

UNDP IN GABON

Gabon has been governed by the same political party since 1967. Drawing on oil resources, it has become an upper middle-income country, ranked by the International Monetary Fund as the third wealthiest nation in Africa. Progress towards many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was inadequate, however, with a notable exception being environmental sustainability.

From 2007 to 2011, UNDP supported efforts to

reduce poverty and pursue the MDGs, promote good governance and control disease. Starting in 2012, it sought to help strengthen economic, democratic and environmental governance, and promote human well-being and increase the participation of all in growth. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2007 to 2016.

TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2007-2014: \$62.4 MILLION

FUNDING SOURCES, 2007-2014



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



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP made a number of strategic and operational contributions to development in Gabon. Work related to the environment led to improvements in the management framework and instruments. Following an institutional assessment carried out in the context of the Second Communication on Climate Change, the National Climate Council was set up, followed by specific plans and strategies for critical resources, including wetlands, coastal areas and land allocation.

Under the governance portfolio, global and sectoral strategies for steering the economy and general governance policies were developed. UNDP helped the Government adopt a National Good Governance Strategy and set up an executive secretariat to strengthen institutional governance, consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and clean-up public finances, among other aims. For the first time, Gabon has a decentralization and devolution strategy, a tool valued by public stakeholders at the highest levels. It drew on unprecedented analysis and research supported by UNDP.

Capacities were built to orient policies in favour of the most deprived people, including through operationalizing and monitoring measures to achieve the MDGs. No strategic mainstreaming of human rights was observed, however. UNDP did contribute to the creation of a national gender policy, although questions remain around its implementation. It also supported projects encouraging a significant share of women participants. Women

comprised 60 per cent of the 5,000 people who benefited from 14 community projects funded by the Articulation of Territorial and Thematic Networks for Governance (ARTGOLD) project, for example.

Programmes were generally relevant to national priorities and the development context, aligning with the country's development priorities as set out in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, and the Strategic Plan for an Emerging Gabon. Despite general evidence of appropriate solutions, however, there were some areas of weakness. The household waste collection project in the less developed urban areas of major towns was inappropriate, for example, as it increased the wealth gap, making poorer populations pay for waste collection services that are free for residents of affluent town-centre neighbourhoods. ARTGOLD operated in the five wealthiest provinces, even though a pro-poor approach should be integral to all UNDP strategies.

Gabon's categorization as an upper middle-income country affected the programme in a variety of ways. Sources of official development assistance have dried up, although needs have not, with significant gaps remaining, particularly in social services and infrastructure. UNDP had to find alternative funding to complement national budget support. In the programme cycle from 2007 to 2011, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) was the main donor. A series of grants greatly contributed to improving indicators for

the prevention and treatment of malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS. UNDP managed funds from Shell-Gabon to support the health department of Ndgougou, where oil sites operated by this company are located. Work on the environment drew on resources from the Global Environment Fund (GEF).

Significant resources came from the Government to deliver projects in partnership with national counterparts. The Government was practically the only donor for governance work. The Anti-corruption and Anti-money Laundering Strategy was entirely state-funded, and although UNDP allocated resources to ARTGOLD, most funding came from the state budget. Some local governments allocated a portion of their investment budgets to the programme.

Although new funding sources were evidence of a degree of programme efficiency, the failure of some of them signaled an erosion in efficiency. UNDP lost GEF and Shell-Gabon funding in part because the added value of the programme frameworks was no longer meeting expectations. The achievements of the Global Fund have deteriorated, and the suspension of Gabon as a recipient of these funds was a clear sign that the strategic capacity that UNDP tried to establish was not sustained.

The high proportion of state funding for the programme hindered implementation through a degree of uncertainty, often arising around timing. Since the state

budget is not operational until the end of the first quarter of every year, often state partnerships are implemented later than that. The ARTGOLD project almost had to recall field staff because state funding was delayed. The Project in Support of the National Commission to Fight Against Illicit Enrichment also experienced delays in getting off the ground. These interruptions have been exacerbated by a drop in oil revenues, which make up 50 percent of the state budget.

Increasingly, performance has become hindered by the slimming of UNDP operations, including a continuous depletion of staff capacity that has ultimately undermined programme value. After the GEF funding was transferred to the World Bank, two national counterparts, in the Environment Ministry and the Ministry for the Economy and Finance, suggested that this was due to a view that UNDP had lost technical capacity and could no longer offer sufficient responsiveness and initiative.

In sum, UNDP's strategic positioning is adequate in terms of supporting governance, poverty reduction and natural resource management, areas where it offers acknowledged added value. In a country faced with problems of wealth distribution, UNDP could play a crucially important role in building the capacity of the Government to reach the most deprived more effectively. The current erosion of its technical capacity, however, requires a reassessment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In line with the development cooperation needs of Gabon as a middle-income country, UNDP should engage with the Government and civil society to reassess its country interventions for maximum impact.
- A loss of responsibility for the management of funds, including GEF and Shell-Gabon, has been due to the continuous depletion of technical capacity. UNDP should define new remits for cooperation and relevant staff profiles. Taking into account budget restrictions and the need to attract state funding more effectively, greater numbers of local staff can be recruited with the highest standards of skill and productivity.
- Given the limited (or non) impact of country programmes and recurrent failures in programme operations, UNDP should refocus its programmes at the strategic level, providing research, convening and capacity building support, and delegate the operational aspects to a national implementing agency supported by a UN agency with relevant expertise.
- To improve learning and programme delivery, UNDP should strengthen its monitoring and evaluation systems supported by an annual monitoring and evaluation plan with defined responsibilities and accountability for the function at the country office.
- State funding should be used as leverage for developing national capacity. UNDP needs to conduct a specific analysis of the capacity requirements of national partners, and systematically plan and implement relevant capacity-building, while involving partners in the financial management of projects.
- UNDP should build a more systematic approach to recovering funding relationships, with a regularly evaluated ad hoc plan and appropriate institutional communication, and buy-in from the whole 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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