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UNDP IN BANGLADESH

As the world's second largest less developed country, Bangladesh is clearly a crucial player in the global fight against poverty. It has made significant progress in reducing human poverty and improving macroeconomic fundamentals as well as social indicators. Preventing reversals and sustaining gains achieved over the past decade poses challenges on many fronts, however, including accelerating inequalities, a deteriorating gov-

ernance situation, environmental degradation, recurring natural disasters and the impending phase out of the Multi Fibre Agreement.

UNDP support has encompassed programmes on poverty alleviation, the environment and governance. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 1996 to 2004.

TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE, 1996-2005: \$153.6 MILLION

PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY THEMATIC AREA, 2003 (\$ MILLIONS)



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP has been a longstanding supporter of environmental issues in Bangladesh, and built on this background to support the Government in preparing the National Environmental Action Plan. An intensely participatory process created broad based ownership, and prompted a series of measures such as a ban on plastic bags and vehicle conversions to reduce air pollution.

To help operationalize activities foreseen in the Plan, UNDP launched a \$26 million initiative that included advocacy and awareness raising as well as successful subnational initiatives. One prominent example was the Solid Waste Management Project. UNDP also played a key role in developing the Water Resources Management Act and the National Forestry Policy; conservation of the Sundarbans; and integrated pest management and national land use policies.

When UNDP has gained a high level of respect in a given area in Bangladesh, it has gone beyond advocacy to consensus-building and coordination of multipartner inputs. This was the case with the Human Security Report, which provided an in-depth analyses of the human security situation and legal framework for human security in Bangladesh. Covering sensitive issues such as the obstacles faced by the poor in accessing justice and dealing with the police, it was followed by the Police Reform Project in partnership with Government.

A local government project in Sirajganj was selected by the Government for scaling up based on its success in engaging local people in local development pro-

cesses. The project resulted in more effective use of local resources and increased revenue mobilization, among other achievements.

Operating in a politically polarized context required cultivating relationships with pro-development elements in the Government. UNDP successfully balanced the recognition that the Government is led by the elected representatives of the people with the fact that serious concerns over the state's accountability to its constituents persist. It chose to undertake "neutral" initiatives to help the poor, while also maintaining strict neutrality in taking on some sensitive issues, such as activities in contested areas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

A growing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society mobilization have greatly contributed to human development achievements in Bangladesh. UNDP provided a useful platform for active NGOs to engage in dialogue with the Government. Some difficulties in undertaking large, multisectoral initiatives, however, arose in terms of managing relationships with the Government and coordinating a number of NGO partners.

UNDP has benefited from the service delivery capabilities of NGOs. Closer collaboration with proactive, experienced and credible NGOs should include their involvement in identifying and conceptualizing appropriate initiatives. This could help UNDP avoid mistakes such as it encountered in community empowerment projects, which were closed when it became apparent

that other organizations offered greater expertise in this arena. The expert panel of the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme would be a useful model for the future.

Country office management often faced a conflict between the headquarters' requirement to spend core resources to the available ceiling, and the need to move upstream and engage in more advocacy and policy formulation initiatives. Upstream activities consume much more staff time but are unlikely to generate high core expenditures. Downstream projects are more likely to relieve delivery concerns.

Continued strengthening of the two-way link between local initiatives and upstream efforts will continue to be vital to the effectiveness of UNDP support. Experience at the field level, for instance, lends credibility at the national level, as has been the case in the environment portfolio. In selecting pilot initiatives, UNDP should keep in mind its comparative advantage and the potential for influence on national policy making, along

with cost effectiveness, local capacity and broad-based participation.

Strengthening UNDP's contribution to development effectiveness is only possible if there is rigorous use of available evidence about what works and what fails. Within the Management for Results framework, existing monitoring systems must be systematically expanded to cover outputs and, where possible, indicators of success associated with delivery. Evidence need not be collected only from within UNDP's own evaluation and assessment mechanisms. NGOs active in practically every village could be sources of information.

UNDP has overcome earlier programme delivery challenges and effectively mobilized external resources while improving its strategic focus. Moving forward, it can do more to address the emerging priorities of the country, including in championing policy alternatives for pro-poor growth to counter the accelerating rise in inequalities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In order to address the rising inequalities in income (and some social sector indicators), UNDP should continue to target the poorest of the poor. To this end, it should continue its efforts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and hopefully, after completing the initial investment in establishing the organizational infrastructure, more resources will directly flow towards development of "safer" areas. While the team clearly recognizes the risks involved and the need to move with caution, it should be possible to set a clearer picture by conducting a needs assessment in partnership with other actors and by developing a coherent development strategy.
- Given the political sensibilities, a National Human Development Report may not be feasible. However, given the rise in inequalities, particularly geographic inequalities, UNDP may make a significant contribution using its comparative advantage and initiate developing a human development atlas – a GIS-based statistical compendium that could provide detailed disaggregated indicators at the subnational level.
- UNDP has made significant headway in the environmental sector at the upstream and downstream level. Clearly, its contributions have been greatly strengthened by its partnership with proactive NGOs and the media. UNDP could institutionalize this link by inviting key NGO actors to be part of its advisory panels.
- UNDP needs to support the ongoing country efforts to diversify exports and to strengthen the non-tradable sector. Already, UNDP has lost its high profile in policy dialogue. To regain its profile, it needs to shift gears in planning its poverty alleviation strategies and advocacy efforts. Clearly, as the first step, additional capacity in the form of trained economists is needed. UNDP should seek to establish its own comparative advantage in specializing in capacity development of the non-tradable sector.
- UNDP should focus its limited resources more on "safe" initiatives in its area of comparative advantage. Thus at the upstream level, it should continue its support to election monitoring efforts but emphasize strengthening local capacities to undertake monitoring. At the downstream level, it should focus more on local governance.

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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