

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bangladesh has a long history of partnership with the United Nations having joined the organization in September 1974. It has participated generously in the UN peacekeeping and has made many other significant contributions including initiating the annual UN General Assembly resolution on a culture of peace, and as a founding member of both the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) began working in Bangladesh in 1973 and has been working since to support national development efforts.

This Assessment of Development Results (ADR) in Bangladesh is an independent country-level evaluation to assess the overall performance of UNDP and its contribution to development in Bangladesh since 2006. It provides stakeholders with an objective assessment of UNDP work and evaluates the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UNDP programmes. This report also examines UNDP strategic positioning in Bangladesh including relevance and responsiveness to national development priorities and needs. The ADR is situated against the background of Bangladesh's human development achievements and national priorities. The ADR is based on a comprehensive literature review and analysis of background data on Bangladesh including project documents, project progress reports, annual reviews, and evaluation reports. The ADR also draws on detailed interviews with stakeholders in Dhaka and field work in seven districts where UNDP is active. Data was collected and analysed over the period July to December 2010.

Over the period covered by the ADR, a series of economic and political changes have taken place

both globally and locally that influenced the pace of development in Bangladesh and merit attention in the context of this ADR. While these changes provide the backdrop against which the relevance and effectiveness of the development projects and policies were assessed, they also underpin the new policy realities and new development challenges. The most striking events that took place during the period covered by this ADR included the global food crisis of 2007-2008, cyclone Sidr in November 2007, and the global financial crisis of 2008—the effects of which are still unfolding. In fact, the combination of natural disasters, food shocks and financial market shocks made Bangladesh particularly susceptible to slippages in meeting the targets of growth, poverty reduction and human development.

UNDP IN BANGLADESH

The UNDP Country Programme Document 2006-2011 was approved by the UNDP Executive Board in June 2005 and a County Programme Action Plan was then prepared and signed with the government in September 2006.¹ Below are the five key areas of intervention in which UNDP would make its development contribution:

- Economic growth and poverty alleviation
- Democratic governance and human rights
- Reduction of social and economic vulnerability
- Sustainable environment and energy management
- Promoting gender equality and the advancement of women

Although the programme covers all of the main

¹ This is unusually late as a CPAP is usually prepared and approved in the period between approval of the CPD and the start of the new county programme.

focus areas of UNDP, the Country Programme Document noted that issues of democratic governance would receive priority attention. However in terms of resource allocation, the area of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and reducing poverty received the largest share of resources, representing 40 percent of the total as compared to 25 percent for the area of fostering democratic governance. Over the period 2006 to 2010 UNDP delivered approximately US\$ 320 million. The country office was also very successful in mobilizing resources; approximately US\$ 250 million over the five-year period being examined.

Following its design in late 2004 - early 2005 the country programme evolved significantly. The Country Programme Document and Country Programme Action Plan set out 13 and 12 outcomes respectively but in 2008 a decision was made to reduce the number to nine. Country office staff stated that this was based on the need to remove some areas where no progress had been made and to adjust the programme to the new UNDP corporate strategic plan. Most important, the implementation of the country programme covered a period of political uncertainty under successive caretaker governments (that lasted from 2006-2008). This led to disruptions in UNDP work and consequently affected its development contribution. During the programme period, UNDP also had to respond to the key events not envisaged when the programme was formulated. Core UNDP activities by each programme theme are described below.

Economic growth and poverty alleviation: UNDP has emphasized supporting the MDG process in Bangladesh. The MDGs also provide UNDP an effective entry-point to engage with the planning and governance process in Bangladesh. The commitment to poverty reduction is fundamental to the UNDP mandate, which is supporting the Government of Bangladesh in developing, implementing and sustaining poverty reduction schemes in innovative and inclusive ways. UNDP, through its poverty reduction portfolio, works to empower

vulnerable groups in rural and urban areas to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

In recent years, significant progress has been made in rural areas. UNDP supports one of the Government's flagship social safety net programmes, providing wages, savings, and livelihood training for the rural poor and vulnerable people, specifically women, through links with local governments, community partnerships, and service delivery. Significantly, the project is focused around an innovative poverty alleviation graduation strategy that delivers long-term improvements, providing not just safety nets but also safety ladders out of poverty. However, rapidly growing urban centres present new development challenges as many people continue to live beyond the reach of basic services. UNDP's urban poverty programme is implementing strategies that aim to improve the livelihoods and living conditions of the urban poor and extreme poor people, especially women and girls, by mobilizing and empowering thousands of urban poor communities to identify, plan and manage local-level infrastructure and socio-economic projects.

