist; and (iv) ensure that the work and comparative advantage of OHCHR as a non-resident UN entity are well reflected in specific terms in UNCT Joint Work Plans, monitoring, reporting and evaluations.

Key national actors - challenges and opportunities

Governments: Although positive cases of progress are demonstrated by the project (notably legislative and policy developments in Fiji and Kiribati), it has generally proved to be challenging to engage governments in Asia and the Pacific on human rights issues related to migration, climate change and democratic/civic space, despite the orientation of some project outputs in this direction. Key factors in this regard have included the complex political dynamics of the region, particularly in Asia, which have seen human rights have lose traction in recent years; an overall low level of awareness among member States of the nexus between climate action and human rights (in particular); and the challenges and risks of engaging with CSOs and EHRDs in the absence of country and regional level protection mechanisms to ensure safety from reprisals by governments.

NHRIs: NHRIs are a specified target group under some project outputs (particularly with respect to climate change and human rights, on which the Philippines Human Rights Commission is a leader regionally). Project engagement has included human rights training and advisory support in the areas of migration and climate change through partnerships with the Diplomatic Training Programme (DTP) and Asia-Pacific Forum on National Human Rights Institutions (APF). DTP has worked with OHCHR under the project to provide training on human rights and climate change for NHRIs in the Pacific (New Zealand, Australia, Samoa, Fiji, Tuvalu (who have an ombudsperson), plus Cook Islands and Vanuatu who currently have the establishment of an NHRI on the agenda. APF has a regional strategy for capacitating NHRIs to promote attention to the protection of human rights defenders.

In Southeast Asia, SEARO co-organized with the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, a two-day regional dialogue on “The Role of NHRIs in addressing Climate Change as a Trans-boundary Human Rights Issue” (October 2019. This was attended by NHRI representatives from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Timor-Leste and the Maldives. SEARO and PRO co-organized the “Asia Pacific Regional Dialogue on the Role of NHRIs in addressing displacement in the context of adverse effects of climate change,” in cooperation with APF (November 2020).

It is observed in this context that NHRIs are an important component of ongoing country level progress, alongside national UN systems. To the extent they are capacitated to act and support other actors in the thematic areas covered by the project, the stronger local autonomous follow-up and impact will be. This is one area where there is scope for an intensified focus around carrying forward Project Results 1,2 and 3 as part of the overall work of the office in the next phase of work in the region, partnering with UNDP (which has an NHRI institutional strengthening focus), APF, DTP and Human Rights Advisors based in UNRC Offices.

Regional CSOs and their local constituencies. As Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), the Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders (APNED) and the Alliance for Future Generations in the Pacific have demonstrated, for example, a key comparative advantage which regional CSOs bring into their partnership with OHCHR is the opportunity to engage with constituencies at the grassroots level, where often the pressure on EHRDS is greatest.

AIPP, for example, provides links to 46 members from 14 countries in Asia with 18 indigenous peoples' national alliances/networks, 30 local and sub-national organizations. 16 are ethnic based organizations, six are indigenous women's organizations, four are indigenous youth organizations and one is an organization of indigenous persons with disabilities. APNED brings together individuals, CSOs, and grassroots and people's organizations who advocate and work on the issue of human rights, environmental protection and natural resource conservation from across the wider region. Inter alia it aims to raise national and local concerns of environment defenders in different international policy spaces. The Alliance for Future Generations is an important partner in the OHCHR's Pacific work on climate change and human rights, in particular, enabling outreach to grassroots voices and EHRDs across member States of the region. This includes raising awareness about how to engage with international human rights mechanisms and UN Special Procedures. Further building on these potentialities is clearly an important ongoing area of focus for the projects and OHCHR's wider work.

Box 2: Thailand as an example of the regional / national interface

The relationship between the project and the work of the OHCHR Thailand team demonstrates how complementary regional and national OHCHR expertise and resources can come together to deliver results at country level, particularly when it comes to monitoring and protection work. The key focus of ongoing OHCHR work in Thailand is civic space, particularly the fundamental rights to freedom of assembly and expression, which aligns with project Result 3. *Inter alia*, the Thailand team provides support to develop HRD skills and knowledge, advocates to the government on HRDs' rights and facilitates links between CSOs and international human rights mechanisms. The protection of HRDs and women journalists have thus been two practical areas of cooperation with the project, with project staff providing access to expertise, resource people and tools - for example through participation of the relevant project staff member as a resource person in training activities for the Thailand NHRI and CSOs.

The additional resources made available under the Top-Up arrangement have further supported national-level research on issues related to digital civic space, as well as scoping, investigation and monitoring visits related to work on civic space and climate change and human rights. Women HRDs, land rights and indigenous peoples' rights are priorities in this context, with a view to moving towards a stronger focus in Thailand on economic, social and cultural rights.

EQ 12: To what extent is the project making a significant contribution to strengthening and enhancing the global work of OHCHR and the broader work of the UN system on human rights issues in the region?

The project's contribution to the global work of OHCHR: The project has contributed in several ways, including:

(i) Strengthening OHCHR's engagement on economic, social and cultural rights in the world's most populated region, applying in practice the OMP's Shift / Frontier prioritization of climate change, people on the move and democratic/civic space. This is contributing over time to the

realization of such rights in the target areas and demonstrating in practice approaches and lessons with wider applicability.

(ii) Expanding OHCHR's constituency through the development and strengthening of partnerships in the project's thematic focus areas. As well as contributing to impact and sustainability, such engagements provide invaluable data and analysis to support global planning and the quality of OHCHR HQ support to work in the region. In several cases, the regional partnerships supported by the project with CSOs are part of and contribute to global networks and work.

(iii) Improving the quality and impact of global OHCHR and broader UN tools. In addition to the OHCHR tools highlighted above, these include the global UN Common Learning Package on HRBA: the work of the global UNSDG Task Team on Human Rights, Leave No One Behind and the Normative Agenda.

(iv) Adding 'on the ground' substance to OHCHR's HQ-based engagement in South Asia, including technical and training support to RCOs/UNCTs, NHRIs and participants in the women journalists' training, as well as the earlier mentioned OHCHR/SEARO role as a member of the support team in Nepal piloting the UN's interim guidance on the operationalization of LNOB in that country.

The project's contribution to strengthening and enhancing the broader work of the UN system on human rights issues in the region: As part of the wider engagement of OHCHR within the UN system in Asia and the Pacific, the additional staff resources made possible by the project have enhanced the influence of the Office at both regional and national levels.

At regional level, as noted above, the project has contributed, in collaboration with UN partners, to increased visibility for human rights at the annual Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. SEARO is furthermore increasingly requested by UNCTs to provide advice on SDG 16 and Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports, including in the context of APFSD. OHCHR's role within the regional UN Peer Support Group (PSG) has also been enhanced, raising the profile of human rights and strengthening its contribution to the human rights dimensions of UNSDCF's and CCAs being developed at national level. The contribution by project staff to the work of relevant UN Issues-Based Coalitions in the project thematic areas, and to the regional UN Human Rights Network in this context, has further been significant and is universally positively assessed by stakeholders.

As also elsewhere indicated, direct support provided by project staff to UN work at country level has been a successful area of project implementation. This has included HRBA training and advisory support for CCA and UNSDCF development as part of the IBC for Human Rights/GEWE, as well as through direct engagement with UNCT planning, monitoring and internal human rights dialogues. A risk assessment module was also developed as part of training provision, linked to input into CCAs (and their updating) and UNSDCFs, to ensure human rights are central to UNCT risk assessments.

EQ 13: Are there key priorities for human rights in the region that have not been addressed yet by the project, and if so, what are they and why not?

The project was specifically designed to bring momentum to particular thematic focus areas in line with regional realities and the OMP Shift / frontier issues, the prioritization of which is well validated by the evaluation. As reported, the project has performed well in these areas, including, to the extent possible, on the challenging issue of democratic/civic space. The trends in the region in the latter area are generally towards a greater closing of space,

including digitally, with a significant acceleration of restrictive legislation and measures as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Engagement with many governments in the region on this issue has thus become more problematic as a result, along with highly variable levels of willingness among the wider UN system to engage in this space at national level.

As noted earlier, the project design did not include specific prioritization of **disability inclusion**, although the original Project Document does refer to vulnerable groups, as well as "excluded, marginalized and invisible groups" in the context of migration. Some efforts were made to reach out to Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) early in the project implementation period (e.g. to the Pacific Disabilities Forum), and interpretation facilities and support are provided in meetings and workshops where needed. However, engagement has been limited overall, linked to the lack of explicit focus in the design.

Looking ahead, it is noted that (i) persons with disabilities are a Spotlight Group within the OMP, and (ii) that this has been an important area of focus in the wider work of OHCHR in the region, particularly with respect to implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Engagement in the Pacific, for example, has included a joint project with ESCAP and the Pacific Disability Forum from 2017-2020 and co-leadership with the Fiji UN RCO and ILO on pilot implementation from 2020-2022 of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS).

There is thus scope in this context to give the rights of persons with disabilities a higher explicit profile in the future design of theories of change, results frameworks and project planning in the project results areas, including at output, indicator and target levels. A strong basis exists for intensified work in this area through the active network of OPDs across the region, some of which OHCHR links with already through work beyond the project. ESCAP is an important partner in this area, given its lead role regionally for the UN in this respect, and its extensive engagement and connections.

One further key human rights area that is quite extensively incorporated within project outputs and activities, but which warrants attention in its own right from a wider regional engagement perspective beyond the project, is **indigenous peoples' rights**.

Subject to available resources, there is potential to further elevate the prioritization of work in this area, approaching it as a core regional issue in line with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, rather than as a subset of other work in areas such as climate change (where the issue remains crucially important). Through the partnership development work of the project and more broadly within SEARO and PRO, a good basis exists for further growth of work in this area within the proposed regional vision and strategy.

EQ 14: What changes in the project, strategies or organizational arrangements of the project could be made to enhance achievements made, address those priorities that have not been addressed or those areas where positive results have not been yet achieved?

Two areas are highlighted in this context. These are (i) strengthening strategic dimensions of partnerships and wider relations with regional CSOs and (ii) further strengthening internal approaches to assess impact of OHCHR engagement.

