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UNDP IN CHINA

China has witnessed a remarkable transformation during the past 30 years towards the goal of *Xiaokang*—building a moderately prosperous harmonious socialist society. Impressive gains have been made across the dimensions of human development: income, health and education. Energy efficiency and energy-saving measures have been introduced, combined with structural changes in the economy to cut emissions. China still faces multiple

challenges in the sustainability and inclusiveness of its growth, however.

UNDP has contributed to development results in poverty reduction, democratic governance, environment and energy, HIV and AIDS, and global partnerships. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2006 to 2009.

TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2008-2009: \$137 MILLION

FUNDING SOURCES, 2006-2009



PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY THEMATIC AREA, 2008-2009 (\$ MILLIONS)



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The UNDP country programme was well aligned with national development priorities in China. UNDP acted on emerging needs and new opportunities, and contributed to a number of development results. Although core funds are limited and largely programmed, adequate mechanisms enabled a prompt response to key events, such as the major earthquake in Sichuan in 2008.

UNDP's relevance stems from its contribution to United Nations goals and values in at least three areas. The first is the close alignment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with China's own vision of a *Xiaokang* society. The second derives from gender equality being one of UNDP's priorities, with stakeholders noting that they might not have adopted a gender perspective without continuous advocacy from UNDP. The third contribution derives from the special attention paid by UNDP to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, especially in the areas of poverty reduction, democratic governance and HIV/AIDS.

A re-orientation of the project portfolio increased effectiveness through a shift from a diverse conglomeration of projects to flagship programmes designed to inform and support policy-making and human development. UNDP placed greater emphasis on the central level and macro policy interventions, and paid greater attention to complex development issues such as the spe-

cial needs of migrant workers and ethnic communities. It helped to better showcase China's achievements globally by encouraging and supporting many initiatives that promote South-South cooperation and global exchange.

Important contributions by UNDP poverty reduction initiatives included integrating the MDGs into China's vision of a *Xiaokang* society and strengthening the links between fiscal reforms and poverty reduction. Democratic governance projects, though relatively small in terms of financial commitments, contributed to capacity development, policy research and advocacy, helping to open space for civil society and enhance human rights protections for poor and disadvantaged groups. For the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, UNDP backed capacity development for planning and coordination, and helped strengthen leadership at various levels and develop new regulations.

Work on energy efficiency supported the commercialization and promotion of new and renewable energy technologies in industries, effectively brokering the mobilization of capital resources for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, and developing systems that improve coordination, working relationships, and performance among partners and government agencies. Assistance helped in finding market-linked and -based solutions to improving energy efficiency, and supported

regulations, codes, guidelines, standards and labels for energy efficiency and conservation in some energy-consuming industries. The effective use of media increased awareness among the public, the government and the private sector.

Several significant outputs from biodiversity conservation projects stemmed from a focus on policy and legal reform, partnerships, engagement of civil society, financing mechanisms, institutional strengthening and influencing public opinion about the value of biodiversity. Mainstreaming biodiversity into planning and investment processes has made significant progress, and partnerships between the Ministry of Environmental Protection, civil society organizations and academia have been established for promoting biodiversity conservation.

During the past three decades, UNDP has cooperated with almost all central government departments, although engagement with provincial governments remains relatively weak. Strategic partnerships have also been forged with the private sector, think tanks, academia, media and national NGOs. Partnerships have effectively increased China's international participation

and cooperation, with a noteworthy example being the International Poverty Reduction Centre. UNDP helped establish the Centre and build its capacity to facilitate the sharing of China's poverty alleviation experience with other developing countries, particularly in Africa.

There is considerable scope for improving programme management. While a majority of stakeholders were satisfied with it, they pointed to gaps in procedures as well as knowledge and competencies to tackle some complex issues. Top-level expertise to advise on policy matters in many development areas is not readily available. Further, UNDP monitoring and evaluation activities are not standardized, and there are few checks to control quality.

During the past three decades, UNDP cooperation in China has ranged over multiple topical and geographical areas. During this period, the nature of the cooperation has evolved considerably, and the interaction with governmental and other national partners at the central, provincial and local levels has widened. Overall, UNDP has become a trusted development partner to China due to its perceived impartiality and neutrality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Refine the strategic vision that UNDP has articulated for China's development, in close consultation with the Government. Limited UNDP resources should be used more strategically to catalyse public action in areas where need is greatest, and to mobilize additional resources for a country of such enormous size and diversity.
- Concentrate on three flagship interventions: Critical international issues, such as climate change, food security and a low carbon economy; critical domestic issues, such as human development, livelihoods, urbanization, migration and ageing; and China's integration with the world.
- Ensure balance between upstream and downstream initiatives. There should be a systematic review of the experience, context and opportunities in each practice area as the basis for arriving at a balance. When engaged in upstream work, UNDP should facilitate the mainstreaming of the best practices of local projects and replicate innovative approaches.
- Retain existing good cooperation with key ministries in the central Government; actively involve local governments in the design and implementation of UNDP projects; and extend partnerships to civil society organizations and the private sector in a strategic and systematic manner.
- Further mobilize additional financial resources and engage in a round of discussions to develop a long-term perspective on funding for China's development.
- Enhance UNDP capacity to match China's needs, and to bridge the knowledge and information gap between international organizations and local partners. Realign staff and work culture to enhance organizational effectiveness and become a more rigorous, results-focused organization.
- Set up a unified programme and project information system, especially to manage projects with different funding sources.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation, including through developing an outcome evaluation plan, and new methodologies to evaluate 'soft interventions'.

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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