UNDP work involves supporting the government's pro-poor policy development and planning by opening up UNDP's global knowledge base to Bangladesh. UNDP has partnered with the government, to support interventions that strengthen local government institutions and make them better able to serve and deliver services to those they represent. In partnership with the government, communities, and non-government organizations, UNDP's multi-sectoral peace-building and service delivery programme in the post-conflict Chittagong Hill Tracts region pursues accelerated, sustainable socio-economic development and poverty reduction based on principles of local participation and decentralized development. The programme builds the capacities of local institutions and community groups to plan and execute small scale income generation projects, as well as expanding the quality and reach of public services from education to health.

Democratic governance and human rights: UNDP played a very active advocacy role in restoring democracy and introducing electoral reforms. The main justification for UNDP involvement is its political neutrality. UNDP's partnership with the Bangladesh Election Commission supports a reformed electoral process through legislative and policy reform, the country's first biometric photo voter registration, constituency delimitation, institutional capacity building, construction of independent local electoral centres and the provision of translucent ballot boxes. National and international observers hailed the historic return to democracy with free, fair and credible elections in 2008, 2009 and 2010, enabled by a reformed legal, policy and institutional framework for elections. A key result was the registration of over 81 million voters through the creation of the country's first ever photo voter list with biometrics.

Representative democracy is not merely a political right; it plays a vital role in protecting the economic and human rights of weaker sections of the community. In this respect, UNDP is also supporting parliamentary reform. The establishment of the National Human Rights Commission was the result of sustained policy advocacy by UNDP, civil society, and other development partners. For the first time in its history, Bangladesh now has an independent statutory body responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights for all citizens. UNDP support to police reform is a long term and comprehensive capacity building initiative to improve human security in Bangladesh and supports the transition from a police force to police service, and strengthens the police's ability to contribute to a safer and more secure environment based on respect for the rule of law, human rights and equitable access to justice.

Reduction of social and economic vulnerability: The key element of the UNDP strategy in this area is to involve people in the choice, implementation and ownership of the disaster mitigation initiatives once the project life is over. In this strategy, the government plays a key role and hence an additional focus of the UNDP strategy

is to enhance the capacity of central government and local government agencies for better environment management to enable the local people to perform their ownership role vis-a-vis environmental projects. UNDP's disaster management portfolio also supported a paradigm shift in Bangladesh, from emergency relief to disaster risk reduction. The provision of policy advice, technical assistance and community-level intervention helped to improve the capacity of the government, the local communities and local institutions to prepare, respond to and 'build back better' from natural disasters.

Sustainable environment and energy management: UNDP supported the Sustainable Environment Management Programme with 21 partner agencies within the government and private sector including NGOs. This was the first programme in Bangladesh to involve such a large number of government agencies, private agencies and NGOs linking environment with major development and poverty reduction strategies. There were approximately 28 projects under this thematic area.

Promoting gender equality and women's advancement: UNDP Bangladesh moved from an agenda for directly addressing gender equality - advocacy and support to gender-related policies and laws, government gender mainstreaming efforts, and sex disaggregated data and research - to focusing interventions in this area to gender mainstreaming in UNDP projects.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions draw on a rich body of findings set out in the main text of the report and some of these findings are included with each conclusion below. The conclusions should be seen as being mutually reinforcing conveying an overall sense of UNDP weaknesses as well as its strengths and the challenges it faces in contributing to development results in Bangladesh.