Strengthening strategic engagement with CSOs: Interviewed regional CSO partners (including APF and DTP) indicated interest in more structured opportunities for strategic level discussion with OHCHR, to include longer-term strategizing for cooperation (i.e. beyond practical project and activity cooperation). They further highlighted the value-added of an increased and regular OHCHR convening role in creating opportunities for collective regional CSO / OHCHR strategic discussion to enhance aggregated impact and cooperation around shared priorities.

Key highlighted areas for more regular structured strategic discussion included: (i) human rights trends, challenges and priorities in the region; (ii) shared priorities in this context; (iii) respective roles of the OHCHR and regional CSOs; and (iv) arrangements for ongoing strengthening of CSO-CSO and CSO-OHCHR networking, mutual support, mutual learning and cooperation. The evaluation concurs that this is a valid area for increased OHCHR engagement, building on already strong CSO partnership foundations. It is thus proposed that this be prioritized within the recommended regional strategy and related results framework and planning documents.

To add further clarity, direction and coherence to the development of regional CSO partnerships, it is further proposed that a **regional partnership development sub-strategy** be developed within the new regional vision, strategy and work programme. This should include overarching and distinct SEARO and PRO components, cover all partnership categories and the links between them, and identify target organizations, agencies, institutions, networks and other entities for follow-up attention. A specific key criterion for engagement with regional CSOs should be the strength of their country level constituency and impact. This in turn provides a basis for their effective regional level engagement.

Addressing the challenges of assessing OHCHR impact: As noted, assessing impact in the project results areas is challenging in light of OHCHR's normative and long-term constituency building role. At the same time there are positive indications of attention being paid to assessment of impact with respect to project training activities, which are a crucial linkage point between regional initiatives and country level impact. Under Result 3, an online follow-up assessment was conducted by SEARO six months later with participants in the women journalists training (see case study 3), with a reasonable return rate of approximately 40 per cent and a decisive useful/very useful rating along with useful feedback on course quality to guide future planning

Under Result 1, SEARO has a standard evaluation approach in place for the training course for Thai border authorities on human rights at international borders in line with global training tools (two sessions and 32 officials involved to date). As well as an overall end-of-course evaluation, a pre-course assessment of participants and daily evaluations are conducted to support participants' learning and reflection. In the case of training for UNCTs under Result 5, end-of-course evaluations are conducted but follow-up assessments and translation of training into action are in the hands of the RCOs and individual UN agencies. It is not known to what extent follow-up is conducted.

As well as continuing to use pre-training assessments and in-course evaluations as a standard practice, it is proposed that the experience of above Result 3 online follow-up be drawn upon by SEARO and PRO as a basis for standardizing such an approach in all relevant situations. Training courses lend themselves well to such an approach, but similar assessments could also be considered for selected regional networking and strategizing events (noting that most online assessment tools include different language options).

It is further proposed that there would be value in OHCHR conducting a longitudinal impact assessment in a selected thematic priority area supported by the project to provide in-depth feedback on impact, lessons and good practices. As well as informing ongoing work in the area concerned, the findings and recommendations of such an assessment would be relevant across all elements of the OHCHR programme in the region. An assessment on these lines could be conducted over a multi-year period, with consideration given to the possibility that it be conducted jointly with other key UN partners working with OHCHR in the thematic area concerned.

2.5 Sustainability

Overview: *Satisfactory*, noting that (i) this area is also a work in progress within a limited timeframe to date and (ii) the close links between progress with respect to impact and enhanced sustainability of project results and work. Considerations related to the sustainability of project results, partnerships, modalities and ongoing work emerged as the overall main concern in stakeholder interviews and document review, particularly in light of the timebound nature of the current Sida support and the projectized finding model that was adopted.

A number of factors were identified in this context which are already demonstrating the potential to contribute to project sustainability during the remaining implementation period and in the next phase of OHCHR work on the project's thematic focus areas. These include the strengthening of project-related capacities for autonomous action, knowledge and mutually reinforcing institutional relationships in areas such as (i) the country-level work of RCOs and UNCTs, including in the context of the SDGs; (ii) the role of regional CSOs as human rights advocates and mobilizers of country-level constituencies; (iii) awareness of and engagement with UN human rights mechanisms and Special Procedures among CSOs and EHRDs; (iv) embedding human rights and climate change in legislation and international commitments; (v) the deliberations of key regional intergovernmental (APFSD, ASEAN and PIF); (vi) the engagement of business interests on human rights concerns and (viii) the development and dissemination of training, analytical and other tools for use by OHCHR globally and regionally, the wider UN system and regional stakeholders.

EQ S1: Are the results, achievements and benefits of the project likely to be durable? How can these be strengthened and their sustainability ensured?

A number of factors were identified which have already demonstrated the potential to contribute to project sustainability during the remaining implementation period and in the next phase of OHCHR work on the key thematic themes concerned. The key lens applied in identifying these factors is the degree to which they have potential to increase the autonomy of ongoing action and learning by key actors within the human rights eco-system in the region.

Each following highlighted factor links back to those identified for greater impact in the preceding section:

(i) Enhanced human rights/development and risk analysis capacities and knowledge of RCOs and UNCTs in selected countries, reflected in CCAs and UNCFs, with potential to increasingly flow into UNCT engagement with governments.

(iii) Enhanced human rights-related capacities and knowledge of regional CSOs which in turn contributes to the awareness and effectiveness of their national/local constituencies.

(iv) Improved knowledge and its practical application among CSOs, EHRDs and other stakeholder groups with respect to UN human rights mechanisms and Special Procedures (resulting in more cases coming forward from grassroots level).

(v) Initial movement towards getting human rights considerations into the agenda of APFSD and strengthened embedding of human rights in the joint UN/ASEAN Plan of Action to implement the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between ASEAN and the UN (2021-2025). Both these developments carry the potential to influence member States' policies and actions, with the ASEAN commitments providing a key lever for strengthening the integration of human rights within UN engagements with member States.

(vi) The incorporation of global norms on the right to a healthy environment (which were adopted with OHCHR/Pacific member State support), into member State policy and legislative

frameworks in the Pacific (see below). The potential now further exists for support from the new Special Rapporteur role which was established with strong OHCHR and Pacific member State support.

(vii) The embedding of human rights and climate change linkages in legislation and policy in Fiji and (in progress) Kiribati, with potential for these developments to provide a model for other countries in the Pacific (a common pathway for ground-breaking policy and legislation among Pacific small island States).

(viii) The development of a consensus within ASEAN on the integration of human rights in country-level environmental impact assessments, with the potential for this practice to be increasingly institutionalized within ASEAN countries.

(ix) Stepped-up levels of multi-stakeholder regional networking and cooperation in project results areas, bringing momentum and potential for greater cohesion of effort alongside the UN regional architecture such as the IBC system and relevant regional working groups.

(x) The availability and application in practice of (a) knowledge, communications and analytical tools supported by the project, and (b) knowledge products such as studies and reports under Results 1-3 which enhance the regional evidence base for advocacy and programme planning. In both areas, the tools and resources provide a resource for ongoing wider use and reference by stakeholders.

A number of **key strategies** employed by OHCHR in the region contributed to enhancing the basis for sustainability of project results, partnerships and work. These closely link to impact enhancing strategies summarized in Section 2.4. Key among them are:

(i) Initiating, technical back-stopping and in other ways supporting regional platforms and processes which contribute to enhanced cooperation and networking. Well-structured and facilitated opportunities convened/convened by OHCHR helped to catalyze greater regional shared knowledge and understandings, contributing to strengthened networking and partnerships for better outcomes in the thematic focus areas of the project.

(ii) Building the regional knowledge and evidence base through strategic research and dissemination in areas ranging from labour migrant schemes in the region, to the trends and challenges with respect to shrinking digital democratic/civic space. Such research has helped to create a resource on which regional, national and international agency actors can autonomously draw for advocacy and planning purposes, including for CCA and UNSDCF development.

(iii) Developing the technical capacities of key actors for ongoing application of HRBA in their work at regional and country levels (e.g. RCOs and UNCT members in selected countries, EHRDs and regional CSOs - and through them, national grassroots constituencies).

(iv) The facilitation of peer learning and knowledge sharing, including through training, networking and strategizing workshops and webinars; the development and dissemination of analytical and knowledge tools relevant to the project's thematic areas; and increased information sharing and awareness building through the revamped OHCHR website, the PRO YouTube channel, and production and dissemination of tailor-made thematic resources for use on relevant UN international days and other suitable opportunities.

(v) Facilitating and capacitating engagement by regional CSOs and nationally-based EHRDs with international human rights mechanisms and special procedures (including with respect to

UPR processes and follow-up on recommendations), thus developing experience and knowledge which can then be autonomously applied and further disseminated.

(vi) Strengthening human rights monitoring and reporting under Results 1-3 in particular, including through the development of specific guidance materials on monitoring methodologies in the Asia-Pacific region. In light of the increasing constraints on civic space for CSOs and NHRIs in the region, OHCHR continued in this context to strengthen the capacity and digital security awareness of CSOs and human and environmental rights defenders in the region to monitor, document, report and advocate around human rights abuses.

(vii) Leveraging the UN SG's 'Call to Action' to encourage and support ongoing intra-UNCT human rights dialogues and assessments which can increasingly be handled internally and autonomously as part of RCO and UNCT core business, drawing on tools, knowledge and methodologies from OHCHR technical and capacity development support.

EQ S2: Are the regional, national and local stakeholders committed and able to continue working on the issues addressed by the project? How effectively has the project built national ownership and necessary capacity where relevant?

As noted, ensuring that all the necessary factors of sustainability and autonomous action are in place remains work in progress across the region, although with some good indications of progress in this regard in a short time period.

