

UNDP IN VIET NAM

Viet Nam entered the group of lower middle-income countries in 2010, marking a significant development milestone. It fully achieved a number of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), although it continues to face issues related to inclusiveness, institutional reforms, effective management of natural resources and disaster risks, and growing climate challenges.

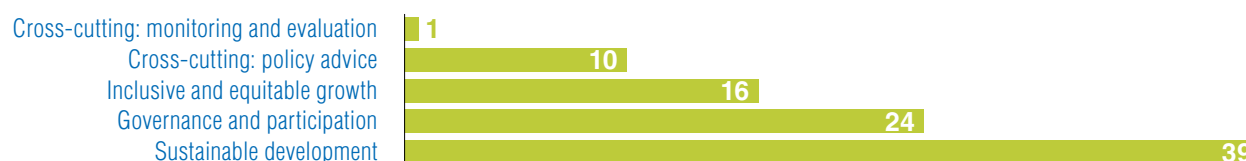
UNDP has offered support related to inclusive and equitable growth, governance and participation, and sustainable development. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2006 to 2016.

TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2006-2014: \$180 MILLION

FUNDING SOURCES, 2006-2014



PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY THEMATIC AREA, 2012-2015 (\$ MILLIONS)



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP's work was relevant and timely as Viet Nam transitioned into becoming a middle-income country. Working as part of the UN Delivering as One pilot, UNDP responded to emerging needs through an upstream policy-oriented approach. Effective engagement with key government agencies cultivated a high level of government trust, which allowed UNDP to lead international dialogue on various policy matters.

One of the key initiatives was the establishment of the Policy Advisory Team, a group of international advisers specializing in various sector-specific issues. Innovative interventions and research provided by the team opened dialogue on sometimes politically sensitive reform issues. Key contributions included collaboration with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank on joint policy messages promoting more inclusive growth and attention to the unfinished MDG agenda, and the definition of new sources of financing through savings from reducing subsidies on fossil fuels.

The team took a flexible approach crucial in addressing complex issues. But its long-term strategy to contribute to a given development programme goal was not always clearly defined. There was more focus on policy formulation than policy implementation, despite much concern over national partners' limited capacity to carry forward innovations and good practices. Numerous research studies contributed to policy discussions, but

their use has not been fully assessed.

The three programme clusters made significant contributions. They established technical, legal and policy frameworks, raised awareness among relevant partners and supported capacity-building. To support inclusive and equitable growth, achievements included helping to improve the quality of national poverty programme documents, and strengthen the national statistical system and monitoring of development goals. MDG monitoring was institutionalized into the Socio-Economic Development Plan monitoring framework, paving the way for the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals at the top policy level. Increased awareness of multidimensional poverty, including in urban areas, led to a government decision to adopt multidimensional poverty as the instrument for poverty measurement.

Under the governance portfolio, oversight functions improved among elected bodies. Human rights' principles were integrated in legal and regulatory frameworks. Awareness of accountability in public administration increased, and there was wider public participation in decision-making. A key achievement was the parliamentary Committee for Financial and Budgetary Affairs' contributions to tax laws and the revision of the law on the state budget in line with international practices and standards.

While notable achievements were observed in the

integration of human rights principles and a rights-based approach in key legal documents, so far, implementation mechanisms to safeguard legal rights and access to justice have been limited. UNDP's support to the Viet Nam Lawyers' Association and its legal consultancy centres provided a meaningful if preliminary contribution to raising awareness and enhanced access to justice for vulnerable groups.

As part of the Joint UN Programme Group on Gender, UNDP contributed to the integration of gender principles in national laws and promoted women's participation in national decision-making. But the incorporation of gender in project design was relatively limited.

The sustainable development programme backed research, technical and legal inputs and consultations for the National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan and the National Green Growth Strategy and Action Plan. Other major outputs included the formulation of the National Target Programme to respond to climate change, scenarios developed with the UK Met Office, and the Climate Public Expenditure and Investment Review prepared with the World Bank.

Despite notable accomplishments, all three programme portfolios were relatively weak on implementation, lacking strategies to achieve specified outcomes and outputs. Challenges included limitations in the measurability of performance against goals, sustainability in

terms of national capacities, and insufficient collaboration with development partners.

The national implementation modality helped increase ownership and results. At the same time, there were challenges in project design and management. Some projects were highly activity-based; lacked critical stakeholders in design (e.g., civil society); and/or lacked an efficient project management mechanism to quickly respond to and resolve day-to-day challenges. Monitoring and evaluation practices were relatively weak.

Within the UN country team, inter-agency coordination and collaboration issues were highlighted as having affected the quality and timeliness of some interventions. Key issues included a lack of a clear joint implementation strategy, management structure, and roles and responsibilities.

UNDP's strengths in Viet Nam have allowed it to gain entry points for crucial development interventions. It should capitalize on them to further advance its programme support. While a framework for partnerships has been forged with the Government, more could be done to strengthen joint planning and delivery among UN agencies and other development partners. Improved links between policy services and programme implementation, as well as improved programme strategy, design, and management, could further bolster UNDP's responsiveness to national needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- UNDP should continue to focus on upstream policy work as its core country programme strategy, but revisit its overall policy praxis/approach to develop a comprehensive strategy that will ensure that all efforts link to the Common Country Programme Document/One Plan outcomes and outputs.
- In close consultation with the government and UN agencies, UNDP should further strengthen its programme approach.
- UNDP, in close consultation with national partners and the Regional Bureau, should strengthen its monitoring and evaluation practices in its projects and policy efforts.
- UNDP should build more effective partnerships with development partners within the UN system and with international financial institutions when taking an issue-based approach to its interventions, to enhance programme complementarity and a leadership role for UNDP.
- UNDP, in close consultation with the government and the UN agencies, should facilitate innovations in inter-ministerial coordination to address specific problems associated with overlapping mandates and programmes. It should engage non-government organizations to enhance delivery of government services.
- UNDP should develop and implement a clear office-wide gender plan/strategy with accountability mechanisms in place for implementation and achievement of set objectives.
- UNDP should assess existing knowledge development options, including South-South cooperation practices and research/analytical work produced by the Policy Advisory Team and the projects, and develop an effective knowledge management strategy for the country office.

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.

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