Annex 5 - Summary of UNOPS Engagement and Management of Implementing Partners

1. This annex is provided in response to recommendation 2 as contained in JIU/REP/2021/4 “Review of the management of implementing partners in United Nations system organization” (JIU/REP/2021/4) requesting the inclusion of UNOPS work with implementing partners in the annual report. It provides a summary of UNOPS approach to engaging and managing implementing partners, and an overview of key initiatives to strengthen its ability to support implementing partners to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. UNOPS has managed grant support project and programme activities for nearly 30 years. Between 2019 and 2023, UNOPS grant support project and programme expenditures totalled more than $1.8 billion and supported over 10,000 implementing partners (IPs). In 2023, UNOPS managed 321 projects with grant support activities, delivering more than $510 million. Grant support project and programme activities represent one of the largest UNOPS output groups, with nearly 20 per cent of total global delivery in 2023. During the reporting period, UNOPS IPs delivered in more than 100 countries, reaching those farthest left behind.

Purpose and core functions

3. UNOPS provides flexible and modular projects services, which functionally span infrastructure, procurement and project management, including human resources and financial management. UNOPS grant support activities are offered as part of its financial management services, delivered with a focus on sustainability and national capacity development. The flexible structure and global reach of UNOPS mean that it can quickly respond to the needs of IPs and the communities in which they work. UNOPS believes that the collaborative advantage of its non-programmatic implementation mandate gives it the agility to support a wide range of country and regional priorities through grant support on demand.

4. UNOPS grant support activities are delivered in accordance with its Grant Support Operational Instruction (2022) UNOPS effectively takes the role of an intermediary, providing effective and efficient services in support of the objectives of the respective donor. UNOPS has harmonised its definition of IP with other United Nations entities and is working within the United Nations interagency working group to address key recommendations from the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) Review of the management of implementing partners in United Nations system organisations (JIU/REP/2021/4).

5. As part of UNOPS efforts to strengthen the management of IPs, an internal UNOPS Grant Support Working Group, which is composed of UNOPS regional offices and grant support practitioners, has been established. The working group supports the development and implementation of requirements as contained in the new Grant Support Operational Instruction (2022), including the establishment of a grants management system.

6. In 2023, UNOPS recruited two new grant support personnel in UNOPS headquarters to develop policies, requirements and guidance, and to build the capacity of UNOPS grant support practitioners and implementing partners. In addition, there are dedicated personnel in headquarters to provide technical assistance globally to UNOPS personnel on these new policies and processes.
Policies, rules and regulations

7. Recommendation 4 of the JIU (JIU/REP/2021/4) emphasises that, by the end of 2023, United Nations entities must update, as necessary, and implement their IP policies and related guidance. During 2023, UNOPS released updated IP requirements and processes in the following areas:

- Inviting proposals and IP selection methodologies;
- Proposal submissions management;
- Proposal evaluation review;
- Capacity assessment of IPs; and
- Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

8. The changes in these requirements and processes have resulted in a more harmonised and coherent approach to the management of UNOPS IPs across the organization, as well as improved communication and cooperation between UNOPS and other United Nations entities.

9. Recommendation 8 of the JIU (JIU/REP/2021/4) states: “The executive heads of United Nations system organizations should, by the end of 2023, share among themselves, through existing inter-agency mechanisms/forums, their specialized training materials and modules for the management of implementing partners, including due diligence, risk and capacity assessments of partners, results-based and risk-based performance monitoring, fraud prevention, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, capacity-building, working with local non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations, the harmonized approach to cash transfers and the United Nations Partner Portal.” UNOPS closed this recommendation in 2023, integrating the findings into UNOPS routine grant support work as indicated below.

10. Throughout 2023, UNOPS was a member of the interagency working group on the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and, as of December 2023, UNOPS is engaged with the interagency working group focusing on implementing partners.

11. In 2023, UNOPS released new requirements and guidance based on the existing United Nations harmonised approach and tools for capacity assessments, PSEA and cash transfers. UNOPS has also built on the lessons learned from other entities in designing the UNOPS ‘Call for Proposals’ process and templates.

12. UNOPS became a member of the United Nations Partner Portal in November 2023. Organisation-wide training on and use of the portal by country offices is planned for 2024. Jointly produced training materials and shared resources are available on the United Nations Partner Portal and new resources and materials are continuously being added by the interagency working group on PSEA. UNOPS utilised the shared resources available through the portal to conduct regional PSEA trainings and has shared these training materials with the interagency working group on PSEA working group. UNOPS has also promoted country-level interagency training within UNOPS in countries such as Pakistan, Egypt, India and Uganda. UNOPS is currently updating and revising its policies and tools on due diligence, risk-based performance monitoring and fraud prevention, based on the existing United Nations harmonised tools and resources.
Engagement with the interagency working groups will continue in 2024 to support a harmonised approach to working with IPs.

Risk management

13. Recommendation 6 of the JIU(JIU/REP/2021/4) requests that United Nations entities “incorporate implementing partner risks into their organization’s risk management frameworks by the end of 2023.” In 2023, UNOPS began a process of developing an integrated grants management system to strengthen its approach to the management and support of UNOPS IPs. Both the JIU and UNOPS Internal Audit and Investigation Group (IAIG) have called for a more harmonized approach to managing IPs\(^1\) and the establishment of a grants management tool respectively\(^2\).

14. To ensure that UNOPS is able to deliver efficient and transparent grant support and maintain and build partnerships with IPs and donors, as well as to ensure that the United Nations Board of Auditors and other audit recommendations will be addressed, a UNOPS Grants Management System (GMS) has been prioritized within the Process Innovation and Digitalization Programme. The GMS will enable UNOPS to have a more robust and integrated approach to risk management and the analysis of IP performance, and improved reporting capabilities.

15. The new and more harmonized approach to due diligence and the IP capacity assessment enable UNOPS to identify the risk rating of IPs and to adapt the risk management approach accordingly. UNOPS is currently reviewing its policies and processes related to high-risk IPs.

16. Joint efforts to implement the PSEA IP capacity assessment using the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) UN Implementing Partner PSEA Capacity Assessment: (Interim) Harmonized Implementation Tool and UN Partner Portal will enable UNOPS to work more closely with other United Nations entities with shared partners to manage risk and build the capacity of IPs.

Internal and external capacity development

17. During the reporting period, UNOPS trained over 130 personnel on the PSEA requirements, conducted two face-to-face training sessions for over 80 UNOPS personnel on the new UNOPS grant support policies and procedures and conducted over 25 virtual sessions with UNOPS personnel on the new requirements. Phase II of capacity building in 2024 will include increasing the knowledge of IPs on UNOPS processes and soliciting feedback from IPs on UNOPS policies and processes.

Commitment to Leaving No One Behind

18. As part of the ongoing efforts to implement the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, UNOPS conducted an external digital accessibility review of its grant support requirements and templates, including the call for proposals and capacity assessment tools used by IPs. The review assessed how well UNOPS digital grant support products meet the needs of persons with disabilities and conform with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines technical standards.

\(^1\) United Nations Review of the management of implementing partners in United Nations system organizations
\(^2\) IAIG/11101/206
19. The assessment provided clear recommendations for improving accessibility for persons with disabilities, as well as non-native English, French or Spanish speakers, and emphasised the importance of ensuring feedback from grant support applicants and other users of UNOPS tools and systems. These recommendations are informing changes within UNOPS grant support to ensure broader inclusion and increased accessibility to resources. UNOPS is currently developing a Grant Support Roadmap for 2024-2026, which will outline the UNOPS priorities and activities to strengthen its work with IPs.