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## UNDP IN COSTA RICA

Costa Rica is a medium-high income country that devotes significant resources to social investment. It has achieved progress in education, health and an increase in per capita income, but with slowing momentum and concerns about inequalities. Under a strongly centralized state, little political and administrative decision-making has devolved to subnational levels. A worrying problem in the last decade has been citizen security.

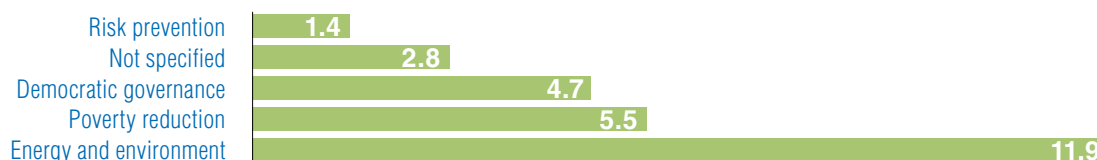
UNDP has supported programmes on human development; reduction of poverty, inequality and social exclusion; the environment, energy and risk management; democracy and governance; and gender equality. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2002 to 2010.

### TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2004-2010: \$26.3 MILLION

#### FUNDING SOURCES, 2006-2010



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



## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In Costa Rica, UNDP had a coherent, effective and substantive programme that made significant contributions to government priorities and the main national human development challenges, despite meagre financial resources. UNDP's most solid achievements related to mainstreaming human development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), backing the formulation of public policies and national development plans, and taking initiatives to ensure compliance with international agreements on environmental protection.

On poverty reduction, inequality and social exclusion, UNDP helped the Government strengthen capacities for conceptualizing and measuring social and economic variables. State capacity to give decentralized attention to disadvantaged populations expanded, including through monitoring of the MDGs and the creation of environmentally sustainable economic enterprises.

UNDP influenced the formulation and implementation of public policies in the fields of biodiversity and water resource protection and management, and sustainable energy, rural electrification and land management. Risk management advanced across different sectors and agencies. The Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme expanded economic opportunities for rural and indigenous communities and women through ecotourism and agroindustry. Results related to the reduc-

tion of ozone-depleting substances were relatively weak.

In democratic governance, UNDP made important contributions to state planning, helping to bolster information systems and implementation capacities at central, sectoral, regional and municipal levels. Citizenship rights and participation improved through the dissemination of knowledge products, technical assistance for consultation processes, and promotion of forums on sensitive public policy issues such as free-trade agreements and the reform of the State.

UNDP also had bearing through practical proposals for public policy. The National Human Development Report on security catalysed actions to address gaps and inequalities. The concept was incorporated into the Integrated and Sustainable Policy for Citizen Security and the Promotion of Social Peace, local security schemes and various prevention programmes.

On gender equality, UNDP supported adjustments of some public policies, including to expand opportunities for representation. It aided in strengthening a gender-sensitive approach in the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and the private sector. National Statistical Indicators for Gender and Economic Management were developed. Inadequate dissemination of good practices resulted in failure to fully capitalize on them, however, and overall the integration of the equality

and gender equity approach was uneven.

With its ethical standards and technical prestige, UNDP was a sought-after partner by the State and society for work on capacity development and knowledge management within the framework of human rights and the values of the United Nations. The organization responded promptly to the specific development challenges faced by a middle-income country.

Insufficient attention to monitoring, evaluation and project formulation had consequences such as the insufficient accuracy of expected results and indicators. Evaluation was scarce and, where present, rarely had any practical bearing. The design and formulation of projects did not sufficiently anticipate and mitigate risks.

Weaknesses in project monitoring and counterpart follow-up led partners to report that UNDP needs to maintain a closer and more consistent link with them and beneficiaries. Projects often involved shared management by a variety of partners, which entailed organizational complications and led to obstacles or delays in execution. Where scenarios of controversy or resistance arose, there were no strategies for communication, advocacy and alliance-building.

The coordination and joint work of the United

Nations system in Costa Rica has been progressively strengthened through successive management efforts of the Resident Coordinators and the involvement of Country Teams. An expression of more active cooperation was the creation of joint programmes and the common monitoring system. Some partners reported some coordination difficulties from the complex procedures of participating agencies.

Financial constraints have been a major challenge. Since 2004, the Government has not contributed financially to the UNDP programme; most resources come from external sources. The effort required to raise funds is costly in terms of human resources, especially considering the small staff. Particularly troubling is the prospect of staff members having to devote more time to fundraising at the expense of programmatic attention.

UNDP has accumulated experience and conceptual capital to address many of challenges of Costa Rica. It has room both to expand its contribution in the country and to disseminate learning in other places, yet its position remains complex due to its financial situation, however. With the imminent graduation of Costa Rica to a net contributor country to the United Nations, UNDP will need to devise a new model to sustain its support.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- UNDP should scale up the integration of human development in the environmental field and strengthen the learning and content coming from these areas into others to advance implementation and synergies with wider priority regional approaches and strategies of donors.
- The country office should be more proactive in the areas of transportation, renewable energy and water governance.
- In the area of democratic governance, UNDP should strengthen practical impact, efficiency and ownership as better conditions for sustainability and replication. An important element is to achieve greater involvement of subnational authorities. The country office can further deepen the programme on security and formalize its current role in the programme to achieve the expected results.
- In the area of gender equality and equity, the country office should integrate this set of issues into the other programme areas, encourage more robust and extensive partnerships, and expand outreach to the media.
- UNDP should reinvigorate the National Human Development Report and place special emphasis on supporting the Government in formulating and implementing long-term strategies to reduce poverty with a focus on human development.
- The country office should review project implementation mechanisms as well as develop and actively implement risk forecasting and mitigation. It should strengthen the formulation of expected results and indicators and baselines, and congruently align evaluation and monitoring for improved results-oriented management.
- The country office should seek ways to more effectively streamline business processes, including in taking up projects according both to priorities and a realistic analysis of human resources.
- UNDP, with appropriate institutional support, should explore with the State how the latter could contribute to a new model to retain and enhance the contribution of UNDP to development in the country.

## 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.

See the full reports at the Evaluation Resource Centre, [erc.undp.org](http://erc.undp.org)