

## **PIR QUALITY ASSESSMENT: WHY AND HOW OF THE QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND INSIGHT ON COMPLETING A HIGH QUALITY PIR<sup>1</sup>**

In addition to following UNDP project-level monitoring and reporting requirements, GEF-financed projects must adhere to GEF policies and requirements. These additional GEF requirements include the preparation of annual GEF Project Implementation Reports (PIR), mid-term reviews, GEF tracking tools, and terminal evaluations; all submitted to the GEF as part of the mandatory GEF annual monitoring and reporting (GEF AMR) process. The GEF AMR requirements have proven to be valuable tools that help project stakeholders, and UNDP, keep projects on track to deliver results on the ground, and to monitor, aggregate and communicate progress across many projects at the portfolio level.

UNDP coordinates, conducts, and ensures the quality of the GEF AMR tools as required under the corporate services and project cycle management services delivered to the GEF covered by the GEF Fee. As close to 50% of the total GEF portfolio of projects under implementation in any given year are supported by UNDP, the GEF relies on – and expects UNDP to continuously adhere to – the GEF AMR requirements in a timely and high quality manner. Doing so demonstrates UNDP’s ‘value for money’, and strengthens UNDP’s reputation as a reliable, efficient and effective partner.

To continuously ensure and improve the quality of the oversight and project assurance services UNDP delivers to the GEF, the UNDP-GEF Directorate has, each year since 2011, commissioned an independent quality assessment (QA) of the annual cohort of PIRs. This note provides a brief look at the practical uses of the PIR QA, outlines how and why PIR quality is assessed, and provides insight on completing a high quality PIR. An annotated guide to the criteria and scoring is also provided.

### **1. Why do we quality assess the PIR?**

The PIR is a monitoring report that outlines progress achieved thus far in a given project, and includes an assessment by various project stakeholders of how well (or not) the project is progressing and what (if anything) should be done to improve performance or provide remedial measures during the following period as necessary. The PIR quality assessment examines the quality and accuracy of this monitoring role (i.e. as a proxy for oversight); it does not assess the actual results achieved (or not) or the quality of project implementation. A PIR for a project that may not be achieving results according to the approved results framework can still receive a high quality PIR rating, provided that the PIR explains the reasons for the project not achieving the results anticipated and includes recommendations for measures to improve performance in the next reporting period.

Why is this important?

- ✓ A PIR that provides a critical, accurate and transparent overview of project-level performance improves the value of the PIR exercise to the Project Board, other projects stakeholders, UNDP and the GEF. A critical assessment will help to ensure any required corrective actions are taken, and the appropriate support can be provided in a timely manner. The PIR QA encourages all those who provide input to the PIR to provide a credible and reliable assessment of project progress;
- ✓ The PIR QA aims to improve the objectivity of the ratings on project results and implementation (i.e. Development Objective (DO) and Implementation Progress (IP) ratings) by assessing whether these self-ratings are supported by factual evidence (ideally there should be general consistency across all ratings based on evidence, which suggests that stakeholders are aligned vis-à-vis their project oversight function);

---

<sup>1</sup>Prepared: 1 September 2017. Please contact [Ciara Daniels](#) or [Nancy Bennet](#) with questions or comments on this guidance note.

- ✓ Credible and reliable DO and IP ratings can be used by UNDP-GEF senior managers to manage risks at the portfolio level, take decisions to address reported challenges, and direct resources to areas that need support;
- ✓ The PIR QA is one way to demonstrate that UNDP’s on-going project oversight and assurance is of high quality, delivers value for money, and helps to achieve results on the ground.

As noted the PIR QA is **not an assessment of project performance**:

- X Not an assessment of project outcomes or results based on the results framework;
- X Not an assessment of the project team or project manager.
- X Not a validation of the data or evidence provided in the PIR.