1. During the ongoing programming period, UNDP has made significant contributions

to a number of key development results in Bangladesh. Other contributions have the potential to be transformational in terms of supporting national goals and aspirations.

Two examples of significant contribution can be highlighted. First, UNDP made an important and timely contribution to election reform, specifically to the 2008 election. The registration of more than 81 million voters in just 11 months is only one example of UNDP contribution through its project support. Second, UNDP interventions in the area of reduction in social and economic vulnerability strengthened government efforts to streamline disaster management efforts towards a total risk reduction approach using community awareness and participation. There are also areas where UNDP has supported efforts that have the potential to be transformative:

- Contribution to placing Human Rights on the policy agenda and institutionalizing it in the National Human Rights Commission.
- Police reform where UNDP engagement is a reflection of its neutrality and position as a trusted partner.
- Support to the decentralization process that has led to policy and legislative reform.
- Application of social mobilization as a tool for urban poverty reduction by encouraging the formation of the organization of the urban poor groups in slums and low-income urban settlements.
- UNDP, widely viewed as a neutral mediator in areas of conflict, played a pivotal role in contributing to service delivery and peace-building in the post-conflict context of the Chittagong Hills Tracts.
- Contribution to rural extreme poverty reduction through innovative interventions, which have the transformational potential of raising rural ultra-poor women out of poverty in a short time-frame.

2. Most UNDP interventions during the programming period 2006 to 2010 reflected national development priorities in Bangladesh.

This has been made possible by forging strategic partnerships at different levels and establishing rapport with successive governments, which made UNDP a trusted and valued partner of the Government of Bangladesh.

It is clear that at an overall level, the UNDP programme, in terms of the stated outcomes to which it will contribute, is relevant to national development priorities, being deliberately aligned to national development strategies. At the same time it builds on its comparative strengths of neutrality and closeness to government in providing support to address difficult issues. For example, since UNDP enjoys the reputation of an impartial player in the development process, UNDP was invited by the Government of Bangladesh to participate in the reform process during a critical time. However, there have been significant shifts in the policies of the government since the departure of the caretaker government. In a number of cases, lack of national ownership, in the sense of ensuring adequate support from the government at the appropriate level for the intervention, undercut UNDP contributions to national development results in general, and 'value for money' in particular.

3. The multi-stakeholder approach adopted by UNDP has been responsible for strengthening UNDP's contribution to improved human development in Bangladesh, especially to addressing the challenge of poverty reduction. In practice, however, there has been mixed experience with respect to involvement of NGOs/Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and local government while the private sector played a limited role in the process.

UNDP has played an important role working with government and other members of the international development community in strengthening the aid effectiveness agenda. UNDP worked closely with civil society across a number of its projects. For example, the Sustainable Environment Management Programme (SEMP) with 21 partner agencies within the government and civil society was the first programme in the history

of Bangladesh in which so many Government organization and also NGOs were involved to link environment with major development and poverty reduction strategies of Bangladesh. The role of NGOs and CSOs is quite varied across the poverty and service delivery projects supported by UNDP as is the role of local government. Partnership with the private sector is also mixed and is more evident in environment projects than in those directed at poverty reduction. More needs to be done to cement broad partnerships across all projects.

4. UNDP has been observed to play multiple roles during the programming period (project implementation, policy advice, fund provider, service provider, advocacy etc.) and in some areas a more appropriate balance could have been achieved.

Multiple roles are, of course, inevitable for an organization like UNDP pursuing multiple routes for poverty reduction and MDG attainment in the shortest possible time. The question is to strike an appropriate balance among different roles. UNDP's advocacy role was important and effective in the areas of human rights, judicial reform, elections and local governance. A more pronounced role of advocacy in some other areas, however, is appropriate, for example in the case of socially complex projects demanding long-term improvements in governance conditions. In general, UNDP should consider shifting from the 'project delivery' mode to a more 'advocacy and policy advice' mode with enhanced reliance on local actors such as government offices, NGOs and CSOs for delivering project outputs.

