



INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION BANGLADESH



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Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the Independent Country Programme Evaluation for UNDP in Bangladesh. This evaluation covers the period 2017 to 2020.

On the back of its strong economic performance over more than a decade, Bangladesh has achieved strong human development gains, dramatically reducing the number of Bangladeshis living in poverty. Given the scale of the challenges Bangladesh faces, the current momentum needs to continue. There are still some 40 million Bangladeshis that live under the national poverty line and many more are vulnerable to shocks that can tip them into poverty. Such shocks are a constant danger given the country's high exposure to natural hazards which are already driving displacement of large numbers of people, and migration to urban centres. Global warming will only make these challenges more acute if it is not addressed.

The evaluation found that UNDP has a well-regarded and wide-ranging development programme in Bangladesh, which has produced some good outcomes overall. In disaster risk reduction, e-service

delivery, informal justice, and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, UNDP is recognized as having made some major contributions to Bangladesh's development progress. The evaluation confirms that UNDP continues to have relevance to Bangladesh, but that its influence has declined, a trend that will inevitably continue as Bangladesh's economy grows. This underlines the importance of UNDP anticipating and adapting to the changes taking place in Bangladesh so as to preserve its current relevance. As part of this, UNDP will need to become more focused in its efforts. It is clear that maintaining its historical programming footprint in the face of declining human and development resources is affecting the quality of delivery and UNDP's influence. This needs to be addressed.

I would like to thank the Government of Bangladesh, national stakeholders, and colleagues at the UNDP Bangladesh country office and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific for their support throughout the evaluation. I am confident the findings, conclusions and recommendations will strengthen the formulation of the next country programme strategy.



Indran A. Naidoo
Director
Independent Evaluation Office

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

a2i	Access to Information
AFSF	Agriculture and Food Security Project
AVCB	Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
CDMP	Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CO	Country office
CPAP	Country programme action plan
CPD	Country programme document
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development
DIM	Direct implementation modality
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
DRRF	Disaster Response and Recovery Facility
EALG	Efficient and Accountable Local Governance
ERF	Early Recovery Facility
EU	European Union
GDI	Gender Development Index
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GEN	Gender Marker
GHG	Greenhouse gas
IBFCR	Inclusive Budgeting and Financing for Climate Resilience
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LDCs	Least developed countries
LGSP	Local Governance Support Project
LoGIC	Local Government Initiative on Climate Change
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MoDMR	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
MoEF&CC	Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Climate Change
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission

NIM	National implementation modality
ODA	Official development assistance
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation
ROAR	Results Oriented Annual Report
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SREPGen	Sustainable Renewable Energy Power Generation
SWAPNO	Strengthening Women's Ability for Productive New Opportunities
UDC	Union Digital Centre
UN	United Nations
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UP	Union Parishad
UPGP	Union Parishad Governance Project
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UZGP	Upazila Governance Project

Evaluation Brief: ICPE Bangladesh

Country context and UNDP programme

Amid strong economic growth over the last decade, Bangladesh has steadily reduced the number of its citizens living below the poverty line and in extreme poverty. Bangladesh attained lower middle-income status in 2012 and met the criteria for graduation from least developed country (LDC) status in 2018. The country will likely be recommended for LDC graduation if, as predicted, it meets these criteria again in the next triennial review in 2021. Bangladesh has moved up world rankings for the size of economy to 41 and is predicted to rise to 24 on this list by 2033.¹ There are good grounds for optimism that this accelerated rate of social and economic development will continue.

If it is to continue its current momentum, Bangladesh will need to address some enormous challenges. Some 40 million Bangladeshis still live below the national poverty line, and around 30 percent of the people live just above that line, highly vulnerable to shocks that can tip them back into poverty. The country is highly exposed to natural hazards, which are a constant threat particularly in the extensive coastal areas. Around 26,000 people lose land to flooding and erosion each year.

UNDP's country programme addresses these challenges in three areas. First, it seeks to address the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable, including projects targeting communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and urban poverty. Second, it focuses on improving democratic governance, including access to justice, local governance, and digital service delivery. Finally, the country programme has a major focus on disaster risk reduction (DRR), including strengthening policies and procedures for emergency response and external assistance coordination and promoting adaptation to climate change.

Findings and conclusions

UNDP has a well-regarded and wide-ranging development programme in Bangladesh which has produced some good outcomes. In DRR, e-service delivery, informal justice, and the CHT, UNDP is recognized as having made some major contributions to Bangladesh's development progress. UNDP has played a constructive niche role in other areas, such as social protection, acting in concert with other donors. Overcoming significant challenges, UNDP has established the foundations for a useful role in the international response to the Rohingya crisis, focused on the long-term development implications of the crisis, and its impact on host communities.

The United Nations system – and UNDP as a key part of it – has continued relevance to Bangladesh. Universally, government partners expressed appreciation for the support UNDP provides in many different areas and emphasized that UNDP and the United Nations system are still highly relevant in Bangladesh. Donors recognized that UNDP has close relationships at the highest levels of the Bangladesh Government and that its neutrality enabled it to work in areas that would be difficult for them to support directly through bilateral projects. This includes, for example, work in areas of human rights strengthening, and support provided in the CHT.

While UNDP is still valued, its relevance and influence have declined. This decline in influence is the inevitable outcome of the increasing scale of the Bangladesh Government's own development resources. It also reflects the fact that UNDP's programme and capability within the office has shrunk substantially in recent years. UNDP's core regular funding has declined and the organization has found it increasingly difficult to mobilize funding from donors at the level it has historically.

¹ Centre for Economics and Business Research, 'World Economic League Table 2019', 2018.

A key challenge UNDP will need to address if it is to preserve its relevance and influence is the progressive fragmentation of its support. Over a period where both delivery and staffing resources have declined, the number of projects in the country office's portfolio has continued to increase. The combination of a declining budget and pressures from many different agencies and geographical regions means that the UNDP programme includes many very small initiatives that operate in widely scattered locations. Arguably, many are too small to be relevant or useful. Many others provide only limited short-term benefits and lack a plausible approach to generating real learning and influence beyond project boundaries.

The outcome is that UNDP staff and programme resources are being spread increasingly thinly across the areas covered by the country programme

document, stretching the country office's management capacity and undermining quality. This is evident in the fact that UNDP has been struggling to provide adequate performance reporting to donor partners, who expressed concern about the openness and frequency of communication from UNDP on key performance issues. Concerns were also expressed about a lack of openness and proactivity to coordination and collaboration with key actors in the areas UNDP works in. A large number of UNDP's most important new programmes have been affected by lengthy delays in receiving government approvals, which underlines the importance of more regular and proactive communication.

The country programme needs to strengthen its focus on promoting gender equality in the context of the projects it delivers, and in modelling its commitment to gender equality.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The country office should address fragmentation in its portfolio by minimizing the number of small projects that rely mostly or exclusively on core funding; reducing the number of projects it manages; and developing larger, more integrated and more flexible programmes.

Recommendation 2. The country office should improve the quality of project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) by: increasing investment in ensuring high-quality M&E expertise is available for supporting implementation across the programme; ensuring all projects have results frameworks that reflect approved funding allocations, to provide a basis for monitoring and accounting for results; establishing a standard format for performance reporting that clearly distinguishes between inputs and

activities, and the outputs, outcomes and impacts they underpin, and only includes results that can be reasonably attributed to UNDP's contributions; and ensuring appropriate attention is paid to the quality of outcomes achieved, rather than simply numbers of results achieved (i.e. people trained), and to challenges.

Recommendation 3. To maximize the potential impacts of programme interventions, especially pilots or geographically delimited interventions, UNDP should avoid engaging in small pilots of untested interventions that have limited prospects of influencing Bangladesh Government policies or programmes. Relatedly, it should increase attention to the feasibility of increasing the scale of proven interventions, reflecting on institutional capacity to replicate them at a larger scale.

Recommendation 4. The country office should increase its focus on promoting gender equality in its programmes, and in its business environment. To ensure it has a foundation for doing so, the country office should: increase the resources it commits to ensuring appropriate attention to gender equality in programme design and delivery and in its business environment; ensure active measures are taken to address the imbalance in staffing, and marked differences in the satisfaction of male and female staff evident in staff survey results; annually review and update gender marker coding so that the data provides an accurate picture of the level of focus on gender equality of the country programme.



CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

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The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs), previously known as Assessments of Development Results, to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results at the country level, as well as the effectiveness of UNDP's strategy in facilitating and leveraging national effort for achieving development results.

The purpose of an ICPE is to:

- Support the development of the next UNDP country programme document
- Strengthen accountability of UNDP to national stakeholders
- Strengthen accountability of UNDP to the Executive Board

ICPEs are independent evaluations carried out within the overall provisions contained in the UNDP Evaluation Policy. The IEO is independent of UNDP management and is headed by a Director who reports to the UNDP Executive Board. The responsibility of the IEO is two-fold: (a) provide the Executive Board with valid and credible information from evaluations for corporate accountability, decision-making and improvement; and (b) enhance the independence, credibility and utility of the evaluation function, and its coherence, harmonization and alignment in support of United Nations reform and national ownership.

Based on the principle of national ownership, the IEO seeks to conduct ICPEs in collaboration with the national authorities where the country programme is implemented.

UNDP Bangladesh has been selected for an ICPE because its country programme will end in 2020. The ICPE was conducted in 2019 to feed into the development of the new country programme. It was carried out in close collaboration with the Bangladesh Government, UNDP Bangladesh country office, and UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

1.1 Country context

While Bangladesh is a poor country, recent economic and social trends have been very positive. The Bangladesh economy grew by an average of 6.5 percent annually in the last decade and by 7.9 percent in 2018, its best growth performance ever. On the back of this trend, Bangladesh attained lower middle-income status in 2012. Bangladesh met the three criteria for graduating from the category of least development countries (LDCs) in the triennial review by the UN Committee for Development Policy in early 2018. Strong growth has been accompanied by macroeconomic stability. Bangladesh's debt-to-GDP ratio is the lowest in South Asia and its credit rating is favourable. Bangladesh has moved up the world rankings for the size of its economy to 41, and is predicted to rise to number 24 on this list by 2033.² This has generated high aspirations among Bangladeshi policymakers to continue at an accelerated rate of social and economic development.

There has been a steady decline in the numbers of people living below the poverty line and in extreme poverty. The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line declined from 57 percent in 1992, to 31.5 percent in 2010 and 24.3 percent in 2016.³ Over a similar period, the incidence of extreme poverty declined from 34.3 percent in 2000 to 12.9 percent in 2016.⁴ Notwithstanding these impressive strides, there are still some 40 million Bangladeshis that live below the national poverty line.⁵ Moreover, the 30 percent of Bangladeshis that

² Centre for Economics and Business Research, 'World Economic League Table 2019', 2018.

³ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2017, and Bangladesh Country Programme Document (2017-2020), 2016.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Bangladesh Country Programme Document (2017-2020), 2016.

live just above the poverty line are highly vulnerable to internal and external shocks that can tip them back into poverty.

Bangladesh's positive economic results have translated into some encouraging trends in gender equality. The Human Development Index (HDI) for gender equality increased from 0.388 in 2000 to 0.567 in 2017. The Gender Development Index (GDI) has increased by 17 percent moving from 0.753 in 2000 to 0.881 in 2017.⁶ Women's share of parliamentary seats increased from 9.1 percent in 2000 to 20.3 percent in 2017. Forty-four percent of Bangladeshi adult women have attained at least secondary school education compared to 48 percent of men. The World Economic Forum's annual Gender Gap Report identified Bangladesh as South Asia's best performer in curbing the gender gap and the fifth globally for women's political empowerment.⁷

However, there are other trends that are concerning. The female to male unemployment ratio increased from 0.85 to 2.12 between 2000 and 2017, meaning women in 2017 are twice as likely to be unemployed than men.⁸ And while the share of women with accounts in financial institutions increased from 26 percent to 35.8 percent between 2011 and 2017 respectively, only 8 percent of Bangladeshi entrepreneurs are women.⁹ Men earned on average 2.6 times more than women in 2017. Gender-based violence remains very high – 87 percent of married women have reported that they have experienced domestic violence.¹⁰

Bangladesh is a majority Muslim nation, with Hindu and Christian minorities. While Bangladesh has strong secular origins and traditions, the country's political and social cohesion and security apparatus have become increasingly challenged by what

some prominent commentators have described as an increase in religious extremism over the last decade.¹¹ Bangladesh's challenges with extremism attracted international attention with the July 2016 attack on a café in an affluent neighbourhood in Dhaka which houses most of the diplomatic community. The attack resulted in the death of 20 hostages, mainly foreign nationals, and two police officers. There has also been a spate of murders of online activists, including secular bloggers and two members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex community, the most recent of which occurred in June 2018. While the nature of the international links is contested, international groups including Daesh (formerly referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL) and groups affiliated to Al Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent have claimed responsibility for several attacks.

Bangladesh has recently experienced an influx of about one million Rohingya refugees from the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Bangladesh's humanitarian response in sheltering the refugees has been widely acknowledged, but this is placing severe stresses on local capacity.

Bangladesh is highly exposed to cyclones and floods, particularly in the country's extensive coastal areas. Tens of millions of people whose incomes depend on the land and river systems of the Bengal Delta are threatened by rising sea levels, saline intrusion, waterlogging and riverbank erosion. An estimated 26,000 people per year lose land to flooding¹² and erosion. Bangladesh is also in a geologically active zone and is overdue for a large earthquake which would likely have devastating consequences. The capital Dhaka, with a population of 11 million, is especially vulnerable. The product of rapid,

⁶ Human Development Report website, 2018 statistical update: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2018-update>.

⁷ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, 2018: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>.

⁸ Human Development Report website, 2018 statistical update: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2018-update>.

⁹ Bangladesh Country Programme Document (2017-2020): <http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/836580?ln=en>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kugelman, M. and Ahmad, A., 'Why Extremism Is on the Rise in Bangladesh', *Foreign Affairs*, 27 July 2017.

¹² Flooding in Bangladesh is a normal, recurring, phenomenon, and regularly causes inundation of 20-25 percent of the country's area and often much larger areas. For example, floods in 1987, 1988, and 1998 inundated more than 60 percent of the country. The 1998 flood caused 1,100 deaths and left 30 million people homeless. Ministry of Environment and Forest, 'National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA)-Final report', 2005: <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/napa/ban01.pdf>

unplanned urbanization, Dhaka is one of the densest cities in the world and has very few earthquake-resistant buildings.

These factors explain Bangladesh's high ranking on all the major global risk indices. The World Risk Index ranks it the fifth most vulnerable country in the world to natural hazards. It comes in at 21 on the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Index, which considers indicators that reflect vulnerability to climate change. The INFORM index, which considers humanitarian crises caused by conflict as well as natural hazards, ranks Bangladesh at 22 in the world.

