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## UNDP IN AFGHANISTAN

Conflict in Afghanistan dates back to 1978 and continues to flare. The 2004 Constitution created a presidential form of government and a bicameral legislature, and generous donor funding has backed reconstruction and noticeable gains in health, education, the power supply and gender equality. But services outside major cities remain limited, local governance structures have never been created, and a struggling economy left 42 percent of people living below the poverty line in 2014, up from 33 percent in 2005.

UNDP’s 2010-2014 Country Programme aimed at fostering good governance, peace and stability; and promoting sustainable livelihoods. Interventions to achieve these two outcomes comprised support to the rule of law, demobilization and disarmament, direct support to key democratic events, institutional development and capacity-building, and poverty reduction and the provision of basic social services. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2009 to 2014.

### TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2009–2014: \$3,998 MILLION

#### FUNDING SOURCES, 2009–2013



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



## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Afghanistan has UNDP’s largest country programme, and the organization has played an extensive, very visible role in the country’s reconstruction. Accomplishments have included the demobilization and disarmament of ex-combatants, paying and training the national police force, supporting electoral processes, funding infrastructure development at the district level, and building the capacity of numerous state institutions.

UNDP’s goals during the 2010-2014 Country Programme would have been ambitious in normal circumstances. Given Afghanistan’s difficult security conditions and complex political situation, it was inevitable that the programme would fall short in some aspects.

A long-term presence, political neutrality and transparent accounting for funds uniquely qualified UNDP to implement a wide variety of governance, state-building and security-related programmes. But few interventions addressed sustainable livelihoods and the need for job creation. Assistance was largely confined to cities and central institutions. UNDP approached its massive capacity development portfolio in a disjointed manner, attempting to stop-gap institutional capacity rather than supporting the resolution of structural issues faced by the civil service.

UNDP’s close association with the Government corresponded to the organization’s mandate and approach, and is aligned with the principles of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. Insufficient ties with civil society, however, resulted in missed opportunities to support active organizations that could lobby for improved services, gender equality and accountable government.

UNDP has faced a number of disadvantages in Afghanistan, including the perceptions that it is accustomed to the role of service provider, competes with the Government for donors’ funds, lacks substance and independence, and has insufficient capacity for tangible results. Very few key development results to which UNDP contributed are sustainable beyond international support. Programmes have relied on the assumption that the organization is in the country over the long term.

Even the generally lauded National Area-Based Development Programme suffered from this problem, for instance, by supporting the creation of local infrastructure without sufficient attention to operations and maintenance. Donor-funded temporary civil service personnel, referred to as non-Tashkeel staff, solved capacity gaps in the short term, but very few were transferred into permanent Tashkeel positions. One exception was the

Ministry of Women's Affairs, which added M&E posts, helping to fulfil its mandate of leading oversight of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan.

UNDP offers one of the few channels for donors to support provinces and districts, and has made some promising advances, such as a component under the subnational governance programme that helped 50 municipalities take small but meaningful steps towards service delivery and the collection of revenue. Support on a greater scale, however, will require moving from project-based regional staff to integrated offices fostering coordination across projects and possibly with other organizations as well. Greater coherence and collaboration could also save personnel, financial and logistic resources.

Opportunities for synergies between the UN Mission in Afghanistan and UNDP have not been systematically pursued, beyond effective collaboration on elections. The mission has been and remains one of the most difficult in the world, with frustratingly slow progress and numerous setbacks that have put the UN integrated mission model to a serious test.

During the first years of the period under review, efficiency suffered from a questionable management

culture, with one consequence being an investigation of procurement fraud. Starting in 2012, when a new Country Director was appointed, accountability increased, and office culture appeared to improve. More substantive support was provided from headquarters. At the same time, efficiency needs to be considered in the context of a perpetual conflict. Running costs are exceptionally high and poor security has strong effects on timelines—stronger than generally recognized.

Many donors appear to be open to increased financing of development activities through UNDP, recognizing that there are limited alternatives to deliver on resource commitments made at the Tokyo conference in 2012. Yet trust has been undermined; winning this back will be necessary for UNDP to successfully recast itself as a substantive partner. One way forward may be for UNDP programmes to pay greater attention to Afghan indigenous governance systems, building on the organization's comparative advantages as a provider of governance support. These systems remain a bedrock of Afghan society, and helping to reconcile central and traditional governance and conflict resolution systems could hold some of the keys to future political stability.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- UNDP needs to continue to rebuild confidence with the Government and its donors.
- UNDP should continue to prioritize democratic governance and the rule of law, but must devote greater attention to local governments, the legislature and the judiciary, and should try to contribute more convincingly to the fight against poverty and (where possible) environmental protection.
- UNDP should examine the possibility of setting up additional multi-donor, multilateral trust funds.
- UNDP should strengthen its involvement in aid coordination forums and processes.
- UNDP Country Office management should, as a matter of priority, improve operational capacity and programme effectiveness by rebuilding a cohesive team of national and international staff.
- Subnational governance and service delivery should continue to be a major component of the programme. To that end, UNDP should also establish regional offices that can better integrate UNDP project activities.
- Specific attention needs to be paid to engaging with customary Afghan governance and judicial systems, which may not be up to international standard but have the important advantages of legitimacy and efficacy.
- The strategic coherence of UNDP's capacity development initiatives should be strengthened through stronger support to the Public Administration Reform process. Sustainability of capacity-building results needs more serious consideration. UNDP should consider a gradual increase in national implementation.
- UNDP should reduce its exposure to poor security conditions, by outsourcing some activities, in particular monitoring and evaluation, and by moving some administrative functions outside the country. It could also consider disengaging itself responsibly from its riskiest programme, the largely ineffective APRP.
- The Country Office urgently needs to expand its communications capacity.
- UNDP should reach out to civil society, including through regular information events during the build-up to the elections and by involving carefully selected NGOs as programme implementers, primarily at the provincial and district levels, but also in lobbying, awareness-raising and civic education efforts.

## 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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