

# Evaluation of the UNDAF Cycles 2011-2015 and 2016-2018 in Cambodia

THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FRAMEWORK (UNDAF) EMBODIES THE STRATEGIC ORIENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN CAMBODIA. IT CORRESPONDS TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES AND REFLECTS THE STRENGTHS OF THE UNITED NATIONS, SHOWING WHERE THE UN SYSTEM CAN BRING ITS UNIQUE STRENGTHS IN A VARIETY OF AREAS IN ORDER TO ASSIST CAMBODIA IN ACHIEVING ITS DEVELOPMENT GOALS.

The UNDAF is a partnership agreement between the 23 UN agencies working in Cambodia and the Royal Government of Cambodia. A first UNDAF in Cambodia was planned and executed between 2011 and 2015. It was aligned with the government's National Strategy for Development Programme (NSDP) 2009-2013. A subsequent UNDAF was designed and put in place for the period 2016-2018, to conclude at the same time as the NSDP 2014-18.

The UNDAF 2016-2018 focuses on:



**Inclusive  
growth and  
sustainable  
development**



**Social  
development,  
social  
protection  
and human  
capital**



**Governance  
and human  
rights**

## Objectives of the UNDAF Evaluation

- Assess the effectiveness of the 2011-2015 UNDAF in advancing the national development agenda of the Government of Cambodia;
- Assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the current 2016-2018 UNDAF cycle in terms of both performance and process;
- Examine how the five UN programming principles have been mainstreamed in the results-based management cycle of the UNDAF 2016-2018;

- Provide actionable strategic and programmatic recommendations to support the development of the UNDAF 2018-2023.

The evaluation criteria used in the assessment are relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

## Methodology

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach to strengthen the reliability of data and increase the validity of findings and recommendations. This approach helped to broaden and deepen understanding of the processes through which results were achieved, and how these were affected by the context within which the UNDAF was implemented. The approach also allowed for triangulation of data from a variety of sources. Methods included document review, interviews, surveys, site visits, tracking of numerical data, and case studies. A sample of programmes (or smaller projects) from different agencies were identified for each of the outcomes from UNDAF 2016-2018. The outcome headings for the two UNDAFs were different but since the programmes were only different in exceptional cases, this approach was able to cover both cycles. Much of the numerical data is from secondary sources and the reliability depends on its origins. The evaluation team closely followed the United Nations Ethical Guide for Evaluation in selecting interviewees, in interacting with them and in respecting their personal and institutional rights. Data collection took place between the end of June 2017 and the middle of August 2017.

# Evaluation Findings

## RELEVANCE

The current UNDAF is relevant to national needs

and priorities. Most programmes and projects are aligned with the NSDP 2014-2018 and the Rectangular Strategy. UNDAF outcome areas 1 and 2 are extremely well aligned with the Royal Government of Cambodia priorities, while Outcome 3 shows a few divergences. The UN influence in Cambodia has decreased over the years due to the emergence of new donors and partners. Despite this, the UN has demonstrated its ability to successfully adapt to changing circumstances.

✓ All UN staff agree that the UNDAF adequately reflected Cambodia's national priorities



62% AGREE

38% STRONGLY AGREE

There are several examples of flexible and adaptive programming in the present UNDAF and interestingly, these are among those with positive track records. These include projects on National funding for contraceptives, or the Cambodia's Climate Change Alliance phase 2 (2014-2019) among others.

The overall coherence of the design of the UNDAF's outputs and outcomes is mixed. Coherence and interconnectedness among components varies across the three UNDAF outcome areas. There is strong coherence in Outcome 2, much less in Outcome 1 and almost none at all in Outcome 3. In addition, the current implicit theory of change underlying the UNDAF is not sufficiently robust. Developing a more accurate theory of change in line with the requirements set out of the 2017 revised UNDAF guidance will require UN agencies to be more selective about which key areas they should focus on.



## EFFECTIVENESS

In terms of effectiveness and results achievement, there are areas where there have been real successes and areas where success has been elusive. Most of the programmes in Outcome 1 all have the potential of lifting targeted populations out of poverty or preventing them from slipping back into poverty. Their effectiveness has however been limited by the difficulty of diversifying the economy, improving market chains, overcoming key constraints such as declining commodity prices and limited access to growth-related education opportunities to increase work force capacity.

The results achieved in Outcome 2 are more impressive than the other outcomes in part because of the interconnectedness of the sectors, in part because of the agencies involved, and in part because of the government support and capacity to deliver services with efficiency.

A certain level of achievement can be seen in Outcome 3 and it deserves to be the foundation for further commitments. But Outcome 3 also has programmes with modest achievements.

The measurement of results achieved is limited by the gaps found in available data. The current results framework provides 33 general and broad indicators that can only directly assess the results of 12 UN programmes. The indicators are of limited relevance to the actual socio-economic impact of the interventions. In addition, relevant data for assessing results at the outcome level is not consistently available, limiting the UN's capacity to assess results in a number of instances.

The attention paid to UN programming principles such as gender equality and environmental sustainability is mostly programme or project-specific.