With respect to regional stakeholders, the regional UN networks and IBCs in which OHCHR is engaged are increasingly taking on board human rights perspectives. This will be critical in maintaining the quality and expanding the outreach of the ongoing HRBA training provided to UNCTs by the IBC for Human Rights/GEWE. At the regional level, visibility for human rights at APFSD has been enhanced as a result of project interventions, as noted above, although again work is still in progress in terms of consolidating and further developing this visibility to the point where it is reflected in resolutions and influences wider ESCAP regional intergovernmental processes. In ASEAN the embedding of human rights in the joint ASEAN/UN work plan provides a stronger basis for ongoing progress. And regional CSOs (particularly those with local constituencies in the region) report having greater knowledge and understanding of international human rights frameworks, mechanisms and UN Special Procedures which can be imparted to country level members, activists and partners.

With respect to national-level institutions and other actors, there has been limited direct engagement with governments through the project to date in Asia, in large part due to the general and increasing antipathy of governments in the region to human rights as elsewhere noted, and the requirement for a request to be received from member States for UN support (by contrast, there is a very active engagement between the OHCHR Country Office and the Government of Cambodia under a long-standing and regularly updated MOU on technical cooperation, but this is outside the scope of the current evaluation).

At the same time, more opportunity has clearly been available in the context of climate change and human rights for engagement with governments in the Pacific. Examples are given above of working with member States in the Pacific on influencing global climate change policy from a human rights perspective, as well relevant legislative and policy development in Fiji and (still in progress) in Kiribati. Governments are often invited to participate in regional fora in the project thematic focus areas, both to contribute in their own right, and as part of an OHCHR influencing agenda, but at this stage it is difficult to discern the degree to which this has flowed back into government policy thinking. Looking ahead, the ongoing capacitation of RCOs

and UNCTs to autonomously integrate human rights into their engagements with governments remains a cornerstone of impact and sustainability in this sphere, as noted earlier.

With respect to NHRIs, which are a pivotal hub for human rights profile and attention at national level in the project thematic areas, it is observed that work remains in progress in terms of national ownership. The Philippines NHRI is an acknowledged leader in the field of climate change and human rights and values its collaboration with OHCHR, but this commitment was in motion before the beginning of the project. Ongoing strengthening of OHCHR's key partnerships with APF, DTP and UNDP will be critical to further progressing the capacity development and mutual support of NHRIs in the project thematic areas.

EQ S3: Has the project been successful in integrating human rights into the programmes and activities of UN regional entities and UN Country Teams? Where SEARO/PRO have worked with other UN agencies, what were the results? What have been some good practices and what have been the challenges?

As indicated above, the project has been successful overall in integrating human rights into CCAs, UNSDCFs, UNCT risk analysis and UNCT planning in countries where this work has been undertaken to date, both through the IBC for Human Rights/GEWE and directly. It is noted however, that ensuring the sustainability of progress to date and its full ownership at local level is still work in progress in some cases. Additionally, a number of countries remain to be engaged. In countries where Human Rights Advisors are in place in the region, active collaboration has been developed between these roles and project staff to support the mainstreaming of human rights in UNRCO and UNCT planning.. It would be useful to conduct a survey, potentially through the IBC for Human Rights/GEWE, of progress in those countries so far prioritized for support to both track progress and identify lessons for future wider application.

With respect to working with other UN agencies, good progress and contributions towards longer term impacts in the project thematic focus areas are evident through partnerships with UN counterparts at regional and national levels. As detailed in the progress table in Annex II, such collaborations have included the first regional workshop for environmental defenders with UNEP, promoting human rights in the context of migration with the ILO and ESCAP; women journalists training and addressing digital space issues with UNESCO; HRBA training for UNCTs with UN Women and UNFPA, in coordination with UNDCO; promotion of children's rights in the context of climate change with UNICEF and UNEP; promoting the right to food, indigenous peoples' rights and climate change with FAO; strengthening the profile of human rights within ASEAN / UN joint work planning with DPA; promoting the integration of human rights, development and the SDGs with ESCAP, particularly in the context of APFSD; and human rights training for Thai border authorities with UNODC and UNICEF.

All feedback indicated open, constructive, and effective partnerships with UN counterparts which had been enhanced through the additional staff resources available to OHCHR as a result of the project. The sharing of common UN global agendas and priorities across the UN system, and the leveraging by OHCHR of the UN Secretary-General's Call to Action all reinforced such partnerships.

The major challenge across all areas was that of resourcing, given the sheer scale and pace of human rights-related developments across the region. In the current global context, there is little prospect for greatly enhanced resources for OHCHR or the wider UN system. The imperative is thus greater to use available resources strategically and efficiently through effective partnerships and clear theories of change which identify the entry points and strategies most likely to have the greatest sustainable impact. The above-summarized sustainability factors indicate that OHCHR is performing well in these respects in the Asia-

Pacific region. In themselves, each strategy represents a good practice which has been tested and proven to add value to the delivery of project results. The regional vision and strategy proposed by this evaluation are intended to further focus, sharpen and reinforce OHCHR's engagement in the region from a long-term sustainable impact perspective.

Case study 2: Moving the UN human rights mainstreaming agenda forward in Lao PDR

Background and actions taken: A core component of OHCHR's engagement under Result 5 has been the provision of HRBA trainings and advisory support for CCA and UNSDCF development, both as part of the IBC for Human Rights/GEWE and through direct support, including for risk analysis, UNCT planning and internal human rights dialogues. Such support was provided to varying degrees in Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Fiji, India, Iran, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Pacific (at regional level), Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste and Viet Nam. The level of engagement and extent of influence varied greatly between countries. OHCHR also provided technical advice to ensure the mainstreaming of human rights into the COVID-19 pandemic UN response plans of Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar and Viet Nam. These were assessed by an OHCHR global multi-stakeholder survey as the strongest of such plans from a human rights perspective.

Lao PDR was an early and in-depth focus for such engagement, actively facilitated by the UN Resident Coordinator. Both directly and as part of the IBC, SEARO provided technical advice and inputs for the development of the Lao PDR CCA and UNSDCF. A subsequent two-day UNCT human rights scan of the UNSDCF and CCA was held in 2019 with active SEARO and OHCHR HQ engagement, with the intention of this being an annual UNCT event once COVID-19 conditions allow.

Results to date: As a result, the Lao CCA and UNSDCF have a substantially greater focus on human rights than previous such documents, particularly with respect to economic, social and cultural rights. The CCA includes key recommendations that were issued by international human rights mechanisms, for example. The importance of the OHCHR role is demonstrated by the fact that the OHCHR (as a non-resident UN entity in Lao PDR) is a co-chair of the UNSDCF Programme Oversight Group (POG). OHCHR's engagement has further contributed to an agreement between the UN Resident Coordinator and the Lao PDR Government to hold a dialogue on engagement with UN Special Procedures; more regular UN conversations with the government on follow-up to UPR recommendations, quarterly meetings with Vientiane-based ambassadors on human rights in Lao PDR; and a quarterly discussion within the UNCT on human rights issues and developments. A human rights-focused UN Volunteer position has also been created within the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO), with 50 per cent of costs covered by an OHCHR contribution.

Lessons and success factors: Key factors cited in evaluation feedback as being influential in OHCHR's role were its human rights expertise; responsiveness to the country context and UNCT needs; a hands-on, practical and grounded approach; the presence of both a dedicated country focal point and human rights mainstreaming focal point within the OHCHR team; and the ability to draw on the relevant experience of other countries. The commitment and proactivity of the UN Resident Coordinator and her office have also been critical factors. Global frameworks such as the SDGs, the UPR and COP 26 were further seen as providing important entry points for engagement in Lao PDR on human rights issues, including those related to economic and environmental developments in the country. Looking ahead, the regular UNCT monitoring and updating processes with respect to the CCA and UNSDCF were seen as important opportunities to continue embedding human rights-based approaches, as was Lao PDR's progress towards LDC graduation in 2026, where links between international human rights commitments and trade considerations (e.g. EU GSP+) will be on the agenda.

EQ S4: Has OHCHR managed to attract new donors to the project/programme?

Apart from the funding provided by Japan to support a JPO within the migration component of the project, no new donors were attracted to the project per se, nor were additional donors sought at this stage, although good synergies were achieved (as elsewhere summarized) with parallel projects funded by Sida and other donors. In the meantime, the strengthening of SEARO's resource mobilization capacity through the transfer of a post from DEXREL in Geneva has begun to open-up the possibilities of an expanded resource base for OHCHR as a whole in the region. The following section elaborates implications and options with respect to the longer-term resourcing of the thematic work initiated by the project.

The balance between core and project-specific resourcing: Sida's resourcing to the OHCHR's work in the project's thematic focus areas was seen as providing vital surge capacity in key areas of critical regional priority which reflected shared strategic priorities of both OHCHR and Sida, with the longer-term intent of providing a basis for the sustainable embedding of the prioritized work streams into OHCHR's ongoing engagement in the region.

After discussion between OHCHR and Sida in the initial project conceptualization period, the project was set-up on a project-funding rather than core funding basis. The evaluation observes that for OHCHR this has proven to be a staff intensive approach which increases transaction costs and decreases the degree of flexibility for the application of funds in line with the project's purpose on the OHCHR side.

It is noted that this contrasts with a number of other Sida funding arrangements with OHCHR which are based on a core funded approach. Generally underpinning such approaches are a commitment to respecting and enhancing the independence and capacities of the implementing partner, agreed shared priorities and attention to the conditions, requirements and milestones which need to be in place to ensure sustainability of the results achieved and the work that has been set in motion.

Such an arrangement for OHCHR's work in Asia and the Pacific would enable the agency to have the flexibility to make the decisions about how best to use the totality of its human and financial resources to achieve the agreed results. The reporting provided under such an approach is generally on a streamlined basis which links with other reporting streams (external and internal) to increase efficiencies and includes particular in-depth attention to thematic and other areas which have been prioritized under the funding agreement. Ensuring that reporting is RBM-based, rather than activity-based, puts the accountability focus on overall results achieved with the support of the funder, rather than on detailed financial and other compliance requirements.

Accordingly, the evaluation supports current thinking which is already on the table within OHCHR and in dialogue with Sida towards establishing a follow-up phase for the project based on a core funded whole-of-office approach. Along with (and in the context of) the development of an overarching regional vision and strategy as highlighted in Recommendation 1, such an approach is seen as providing the best basis for the integration and further growth of the thematic work initiated by the project.

