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## UNDP IN CAMBODIA

Cambodia has undertaken a triple transition from conflict to peace, from autocracy to democracy, and from a centrally planned economy to market-based economic development. Despite enormous challenges, and while remaining a poor country, Cambodia has achieved considerable economic success in the past decade. Various social indicators related to health, education and other social services also point towards improving trends.

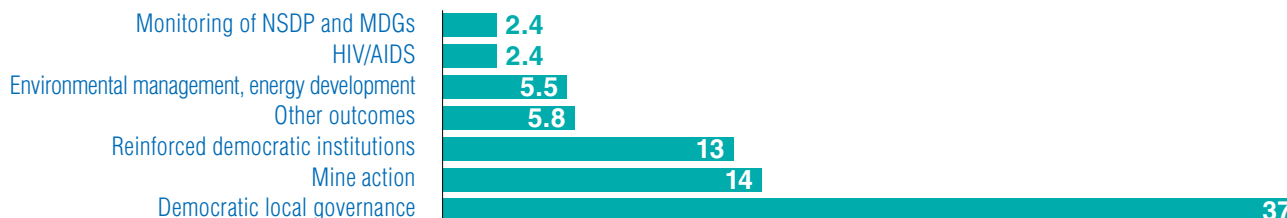
UNDP has provided support in such diverse areas as aid coordination, democratization, decentralization, environmental conservation, and poverty alleviation through employment creation. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2001 to 2010.

### TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2006-2010: \$173.6 MILLION

#### FUNDING SOURCES, 2006-2010



#### PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY OUTCOME, 2006-2008 (\$ MILLIONS)



## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Across the spectrum of UNDP activities in Cambodia, a great deal was achieved in building institutions and capacities. Yet outcomes were compromised by a lack of focus on people. In democratization and decentralization programmes, participation and empowerment remained limited; in environmental programmes, there was more emphasis on conservation than on sustainable livelihoods; in poverty-related programmes, more success was achieved in building capacity for market-led development than in creating employment opportunities.

Through the democratization programme, UNDP helped the Government implement major reforms in the electoral process, and the 2008 national elections were widely acknowledged to have been more ‘free and fair’ than the previous ones. Yet little effort was made to strengthen civil society organizations and thereby develop the democratic space for citizens at large.

Far-reaching contributions towards developing the structures and systems of decentralization and local governance sought to enhance people’s participation and improve the government’s ability to more effectively provide services. For the first time, this has made it possible for ordinary citizens to participate in local decision-making.

The full potential of these structures and systems has yet to be fulfilled, however, with wide variance in participation among communes.

The environmental programme accomplished a great deal, but only a few specific pilot projects emphasized sustainable livelihoods by using the community-based natural resource management approach—with a good deal of success. In the biggest environmental project, for the Tonle Sap Basin, UNDP moved away from this approach. As a result, the Tonle Sap Project and several others showed considerable success primarily in conserving biodiversity. One possible reason for this imbalance lies in the excessive reliance of UNDP on the Global Environment Facility, which is primarily concerned with conservation, for financing its environmental projects.

Poverty-related activities have built capacity for private-sector led development through reliance on the forces of the market and globalization, but little was achieved in introducing a pro-poor bias. In choosing products for export, no special consideration was given to small producers, for instance. UNDP needs to be more involved in rural and agricultural development, where poverty is most heavily concentrated.

Along with other UN organizations, UNDP has helped Cambodia develop a sophisticated and unique institutional structure for mainstreaming gender in government departments and ministries. Gender mainstreaming action groups have been set up in a number of ministries; many have produced gender mainstreaming action plans, some of which have received budgetary support. Yet national capacity to manage this structure is severely limited. The most significant capacity development has occurred in the Ministry of Women's Affairs, but the ministry does not have enough human resources to support all gender mainstreaming action groups.

Potential synergies across programme areas could be exploited, such as between environmental and poverty projects. The wide-ranging effort to set up a decentralization structure should help make community-based initiatives more effective and efficient. If successful execution of community-based projects can be tied with local government planning, this would lend credibility and effectiveness to decentralization.

Strong partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders earned UNDP high regard. Yet sustaining strategic collaboration with other development partners is a challeng-

ing task, especially in a country where many agencies are competing. While UNDP generally met this challenge, areas of concern included the lack of consensus on the objective of the decentralization programme. Cambodia has an elaborate structure for aid coordination, and UNDP has played a vanguard role in developing institutional capacity to handle coordination, some parts of the system are not functioning as well as expected.

Efficiency could be enhanced by fully exploiting potential programme synergies and taking active steps to find partners to scale up pilot initiatives. The high rate of staff turnover has potentially deleterious effects.

While UNDP emphasizes capacity building, in practice this has been hampered by the de facto conversion of the national execution modality into the direct execution modality. Salary supplements for project staff raise questions about incentives beyond the project period.

Few countries have changed as radically as Cambodia has during the last two decades, and UNDP has been a steady partner in this change, responding to evolving needs. As successful as support has been, regular reflection is needed to maintain a focus on accelerating human development and real improvements in people's lives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- UNDP needs to change its approach towards civil society, strengthening it with a view to developing capacities.
- UNDP should devise structures that forge the link between conservation and livelihood more effectively.
- To better integrate livelihood concerns into conservation projects, UNDP should forge partnerships with other agencies concerned primarily with human lives and livelihoods while pursuing environmental objectives.
- UNDP should introduce a more explicit pro-poor bias into its poverty reduction programme.
- To accelerate poverty reduction, UNDP should engage more in agricultural and rural development activities, preferably by entering into collaboration with other development partners.
- UNDP should exploit potential synergies among its programme areas to the fullest.
- UNDP successfully involves other development partners at the stage of execution and implementation of projects, but it needs to do more to ensure cooperation at the stage of project design.
- UNDP needs to do more to bridge the conceptual divide among its partners in decentralization projects, helping the Government devise an efficient system for combining governance reform with service delivery.
- UNDP could play a more active role in revitalizing aid coordination, making use of the goodwill it enjoys.
- To enhance UNDP's ability to offer imaginative ideas quickly in response to changing country needs, it should restore the flexibility and quick response ability of the Insight for Action Initiative.
- To enhance effectiveness and efficiency, UNDP should move faster towards a programme-based approach.
- UNDP should make a systematic attempt to convert pilot initiatives into larger-scale activities, and seek out partners through whom the scaling up can be achieved.
- UNDP should make greater effort to separate technical support from capacity building support, and find innovative ways of combining the two in a synergistic rather than competitive relationship.
- UNDP should further strengthen its effort to mainstream gender in the work of sectoral ministries; the UN country team should also mainstream gender in work across the board.

## 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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