



Independent Mid-Term Programme Evaluation

Global Programme on Countering Terrorist Use of Weapons

Location of intervention: Global

Timeframe of intervention: September 2018-September 2021, subsequently extended 4 times, with current end date of March 2028

Funders: Canada, European Union, Finland, France, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (co-funder), Russian Federation, and United States of America

Implementing partners: Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Substantive partners: Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), NATO, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), and US Department of State

Scope of evaluation: Programme activities from September 2018-July 2023¹

Date of evaluation: December 2022-May 2025 (data collection completed in February 2024)

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URL for evaluation report: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/publications>

Background and Context

The Global Programme has an intended goal of contributing to making the world safer and more secure from terrorist acquisition and use of weapons through the implementation of the provisions of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS), and its subsequent reviews, related to weapons of mass destruction (WMD), chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials, small arms and light weapons (SALW), improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and unmanned aircraft systems (UAS). It plans to achieve this by enhancing capacities of Member States, International Organizations and United Nations (UN) entities to prevent terrorists from accessing and using weapons, materials and/or components and to ensure that they are better prepared for and can more effectively respond to a terrorist attack involving such weapons or materials. The Programme aims to deliver on this goal by enhancing visibility of UNOCT activities on countering the terrorist use of weapons; strengthening strategic partnerships; advancing knowledge and understanding of the threat and risk of terrorists acquiring and using weapons; improving the capacities of Member States in prevention, preparedness and response to terrorist attacks; and improving United Nations international interagency coordination on preventing and responding to terrorist attacks involving WMD/CBRN/SALW/IED/UAS.

¹ Projects initiated after the evaluation launch in December 2022 were not included in the evaluation scope.

Key Findings

Relevance: The Programme and projects had high relevance and alignment with the United Nations GCTS, the UNOCT Strategic Plan and Results Framework (SPRF), the strategic priorities of the implementing partners, and the needs of Member States. The Programme and projects are also relevant for the obligation of States, under international human rights law (IHRL) to respect and protect the right to life, the UNSDGs particularly Goal 16, and to a lesser extent, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. COVID-19 delayed the implementation of activities and interrupted planned approaches. In several cases, the team responded where possible with online delivery of meetings and trainings and responding to heightened interest by holding webinars and meetings on biological threats. The Programme has a diverse portfolio of foundational projects and informative activities and reports and was able to address and respond to emerging threats appropriately.

Coherence: Coordination, and addressing gaps, and responding to the needs of beneficiaries, was deeply embedded into the Programme design and implementation. Implementing partners reported positively about the value of the coordination efforts and the responsiveness and support provided by the UNOCT Programme team. The UNOCT's collaborative approach to working directly with Member States to develop the objectives and materials for trainings improved their coherence. The Programme can improve on technical coherence in terms of training standardization, Subject Matter Expert (SME) collaboration, and technical oversight.

Effectiveness: The Programme has so far demonstrated success in improving the visibility of UNOCT (Output 1), achieving the planned numbers of partnerships (Output 2), and has achieved its planned contributions to international interagency coordination (Output 5). The Programme has had substantial effectiveness so far in directly contributing to Member States having improved capacities (Output 4). The Programme has produced three high quality regional threat assessments to promote risk knowledge/understanding through a partnership with International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), and additional reports through other pilot projects (Output 3). However, there are several challenges with Programme Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems, the Programme document is out of date, and pathways for change are not clearly outlined. Technically, the effectiveness of the UNOCT WMD/CBRN Programme hinges on its SME staff and the quantity and quality of the reports and training that it produces for Member States. The Programme's ability to align training, threat assessments, and SME engagement with evolving security challenges will ensure the Programme remains responsive, effective, and impactful.

Efficiency: The budget management system used by the Programme has complexities which made it challenging to comprehensively assess efficiency as part of this evaluation, however, information available indicates the Programme/project results justify the costs incurred. Projects were operated with lean funding, and time, staffing, and resources (including for evaluations) were often insufficient for the high levels of ambition of the Programme and projects. The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to bottlenecks and delays. The UNOCT Programme team is very small considering their wide remit (both geographical and in terms of types of weapons covered) and would benefit from additional technical and administrative support. The technical efficiency of the Programme can be improved with more quality control, more standardisation of training frameworks, more diversification in content development, and additional resources and structured review process for reports and training materials.

