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UNDP IN PACIFIC ISLANDS

The Pacific subregion is highly diverse, spanning some 6,000 miles of the Pacific Ocean. Populations tend to be young, and population density is often high, pressuring natural resources. Common development constraints, typical to small island nations, include vast distances, small and dispersed local markets, and high unit costs of social and economic infrastructure. Poverty has become a significant issue in recent years.

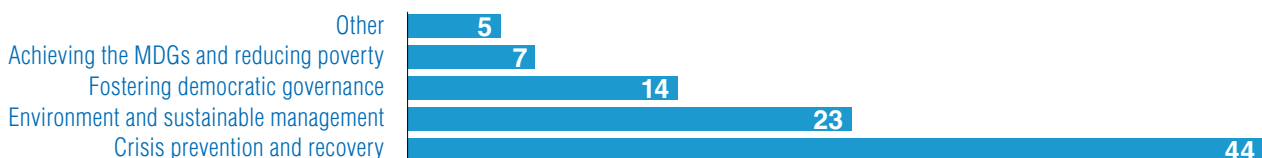
UNDP has two multi-country offices covering 14 Pacific Island countries, with additional support from the UNDP Pacific Centre. Four programme areas are poverty reduction, governance and human rights, crisis prevention and recovery, and environment and sustainable development. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2002 to 2011.

TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2004-2010: \$92.5 MILLION

FUNDING SOURCES, 2004-2010



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



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP in the Pacific made good inroads in mainstreaming the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in national processes and deepening understanding of poverty as a pressing development issue through policy and analytical research. Progress was also notable in some spheres of democratic governance, and crisis prevention and recovery in terms of responding to immediate disasters and strengthening disaster management. Innovative and downstream approaches showed good results in the area of energy and environment.

Gender equality initiatives saw mixed success. Capacity development contributions were fraught with endemic challenges of brain drain, rotation within public services and out-migration. Where expected results were not met or delayed, this was largely due to a combination of factors, including those outside UNDP's control.

UNDP addressed a development agenda relevant to all Pacific Island countries through an overarching strategic programme focus as a basis for individual country projects and initiatives. It demonstrated consistent strategic alignment of activities, was imaginative and responsive, and operated with agility in a dynamic partnership environment. The standard approach that worked for most countries was limited in so-called micro-states, however, where development needs require attention at downstream and local levels. Service provision is more

costly and effort-intensive because of thin government structures and lack of trained people.

Projects were generally well designed in a consultative way, but often suffered from delays caused on both the national and UNDP sides. Many projects operate outside the mainstream action or institutional structure of the government, which makes eventual integration difficult. Yet effectiveness in achieving results as well as sustainability were much greater where projects were driven by a government agency. The integration of MDG processes in national policy and planning, for example, enjoyed significant promise of longer sustainability.

Support to parliaments took a systemic view to enhance capacities in various ways, such as through training, handbooks, and establishment of committee structures, record management systems and procedures. This approach proved effective and sustainable. Other positive experiences emerged in projects with close engagement with civil society organizations in managing resources and processes, backed by commitments by local population groups to sustain project benefits.

Attention to project-level technical monitoring and enhancing access to UNDP's technical knowledge remain urgent necessities. Better acceptance of policy-level work by governments would be facilitated by technical quality assurance by competent professionals.

Project outputs with policy implications also require substantive deliberation over time with different levels in government. Qualified, articulate professionals need to be available periodically at the project level.

Efficiency in programme management was mixed. Overambitious plans and unpredictable sources of funding at times caused initiatives to stall. The main issue of concern was managerial efficiency involving the timeliness of project approvals, timely procurement of inputs and recruitment of technical experts/consultants, and disbursement of funds. A number of issues arose from the challenges to multi-country offices of administering programmes across remote countries and locations.

Efficiency of project management at the site level, especially at subnational or outer island level, was weak. Late designation of counterparts, high turnover, lack of proper understanding of processes, and lack of substance on the project were some chronic problems. High operational costs limited UNDP monitoring. There were endemic rigidities in the national execution and national implementation processes that may have caused some delays. These should be assessed carefully, considering capacity constraints, efficiency and cost.

UNDP missed opportunities to leverage the joint strength of the multi-country offices and the Pacific

Centre in a systematic and synchronized way to deliver the best knowledge, capacity and technical substance at the country level. The lack of an integrated management structure was the main reason for less than optimal performance in this area. In view of the increasing number of agencies with more technical clout crowding the area of the environment, UNDP needs to establish a specific niche for itself, beyond project management, on environmental governance.

UNDP maintained positive partnerships with governments, donors, regional organizations and civil society organizations. Its standing in the Pacific is disproportionately high in relation to the resources it directly contributes, primarily because it has forged strategic partnerships and dealt with partners in a way that generates trust and mutual respect.

Overall, the most distinctive characteristic of UNDP's strategy may be its sustained focus on critically important issues with evolving depth and complexity, requiring advocacy and adequate evidence for generating policy support and strategic directions. Longer term support allows the space and time for countries to develop national positions, internalize these in institutional structures and develop adequate capacity to move forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The four outcome areas with gender equality as a cross-cutting theme continue to be most relevant for the Pacific Island countries. The next programme cycle should continue and consolidate in those areas.
- UNDP's emphasis on work at the central and policy level should be balanced with opportunities for work at the downstream and outreach level with civil society organizations and communities.
- UNDP should accord priority and adequate technical support to project cycle management. Project formulation should be addressed in a technically competent fashion.
- Efficiency issues should be addressed on a number of fronts: Choice of implementation mode should be guided by the country situation rather than the corporate prescription of UNDP; more flexible human resources modalities or options for project-level recruitment should be introduced; and delays in fund transfers to projects should be addressed.
- Production of a periodic subregional Human Development Report should be considered to facilitate advocacy on sensitive issues and to provide added support for promotion of and compliance with UN values.
- Connect, integrate and infuse UNDP's global knowledge and solutions in Pacific project level work.
- Introduce an institutional oversight system that would enable the multi-country offices and the Pacific Centre to consolidate the organization's strength to deliver better quality development assistance. The performance of the current rules of engagement should be reviewed and applied with regular oversight by the senior management of the offices and the Pacific Centre. A dedicated participatory management deliberation between the offices, the Pacific Centre and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific is recommended to seriously explore potential options and follow up with bold decisions to implement all consequential changes

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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