

Eleventh session of the Assembly
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Note by the Director-General Medium-term Strategy 2018-2022 - External Evaluation

I. Background

1. IRENA's strategic objectives are defined on a five-year basis through its Medium-term Strategy (MTS) that is developed through a consultative process with Members. IRENA's current MTS 2018-2022 sets out the Agency's mission and provides a four-pillar structure through which the successive Work Programmes are implemented. The MTS also provides for "a mid-term external evaluation that will also inform the development of the next Medium-term Strategy."¹ Accordingly, an external evaluation of the current MTS was undertaken in the course of 2020. The evaluation was conducted by IOD PARC, an independent consultancy company specialising in monitoring, evaluation, and organisational development.
2. The main objective of the evaluation was to assess the progress made since 2018 against the framework laid down in the MTS 2018-2022 and a review of the Agency's positioning in the context of the global energy transition. Building on the self-evaluation conducted in 2018, this evaluation has also considered the reach, effectiveness and impact of the Agency's activities as laid down in the two relevant Work Programme and Budgets (2018-2019, 2020-2021). In addition, the evaluators were requested to provide recommendations to the Director-General on several aspects of the MTS implementation, including on measures to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation structure.
3. The external evaluation was undertaken in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, so there were limitations to what could have been done, most notably with respect to the assessment of impact at the country-level. The evaluation process included a review of IRENA's knowledge products, governing, policy and strategic documents, and the Agency's own monitoring data and information. Surveys were circulated to IRENA Members, external stakeholders, and staff to be filled in anonymously. Response rates provided credible basis for analysis. Out of 161 Members², 50 responded; out of 221 external stakeholders, 39 responded; and out of 249 IRENA personnel³, 76 responded. In addition, the evaluators interviewed 25 individuals, comprising Members, and other public and private stakeholders.

¹ A/8/11 Medium-term Strategy 2018-2022.

² At the time of evaluation.

³ Refers to staff and other personnel holding IRENA contracts at the time of the evaluation.

4. The findings of the external evaluation, presented in the attached report, are provided for Members information and feedback. The report also includes a segment on the methodology used to conduct this process.

II. Next steps

5. As in the previous cycle, this evaluation is a milestone in the assessment of validity and relevance of the MTS 2018-2022, and an input into the process of the development of the next strategy. The findings of the evaluation show that the mission and objectives of the current MTS remain valid and can effectively guide the programmatic implementation for its duration until the end of 2022.
6. The current MTS was a product of an inclusive and comprehensive two-year process, which included the establishment of a Working Team comprising interested Members to guide and support its development. As the Assembly will have to adopt the new MTS at its 13th session in 2023, the 11th Assembly may wish to consider a similar process for the development of MTS 2023-2027. The Working Group would convene as necessary between the Council meetings to provide substantive input into the deliberation on the next strategic cycle.



Mid-term Evaluation of IRENA's Medium Term Strategy 2018-2022

Summary Report

Prepared for // IRENA

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Executive Summary

This mid-term evaluation of IRENA's 2018-2022 medium term strategy was undertaken to provide an independent and objective assessment of IRENA's progress towards delivering its strategy. The evaluation also assessed the effectiveness of IRENA's activities, processes and partnerships and its impact. Evaluation data was gathered through a combination of document review, interviews and online surveys with IRENA members, partners and staff, and analysis of IRENA's own web and media monitoring data.¹ The evaluation was undertaken by IOD PARC, an independent consultancy specialising in monitoring, evaluation and organisation development.

IRENA has performed effectively against its 2018-2019 Work Programme and Budget, delivering 97% of its core funded outputs. The overall strategy is in line with what stakeholders believe its mandate to be and global needs. The evaluation survey suggests it is delivering well against all of its strategic objectives and that performance is on an upward trajectory since the last evaluation undertaken in 2015.

IRENA's members and partners consistently identify several aspects of the Agency's work as being particularly valuable and influential. IRENA's convening power, their inclusive approach to partnership and collaboration, and their facilitation of networking and relationship-building across the renewables sector are all identified as critical, well-delivered functions. IRENA's work on the generation and curation of renewables-related data and analyses is also universally commended, with stakeholders placing particular value on the independence, objectivity and reliability of IRENA's contributions. IRENA's work on co-benefits and socio-economic outcomes, and their data on auctions, pricing and costs were also frequently singled out.

IRENA collaborates effectively across its stakeholder group, though further and deeper engagement with the private sector and financial institutions/banks may be beneficial. Developing and maintaining a good relationship with the IEA is seen as important especially given their shared areas of interest and the number of countries who are members of both.

IRENA's strengths are underpinned by what members and partners identify as being the Agency's main comparative advantages, specifically their global mandate and membership, and their exclusive focus on renewable energy. Many stakeholders also identify IRENA's size as being a comparative advantage, supporting a degree of nimbleness, flexibility and responsiveness that is not characteristic of other international and inter-governmental institutions. This also allows for the development and maintenance of more personal relationships between IRENA staff, members and partners: there is a genuine sense of community and shared purpose amongst IRENA's stakeholders. This organisational leanness also introduces a level of risk given the scope of IRENA's mandate and the number of initiatives and activities.

Members and partners see a clear role and strategic opportunity for IRENA to address knowledge gaps on precisely how countries can build the necessary political and societal momentum for a renewables-based energy transition, and around the practical, tangible steps that will be required. For IRENA to become a leader in the energy transition debate, some members and partners feel that it may be necessary to take a less 'purist', exclusively renewables-focused approach, and work more closely with a broader set of stakeholders.

¹ Annex 1 provides an overview of the evaluation approach

There are mixed views as to what degree IRENA should engage at a country level. IRENA has supported individual countries through country-specific advice and project-level technical assistance. Some interviewers highlighted IRENA's work with the ADFD as being considered particularly effective and identify the ADFD Facility as a template upon which IRENA could develop more relationships with additional investors. A sizeable number of members and partners suggest that a suitable role for IRENA should be to strengthen their role of 'matchmaker function', identifying and facilitating linkages between investment opportunities and donors / financiers.

At present it is difficult for IRENA to track what impact its work is having as monitoring is done primarily at activity and output level. The results of the evaluation survey suggest that stakeholders perceive that all of IRENA's core activities are influencing change, though the evidence of how is at present limited. The midterm strategy includes a commitment to developing a more comprehensive results framework which can map out the causal pathways and IRENA's contribution to higher level changes. This work is part of the 2020-2021 workplan.

