ANNEX 8
TIPS ON HOW TO RUN REFLECTION SESSIONS

Reflection sessions provide an opportunity to pause, step back and assess whether your programming is on track. They allow teams and partners the space to think differently, to make sense of what's happening, surface assumptions and adapt to context shifts in order to improve outcomes.

Reflection sessions are not the same as formal consultations or validation meetings. Their purpose is structured learning and adaptation. Depending on the objective, they may involve only UNDP personnel or also include partners and stakeholders, but the focus remains on making sense of evidence and context to inform programming decisions.

These sessions help answer strategic questions:

- Are we seeing the change we hoped for?
- What is emerging in the context?
- Are we still doing the right thing, in the right way, for the right people?

When to hold a reflection session

- Regularly—for instance, every six months during implementation (or annually for multi-year projects).
- After major shifts—such as political changes, security incidents or community feedback.
- At least once in the project life cycle—for shorter initiatives, a session should be held to generate learning for future programming or to course-correct if held during implementation.

Tips for running a reflection session

1 Define a clear purpose

Keep it simple and focused. Examples:

- "To reflect on the last six months and identify what's working or not."
- "To understand emerging risks and shifts in context."
- "To decide whether and how to adapt our approach going forward (in consultation with relevant partners)."

2 Create a safe space for honest dialogue

- Set the tone: leaders or managers should model openness and curiosity.
- Focus on learning, not blame.
- Encourage participants to speak candidly about what is really happening, not just what is in the project or donor report.
- Go beyond describing activities or events to explore how and why things happened the way they did.

3 Include diverse voices

- Bring together personnel from different roles, regions or levels.
- Include partners, such as local authorities, civil society or community representatives, where appropriate.

4 Use simple guiding questions

Questions could include:

- “What are we learning from how people are responding to our intervention?”
- “Are we seeing the outcomes we expected? If not, why?”
- “What could be done now to change the outcome?”
- “What has changed in the context?”
- “What resistance or unexpected results have we encountered?”
- “What assumptions no longer hold?”

Tools such as the What So What Now What model can help teams think about an experience, its implications and what that means for the future.

5 Look beyond activities

Encourage discussion not just on what was delivered, but on deeper change. Explore questions such as:

- “Are people’s experiences of justice or safety improving?”
- “Is trust or participation increasing?”
- “Are we reinforcing or disrupting harmful norms?”

6 Document and follow up

- Assign someone to capture key insights and recommendations.
- Tools such as the Start, Stop, Continue matrix can help structure discussion and prioritize actions. For example:
  - Start: What should we begin doing to address emerging needs or opportunities?
  - Stop: What is no longer effective or appropriate?
  - Continue: What is working well and should be sustained?
- Share outcomes with decision-makers and reflect changes in workplans or strategies.
- Let session participants know what was acted upon.
- Where appropriate, share back relevant insights or programming changes with partners and communities.

7 Keep it light but purposeful

- A full- or multi-day workshop is not always necessary. A focused short reflection session may suffice.
- Use flipcharts, sticky notes or online tools (e.g. Mural) to keep the session interactive.
- Avoid formal presentations; promote conversation instead.
- Repeat regularly to embed learning into your way of working.