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## UNDP IN ALBANIA

Over the last decade, Albania has been focused on European Union (EU) accession, accompanied by the evolution of democratic institutions. In 2014, the country gained EU candidate status, which led donors to begin downsizing their programmes.

The United Nations system operates in Albania under a One UN programme. Key UNDP programme areas have comprised democratic governance and local devel-

opment, with a wide range of efforts related to public administration reform. An economic and social inclusion portfolio put a strong emphasis on support for achieving gender equality. A key area of intervention on the environment was biodiversity. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP assistance from 2007 to 2015.

### TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2007–2014: \$60.9 MILLION

#### FUNDING SOURCES, 2007-2014



#### PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY THEMATIC AREA, 2007-2014 (\$ MILLIONS)



## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation found that the UNDP programme was firmly anchored in Albania’s development priorities, including in terms of EU accession. UNDP also leveraged its strong relationship with the Government to bring attention to less visible priorities, such as social inclusion and youth employment, aiming to support a development process rooted in a human development perspective.

A wide range of activities, to varying degrees, contributed to development results. UNDP’s role has been relevant and important in developing key policies and filling institutional gaps in areas such as governance, social inclusion and the environment. Perhaps the most significant contribution was in furthering territorial and administrative reform. UNDP supported a new law and operational tools for the transfer and amalgamation process after the 2015 elections. The reform was politically highly sensitive, and UNDP, regarded as a neutral and reliable partner, aided the right sequencing of new steps and coordinated support with various organizations assisting the Government.

Regional and local development work produced good project-level outputs, such as regional development plans and small-scale infrastructure projects, but given significant contextual changes, these outputs did not add up to creating a regional and local development model. Almost two years of work in supporting the central Government on regional development policy was invalidated

when the EU introduced a new funding and implementation approach.

More synergies could have been explored in the democratic governance and local development portfolio, for example, between territorial and administrative reform and service delivery, and economic governance and regional and local development. The right-sizing exercise undertaken in 2014–2015, when democratic governance and regional development were merged into one programme unit, has enhanced managerial efficiency in this area.

UNDP support complemented government staff needs and capacities, given inadequate human resources in some institutions. While this helped enable these institutions to function, in some cases, capacity development was limited, which may hamper the sustainability of outcomes. The pressure for UNDP to deliver outputs quickly and show results was at times a perverse incentive, encouraging the organization to deliver programmes directly rather than through government institutions.

The development and enhancement of a national gender equality strategy and social inclusion strategy benefitted from UNDP assistance. The organization also backed the adoption of gender-based violence laws and by-laws, and a Roma action plan. But tangible results were difficult to measure since the Government had not made significant advancement in the internalization of mechanisms and policies to mainstream social inclu-

sion principles. Implementation of the national action plan for the Roma Decade was slow due to inadequate resources and insufficient coordination at the local and central levels.

Despite a strong gender portfolio, systematic integration of gender issues in UNDP governance and environment programmes remained a challenge. Many programmes remained focused on equity in the number of women and men targeted; more systematic analysis of gender dimensions was required. There was not yet a multidisciplinary approach to addressing cross-cutting issues—not just gender, but also human rights, social inclusion and environmental management.

UNDP's support was critical for Albania to develop an environmental legal and policy framework. The country established its first marine protected areas, and in 2014 created the National Protected Area Agency, among many other achievements. The environment is an area where most resources come from external funding, however, which was the most important force determining where, how and when UNDP work was undertaken. Funding for environment management is a key challenge for sustainability.

Within the UN Delivering as One framework, UNDP worked closely with other UN agencies to enhance programme strategizing. It was able to focus on activities in fewer areas, while making more system-

atic contributions. Beyond UNDP's strong relationship with the Government, leveraging partnerships with other development actors was important to programme achievements, while a participatory approach enhanced ownership.

UNDP's flexibility gave it a real comparative advantage in mobilizing resources. Programming documents did not include an objective on territorial reform, for instance, but as this emerged as a national priority in the reform agenda, UNDP stepped forward to mobilize and coordinate donor support through a pooled funding mechanism. This assisted the Government in developing the vision, strategic orientation and related legislation for the reform, leading to the passage of the law formalizing the new administrative and territorial division in time for local elections in 2015. Had this deadline passed, the next real opportunity would not have arisen before 2019.

Overall, UNDP has positioned itself well to play a meaningful role in Albania's development process, but a major challenge comes from limited funding. Key areas of support, such as governance, are also accession priority areas where the EU is directly involved. UNDP's engagement on some of these issues depends largely on dialogue with both the Government and the EU for strategic and financial partnership, and increasing government co-financing of programmes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- UNDP's relevance in an EU accession context remains being responsive to emerging development needs and priorities of the Government. Moving forward, UNDP should provide an adequate balance of policy and demonstration of viable development models. UNDP should focus more on service delivery at the local level.
- UNDP should continue to strengthen its efforts for resource mobilization. It should also explore cost-sharing options or technical service modalities fully financed by the Government.
- UNDP should strengthen partnership and knowledge cooperation with other development actors and should focus on scaling up impact.
- UNDP should apply a multidisciplinary approach to cross-cutting issues, including human rights, gender equality, social inclusion and environmental management.
- UNDP should prepare a long-term strategy for its development support to Albania during the course of the EU accession process. The strategy should outline UNDP's key areas of support to Albania in moving forward with EU membership.

## ABOUT THE ICPEs

Independent country programme evaluations (ICPEs) are the backbone of the work of the Independent Evaluation Office. They capture evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results and the effectiveness of strategies supporting national development. They enable continued improvement in UNDP programmes, contribute to strengthened national ownership and evaluation capacity, and underpin accountability to national stakeholders and UNDP's Executive Board. To date, over 100 ICPEs have been conducted worldwide.

See the full reports at the Evaluation Resource Centre, [erc.undp.org](http://erc.undp.org)