

Evaluation Brief: ICPE Colombia

Colombia is on the threshold of significant changes that have the potential to further consolidate development in the country and its position in the region. There have been achievements in the peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-FARC*), towards a negotiated end to the armed conflict. The top economic performer in Latin America in the last decade, Colombia sustained its economic growth through sound macroeconomic management. As a recently joined member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the fiscal and development reforms in the country are geared towards accelerating this process.

As the top economic performer in Latin America in the last decade, with a GDP growth rate of 4.3 percent in 2000-2014 and 2.4 percent in 2015-2018 and resulting favourable labour market outcomes, Colombia has made impressive strides in poverty reduction with improvements in shared prosperity. From 2002 through 2014, total poverty fell from 49.7 percent to 28.5 percent, lifting 6.7 million people out of poverty. However, Colombia still faces vast challenges in income inequality and financial inclusion, especially among the Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations as well as gender disparities. The *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo* (PND) or National Development Plan for 2014-2018 addresses areas that enable development and economic transformation and emphasizes OECD membership priorities. Three policy areas, i.e., peace, social equality, and human capital, together with a set of strategies have been adopted to implement the PND. The PND aims to increase production in sectors at the base of the income pyramid, by encouraging entrepreneurship in micro and small enterprises.

The *Plan Marco de Implementación del Acuerdo Final* (PMI) or Implementation Framework Plan has ushered in peacebuilding processes to disarm and demobilize the FARC and address the needs of over 88,000 victims of conflict and over 7.6 million internally displaced persons. Moving forward, ensuring citizen security and addressing persisting drivers of crisis – including grievances over land tenure, dispossession, displacement particularly in rural areas, and vulnerability to poverty – remain key priorities to contain recurrent violence. Despite longstanding decentralization processes, lo-

cal-level institutional capacity and accountability remain challenges. Effective subnational governance is not only crucial to providing better services and planning but also to fostering stronger, more resilient and inclusive economies.

UNDP Programme

Building on over four decades of development engagement in Colombia, the UNDP programme for 2015-2019 is located within the broad framework of the National Development Plan (2014-2018) and aims to respond to key priorities of the Government. The premise of the UNDP programme in Colombia was the anticipated implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, the transition to peace, and membership of the OECD. The country programme is envisaged to respond to policy and programme implementation gaps for inclusive and sustainable growth, inclusive governance for urban and rural development, and inclusive and sustainable governance and transition to peace.

The UNDP country programme outlined three development outcomes with complementary objectives:

- Growth is inclusive and sustainable, incorporating productive capacities that create employment and livelihoods for the poor and excluded;
- Strengthened institutions to progressively deliver universal access to basic services;
- Strengthened national and territorial capacities for the transition to peace (includes early recovery and rapid return to sustainable development).

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology is structured around the following main questions:

- What did the UNDP country programme intend to achieve during the period under review?
- To what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives?
- What factors contributed to or hindered UNDP's performance and, eventually, to the sustainability of results?

Findings and Conclusions

- UNDP was successful in providing more balanced support to stabilization and development priorities, enabling a vital platform at the community level for the engagement of various development actors, which included the Government as well as international agencies.
- UNDP contributed to the implementation of key Peace Accord transition priorities. Notably, UNDP has played a bridging role between the Government and affected communities in areas with FARC presence. These efforts contributed to reincorporation and community dialogue processes critical for stabilization and peace.
- Income-generation and livelihoods activities had outcomes at the community level, yet scalability remains an issue. UNDP is yet to demonstrate comprehensive programme options for reducing rural poverty. The small scale and scope of the interventions in the absence of institutionalization of the initiatives undermined more holistic responses.
- Environmental conservation and protection is a key priority for national development and international engagement. UNDP support has been pertinent to Colombia's environmental priorities and sustainable development agenda, contributing to improving capacities at the territorial levels.
- UNDP's support to addressing governance issues is broad. While there were successes in the area of promoting citizens' voice and participation in areas with armed conflict, a strategic framework to guide core governance support essential for accelerating stabilization and development was lacking.
- An integrated approach to sustainable development is evolving. The nexus approach initiated by UNDP is yet to gather momentum.
- UNDP has shown commitment to strengthen gender equality and empowerment of women in programme strategies and planning through specific initiatives and addressed across different projects.
- Weak knowledge management has led to the poor consolidation of programming lessons, reducing the possibility of policy-focused reflections. Consolidation of lessons from the community level and policy research did not receive adequate attention, reducing the possibility of informing national programmes and policy.
- The territorial presence of UNDP was a key factor in UNDP's contribution to the development and stabilization process in Colombia. There is scope for better utilization of this comparative advantage than merely as project implementation units.

Recommendations

- **RECOMMENDATION 1.** UNDP is well positioned to promote a development-centred stabilization and sustainable peace approach. UNDP needs to be more proactive in identifying key areas for its engagement in Peace Accord implementation. UNDP's ability to inform national policies and link community-level initiatives with national programmes lies in demonstrating well-tested programme models.
- **RECOMMENDATION 2.** UNDP should consider facilitating a comprehensive contextualized territorial development signature solution that can engage various actors towards a common agreed plan. In line with national development strategies, the solution should aim to accelerate employment and livelihoods, promote a sustainable environment, and strengthen inclusive governance.
- **RECOMMENDATION 3.** UNDP should strategize support to private sector development and impact investment in Colombia.
- **RECOMMENDATION 4.** Programme synergies and mutual reinforcement need to be pursued for enhancing development outcomes. UNDP should have a deliberate approach to overcome programme silos within/between sustainable development programme areas.
- **RECOMMENDATION 5.** UNDP should take measures to strengthen and formalize programmatic partnerships with the United Nations agencies as well as other international agencies.
- **RECOMMENDATION 6.** UNDP should consider specific measures to strengthen knowledge management to inform policy processes.
- **RECOMMENDATION 7.** To avoid reputational risk, conscious efforts are needed to clarify UNDP's development and fiduciary service provider role. UNDP should position itself in a way that it can adequately balance providing development services as well as engage on more substantive issues.