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## UNDP IN INDIA

The Indian economy has performed impressively over the past two decades. Further, India today is the world's largest democracy with a vibrant electorate, active Judiciary and civil society groups, and a fiercely independent media. Despite its many noteworthy achievements, the country faces several challenges. Economic growth is decelerating, the incidence of unemployment on a current daily basis is high, there is widespread undernourishment,

and environmental problems are significant. Efforts are underway to address a variety of issues under the 10th Five-Year Plan.

UNDP support has centred on growth with equity, with poverty alleviation and human development as central concerns. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation that covered UNDP work from 1997 to 2002.

### TOTAL PROGRAMME UTILIZATION, 1997-2001: \$38.5 MILLION

#### UTILIZATION BY PROGRAMME AREA, 1997-2001 (\$ MILLIONS)



## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

UNDP's consistent support to people-centred development processes and effective advocacy of sustainable human development have established an image of impartiality and neutrality. In India, UNDP has sensitively calibrated its global agenda to suit local circumstances. This effort needs to be encouraged. The Government of India also needs to appreciate that while UNDP's financial inputs may be modest, it has other unique strengths.

Important shifts in UNDP's country strategy were made in order to encourage national capacity building and sustainability. There was a change from a project approach to a programme approach, a focus on long-term capacity building and institution-building at the community level rather than purely technical inputs, greater involvement of national expertise instead of reliance on international consultants, a shift to national execution and ownership by the Government, and stronger partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Nonetheless, a recurrent issue was the pursuit of multiple objectives and a large number of programmes and subprogrammes, which diffused focus, strained managerial resources, rendered monitoring and evaluation difficult, and led to sub-optimal utilization of resources. Education and health programmes, for example, were relatively small interventions compared to much larger programmes being implemented through other sources. In both sectors, UNDP can make only a limited impact. It needs to examine whether pilot interventions will make a distinctive contribution to new thinking.

Community-based pro-poor initiatives demonstrated many new and innovative approaches. They made several impressive achievements. Available evidence, however, suggested that they have been accompanied by intense

managerial and technical inputs, a great deal of commitment, and external supervision for relatively small operations. It may not, therefore, be easy to replicate them. Given the fact that there are other, bigger players in the arena of poverty alleviation, a better strategy may be to widely share the experiences of UNDP-supported programmes. With their substantially larger funds, these actors can exercise greater influence in ensuring replication and mainstreaming of successful approaches.

Some beginnings have been made. For instance, under the District Poverty Initiative Programme, the World Bank has adopted the model of the UNDP South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme and has provided about \$2 million for each district.

While programmes and subprogrammes were well designed and comprehensive, their preparation and approval tended to get delayed. Often, they were designed independently and functioned more or less in isolation from each other. Most did not seem to implement exit strategies. There were many instances of beneficiaries developing a dependency syndrome.

A programme to assist artisans in the leather sector was focused on poverty alleviation, sustained livelihoods, and building linkages between the organized and the unorganized sectors. The programme resulted in higher incomes, higher wages and availability of work throughout the year. The actual composition of beneficiaries suggests that women and the poorest workers were being directly targeted, however. The programme's quality service was highly subsidized, at a level beyond the reach of most state governments, undercutting prospects for sustainability.

Despite a rights-based approach to gender equality in

programme and subprogramme documents, the focus on gender was strongest in community-based programmes implemented through NGOs, depending on their perspectives and skills. In some programmes, there was a risk of reinforcing traditional gender inequalities and biases. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks needed to be consciously gendered. UNDP has taken several steps to strengthen integration of gender into programmes, including capacity-building for programme teams and partners, and participatory exercises for gender impact assessment. These efforts need to be strengthened.

The recently published National Human Development Report, accompanied by a series of subnational reports, was a signal achievement of UNDP advocacy. Although the outlay for this project was small, it can make a significant difference in ensuring higher priority to issues of human development in public policies and development plans, particularly in the states, and in strengthening partnerships to fight poverty across the country. Reports need to be followed up by studies in priority areas, evaluation studies of specific programme

interventions, etc. Further, while the global Human Development Report has been a vehicle for disseminating development lessons from India, more systematic and intensive action is needed to bring international experiences to India, and to share these within it

To bring about synergies in collaborative efforts and long-term sustainability of programmes, there is a need to build partnerships and alliances at several levels, with special attention to state governments, district administrations, and panchayats. So far, these have not received adequate attention, although they have a decisive role in carrying programmes forward.

In general, UNDP's efforts will be better rewarded if it focuses on indirect interventions, such as demonstration programmes and capacity building, backed by some direct interventions for hands-on experience. It needs to curb the temptation to undertake a large number of scattered initiatives, even if they are worthwhile, because only a concentrated effort can lead to a distinctive contribution and value addition.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Programmes should be developed around the objectives of India's 10th Five Year Plan and the overarching goals of the United Nations in India.
- UNDP needs to sharpen its focus and choose only the most appropriate programmes. Subprogrammes should converge both thematically, focusing on a few clearly identifiable themes and objectives, as well as geographically. Intersectoral linkages need to be consciously developed.
- Programme design and implementation strategies should be redefined by undertaking a rigorous analysis of the aspects of class, gender and replicability. Otherwise, the poorest and the most vulnerable may be neglected, men may sabotage the process of women's empowerment, and replication may not happen. Programme design should also incorporate rights-based perspectives.
- Exit strategies should be specified, with milestones for each stage of a given intervention.
- Communications and advocacy strategies should be strongly built into all programmes as a means of sharing best practice and ensuring replicability.
- Partnerships and alliances need to be built at several levels. Special attention needs to be given to building partnerships with the state governments, district administrations and panchayats.
- Greater attention must be given to ensure that UNDP interventions contribute to strengthening the links between NGOs and panchayats, and encourage transparency.
- Representatives of women's groups and gender experts should be consulted in programme formulation. The Department of Women and Child Development and the National Commission for Women should be actively involved. Men need to be fully involved in programmes for ensuring gender equality at the community level.
- UNDP and the Government need to promote more effective networking among NGOs with proven expertise, field presence and competence in addressing critical issues. Focused efforts are also needed to develop these NGOs as resource centres and 'mother NGOs'.
- Social mobilization is a complex process that requires time; this should be kept in view while designing programmes and working out the schedule for implementation.

## 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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