For instance, the UNDAF results framework and Consolidated Annual Work Plans do not contain disaggregated indicators tracking beneficiaries by men or women. Impact on women and girls, and gender sensitivity generally, is direct in more than half of the

programmes examined for the report. Women and girls are not direct programme beneficiaries across the board, as many of the programmes oriented toward economic growth or law for example are unlikely to have a direct impact on women. Accepting gender as a cross-cutting theme clearly does not mean that there is gender sensitivity in all sector and all outcomes equally. It does mean that the UNDAF has succeeded in according priority to ensuring programmes are gender sensitive.



**There are examples of successful partnerships with non-traditional partners and the UN is considered a trusted source of expertise and partner for the Government in critical areas.** At the agency-level

however, partnerships between UN agencies, such as joint UN programming, have so far shown limited success. Joint programmes are few in number and agencies are not readily inclined to work closely in tandem and, in any event, it is difficult given quite different corporate cultures.

**EFFICIENCY**

In terms of efficiency, **there are many examples of programmes that have been delivered in a cost-effective manner.** However, most UN agencies are experiencing drastic cuts in funding and are either following the money or discontinuing programmes altogether. Declining success in mobilizing resources among agencies has a direct impact on the funds available for UNDAF outcomes. For four of the five outcomes in the previous UNDAF, there were significant funding gaps between the planned budgets and the actual expenditures. At the present time, almost 70 per cent of the funds required to implement the UNDAF as planned are yet to be mobilized.

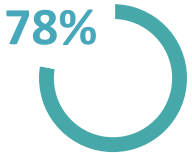
Most UN agency representatives believe the UNDAF is worth the effort, but many indicated that it did little to serve the specific interests of their respective agencies. Smaller agencies tend to perceive UNDAF processes as a burden.

There is no budget line for formulating and managing the UNDAF. As a result, the coherence and rationale of the UNDAF is limited. The Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO) would benefit greatly from having a dedicated staff member to manage this complex task.

**SUSTAINABILITY**

**The institutionalization of UN programmes or initiatives plays a significant role in the sustainability of results.**

Many programmes are now part of government responsibilities, while other are not due to a variety of factors (e.g., lack of funding or commitment). The emphasis on capacity development has had notable results. However, the lack of internal logic in the UNDAF programmes makes it easy for the Royal Government of Cambodia to pick and choose areas it wishes to support or own.



**78% of UN survey respondents agree that the UNDAF promotes ownership of UN Programme by the government.**

**Conclusions**

Even though this evaluation describes challenges associated with the UNDAF, all stakeholders recognize that there is no going back and know they must work together for the UN to work effectively in Cambodia and to remain relevant. Guidance from the UN and the latest report of the UN Secretary General confirms this trend.

The overall performance of the UNDAF was variable. In spite of some successes, the two UNDAFs have not fully met the standard criteria for development interventions nor the evolving expectations of the UN System in Cambodia. Key issues deserve to be highlighted to assess the past and present UNDAFs as a whole and of critical concern for designing a future one.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** The UNCT and the RCO in consultation with the Programme Management Team (PMT) should explore ways to assure full-time capacity with a dedicated budget to manage the UNDAF process, to guide its development and maintenance, to promote areas of coordination and joint programming, to ensure all agencies have an appropriate role, reconcile differences and usher in a new sense of common purpose.

**Recommendation 2:** The UNCT and the RCO in consultation with the PMT should assume responsibility for building the next UNDAF on a credible and well-reasoned theory of change, undertaken in tandem with the Common Country Assessment, informed by widely accepted understandings of conditions of inclusive growth documented in the development literature.

**Recommendation 3:** The UNCT and the RCO in consultation with the PMT, in collaborating with agencies, should follow the numerous directives already in place for utilizing the UNDAF to place Agenda 2030 at the centre of UN activities in Cambodia to develop the 2019-2023 UNDAF.

**Recommendation 4:** The UNCT, the RCO and the PMT should take advantage of emerging opportunities for joint programming. These should be the stepping stones for a more coordinated UNDAF.

**Recommendation 5:** The UNCT and the RCO in consultation with the PMT should be particularly cognizant of the considerable commitments the UNDAF requires of all agencies, large and small. Every effort should be made to ensure that the process is an inclusive one, sensitive to the considerable differences among agencies in size, endowments and expertise.

**Recommendation 6:** The UNCT and the RCO in consultation with the PMT along with collaborating agencies should assume a more constructive, realistic and critical approach to results reporting.

**Recommendation 7:** The UNCT and the RCO in consultation with the PMT should vet the UNDAF and its results matrices to ensure that extra care is taken to propose performance indicators, targets and data collection procedures that are pertinent to programme impact where it is taking place.

**Recommendation 8:** The UNCT, the RCO, participating agencies and the PMT should be particularly attentive to achieving a reasonable balance between supporting economic growth on the one hand, and protecting specific vulnerable populations on the other.

**Recommendation 9:** The UNCT in collaboration with the RCO should build on past programming successes. It is important to meet the challenges posed in the programming areas of governance with programming initiatives that recognize the obstacles and yet that meet these obstacles with renewed attention.