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UNDP IN LIBERIA

In recovering from a long civil war, Liberia has seen remarkable efforts by its Government as well as bilateral and multilateral development partners. Fundamental gaps remain, however, such as the large share of Liberians still living in poverty. Closing these dichotomies will be vital to long-term peace.

Starting in 2004, UNDP operated in the context of post-conflict recovery, reconstruction and peacebuilding, with programmes for disarmament, demobilization,

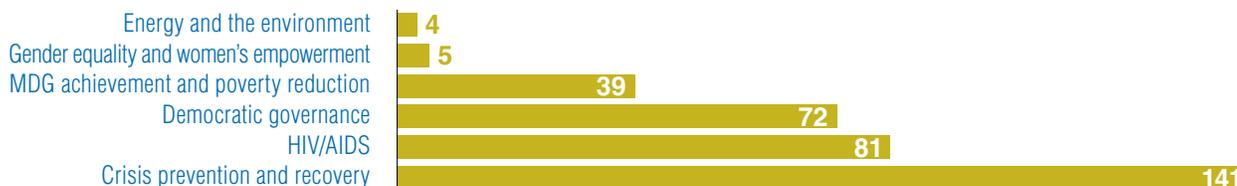
reintegration and rehabilitation; democratic governance; community-based recovery; human rights, protection and gender; capacity-building for the HIV/AIDS response; and environmental management. In 2008, it reduced its focus to democratic governance and pro-poor economic growth. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2004 to 2011.

TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2004-2010 \$342.4 MILLION:

FUNDING SOURCES, 2004-2010



PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY THEMATIC AREA, 2004-2010 (\$ MILLIONS)



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP contributed to all of the most significant priorities of Liberia's transition, as defined by the Government, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and leading analyses of the structural causes of Liberia's conflict. Working with the Governance Commission and other targeted commissions as well as relevant ministries, UNDP sought to address the exclusion of large population segments from decision-making and political power; legislation that institutionalizes ethnic, tribal and religious discrimination; inequitable land distribution; corruption; and human rights violations. It worked on key institutional aspects of the rule of law, with the appropriate exception of the reform of the armed forces.

These areas of work remain key to long-term stability and development, and in most cases, involve managing power relationships. An overall strategic approach was to establish special commissions to analyse issues, develop policies and seek redress. They were mostly ineffectual, however, with insufficient enforcement capacity, and were blocked by vested interests.

By attempting to address as many priorities as possible, UNDP spread its capacity thin, resulting in a lack of technical depth, and compromising programme sustain-

ability and effectiveness. This tendency was exacerbated by the Government's wish to have a neutral agency such as UNDP in a leadership role across many arenas, and the President's direct and successful efforts to mobilize resources by ensuring UNDP involvement.

UNDP's rural development programmes largely consisted of projects implemented quickly, in a semi-humanitarian assistance mode. The development experience gained by UNDP in other post-conflict settings worldwide was not sufficiently applied. Further, low population density and large distances between communities made it more difficult to introduce effective cost-recovery mechanisms to ensure sustainability. Most such schemes are likely to remain dependent on external support or subsidies for a long time.

UNDP positioned itself as a service provider to all donors in the procurement of equipment for the early rehabilitation of essential institutions; managing contracts for rehabilitation and reconstruction; procuring essential supplies for a number of institutions; sponsoring key positions in various branches of Government; managing quick implementation projects on behalf of donors; and administering large multidonor trust funds. This role

strengthened UNDP capacity to support aid coordination. But it also tended to carry on too long, reducing sustainability and adversely affecting national capacity-building. This situation persisted in part because of the continued lack of confidence among other international partners in Liberia's national institutions.

Virtually all government counterparts criticized the efficiency of UNDP's procurement. While delivering on UNDP's fiduciary commitments while meeting programming deadlines posed a challenge in a difficult institutional environment, cumbersome procedures often resulted in goods or services being delivered late.

A significant capacity deficit remains at the level of middle management and below in all government agencies. Education levels are low, and it is difficult to recruit and retain well-qualified Liberians. The problem is severe in Monrovia and considerably more so at sub-national government levels. If the decentralization plans championed by UNDP and the Governance Commission are to succeed, sufficient incentives need to be put in place to attract well-qualified civil servants to local government posts for extended periods of time.

A project-based approach to programmes could have benefited from a more coherent, strategic approach that

capitalized on synergies among UNDP and United Nations country team programmes, especially at the local level, which saw a number of largely parallel interventions. As a whole, the United Nations integration strategy in Liberia was vague, possibly reducing potential benefits. While UNDP backed government-led efforts to define necessary structural changes, for instance, there was relatively little evidence of UNDP using the UNMIL Security Council mandate as leverage with the National Assembly to exert pressure for change in the areas of land reform or anti-corruption and human rights measures.

To fulfil donor requirements, activities and outputs were monitored and reported on a project-by-project basis. There appeared to be no systematic framework for monitoring development results at the outcome/impact or the local/national levels.

As Liberia transitions from UNMIL, UNDP must support national leadership over aid coordination. Efforts underway to support the transition of some projects to a national execution modality should continue, focusing on building national capacities to adopt leadership roles. A continued focus on addressing the root causes of conflict will also be critical to support long-term stability, peace and development in the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- UNDP should focus on more geographically and thematically targeted projects and programmes.
- There is an urgent need for a coherent, strategic and comprehensive programme approach. Synergies and mutual reinforcement need to be captured with a view towards enhancing overall results at the outcome level. Success depends on the extent to which broader structural impediments of progress are addressed.
- UNDP needs to transition away from quickly implemented projects to longer-term development project activities that increasingly place national institutions in the lead of programme management and implementation. These activities should also shift their emphasis from infrastructure rehabilitation and the procurement of equipment to long-term capacity building.
- Every UNDP project should have an explicit exit strategy, developed in conjunction with Liberia's Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs and the counterpart government agency.
- Furthering government efforts to promote gender equality, improve women's access to economic resources and address gender-based violence should be a key dimension of the UNDP programme.
- Given the importance of the UNDP mandate in integrated peacekeeping missions, Member States should consider allocating an assessed budget for governance and essential development aspects of missions.
- UNDP and UNMIL will need to initiate a systematic handover process.
- 'Delivering as One' should harness the technical capacity of the entire United Nations system for joint implementation of programmes and activities.
- UNDP should develop in-house senior technical advisory capacity in each priority thematic area to provide advisory services to the Government, the Resident Coordinator, the UN team and UNDP senior management.
- Cost considerations need to be balanced with those of quality and professional standards. UNDP needs to deploy additional capacity at the county level to ensure systematic monitoring and oversight.

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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