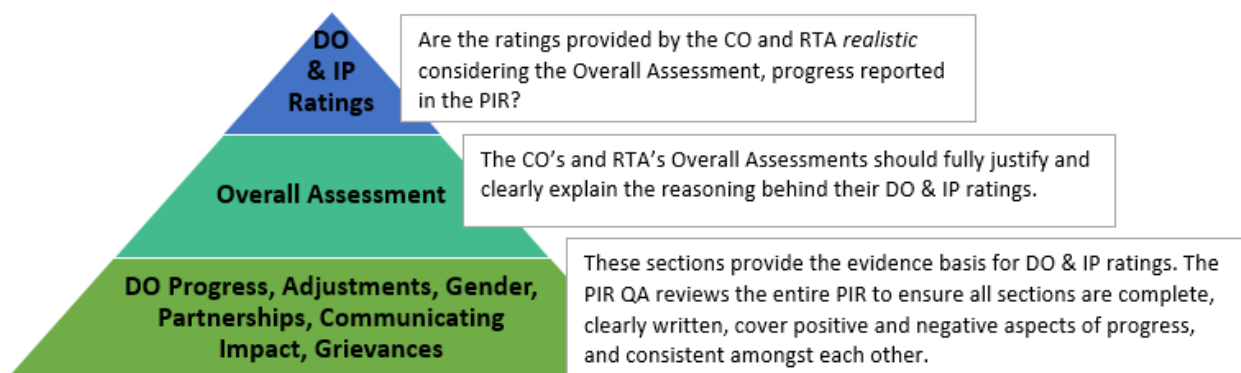
## 2. How is PIR quality assessed?

The PIR quality assessor reviews the entire PIR and provides a rating against five quality criteria: completeness, balance, consistency, substance and reliability, and clarity. An annotated PIR quality ratings scale, with notes on how the ratings are scored, starts on page 4.

The DO and IP ratings and Overall Assessment are reviewed carefully to ensure they are substantiated by evidence and progress reported in the DO Progress, Adjustments, Gender, Partnerships, Communicating Impact, and Grievances sections of the PIR.

### Five PIR quality Criteria

- A. Completeness
- B. Balance
- C. Consistency
- D. Substance and reliability
- E. Clarity



## 3. Common weaknesses in PIRs rated as ‘lower quality’:

- For projects that have not progressed as much as anticipated (such as projects doing their first PIR), common challenges are incomplete sections of the PIR and/or lack of analysis of lower than expected progress (even to explain no progress). The fact that a given project has not undertaken many activities or is slow to become operational is not an excuse for not completing or explaining mandatory sections. The PIR should explain the reasons for delays or underachievement in a transparent fashion.
- 56% of PIRs in 2016 received a 4 (out of 6) on clarity due to a lack of organizational coherence of the comments on DO and IP ratings and the difficulty in following the reasoning behind the ratings given.
- Measures to manage or mitigate critical risks was not included in the PIR;

- RTA's Overall Assessment was not well organized or systematically presented and therefore was hard to follow.

#### 4. Tips for completing a high quality PIR:

- a) Review the 'Ratings Definitions' provided at the bottom of the DO and IP Ratings sections and make sure that the ratings are consistent with the definitions
- b) Don't avoid giving unsatisfactory ratings if the evidence clearly indicates unsatisfactory performance vis-à-vis the rating definitions. A high quality PIR does not mean that DO and IP ratings must be in the satisfactory range; high quality reporting is credible and realistic and shows all aspects of project progress, both positive and negative. Robust, complete and reliable ratings and recommended actions are arguably even more important for projects that may be underachieving according to original DO and IP targets, so that appropriate remedial measures can be applied.
- c) The RTA should revise the Overall DO and/or IP Rating (in the Approve/Submit page of the PIR) if there are discrepancies in ratings such that the overall DO and/or rating is much different than the RTA rating.
- d) For projects doing a PIR for the first time that may have little to report, the RTA and CO should be upfront about the reasons for the lack of progress and the limits to be able to report on development results; analyze and provide critical comments on implementation progress (or lack thereof), even if little has been done.
- e) The Programme Associate should review all sections of the PIR for completeness and can make changes directly, liaising with the RTA and Country Office as necessary.
- f) The RTA, and/or the Programme Associate working closely with the RTA and Country Office, should read through and edit the PIR for clarity, particularly the RTA's Overall Assessment. Is the reasoning behind the DO and IP ratings clear and backed by evidence? Is the information well-organized and easy to follow? It may help to download the PIR Word Report and make edits to the Word file before copy/pasting back into the online PIR.
- g) Complete all sections of the PIR. All sections, except Grievances (unless relevant), must be completed. It is acceptable to enter 'N/A' or 'nothing to report this year' in the Partnerships section if questions don't apply to the project, however, 'N/A' is not acceptable anywhere else. For example, if the project has no results to report on gender, then this must be explained in the Gender section.
- h) Ensure DO and IP ratings are backed by reliable and substantive information in the PIR.
- i) Some examples of high quality 2016 PIRs are available [here](#), including:
  - [Example of a high quality PIR with unsatisfactory range DO and IP ratings](#)
  - [Example of a high quality PIR with satisfactory DO and IP ratings](#)
  - [Example of a high quality PIR with highly satisfactory DO and IP ratings](#)
  - [Example of a high quality PIR of project that has not progressed much](#)
  - [Example of a high quality PIR of project with delays closing and no Project Manager.](#)