The achievements and foundations already put in place by the project thus become part of the OHCHR's wider regional value proposition which would underpin the development of a consolidated regional resourcing proposal to be presented to Sida and other funders. With core / whole-of-office funding as the central pillar, specific other areas of programming need can be identified and targeted to potential funders as part of OHCHR's wide and diverse donor base.

It is noted in this context that relations with resourcing partners can and do encompass non-financial aspects related to knowledge development and sharing, lessons and approaches for

innovation and joint advocacy. Partnerships beyond those providing financial resources (including governments, other UN agencies, regional organizations and research institutions, for example) bring further critical value in similar ways to OHCHR's long-term effectiveness and impact in the region.

With respect to the resourcing dimension of partnerships, the following further considerations are important as OHCHR looks ahead to the next phase of its work in the region under a new OMP:

(i) Developing a diverse pool of donors to accompany Sida in the long-term support of OHCHR's Asia-Pacific programme, with particular attention to developing resourcing relations with funders based in the region. As well as ensuring a wider resourcing base beyond dependence on one particular funder, this will help diffuse perceptions in the region that OHCHR is "Western driven."

(ii) OHCHR is able to commit to investing its own resources into the ongoing long-term development of the work arising from the project and more broadly. This includes unearmarked funding and (as elsewhere highlighted), shifting existing global post to the region in order to both address temporary funding gaps in funding and to allow the seizing of strategic opportunities.

2.6 Gender and human rights (disability inclusion) integration

Overview: Gender mainstreaming and gender-specific engagements under the project are assessed as *very satisfactory*. There is solid evidence across all workstreams of consistent and well-targeted attention to gender equality and women's empowerment. At the regional level, OHCHR's role in the UN Issue-Based Coalition (IBC) for Human Rights, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, which supported human rights and gender mainstreaming within UN Country Teams, as well as its role in various collaborative inter-agency gender capability building efforts, was universally positively assessed by all interviewed UN country and regional stakeholders. OHCHR's ability to keep gender and human rights concerns 'on the table' and visible within UN interactions was noted and highly valued.

At the activity level, the women journalists training was a prominent and successful intervention with good visibility at country and regional levels. The challenge now is to carry the regional engagement and network of participants forward into national level follow-up and expansion through or with local institutions. The transborder issues training conducted in Thailand also had a strong focus on issues facing women and girls, as well as LGBTI+ persons.

With respect to disability inclusion, it is earlier noted that this area was not explicitly prioritized in the project design, although some efforts were made to engage with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in implementation of the project in the Pacific. Beyond the scope of the project per se, the wider work of OHCHR in the region includes a focus on the promotion and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), providing the basis for a greater future focus in this regard in the project's thematic focus areas.

With respect to the project theory of change (ToC), there is scope for more explicit and detailed mainstreaming of gender equality, disability inclusion and LNOB considerations into the description of strategic interventions and risk assessments, beyond the gender perspective summaries and the gender references in the main ToC narrative under each Result. Similarly, the five-year Project Results Framework (updated 30 October 2021), would have benefited from the addition of a more specific mainstreaming of gender equality, disability inclusion and LNOB at output, indicator and target level.

EQ GHR 1: Has a Human Rights Based Approach (principles of non-discrimination, participation, transparency, accountability) been mainstreamed across all areas of the project?

As well as being an integral part of project delivery in terms of stakeholder capacity development (e.g. HRBA training for UNCTS and regional CSOs), there is strong and consistent evidence that HRBA principles have been generally applied across all areas of the project's design and implementation, as follows:

Non-discrimination and equality: In terms of project design, implementation and practice, it is clear (validated by stakeholders) that every effort has been made to ensure gender balance in participation in events, processes, publications, reports and tools and reporting. Partners further validated OHCHR's role as an advocate for and practitioner of gender equality and women's empowerment within cooperative arrangements and activities. At the level of project design, gender equality perspectives have their own specific sections in the ToC for each result. However, as earlier noted, the updated five-year Project Results Framework includes explicit gender equality references in only one area (Result 3, Output 2 and related indicator and target concerning human rights training for women journalists in Asia). Beyond this, no gender specific or mainstreamed markers are included at output, indicator or target level. Likewise, disability inclusion and LNOB markers are absent at this level.

Participation: OHCHR's attention to the facilitation of stakeholder participation in project activity development and implementation is favorably reflected in stakeholder feedback on OHCHR comparative advantage. For example, OHCHR is noted among stakeholders for its attention to ensuring that voices which are often marginalized (e.g. women, children, migrant workers, indigenous peoples) are present in fora and public communications related to the project. At a global level, support for the effective participation of Pacific Island States in recent COP 26 and Human Rights Council meetings was a priority for the climate change component of the project and was likewise positively viewed by stakeholders. The positive outcomes of participation by Pacific member States at the UN Human Rights Council are highlighted in earlier commentary.

Transparency: The focus on democratic/civic digital space has transparency (and safety) of public discourse at its core. As noted, this area is central to progress in all the project results areas and needs increased resourcing and support beyond the current Result 3 per se. OHCHR is furthermore seen by interviewed stakeholders as an open and transparent partner. Areas cited in this context were (i) transparency about the agency's comparative advantage and limited resources, hence the need to be very focused; (ii) transparency and openness in the development of activity and funding plans and arrangements jointly with partners; and (iii) transparency in proactively making policies, plans and information available to UN counterparts at regional and national levels.

Accountability: This element of HRBA has several aspects: Accountability to (i) the global human rights framework and international human rights law; (ii) the OHCHR OMP; (iii) Sida and other donors for the transparent and effective use of funds in light with agreed purposes; and (iv) above all, local populations experiencing violations and undermining of their human rights in the project thematic areas. It is found that OHCHR has performed well in each of these areas, with the latter area reflected, for example, in the attention to women EHRDs; ensuring marginalized voices are present in project-related fora; and the development of partnerships with CSOs such as AIPP, APNED and the Alliance for Future Generations which are grounded in and accountable to grassroots constituencies.

EQ GHR 2: Did the project achieve results in the areas of gender equality and women's rights?

With respect to results which are attributable to gender mainstreaming in thematic focus areas, there is good evidence of consistent efforts and attention in activity planning and implementation, good participation by women in project activities, and good profile for gender equality and women's empowerment in publications, tools, narratives and communications (see Annex II for elaboration). Examples include (i) strong visibility for migrant women in activities and narratives related to Result 1; (ii) enhanced awareness of women EHRDS on how to engage with UN human rights mechanisms and Special Procedures; (iii) good profile for gender dimensions in stakeholder dialogue and advocacy on democratic / civic space; (iv) raised awareness and understanding of gender and LGBTI+ issues among Thailand border authorities as a result of training under Result 1; (v) an increased profile for grassroots women's voices in project-related fora (e.g. voices of migrant workers, indigenous women and youth); and (vi) a collaborative emphasis on gender mainstreaming with UN Women and UNFPA in the context of HRBA training.

With respect to gender-specific activities, the major initiative in this respect as noted is the women journalists training programme, described below in Case Study 3.

Case study 3: Regional training programme on 'Enhanced protection of women journalists and advance women's human rights in the context of shrinking democratic space in Asia in 2020-2021'

Background and actions taken: Organized by SEARO in collaboration with UN Women, UNESCO and a number of regional human rights NGOs, the training brought women journalists and media workers from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. The aims were to (i) raise journalists' and media workers' awareness of how the narrowing of civic/democratic space is affecting women in their respective countries and in the region, exploring the specific impact on the work of women journalists; (ii) increase the capacity of women journalists to apply a gender lens to their work with a focus on accountability for the rights of women and girls, as well as to women's access to justice and effective gender-responsive remedies; (iii) exchange information across the region among women journalists and media workers on measures, including risks and safety measures, to expand their enabling environment and working space in their respective countries and in the region; (iv) build the capacity of journalists, in particular women, on basic concepts of safety, including on risks associated with digital space (cyber security); and (v) build/strengthen/establish a network of journalists trained to report on women's access to justice and the impact on civic/democratic space. The intention is to strengthen partnerships with the UN for future collaboration in this regard. The programme consisted of self-paced e-Modules OHCHR's global online training platform (Moodle), supported by live webinars and follow-up assignments.

Results to date: 41 women journalists from the countries concerned increased their awareness, knowledge and skills with respect to the human rights dimensions of their role. An online follow-up assessment conducted by SEARO some months later, with a reasonable return rate of approximately 40 %, produced a decisive useful/very useful rating by participants, with many examples provided of how training has been subsequently applied in practice. Links which were established among the participants, many of whom faced similar challenges, are being maintained, drawing on the strong commitment and a good level of mutual trust developed by participants during the programme itself. The fact that several of the participants were young women further provides SEARO with the opportunity to further strengthen its outreach and engagement with youth working in this field. UN Women and UNESCO representatives also highlighted the way in which working together on the programme had enhanced their partnerships with SEARO and each other at the regional level.

Lessons and success factors: These included (i) the value of creating a women-specific learning space,

including in terms of creating a basis for follow-up networking and mutual support; (ii) the importance of careful tailoring of content which is well-grounded in the real and pressing issues faced by the journalists in their own countries; (iii) the blend of self-paced learning with live online engagement and follow-up; and (iv) the value-added of partnerships with UN and NGO counterparts with substantive knowledge and experience to bring into the course design and implementation, and to assist with follow-up. There is potential now to continue the training at national level in some countries, drawing on the participants and their own connections as well as UN Women, UNESCO and other UN and NGO in-country resources, linking to local training capacities and bodies where available.

EQ GHR 3: Do the benefits of the project accrue equally to women?

There are two primary lenses through which this question can be examined: (i) women/gender-specific activities such as the above successful women journalists' training (the main such activity to date); and (ii) the mainstreaming of gender across all areas, which the project has demonstrated well. However, it is difficult to assess the overall degree of equitable accrual of benefits across both areas without more comprehensive data gathering over time through means such as tracer studies, post-activity follow-up surveys and further qualitative research. It is thus proposed that this question be included in the longitudinal impact assessment in a selected project thematic area which is recommended by this evaluation.

EQ GHR 4: What strategies relevant to the integration of disability inclusion could be adopted by the Office for future interventions in the areas covered by the project?