In the face of these large-scale threats, Bangladesh has been very successful in reducing mortality from natural hazards, demonstrating that poor countries can make significant inroads in minimizing the consequences of the hazards they have to contend with. Improved disaster preparedness and response and relatively higher levels of household adaptive capacity have dramatically decreased the number of deaths from flooding. Moreover, a cyclone shelter programme has helped the country dramatically reduce tropical cyclone mortality since the 1970s. Bangladesh's success in reducing mortality from tropical cyclones is supported not only by cyclone shelters but also by a slow but steady improvement in education, health and sanitation, and in the number of people living below the poverty line.

1.2 UNDP programme in Bangladesh

UNDP's country programme document (CPD) for Bangladesh identified three priorities for the period 2017-2020:

- (a) Ensuring economic growth is inclusive and supports economic opportunities, particularly for women;
- (b) Improving social policies and programmes, with a focus on good governance and structural inequalities; and
- (c) Building resilience and improving environmental sustainability.

These priorities areas are directly related to the three outcomes the country programme sought to contribute to (see Table 1). The first outcome planned to address the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable, including projects targeting communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and urban areas. It also planned to improve the Bangladesh Government's social welfare policies, and the targeting of women. The second outcome sought to implement interventions supporting improved access to justice by working to strengthen the village courts system and human rights bodies. It also sought to do so by supporting local government and innovation, with a focus on promoting the use of information technology in service delivery.

The third outcome planned supporting disaster risk reduction, including strengthening policies and procedures for responding to emergencies and coordinating external assistance. Climate change-related interventions were also targeted, including working with local governments to support community-level adaptation and promoting renewable energy generation and environmental management. The management of natural resources was set to focus on protected area management and capacity development of the Ministry of Environment Forestry and Climate Change. Under this third outcome area, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the CPD emphasized the need for inter-sectoral coordination on integrating climate change adaptation and disaster resilience through institutionalizing a whole-of-government and broader society approach to risk management.

There are overlaps of the work undertaken in these different outcomes areas which prompted this evaluation to adopt an issue-based assessment approach. A detailed description of the projects is presented in the portfolio analysis of the evaluation terms of reference (see Annex 1, available online).

TABLE 1: Country programme outcomes and indicative resources (2017–2020)

Country programme outcome	Indicative resources (million US\$)	Expenditures to date (million US\$)
Outcome 1: Increase opportunities, especially for women and disadvantaged groups to contribute to and benefit from economic progress	Regular: 6.0 Other: 79.3	Regular: 2.6 Other: 10
Outcome 2: Develop and implement improved social policies and programmes that focus on good governance, reduction of structural inequalities and advancement of vulnerable individuals and groups	Regular: 6.3 Other: 58.5	Regular: 4.7 Other: 26.4
Outcome 3: Enhance effective management of the natural and man-made environment focusing on improved sustainability and increased resilience of vulnerable individuals and groups	Regular: 10.8 Other: 144.7	Regular: 3.3 Other: 21.6
Other		Regular: 0.4 Other: 4.6
Total	305.6	73.6

Note: Financial data are limited to programme expenditure

The CPD identified an indicative budget of just over \$300 million. Spending as of December 2018, halfway through the CPD period, suggests actual resourcing will fall well short of this estimate, and roughly half of what was expected in the CPD. Delays in approval of major programmes and projects are a significant cause of this financial gap.

UNDP's programme in Bangladesh has halved in size over the last five years, from an expenditure over \$80 million in 2012 and 2013 to around \$40 million annually from 2016 to 2018 (Figure 1).

This trend reflects declines in both core and non-core funding, which are both less than half what they were in 2012 and 2013, although the decline in non-core funding accounts for most of the reduction (80 percent), in absolute terms. From 2017 to 2018, the most important source of funding were bilateral donors, with vertical trust funds and UNDP regular resources making up about 25 percent of total resources, in roughly equal proportions (Figure 2).

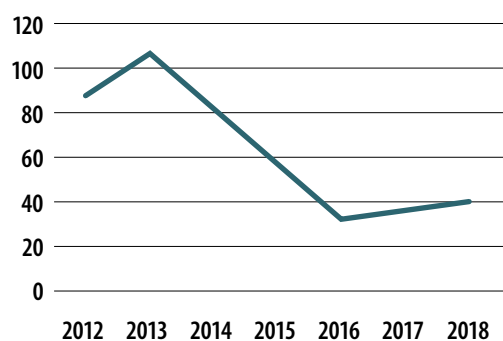
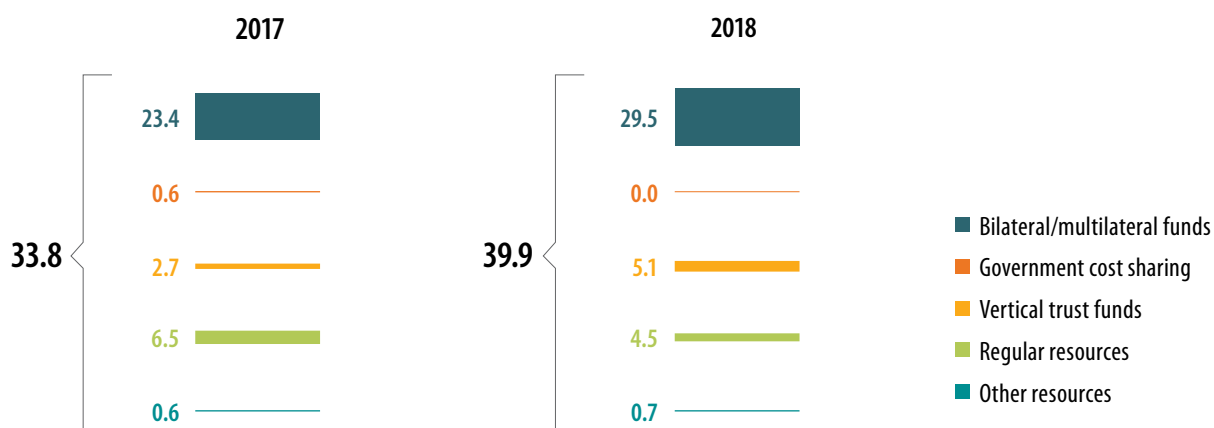
FIGURE 1. UNDP expenditure, 2012–2018, current prices (million US\$)

FIGURE 2. Total expenditure by fund category and year (million US\$)

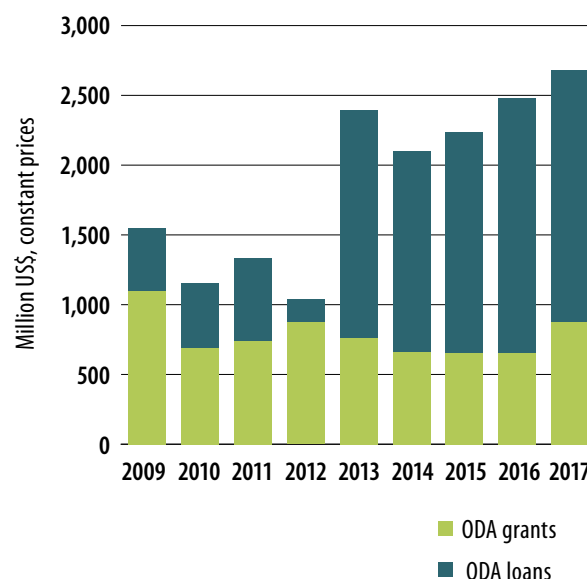


This trend has occurred despite increases in official development assistance (ODA) to Bangladesh over the same period, although the composition of ODA has changed due to the increasing importance of concessional loans as a component of ODA (Figure 3).

UNDP is a small development partner to Bangladesh, providing less than one percent of the country's ODA in recent years, and about five percent of grant aid. UNDP's financial contribution represents less than one-tenth of one percent of the Bangladesh Government's budget. This means that UNDP's ability to directly generate benefits is limited by either the small scale of its interventions, or by its ability to use resources to generate larger impacts by prompting systemic changes in Bangladesh Government policy or practice in focus areas.

Not reflected in Figure 3, China has become an important source of external finance in Bangladesh. According to data compiled by the independent think tank AidData, Chinese financial flows to Bangladesh amounted to close to \$2 billion in 2014, although ODA-like flows¹³ were only a small (<5 percent) component.

FIGURE 3. ODA grants and loans by DAC countries and EU institutions to Bangladesh, 2009-2017, total and selected donors



Source : <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/IA-Bangladesh-2019.pdf>

¹³ Includes a subset of projects from AidData's Geocoded Global Chinese Official Finance dataset with 'flow-class' values of 'ODA-like'. These projects roughly correspond to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's definition of official development assistance (ODA) in that they were categorized development intent and they are highly concessional in nature (i.e. they have a grant element of at least 25 percent). Includes only projects with 'status' values of 'implementation' or 'completion'.

1.3 Evaluation questions and methodology

The ICPE will address three evaluation questions. These questions will also guide the presentation of the evaluation findings in the report.

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

The assessment, which is qualitative in nature, was based on an analysis of the correlation between reported project achievements, their contribution to expected outputs under each outcome, and consequently the overall outcome objectives. Special attention was given to assessing gender results across the portfolio. The evaluation assessed the extent to which the gender marker provides a reasonable indication of the focus of the programme in promoting gender equality, and the likelihood that it will produce significant improvements in gender equality.

Scope: This ICPE covers the current (2017-2020) programme cycle. It covers interventions funded by all sources, including core UNDP resources, donor funds, and government funds. It also focuses on initiatives from the regional and global programmes and 'non-project' activities that may be crucial for the political and social agenda of the country.

The projects in the evaluation's scope are set out in Annex 2 (available online). These have been identified on the basis that: they are or have been active in the current CPD period, or they are precursors to currently active projects; they are evaluable, in the sense that they are doing work in their area that has been a focus for UNDP over a long enough period to be able

to say something meaningful about their progress, likely or actual outcomes; and they are large enough to warrant specific attention.

The Bangladesh programme consists of around 45 active projects, although many of these are very small and some have just started. The evaluation focused on the 25 largest active projects in the country programme.¹⁴ Together, these account for around 93 percent of UNDP's programme expenditure over the past two years, and 96 percent of its expenditure in the CPD period.

Assessment of data collection constraints and existing data: Beyond information collected in stakeholder interviews, the evaluation did not involve primary data collection. The rigour of the evaluation's outcome assessments thus depends on the quality of the available documentation about the objectives and outcomes of UNDP's work, with interviews used to identify data sources and explore lines of inquiry. To counteract potential biases, the evaluation draws from a diversity of data sources, including government data and documentation, project documentation reporting, media reporting and independent reviews and evaluations. Triangulation between different sources was used to test and validate feedback from stakeholders and performance claims in project reporting. The evaluation assessed whether there is valid and reliable information about the views of intended beneficiaries about UNDP projects and where this is available, included this in reporting. An effort was made to tap into a diversity of views about UNDP's work to develop a fuller understanding of the political context and UNDP's performance.

Data collection methods: The IEO and the country office identified an initial list of background and programme-related documents. Document reviews included: background documents on the national context, documents prepared by international partners and other UN agencies during the period under review; programmatic documents such as

¹⁴ A large project is a project whose expenditures exceed \$300,000 between 2017 and 15 November 2018, the date at which expenditure data were extracted from PowerBi/Atlas.

workplans and frameworks; progress reports; monitoring self-assessments such as the yearly UNDP Results Oriented Annual Reports (ROARs); and evaluations conducted by the country office and partners, including the quality assurance reports. Where necessary, information and data collected from multiple sources was triangulated to ensure their validity.

Stakeholder involvement: A participatory and transparent process was followed to engage with stakeholders at all stages of the evaluation process.

Limitations: The IEO previously evaluated the Bangladesh country programme in 2011. This ICPE considers the recommendations from that evaluation to the extent that they remain relevant. The short time available for fieldwork did not allow the systematic collection of beneficiary views and unintended consequences of the project on non-target groups. Where this information was not available, it is identified as a limitation. The extent to which the evaluation will be able to assess outcomes depends on the stage of completion of different components of the work. Where projects are in their early stages, the focus of the evaluation is on whether there is evidence that their design reflects learning or builds on outcomes achieved from previous projects.




CHAPTER 2

FINDINGS

DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP
sustainability MANAGING FOR RESULTS responsiveness COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT responsiveness
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This chapter outlines the findings of the evaluation about UNDP's effectiveness in achieving its objectives in the country programme document, for each programme outcome and cross-cutting area. It also describes the main factors that influenced UNDP's performance and contributions to results.

2.1 Poverty reduction



CPD Outcome: Increase opportunities, especially for women and disadvantaged groups to contribute to and benefit from economic progress

RELATED OUTPUTS

OUTPUT 1.1: The Government has knowledge and skills to better target remaining pockets of poverty and expand opportunities for women to contribute to and benefit from economic progress

OUTPUT 1.2: National and local government have the capacity to implement urban and rural poverty policies and programmes

OUTPUT 1.3: Government has the capacity to create an enabling environment for pro-poor and green growth

Addressing urban poverty

Finding 1. UNDP has made important contributions to urban poverty reduction, but progress has been stymied by prolonged delay in getting approval for the current phase of work.

UNDP has had a long-standing focus on reducing urban poverty through the \$64.9 million Urban Poverty Alleviation project, which the country office implemented from 2008 to 2015, with funding from the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID). Notwithstanding measurement and implementation challenges, this work was ultimately assessed as having contributed reasonably to tackling some challenges associated with rapid and unplanned urban growth. While there were problems in establishing causal attribution, the available evidence suggested the project achieved its target of measurable improvements in livelihoods and living conditions of three million poor people living in slums in 23 major cities and towns across Bangladesh. This was achieved through a combination of interventions including grants to improve water supplies and sanitation, to seal paths and improve drainage, to start businesses or for apprenticeships and training, to promote health and nutrition, tackle domestic violence and reduce early marriage. Overall, 247,000 households were provided with better water supplies, 187,000 with improved latrines and 495,000 households benefiting from improved drains and footpaths.¹⁵

¹⁵ See: UNDP (2016) Independent Mid-term Outcome Evaluation: Country Programme Document (2012-2016)-Outcome 2.1 (Poverty reduction) and DFID (2015) Urban Poverty Alleviation Project, Project Completion Report. As discussed in these two reports, rigorous evaluation of the project was stymied by the absence of a clear theory of change for the project and weak monitoring systems. Weak monitoring systems was one of a number of concerns identified by the DFID about UNDP's management of the project in its completion report for the project. This concluded that: 'Although management improved significantly over the life of the programme and especially in the last two years, there were major weaknesses through much of the programme that held back progress.'

The current vehicle for UNDP's work on urban poverty is the Livelihoods Improvement of Urban Poor Communities (LIUPC) initiative. The LIUPC is the largest project in UNDP's Bangladesh portfolio, with contributions from the DFID (\$83 million), UNDP (\$1 million) and the Bangladesh Government (\$13 million).

