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UNDP IN MALDIVES

A small island developing state, the Maldives is exposed to external shocks such as the December 2004 tsunami. Rising sea levels may cause many islands to disappear, while other islands may become too densely populated to sustain their population. Moreover, the Maldives faces serious economic challenges arising from the narrow economic base comprised almost exclusively of tourism and fisheries. Dealing with recent graduation from least

developed country status and further sustaining democratization and respect are other major challenges.

UNDP activities include programmes on poverty reduction, democratic governance, the environment and disaster management. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2003 to 2010.

TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2004-2010: \$61.4 MILLION

FUNDING SOURCES, 2004-2008



ALLOCATED RESOURCES BY THEMATIC AREA, 2004-2008 (\$ MILLIONS)



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP's presence and contribution is of paramount importance to the Government of the Maldives, especially as most donors do not prioritize the country. This also means, however, that the organization stretches too few human and financial resources over a very wide range of interventions. Although these were relevant, they were sometimes not sufficiently fitted to institutional priorities and may have overstretched government capacity. The most valued UNDP attributes included its long-standing presence, flexibility and responsiveness, including to unplanned emergencies or changing development plans, and its ability to provide international expertise.

UNDP's support to new democratic institutions was widely recognized, although democratic gains are still fragile, and the capacity of key institutions such as Parliament and the judiciary remains worryingly weak. Results from support to livelihoods and post-tsunami reconstruction at the atoll and island level were mixed. Some individuals and communities benefited; others were not able to use or to sustain the benefits extended to them. There were complaints of irregularity, lack of transparency and wastage. Insufficient capacity has been developed to enable islanders to tap into regional or national systems—markets, transport, knowledge and investment opportunities, among others.

Gender equality and youth remained major areas for support. In spite of progress towards gender parity at primary and secondary levels of education, gender equality and the rights of women were a particular concern at a time when conservative trends threaten progress. Capacity for gender analysis and programming was limited within the country and appeared insufficiently developed within UNDP, however. UNDP and the UN system played an important role in drawing national attention to youth issues through their support for the Youth Voices report and its laudable participatory process. But follow-up was inadequate, boding ill for the country's future political and socioeconomic development given a number of challenges faced by young people today.

Although HIV/AIDS was recognized as a threat of potentially disastrous proportions at the central level, there was little awareness of the problem at the local level. The effectiveness of the HIV/AIDS programme was limited due partly to the focus of the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria on numerical targets rather than qualitative results, and partly due to lack of clarity regarding roles and ownership. Efforts may not be sustainable because limited capacity has been built.

UNDP has been effective in advocacy, including through its support to the Millennium Development

Goals and Youth Voices reports. Reports of the independent UN-appointed Special Rapporteurs have not been utilized fully as advocacy tools, however. Some positive results in capacity development at the policy level took place in the area of energy, effective waste management and climate change. But opportunities to develop national capacities are sometimes missed through reliance on international rather than national consultants, and the failure to pair nationals with internationals to enable learning.

The view of UNDP effectiveness at the island/atoll level is very different from that at the central level. In disaster management support, the central level believed that UNDP had responded well in efforts to strengthen national capacity, including by integrating disaster risk reduction in the national building code and school curriculum. At the island/atoll level, however, there appeared to be little awareness of how to deal with disaster.

UNDP programme design and implementation need to be more robust. The practice of embarking on projects with budgets that are partly unfunded, on the basis

that the remainder would be raised while implementation proceeds, was a risky one. In general, risk factors were identified at the project formulation stage, but it was not clear that mitigation strategies would effectively deal with the risks or that key barriers were identified and addressed. Few projects had developed exit strategies; among those that had strategies, there were question marks as to whether they will work.

One important measure to facilitate project implementation was to enable partners to address lack of clarity and tensions through joint task forces and other mechanisms. For the important Atoll Ecosystem-based Conservation Project, mid-term evaluation findings were used to support a participatory revision by project management and stakeholders, leading to valuable intermediate results.

In sum, the experience of the Maldives has many ingredients that may be relevant for other country offices. These include the need to achieve more with fewer interventions and to take a more strategic approach, while addressing the barriers of weak policy and capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- UNDP should continue to provide support to the small UN country team to strive towards a higher level of joint planning, implementation and monitoring.
- UNDP must adopt a more strategic approach in its country programme—an approach that has a sharp focus on a narrower range of themes while addressing the main barriers of weak policy and weak capacity.
- The programme focus should continue to be upstream, at the central and (eventually) provincial level.
- UNDP should reduce poverty alleviation work at the community level and concentrate on the policy level.
- The country programme should continue to focus on governance/human rights as a flagship theme at the central level, with particular emphasis on the judiciary and parliamentary development; and it should move into provincial government support as and when the decentralization policy starts showing results.
- UNDP should refocus environment work on climate and biodiversity while broadening the resource base beyond the Global Environment Facility and exploring the possibility of support from the private sector.
- Pass on the coordination and initiative on disaster and risk management activities to the National Disaster Management Centre, ensuring that it is strengthened as part of programme implementation.
- Develop government capacity to manage the HIV/AIDS programme with a view to handing over the programme to the Government and giving the lead within the UN country team to UNFPA and WHO.
- UNDP should adopt and support a strategic approach to gender equality.
- While not necessarily taking a programme lead on youth, UNDP should facilitate UN country team action to support a sustained and strategic national intervention to tackle this pressing concern.
- Except for one-off responses to emerging needs, UNDP must ensure that a project fits within the strategic framework of the Country Programme Document outcomes, which in turn should fit with the UN Development Assistance Framework.
- All interventions must aim to increase local capacity and enhance empowerment.
- Engage in effective performance monitoring for adaptive management and make exit strategies and sustainability plans an essential element of all projects.

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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