As noted earlier, there was no explicit attention to disability inclusion in the original project design, which is reflected in the lack of visibility in interventions under the project. Potential strategies to strengthen future engagement in this area in the context of existing wider OHCHR work in the region are presented below. It is acknowledged that these will require staff inputs and time within already full workloads (as does gender mainstreaming). It is thus proposed that the requirements for a stepped-up focus on disability inclusion within the ongoing thematic areas of the project be factored into the relevant job descriptions and resourcing arrangements for a follow-up expanded phase of the project.

(ii) Map, reach out to, and establish partnerships with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and their connections and constituencies in the project's thematic areas. It is noted that OPDs have been very engaged in UN efforts in the region to strengthen inclusion in disaster response and management initiatives, which in turn links increasingly to climate change and human rights issues.

(ii) Building on initial efforts in this regard, ensure participation of persons with disabilities and their organizations in all stakeholder activities which are implemented as part of the project thematic focus areas. This requires proactive and systematic outreach and planning, as well as continuing to ensure that all the necessary facilities and support arrangements are in place to enable full and active participation.

(iii) Reach out to and engage with the ESCAP disability team, programme and regional strategy, including participation in regional and national intergovernmental events convened by ESCAP, in line with their UN lead role in the region on promoting the rights of persons with disabilities in all spheres. This also regularly flows into annual meetings of the Regional Commission (often described as a form of regional parliament) in the form of reports and resolutions on regional cooperation in this context. Strengthening such links potentially offers OHCHR opportunities to extend its normative presence and influence in issues related to the rights of persons with disabilities.

(iv) Strengthen the explicit reference to engagement on the rights of persons with disabilities, and with regional OPDs and their national links, in future formulation of ToCs, results frameworks and project plans with respect to the project results. This should include the inclusion of specific markers at the outputs, indicators and targets level to reinforce the focus on monitoring and review in this area.

III. LESSONS LEARNED

A number of lessons, as follows, stand out from stakeholder feedback and the review of documentation on implementation of the project. As well as providing reference points for ongoing project planning, implementation and improvement through 2022-2023, these provide useful inputs into forward thinking for the development of the strategy and planning for the next phase of the work of OHCHR in Asia and the Pacific. The following elaborates the summarized lessons highlights provided in the Executive Summary.

(i) The importance of being very clear about and diligently working to OHCHR's comparative advantage, which has been a key factor in successful project implementation to date.

(ii) Continuous review of the rapidly evolving regional context within which OHCHR works is critical. OHCHR's ability to reorientate its working modalities and take account of the impact of the pandemic on government priorities have been key factors in the project's success during a challenging period.

(iii) Maximizing the value-added of partnerships, working relationships and connections at all levels has proven itself as a defining factor in OHCHR's ability to exert influence and leverage limited resources for larger results within such a diverse and complex region.

(iv) At the same time, developing effective partnerships requires dedicated long-term staffing resources to provide consistency and continuously build trust and shared understanding around shared priorities and outcomes over time.

(v) The blend within the project work of regional and country-level UN agency relationships has been important in terms of conveying a message from 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' that integrating human rights into development policy and programming is the responsibility of all UN agencies and staff, and not only OHCHR.

(vi) Project experience demonstrates the value-added of effectively leveraging the opportunities provided by relevant global and regional frameworks to which UN member States and the UN system are committed (e.g. the Global Compact on Migration).

(vii) People are OHCHR's greatest resource. The importance of staff skills, experience and orientation in the right roles with the right support is fundamental and has been demonstrated by the project.

(viii) Projectized funding arrangements can impose internal burdens if full provision is not included for the additional management oversight and administrative support required. In this context, the value of core / operational funding from donors is accentuated.

(ix) In a complex project such as this, the role of the project coordinator role (albeit shared with other programmatic responsibilities) demonstrates the value of resourcing a position at a

suitable level to facilitate overall alignment and linkages, monitoring of progress, cross-project and wider communication flows, and coordinated interfacing with the funding partner and reporting.

(x) Undertaking wider UN system roles and responsibilities can be very resource intensive, requiring that they be built into staffing, work and budgetary planning from the beginning.

(xi) An important factor in maximizing impact with respect to the integration of HRBAs in CCAs and UNSDCFs is a 'whole of cycle' involvement throughout the entire process. This encompasses initial consultations on the CCA through to the final formulation of the UNSDCF and subsequent work planning and review. The fact that OHCHR is a non-resident agency (apart from in Fiji and Thailand) can pose challenges in this respect, requiring proactive planning and allocation of limited internal resources, as well as tapping into the contributions that the wider IBC can make.

(xii) Paying attention to language requirements and cultural factors can be key factors in ensuring meaningful engagement with more marginalized and vulnerable stakeholders.

(xiii) Follow-up to all events (meetings, trainings and others) has proved to be critical to strengthening the basis for longer term impact and needs to be planned in advance to ensure that contact and momentum are maintained and the likelihood of sustained results is enhanced.

(xiv) Although attention is built into the project design to the mainstreaming of gender equality, disability inclusion and LNOB, constant and critical review is important to continue deepening this in all aspects of project implementation.

(xv) With respect to project design, the inclusion of a six-12 month inception phase would have been helpful in terms of ensuring staffing and other foundations were in place to a greater extent before project implementation fully commenced.

IV. RECOMMENDATION WITH ACTIONS, TIMELINES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Drawing on the above findings and lessons, the following recommendations and supplementary action points are proposed for action of OHCHR at global, regional and country levels:

3.1: In sync with the preparation during 2023 of OHCHR's OMP and Regional Programme for 2024-2027, develop an overarching regional-level vision and strategy for the work of OHCHR in Asia and the Pacific in the context of (i) the OMP global theory of change and (ii) internal developments with respect to the balance between global and regional roles and responsibilities.

Such an Asia-Pacific strategic framework is seen as providing the most conducive environment for the long-term integration of the thematic work initiated by the project so that it can sustainably continue and grow as part of broader regional programming. It will also provide a comprehensive framework for the systematic mobilization of core and programmatic resources to expand OHCHR's work in the region in the project focus areas as well as more broadly. Key considerations in this context include:

(i) Encompassing both the shared priorities for OHCHR across the whole region and the distinct dimensions which are of relevance to Asia and the Pacific respectively.

- (ii) Making clear the strategic added-value of OHCHR in this context, based on the agency’s comparative advantages at regional and country levels, and the links between both.
- (iii) Paying attention to being well grounded in an analysis of “how changes happen” at regional, subregional and country levels in Asia and the Pacific.
- (iv) Establishing an overarching management approach for the shared aspects of the vision and strategy which ensures clarity in oversight and decision-making, including with respect to staffing and budgetary allocations in this sphere.
- (v) Providing the basis for strategically and structurally linking projects implemented with support from different donors (or different projects supported by the same donor).
- (vi) Encompassing the recommendations that follow within the regional visioning and strategy development processes.

Actions to be taken	Timeline	Lead responsibility
With OHCHR HQ, the design and implementation of a regional vision and strategy development process in the context of global directions and development in this regard, including consultations with key regional UN, CSO and other partners.	Carry forward in 2023 in sync with the preparation of OHCHR’s OMP and Regional Programme for 2024-2027. Complete before the project Top-Up period comes to an end, subject to clarity from OHCHR HQ on future directions vis-a-vis respective global and regional roles and responsibilities.	SEARO and PRO jointly, with OHCHR HQ

3.2: OHCHR should pursue the possibility with Sida of an expanded second phase to its funding. This should be based on (i) a core / whole-of-office approach with each of SEARO and PRO, (ii) a combination of overarching Asia-Pacific components and distinct SEARO and PRO components; and (iii) a clear sustainability strategy concerning the ongoing mobilization of the necessary resources by OHCHR (including through internal staff and resource transfers) to continue and grow its engagement in Asia and the Pacific in the project thematic areas, as well as more broadly.

Shifting to a core-funding approach from the current project-based one, expanded to include the full office work programmes of SEARO and pro will both (i) further reinforce the integration of the current thematic workstreams initiated by the project and (ii) reduce transaction costs and enable OHCHR to have the medium-term financial security and flexibility to ensure human and financial resources are used in most effective way possible to achieve agreed results.

It is also proposed - in line with global good funding and donorship practice - that OHCHR continue to advocate more generally with major long-term donors for core and untagged funding (as against individual project funding) to be considered as a preferred option for supporting long-term OHCHR capacities in strategic priority areas. Such resourcing arrangements should (i) ensure additionality (i.e. provide additional resources on top of core funding already in place, not be a replacement for this); (ii) be part of comprehensive long-term global and regional OHCHR resourcing plans; and (iii) include a strategy for long-term sustainability. The latter aspect should be explicitly built into all major donor resourcing

arrangements, with milestones and structured joint reviews of progress from a sustainability perspective.

Actions to be taken	Timeline	Lead responsibility
<p>OHCHR to (i) develop a value proposition and comprehensive proposal for funding and (ii) consider options for the efficient oversight and management of the overarching/shared whole-of-region component of the final resourcing package.</p> <p>Sida to consider the proposal in light of its new regional strategy and prioritization of its available resources.</p>	<p>Clarity on the way forward should be achieved by the end of 2022 to enable sufficient planning and preparation time to have all the necessary conceptual, legal and planning foundations in place by the end of the current project.</p>	<p>-SEARO and PRO to lead preparation of value proposition and proposal, in liaison with OHCHR/DEXREL.</p> <p>-Sida on its position vis-a-vis a potential expanded core/whole-of-office next funding phase covering both -SEARO and PRO.</p> <p>OHCHR HQ, SEARO, PRO and the Sida regional office to negotiate jointly, towards new arrangement and agreement, building on initial discussions to date.</p>

3.3: Conduct internal human resources review to provide the basis for formulating an organizational development plan to support the regional-level vision and strategy and systemically embed the thematic focus areas of the Sida project.

