

UNDP IN BARBADOS AND OECS

Most Eastern Caribbean countries are relatively well off. But considerable poverty, under-employment, institutional capacity weaknesses, and gender and social inequities remain. Weak government accountability, poor overall economic diversification and vulnerability to extreme weather events are among other factors pointing to the many pressing and sensitive challenges the subregion faces in balancing prosperity and risk.

UNDP's subregional office covers Barbados and the nine members and associate members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), offering programmes on governance, poverty reduction, and the environment and disaster management/response. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 2001 to 2008.

TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 2001-2008: \$52.5 MILLION

FUNDING SOURCES, 2001-2007



PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY PRACTICE AREA, 2001-2008 (\$ MILLIONS)



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP's commendable programme in the Eastern Caribbean enjoys a strong profile and reputation. Sustained relevance has been due to UNDP responding to evolving partner needs and maintaining key partnerships. National stakeholders, including net-contributing countries (NCCs), considered the organization's presence to be very important in highlighting considerable remaining economic disparities and vulnerabilities among and within countries.

In general, UNDP is highly respected for its consistent focus on improving human and social development. Social policy analysts and public sector managers said that they depended on UNDP to advocate on their behalf with politicians and policymakers regarding the importance of ensuring equitable and sustainable economic growth through the continued integration of social protection and anti-poverty measures.

UNDP's comparative advantage stems from addressing social development issues mainly in the broader upstream areas of leadership, policy consultation, advocacy, technical capacity development and networking. Effective examples of this type of assistance were observed, for example, in the Support for Poverty Assessment and Reduction in the Caribbean project. It represents a best practice for direct UNDP engagement with cross-cutting regional and subregional social pol-

icy issues. Aimed at improving statistical research on addressing the roots of poverty, it helped, for instance, in developing and using Millennium Development Goal (MDG) indicators relevant to high- and middle-income countries.

To maximize synergies inherent in linking development concerns at national, subregional and regional levels, an overarching subregional programme framework, as opposed to a multicountry approach where each country is dealt with separately, appeared to be fully justified. Yet overall development performance and effectiveness varied. Although many useful short-term results were achieved, including good contributions to country and subregional development objectives, only moderate progress was made towards longer term development results.

A complete withdrawal from direct implementation within countries could lead to a decline in visibility—one of the factors underlying UNDP credibility in some areas. But too much involvement in direct project support in small countries did not seem feasible given the large number of countries, their widely differing development status and the relatively small amount of available resources. In most cases, strategic leveraging of resources or cooperative arrangements with agencies that have appropriate expertise in community implementation would be more appropriate.

Some missed opportunities were apparent in establishing more effective development partnerships with NCCs, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The first group, for example, has the potential ability to contribute more fully to the subregional programme not only monetarily, but also in knowledge sharing through South-South cooperation. UNDP lacked a clear strategy for consistently engaging with non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

Weaknesses in management systems included a marked absence of adequate internal monitoring and evaluation. No links were made between critical reviews of progress towards development results and ongoing tracking of resource expenditures. It was therefore impossible to accurately judge overall cost-effectiveness or cost-efficiency. The lack of available overhead from project-based work for the subregional office appeared

to lead to chronic understaffing, overwork and unsustainable multitasking on the part of staff. Financial sustainability appeared to need more attention, given dependence on a single cost-sharing arrangement for one large regional initiative.

Overall, all major development stakeholders, including UNDP, agree that the region and subregion need a more nuanced classification of countries to depict the special circumstances and vulnerabilities of small island developing states. That said, UNDP continues to play an important broad strategic role in the subregion, particularly on common development concerns that require a coordinated 'big picture' response. UNDP has filled a key niche and is well positioned—with some adjustments—to continue as a lead actor on issues of small island developing states, regional economic integration, the MDGs and climate change adaptation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The UNDP subregional programme should focus its priorities on upstream initiatives (e.g., policy, advocacy, multistakeholder coordination, networking, knowledge brokering and capacity-building) that will concretely address broad underlying issues, particularly related to poverty and social vulnerability in the Eastern Caribbean as a key development theme.
- UNDP should increase its focus on South-South cooperation and define a clear action plan for implementing and measuring the effects of these activities in a more systematic way in order to build on the inherent opportunities for enhanced South-South knowledge exchange, particularly between NCCs and non-NCCs.
- UNDP should increase consultation with, as well as revise, update and expand its relationships with NCCs to maximize emerging opportunities for upstream, knowledge-based programming.
- UNDP should strengthen partnerships with the private sector and play a proactive advocacy role in linking government, the private sector and NGOs on environmental, social and climate change adaptation issues.
- The office should develop a detailed resource mobilization strategy with specific targets and timelines.
- UNDP should integrate climate change adaptation as a cross-cutting issue across all programme areas.
- UNDP should help convene and coordinate key stakeholders in order to support the creation of a standardized vulnerability analysis tool or index that can be used to more accurately describe and rank the countries of the Caribbean, especially small island developing states–NCCs.
- UNDP headquarters should formally designate UNDP Barbados as a subregional office (with an appropriate name such as 'UNDP Eastern Caribbean') rather than as a country office, and should work closely with the Resident Representative and senior managers in order to develop a customized management strategy and set of procedures or tools that are better suited to the special requirements of this type of office.
- Overall coherence and results focus should be improved by strengthening the capacity of the subregional office to utilize results-based management and by ensuring that all funded initiatives clearly contribute to achievement of longer-term programme outcomes, with priority given to upstream policy/advocacy objectives.
- Well-defined sustainability strategies should be incorporated into every subregional programme initiative.
- UNDP should selectively increase its on-the-ground presence in countries receiving target for resource assignment from the core funds, at least on a short-term or temporary basis, in order to build technical and implementation capacity within countries.

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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