Unfortunately, the programme has faced major and costly delays, and at the time of the evaluation had only been underway in earnest for less than one year. It is thus too early to assess the outcomes from this work.¹⁶ Aside from concerns about the value for money impacts of the extended delay¹⁷, there are also some concerning signs about the quality of implementation of the preparatory phase of the project, which are evident in the DFID's annual assessments of the project. For example, the DFID's 2016 annual review observes that: 'UNDP produced a series of inception documents over this period. Most need further work to reach the necessary standard.'¹⁸

Strengthening social protection systems

Finding 2. In concert with other donors, UNDP has played a useful niche role in strengthening Bangladesh's social protection systems.

The Bangladesh Government is strongly committed to reforming its social welfare policies and systems, so they are more efficient and effective.¹⁹ Reforms are needed, evidenced by the fact Bangladesh currently delivers social welfare payments through

some 113 different programmes, implemented by 23 line ministries. Credible reforms are being implemented, as evidenced by the reduction in the number of schemes to the current level (113), from over 150 four years ago.²⁰

Working through the \$7 million Social Protection Policy Support project (2014–2018) (financed by the United Kingdom (DFID-\$3.3 million), and Australia (DFAT-\$1 million)) UNDP implements a component of a much larger programme of support for social protection reforms funded by the DFID and Australia.²¹ Working in concert with other donors, UNDP has provided support through technical assistance which has helped to establish the structures and capability needed to deliver sustained improvements to Bangladesh's social welfare system. UNDP's most substantive contribution to this was in its work on the National Social Security Strategy, which donors and the Government have endorsed as providing a clear vision and a plausible road map for reform.²² UNDP has also supported the development of a number of other subsidiary policies and strategies, including Gender Policy and action plans for implementation of the National Social Security Strategy.²³ The quality of this work is well-regarded by donors and the Bangladesh Government counterparts. Overall, it has contributed to the development of the government structures and capabilities required to strengthen Bangladesh's social security system, with improvement evident in both targeting and payment systems.²⁴

¹⁶ It took just over two years for the project to be formally approved from the date of the Project Appraisal Committee approval. Over this period, the project incurred substantial (\$9 million) expenditures, largely on project staffing, which accounted for 53 percent of project expenditure. Over most of this period, project staff were not able to implement the activities they were recruited for, resulting in a very high ratio of staffing costs to project activities.

¹⁷ Specifically, many of the delayed projects incurred significant staffing (and associated operational costs) while approvals were pending. However, project personnel were not fully utilized in these cases because UNDP was unable to initiate project activities until project approvals had been obtained. UNDP Office of Audit and Investigations, (2018), Audit of the UNDP Country Office in Bangladesh.

¹⁸ DFID, 'Annual Review of the National Urban Poverty Reduction Project', 2016. (Now known as the 'Livelihoods Improvement of Urban Poor Communities' project.)

¹⁹ DFID, 'Strengthening Government Social Protection Systems for the Poor: Annual Performance Reviews, 2014-2018'.

²⁰ UNDP, 'Social Security Policy Support Project-Annual Progress Report', 2018.

²¹ The programme, Strengthening Government Social Protection Systems for the Poor (SGSP), is a £18.70 million four-year programme mainly providing technical assistance to improve the efficiency/effectiveness of the Bangladesh Government's own expenditure on social protection. It provides technical assistance to a range of line ministries which themselves manage and implement substantial social protection programmes.

²² DFID, 'Strengthening Government Social Protection Systems for the Poor: Annual Performance Reviews, 2014-2018'.

²³ UNDP, 'Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) support to Social Protection Policy Support (SPPS), Annual Progress Report 2018', 2018.

²⁴ DFID, 'Strengthening Government Social Protection Systems for the Poor: Annual Performance Reviews, 2014-2018'; UNDP, 'Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) support to Social Protection Policy Support (SPPS), Annual Progress Report 2018', 2018.

Finding 3. UNDP has developed an effective approach for addressing the needs of impoverished and disadvantaged rural women. This model has attracted a high level of support from the Bangladesh Government. However, there is currently no plausible strategy for taking the pilot to scale.

Strengthening Women's Ability for Productive New Opportunities (\$4.7 million, 2014-2019) aims to develop the capacity of local government to manage social safety net projects effectively.²⁵ Envisaged as a \$104 million programme in the project document, 26 percent of which was to be covered by parallel government contributions, the project commenced with a \$73.5 million unfunded component. Actual spending from 2014 to 2019 was \$14.2 million, with 61 percent of this amount coming in the form of parallel contributions from the Bangladesh Government. UNDP has provided the lion's share of donor funding, with small amounts mobilized from private sector partners.

The funding gap required a big reduction in the project's scope, from 65,000 beneficiaries to under 10,000.²⁶ The project management unit ran out of funding and had to mobilize finance from private sector partners to continue operating.²⁷

In spite of these challenges, the project has delivered some good results. An impact evaluation²⁸ using a randomized control trial method was completed at the end of 2017 and found that the project had made a tangible direct contribution to women participants' economic empowerment, with benefits delivered to the intended beneficiaries.^{29,30}

The Bangladesh Government has demonstrated its strong support for the project bearing most of the cost and has committed to scaling up the model across 200 *upazila* (subdistricts) in its National Social Security Strategy Action Plan, and included estimated allocations for the programme in its Medium Term Budget Framework.³¹

While these are some commendable results and impacts, there have also been a number of limitations. In particular, there is insufficient evaluative work addressing the value for money or scalability of the approach modelled by the project. This evaluation considers it is highly likely the project's success in targeting beneficiaries (the project has achieved a high level of precision targeting, estimated at 96 percent accuracy) to be as much a function of the fact the project was implemented in the poorest district of Bangladesh and addresses only a few beneficiaries. The relative economic homogeneity of the targeted population coupled with the small size of the beneficiaries enabled a high degree of selectivity and oversight that may not be transferable or feasible if the approach is implemented on a larger scale with an economically heterogeneous population. More high-quality analytical work is required to assess the feasibility of the model for the Government of Bangladesh, and if it is feasible, in promoting reforms required to adopt the model or elements of it at scale. There should be increased focus on this in the next phase.

²⁵ This project is a typical public works based 'graduation model' targeting distressed and vulnerable rural women by adopting an employment and skill development approach. It aims at lifting the poor out of poverty during the project period, through access to guaranteed wage employment. The particularity of this model is to combine access to employment through public work during the project with mandatory savings, participation in rotating savings and credit association, training on life skills and livelihoods and linkages with local markets and potential employers. The idea is that the set of skills learned from training will help beneficiaries invest their savings for productive purposes to sustain high income and living standard beyond the project.

²⁶ Strengthening Women's Ability for Productive New Opportunities (SWAPNO) project document and project reporting.

²⁷ Interviews.

²⁸ This evaluation was carried out by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

²⁹ SWAPNO, 'Report on Impact and Evaluation of 1st Project Cycle', 2017.

³⁰ SDG Fund Joint Programme, 'Final Narrative Report', 2018.

³¹ Action Plan (2016-2021): Implementation of National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh, p.12: https://cabinet.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/cabinet.portal.gov.bd/page/6ad00da9_924b_455a_b0e4_c75a960b0808/Action-Plan-of-NSSS.pdf; Medium-Term Budgetary Framework (MTBF) 2017-18 to 2019-20, p.418: https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/b618ee33_8727_40f6_b290_5dbd3dd0090b/37_LGD_English.pdf.

Supporting digital service delivery

Finding 4. UNDP has provided significant leverage to the Bangladesh Government's efforts to improve service delivery using e-governance. However, there is significant room for improvement in the clarity and transparency of reporting about UNDP's contribution to progress, challenges, and priorities.

UNDP's assistance in the area of information and communication technology (ICT) for development extends as far back as 2001. Since 2006, the vehicle for this assistance has been the Access to Information (a2i) programme, which has largely operated under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), but was moved to the ICT Division in mid-2018. The project entered its second (\$50.4 million) phase in 2012 with major contributions from UNDP regular resources (\$7.9 million), USAID (\$6.1 million), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (\$3.3 million), and the International Labour Organization (\$0.2 million). As a major Bangladesh Government initiative, the most substantial contributions to a2i come in the form of parallel contributions (\$31.7 million) from the Bangladesh Government.

The objective of the project was to increase transparency, improve governance, and reduce the time, difficulty and costs of obtaining government services for underserved communities of Bangladesh. This addresses core development issues for Bangladesh, where citizens, 70 percent of whom live in rural areas, have typically had to travel long distances to access government services, imposing high costs and lengthy delays.³² UNDP's contribution is largely in the form of technical assistance.

The project has been very successful in supporting the Bangladesh Government to improve service delivery through effective use of information technology. It has won many national and international awards and features prominently in publications showcasing UNDP's support for innovation.³³

The progress the project has made is evident in Bangladesh's global rankings for digital service delivery. At the commencement of a2i in 2006, Bangladesh was ranked 162/193 in the United Nations E-Government Development Index and 151/193 in its E-Participation Index. Today it is ranked 115 and 51 in those respective indices.³⁴ In 2018 Bangladesh was ranked the highest among LDCs (a category it has since graduated from) for e-government development.³⁵

This progress reflects the Bangladesh Government's strong commitment to improving the efficiency and productivity of public service delivery using ICT.³⁶ This is evident in the establishment, from 2009 onwards, of a network of digital service centres, first as a pilot in 30 unions, and later in each of the 4,500+ unions in the country. These Union Digital Centres (UDCs) are service delivery outlets providing information and services such as citizenship and passport applications, mobile banking and utility bills payment. These services are provided by entrepreneurs with the expectation that revenues generated would ultimately sustain the network.³⁷

The results achieved through the project have been impressive and include:

- A2i supported the successful rollout of over 5,286 UDCs nationally. These centres provide approximately 6.5 million services per month;³⁸

³² A2i Project Document.

³³ UNDP, 'Moon Shots and Puddle Jumps: UNDP Innovation Facility, 2017–2018 Year in Review', 2018.

³⁴ See: <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Data/Country-Information/id/14-Bangladesh/dataYear/2018>.

³⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'E-government survey 2018: gearing government to support transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies', 2018. See: https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/Portals/egovkb/Documents/un/2018-Survey/E-Government%20Survey%202018_FINAL%20for%20web.pdf.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Mobasser Monem and Ferdous Arfina Osman, 'Baseline Assessment: Access to Information (II) eService Delivery for Transparency and Responsiveness (Support to Digital Bangladesh)', 2018.

³⁸ A2i, 'Annual Review Report-2018', 2019.

- A2i worked across the Government to develop online platforms for delivering services and simplify government services. A2i reports having simplified 424 services since its commencement. Examples of the systems a2i has helped develop include:
 - » an online system for accessing, recording and transferring land titles, substantially improving the efficiency of land administration systems;
 - » an e-filing system, which has been used by over 4,000 government offices until 2018, and over 55,000 government officials;
 - » an online payment capability for 10 government services;³⁹
 - » a system for birth registration, reported to have reduced the time required for rural citizens to receive birth certificates from about eight days to just eight hours.⁴⁰
- A2i reports, on the basis of 85 studies, that it has achieved large reductions in the time, cost and number of visits of the service recipients, amounting to 1.2 billion days, \$4.7 billion, and 627 million visits avoided as a result of the expansion in digital services.⁴¹
- While there has been no attempt to quantify this, the development of e-governance platforms will likely have had a positive impact on corruption by enabling more effective control and monitoring of employee behaviour.⁴²

A2i is deeply embedded within and has a major leadership role in Bangladesh Government's digital service delivery agenda. As such, it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess the extent of UNDP's contributions to progress in digital service delivery. Government counterparts informed the evaluation that while many of the results supported by a2i would have no doubt happened without UNDP's

assistance, a2i has been important for its ability to provide access to national and global expertise that the Government could not have procured under its existing policies. It is reasonable then to conclude that UNDP has had an impact on both the speed and quality of progress.

The difficulty in assessing UNDP's contribution reflects a real lack of transparency and clarity in reporting about what a2i's activities and areas of focus are. None of the reporting reviewed by the evaluation team makes any attempt to differentiate between the project and the broader Bangladesh Government initiative and infrastructure it is supporting. Performance reports consist of lengthy lists of achievements, many of which are government-wide and not necessarily attributable to the project. The 2018 ROAR, for example, includes the claim that 141,044 people, out of which 40 percent were women, across Bangladesh were employed in full-time equivalent jobs and livelihoods "with UNDP's support". This claim is attributed to the a2i 2018 annual performance report which repeats the same statement, but with no evidence to substantiate either it, or a2i's contribution to it.

Another problem with reporting is that it lacks a clear discussion of the priorities and identification of ongoing challenges. For example, the achievement of gender balance in the UDC operations, underpinned by a rule on UDC operations states that one male and one female entrepreneur are supposed to be in every UDC. This is routinely cited as the project's major success in gender equality and in the 2018 performance report this statistic is supported by a case study of a successful female entrepreneur. However, a survey of 105 unions conducted by Transparency International found this requirement had been met in only 76 percent of UDCs, whereas only male entrepreneurs participated in 23 percent of the UDCs and only female entrepreneurs in 1 percent of the UDCs.⁴³ Challenges in bedding down the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ UNDP, 'Moon Shots and Puddle Jumps: UNDP Innovation Facility, 2017–2018 Year in Review', 2018.

⁴¹ A2i, 'Annual Review Report-2018', 2019.

⁴² Shim, Dong Chul and Eom, Tae Ho, 'E-Government and Anti-Corruption: Empirical Analysis of International Data', 2008.

⁴³ Transparency International, 'Union Digital Centres (UDCs) in Delivering Services: Roles, Potentials and Challenges', 2017.

digital service centre model are acknowledged by a2i's 2018 annual report⁴⁴, but includes no planned response. The project supports a very diverse range of initiatives, including for example, support for digital financial services, support for a digital campaign on nutrition, development of e-commerce, development of a national web portal and call centre, development of an agriculture portal, and an apprentice management system.

Overall, it is not clear what UNDP considers to be the major priorities for sustaining its support to the Bangladesh Government to continue to expand e-services. There is no formal mechanism through which a2i conducts policy advocacy and prioritizes policy research it can use to influence and inform the resolution of known policy challenges. Currently, only about 22 percent of 2,700 services provided by the Government are available online, underlining the scale of the challenge of continued expansion of digital services.⁴⁵ Given the size of this task, there is a risk that the programme may have stretched itself too thinly through involvement in so many policy areas, and is consequently not paying enough attention to the fundamentals. Looking forward, there would be benefit to more clearly articulating a2i's priorities and more clearly distinguishing in monitoring and evaluating its specific contributions to Bangladesh Government outcomes.

2.2 Democratic governance

CPD Outcome: Develop and implement improved social policies and programmes that focus on good governance, reduction of structural inequalities and advancement of vulnerable individuals and groups

RELATED OUTPUTS

OUTPUT 2.1: Civil society, interest groups, relevant government agencies and political parties have tools and knowledge to set agendas and to develop platforms for building consensus on national issues

OUTPUT 2.2: The Government has the capacity to carry out formal or quasi-formal, demand-driven and gender-sensitive reforms of the justice sector to provide more equal access to justice to women and men, especially those from marginalized groups

OUTPUT 2.3: The Government has the capacity to develop policies and carry out sectoral and geographical interventions in districts where inequality of progress is evident

Access to justice and human rights

Finding 5. UNDP has had very little influence on the operation of the key formal justice sector institutions, and through them, access to justice and human rights for Bangladeshi people. UNDP has been unsuccessful in mobilizing funding for a continuation of past work in this area, despite having invested significant core resources towards that end. The exception to this is a programme of work with the Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission, which UNDP has supported since it was established in 2010. The poor quality of documentation available about this project makes it difficult to assess the quality or impact of the work undertaken.