There is a shared perception from stakeholders of IRENA's continued and growing contribution to the energy transition arena. Of perhaps most relevance and potential value to the global effort is IRENA's conceptualisation (and pursuit) of energy as a means to delivering higher-level socio-economic and climate goals, rather than energy as an end in itself. Demonstrating how renewables can underpin not just a successful energy transition, but a transition that also delivers multiple social and economic benefits is seen by stakeholders as an argument that IRENA is already best-placed to deliver.

Conclusions

These conclusions are based on the inquiry processes undertaken by the evaluation team. The team will review these further with IRENA to develop a series of operational recommendations.

- 1. The direction outlined in the 2018-2022 Medium Term Strategy is valid and should continue to guide work planning for the remainder of the period.** The major risk the evaluation team see that IRENA need to manage is the potential of trying to do too much with finite resources and potentially a) over-reach, leading to a staff team that become overstretched and less effective and b) become perceived as undertaking work which is either outside their core comparative advantage or undermines where that value comes from.
- 2. Expedite the development of a shared, organisation-wide results framework and monitoring strategy,** with a view to improving the evidence base on where and how IRENA contributes to impact. This will enhance external reporting but more importantly inform decision making processes and help guide decisions as to how IRENA should utilise its resources.
- 3. Strengthen IRENA's analytical capability and service offering to lead the energy transitions with an added focus on just transitions** including defining how IRENA can facilitate the necessary change processes at national, regional and international levels and how it collaborates with other stakeholders.
- 4. Define an engagement strategy that aims high (Ministerial-level) and wide (beyond energy),** to continue building IRENA's visibility and influence on energy transitions.

5. There are different views as to what IRENA's role should be at a country level and whether they should be more directly involved in implementation level activity. It will be important for IRENA to work through these for the next Medium Term Strategy. The evaluation team are aware that as a Membership organisation IRENA will, to a degree, need to be demand led and respond to requests from member countries. These responses though also need to consider IRENA's global role and expectations at a global level, as to where it makes most impact, and its current and likely future resource base. This is not an unusual balancing act for organisations like IRENA. **The evaluation team's assessment based on the data they have and their experience, is that IRENA's primary emphasis at a country level should be on providing strategic support and advice and a 'matchmaking'/facilitation role.**

1. Findings

1.1 RELEVANCE

EVALUATION QUESTION 1:

Has IRENA functioned as a 'Centre of Excellence' that has supported effective policy and decision-making through provision of authoritative knowledge and analysis on renewables-based energy transformation at global national and sectoral levels? Have IRENA's knowledge services been found useful and been used?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

IRENA produces and curates valuable, reliable, well-used data and analysis that is integral to renewables policy and decision-making processes in developing and developed countries alike. All key stakeholders – governments, companies, international organisations, NGOs, academics – use IRENA's knowledge products and services. In comparison with data and analyses from other sources, IRENA's inputs are especially valued for their objectivity and independence.

IRENA supports policy and decision making as knowledge is seen as authoritative and credible.

Data, such as that on auctions, costings and pricings is commercially sensitive, so can be difficult to obtain, yet is vital for fully informed policy development and commercial decision-making. IRENA's work on this data has filled a significant knowledge gap for its stakeholders and illustrates how their perceived independence enhances IRENA's credibility in this service area. In interviews a range of stakeholders also highlighted IRENA's knowledge work on socio-economic data and co-benefits (particularly job creation and health) as becoming increasingly important to their work.

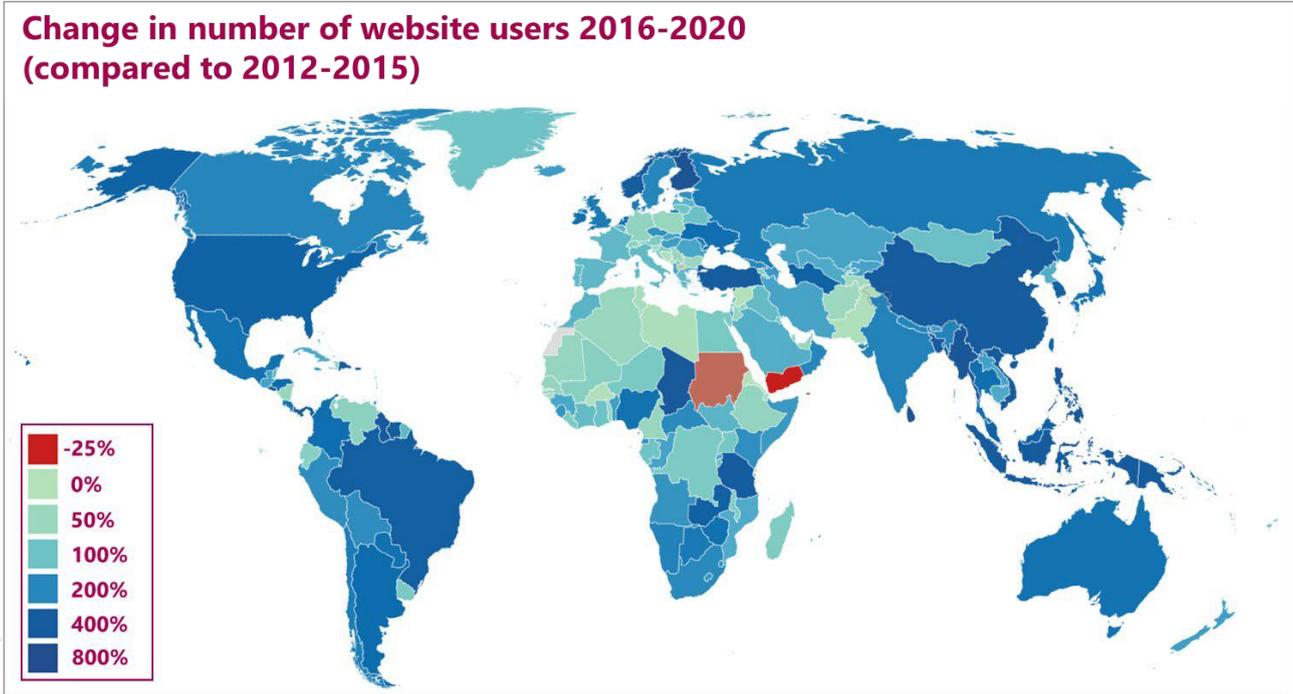
Importance of seeing energy as a means rather than an end

IRENA's approach to conceiving of energy as a means rather than an end is universally supported, with the underpinning data and analyses welcomed by many policymakers. The knowledge that IRENA provides here is also a need and a gap that other stakeholders would find difficult to fill (i.e. it's important that IRENA continue to 'plug' this gap). The data also helps stakeholders to build a stronger case to answer the big question: "why should we go for renewable energy?"