5. The design of the UNDP programme, as well as the projects that constitute it, did not always adequately focus on ensuring sustainability through stronger institutional linkages and capacity development.

First, there is an overriding need to shift from the project mode of operations to seeking more sustainable institutional linkages. The ongoing move from pilot to first generation (UNDP implemented)

to second generation (nationally implemented) reforms needs to be encouraged in UNDP programmatic interventions in Bangladesh. Second, not enough attention was paid to the institutional sustainability of community organizations in Bangladesh. It is critical to ask whether the design of UNDP interventions explicitly includes long-term support to building capacity, institution building and institutional sustainability to community organizations of the poor in rural and urban areas. Third, the capacity building component of some UNDP projects has yet to produce the desired results due to structural and contextual factors. Part of the problem lies in the external policy and institutional environment within which these projects operate.

6. Although UNDP largely succeeded in mainstreaming gender in all its programmes, and UNDP programmes have made substantial and meaningful contribution in terms of addressing practical gender needs, the strategic gender needs of women, especially in vulnerable communities, remain largely unaddressed.

UNDP should be commended for embedding gender concerns across all its projects and programmes and is now well positioned to support national efforts aimed at addressing strategic gender needs. This is a difficult proposition, given the socio-cultural construct of gender roles and divides along the private-public realm. However, it needs, to be emphasized that practical gender needs are the pathways towards meeting strategic gender needs. Moreover in the absence of adequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, the pathways towards gender equality cannot be assessed properly.

7. UNDP's initial thrusts on addressing environmental degradation seem to have lost momentum in recent years. This can be attributed to the increasing preoccupation, maybe justifiably so, with programmes related to mitigation and adaptation to climate change in Bangladesh.

Although UNDP started its programmes and

projects in this area by focusing on mainstream environment and energy issues, it is evident from the allocation of funds that it has gradually shifted away from this area and moved on to a climate change agenda related to adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction. Climate change is a very important issue for Bangladesh, and it needs to be addressed properly. However, environmental degradation is still responsible for poverty and the poor standard of living for millions of people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations highlight only the most critical areas in which UNDP could enhance and consolidate its contribution bearing in mind its mandate and comparative strengths as well as what is operationally actionable.

1. To remain relevant, UNDP should continue to align its programme with national development priorities, specifically the Sixth Five-Year Plan and the framework of Joint Country Strategy.

Currently UNDP programmes are based on the PRSP. There has been a shift to medium-term planning (Sixth Five-Year Plan) and long-term planning (Perspective Plan). UNDP should closely follow this shift in approach to planned development in Bangladesh during its future interventions. Also, periodic adjustment using the opportunity of a new country programme to assess the relevance of ongoing projects and alignment to the national planning framework is recommended.

2. Appropriate exit strategies need to be built into the programmes and projects to strengthen the potential for sustainability.

UNDP should redesign the programmes and projects on outcomes and outputs that are achievable and realistically implementable in the time-frame envisaged. Continuance of projects for a long time makes the country aid dependent and also develops a culture of dependency. Appropriate

exit strategies should, therefore, be designed to ensure that benefits continue to flow even after support is withdrawn.

3. UNDP, together with national partners, should undertake periodic adjustments of innovative projects in light of experience.

An example of this would be the governance and poverty reduction projects. For instance, innovative projects such as Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction and Local Government Support Project-Learning and Innovative Component need to be adjusted in the light of new sets of challenges in the areas of persistently weak local governance and lack of adequate coordination among local government, NGOs, CSOs and local communities. This is especially important in the context of new leadership elected in the recently held *Union Parishad* election in 2011 (the previous election was held in 2003). Lessons learned should be incorporated into revising the project design and linked to national entities responsible for policy making.

4. UNDP should strengthen its advocacy role, especially in areas that directly promote UN values such as human rights and gender equality.

