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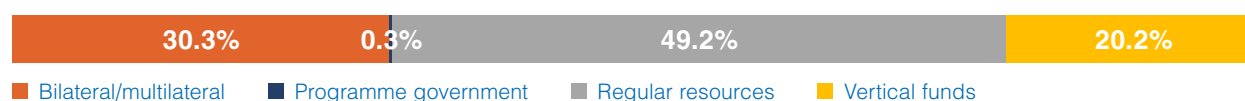
UNDP IN INDIA

While a high growth rate has been among the clear achievements of the Indian economy in the past decade, there are areas of concern with respect to human development, where indicators are relatively poor. Combined with a remarkably vibrant democracy, this creates social and political pressures for policy changes towards greater economic justice. The Government is aware of the multidimensional challenges of ensuring inclusive growth.

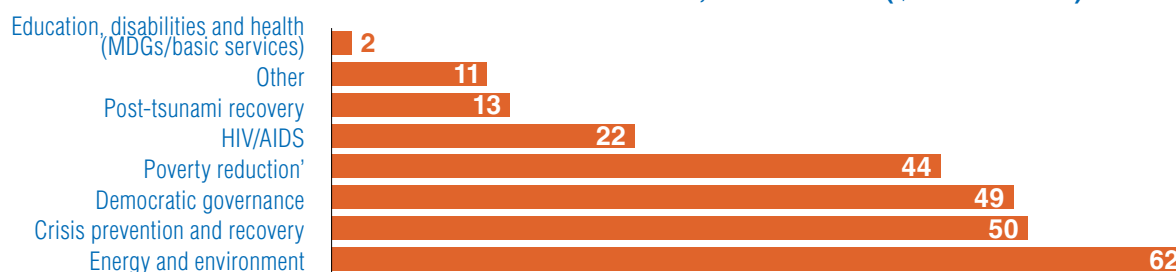
UNDP has provided support on issues including inclusive growth, poverty reduction, gender equality, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the impact of AIDS, responsive governance, conflict and disaster risk management, and environment and energy. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2004 to 2011.

TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2004-2010: \$253.6 MILLION

FUNDING SOURCES, 2004-2011



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



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP's strengths in India emerge from its empathy, flexibility, and efforts to align its activities closely with national and government priorities. These strengths also generate some weaknesses, particularly in terms of overstretch and lack of focus. While UNDP has made efforts to achieve greater focus and reduce the proliferation of activities, this still remains a concern.

In the early phase covered under this evaluation, human development featured as a key organizing principle of UNDP's work. The organization promoted the approach at the state level, and pioneered subnational Human Development Reports (HDRs) that were highly innovative and successful. In the country programme that began in 2008, this focus dissipated, and UNDP did not adequately follow up on its successes. More recently, there were signs that the human development focus was again being emphasized, which was highly welcome.

Such a cross-cutting organizational principle can help UNDP break the current silos among various programme areas and move towards better integrated, cross-thematic work with stronger impact. While individual projects usually fit into national priorities, there was relatively

little collaboration or synergies among them.

Programme effectiveness was variable. Highly effective initiatives included the subnational Human Development Reports, which covered 15 states and 80 districts. In most parts of the country, UNDP is known largely because of these flagship reports, which were widely appreciated and contributed to policy discussions.

Projects to introduce energy efficiency in small-sector tea processing units and remove barriers to energy efficiency in steel re-rolling helped reduce emissions and make available more efficient processes and technologies in energy-intensive units in the informal sector.

Other activities were less immediately effective. Work on access to justice and legal literacy, for example, despite the huge potential of the programme, did not take into account the need for long lead times to build linkages with state and central government legal authorities. An initiative to improve livelihoods in two districts of the state of Orissa was enthusiastically taken up by local authorities, but the project time frame was so short that the exercise mainly resulted in a sense of dissatisfaction with UNDP. Several livelihood projects

were not sufficiently conscious of the need to maintain core labour standards and were implemented in gender-insensitive ways.

The lack of strategic focus and synergies, short implementation periods and sudden stops without careful assessment of the requirements for the ‘last mile’ reduced effectiveness. In the areas of poverty reduction, and energy and environment, given the large number of national and international players interested in similar activities, UNDP needed to highlight the specific value added that it can bring.

There were concerns about delays in starting projects and excessively rigid project cycles. The office structure was too centralized, which prevented the acquisition of locally relevant knowledge in projects in different parts of the country, and did not allow for adequate supervision and monitoring of field projects.

The fragmented nature of the programme put heavy pressure on programme management, while the technical skills of staff were sometimes inadequate. This affected the choice of activities and partners, as well as the capacity to supervise and monitor particular projects, and hampered effectiveness, innovation and learning. In general, there was not enough external networking to ensure awareness of and responsiveness to wider social capacities and demands.

Detailed reporting requirements were very time-consuming and not always very useful. Monitoring and evaluation systems were not put into place or implemented effectively. The current results framework, largely based on a listing of numerical indicators, without an attempt at comparative or counter-factual analysis, does not allow for measuring and demonstrating results in a way that can be useful for future activities.

A major factor affecting both the visibility and sustainability of projects was the lack of engagement with

local and state-level administrations, and the lack of efforts in finding ‘champions’ for continuing initiatives. In some cases, lack of sustainability was built into project design, such as through a lack of exit strategies. Many pilot projects did not lead to replication or upscaling, and, therefore, had little impact.

Partnerships were not fully utilized, and there was untapped potential in developing broader collaboration. UNDP relied mostly on the Government as a partner and so missed some opportunities to cooperate with civil society, academics, development research centres and others. It did not work sufficiently with state and local governments in a systematic and sustained way. Partnerships with other UN agencies could have been more effective with a clearer division of labour.

There was much more potential for systematically promoting South-South cooperation. While UNDP engaged in a number of activities to promote this, these tended to be isolated events rather than a concerted effort. South-South cooperation has great potential to bring lessons from successful experiences elsewhere to India, and disseminate the Indian experiences to other developing countries. UNDP has a potential role as an important knowledge broker helping the Government in its ambitions to provide useful lessons to other countries in the region and beyond.

With development partners at all levels finding it hard to identify a clear mandate for UNDP, it was reassuring to note that the organization has moved to reduce the number of its projects and focus them more strategically. UNDP has made several important contributions to India’s development in the past decade, but it must now reposition itself, and change methods of work substantially in order to meet the changing context within the country and globally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Shift the main focus of UNDP activities away from small projects upstream to become more of a development think-tank, a locus for learning and unlearning about development issues, and engaging in policy advocacy.
- Look for overarching focal issues around which to organize work and shed extraneous or small activities that are not part of the central focus. Human development should once again become the organizing principle for UNDP work in India.
- Strengthen the capacity of the country office, while setting up strong and viable offices in each of the UN Development Assistance Framework states. Shift all field project activity to the relevant states.
- Improve and strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems.

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