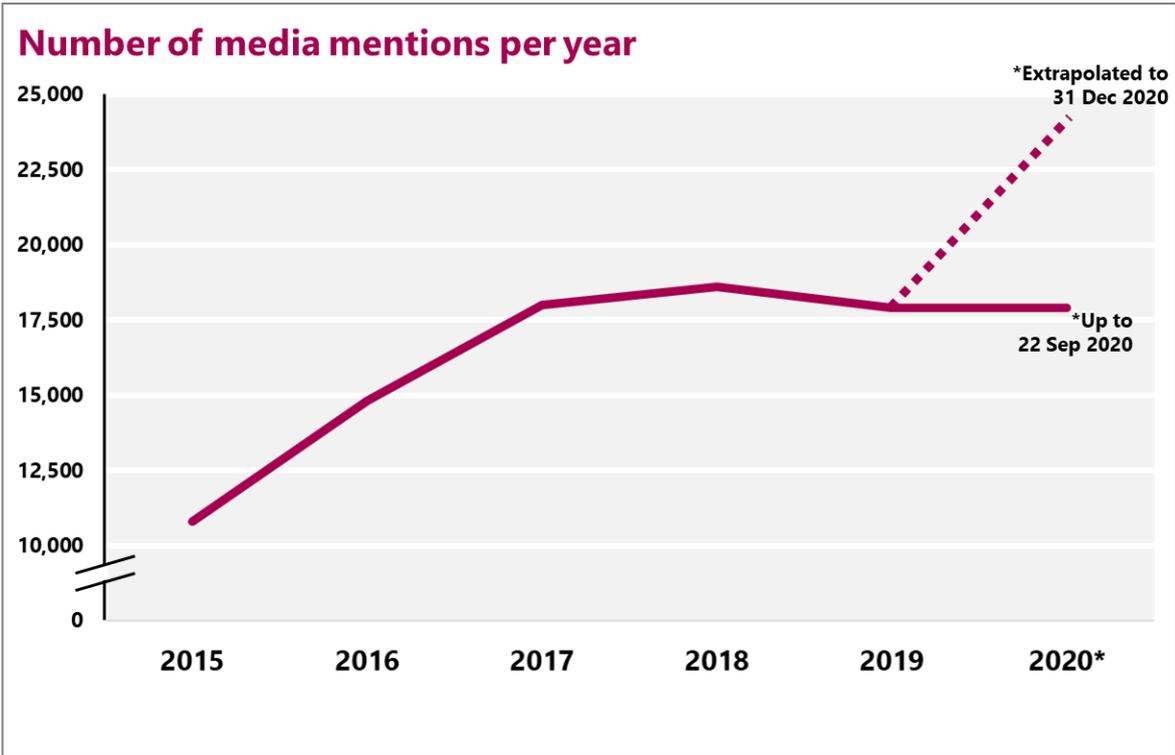
Evidence of a sustained growth in interest in IRENA's knowledge services

IRENA's own web monitoring data confirms an increasing interest in the organisation and its knowledge services across both developed and developing countries:

EVALUATION QUESTION 2:
How do members and partners define IRENA's comparative advantage?



Media interest has also increased since IRENA started tracking the data in 2015. Since 2015 there has been a steep increase in media mentions and this has been sustained during this Medium Term Strategic period. Given IRENA's stage of organisational maturity, an analysis of media coverage needs to move beyond tracking volume and focus more on the quality and likely influence these 'mentions' have.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Stakeholders consistently identify IRENA's two overarching comparative advantages as being (i) their exclusive focus on renewables and (ii) their global mandate, which in turn is derived from their broad, growing global membership which provides legitimacy and credibility. To quote one partner, the Agency now has a "*good global position with a commanding presence, particularly in African countries*".

Being nimble, flexible and responsive is seen as a source of comparative advantage

IRENA's staff base and tight mandate was regularly identified as an advantage and seen to support a degree of nimbleness, flexibility and responsiveness that is not characteristic of other international and inter-governmental institutions. It also allows for the development and maintenance of more personal relationships between IRENA staff, members and partners: there is a genuine sense of community and shared purpose across IRENA's stakeholders. They feel that IRENA is "*accommodating to all countries*".

This responsiveness and close level of support has been critical during the Agency's formative years, helping to build trust and ownership of IRENA across members, although there were some views that the Agency can get pulled into being too responsive and eager to respond to any requests for support.

Importance of being perceived as independent and neutral

IRENA's perceived independence was again frequently referred to as a source of comparative advantage. IRENA is seen as an objective, neutral actor in the sector: to paraphrase one interviewee "*they are the referee, rather than the player*". This neutrality allows IRENA to broker relationships, provide advice and deliver support that could otherwise be difficult to arrange via, for example, bilateral government-to-government relationships. IRENA therefore has been able to act as a 'bridge', facilitating smoother introductions of renewables into 'new' countries.

1.2 EFFECTIVENESS

EVALUATION QUESTION 3:

Are the Agency's programmatic activities being delivered effectively? Are the objectives defined in the MTS being adequately fulfilled, considering the Agency's size and scope?