⁴⁴ The report notes that the target of generating BDT 20,000 per month has been fulfilled by about 50 percent UDCs and that only 57 percent of UDCs are financially sustainable.

⁴⁵ Korea International Cooperation Agency, 'E-government Master Plan for Digital Bangladesh', 2018.

Between 2009 and 2016 UNDP implemented a major programme of work funded largely by the European Union and the United Kingdom to strengthen key elements of the formal justice system, focusing particularly on the police. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of any sustained improvement arising from these past efforts. The outcome evaluation of the 2012-2016 CPD concluded in 2015 that the impact of interventions in these areas had been limited. In particular, UNDP was unsuccessful in advancing judicial independence and improving integrity in the judicial system and was not able to reduce the backlog of cases in the higher courts, one of the key indicators of an efficient justice system. Human rights abuses by the police were reported to be widespread and continuing, thereby undermining the outcome.

Another area of UNDP support for the formal justice sector has been focused on the National Human Rights Institution. As is captured by the UNDP's Independent Evaluation Office 2011 evaluation of the Bangladesh country programme, UNDP was instrumental in the creation of Bangladesh's human rights architecture, and the establishment of the Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in 2010.⁴⁶ UNDP has supported the NHRC since that time, and is currently at the mid-point of a five-year \$7.5 million phase of support, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). The project provides a team of advisers to support the NHRC in fulfilling its mandate. This helps to compensate for shortfalls in the NHRC's human and financial resources, including in such areas as fact-finding and engagement with government institutions.⁴⁷

The NHRC is strongly supportive of the project and its objectives, and there is undoubtedly merit to UNDP's continuing partnership with it. However, the evaluation does not have sufficient evidence to confidently assess the results of the work completed to date. Project reporting consists of long lists of activity descriptions under the five project outputs. It is unclear how or to what extent the activities reported address or reflect progress against the commitments and performance indicators in the project document or annual workplans. The relevance of the project document as a governing framework for the project is unclear, given that just over one third of the resources required is unfunded. There is limited discussion or acknowledgement of challenges or areas for improvement. Donors reported to the evaluation that they currently have inadequate information on which to assess whether the project is on track.

Finding 6. UNDP has made a major contribution to the development of the Bangladesh Government's system for resolution of disputes, which is providing an increasingly useful alternative to the formal justice system for addressing minor criminal and civil disputes.

In Bangladesh, village courts have evolved from a traditional village arbitration system or *shalish* as a way to settle disputes and reconcile parties in line with a restorative justice model (expressly the court has no powers to punish). The Government formalized this system by issuing a Village Court Ordinance in 1976, which was replaced by the Village Court Act 2006 that established a village court in each union to deal with a range of minor criminal and civil disputes.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The nature of UNDP's role was described by the IEO's 2011 Assessment of Development Results for Bangladesh as follows: "The establishment of a NHRC is a significant milestone in the Bangladesh-UNDP partnership. The enactment of NHRC Act in 2009 by a democratically elected Parliament represents a victory of a 14-year-long advocacy programme of UNDP. In April 1995, the Institutional Development of Human Rights in Bangladesh was launched with the active support of UNDP. It formulated a draft bill in 1999. The caretaker government first established the Human Rights Commission by promulgating an Ordinance. The UNDP country office provided significant support to the Government of Bangladesh in preparing the draft legislation. The Commission was first established by the Government on 1 December 2008. The law was re-enacted by Parliament in 2009 and the newly elected government has constituted the NHRC in the light of new law."

⁴⁷ Human Rights Programme, project document.

⁴⁸ Mohammad Rafiqul Islam Talukdar, 'A Review of the Village Courts in Bangladesh', *BRAC Institute of Governance and Development*, 2014.

UNDP's support for the village courts started in 2009, and from 2016 entered into its second (\$36 million) phase, with financing from the European Union (\$26 million), DANIDA (\$2 million) and the Bangladesh Government (approximately \$5 million). The project aims to improve the effectiveness of the village courts as a local arbitration mechanism, and reduce pressure on the formal justice system, where complex, long and cumbersome procedural requirements effectively exclude large proportions of the Bangladesh population from accessing fair and speedy justice. Both phases have been implemented by the Local Government Division (LGD) under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives.

The project has performed well in helping to establish an effective model for local dispute resolution. The first phase underpinned the successful establishment of village courts in 351 of the country's 4,500 unions. The impact of the project was evidenced by significant increases in the number of cases heard in the unions supported by the project compared to those that were not, significant differences in the awareness of village courts in project unions compared to non-project unions, and significant differences in the maintenance of documentation about the cases heard in project areas compared to non-project areas. The project also supported a major revision to the Village Courts Act in 2013. Consistent with policy advocacy from UNDP, the revision allowed the village courts to attend more cases with increased financial cap from BDT 25,000 to BDT 75,000. The revised Act also requires compulsory inclusion of female representatives in the five-member panels of village courts if cases relate to child and women's rights.⁴⁹

The second phase builds on this platform by scaling up the support provided through the project to 1,078 unions, following the lead of the LGD, which has already financed the establishment of court

benches in 1,000 unions, and the distribution registers, forms and knowledge products to all unions. For the second phase, the Government committed a further \$5 million to improving the functioning of courts not covered by the project. An additional \$5 million has been allocated by the EU to expand the project activities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, an amendment that is pending Government approval.

Stakeholders consulted by the evaluation were positive about the outcomes of the project, regarding it as a sustainable and well-established mechanism for improving local dispute resolution. This view is backed up by a mid-term evaluation of this project completed in end 2018, which concluded that:

The AVCB II provides a textbook example of how a project management unit can harness donor support to align with government policy and through partnership with civil society groups deliver an efficient and effective service.

A cost-benefit analysis completed by the Copenhagen Consensus Centre in 2016 suggests the benefits provided by the courts to petitioners in reduced time and psychological stress substantially outweigh the costs of the intervention.⁵⁰

The challenge moving forward will be to explore the effectiveness and affordability of institutional support and monitoring models developed by the project, so that knowledge from this can underpin the continued institutionalization of village courts across the country. To put this in context, a baseline survey conducted by the project shows that village courts are still a relatively uncommon recourse for dispute resolution. Village courts were used in just four percent of cases identified by the survey, compared to 86 percent that were adjudicated by *shalish* (the informal adjudication/mediation conducted by village leaders that the formal village courts model is based on).⁵¹ From an institutional strengthening

⁴⁹ Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, 'Technical Project Proposal, Activating village courts project in Bangladesh Phase 2', 2016.

⁵⁰ Md. Shanawez Hossain and Nabila Zaman, 'Benefits and Costs of Operationalizing Village Courts in Bangladesh', *Copenhagen Consensus Centre*, 2016.

⁵¹ UNDP, 'Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh (Phase II) Project: Baseline Report', undated.

perspective, there is a need for the project to invest in developing stronger systems for the administration of village courts beyond project areas. Currently systems for doing so are weak, as is documented by the recent mid-term review.⁵²

Finding 7. Baseline surveys suggest the village courts project may be having limited impact on gender equality despite performance claims to the contrary. Substantive analysis of the gender dimensions of this work is largely absent from project documentation. Overall, the evidence base about the impacts of the village courts project on gender equality needs to be improved.

Attention to gender in project reporting and analysis is weak. For example, the 2017 ROAR includes the following claim, but provides no justification: “Equal access to justice, *particularly for women*, was facilitated by scaling up village courts to 24 percent of the country’s total union parishads together with improved capacity to resolve petty disputes at the doorstep of the communities”. The 2018 ROAR also cites only positive results on gender and justice and identified no challenges. Supporting references provide scant justification for the results claimed. The 2018 mid-term review of the village courts project does not contain a credible assessment of the focus or impact of the project on gender equality.⁵³ This is in spite of evidence that the project may not have had a significant impact on women’s empowerment. Inclusion of a female representative in the five-member panel of village courts is compulsory if

a case relates to child and women’s rights. However, compliance is a challenge and women’s participation in village court decision-making is still very low.⁵⁴ The capacity of the project to address the deep challenges Bangladesh faces with gender-based violence, for example, is something that would benefit from more attention.

Support for local government

Finding 8. UNDP has contributed to improvements in the effectiveness of the local government bodies it has supported. This has included improvements in civic engagement, completion of annual plans and budgets, revenue collection and budget execution and allocation of resources to advance gender equality.

UNDP has tried to strengthen Bangladesh’s system of local government, working through the \$19.3 million Upazila Governance Project (UZGP) and the \$18.4 million Union Parishad Governance Project (UPGP), which were implemented simultaneously between 2012 and 2017. These efforts are continuing through the \$7.3 million Efficient and Accountable Local Governance (EALG) project, which commenced in mid-2018, with funding from DANIDA (\$3 million) and the SDC (\$3 million).⁵⁵ These projects have supported the Local Government Division of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives to improve the effectiveness of the local government system, and build the capacity of the two lowest tiers of Bangladesh’s three-tiered local

⁵² The mid-term review observes that: ‘The AVCB aims to support LGD in developing a M&E framework comprising Decentralized Monitoring, Inspection and Evaluation under LGD, a Village Court Management Information System at UP level and Village Court Management Committee meeting quarterly at Upazila level... None of these are functioning as at time of this report.’

⁵³ The gender equality section is as follows: “UNDP reports good networking with local NGOs in getting the message out to their constituents, especially women. The MTR team was unable to check this. The Women Development Forums that showed early promise appear to be less active now and no sign of them was seen in any of our visits to the districts. Inroads have been made in some districts in boosting women applicants and panel members. However, in Chattogram [Chittagong] and Sylhet, the PNGO [partner nongovernment organization] observed that this proved a challenge owing to the deep conservatism in these (and other districts). The removal of cultural and religious taboos will take time.”

⁵⁴ The baseline survey conducted for the second (current) phase of the project shows there is no difference in women’s use of village courts between project and non-project areas and no difference in the involvement of women in hearing cases brought forward by women. This survey suggests that women are involved in just 0.5 percent of the cases heard by the village courts in both project and non-project areas, despite the requirement they involve at least one woman when the case involves a woman or a child. UNDP, ‘Impact Evaluation of Activating Village Courts Bangladesh by a Randomized Controlled Trial: Baseline report’, undated.

⁵⁵ Other aspects of UNDP’s work with the Bangladesh system of local government are addressed elsewhere in this report. This includes efforts to mainstream climate change (Local Government Initiatives on Climate Change (LoGIC), Inclusive Budgeting and Financing for Climate Change), and to integrate local governments in the administration of the Bangladesh social security system (SWAPNO).

government system, the union parishads (the lowest level of the local government system) and the upazila (subdistrict) parishads.⁵⁶

Given the size of the project's budgets, UNDP's strategy has been to pilot and evaluate policy innovations to improve participatory local development rather than supporting implementation at scale. For this reason, the UPGP project targeted its capacity-building, technical and financial support to 564 of the 4,498 union parishads. Similarly, the UZGP provided support on planning, budgeting and governance to all 487 UZPs, but provided more specialized training to 65 upazilas, and additional fiscal resources to a subset of 14 upazilas within this group.⁵⁷ Overall, around 80,000 officials in union and upazila parishads were trained by the UPGP/UZGP project.⁵⁸ Capacity improvements were also supported by a performance-based grant system, which stimulated competition between and positive self-reflection among local government institutions.

The UZGP and UPGP projects brought about improvements in several aspects of local government capacity in project areas compared to baselines and non-project areas. These included improvements in:

- civic engagement by achieving significant increases in the regularity of conduct and community participation in 'Ward Shavas', open budget meetings, and women's development forums.⁵⁹ This included improvements in the participation of poor people and women;

- completion of annual plans and budgets and in the execution of budgets at the union and upazila levels;
- revenue collection assessed as instrumental to the achievement of estimated relative benefit-cost ratios of 8.1 percent for the UPGP and 18.5 percent for the UZGP project;
- allocation of resources to activities that aim to advance gender equality, implemented under the oversight of the Women's Development Forums;
- community perceptions of the efficiency and effectiveness of union parishads.⁶⁰

Experience in these areas was fed into and supported national policymaking, including by drafting policy studies, strategies, regulations, rules and guidelines to support improved implementation of local government acts. The success claims for support to national policymaking are intricately tied to an assessment of the World Bank-funded Local Government Support programme, which is implemented nationally and entered its \$300 million third phase in early 2017.⁶¹ The mid-term review of the UPGP and UZGP projects points to a reasonable level of collaboration and coordination between the two organizations in areas of directly overlapping interest and focus. While it is difficult to assess the significance of UNDP's contributions to the local government systems against those supported by the World Bank, it is clear UNDP has had a significant influence in some aspects of national policy. In particular, it has had a significant influence over the design of the performance-based mechanism currently in place for allocating grants

⁵⁶ The third and highest-level administrative units are the Zila (District) parishads, of which there are 61 across the country. Urban areas are covered by a different system consisting of *pourashavas* (municipalities) and city corporations. These were not covered by the project.

⁵⁷ UNDP, 'Mid Term Evaluation of the Union Parishad Governance Project (UPGP) and Upazila Governance Project (UZGP)', 2014.

⁵⁸ Project completion reports.

⁵⁹ Ward *shavas* and open budget meetings are participatory forums that are required under the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009. Women's Development Forums are bodies established by UNDP that have subsequently been adopted across the local government system. For a full description see: Chowdhury, Shuvra, 'Public Forums for Social Accountability: A Study of Ward Shava and Open Budget System of 06 (Six) Union Parishads of Bangladesh', 2017.

⁶⁰ Department of Public Administration, University of Dhaka, 'Impact Assessment of Upazila Governance Project & Union Parishad Governance Project', 2017.

⁶¹ The EALG design for example reports that LGSP played a crucial role in upscaling of UNDP supported innovations in subsequent LGSP cycles, although it does not clearly identify which of these innovations have been adopted, nor the resulting impacts. The mid-term review of the UPGP/UZGP projects states that: "One of the *raison d'être* of the UPGP is its ability to add value to LGSP 2; spearheading local governance, CB and fiscal innovations as well as regulatory improvements and best practices which can be upscaled and disseminated nationwide through LGSP"

to union parishads.⁶² UNDP also assisted the LGD with the establishment of Women Development Forums across the country covering all upazila parishads (487) and districts (64), which are expected to be allocated at least 3 percent of available development resources.

