

Evaluation Brief: ICPE Tunisia

Since 1987, the Government of Tunisia and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have had a partnership, formalized in country programmes of cooperation, aimed at advancing the country's aspiration for sustainable human development. The current programme, covering the period 2015 to 2019, was designed to support Tunisia's transition in building a democratic system and an inclusive and sustainable growth model conducive to reductions in poverty, inequality and exclusion, particularly at the local level. It provides policy support and institutional capacity development under three programme components: (a) sustainable development; (b) democratic governance; and (c) resilience-building. The approved indicative budget of the programme was set at US\$40 million.

The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation (ICPE) in Tunisia in 2018 prior to the scheduled completion of the country programme in 2019. The primary purpose of the evaluation is to inform the development of the next UNDP country programme and to strengthen accountability to national stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board. This is the second ICPE of the UNDP programme in Tunisia, with the previous evaluation having covered the period 2002 to 2010.

Findings and conclusions

UNDP has been an important partner to the Government of Tunisia in its democratic transition. The country programme includes several flagship projects—electoral support, transitional justice, security sector reform, public accountability and support to Parliament—that are helping to lay the foundation of a governance architecture

embodying the democratic values of inclusiveness, participation, accountability and good governance. In responding to emerging national priorities, UNDP consolidated its position as a trusted development partner. Though UNDP cannot be credited with the achievements of new democratic governance institutions, it is recognized for the policy advisory support and institutional capacity development it has provided to these institutions, which enabled them to become operational and achieve important results. However, while the programme has been generally effective, it is operating in a fluid environment stemming from the institutional and other contextual complexities inherent to the transition process, and the challenge now is consolidation of the programme's results by the end of 2019.

The evaluation also found that there has been a greater emphasis on contributing to democratic reforms than to supporting job creation and strengthening entrepreneurship, which remain main preoccupations of the Government since before the 2011 revolution.

Further, the current approach to civil society engagement, centred on developing the capacities of community-based organizations, while positive for strengthening civil society capacities, is not consistent with the country programme's policy and institutional focus and may limit strategic partnerships with a wider range of civil society actors.

Lastly, the partnership strategy of the country office has been focused more on the delivery of its project activities and outputs and less on establishing linkages and synergies to enhance the collective contribution of actors.

Recommendations

The new country programme should be more flexible, pursuing greater adaptive planning and management approaches to address the challenge of working in a fluid national context. The results framework of the country programme has remained unchanged despite limited progress in some of the key outcome results. The country office and stakeholders of the country programme need to more explicitly recognize the dynamism and change of speed of the national context, reflecting it in ongoing environmental scanning, risk analysis and rigorous monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes, which are subsequently used to inform midcourse corrections. This requires greater clarity in the country programme's theory of change, investments in a M&E function that supports the monitoring of key assumptions for success at project and programme levels, and a greater level of integration of M&E practices.

UNDP should seize the opportunity of the preparation of the next country programme to conduct a strategic review to identify a differentiated and strategic niche in the area of job creation with a view to enhancing its value proposition in this area of work. Such positioning should be informed by a thorough analysis and reflection on past successes and failures and the positioning of other stakeholders. As noted in this evaluation, while successive projects are credited for their capacity development support and

multi-stakeholder approach, interventions have had limited sustainable results in terms of job creation, and at the same time have not demonstrated an approach distinct from those of other actors. While supporting the development of entrepreneurship and social and economic solidarity is in line with national priorities to address the challenge of unemployment, particularly of youth, UNDP should seek to be more ambitious and innovative in its value proposition and explore other entry points and modalities for supporting job creation, including balancing between supporting self-employment and wage employment options in order to adapt its response to the employment aspirations of Tunisians.

UNDP should review the current level and nature of partnerships developed with civil society to ensure that such partnerships are at the strategic level required in Tunisia's middle-income country context. The UNDP strategy for engagement with civil society organizations has focused on supporting the emergence and organizational capacity development of civil society groups in local governance and development. While this level of engagement is relevant, UNDP should re-examine the strategic fit of this approach given the growing influence of larger and more established civil society actors in public debates, with whom partnerships were not developed. There are important synergies, at technical rather than financial levels, that could be explored

with existing civil society actors. UNDP should seek opportunities to more systematically consider synergies with existing civil society actors across its portfolio, with due regard to the need to maintain its positioning as a neutral partner.

UNDP should consider adopting a more proactive coordination role with regard to its engagement in strategic partnerships with other actors who are contributing to the same objective, so as to enhance coherence and harmonization and optimize collective contributions where relevant. UNDP Tunisia has developed effective partnerships with the national authorities, which has enabled it to position itself as an important development partner in several sectors that are relevant to Tunisia's development plan, particularly in the area of democratic governance. UNDP is engaged with the relevant national authorities in the implementation of its country programme and is recognized for its positive contribution to development challenges. However, further leveraging existing capacities through strategic partnerships is likely to grow as an imperative for the positioning of UNDP in Tunisia. Given anticipated declines in both UNDP resources and donor funding, the country office should lay the groundwork for strategic partnerships in the current cycle to avoid opportunistic resource mobilization. Different from funding partnerships, the proposed strategic partnerships are centred on leveraging and knowledge exchange.