PIR QUALITY ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND SCALE								
	Criteria	Explanation	Rating Scale (score)					
			HS (6)	S (5)	MS (4)	MU (3)	U (2)	HU (1)
A	<b>Completeness</b>	The PIR is complete and provides a comprehensive picture of project progress.	All sections completed including “nothing to report this year” as relevant. The PIR gives a comprehensive picture of project progress.	All sections completed including “nothing to report this year” as relevant. The PIR gives a sufficient picture of project progress.	Some sections not completed. The PIR gives an adequate picture of project progress.	Many sections not completed. The PIR gives an inadequate picture of project progress.	Most sections not completed. The PIR gives an incomplete picture of project progress.	None of the sections completed. The PIR provides no picture of project progress.
B	<b>Balance</b>	Positive and negative aspects of project progress are included to enable a realistic assessment of overall performance.	The project strengths and weaknesses, constraints and challenges are described in detail.	The project strengths and weaknesses, constraints and challenges are described in a general way.	Some project strengths and weaknesses, constraints and challenges are acknowledged but not described.	There is little or no assessment of project strengths and weaknesses, constraints and challenges.	There is no recognition of any project limitations, constraints or challenges affecting achievement or sustainability	Information is very terse or completely missing or strongly biased in assessing achievements and progress
C	<b>Consistency/ Evidence</b>	The PIR is internally consistent between different sections and supported by evidence.	The overall rating fully aligns with the evidence provided in the PIR.	The overall rating is aligned with data/evidence provided but with less specificity.	Minor discrepancies across PIR sections.	Major inconsistencies across PIR sections.	Distinct inconsistencies or contradictions between sections. Little evidence provided to support ratings.	Major inconsistencies or contradictions between several sections. No evidence provided to support ratings.

PIR QUALITY ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND SCALE								
	Criteria	Explanation	Rating Scale (score)					
			HS (6)	S (5)	MS (4)	MU (3)	U (2)	HU (1)
D	<b>Substantive-ness &amp; reliability</b>	The overall assessments provided by the Country Office and RTA in particular substantiate the assessment of progress and performance and demonstrates strong oversight.	The overall assessments provide a thorough assessment of whether the project will achieve its objectives by project closure, and a critical review of implementation progress over the past year including critical risks. Key steps to be taken to improve performance are outlined. Differences between ratings provide by the RTA and CO; or CO and PM are explained/justified.	The level of detail is less and some aspects of performance are not addressed such as a complete understanding of how critical risks may affect progress and performance. Differences between ratings may not be fully explained.	The overall assessment is not sufficient to assess progress and does not convey strong oversight.	The overall assessment is not complete and does not provide enough specifics to substantiate the progress and performance of the project. Signals that oversight may be weak.	The information is very general and without sufficient justification or transparency in the performance ratings. Signals poor oversight.	The information is very general and without backup monitoring data to justify the performance ratings. Signals no oversight.
E	<b>Clarity</b>	The information reported is clear and understandable.	The information reported is well-organized, and easy to follow and understand.	The information reported is not very well organized and is not easy to understand.	The information reported is not well organized, and is difficult to follow and understand.	The information reported is very difficult to understand.	The information reported adds little value.	The overall assessment adds no value.