Finding 9. The incremental improvements UNDP has supported to local governance, and impact of the support on poverty in Bangladesh is bound by the limited progress the country has made in delegating additional resources and autonomy to local government institutions. This situation is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

While the improvements above are positive, resources allocated to local governments remain small. Although allocations have increased, they have not kept pace with the growth in Bangladesh's overall development budget.⁶³ It is highly unlikely that Bangladesh will pursue any major reform of the local government system, or substantially increase the resources it allocates to it in the immediately foreseeable future.⁶⁴ Currently, fiscal transfers to union parishads account for less than two percent of the Bangladesh Government's budget.⁶⁵

Moving forward, UNDP should work to more clearly articulate the policy reform objectives against which the impact of its current work can be considered and assessed at scale. As part of this, UNDP should look for opportunities to more explicitly and formally link its local government assistance with the programme of support being managed by the World Bank. This will be enabled by the recent establishment of two new framework agreements designed to strengthen collaboration and make project assistance faster and more efficient for countries.⁶⁶

Other governance support

Finding 10. Over the last four years, UNDP has maintained a substantive focus in three areas: village courts, support for the Human Rights Office, and supporting local governance, including in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Other democratic governance support has been fragmented. There have been seven initiation plans in this period funded through Bangladesh's declining core resource allocation. A further three short-term projects have been established that rely heavily on core funding. Overall, UNDP's governance programme looks to be driven by a mixture of donor priorities, and desire to maintain relationships with key stakeholders in the Bangladesh Government, rather than an analysis of opportunities and constraints on development, and UNDP's comparative advantages.

Outside of the three governance areas where there has been a substantive and sustained focus, UNDP's governance programme is fragmented. Ongoing work with the Innovation Unit of the Prime Minister's Office, the Bangladesh Planning Commission, and the Ministry of Finance, is being implemented under short-term frameworks and is highly dependent on UNDP core resources. This includes:

- Knowledge for Development Management was supposed to run for three years up to August 2017, but it is still active almost two years later. Spending on the project over this time has amounted to under \$700,000, less than a third of the resources allocated in the project document.
- Engaging with Institutions IP, is a short-term core funded bridging project, pending the design and establishment of a new Sustainable

⁶² Department of Public Administration, University of Dhaka, 'Impact Assessment of Upazila Governance Project & Union Parishad Governance Project', 2017.

⁶³ World Bank, 'Local Government Support Project, phase 3, Project appraisal document', 2017.

⁶⁴ The 7th Five-Year Plan acknowledges the importance of strengthening the local government system, with an emphasis on incremental improvement rather than comprehensive reform.

⁶⁵ UNDP, 'Mid Term Evaluation of the Upazila Governance Project & Union Parishad Governance Project', 2014.

⁶⁶ See: https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/announcements/2019/UNDP_and_World_Bank_launch_two_new_agreements_to_advance_collaboration_at_the_country_level.html.

Development Goals (SDG) platform, with uncertain resources. (Similarly, the predecessor project, Support for Sustainable and Inclusive Planning, was implemented with an unfunded component amounting to 50 percent of the estimate resources required).

- The National Governance Assessment framework IP, which is a vehicle UNDP established to support the Governance Innovation Unit of the Prime Minister's Office in its aspiration to develop a framework to track long-term progress in the area of good governance. It was implemented for one year over 2017, went into a hiatus in 2018, but is being revived in 2019. The framework for spending on this project and accountability for its results is unclear.

The work undertaken has merit and is valued by counterparts, but the primary driver appears to be a desire to maintain strategically important relationships with stakeholders in the Bangladesh Government. Accountability for results, as measured against what is set out in the approved project documents of these projects is weak, reflecting the absence of an up-to-date and agreed accountability frameworks, and weakly aligned reporting.

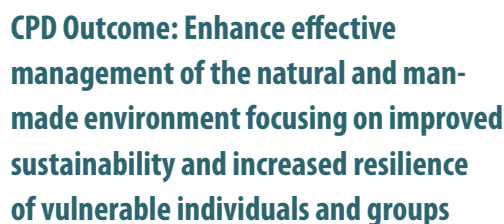
A further short-term project was implemented in the area of electoral assistance. While UNDP has had a history of support for electoral systems in Bangladesh, its support for the 11th national parliamentary election in 2018, jointly implemented with UN Women, was relatively modest, at \$1.5 million, with half of this financed by the SDC, and lasted just one year. This lack of donor financial support reflects a lack of donor confidence in the likely returns from electoral assistance, based on the experience of previous projects.⁶⁷

Given the late start and small scale of the assistance in the context of the Bangladesh electoral system, it is likely the outcomes from this project were modest.

Unfortunately, it was difficult for the evaluation to assess the results. First, the scope of the work undertaken was very limited, given the scale of the problems it seeks to address. Second, the unfunded component of the project, as described in the project document, comes to about two-thirds of the project's intended value, which means it is not possible to line it up against the project's agreed activities and objectives. Finally, no activity reporting was provided to the evaluation team, other than in the form of project steering committee meeting minutes.

A final project was established in 2017 to better understand and address the growing concern about the threat of increasing radicalization, an area of work that was not identified by the CPD when it was finalized in September 2016. UNDP's design for the project, building of an initial implementation plan project, has attracted broad donor support, with commitments from three donors, and further support pending from two others. Even with these contributions, the unfunded component of the budget in the project document is almost half the total. It is too early to assess outcomes from this initiative.

2.3 Resilience



CPD Outcome: Enhance effective management of the natural and man-made environment focusing on improved sustainability and increased resilience of vulnerable individuals and groups

⁶⁷ The 2015 evaluation of UNDP's Bangladesh governance programme observed that the donors had suspended funding from UNDP's elections and parliament projects after the 2014 elections, reflecting dissatisfaction with a perceived lack of flexibility to adjust its outputs based on changes in the political environment. The country office currently implements some modest activities with the Bangladesh Parliament, including peer-to-peer training for MPs on their SDG oversight role (funded by KOICA, \$50,000) and work with MPs to improve their capacity on SDG monitoring, funded by TRAC resources (\$90,000).

RELATED OUTPUTS

OUTPUT 3.1: Government institutions have improved capacities, and institutional and legal frameworks to respond to and ensure resilient recovery from earthquakes, weather extremes and environmental emergencies

OUTPUT 3.2: The Government has the capacity to set up regulatory systems and to implement a range of pro-poor, resilience-focused green economic initiatives

Disaster risk reduction and recovery

Finding 11. UNDP has made a significant contribution to Bangladesh's shift from relief and response to risk reduction over the last 15 years. UNDP played a major role in the establishment of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) and over 15 years has supported it to develop and update legislation, rules, policies and actions plans. Contributions extended to the capacity development of the MoDMR staff and enhancing volunteerism among communities. There is further scope for improvement in M&E, and documentation of major DRR projects in Bangladesh.

UNDP's history in disaster management in Bangladesh goes back as early as 2004, with the establishment of the \$80 million+ Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CMP), which extended over two phases to 2015 (CDMP-I & CDMP-II). Concurrently with the CDMP, UNDP also ran a series of flexible facilities for mobilizing funding and implementing disaster and emergency relief and recovery mechanisms. The two most recent of these

was the Early Recovery Facility (ERF, 2011–2018), and the Disaster Response and Recovery Facility (DRRF, 2018–). UNDP directly implements both.

Over this period, Bangladesh has undergone what stakeholders consulted by the evaluation described as a paradigm shift, from having a predominantly relief and response focus to a risk reduction approach. The significance of this shift can be understood by contrasting Bangladesh's experience with Cyclone Fani in 2019, which it survived with a loss of life that is a small fraction of what it has experienced with cyclones of a similar magnitude in the past.⁶⁸

While it is difficult to quantify this, UNDP contributed significantly to the progress Bangladesh has made during this period. UNDP's contributions have been extensive, and able to influence disaster management policies and response capacity at scale. This was attested to by senior staff of Bangladesh's lead agency for disaster management, the MoDMR, and is also reflected in evaluation reports and annual progress reports. The MoDMR and development agencies reported that UNDP is still their first choice and the most-trusted partner in the area of disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Senior-level executives at the MoDMR interviewed by the evaluation provided insights into how valuable the ERF-sponsored trainings were for DRR officials.

The ERF did not have a full-time M&E officer for the project.⁶⁹ Although the project document included provisions for such an officer, the job was carried out as an additional responsibility by a project officer. Recognizing the multifaceted and dynamic activities of the ERF, there should have been a full-time M&E officer throughout the full term of the ERF. Documentation has suffered in the absence of a dedicated officer responsible for maintaining a detailed record of activities and accomplishments of the over 70 projects undertaken under the ERF.

⁶⁸ An estimated 14 people were killed by Cyclone Fani. Over the past three decades there has been a major reduction in the number of cyclone-related deaths. Cyclone Gorki in 1991 led to 147,000 deaths; whereas the deaths in Cyclone Sidr in 2007 were 4,500 and only six in the Cyclone Mora in 2017. Office of the UN Resident Coordinator, 'Flash Update No. 2, Bangladesh, 2019 Severe Cyclonic Storm "Fani"'. See: <https://reliefweb.int/report/Bangladesh/office-un-resident-coordinator-flash-update-no-2-Bangladesh-2019-severe-cyclonic>

⁶⁹ UNDP, 'Terminal Evaluation of the Early Recovery Facility (ERF) Project Final Report', 2018.

Finding 12. UNDP has been playing a proactive role in earthquake risk reduction, including establishing community-based disaster management and voluntary networks for immediate search and rescue operations in the wake of disasters. It has developed a novel approach for assessing seismic exposure of buildings and socio-economic exposure assessment and supported contingency planning in Mymensingh Municipality.

The CDMP I introduced and encouraged an increased focus on to earthquake and tsunami risk in disaster management approaches. The CDMP II strengthened earthquake risk reduction activities taken from the CDMP I and developed active fault maps and seismic vulnerability maps for nine cities in Bangladesh. A recent example of UNDP's work on earthquake risk reduction was research it has completed in Mymensingh Municipality assessing the seismic exposure of buildings and community vulnerability and developing a contingency plan for the ward 14 in 2018 (see Box 1).⁷⁰

Based on the research findings, the Municipality has allocated a revenue budget for refresher volunteer training in cooperation with the Fire Service and Civil Defence in response. However, it will be challenging to execute the UNDP-supported Mymensingh earthquake risk reduction model because of insufficient funding for retrofitting buildings and difficulties in increasing community awareness, involvement and support from other governmental organizations.⁷¹

The MoDMR appreciated the Mymensingh Municipality earthquake risk reduction model because of its approach of integrating an assessment of seismic exposure of buildings and community vulnerability with a local contingency plan. However, no plan has yet been established to replicate this work in other areas. Such findings should be more widely disseminated through electronic and print media partners, and by engaging key national institutions, ministers and experts so they can influence policy and planning in other urban areas.

BOX 1. Disaster-resilient town development plans in Mymensingh Municipality

Bangladesh's preparedness for earthquakes and associated disasters is weak, an outcome that can be attributed to the infrequent occurrence of this type of hazard. However, the experience of the 1762 Chittagong and 1885 Bengal earthquakes suggest that any future events of this magnitude will be catastrophic. According to the seismic zoning map of the Bangladesh National Building Code, 1993, Mymensingh is one of the most vulnerable regions in Bangladesh. With support from UNDP, the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology has conducted a seismic exposure and vulnerability assessment and prepared a community-level contingency plan in the municipal area for enhanced disaster preparedness. The study shows that 66 percent of buildings in the ward number 14 of the municipality are high risk in the event of seismic activity.

The earthquake contingency plan prepared for the study area included: temporary shelter planning, emergency health facility planning, Ward Coordination Centre planning, and evacuation route planning. Earthquake awareness and preparedness were improved through contingency planning for the municipal government, development of vulnerability assessment tools and training conducted for schools. Communities benefited from awareness on building code standards and first responder training on earthquake preparedness. They underwent training through earthquake drills. After the completion of the UNDP project, the Mymensingh municipal authority recognized the importance of the earthquake risk reduction model for other areas of the city and allocated funding from the annual budget to extend similar vulnerability assessment plans for another three wards including exercising community-level contingency plan and earthquake drills.

⁷⁰ Assessment of Seismic Exposure, Building and Socio-economic Exposure Assessment and Contingency Planning for Ward 14 of Mymensingh Municipality by the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

⁷¹ Interview data.

Finding 13. The ERF and DRRF have funded a variety of early recovery activities benefiting victims of natural disasters, responding to the Bangladesh Government appeal to extend support during the north-western flood, landslides in CHT and south-eastern tropical cyclone Mora emergencies in 2017. Although the ERF was able to target assistance to the most affected victims of flood disasters, some aspects of local-level relief interventions were poorly designed, which suggests UNDP needs to pay more attention to monitoring its field-level interventions.

Between 2011 and 2018 the ERF spent \$20.3 million on post-disaster recovery⁷² through some 70+ projects funded by UNDP core resources, a range of bilateral donors and UN agencies and funds. UNDP, supported by the ERF, leads two of the eight humanitarian clusters (early recovery cluster and shelter cluster, with the International Federation of the Red Cross). Under the banner of providing complementary support to national emergencies and early recovery needs, and promoting innovation in early recovery, UNDP has engaged in activities such as:

- Supporting recovery of livelihoods through cash grants and cash for work, and livelihoods training programmes in the wake of Cyclones Aila and Mahasen;
- Developing disaster-resilient shelters combined with coastal embankment strengthening, coastal afforestation and promotion of water-based livelihood recovery;
- Providing emergency shelter support to households displaced by the extensive 2017 floods and communities affected by landslide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the same year.

Disaster-affected communities have welcomed this assistance. While the goal of addressing immediate needs has some intrinsic merit, the objectives behind UNDP's involvement and its added value in such cases are not clear. There is limited scope in such efforts to influence Bangladesh Government

policies and capacities for response or recovery. The scale of the assistance has been small compared to recovery needs and the Bangladesh Government's own programmes in these cases. Documentation of the costs and benefits of innovative approaches is weak, reducing the likelihood that successful approaches will be widely adopted.

Finally, whether UNDP Bangladesh has the capability to design and deliver effective post-disaster recovery micro-interventions is questionable, given the breadth of the work undertaken by the country office and limited staffing resources. This was evident in the case of the ERF's response to the Bangladesh Government's appeal for support for the north-western flood-affected regions in late 2017 and early 2018. The ERF provided a package consisting of two bundles of tin, a trunk, cooking apparatus, bed sheets, blankets and pillow covers, mosquito nets, a saw/apparatus and school bags for children to 17,210 flood-affected families. The final evaluation report of the ERF confirmed from field visits that it had delivered the relief items to beneficiaries. However, the same report indicated that beneficiaries had not been able to utilize the tin because they could not raise the BDT 10,000 required to rebuild their houses with the material.⁷³ UNDP should closely consider the costs and benefits and objectives of complementary relief and recovery assistance.

Finding 14. UNDP initially found it difficult to establish a clear role in the international response to the Rohingya crisis, and was criticized as being slow, and individualistic in the first phase of its response. In the form of a well-staffed sub-office headed by a long-term officer in Cox's Bazaar, UNDP has established the foundations for future work.