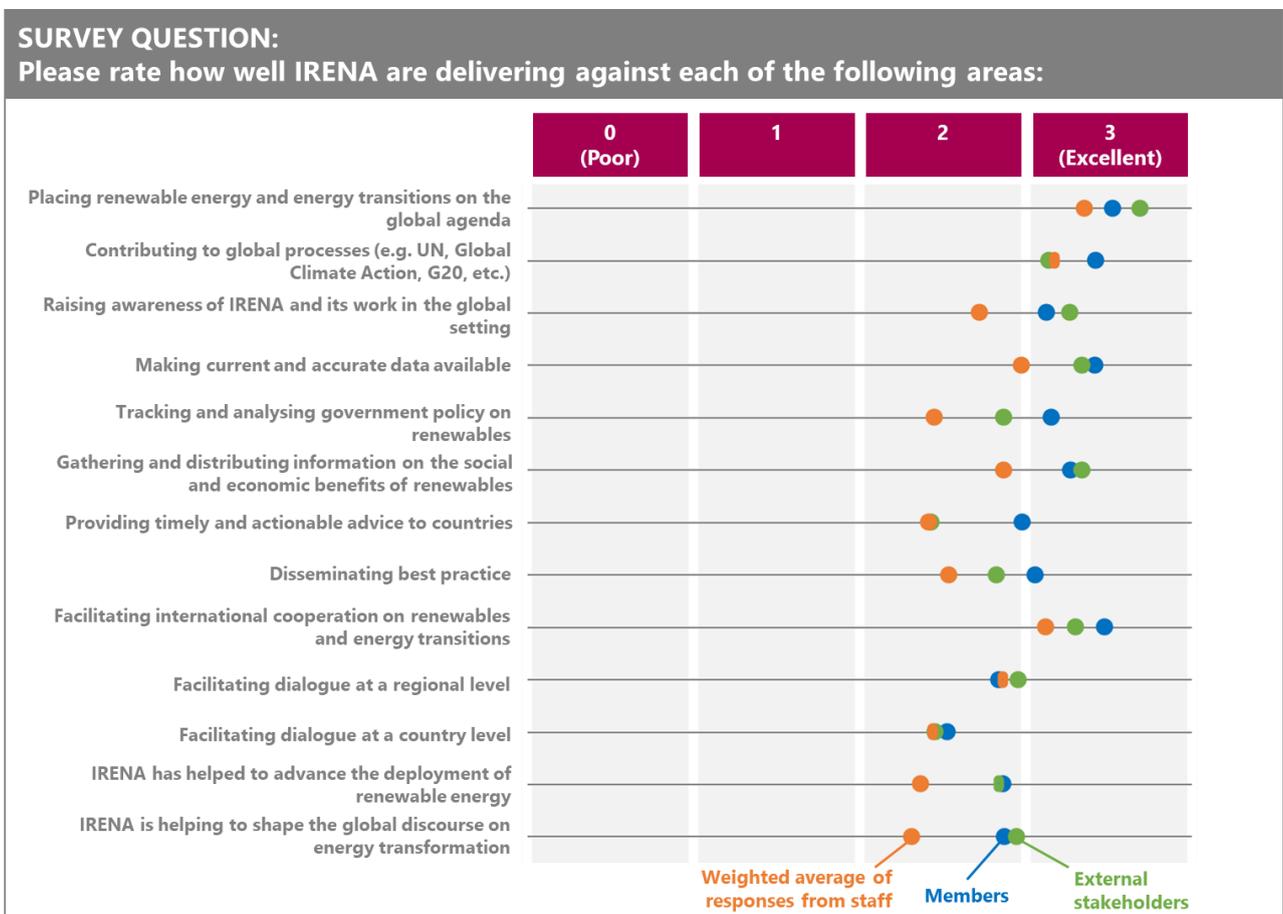
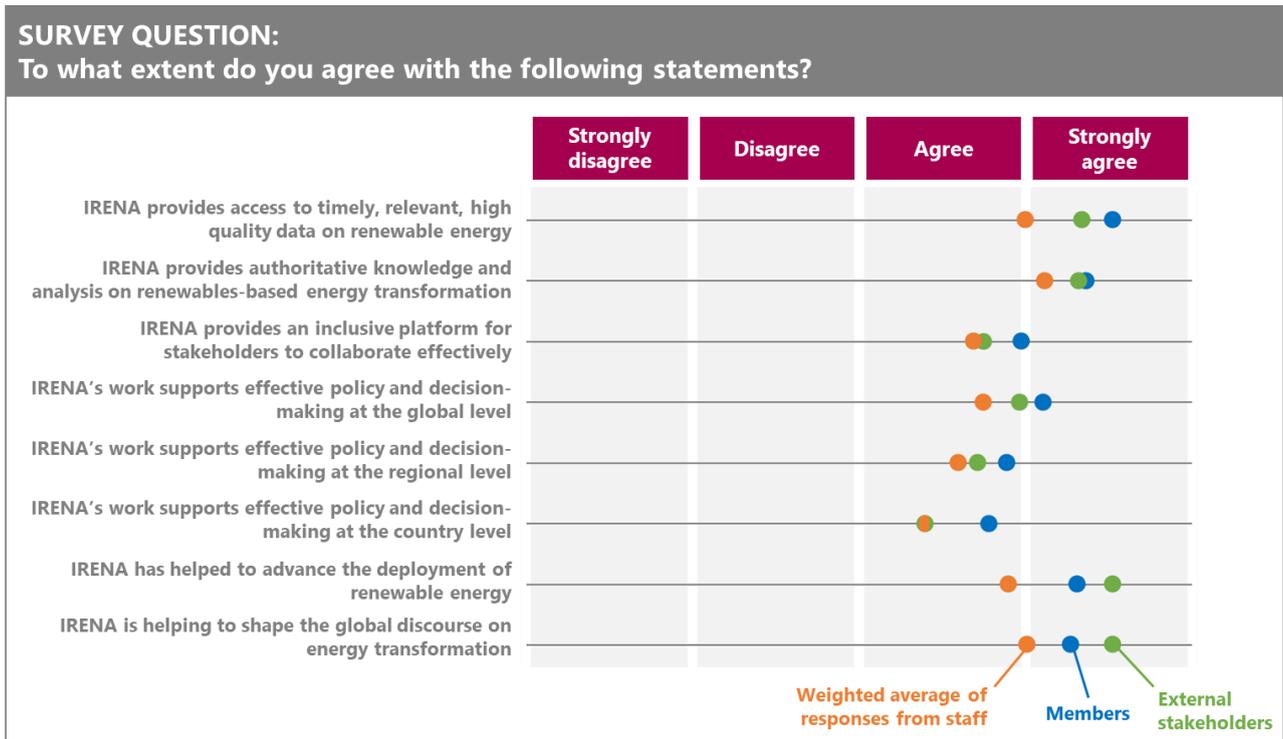
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

IRENA is delivering well against its workplan and its activities though there are some concerns amongst some stakeholders and staff as to whether it could get stretched too thin given size and scope.

Performance against workplan and objectives seen as strong and on a positive trajectory

IRENA's strategic principles and objectives are well-supported by members and partners and the MTS strategic objectives and pillars are tightly aligned with the priorities cited by stakeholders. As outlined in a recent internal review IRENA has delivered effectively against its 2018-2019 workplan

having achieved 94 out of 97 agreed core funded deliverables. The survey results below illustrate that stakeholders agree or strongly agree that IRENA is delivering against all of its objectives though there are some variations in views in certain areas.



