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## UNDP IN MAURITANIA

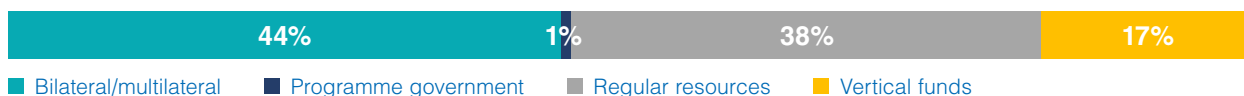
Mauritania, one of the least developed countries, has high rates of poverty, and strong geographical and social inequalities. Democratic institutions are still weak, while the environment is vulnerable to fallout from climate changes.

UNDP has provided support in the areas of fighting

against poverty, governance and the environment. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2009 to mid-2015.

### TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2009-2014: \$28 MILLION

#### FUNDING SOURCES, 2009-2014



#### PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY THEMATIC AREA, 2009-2014 (\$ MILLIONS)



## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

On the whole, UNDP interventions were relevant and aligned with national priorities. They capitalized on UNDP comparative advantages—its neutrality, advocacy and technical expertise. But questions have also arisen around the reach of this support. While the organization has undeniably contributed to development results in Mauritania, the results remain partial, rather than transformational. Without a well-defined strategy for the programme as a whole, there was a tendency to back actions or specific processes, without really strengthening capacity or addressing structural problems.

As a long-standing partner with access to policymakers, UNDP made some notable contributions to national strategic planning. Advocacy encouraged the integration of the environment in the third poverty reduction strategy paper, for example. The second National Environmental Action Plan became more concise and pragmatic than the first. UNDP supported the creation of a ministry for the environment, and contributed to adoption of the National Strategy on Gender Mainstreaming.

Limited national ownership has meant that several strategies have waited a long time for validation, however, such as on microfinance. Other strategies or legal instruments have never been adopted, such as a strategic framework for public service.

Adopted policy documents have not always been followed by consistent implementation. Despite UNDP's contributions to the formulation and monitoring of the poverty reduction strategy paper, for example, results were not felt on the ground. The territorial governance

and local development project supported the creation of regional thematic groups that developed guidelines for regional development, but the groups lost their dynamism after the production of the documents. Regional poverty strategies have not been implemented due to the lack of resources and capacities. Links between on-the-ground interventions to reduce poverty and inequalities and upstream support were not clearly articulated.

In direct interventions, some innovative and successful solutions, such as the introduction of multifunction platforms, contributed to improved living conditions. Rapid recovery actions extended support to fragile communities. Quality remained variable, however. The dispersion of projects limited their visibility and potential for multiplier effects, as well as the capacity of UNDP to follow them regularly and to learn from them. Many interventions responded to the immediate causes of poverty and vulnerability, but not to structural causes, such as unequal access to social services and natural resources.

In the field of the environment, pilot activities at the community level did not feed into strategic policy discussions. For the governance programme, the focus was not on substantive issues, but on support for tools and work approaches, often in response to requests made by government administrations.

UNDP interventions have contributed, to some extent, to reduced inequalities and exclusion, and to the empowerment of women. Downstream interventions clearly targeted women and vulnerable populations. They contributed directly to reducing domestic work-related

burdens, and increased financial self-sufficiency. Small facilities such as wells, catchments for surface water and solar panels have somewhat reduced inequalities in some vulnerable rural communities. Some interventions in governance took a gender dimension into account, such as through mobilizing women to engage in the electoral system. The reduction of inequalities was mostly not included in environmental activities.

The lack of sufficient attention to inequalities stems from the fact that no overall strategy was in place for the consistent integration, monitoring and evaluation of gender and other dimensions. By creating a gender committee and subscribing to the corporate Gender Equality Seal, the country office has put in place mechanisms to improve at least some level of integration.

On the whole, programme sustainability was low, due to a lack of exit strategies, national ownership and capacity-building. At the community level, interventions often targeted vulnerable populations that do not necessarily have the human or financial capacity to maintain new technologies or facilities requiring maintenance and/or periodic repairs, such as pumps or solar freezers. Mechanisms for follow-up or supervision beyond the project had not been foreseen. Interventions improving traditional production techniques—for example, surface water collection systems, or preparation of couscous for sale—are potentially more manageable.

In terms of capacity-building, the emphasis was often on the production of outputs, including through the use

of external resources, rather than on strengthening the capacities of beneficiaries. For example, the provision of expertise to support Parliament has not translated into the acquisition of internal skills. These shortfalls meant that despite a new arsenal of strategic policy and legal documents, results will not last.

The functioning and organization of the country office to some extent undermined UNDP efficiency and effectiveness. A lack of communication meant missed opportunities for sharing collective expertise. There could have been better collaboration between the three units of UNDP working on the poverty reduction strategy paper, the regional poverty plans and community recovery, for example. Other issues involved delays in recruitment and purchases. The national implementation modality relied heavily on the time-consuming processing of direct payments, reducing staff time for more strategic work.

According to a very large number of stakeholders in Mauritania, UNDP is an important partner in development. But without a clearly articulated strategic vision, coupled with slow response times and insufficient attention to details, its reputation could be tarnished. Despite its traditionally strong positioning in the development landscape of Mauritania, the organization is increasingly being challenged by other players, new or old, with implications including critical challenges in the mobilization of resources.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- UNDP should develop a medium- to long-term strategic vision for its entire programme. It must identify niches where it has recognized comparative advantages. It must strengthen its role in advocacy with the Government within the framework of its long-term vision. The preparation of the new poverty reduction strategy paper is a good entry point to identify and then work on development issues.
- UNDP needs to deepen its analyses, including risks and potential political blockages, and develop strategies to address them.
- UNDP should ensure the balance between upstream and downstream interventions, while ensuring a link between the two levels. Interventions must be based on national commitments to implementation with monitoring arrangements. The dialogue on change must be structured and followed. Field interventions should be geographically concentrated for more impact.
- UNDP should strengthen its efforts to integrate gender and human rights in its programme.
- At the office level, the country office must energize its team, improve internal communications and create a culture of results-based collaboration.
- UNDP should develop a strategy for a careful transition towards a genuine modality of national implementation.
- UNDP needs to improve its external communications and strategy for partnership and mobilization of resources.

## 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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