Such review should be conducted in the context of the regionalization process discussions taking part within the Office. Key considerations of the review and resultant plan should include (i) reconfiguring SEARO and PRO as necessary to systemically embed and adequately resource the thematic areas supported by the Sida project; (ii) steps to upgrade the status of OHCHR to a level commensurate with that of other entities within the UN system in Asia and the Pacific; (iii) ensuring all role classifications are at suitable levels, are appropriately aligned and provide career pathways which will help to attract and retain staff.

With respect to the configuration of the two offices to ensure the continuation and strengthening of thematic work initiated by the project, the following enhanced staffing components are proposed:

(i) The establishment of the following core programme teams: four specifically dedicated professional staff (two in SEARO and two in PRO) in the area of climate and human rights, including business and human rights; and three specifically dedicated professional staff (two in SEARO and one in PRO) in the areas of (i) migration and human rights; and (ii) development/SDGs and human rights. The latter roles would work closely with the newly established development economist role at SEARO under the Top-Up funding arrangement (see further below).

(ii) Two in-house technical/specialist positions to advise on, mainstream and expand work initiated in the area of democratic/civic space under the project. It is proposed that consideration should be given to one such position being based in SEARO and one in PRO. This option recognizes that each subregion has its own particular challenges and dynamics in this regard.

(iii) Continuation of the aspects of the work of the SEARO-based Communications Team in support of the project’s thematic workstreams, supplemented by the addition of a

communications/outreach post in PRO to serve such needs, as well as communications requirements more broadly, in the Pacific.

(iv) The continuation beyond the Top-Up phase of the economist post in SEARO, noting the value-addition of this post to OHCHR’s engagement on human rights and development

(iv) The establishment of a rule of law technical/ specialist post in SEARO to advise and support work in this respect across all workstreams, with consideration to be given the need for a similar role in PRO.

The recommended review should further consider (i) the value-addition and rationale of roles located at global HQ vis-a-vis roles at regional level, (ii) whether there should be a rebalancing of relevant roles towards the region, with selected positions being transferred accordingly (whether agreed on a region-specific basis or as part of the broader global /rebalancing considerations currently on the table at OHCHR HQ); (iii) the need to consider that in the long-term and across OHCHR Regional Offices there is an equitable distribution of thematic capacity, irrespective of the availability of earmarked funding to bolster such capacity; and (iv) the SEARO and PRO management and administrative requirements of all staffing increases and internal structural changes, to ensure these are part of human and financial resourcing planning from the beginning.

Actions to be taken	Timeline	Lead responsibility
<p>ToR to be developed for the internal human resources review and responsibilities and tasks allocated.</p> <p>A process to be designed for the development of an organizational development plan covering the areas indicated above, and others considered relevant in areas including resource mobilization and professional development.</p>	<p>The ToR and design of the organizational development process to be finalized by the end of 2022 with implementation to proceed in 2023.</p>	<p>Jointly developed by the HR Sections/responsible staff of OHCHR HQ, SEARO and PRO. overall leadership for implementation to be provided by OHCHR HQ.</p>

3.4: Within the context of the proposed development of a regional vision and strategy, review how OHCHR can best engage with the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, particularly with respect to the appropriate balance between global and regional roles for engagement in South Asia and East Asia.

In the context of the approaches proposed above, and noting current SEARO engagement with South Asia, in particular, it would be further timely to consider what steps are required to strengthen OHCHR engagement in the two subregions with respect to the project thematic focus areas, as well as more broadly. Key options in this regard are (i) to continue with the status quo arrangements with necessary improvements; (ii) a reconfigured, enlarged and suitably resourced SEARO which can incorporate key elements of current South Asia and East Asia engagement by OHCHR HQ; or (iii) the development of OHCHR regional hub(s), at least in South Asia. It is noted in this context that the rationale for the existence of OHCHR’s South-East Asia and Pacific offices would also appear to apply to South Asia, at least.

Actions to be taken	Timeline	Lead responsibility
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To be included in the design of the process to develop a regional vision and strategy, integrating the workstreams initiated by the project and	Clarity on the way forward should be achieved by the end of 2022 to enable sufficient planning and preparation time to have all the necessary conceptual, legal and planning foundations in place by the end of the current project.	OHCHR HQ, SEARO, PRO and the Sida regional office jointly.
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3.5: Continue to strengthen links between regional and country-level engagement, results and impacts, with an overall ‘driving’ orientation towards increasing the enjoyment of human rights at country level.

Noting that 42 per cent of current project indicators include a specific national impact element (e.g. reference to government, ministries and other national-based actors), and on the understanding that this is the ultimate sphere in which OHCHR regional programming need to be demonstrated in all substantive areas, it will be important to ensure that the regional /country nexus is an explicit driving element of future strategic and programme planning.

Member States, NHRIs, the national constituencies of regional CSOs and national CSOs and other actors are all critical actors in terms of increasing the enjoyment of human rights by national populations and need to be a specific focus of OHCHR work at regional level.

Noting that the work of UN RCOs and UNCTs engages with all of these actors, it is clear that mainstreaming human rights within CCAs, UNSDCFs and associated UNCT plans will continue to be a cornerstone for OHCHR impact in this regard. To consolidate and expand progress to date in a context of limited human resources, it will be necessary to (i) continue to enhance the efficacy and accessibility of online resources to support UNCT human rights mainstreaming efforts; (ii) continue to strengthen the human rights training capacities and available tools of the relevant UN Issue-Based Coalitions; (iii) continue to deepen the link between all regional office work in this respect and the roles of in-country Human Rights Advisors where they exist; and (iv) ensure that the work and comparative advantage of OHCHR as a generally non-resident UN entity are well reflected in specific terms in UNCT Joint Work Plans, monitoring, reporting and evaluations.

Actions to be taken	Timeline	Lead responsibility
Take stock of current progress in mainstreaming human rights within UN systems at country level with a view to identifying where efforts in the coming phase of such work needs to be focused in terms of (i) countries where further consolidation is required; (ii) priority new focus countries and (iii) the resourcing and tools development needs which need to be addressed in order to continue strengthening sustainability of results. The above-summarized set of factors in this regard provides a reference point for such stock take.	The stock take should be undertaken internally by the end of 2022 in order to achieve clarity on the way forward to guide work in this regard in the last year of the project.	SEARO and PRO with HQ support and advice, in consultation the IBC for Human Rights/GEWE and other relevant UN colleagues at regional and national levels.

3.6: Further enhance strategic partnerships with regional CSOs by (i) leveraging OHCHR’s convening power to further strengthen engagement with and among regional CSOs, and (ii) developing a partnership sub-strategy to further strengthen the basis for a holistic and integrated whole-of-region long term approach in this regard.

Building on partnerships and networks developed through the project, further increase opportunities in the post-COVID period for (i) regular OHCHR/CSO discussion at the strategic level (i.e. beyond practical project and activity cooperation); and (ii) collective regional CSO / OHCHR strategic discussion to enhance aggregated impact and cooperation around shared priorities.

Key areas for potential periodic discussion in both areas which were highlighted in CSO consultations included (i) longer-term human rights trends, challenges and priorities in the region; (ii) shared priorities in this context; (iii) respective roles of the OHCHR and regional CSOs; and (iv) arrangements for ongoing strengthening of CSO-CSO and CSO-OHCHR networking, mutual support, mutual learning and cooperation.

Taking account of the critical contribution of strengthened and new partnerships for the success to date of project workstreams, and the number of partnerships which touch on several areas of OHCHR work at thematic and different geographic levels, it is further proposed that a **regional partnership development sub-strategy** be developed within the broader new regional-level vision and strategy. As well as prioritizing particular strategic partnerships, this should include the facilitation of networking between partners and link with and support OHCHR resource-mobilization plans.

Actions to be taken	Timeline	Lead responsibility
<p>Incorporate an annual comprehensive OHCHR-CSO regional strategic dialogue into the SEARO and PRO joint work planning</p> <p>Develop a regional sub-strategy for partnership development which <i>inter alia</i> brings together Asia and Pacific partners and the links between them.</p>	<p>A comprehensive OHCHR CSO strategic dialogue on the lines indicated to be convened in 2023, and annually there-after.</p>	<p>SEARO and PRO jointly, supported by OHCHR HQ.</p>

3.7: Recalibrate OHCHR’s approach to CSO grant funding in Asia and the Pacific towards smaller and strategically-targeted seed funding in high impact catalytic areas, supported by streamlined procedures and accountability requirements.

As well as contributing to CSO partners' capacities and effectiveness, the provision of grant funding can also afford protection and credibility to partners at country level and cover resourcing gaps when CSOs are not able to receive funding bilaterally from other sources - e.g. for legal or political reasons. At the same time, it is evident that OHCHR is not yet well set up in terms of capacity for the efficient and expeditious disbursement of funds, although work is currently underway at OHCHR HQ to improve the efficiency and timeliness of the process.

Taking account of challenges to date in ensuring expeditious and streamlined disbursements and the available CSO-friendly funding alternatives in the region, it is proposed that OHCHR (i) reorient its funding support in Asia and the Pacific towards strategic and streamlined short-

term seed funding in areas which will add specific catalytic value to the advancement of OHCHR programming priorities (e.g. strategic research and particular high-impact short-term interventions, including in order to provide protection and credibility to the recipient); (ii) work with OHCHR HQ to develop and put in place appropriate criteria and streamlined, transparent and accelerated procedures for such funding in the region; (iii) prioritize working with and through network CSOs with capability to accountably manage grants as well as sub-grants to smaller CSOs; and (iv) seek opportunities to facilitate links between existing and new CSO partners and suitable alternative funding sources.

Actions to be taken	Timeline	Lead responsibility
<p>Develop the criteria and modality for a streamlined and rapid turnover strategic seed funding facility. Clarify the resource requirements for managing such a facility in the region and ensure this is taken into account in the recommended internal HR review.</p> <p>On the basis that OHCHR remains a donor in the region through the seed-funding modality, participate in relevant regional donor coordination mechanisms as a vehicle for promoting support for human rights partnerships and activity.</p>	<p>By the end of 2023, to be part of the resourcing arrangements under a follow-up expanded phase of the current project, if agreed.</p>	<p>SEARO and PRO to develop the criteria and modality for a streamlined and rapid turnover strategic seed funding facility for Asia and the Pacific (unless it is decided to make this a global approach, in which case work led at HQ would be supported by SEARO and PRO)</p> <p>This should be done in sync with current work underway at OHCHR HQ to streamline and speed-up grant disbursements.</p> <p>SEARO resource mobilization officer to lead engagement in relevant regional donor coordination fora.</p>

Recommendation 3.8: Conduct a longitudinal impact assessment in a selected thematic priority area supported by the project to provide in-depth feedback on impact, lessons and good practices to inform ongoing work in the area concerned, as well as across the work of SEARO and PRO.