Although UNDP is strategically positioned to promote UN values, the advocacy role of the organization in the areas of human rights and gender is extremely critical in countries like Bangladesh. Given the weak nature of accountability of state actors, it is important to strengthen the system of state monitoring and civic advocacy by the civil society at large. It is equally important to ensure transparency and a level playing field in the non-governmental sector as well. Concerns about promoting gender equality need to be adequately addressed in both policy advocacy, especially in compliance with international conventions, and outcome monitoring and reporting.

5. UNDP should try to avoid 'fragmentation effects' by providing adequate emphasis on both developmental and social cohesion needs within and across communities.

This is particularly important for socially complex projects such as Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility, where more emphasis was given to the promotion of micro-grant based income-generation activities and less on building social cohesion. Although the project achieved some tangible results in terms of post-conflict peace efforts, the developmental impact of peace itself may have been compromised by the growing discontent expressed by different ethnicities.

6. The issue of shock prevention to avoid income erosion needs to be given more attention in future UNDP programmes, which currently focus mainly on income generation.

Three major types of shocks experienced by the project beneficiaries are: health related, natural disaster related, and personal insecurity related (related to theft, harassment faced due to institutional malpractices and misgovernance). Each of these shocks demand different prevention strategies. For instance, health related shocks can be addressed by effective micro-insurance in curative health care. Measures related to natural disaster related shocks resist a single solution given the diversities in the sources of natural disasters (flood-prone, coastal and dry-lands will demand different coping methods and mitigation policies). Personal insecurity related shocks require long-term institutional improvements, but they can also be mitigated in the short-term, for instance, through easy recourse to legal aid and human rights aid by civic organizations, strengthening alternative mechanisms for grievance resolution, awareness raising in the criminal justice system, and ensuring access to information (speedy media disclosure of the events of injustice as well as increased rights awareness among the poor and the marginalized).

7. Given its long-term commitment to Bangladesh, UNDP should build on its success in addressing practical gender needs to explicitly move to the more challenging task of supporting strategic gender needs.

The issue needs to be addressed at the political, cultural and economic levels. A paradigm shift is required in the structure of political parties, through the induction of gender sensitive issues and programmes. Members of Parliament as well members of local government bodies need gender sensitization training. The formal domain of politics and policy making need to be demasculinized and made more humane. At the cultural level, the academic curriculum at all levels needs to incorporate gender studies or gender related issues. This is critical to bring about a shift in the popular psyche. At the economic level, budgetary allocations for gender related issues should be increased. Instead of supportive structures, the emphasis ought to be on transformative structures like allocations for women to have entry into the market in non-traditional sectors, which are sustainable and not project dependent.

8. UNDP should play an important role in promoting regional cooperation on environmental and disaster management issues among South Asian countries in general, and between India and Bangladesh in particular.

Environmental issues are interlinked, so it would be useful to develop South-South cooperation between Bangladesh and India. Issues that require immediate attention are water flows between India and Bangladesh, protection of Sundarban and pollution in rivers. UNDP could play the role of a catalyst to promote cooperation within the region.

9. Comprehensive disaster management programmes of UNDP need to focus more on supporting the livelihoods of the poor within an asset livelihood framework (extended by rights to development of the poor) in design when it comes to the issue of revival of the local economy.

Recently, disaster management programmes in Bangladesh have refocused using a systematic approach to identifying vulnerable communities. However, with climate change becoming a reality, the risk and vulnerability of the communities is

likely to be exacerbated. There are communities even in urban locations that are poor and vulnerable. Many communities will lose their livelihood due to climate change risks. The programmes need to focus on new risks and their effects on livelihood, because a livelihood based strategy is likely to succeed in reducing community level risks due to such vulnerability.

10. UNDP should continue to focus on environment-related issues like pollution and degradation of natural resources to ensure sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Mainstreaming environmental issues into policy making will require continued involvement of UNDP on these issues. However, since UNDP has reduced its engagement from the core environmental issues, poverty-environment links have been overlooked. This will adversely affect achievement of several MDGs related to health and environment. UNDP should therefore realign its engagement in this sector to restore environmental focus to its projects and programmes.