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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION MALAYSIA

UNDP IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia is an upper middle-income country aiming to attain high-income country status. Long interested in sharing its development experience with other developing countries, it has contributed extensively to capacity development in African and Asian countries.

As a long-standing development partner in Malaysia, UNDP provides support for inclusive growth; environment, energy and climate change; and the global partnership for development. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2008 to 2015.

TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2008-2013: $25 MILLION

FUNDING SOURCES, 2008-2013

PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY THEMATIC AREA, 2008-2013 ($ MILLIONS)

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP has positioned itself well in Malaysia, shifting from responding to national strategies to helping to articulate them, as demonstrated by close involvement with the preparation of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan. It has carved out a niche as a source of intellectual capital, brought sensitive issues to the table and stimulated debate on policy change. UNDP is seen as source of ideas, rather than as a source of funding, as is appropriate in this upper middle-income context.

Interventions addressing inclusive growth have targeted both specific issues in Malaysia's unfinished development agenda and emerging human development challenges. UNDP's expertise in inclusive growth (such as dimensions of inequality, social mobility and inclusion, the urban poor) and human development coincided strongly with the Tenth Malaysia Plan's emphasis on reducing relative poverty and inequality, and with the focus on the 'People Economy' proposed in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan.

Among other achievements, the organization helped develop a multidimensional poverty index, and deploy GIS mapping and other technical tools to make a case for equity in the '1Care for 1Malaysia' plan for transforming the national health care system. Several notable contributions came in highlighting inequalities, such as pockets of poverty in the states of Sabah and Sarawak, among the indigenous Orang Asli and for people with disabilities.

Despite UNDP's stated intentions to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment, gender has not been integrated as a development concern across the programme. Only a few specific, modest contributions were made. There seemed to be limited understanding of the notion that gender programming requires a thorough analysis of effects on both men and women in terms of potential benefits and drawbacks. A corporate tool to track gender equality and women's empowerment showed that only 4 of 61 projects had gender equality as a main objective. These were all in the inclusive growth portfolio. Around a third, all in the environment portfolio, were not expected to contribute to gender equality at all.

UNDP has made significant contributions to results in the environment, energy and climate change sectors. It helped Malaysia to both better meet socioeconomic development and ecological demands on resources, and fulfil international commitments. Risks were managed to reduce impacts on people and the environment. Energy security has improved. Elements of equity and inclusivity were built into interventions, particularly in biodiversity initiatives. There was a new emphasis on sustainable use, equity and sharing of benefits, and resource valuation based on the use and conservation potential of natural resources, such as through payment for ecosystems services.

Greater attention could have been given to demonstrating links between achievements in the environment and human development and inclusive growth targets, both in the articulation of project frameworks and the communication of results. While a shift in this direction has started, UNDP's niche was still not clear to many

stakeholders. It was perceived less as a thought leader and more as a source of support for facilitating access to Global Environment Facility projects. UNDP could have done more to profile itself as a source of innovation and expertise.

South-South cooperation is a highly relevant area of engagement, given Malaysia's interest and potential for increasing its engagement. UNDP adopted a dual strategy of supporting strategic thinking on new directions in South-South cooperation, and assisting institutions to provide in-depth training on specific topics of interest to national and international participants. Desite effective support to individual institutions, which have offered training opportunities to participants from Southern countries, progress towards the intended programme outcomes—increased engagement in the global partnership for development—was limited.

An emphasis on facilitating high-quality empirical research and providing evidence-based policy advice has been very relevant to Malaysia, which has relatively high levels of technical capabilities, but still confronts some gaps in skills. In the development of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, for instance, UNDP was involved in 11 of 42 initial strategy papers, but also supported a technical writing workshop for 47 Economic Planning Unit staff. It helped them identify strengths and weaknesses of the Tenth Malaysia Plan Report, and build on lessons learned in terms of ease of readability and coherence. In a project on conserving marine biodiversity, UNDP helped the Department of Marine Parks enhance its capacity to better manage marine parks together with communities, and employ structured management techniques grounded in solid baseline data.

UNDP has progressively sharpened its focus, strengthened its programme management, and addressed implementation challenges. It worked with the Government to review, clarify and document the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the project cycle, for example. But reporting has not consistently focused on results and contributions to outcomes. It tended to foreground the number of projects implemented and the types of project outputs produced, rather than assessing contributions or progress towards intended outcomes.

In sum, UNDP has been a dependable, trusted and responsive development partner, supporting Malaysia in selected sectors. Among its comparative advantages are its neutrality, and its ability to combine international perspectives with local knowledge. By combining deep global knowledge of specific inclusive growth issues with sound local knowledge, it has been able to identify key development gaps, formulate relevant projects, and propose policy options for addressing relative poverty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- As Malaysia prepares to launch its final five-year plan designed to achieve Vision 2020 and high-income status, UNDP should continue to identify gaps and challenges faced by the poorest and most excluded groups to assist Malaysia in reducing inequalities. At the same time, UNDP should help Malaysia look beyond 2020 to continue and/or begin addressing other challenges to sustainable human development that are likely to remain even as economic targets are met.
- In determining specific areas of intervention for the next country programme, UNDP and the Government should identify where UNDP's Strategic Plan 2014-2017, UNDP Malaysia's comparative expertise, the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals and the Government of Malaysia's priorities intersect, to ensure that the country programme is focused and designed to ultimately address the opportunities and capabilities of the poorest and most excluded, as well as promote sustainability.
- UNDP should more systematically use gender analysis and disaggregated data in programme planning and implementation, and should develop a gender strategy to inform its own programme design, appraisal, monitoring and evaluation.
- Given that spatial inequalities remain, UNDP may consider, in consultation with the Government, a stronger state-level engagement in the next country programme, focusing on the states with the highest rates of multidimensional poverty and/or the greatest inequalities.
- UNDP should continue to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation systems, as well as its reporting and communication on results and contributions to outcome-level change.

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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