Sustainability: The Programme lacks an embedded sustainability plan, though some projects were designed to foster ongoing collaboration with implementing partners. Positive signs of sustainability include established partnerships and tangible outputs like reports, which may need updating and wider dissemination. Beneficiaries report continued use of learnings, but challenges such as limited equipment and train-the-trainer (TTT) models may hinder long-term impact. Practical interventions and advisory groups show strong potential for sustained use, provided they are regionally relevant, nationally owned, and integrated into existing systems. Trainings

reliant on external trainers risk reduced effectiveness unless localised. Iraq and Jordan reported progress in building capacities and expressed interest in continued support.

Human rights, gender equality, leave no one behind, and disability inclusion: The evaluation found limited integration of gender equality and human rights in the Programme's design and most projects, highlighting the need for a comprehensive gender and human rights analysis. While efforts were made to promote women's participation and visibility during implementation, representation remained low in key national agencies. Some projects incorporated human rights messaging, but periodic risk assessments were lacking, and guidance on applying the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) was absent. Partners like CTED, UNODC, and UNODA did reportedly apply rights-based approaches, though this has not been included in the available documents. The Jordan project notably addressed gender issues during decontamination. Capacity in these areas has grown with support from the Human Rights and Gender Section (HRGS), but additional resources and clearer collaboration between the Section and the Programme are needed.

Key Lessons

The evaluation documented large number of lessons which can support revisions to the Programme and projects in the future. The key lessons learnt which have been identified were:

1. **Programme and Project Management and Reporting:** The programme document and some project documents are not up to date and the Programme's logical framework has several critical issues. Logical framework indicators are not regularly reported against.
2. **MEL system:** The Programme and projects lacked a comprehensive MEL system to collect data to report against logical framework indicators and also to gather and document learnings.
3. **Theory of Change:** The Programme lacks a Theory of Change, as it was not a requirement when the Programme was first designed.
4. **Budgetary management system:** The budget management system is time consuming for managers to use to extract information on budgeted expenditures against planned budget lines.
5. **Human rights due diligence:** The UN HRDDP in cases of support to non-UN security forces was not applied, nor was conflict sensitivity analysis or risk assessment of risks of negative impacts on human rights. This was due to the lack of internal guidance during the evaluation period for programmes on how to operationalise the UN HRDDP.
6. **Structured and Contextually Relevant Training:** Trainings could be structured more around established educational frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy and in some cases lack regional and contextual relevance.
7. **Formal (Documented) Quality Assurance and Peer-Review Process:** There are some inconsistencies in technical accuracy, instructional quality, and materials developed for trainings. No standardised technical review and evaluation process is utilised.
8. **Train the trainer (TTT) approaches:** A more comprehensive TTT approach is needed to ensure further roll-out of trainings within trained national entities.

Recommendations

1. Update Programme document to reflect changes in scope and relevance to cross-cutting themes.
2. Improve Programme and Project management and reporting, including MEL approaches.
3. Enhance technical oversight and SME collaboration for quality assurance.
4. Expand intermediate and advanced trainings, including more Table Top Exercises (TTX) and TTT approaches.

5. Incorporate engagement with civil society into the Programme's approach.
6. Incorporate gender, human rights, and conflict sensitivity analysis into the Programme design and apply the UN HRDDP.
7. Ensure the Programme and new projects under the Programme have sufficient staffing resources when submitted to the Programme Review Board (PRB).
8. Update dissemination approach for regional threat assessments and monitor effectiveness.

Methodology

The methods employed by the evaluation team and number of stakeholders consulted were: (1) 37 semi-structured key informant interviews (18 male, 19 female) conducted online with UNOCT Programme and Project Managers, UNOCT staff, implementing/coordination partners, Member States/Duty Bearers, a civil society organisation (CSO) and a CSO Engagement Expert, and a donor; (2) two quantitative online surveys with 21 representatives from implementing partners and Coordination Partners (14 male, 7 female) and 81 duty-bearer beneficiaries of capacity building activities (60 male, 19 female, 1 non-binary/other, 1 prefer not to say); (3) a qualitative systematic review of 20 training courses and capacity building initiatives, reports and publications; (4) a desk review of Programme and Project documents and external relevant reports; and (5) secondary data analysis of project monitoring data. The evaluation assessed activities undertaken by the Programme up until July 2023, but due to an extension to the evaluation timeline, the evaluators have also taken into consideration information provided at a later stage while the evaluation report was being finalised in line with a user-focused evaluation approach. Any projects that started after the evaluation commenced are not included in the scope of the evaluation.