Such assessment would be conducted over a multi-year period, in line with OHCHR METS guidelines on assessing impact of HR education and capacity building. Consideration should be given to the possibility that the assessment be conducted jointly with other key UN partners working with OHCHR in the thematic area concerned. At the same time, the use of relevant online tools for training and other activity impact assessment purposes (e.g. six or 12 months after an activity) should be extended across all programme areas to the extent possible, drawing on the experience and lessons of the online follow-up assessment conducted with participants in the training for women journalists under result 3. It is recognized in this context that a degree of flexibility may be required from OHCHR HQ to allow SEARO and PRO to use the best available online assessment package.

Evaluation findings indicate that it is difficult to assess the overall degree of equitable accrual of benefits from a gender perspective across the project without more comprehensive data

gathering over time through means such as tracer studies, post-activity follow-up surveys and further qualitative research. It is thus proposed that this question be included in the longitudinal impact assessment.

Actions to be taken	Timeline	Lead responsibility
Determine the strategic focus area. Decide whether to conduct as a joint process with other UN partners. Develop an assessment plan, allocate resources, develop ToR and recruit.	Conceptualization and preparatory work to begin in 2022, with assessment to commence in 2023.	OHCHR HQ evaluation team, working with SEARO and PRO jointly.

3.9: Ensure gender equality, disability inclusion and other LNOB markers are specified in future results frameworks and other programme and project planning documents related to the project results areas (and beyond). This should be the case at all levels, including at output, indicator and target levels, and linked where possible and appropriate to relevant SDG and national indicators and targets.

Specific mainstreaming markers across the whole results framework beyond gender-specific activities would assist in further focusing planning, resourcing, delivery and reporting attention in the areas highlighted. Other LNOB markers should include children and youth, noting that this is an OHCHR Spotlight focus and is already an area of engagement under project Results 1 and 2. To reinforce coherence with other key frameworks, as well as the ability to obtain relevant data through tapping into wider such processes, indicators and targets should be linked to relevant SDG and national equivalents where possible and appropriate.

Actions to be taken	Timeline	Lead responsibility
Attention to specific inclusion of gender equality, disability inclusion and LNOB markers in strategic, results framework and other programmatic documents.	During the process of future ToC, results framework and other programmatic and project design.	Relevant lead drafters at OHCHR HQ, SEARO and PRO levels.

Management response to the evaluation recommendations

Please note that management responses are published jointly with the respective evaluation report in the Office's website and the UN Evaluation Group portal. Therefore, internal information or politically sensitive contents should not be included in the management response.

1. Overall comments on the evaluation

In case the unit responsible would like to provide any additional comments on the evaluation, e.g. contextual information, etc., in response to the evaluation recommendations, to be published with the management response, please do so below. **This part is optional.**

Overall comments on the evaluation

We highly value the evaluation and its recommendations and think that it will help strengthen the two OHCHR Regional Offices in Asia-Pacific and the process of seeking to gain in efficiency through strategic prioritization and information management.

It would be vital to appreciate that this evaluation covered the Sida funded workstreams and not the full SEARO/PRO programme.

Two other recent evaluations are relevant for this management response, namely 1. the Evaluation of the Cambodia Country Programme 2017 – 2020 (2020) and 2. the evaluation by the EU of the project in Thailand (2022; final report due in December 2022) and its outcomes related to the links between regional and country strategies and work, sustainability of staff and activities, grants management and LNOB markers .

2. Management response to the evaluation recommendations

Please complete the relevant details below:

1. Management position on recommendation i.e., “Accepted”, “Partially Accepted”⁷ or “Not Accepted”. The management position should be based on the recommendations or part of the recommendations relevant to OHCHR’s mandate and scope. Recommendations falling outside the OHCHR’s mandate or scope, such as donor’s or other stakeholders’ responsibility, do not require a management position.
2. Management comment – this is a place to provide comments on the management position. If the management position (above) is Not Accepted, this field is mandatory, and any reasons for not accepting the recommendation must be clearly explained here. If there is no additional information here, please write “None”.
3. Key actions – this is a place to formulate a specific, concrete and actionable plan for the implementation of the recommendation. Please state one action per row. If needed, please add rows as required.
4. Responsibility – The unit(s) responsible for the implementation of each action should be clearly outlined in order to avoid confusion and to encourage ownership. Where there are multiple units involved, it should be indicated who takes the lead for overall coordination. In case multiple units are involved, the unit responsible for the programme evaluated should conduct the respective consultation with the other units to agree on the actions, responsibility, and timeline. Please ensure that all relevant parties are consulted and agreed with proposed actions and time-frame prior to submitting to the PBRB for endorsement. Please note that PPMES does not take responsibility for coordinating the relevant parties for consensus.
5. Time-frame – this should be on a quarterly basis format, e.g., Q1/2022. At the time of preparing management response for the first time, if proposed actions are already implemented, the date of implementation should be stated as “implemented”.

Management response
Evaluation of the OHCHR Project: Strengthening the Capacity of Regional Actors to Promote Human Rights, Accountability, Democratic Space and Gender in the Asia-

⁷ “Partially Accepted” may be used when management of the evaluated unit, (i) wishes to express reservations to accept the entire recommendation, (ii) is unable to commit implementation of recommendation with the concrete target date due to uncertainty involved in the context, etc. PPMES is available for advice how this option can be used.

Pacific Region		
Recommendation 1: In sync and aligned with the preparation during 2023 of OHCHR’s OMP and Regional Programme for 2024-2027, develop an overarching regional-level vision and strategy for the work of OHCHR in Asia and the Pacific in the context of (i) the OMP global theory of change and (ii) internal OHCHR developments with respect to the balance between global and regional roles and responsibilities.		
Management position on recommendation: Accepted		
Management comment:		
<p>The Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Service (PPMES); The Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division (FOTCD) Asia-Pacific, Middle East and North Africa (APMENA) Chief of Section and Chief of Branch as well as the FOTCD Director were consulted.</p> <p>OHCHR Regional Office for South-East Asia (SEARO) and Pacific Regional Office (PRO) have been requested to provide to Sweden an OHCHR Programme and Budget Review Board (PBRB) -approved multi-year proposal by end of December 2022, with a corresponding budget and organigramme. OHCHR will provide to Sweden, and the rest of the donor community, a fundraising proposal with two sub-regional components (South-East Asia and the Pacific), under a regional chapeau, underpinned by the current Organization Management Plan (OMP) and related Theory of Change (TOC).</p> <p>A full-fledged Asia-Pacific Strategy (referenced to in Recommendation 2) will be prepared later in 2024, taking into account the timeline for the new OMP, to be issued in late 2023 or early 2024, the directions provided by the new High Commissioner, developments on the HQ/Regional and Country Presences strengthening agenda and revised regional, subregional and country notes.</p> <p>If required and as appropriate, SEARO and PRO will discuss with donors the implications of the new OMP and Asia-Pacific Strategy in Q1-Q2 of 2024 and revise the approved Theory of Change and Results Framework of the funded submissions.</p>		
Key Action	Responsibility	Time-frame
1. Fundraising proposal (with sub-regional components) drafted and submitted for review and endorsement by PBRB through Director of FOTCD	SEARO, PRO and OHCHR HQ	End Dec 2022
2. Asia-Pacific Strategy drafted and submitted for approval to SMT	SEARO, PRO and OHCHR HQ	June 2024
Recommendation 2: OHCHR should pursue the possibility with Sida of an expanded second		

phase to its funding. This should be based on (i) a core / whole-of-office approach with each of SEARO and PRO, (ii) a combination of overarching Asia-Pacific components and distinct SEARO and PRO components; and (iii) a clear sustainability strategy concerning the ongoing mobilization of the necessary resources by OHCHR (including through internal staff and resource transfers) to continue and grow its engagement in Asia and the Pacific in the project thematic areas, as well as more broadly.

Management position on recommendation : Accepted

Management comment:

The Donor, External Relations Section (DexRel) and PPMES were consulted.

SEARO and PRO are preparing a joint fundraising proposal, with sub-regional components, articulating the specific thematic areas of work which require a joint approach (climate change, migration, etc).

The fundraising proposal, once endorsed by PBRB, will be submitted to Sida as fundraising proposals, in December 2022. The strategy will detail the HR challenges in the region; the role, added value and potential partnerships of OHCHR; the expected outcomes and intervention modalities as well as the overall yearly investment requirements by the donor community.

It will also include corresponding organigrammes for each Regional Office, with revised core and needs based staffing levels and positions, ensuring that the staffing structures are fit for purpose for the proposed programmes.

The fundraising proposal will be presented to all donors, as the regional Human Rights Programme, and all donors will be encouraged to contribute to the core programme of OHCHR's Regional Offices in Asia-Pacific, rather than thematically or geographically. That will ensure the necessary flexibility in the funds applications, to adapt to circumstances while pursuing the agreed programme outcomes.

OHCHR will also encourage donor coordination, with the establishment of dedicated development partners fora, as well as common donor reporting, such as through the annual report.

Concerning the sustainability strategy, it will be formulated on four pillars:

- Resource mobilisation (voluntary contributions) for the two Regional Offices;
- Allocation of un-earmarked funding, which is under the PBRB's purview;
- Possible internal "transfer" of human resources, which is dependent on the overall HQ/Regional and Country Presences strengthening process;
- Possible increases in UN Regular Budget allocations for OHCHR Regional Offices.