Beginning in August 2017, around 745,000 Rohingya refugees fled across the Bangladesh border from Rakhine state in Myanmar, almost tripling the population of the Ukhiya and Teknaf subdistricts. As of January 2019, over 900,000 stateless Rohingya

⁷² UNDP, 'Terminal Evaluation of the Early Recovery Facility (ERF) Project Final Report', 2018.

⁷³ Ibid.

refugees reside in these two subdistricts, the vast majority in 34 congested camps. The largest camp, the Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Site, hosts approximately 626,500 refugees.⁷⁴

This has put huge pressure on host communities, increasing commodity prices and competition for employment, overloading education and health facilities, depleting drinking water and accelerating the deterioration of roads. A UNDP study found that over 4,300 acres of hills and forests in Cox's Bazar were razed to build the refugee settlements.⁷⁵ Forest clearance and construction of houses in steep terrain have increased the risk of landslides. Grassland used as cattle feed and in construction has been depleted, and private and public ponds have been contaminated.⁷⁶ This has ignited tensions between refugees and host communities, as evidenced by several significant clashes.⁷⁷

The Bangladesh Government considers repatriation of the refugees to be the only acceptable solution to the crisis. The Myanmar Government has committed to creating conditions conducive for return, including bilateral agreements with the Bangladesh Government and the memorandum of understanding between UNHCR, UNDP and the Government of Myanmar. However, the most recent Joint Response Plan for the crisis underscores the fact that the root causes of their plight in Myanmar have not been addressed and their future is yet uncertain.⁷⁸

With no resolution in sight, the humanitarian community is attempting to strengthen linkages to development actors to ensure that ongoing humanitarian interventions link to the longer term development priorities of the Government

of Bangladesh. In 2018, the World Bank committed a \$480 million grant under its IDA18 Regional Sub-Window for Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh. This grant aimed to benefit both refugee and host population health, education and multi-sector interventions including livelihoods and infrastructure (such as cyclone shelters and roads). The Asian Development Bank has approved \$100 million out of \$200 million earmarked for the crisis for water and sanitation, disaster risk management, energy supply, and road access to and within camps.⁷⁹ Thus far collaborative efforts of the Bangladesh Government, UN agencies, aid and development agencies, and local Bangladeshi actors have ensured all Rohingya refugees have been receiving basic livelihood support and living conditions in the camps have improved.⁸⁰

Due to time and resource constraints this evaluation was unable to assess the situation on the ground or consult widely with donors about UNDP's role. However, consultations were undertaken by an after-action review of UNDP's initial response in December 2018. It is clear from this review that in the early period of the crisis, UNDP found it difficult to establish a clear role for itself in the international response. Not being a humanitarian agency, UNDP was not approved by the Government of Bangladesh to participate in the response at the outset, which caused a delay. UNDP was not successful in achieving its desired host community coordination role, and there were many negative impressions by humanitarian donors of its interagency coordination activities. UNDP was characterized as being slow in establishing a presence, finalizing assessments and initiating project implementation and as not sufficiently participatory in its approach.⁸¹

⁷⁴ UN Resident Coordinator, UNHCR Bangladesh and IOM Bangladesh, '2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis', 2019.

⁷⁵ 4,300 acres of hills, forests razed for Rohingya shelters, *The Daily Star*, 19 September 2018. See: <https://www.thedailystar.net/rohingya-crisis/rohingya-influx-puts-biodiversity-risk-in-coxs-bazar-1635562>.

⁷⁶ UNDP and UN Women, 'Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh: Early Recovery Joint Assessment', 2017.

⁷⁷ UN Resident Coordinator, UNHCR Bangladesh and IOM Bangladesh, '2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis', 2019.

⁷⁸ According to the report, the refugees "articulate ongoing concerns about the security situation in Rakhine State, their lack of recognized Myanmar citizenship and other restrictions there on their rights to freedom of movement, and access to livelihoods, health and education."

⁷⁹ See: <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-100-million-grant-approved-first-phase-proposed-200-million-package-displaced>.

⁸⁰ UN Resident Coordinator, UNHCR Bangladesh and IOM Bangladesh, '2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya: Humanitarian Crisis', 2019.

⁸¹ The After-Action Review observed that: "External partners (including donors, agencies, coordination bodies) have also conveyed that UNDP at country level has been considered as an 'individualistic' agency not very prone to consultation and communication." Final report on After Action Review (AAR) of UNDP response to the Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, UNDP has made progress in establishing its role. UNDP has established a foundation for future work in the form of a well-staffed sub-office at Cox's Bazar which is instrumental for the implementation of activities. With this as a platform, UNDP mobilized around \$15 million for 12 projects at the time of the evaluation, with a further \$9 million on five projects in the pipeline covering the areas of governance, service delivery, rule of law; community cohesion; inclusive recovery and development; environmental management and disaster risk management.⁸² UNDP has also done some useful work, focusing on reducing the pressure of the crisis on host communities, and on disaster risk reduction in camp areas and adjacent host communities.⁸³ Its role and expertise in disaster risk reduction have been appreciated by the humanitarian community.⁸⁴

The evaluation considers there is a risk, given the number and small size of the projects being established, that this work becomes disconnected from UNDP's mainstream development programmes and expertise in Bangladesh. This risk is exacerbated by the lack of strategic clarity about UNDP's intended role in the response, as evidenced by the fact it developed as many as 26 concept notes for potential projects for funding.⁸⁵ To mitigate this risk, UNDP should seek to integrate the focus on the development needs of host communities within its major development programmes, and look for opportunities to complement and enhance the work being undertaken by other donors. This is consistent with the recommendation of the after-action review that UNDP should strengthen its partnership with UNHCR on the humanitarian-development nexus and longer

term aspects of the response.⁸⁶ A similar argument is made by the Joint Response Plan 2019, which urges the humanitarian community to ensure that ongoing humanitarian interventions link to the longer term development priorities of the Bangladesh Government in Cox's Bazar.

UNDP acknowledged that this was a significant risk in the early days of the crisis, but advised that its position is now much more seasoned in the context of increasing acceptance that the crisis is likely to be protracted. In this context, it further advised that it is now well recognized as a key player in the multi-UN agency response to the crisis.

Climate change adaptation

Finding 15. UNDP has helped the Bangladesh Government develop a budgeting and accountability framework for climate finance, encouraging a shift in Bangladesh from climate change being an environmental agenda to it being a core development issue. However, it is not clear how or to what extent these fiscal frameworks and budgetary protocols will contribute to adaptation on the ground, and weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation make it difficult if not impossible to assess the significance of major results, including the extent to which they can be attributed to support provided by UNDP.

Inclusive Budgeting and Financing for Climate Resilience (IBFCR) was designed as a \$2.2 million project funded by the DFID, UNDP, GIZ (the German development agency) and SIDA and implemented by the Ministry of Finance. It has two levels of focus. It

⁸² Advice from country office.

⁸³ Through the ERF, UNDP employed 1920 (one third women) people in the host communities in the four most affected Unions of Ukhyia and Teknaf Upazilas to improve the condition of 48 km of feeder roads connecting villages to main roads. The ERF also provided financial support to employ 245 Rohingyas for 32 days for the collecting and dumping of solid waste generated in the camps and 100 host community members for 20 days for the solid waste management at Ukhyia market. Under the ERF, 1,000 bins (950 in the camp and 50 in the market) distributed to collect solid waste and created 101 temporary pits with fences.

⁸⁴ These include: the early recognition by all actors of DRR deployment as a priority; providing technical advice on preparedness to the Emergency Task Force and the Inter Sector Coordination Group per their request; the continuity of staff deployed from country office and the recognized in-country experience and technical capacity of staff working on DRR issues; and the choice of an advisory role rather than a coordinating one, coupled with some funding to implement activities. UNDP first raised the issue of host community needs at the time of the Early Recovery Initial Assessment, highlighting the necessity of a coordinated approach.

⁸⁵ UNDP Crisis Bureau, 'Final report on After Action Review (AAR) of UNDP response to the Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh', 2018.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

supports the national government to implement its climate fiscal framework. At the local level, it aims to develop effective models for planning and budgeting to address climate change.

The start of the project was delayed by 2.5 years because the Bangladesh Government took that long to approve it. Further delays prompted the DFID to reduce its contribution to the project. The resultant funding gap was managed by reducing the number of local governments the project worked with from nine to two and by reducing the scope of planned M&E work. While the project document envisaged a comprehensive M&E system, involving annual review reports, mid-term and end-of-project evaluations, and an ex post impact assessment one year after project completion, none of these activities were completed. As evidence of the project's monitoring activities, the evaluation team was provided with meeting minutes.

In the context of budget cuts and delays and in the absence of any credible reporting – independent or otherwise – of the project's inputs or outputs, it is difficult to confidently assess the significance of major results.

Consultation with the national project director and country office staff suggest the project has provided useful support for the development of the Bangladesh Government's climate fiscal framework, including developing a system for tracking internal climate finance. Consultations with senior executives from the Ministry of Finance suggest that climate-inclusive budgeting and financing mechanisms have already been institutionalized and will be sustained beyond the completion of the IBFCR. Officials noted that the IBFCR's contributions had encouraged a shift from climate change being an environmental agenda to it being a core development issue. These are positive indicators but should be considered with caution for a few reasons. Firstly, the evaluation also notes that this is not the first time that UNDP has assisted Bangladesh in developing a climate fiscal framework (it also did so in 2014), which raises

questions about the significance or sustainability of current efforts.⁸⁷ Secondly, and more importantly, it is not clear how these fiscal frameworks and budgetary protocols will contribute to adaptation on the ground level because they do not specifically address current and projected impacts in specific geographic areas and sectors that are particularly vulnerable or exposed.

Finding 16. Through the IBFCR project, UNDP piloted a planning and budgeting methodology to address climate risk at the local level and financed some micro-scale adaptation initiatives. This approach is currently only happening at a very small scale, focused on just two of Bangladesh's 4,500+ unions, the lowest tier of the local government system, and generating livelihoods activities that provide a short-term benefit to a very small number of people. There is no credible strategy in place evaluating the value for money of, or potential for scaling up of any aspect of this pilot. In the absence of credible information, it is impossible to verify claims that knowledge and information generated from pilots have been integrated into other interventions in UNDP's climate change adaptation portfolio.

One component of the IBFCR project aims to support effective planning and budgeting for climate change finance at the local level. It aimed to achieve three outputs: strengthened role of local government division and union/upazilas in the integration of climate change finance in planning and budgeting at national and local levels; climate-sensitive planning and budgeting established/strengthened at union, upazila and pourashava level in nine localities of Bangladesh; climate resilience grants linked for climate-resilient planning and budgeting at local government institution level.

As discussed above, budget constraints forced a reduction in the scope of the local government partnerships from nine to two in the Deluti and Latachapli union parishads. Support to these unions focused

⁸⁷ (a) *The Daily Independent*, 'Reducing impact of climate change: stress on updating climate fiscal framework', 22 March 2019, Dhaka, Bangladesh (b) *The Dhaka Tribune*, Experts: Climate Fiscal Framework needs to be more citizens centric', 21 March, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

on the integration of climate change finance in planning and budgeting at the local level. For example, with technical and financial support of the IBFCR, the Deluti Union conducted risk assessments, developed a baseline and a local climate action plan, developed a climate and gender-responsive action plan and budget for 2018-2019. The evaluation team was able to undertake a field visit to consult with stakeholders and beneficiaries of the work completed in Deluti Union. Discussion with UP chairman, members and some beneficiaries indicated that the capacity of the UP had been enhanced in developing the action plan to reduce climate change impacts and disaster preparedness. Women were consulted at all stages of this work and their needs were well reflected in the projects plans and activities. Unfortunately, given the lack of finance available at the local level, and the size of the funding gaps in the plans developed, it is unclear what impact this exercise has had.⁸⁸

The project also funded a number of micro-activities in the local climate action plan it helped the Deluti Union to develop, which identified adaptive livelihood options to reduce climate risks as a high priority. To address this priority, the project trained 100 women on climate-resilient livelihoods in two Deluti Union villages.⁸⁹ The project also funded the construction of a women's centre, including a day-care facility to provide a space where women can come to gain training on adaptive livelihood skills and share knowledge and information. Although the union and beneficiaries were happy to receive this support and the project had some capacity-building impact, the evaluation questions whether this was a strategic investment for UNDP. The level of direct impact that UNDP could realistically obtain from these micro-activities, many of which are untested, is limited. Furthermore, the lack of attention to documentation and evaluation of the results of these pilots suggests they provide limited scope for learning beyond those directly involved.

Finding 17. UNDP Bangladesh is implementing separate projects and clusters on climate change adaptation and disaster resilience with substantial overlaps between the areas of work of different projects. There is little evidence of intersectoral coordination or attempts to exploit synergies between the different areas of work. Rather, individual activities have been designed and implemented in isolation by the same national stakeholders and managed by separate teams within projects and the UNDP country office. This is contrary to the aspirations of the CPD 2017-2020, which emphasized the importance of institutionalizing a whole-of-government and broader society approach to risk management.

UNDP currently has four projects under implementation, the IBFCR, LoGIC, the National Resilience Programme and the DRRF, that are focused on inter-related areas of climate change planning, financing, and adaptation. The activities of these projects have been designed and implemented in isolation by the same national stakeholders and managed by separate teams within projects and the UNDP country office. The projects are all engaged in similar areas of work on awareness building and capacity development of different ministries with regard to climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, response and recovery. The most common ministries included in these projects are the MoDMR, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), and Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives which implement DRR and climate change adaptation activities at the grass-roots levels.

There has been much emphasis on integrating climate change adaption, disaster risk reduction, recovery and development approaches in order to achieve resilience pathways set out in

⁸⁸ The climate fiscal framework developed for the Latachapli Union included high priority activities for combating climate change and disaster impacts and a five-year action plan requiring BDT 279.15 million to implement. This compares to estimated revenues of BDT 9.5 million over the same period. UNDP, 'Local Climate Fiscal Framework Report Latachapli Union Parishad, Kalapara Upazila, Patuakhali District,' 2017.

⁸⁹ Elected Union Council members called an open meeting in their respective areas to explain about the opportunities (i.e. crab fattening and hydroponic). Those women showing much enthusiasm and having previous experience in agricultural and fishing activities were selected with general consensus among local elected female councillors, ward councillors and UP chairman.

the Sendai Framework, the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and development literature.⁹⁰ Similarly, the UNDAF and the CPD 2017-2020 stressed the need for intersectoral coordination on integrating climate change adaptation and disaster resilience through institutionalizing a whole-of-government and broader society approach to risk management. However, these four programmes/projects have been implemented separately and show limited evidence of collaboration.

UNDP acknowledged that it is increasingly constrained in its ability to follow the UNDAF and CPD, as donors' strategic directions are becoming more influential in the midst of declining core resources of UNDP. Notwithstanding this challenge, it advised that intersectoral coordination and synergies between projects has been addressed through Inter-Ministerial Steering Committees, that projects shared the same stakeholders, and that project objectives and deliverables were complementary not overlapping. The Bangladesh Government advised that the LoGIC programme has drawn significantly on UNDP's work on climate change with the CDMP, and earlier UNDP-UN Capital Development Fund support (UPGP & UZGP) in the use of fiscal decentralization to design local government financing instruments.