The 2015 evaluation survey of IRENA members and staff asked a similar set of questions. The graphic below illustrates a clear positive trend in performance in most categories:

Please rate how well IRENA are delivering against each of the following areas:	Weighted Average (out of 10)		Diff	Weighted Average (out of 10)		Diff
	Members 2015	Members 2020		Staff 2015	Staff 2020	
Placing renewable energy and energy transitions* on the global agenda	8.97	8.80	-0.17	7.23	8.38	1.15
Contributing to global processes (e.g. UN, Global Climate Action, G20, etc.)	8.33	8.54	0.21	7.05	7.92	0.87
Raising awareness of IRENA and its work in the global setting	8.15	7.80	-0.35	6.28	6.80	0.52
Making current and accurate data available	7.67	8.53	0.87	6.90	7.43	0.53
Tracking and analysing government policy on renewables	7.22	7.87	0.66	6.75	6.11	-0.64
Gathering and distributing information on the social and economic benefits of renewables	7.73	8.16	0.43	6.83	7.16	0.34
Providing timely and actionable advice to countries	6.79	7.44	0.66	6.28	6.03	-0.25
Disseminating best practice	7.45	7.64	0.19	6.20	6.34	0.14
Facilitating international cooperation on renewables and energy transitions*	8.22	8.68	0.46	7.55	7.79	0.24
Facilitating dialogue at a regional level	7.22	7.09	-0.12	6.93	7.14	0.22
Facilitating dialogue at a country level	6.21	6.30	0.09	6.65	6.09	-0.56
Enabling multi-stakeholder interaction (e.g. private sector, non-governmental entities, etc.)	5.81	7.15	1.34	5.58	5.90	0.33
Strengthening institutional capacity & skillsets in renewables at the country & regional level	6.25	7.17	0.92	5.73	5.77	0.05

*The red text was only used in the 2020 survey

Interviewees echoed this positive view and were supportive of the Agency's overall strategic direction as defined within the MTS. The most significant level of variation concerned the nature of support provided by IRENA at a country level.

Opportunity to build on work in energy transition arena

When asked to identify the most significant strategic opportunity for IRENA – there was a common consensus amongst interviewees that this was in the energy transition arena. Specifically, there are national, regional and international knowledge gaps on precisely how countries can build the necessary political and societal momentum, and around the practical, tangible steps that will be required. Many stakeholders also noted that IRENA could be a leading voice in advocating for an

economically and socially just transition, also ensuring that IRENA build knowledge around how, practically, this can be attained.

Mixed opinions on what level of country support should be provided

There is a general consensus that IRENA should provide individual countries with strategic advice, and a 'matchmaking' function within developing countries, identifying and facilitating linkages between investment opportunities and donors /financers. However, there was a lack of consensus as to the degree of 'operational support' that should be provided. Developing country stakeholders in particular tended to be highly supportive of IRENA's national interventions, and indeed regularly called for more resources and emphasis on this form of activity; other stakeholders were more hesitant as they felt that 'operational' work going beyond strategic advisory inputs might compromise the Agency's objectivity, neutrality and normative role. The survey shows that staff also feel that services and advice at a country level are not being delivered as effectively as in other areas.

Potential risks to effectiveness

Interviewees did highlight a number of risks and potential barriers to current and future delivery effectiveness. There was a concern that IRENA could be spreading itself too thinly, supporting too many initiatives and delivering too many activities given its resources. Some felt that the diversity and extent of IRENA's work could be reducing its potential effectiveness and impact.

Some interviewees were concerned about issues that might impact on IRENA's institutional efficiency and effectiveness in particular instabilities within the staff base such as a high number of vacancies, high staff turnover, and long recruitment times. It is notable that these ostensibly internal challenges were a clear point of concern for primarily external stakeholders.

EVALUATION QUESTION 4:

How have Agency partnerships and collaborative arrangements with international, regional and national intergovernmental, governmental or non-governmental organisations, technical and expert entities, private sector, and other networks and groups supported delivery of its programmatic activities and MTS? Are these arrangements aligned with the Work Programme and Budget 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 and MTS?

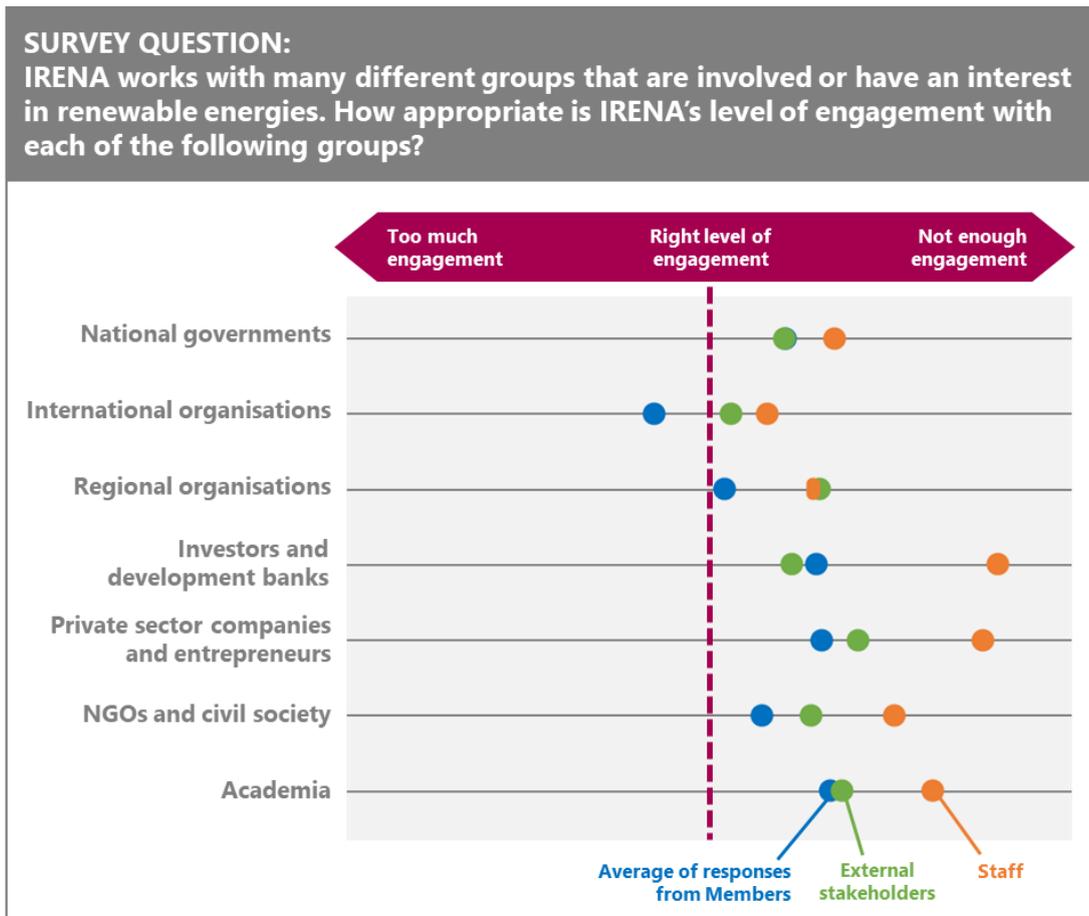
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