In addition, the expected results of OHCHR's work in the region inherently aim at reinforcing local capacities of national and regional actors to promote and protect human rights, fight impunity and prevent violations, therefore contributing to reducing, in the long term, the need

for a large OHCHR footprint in the region.		
Key Action	Responsibility	Time-frame
1. Finalize a new funding agreement with Sida through to the next OMP (2024-2027) based on the regional fundraising proposal (with sub-regional components) and considering the challenges and opportunities identified in the independent evaluation.	SEARO, PRO and DEXREL	30 June 2023
Recommendation 3: Conduct internal human resources review to provide the basis for formulating an organizational development plan to support the regional-level vision and strategy and systemically embed the thematic focus areas of the Sida project.		
Management position on recommendation : Accepted		
Management comment:		
<p>The Chief of the Human Resources Management of the Programme Support and Management Services (PSMS); PPMES and FOTCD APMENA Branch and Director were consulted.</p> <p>While the focus of this recommendation was largely related to the structure of SEARO, both SEARO and PRO are in discussions with the Chief of PSMS, to determine how to best proceed for this exercise, which needs to be completed before the sub-regional strategies are finalised and submitted to the PBRB, as it will inform the accompanying organigrammes.</p> <p>In the medium term, the vision of the new High Commissioner for the Office, as well as developments on the HQ/Regional and Country Presences strengthening agenda and any RB budget developments will inform future revisions of the organigrammes.</p>		
Key Action	Responsibility	Time-frame
1. Human resources assessment	SEARO and PRO, PSMS/HR	December 2022
2. Prepare a fit for purpose organigram for each RO with core (“programme”) and needs based required staff, informed by the human resources assessment and the required HQ substantive support (including details of related cost recovery levels).	SEARO and PRO, PSMS/HR	December 2022
Recommendation 4: Within the context of the proposed development of a regional-level vision and strategy, review how OHCHR can best engage with the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, particularly with respect to the appropriate balance between global and regional roles for engagement in South Asia and East Asia.		

Management position on recommendation: Accepted

Management comment:

The FOTCD APMENA Branch and Director; and PPMES were consulted.

As regional and sub-regional notes will be revised in the context of the conceptualisation and rolling out of the 2024-2027 OMP, the “whole of office” approach will be clarified, as the engagement of OHCHR in the Asia-Pacific region will be articulated in a series of interlinked documents and strategies:

- Overarching strategy for the Asia-Pacific region, detailing the scope and footprint of the Office in the region and sub-regions (RO, CO, HRAs and HQ-led coverage)
- SEARO Strategy for South-East Asia
- PRO Strategy for the Pacific

Eventually the HQ/Regional and Country Presences strengthening agenda will also require an analysis of how OHCHR can best cover the Asia-Pacific Region through its existing and future capacity and will therefore inform the modalities for engagement and the balance between regional/country presences and HQ coverage.⁸

Key Action	Responsibility	Time-frame
1. Revise regional and country engagement strategies, with modalities for engagement with the region and sub-regions, balancing HQ and field coverage.	FOTCD, with inputs, inter alia, from SEARO and PRO	31 December 2023 (tbc)

Recommendation 5: Continue to strengthen links between regional and country-level engagement, results and impacts, with an overall ‘driving’ orientation towards increasing the enjoyment of human rights at country level.

Management position on recommendation : Accepted

Management comment:

PPMES; and the Chief of FOTCD APMENA Branch were consulted.

The regional fundraising proposal will articulate SEARO’s and PRO’s vision and requirements for their engagement in the Asia-Pacific region, including thematic regional and country work, as well as the synergies with the other OHCHR field presences in their region (HRAs and

⁸ Note: Concerning the sub-regions in Asia, the region is divided in six sub-regions, under the classification of the UN Statistical Division (and as visible in [UNdata](#)): Central Asia, Eastern Asia, Northern Asia, South-East Asia, Southern Asia, Western Asia.

COs).		
The upcoming Evaluation of the EU-funded Thailand programme, due to be completed by December 2022 and which is looking specifically also at country work and its link with regional approaches, will include insights and recommendations to that end, which might assist in conceptualising both the strategies and the organigrammes.		
Key Actions	Responsibility	Time-frame
1. Continue to strengthen the links between regional and country engagement	SEARO and PRO	31 December 2023
Recommendation 6: Further enhance strategic partnerships with regional CSOs by (i) leveraging OHCHR’s convening power to further strengthen engagement with and among regional CSOs, and (ii) developing a partnership sub-strategy to further strengthen the basis for a holistic and integrated whole-of-region long term approach.		
Management position on recommendation: Accepted		
Management comment:		
PPMES; DexRel; Civic Space Unit of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division (TESPRDD) and the Deputy High Commissioner’s Office were consulted.		
The sub-regional partnership will need to be aligned with and contribute to the Office-wide Resource Mobilization and Partnerships Strategy, including on issues like desired outcomes and criteria for engaging in partnerships, classification of types of partnerships, keeping a registry of existing and potential ones (through Salesforce, for example), etc. It will also need to be take into account of the partnerships that exist in other OHCHR presences in the region.		
A next step will be to undertake a comprehensive partner mapping at regional and country levels.		
Key Actions	Responsibility	Time-frame
1. OHCHR’s will convene CSOs to ensure dialogue and consultations with and between CSOs and reflected them into the regional fundraising proposal	SEARO and PRO	December 2022
2. Develop a partner mapping at regional and country level	SEARO and PRO	Dec 2023
Recommendation 7: Recalibrate OHCHR’s approach to CSO grant funding in Asia and the Pacific towards smaller and strategically-targeted seed funding in high impact catalytic areas, supported by streamlined procedures and accountability requirements.		
Management position on recommendation: Partially accepted		

Management comment:

PSMS; the Civic Space Unit of TESPRDD, and the OHCHR Grants Committee Chairperson were consulted.

SEARO agrees with the suggested recalibration of grant making as per the recommendation, as long as it is aligned with OHCHR's global grant making criteria and guidelines. In fact, OHCHR-SEARO has applied the criteria for giving out grants as governed by the SOP of the Grants Committee, the UN Secretariat and PSMS.

Concerning the streamlined procedures and accountability requirements, OHCHR is scheduled to roll out its delegation of authority to the field for selected functions, which is expected to expedite the process of disbursements, as this has been identified as a particularly onerous process. This, however, will require Regional Offices to have dedicated programme management capacity. To be noted that PRO did not have significant grants over the course of this project.

Key Action	Responsibility	Time-frame
1. SEARO and PRO to consider, as part of its regional structures, a dedicated programme management capacity within ROs.	OHCHR SEARO and PRO	Q4 2022

Recommendation 8: Conduct a longitudinal impact assessment in a selected thematic priority area supported by the project to provide in-depth feedback on impact, lessons and good practices to inform ongoing work in the area concerned as well as across the work of SEARO and PRO.

Management position on recommendation: Partially accepted, depending on funding and thematic focus

Management comment:

The Director of TESPRDD; and the PPMES were consulted.

A long-term assessment on any given thematic area (migration, climate change or civic space) would look into the work of a Regional Office as well as the HQs global policy (at HQ) on the selected theme with the view to capture lessons learned and best practices from the rolling out (in the field) of such global policies.

In the current circumstances, the Regional Offices in Asia-Pacific and HQ do not have sufficient resources to bind themselves to a long-term thematic evaluation, however, we accept the value added and appreciate the spirit of the recommendation. This is an activity that could be considered, contingent on funding and thematic focus.

Key Action	Responsibility	Time-frame
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<p>1. OHCHR-SEARO will consider the implementation of this recommendation in the process of the OMP planning exercise and contingent on funding. OHCHR PRO will likewise consider it if it concerns the thematic area of climate change (the only area of PRO’s work covered by the project), provided that additional funding is made available.</p>	<p>SEARO</p>	<p>2023, subject to availability of funding</p>
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Recommendation 9: Ensure gender equality, disability inclusion and other LNOB markers are specified in future results frameworks and other programme and project planning documents related to the project results areas (and beyond). This should be the case at all levels, including at output, indicator and target levels, and linked where possible and appropriate to relevant SDG and national indicators and targets.

Management position on recommendation: Partially accepted, contingent on funding

Management comment:

The Adviser on Disability; the Chief of the Women’s Human Rights and Gender Section; Human Rights Indicators and Data team within the Methodology, Education and Training Section (METS) and PPMES were consulted.

It is important to note that the scope of the independent evaluation was solely intended to cover the Sida-funded, earmarked project and its implementation over the last four years. It was not intended to evaluate the overall work and results of SEARO and PRO. That said, embedding LNOB, gender equality and disability inclusion markers in the sub-regional strategies would be beneficial to OHCHR’s capacity to track progress in these areas of programme implementation over time.

OHCHR SEARO will incorporate, in its forthcoming regional fundraising proposal, a results framework which considers relevant LNOB, gender equality, and disability inclusion markers (output, indicator and target levels), linking them to relevant SDG targets or indicators. However, to make the best use of these markers there is a need for additional capacity for monitoring and evaluation, and associated resources, as this is a technical area of expertise currently lacking in the regional offices.

In addition, SEARO and PRO will work towards including a more specific and detailed mainstreaming of these issues (GE, DI and LNOB) in the theories of change, strategies, risk assessments and results (output, indicator and target level) of future programmes and projects.

HQ support and capacity development for SEARO and PRO will be required to undertake such action for improved programme planning.

The Women’s Human Rights and Gender Section (WHRGS) supports SEARO’s further integration of gender equality, including through addressing elimination of intersecting forms of discrimination.

Key Action	Responsibility	Time-frame
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<p>1. Embed LNOB, gender, disability markers in the sub-regional strategies, theories of change, risk assessments and results (output, indicator and target level) and related Results Framework, capacity permitting and subject to support received from OHCHR HQ.</p>	<p>SEARO and PRO, with support of PPMES, METS, TESPRRD</p>	<p>December 2022</p>
<p>2. Envisage dedicated programme management capacity within the ROs that would support the identification of relevant indicators as well as monitoring and reporting on their implementation.</p>	<p>SEARO, PRO</p>	<p>July 2023</p>
<p>3. Capacity would be required, either through HQ-led support and expertise or through additional human resources at the regional levels to address the programmatic implications for expanded work in some areas linked to these markers, notably on disabilities.</p>	<p>SEARO, PRO</p>	<p>July 2023</p>