Strengthening natural resource management in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

Finding 18. UNDP has a longstanding and well-regarded role in supporting peace and development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, one of the most impoverished and disadvantaged regions in the country. Despite designing a comprehensive programme of assistance, including areas such as access to justice, youth and volunteer engagement, and gender-based violence, the scope of UNDP activities is narrow, focused on watershed management and food security. These activities are valued by donor partners and the Government and are performing well.

The Strengthening inclusive development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) project was designed as a five-year \$31.6 million multi-donor project targeting the CHT, one of the most disadvantaged regions in Bangladesh. It commenced in 2017. This project is a continuation of UNDP's long-lasting support to sustainable peace and development process in the post-conflict region of CHT through the Promotion of Development and Confidence Building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts project (2003-2016). It is implemented by UNDP in partnership with the Ministry of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs.

For various reasons, it is very hard to get a clear picture of the achievements of the current phase of assistance. The project document describes a comprehensive programme of assistance covering 57 activities across three outputs. To provide a flavour for the breadth of the planned programme and diversity of activities, the results and resources framework includes activities such as: constructing shelters for victims of violence against women; improving policing; improving land administration, supporting local government authorities, and volunteer and youth networks, developing case management systems based on traditional justice systems, working with the courts to promote traditional forms of justice, support for legal aid services, and small grants schemes. Overall, only nine of the 57 activities identified are funded, all in the first of three outputs (community land management), and the document was signed with a \$12 million funding gap. The unfunded components cover aspects of governance and increasing community engagement and participation in the CHT.

The activities that are funded are subprojects supported by two donors. The first subproject is the long-running Agriculture and Food Security Project (AFSP) funded by DANIDA to improve living conditions of poor marginal and small farmer households through enhanced, integrated and sustainable agricultural productivity. The AFSP commenced in 2009 and entered its third phase in 2018. The farmer field

⁹⁰ UNISDR, 'Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030'; IPCC, 'Managing the risks of extreme events and disasters to advance climate change adaptation', 2012; Schipper, S., and Pelling, M., 'Disaster risk, climate change and international development: scope for, and challenges to, integration', *Disasters*, 2006.

school approach forms the basis for efforts to promote production increases and diversification. The second subproject, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-Management Activity, is funded by USAID. This started in 2013 and is expected to end in 2019, although an extension was planned at the time of the evaluation. As is indicated by the title, the project supports watershed protection by promoting and supporting the management of forest resources in the region.

Consultations with the Ministry of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, USAID and DANIDA confirmed the view presented in project reporting and previous evaluations, that the two current activities are well-established and performing well.⁹¹ The Ministry of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs highlighted the continuing value it places on external assistance, including from UNDP. By virtue of its neutrality, UNDP is recognized as having a key role to play in the region. The watershed protection activity, for example, has developed a well-established and effective model for community-based management of village forests, small streams and associated micro-watersheds, covering 104 villages and 4,196 hectares.⁹² An impact evaluation of the food security project crop suggests the project has increased yields due to the adoption of new farm management techniques and increased access to extension services, translating into an increase in household income, mostly for male-headed household and increased food intake.⁹³

With increasing population pressures on the region stemming from the influx of Rohingya refugees, there is scope for UNDP to leverage its presence and knowledge and help to reduce or manage these pressures. To this end, work is underway to incorporate additional components to support the host communities affected by the Rohingya influx, with

additional funding from DANIDA and Canada. This is on top of a recent agreement reached with the Asian Development Bank, which has had a long-standing commitment to the region.⁹⁴ In managing this expansion, the evaluation considers that UNDP should be mindful of the need to work within the expertise and capability built in its existing programme, rather than risk over-extending itself into too many new or different areas.

Environmental protection

Finding 19. Interventions in coastal afforestation and reforestation, aquatic biodiversity conservation, and community-based forest management in the CHT are well-designed but complex. Unfortunately, weaknesses in the benefit-sharing regimes and integration of alternative livelihood interventions, combined with weak monitoring and evaluation undermine the learning potential from these activities, and prospects for taking them to scale.

UNDP is implementing three projects to improve natural resource management at the community level, all carried out by the Forest Department of the MoEF&CC. The \$1.6 million five-year project, Expanding the protected area system to incorporate aquatic ecosystems, is GEF-funded and seeks to conserve the population of dolphins in the Sundarbans. The Integrating Community-based Adaptation into Afforestation and Reforestation Programmes is a five-year \$5.7 million GEF-funded project aiming at reducing the vulnerability of coastal communities to the adverse impacts of climate change by protecting mangrove forests. Finally, the six-year USAID-funded \$8 million Chittagong Hill Tracts Watershed Co-management Activity (CHTWCA) implemented by the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, and Forest Department addresses sustainable forest

⁹¹ See for example, UNDP, 'Final Review: Promotion of Development and Confidence Building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts', 2015; UNDP, 'Independent Mid-term Outcome Evaluation Country Programme Document (CPD) (2012-2016), Outcome 2.1 (Poverty reduction)', 2016.

⁹² UNDP, 'Strengthening inclusive development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts-Annual report', 2017.

⁹³ UNDP, 'End-Evaluation/Impact Assessment for Agriculture and Food Security Project Phase II', 2018.

⁹⁴ \$470,000 to support skills training of neighbourhood groups, with a focus on community assets and financial management, leadership and participatory monitoring and planning.

management⁹⁵ and biodiversity conservation. This project is a component of the larger CHT-focused project described above.

All three projects share a common focus on livelihood strategies and community-based natural resource management. They all tackle the complex challenge of balancing human needs with environmental goals. To reduce community dependence and pressure on natural assets (mangroves, forests and dolphin populations) that are under threat, they promote alternative livelihoods and stronger community participation in resource management decisions.

The challenge of promoting the adoption of alternative livelihoods to reduce pressure on the environment is underlined by a dearth of knowledge about the effectiveness of alternative livelihood strategies on environmental outcomes.⁹⁶ A core problem encountered by alternative livelihood strategies resides in the fact that households usually engage in multiple livelihoods activities. This means it is not clear whether alternative livelihoods will replace the activities that induce pressure on the natural ecosystem; whether they will become just an additional activity performed by the household; or whether they will simply fail to be adopted.

Two out of the three projects also face significant additional challenges in achieving a benefit-sharing regime that has been shown to be central to achieving sustainable resource management. The mode of community-based resource management the three projects adopt has been proven to be effective. However, this effectiveness is usually associated with devolution of management power

to the communities in a manner that enables them to continue to benefit from the resource, as distinct from assigning them a pure resource protection role. This is especially true in resource-constrained countries, where governments usually struggle with enforcement.⁹⁷

In the case of both the coastal afforestation and aquatic biodiversity projects, it is not clear how the community will benefit directly from the resource. This was confirmed by an initial study in the mangrove restoration project, which revealed that the scope for benefit-sharing with the forest resource protections group is limited. It follows then that the prospect for sustainability of effective community involvement is not strong, and that the projects may need to explore alternative strategies. The country office is aware of this limitation and is experimenting with approaches to overcome it. These approaches consist in the provision of micro-capital grants in the coastal afforestation project and the promotion of alternative income-generating activities and sharing of tourism revenue in the case of the aquatic biodiversity project.

An additional risk particular to the coastal afforestation and reforestation project is the sustainability of the mangrove restoration works. The project has adopted a sound strategy for enrichment of plantation with 10-12 climate-resilient mangrove species. However, there are still inherent uncertainties and given the complexity of the physical processes involved in ecosystem restoration. This includes the risk that restored areas could be damaged by cyclones (common to the area) prior to becoming established.⁹⁸ If established, however, the

⁹⁵ Forest resource targeted are village common forest and headwater reserved forest.

⁹⁶ This was confirmed by a recent systematic review conducted by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, 3ie, which only identified one study of livelihoods interventions that had had a positive impact (the use of energy efficient stove in the reduction of tree felling in villages in China) in reducing local pressure on natural resources. Roe, D., Booker, F., Day, M., Zhou, W., Allebone-Webb, S., Hill, N.A.O., Kumpel, N., Petrokofsky, G., Redford, K., Russell, D., Shepherd, G., Wright, J., Sunderland, T.C.H., 'Are alternative livelihood projects effective at reducing local threats to specified elements of biodiversity and/or improving or maintaining the conservation status of those elements?' 2015. See: <https://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/systematic-review-repository/are-alternative-livelihood-projects-effective-reducing>.

⁹⁷ Gilmour, D., 'Forty years of community-based forestry: a review of its extent and effectiveness', 2016. See: <http://agris.fao.org/agris-search/search.do?recordID=XF2017000018>.

⁹⁸ IUCN, 'Mass mangrove restoration: Driven by good intentions but offering limited results', 2017. See: <https://www.iucn.org/news/forests/201702/mass-mangrove-restoration-driven-good-intentions-offering-limited-results>; José Antonio Cabo Bujan and Nizamuddin Al Hussainy, 'Final evaluation of the Community-based adaptation to climate change through coastal afforestation in Bangladesh 2009-2015: Terminal evaluation report, (ICBACCC) project', 2016.

greenbelt has the potential to play a significant role in reducing the risk of flooding from cyclones and other coastal storms.

Except for the CHTWCA activity, it is not apparent from project reporting that the challenges mentioned above are being thoroughly considered in project implementation. While the project on aquatic biodiversity protection has not provided any progress reports to date, the reporting of the ICBAAR projects do not reflect actions toward integrating the various components of the project such as alternative livelihood strategies, community participation, and mangrove restoration. For example, it is not clear from coastal afforestation project progress reports whether community members targeted for the promotion of alternative livelihoods are the ones that are most dependent on forest resources that are being degraded. In the conservation of aquatic biodiversity project, fishing households are the right target, but budget constraints mean livelihood activities are only focused on a small portion (16-20 percent) of the population that depends on aquatic resources. Additionally, the project is exploring options for ensuring the sustainability of the alternative income-generating activities supported by the project. Notwithstanding these efforts, the evaluation considers the prospects for scaling these alternative livelihood activities is highly constrained.

Finding 20. UNDP has made a few positive contributions to improving the capacity of policy and institutional stakeholders to implement Rio convention commitments.

The National Capacity Development for the Implementing Rio Convention project is a four-year \$0.9 million initiative implemented by the Department of Environment (DoE) of the MoEF&CC. The project supplies DoE technical assistance to enhance the capacity of relevant policy and institutional stakeholders to enable compliance with the three Rio Conventions and other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). The project responds and

addresses the National Capacity Self-Assessment of 2007, which highlighted limited technical and managerial capacity of human resources in the relevant MEAs areas as the most critical impediment to the implementation of MEAs in Bangladesh.⁹⁹ The project has made a number of constructive and useful contributions to ensuring the Bangladesh National Policy and Development plan address Rio convention commitments. For example, it has developed training modules on the Rio Conventions that have been incorporated into the curriculum of the Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy. It has delivered communication and outreach activities to government officials, youth and the media. It has also established an expert group of government institutions involved in environmental governance.¹⁰⁰

Climate change mitigation

Finding 21. Climate change mitigation interventions were successful in delivering outputs, laying the foundations for future carbon emission reduction. It is not possible to assess from the available evidence whether or how these interventions will be leveraged to secure Government buy-in for scaling-up carbon emissions reduction.

UNDP is addressing climate change mitigation within the environment portfolio through two projects. The first is a three-year \$2.15 million UN-REDD Bangladesh National Programme project funded by UNDP (\$1.15 million) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (\$1 million) and implemented by the Forest Department of the MoEF&CC. This is the readiness phase of a local adaption of the REDD+, a forestry greenhouse gas emission mitigation mechanism adopted by the conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The second project is the six-year GEF-funded \$4 million Sustainable Renewable Energy Power Generation (SREPGen) initiative implemented by the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority. It aimed to reduce the growth of

⁹⁹ UNDP, 'National capacity development for implementing Rio Conventions through environmental governance -Project document', 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Bangladesh Government, GEF and UNDP, 'Rio project: Annual Progress Report', 2018.

greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from fossil fuel-fired power generation by expanding renewable energy production.

Despite major delays in the inception and implementation of both projects, one-year no-cost extensions have allowed for the delivery of most project outputs. The REDD+ project supported the implementation of Bangladesh's REDD+ Readiness Roadmap by establishing REDD+ management processes, completing its National REDD+ strategy, and developing the capacities required to implement REDD+. These activities contributed to the development of a national framework to address deforestation and forest degradation and improved understanding of deforestation drivers through various studies. One notable achievement of this project is the establishment of a national forest monitoring system, the Bangladesh Forest Information System, which can provide better data on Bangladesh's forest resources and trends. These activities are a prerequisite for mobilizing finance that is available for implementation of the REDD+ strategy.¹⁰¹

Whether these preliminary activities will lead to any reduction in GHG emissions is hard to determine.¹⁰² However, given the result-based payment concept behind REDD+ remains largely untested due to complexity of measurement, among other things, and the lack of international finance, the prospects for REDD+ to effectively contribute to climate change mitigation are not strong, unless the project succeeds in mobilizing national financing.¹⁰³ The complexities of securing finance in the context of REDD+ projects¹⁰⁴ and implications in Bangladesh are not addressed in performance reporting.

A mid-term review of the SREPGen project assessed output delivery as unsatisfactory in 2017, because there had been very little progress in implementing three of the four project components and no progress on the fourth.¹⁰⁵ Implementation of one component was delayed because the technology the design had identified for deployment (solar lanterns) was found to be unviable. Another reason for the delay was that other donors had taken up substantive roles in the areas identified for work, including in developing policy and regulatory frameworks, feasibility assessments of wind power development. These changes necessitated a substantial redesign, with a focus on developing a hybrid solar and wind energy powered mini-grid system suitable for areas not easily accessible to the main grid. While the feasibility of the system for adoption at scale needs to be tested, the development of the new approach demonstrates a positive adaptation of the project to changes in context. Reflecting this, UNDP's Regional Technical Adviser assessed the implementation of the project as highly satisfactory in its most recent annual review.

Although the renewable energy project and the mini-grid solution can be expected to reduce GHG emissions, this contribution is likely to be very modest, even in the best-case scenario. First, the potential GHG savings from adopting solar lighting in non-electrified rural households is small, amounting to around four percent of Bangladesh's 2017 carbon emissions (by replacing kerosene use for lighting).¹⁰⁶ Second, the solution targets very few rural communities, which means these potential benefits will only be realized if the system is

¹⁰¹ See: <https://redd.unfccc.int/fact-sheets/redd-mrv-and-results-based-payments.html>; and <https://academic.oup.com/jof/article/115/4/323/4599161>; <https://redd.unfccc.int/>

¹⁰² The country office has advised that the outputs of the REDD+ project have informed Bangladesh Government actions (represented by the Forest Department) in the form of the establishment of two mega plantations, including one (60,000 ha) financed by government resources and another (77,600 ha) funded by a World Bank loan.