IRENA's work on partnership-building and networking was routinely commended by interviewees. Particularly strong are relationships with members (governments) and international / intergovernmental entities. However, IRENA also does well in building relationships with other stakeholder groups. The annual IRENA Assembly is seen as an especially valuable, inclusive networking platform for the renewables sector, with many identifying the Assembly as the single most important event in the sector's calendar.

IRENA in the main is balancing its engagements with different stakeholders well and the importance of engagement with the Private Sector and financial organisations was highlighted

The survey responses suggest that IRENA is balancing its levels of engagement with different stakeholders reasonably well, though staff feel that more engagement is perhaps needed in particular with the private sector and banks. This does contrast slightly with Interviewees who felt

that IRENA’s relationship with the private sector is well-developed and substantive, particularly when compared to other intergovernmental organisations.



A critical and highly positive engagement platform with the private sector is the Coalition For Action, which is highly valued by the Coalition’s membership. Some feel the Coalition (and indeed IRENA’s other collaborative platforms) would, however, benefit from further segmentation, supporting – for example – workgroups or ‘sub-coalitions’ where membership is restricted to specific types or organisations (infrastructure developers, distribution companies, NGOs, academia, etc.)

Some interviewees highlighted IRENA’s work with the ADFD as being particularly effective and identify the ADFD Facility as a template upon which IRENA could develop more relationships with additional investors. This would see IRENA pursue the role of ‘matchmaker’, helping to identify and bring together opportunities and investors.

IRENA’s relationship with IEA

IRENA’s relationship with the IEA was brought up by nearly all interviewees as being extremely important. The energy sector needs IRENA, IEA and other sector actors to work effectively together and at times this is not happening. Given that there are countries who are members of both IRENA and IEA, effective collaboration is a shared responsibility beyond just the two agencies themselves.

1.3 IMPACT

EVALUATION QUESTION 5:

How have Agency country, regional and local activities contributed to advancing the deployment of renewable energy?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

IRENA is viewed to have made a positive contribution to advancing the deployment of renewable energy though it is difficult to systematically identify how and where.

Monitoring and Evaluation Approach needs to be further developed to track impact

At present IRENA does not have a monitoring and evaluation framework that enables the Agency to systematically track impact. The development of this is planned for the second half of this Medium Term Strategic Period and this evaluation includes work to inform this process.

IRENA does monitor its work, but systems are activity and output-focused: so, the Agency has a good understanding of – for example – the comparative demand and uptake of their various knowledge products, but limited understanding of what happens with those knowledge products, who is using them, how are they using them, and what is their ultimate influence. Monitoring systems are developed and applied on a team-by-team basis, with limited crossover between systems.

A new systemic approach will need to map out the Agency's contribution to tangible change by identifying the often complex pathways through which IRENA delivers impact. This is a common challenge faced by knowledge-brokering institutions that have a primarily normative role as their work is typically one or even several steps removed from the high-level impact and goals that they are ultimately supporting.

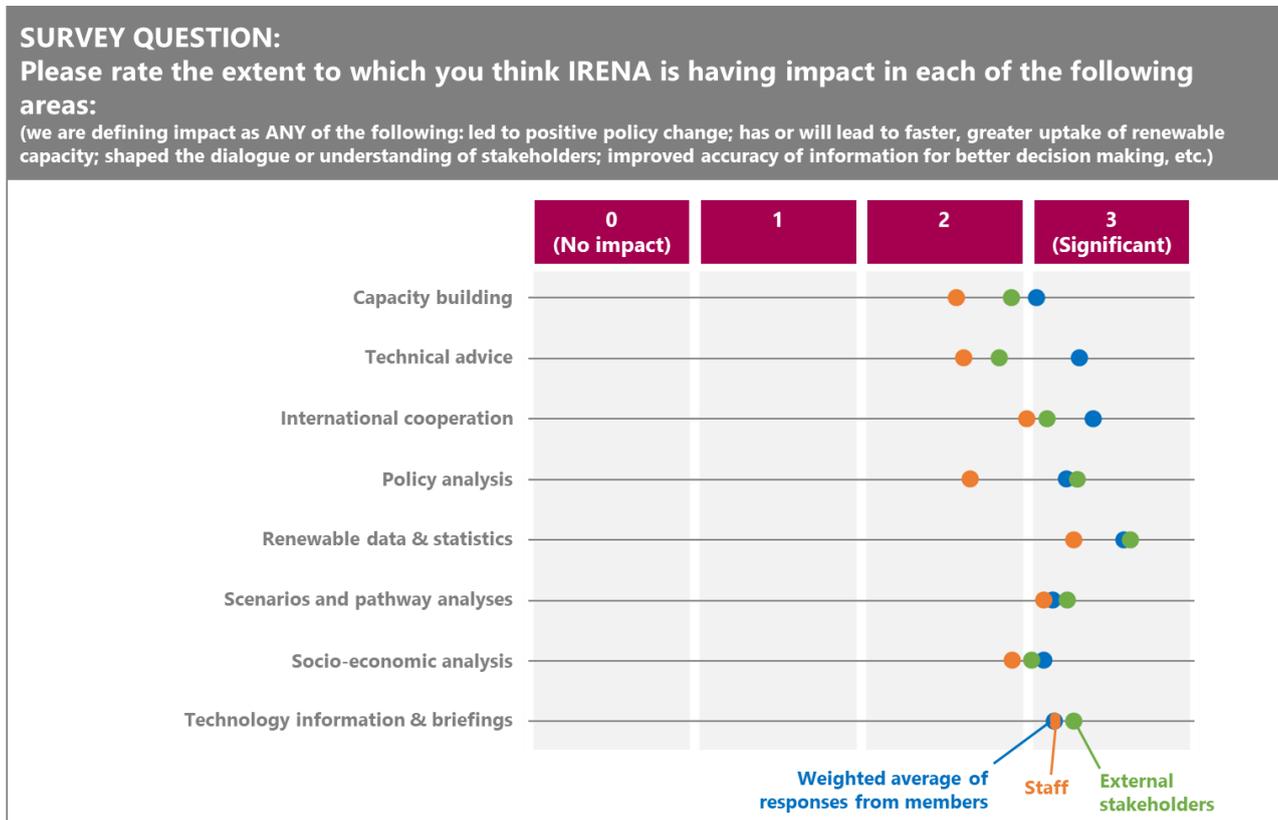
Positive impact from across IRENA's service offerings but evidence based on perception.

