
Despite significant economic growth in the past 15 years, Ethiopia is still classified as a least developed country and faces several challenges, including poverty, climate vulnerabilities, conflict and governance-related issues. In order to address those challenges and realize the national vision of becoming a carbon-neutral middle-income country by 2025, the Government of Ethiopia is implementing a five-year Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II) (2016-2020). UNDP’s country programme was informed by the national context and development priorities reflected in the GTP II and has three main interlinked components: (i) accelerating economic growth and poverty reduction; (ii) climate change and resilience building; and (iii) strengthening democratic governance and capacity development.

Findings and conclusions

UNDP’s country programme is relevant to the development priorities of Ethiopia and has achieved tangible results, though to varying degrees in most areas covered. Building on its long-term commitment and past successes, UNDP is considered a legitimate and credible partner in supporting Ethiopian institutions to address critical development challenges. UNDP has established a niche and positioned itself well to support governance reforms that were not in the political debate before the 2016-2018 political crisis, and has provided effective support to processes and measures aimed at political openness. The change in political context is opening new opportunities for UNDP to support the country. UNDP has been invited to facilitate dialogue and is using its governance programme to support and ensure the viability of the reform measures the new Government is undertaking.

In line with the evolving context, UNDP is increasingly supporting the Government in the areas of conflict resolution and prevention, through the promotion of social cohesion and institutional capacity development. The country programme built capacity and supported a wide range of stakeholders at both upstream and downstream levels in their efforts to improve trust and confidence between political and religious actors. UNDP interventions also indirectly supported conflict prevention at different levels through institutional capacity support to democratic institutions, interventions aimed at building resilience of natural resources management, support to private sector development for employment and others. However, the programme does not have a clearly defined strategy on how it can best support peace-building, conflict resolution and prevention, including where it should focus efforts, both in terms of geographic areas and communities, and national policy processes.

UNDP has predominantly focused on institutional capacity development at the federal level across the different thematic areas it is involved in. The downstream work of UNDP has essentially been in resilience building at the community level. Until recently, the prevailing policy context may have limited space for engagement with regional states. There are, however, tremendous institutional capacity gaps and inequalities of opportunities at regional levels. Changes in the political context may provide a window for UNDP to reconsider opportunities to engage with regional states.

Although relevant, UNDP’s interventions are spread too thinly across too many thematic areas and regions, undermining the quality and sustainability of interventions. Overall, the programme lacks a conceptual approach to transformation. Although some upstream interventions supported institutional reforms aimed at boosting transformative changes, most projects have only supported incremental change. Programmatic planning in
some areas, such as the Governance and Democratic Participation Programme, has enabled UNDP to take a more strategic and cost-effective approach with potential for transformative results. These projects should be used as models for addressing fragmentation in other parts of UNDP’s portfolio.

While UNDP has developed strong relationships with government institutions as a partner of choice in the development process, communication and knowledge sharing with UN agencies and donors could be improved to enhance potential and opportunities for synergies, replication, and scaling up of successful results. While recognizing the limitations for UNDP in engaging with civil society actors due to an unfavourable legal framework in the past, there is scope for partnerships with UN and non-UN actors and civil society to go beyond information sharing, resource mobilization and project implementation, and establish linkages and synergies to enhance their collective contribution to the development process.

While the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system provides basic information on the implementation of activities and delivery of outputs of the country programme, there is room for improvement in assessing the transformative impacts of interventions and project experiences to promote and manage the potential for scaling up.

UNDP Ethiopia places a priority on gender mainstreaming in its interventions and has made encouraging progress recently. UNDP has played an important role in advocating for gender equality in high-level forums and policy processes, and there is evidence that some downstream interventions adopted differentiated approaches in targeting women in the area of livelihood diversification. However, this is limited to a few interventions. UNDP has focused mainly on the inclusion of women as participants but has not systematically sought to address the needs of different genders and specific groups, such as the female youth.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1.** For its next country programme in Ethiopia, UNDP should strengthen the linkages between upstream and downstream interventions in order to enhance the likelihood for transformational change. It should strengthen its strategic focus and ensure integration between thematic areas, to better build synergies and reduce fragmented initiatives. Clear theories of change should be developed, and guidelines provided for the selection of programmes and projects, as well as for maintaining and strengthening the downstream-upstream linkages.

**Recommendation 2.** UNDP should take advantage of the opportunities that have been generated by the 2018 political changes to promote stronger engagement and partnerships with regional states, including the development of regional capacities in areas where it has comparative advantages.

**Recommendation 3.** UNDP should develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilize expertise, knowledge and resources, and promote greater synergies with the operations of other actors in the development landscape of Ethiopia.

**Recommendation 4.** UNDP should continue and strengthen the application of right-based and inclusive approach in its programming. Particularly, UNDP should prioritize gender mainstreaming and ensure the effective implementation of its Gender Equality Strategy. It should make gender equality and women’s empowerment a critical component of its interventions.

**Recommendation 5.** While continuing its upstream level support to the Government’s efforts in implementing peace policies, and to the Ministry of Peace in its strategy and processes for peace and conflict resolution, UNDP should advocate and adopt a more deliberate and integrated approach in addressing underlying causes of conflicts and of instability.

**Recommendation 6.** UNDP should improve the M&E system of the country programme to ensure that it better captures UNDP’s contributions to transformative changes for sustainable development and also supports knowledge management and communication for development, which in turn would strengthen the ability of UNDP to demonstrate the added value of its interventions and enhance the prospect for scaling up.