EVALUATION BRIEF JULY 2011

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INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION MALAWI

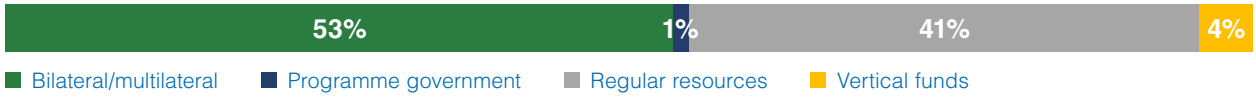
UNDP IN MALAWI

Malawi is a small, landlocked country that ranks among the poorest nations. The population is predominantly rural although rapidly urbanizing. Key issues include democratic accountability and access to justice and to social services, especially for the most vulnerable groups. The country depends heavily on donor assistance, which typically comprises 30 percent of the national budget.

UNDP programmes have addressed challenges related to poverty reduction and economic growth, energy and the environment, governance, gender and women's empowerment, mainstreaming of HIV and AIDS, and capacity 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: $144.7 MILLION

FUNDING SOURCES, 2004-2010



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

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP has been highly relevant to Malawi's development needs and the overall mandate of promoting sustainable human-centred development underpinned by poverty reduction, equity, fairness and justice. The organization demonstrated a great deal of responsiveness to emerging needs, including by reorganizing some of its activities into a cluster focusing on growth and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in response to the Government's emphasis on sustainable economic growth.

Programmes have paid particular attention to the human development dimensions of gender equality, women's rights and vulnerable groups. In achieving these objectives, however, UNDP has not focused on selected areas of strategic significance. It has been reactive rather than proactive, and has not been as well targeted, deliberate or transparent as it might have been. It did not take advantage of complementarities among interventions. There was some indication, however, of a shift to a more measured and strategic response.

Some notable contributions to development results included support for holding credible elections, progressive expansion of the civil society network on human rights, development of capacity in data collection and analysis, and development of systems, institutions and policies that have served as a framework for the country's decentralization programme.

As part of public sector reform and service delivery, UNDP adopted a three-pronged approach to capacity development, focusing on improving the policy environment, developing and strengthening institutions, and developing human resources. This led to stronger capacities to implement the MDGs, and coordinate and manage development assistance.

An imbalance between the demand for upstream and downstream activities meant that programmes were skewed towards upstream activities in response to government demand. Although UNDP engages in a number of downstream activities, some informants suggested these operated without a clearly defined strategy or policy framework. More recently, UNDP concentrated downstream work in areas where policy development is one of the preconditions for providing sustainable solutions to development problems. This was the case in strengthening the microfinance system, where UNDP worked with other donors to bolster a policy and institutional environment conducive to pro-poor provision of microfinance services, using best practices.

Despite a greater emphasis on upstream work, UNDP is more successful in its downstream interventions, partly because upstream activities face more obstacles to efficacy. Most of the upstream work has succeeded in producing outputs, such as policies and strategies, but not many of them have been approved by the Government

or implemented. UNDP has not generally exploited its role as a trusted government partner to influence institutional changes, particularly implementation of sectoral policies developed with its support.

National partnership continues to be biased towards the central Government. UNDP needs to expand its work with local authorities or make clear its comparative advantage and how it will seek partnerships to enhance links with the local level. Programmes involving work with local authorities and non-state actors have been more successful and have a high prospect of sustainability. Expanding the UN Delivering as One initiative has the potential to enhance such initiatives.

In general, weak links between outputs, indicators and outcomes in the results framework led to an apparent lack of coherence among the interventions as well as mixed effectiveness of some. A well-articulated programme framework might have helped highlight risks and conditions for success, and the potential roles of partners in jointly achieving outcomes.

The lack of well-designed, comprehensive strategies undercut sustainability. Although most programmes included capacity development and used national implementation, most had no explicit exit strategies. Often the absence of government funding further hampered sustainability. Some downstream activities were highly dependent on UNDP, demonstrating little government commitment in terms of counterpart funding or integration of innovations into mainstream government activities. As a result, opportunities were few for downstream activities to scale up after UNDP funding phased out.

Performance was greatly hampered by inefficiency, due to issues involving dependence on resource mobilization and internal systems. UNDP approaches were widely acknowledged as sound, but their ability to catalyse other activities was constrained by rigidities in systems and procedures. These manifested, for example, in delayed disbursement of resources to implementing partners.

In sum, UNDP support ranks relatively high on relevance and effectiveness, but less so on sustainability and efficiency. It could do more in building on core comparative advantages, such as by taking a more focused approach to programmes, and ensuring follow-through on policy and other upstream interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- UNDP needs to rationalize its programme portfolio in line with its comparative advantage and to respond to emerging issues that are critical to UNDP and to Malawi. Governance remains a critical development challenge; UNDP should consider extending its focus to economic governance, while also streamlining the breadth of its focus. It should concentrate on capacity-building and coordination of multistakeholder governance activities, especially in elections. In terms of pro-poor growth, it needs to scale up advocacy for poverty reduction and human rights. Partnerships with civil society, the private sector and local institutions need strengthening.
- UNDP should expand its capacities for policy analysis and engagement so it can fully exploit its comparative advantage in upstream work.
- UNDP should use its privileged position with the Government to engage in dialogue to facilitate adoption of policies already developed and implementation of policies already adopted, along with other key initiatives.
- In its downstream activities, UNDP should shift its approach from direct interaction with beneficiaries to building the capacity of service providers such as the private sector, NGOs and other non-state actors.
- UNDP should consider adopting a political economy approach, which entails understanding the realities of power relations, incentives and change processes, to the analysis of development challenges in order to inform overall programme design.
- UNDP should move away from a project approach and towards a programme approach. This will encourage integration of related activities into one programme, and ensure coherence and strategic focus.
- UNDP should design programmes with realistic budgets to improve efficiency.
- UNDP should endeavour to strengthen the capacity of its implementing partners in monitoring, evaluation, financial management and report writing.

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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