Interviews and reviewed documentation provide a positive sense that IRENA's work has supported the deployment of renewable energy. Some interviewees were able to provide anecdotal examples of where IRENA's inputs made a definite contribution to higher-level goals and impacts. The most tangible results were delivered where IRENA had a direct role in identifying opportunities, creating linkages and facilitating investment, most notably via the ADFD facility. However, most of the cited examples of IRENA's impact identified the role and influence of the Agency's analyses and data on national policy. Policy and decision-makers from both developing and developed countries noted that IRENA-curated data and knowledge was an important component in their policy and planning processes.

Where interviewees were not able to provide concrete evidence of impact the conclusion was not that IRENA were ineffective, rather that tangible results were especially challenging for IRENA to demonstrate, given the knowledge-based, normative nature of the organisation. IRENA's work is

ordinally far removed from the point of impact: an IRENA dataset or briefing might directly influence a national policy, but there are still a multitude of steps before that policy translates into – for example – infrastructure investment, reduced emissions and increased employment.

The survey suggests that even if stakeholders cannot pinpoint tangible evidence, they are still clear in their perceptions that IRENA creates impact across the range of services it provides, with data and statistics being the area which is seen to most influence positive change.



There is also a clear positive trajectory against most categories since the 2015 evaluation survey of IRENA members and staff.

Please rate how well IRENA are delivering against each of the following areas:	Weighted Average (out of 10)		Diff	Weighted Average (out of 10)		Diff
	Members 2015	Members 2020		Staff 2015	Staff 2020	
Capacity building	7.62	7.62	0.00	6.00	6.42	0.42
International cooperation	7.56	8.47	0.91	6.83	7.48	0.64
Policy analysis	7.33	8.07	0.73	6.57	6.62	0.05
Renewable data and statistics	7.90	8.93	1.03	7.17	8.18	1.01
Socio-economic analysis	6.92	7.73	0.81	6.63	7.25	0.62
Technology information & briefings	8.03	7.89	-0.14	7.13	7.90	0.77

What does success look like for IRENA?

In addition to identifying tangible examples of IRENA's impact so far, interviewees were also asked what success would look like for IRENA *in the future*. Four recurring themes arose, presented here in order of the frequency cited by interviewees:

- **IRENA is demonstrably influencing policy and is actively sought out by governments as a trusted advisor.** Flagship reports are on the desk of every Energy Minister, no relevant debate on renewables takes place without IRENA, and demand for IRENA's support is coming not just from countries, but from across government within those countries (i.e. not just from Energy departments).
- **IRENA has an increased role in identifying and helping to secure investment for renewables in new countries and contexts.** This role includes 'smoothing the path' by providing analysis on issues that – to date – have been difficult for the private sector to resolve (e.g. regional interconnectors for offshore wind).
- **IRENA can demonstrate their tangible, direct influence on the widespread adoption of renewables within specific countries,** which will necessitate closer monitoring, but is necessary to show the Agency's 'true' value and impact.
- **IRENA is recognised as a global leader on energy transitions,** particularly on just energy transitions.

EVALUATION QUESTION 6:

How have Agency activities created impact and helped to shape the global discourse around energy transitions?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

At this stage, there is limited tangible evidence over the extent of IRENA's influence on the global energy transitions discourse, though it is clear that interviewees and survey respondents do think IRENA's work and activities have helped shape global discussions.

IRENA is well positioned to play a leading role in the energy transition debate

There is very broad support for IRENA's strategic positioning towards renewables-based energy transformation: members and partners see this move as a natural fit and logical progression for the Agency. Many stakeholders specifically endorse the Agency's conceptualisation and pursuit of "energy as a means rather an end", noting that IRENA is well-placed to demonstrate how transitions can deliver not just new energy infrastructure, but new socio-economic benefits as an integral, essential part of the process.

Moving away from simple promotion of renewables

While there is near-universal support for the strategic emphasis on energy transformation, there is less consensus on balance across different streams of work. Many members and partners feel that IRENA's main priority should continue to be the promotion of renewables, and support for developing countries that are embarking on the development of renewables policy and infrastructure. However, other members and partners think there is no longer a need for IRENA to undertake 'basic' promotional or awareness raising work around renewables. This constituency feels that – due to the dramatic changes in the commercial environment and increased feasibility of renewables since IRENA's formation – the main argument has been won and the case for renewables has been incontrovertibly made. The main barrier now is not techno-economic, rather it is a resistance to transition and the associated uncertainties. The perspective here is that IRENA

should completely shift to focusing on energy transition. Some IRENA members go as far as to say that such a reorientation should see IRENA looking beyond renewables and undertaking more work on the role of other energy sources in the transition.

Developing a higher profile across a wider audience

Regardless of whether and how IRENA refocus priorities and resources towards energy transition, the great majority of members and partners feel that the Agency needs to become more visible at a higher level, and among a broader range of audiences. While IRENA does generally have presence at important events, there is a sense that they are still perceived as a follower, rather than a leader. Particularly within the context of energy transition, members and partners advocate for IRENA's substantive involvement at energy-relevant events but also – crucially – at high-level events that are not focused on energy. Through those 'non-energy' platforms IRENA should aim to connect with and influence discussions around how energy transitions can improve (e.g.) health outcomes, job creation and educational attainment. To paraphrase one respondent: *"IRENA should not be satisfied with just talking with the Energy Minister, they need to talk with the Health Minister, the Education Minister, the Treasury"*.

Engaging with everyone

Although there are conflicting views here, a minority of IRENA's members feel that the Agency should now engage with fossil fuel companies, particularly if there is to be an increased institutional focus on energy transition. The same members caution against IRENA being too 'purist' about renewables. This is also seen as a logical point of collaboration and coordination with the IEA. But opposing views are also prevalent across IRENA's members and partners: many feel that having 'big oil' around the IRENA table would reduce (even eliminate) the Agency's credibility and would push current partners away from further collaboration with the Agency.

2. Conclusions

The evaluation team will be working with IRENA to discuss these and too develop operational recommendations

Conclusion 1:

The direction outlined in the 2018-2022 Medium Term Strategy is valid and should continue to guide work planning for the remainder of the period

The major risk the evaluation team see that IRENA need to manage is the potential of trying to do too much with finite resources and potentially a) over-reach, leading to a staff team that become overstretched and less effective and b) become perceived as undertaking work which is either outside their core comparative advantage or undermines where that value comes from. The overall structure of programme and pillars in the future workplan seem appropriate, however, IRENA should reflect on and look to understand and respond to the concerns of some stakeholders over possible overreach.

Conclusion 2:

Expedite and prioritise the development of a shared, organisation-wide results framework and monitoring strategy

Teams within IRENA have relatively well-developed output and activity-focused monitoring systems. However, there is limited substantive outcome or impact level monitoring being undertaken within the Agency, and no shared results or monitoring framework that all teams can use and contribute to. A systematic, shared, institution-wide results framework and monitoring strategy is planned, and this should be prioritised to build the evidence base necessary for understanding the extent and nature of IRENA's impact. This will aid reporting but more importantly inform decision making. and to better inform strategic decision-making.

Conclusion 3:

Strengthen IRENA's analytical capability and service offering to lead the energy transitions with an added focus on just transitions

Some of IRENA's current work and services are already transition-focused, but a consolidation and clear branding of this work would help to formalise and further underline the strategic priority of this area for IRENA. This should include a clear articulation and communication of how IRENA can (will) contribute to identifying, facilitating and monitoring the necessary change processes at national, regional and international levels and an identification of the key partners who IRENA should work with and the necessary conditions for effective working/collaboration.

Conclusion 4:

Define an engagement strategy that aims high (Ministerial-level) and wide (beyond energy)

To be more influential and impactful, IRENA members and partners believe that the Agency's visibility and engagement within high-level political platforms has to be increased: a common refrain from stakeholders is that IRENA needs to move towards being "*a leader, not a follower*". IRENA should also aim to strengthen visibility and engagement not just within the energy

domain, but across all sectors that stand to be affected by (and gain from) shifting energy mixes. IRENA's current work on co-benefits, job creation and socio-economic outcomes is highly valued by members and partners, and IRENA should continue to deepen this work and promote it amongst relevant (energy and non-energy) decision-makers.

Conclusion 5:

There are different views as to what IRENA's role should be at a country level and whether they should be more directly involved in supporting operational project level activity. It will be important for IRENA to work through these for the next Medium Term Strategy.

The evaluation team are aware that as a Membership organisation IRENA will, to a degree, need to be demand led and respond to requests from member countries. These responses though also need to consider IRENA's global role and expectations at a global level, as to where it makes most impact, and its current and likely future resource base. This is not an unusual balancing act for organisations like IRENA. The evaluation team's assessment based on the data they have and their experience, is that IRENA's primary emphasis at a country level should be on providing strategic support and advice and a 'matchmaking'/facilitation role.

Annex 1: Evaluation Approach

This independent evaluation was commissioned by IRENA to address four objectives:

- i.** Evaluate the progress made since 2018 against the framework laid down in the medium term strategy (MTS) 2018-2022 and a review of the Agency’s positioning in the context of the global energy transitions.
- ii.** Evaluate the reach, effectiveness and impact of the Agency’s activities as laid down in the two relevant Work Programme and Budgets (2018-2019, 2020-2021) within the framework of the MTS and the broader context of the changing energy landscape.
- iii.** Provide conclusions and recommendations to strengthen the Agency’s programme delivery under its guiding principles and provide an external perspective on its mission and strategic objectives in a dynamic working field. This information will also inform the preparation of the next MTS 2023-2027.
- iv.** Recommend measures to strengthen monitoring and evaluation structure.

To address these objectives, the evaluation was tasked with answering six evaluation questions, grouped against the three evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness and impact:

Criterion	Questions
Relevance	Has IRENA functioned as a ‘Centre of Excellence’ that has supported effective policy and decision-making through provision of authoritative knowledge and analysis on renewables-based energy transformation at global national and sectoral levels? Have IRENA’s knowledge services been found useful and been used?
	2. How do members and partners define IRENA’s comparative advantage?
Effectiveness	3. Are the Agency’s programmatic activities being delivered effectively? Are the objectives defined in the MTS being adequately fulfilled, considering the Agency’s size and scope?
	4. How have Agency partnerships and collaborative arrangements with international, regional and national intergovernmental, governmental or non-governmental organisations, technical and expert entities, private sector, and other networks and groups supported delivery of its programmatic activities and MTS? Are these arrangements aligned with the Work Programme and Budget 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 and MTS?
Impact	5. How have Agency country, regional and local activities contributed to advancing the deployment of renewable energy?
	6. How have Agency activities created impact and helped to shape the global discourse around energy transitions?

The evaluation drew on a series of tools to gather and analyse qualitative and quantitative information:

- **Interviews:** Representatives from 25 IRENA members and partner organisations were interviewed remotely (via Microsoft Team, Skype, Zoom).

- **Desk review:** A literature review analysed all relevant documentation including IRENA knowledge products, governing, policy and strategic documents, and IRENA’s own internally produced monitoring data (including web and media analytics). Another key reference was the *2011-2015 Impact Review* of IRENA, which was the last independent evaluation of the Agency’s work. This current evaluation was able to use some of the material from the 2015 Impact Review (particularly the Impact Review’s survey data) to support trend analysis.
- **Online surveys:** Surveys were circulated to three groups, namely (i) IRENA members, (ii) external stakeholders (e.g. Coalition members, partners, consultants working with IRENA) and (iii) staff.² Response rates were as follows:

Survey Group	Population	Responses	Response rate
Members	161	50	31%
External Stakeholders	221	39	18%
Staff	249	76	31%

The surveys asked a mix of closed (quantitative) and open (qualitative) questions. This included two questions that had previously been asked during the 2015 Impact Review, thereby allowing for direct comparison (trend analysis) of survey responses in 2015 and 2020.

The evaluation was undertaken by IOD PARC, an independent consultancy specialising in monitoring, evaluation and organisational development. The team comprised two evaluation consultants, plus a third quality assurance consultant. IRENA’s Planning and Programme Support Team oversaw the evaluation and provided logistical and administrative support for the independent evaluation team.

² ‘staff’ refers to all personnel who were holding IRENA contracts at the time of the evaluation.