¹⁰³ See: <https://redd.unfccc.int/fact-sheets/redd-mrv-and-results-based-payments.html>; <https://academic.oup.com/jof/article/115/4/323/4599161>; and <https://redd.unfccc.int/>

¹⁰⁴ Gabrielle Lipton, 'A brief explainer of how REDD+ finance works', 2018. See: <https://forestsnews.cifor.org/56485/a-brief-explainer-of-how-redd-finance-works?fnl=en>

¹⁰⁵ Eugenia Katsigris, 'Mid-Term Review-Bangladesh: Development of Sustainable Renewable Energy Power Generation (SREPGen)', 2017. The mid-term review observed that: "While project expenditures as of 1 August 2017 were only 15 percent of GEF funds, cost efficiency might still be ranked low as activities tend to veer off the main focus (solar boats and solar charging stations for vehicles) and there has been an overemphasis on study tours."

¹⁰⁶ Wang, L., Bandyopadhyay, S., Cosgrove-Davies, M., and Samad, H., 'Quantifying carbon and distributional benefits of solar home system programmes in Bangladesh', 2011. See: <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/pdf/10.1596/1813-9450-5545>.

found to be effective, and feasible for adoption at scale. As such, the project's benefits relate more to the benefits of rural electrification than to reduced GHG emissions, which is the objective of the project. To ensure the full potential of the pilot is realized, the pilot needs to be evaluated for its effectiveness, and feasibility of wider adoption.

2.4 Gender

Finding 22. Use of the gender marker exaggerates the focus of the programme on gender equality. There is significant room for improvement in the gender balance of staffing in the country office and project offices, and in the conditions that will make UNDP an attractive place for women to work.

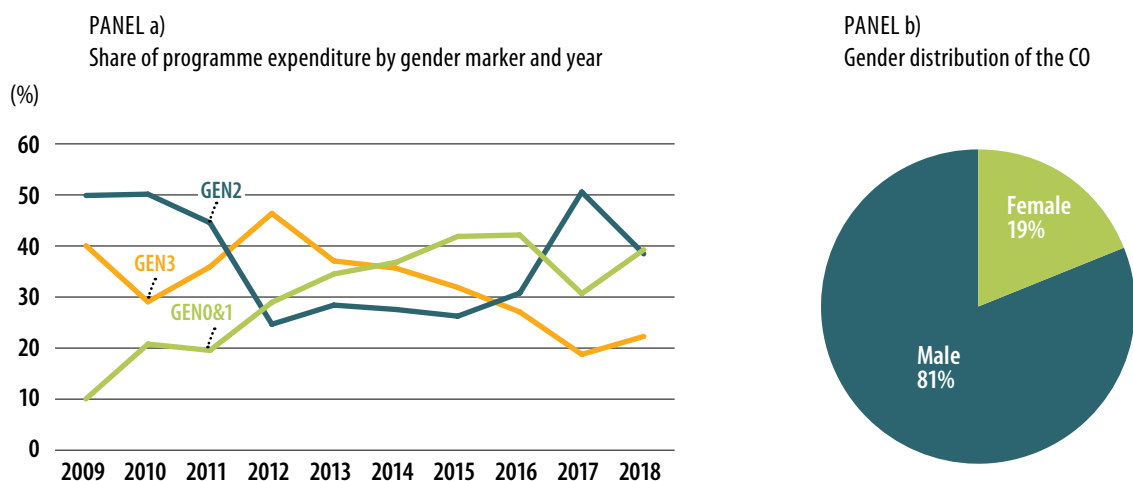
UNDP's gender marker system is the key tool it uses to monitor the extent to which its programmes and projects promote gender equality. The markers enable UNDP to distinguish between outputs that: are not expected to contribute noticeably to gender equality ('GEN0'); make a limited contribution to gender equality ('GEN1'); promote gender equality in a significant and consistent way ('GEN2'); or have gender equality as a main objective ('GEN3').

Statistics on the gender focus of the Bangladesh programme are shown in Figure 4. This shows a slight decline in the proportion of programme expenditure on average share of expenditure on outputs marked as GEN2 and GEN3, from a high of 83 percent during the period 2009-2011, to 65 percent in the current planning cycle.

The evaluation team assessed project documents, resource and result frameworks and reporting for the 27 projects in the scope of this ICPE. This analysis revealed a very high level of incongruity between the level of focus on gender equality suggested by the gender marker, and actual focus suggested in project documentation. The evaluation estimates that close to a third of the projects covered have inflated gender marker ratings, which suggests the actual proportion of expenditure that matches the definitions for GEN2 and GEN3 ratings is much lower than what UNDP's systems suggest. This tendency to exaggerate the gender focus of the programme was highlighted by a similar process led by UN Women, assessing 16 active projects.

While the gender marker inflation affects our ability to assess UNDP intention in mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment across its

FIGURE 4. Key gender statistics for the Bangladesh country programme



programme, there is also a dearth of evidence on the outcomes of these investments. Across the set of 27 projects in this evaluation, only one (SWAPNO) provided compelling evidence about its contribution to gender equality.

At least in part, these challenges reflect a lack of internal resourcing of gender expertise within the programme. Since the staffing cuts that followed a change management exercise in 2016, UNDP Bangladesh has not had a dedicated gender adviser on its staff. In this context, the recent collaboration with UN Women to assess the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming within the portfolio takes on an added significance. This partnership should be strengthened.

There is a high gender imbalance of the country office's human resources (Figure 4-panel b). Of a total of 503 staff and non-staff members, 94 are women, representing just 19 percent of the workforce, a situation that has existed since at least September 2016.¹⁰⁷ This imbalance exists for both staff and non-staff members, across all types of contract and grade. The results of the 2018 General Staff Survey revealed a significant disparity between the experiences of male and female staff in the office. The proportion of male staff providing favourable responses was systematically higher (an average of 15 points) than female staff across all the 15 main categories assessed. Differences were particularly stark on dimensions relating to: flexibility in the workplace (26 points); growth and development (24 points); ethics and ethical behaviour (22 points); performance management (21 points); agility (19 points); openness and trust (19 points); and leadership and direction (18 points).¹⁰⁸ The stark disparity in results, combined with the imbalance in staffing, points to the substantial scope for improvement in ensuring that the office culture promotes the sort of environment which is gender-friendly.

Discussions with the country office revealed that it is taking a number of positive actions to address these challenges, and that changing the situation was difficult, particularly in project offices, where UNDP has less capacity to influence the workplace culture. The country office also communicated that it had found it difficult to identify and attract qualified female candidates, especially in more senior roles. The programme has a comprehensive gender equality action plan (2016-2020), which acknowledges its weakness on the issue of gender equality and includes specific attention to recruitment practices, and sexual harassment. The country office has recently renewed its focus on addressing sexual harassment by developing an action plan for the period 2018-2019. However, the evaluation team is unconvinced that the scope of current actions, and in particular the resourcing of them, suffices to ensure that significant inroads are made in addressing these known issues. The evaluation considers that UNDP needs to increase the resources it is committing to improving gender dynamics in its business environment, focusing particularly on appropriate action in project offices. The office clearly needs to go beyond passive measures, such as requirements to have female participation in recruitment panels, to more active measures, such as targeting and encouraging applications from potentially qualified female candidates.

2.5 Partnerships

Finding 23. Programme development has been hugely affected by prolonged delays in the approval of major donor-funded interventions by the Bangladesh Government, the number and length of which call into question the strength of UNDP's dialogue and communication with the Government. Communication with partners about these delays has been lacking, and UNDP has failed to involve donors in the

¹⁰⁷ UNDP, 'UNDP Bangladesh Gender Equality Action Plan 2016-2020', 2016.

¹⁰⁸ The numbers in parentheses are the differences between the percentage of male and female staff that score favourably on the enumerated dimensions.

resolution of the delays. Partners also noted a reluctance by UNDP to connect and collaborate with major partners working in areas related to its work.

Seven major donor-funded projects have experienced prolonged delays in achieving formal approval from the Bangladesh Government, after project documents have been signed. This included 2.5-year delays for two projects (Urban Poverty and Inclusive Budgeting and Financing for Climate Resilience), and delays of greater than one year for several others. Partners expressed understandable concerns about these delays, and suggested UNDP had failed to clearly explain the cause for the delays, or to involve them in resolving them. Partners perceived this as reflecting a lack of openness on the part of UNDP, and noted UNDP needed encouragement to engage or collaborate with other major actors in the areas they work in. In some cases, partners expressed doubts about whether some UNDP staff fully understood key details about the projects they manage.

2.6 Results management

Finding 24. Reporting frameworks are poorly designed and fail to promote either learning or accountability. There is insufficient focus on programme quality, and a tendency to equate quality with delivery.

With some exceptions, there are significant problems with monitoring and evaluation across the programme. This is reflected in weak reporting, which is evident in close to at least half of the projects in the evaluation's scope, and was attested to by all the donors consulted by the evaluation team. At issue is a failure to distinguish between inputs and activities and the outcomes and outputs they are supposed to be addressing, and a related failure to make any effort to distinguish UNDP's contribution to outcomes achieved by the Bangladesh Government. There is a general reluctance to identify or

address challenges in reporting, which tends to present an unjustifiably glowing view about the performance of different projects. Underlying this is often an underlying weakness in basic accountability frameworks. Around one-third of the project documents and associated results frameworks covering the projects in this evaluation's scope have limited to no relevance to the work undertaken. This has occurred because of a combination of factors, including projects being approved with substantial unfunded components, delays in government approvals, and lack of flexibility of some development partners to update results frameworks.

These weaknesses are also apparent in programme reporting through the ROAR. This document reflects a tendency to present numbers out of context and which misrepresent the nature of UNDP's achievement. Big claims are sometimes made that have a tenuous connection to the support provided by UNDP, and that are not based on an appropriate degree of rigour.¹⁰⁹

With some project-specific exceptions, donors consulted by the evaluation universally communicated concerns about the quality of project reporting, and related worries about the quality of UNDP's M&E systems. Programme staff consulted by the evaluation displayed a tendency to focus on conflating programme quality with programme delivery, a fact they attributed to the high levels of pressure that are placed on delivery by the regional bureau and headquarters.

The country office has 15 evaluations planned over the 2017–2020 CPD period and had completed seven by September 2019. Some positive efforts have been made to conduct rigorous evaluations of the impact of UNDP's work, with varying degrees of success. These efforts are commendable and should be continued. What is missing is often rigorous analysis of a more routine variety, with sound management information systems and data collection at its core,

¹⁰⁹ The 2018 ROAR, for example, includes the claim that 141,044 people, out of which 40 percent were women, across Bangladesh were employed in full-time equivalent jobs and livelihoods "with UNDP's support". This claim is attributed to the a2i 2018 annual performance report which repeats the same statement, but with no evidence to substantiate either it, or a2i's contribution to it.

combined with logical theories of change that connect inputs and activities with outputs, outcomes and impacts.

2.7 Portfolio management

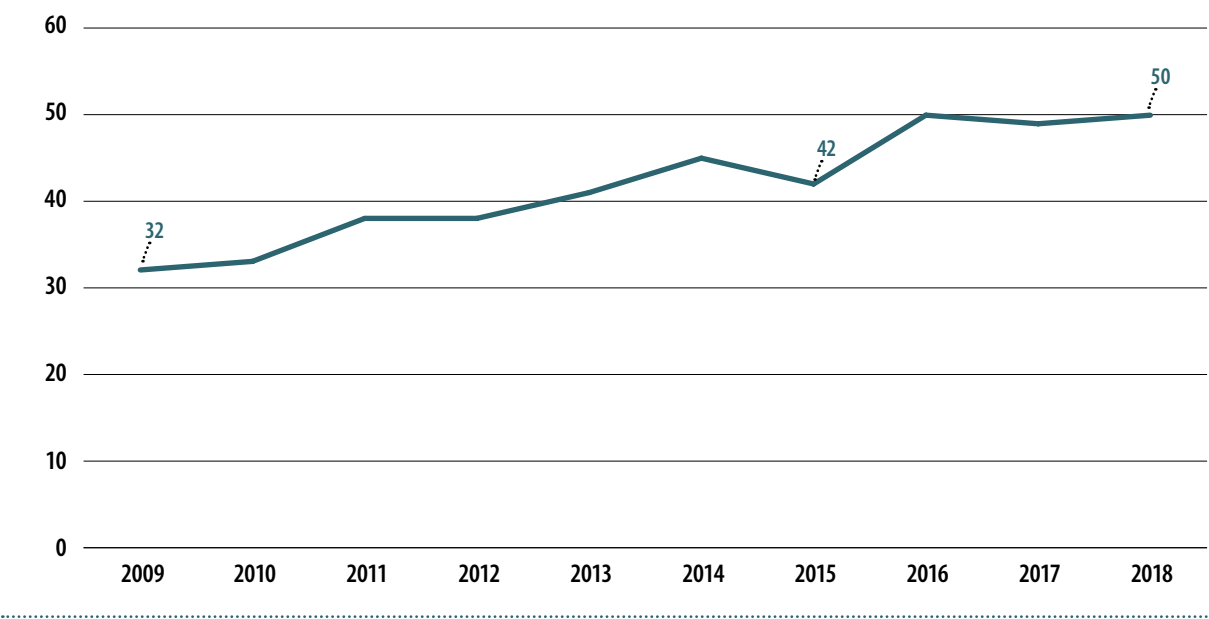
Finding 25. The UNDP programme has become progressively more fragmented, creating a major burden on staff over a time when staff capacity has decreased. There is an urgent need for the programme to reduce the number of small projects under management and develop broader issue-based programmes.

One of the core challenges facing the country programme relates to the large number of projects in the portfolio and the manageability of this given available resources. The evidence for this is striking. Since 2009, there has been a 56 percent increase in the number of projects in the portfolio (Figure 5). The average project is roughly half what it was ten years ago, and there has been a significant increase

in the predominance of small projects in the portfolio. Finally, there has been a reduced number of staff in the country office (from 70 in 2015 to around 45 currently).

There are two areas where fragmentation is particularly apparent and where there are good prospects for consolidation. The first of these is in the governance portfolio, where there are a number of different projects being implemented, each with very similar areas of focus and objectives. This is also apparent in the work on climate change adaptation where there are also significant overlaps in the focus of many of the other programmes. The impact of this high number of projects is that it makes it very difficult for the country office to stay on top of core requirements: strategy, policy dialogue, work planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The office is stretched very thin across too many different projects and agendas and is struggling to manage these fundamental issues.

FIGURE 5. Trend in the number of active projects, 2009–2018





CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP
sustainability MANAGING FOR RESULTS responsiveness COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT responsiveness
COORDINATION HUMAN effectiveness COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIP sustainability
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This chapter presents the evaluation's conclusions on UNDP's performance and contributions to development results in Bangladesh, recommendations, and the management response.

3.1 Conclusions

- **Conclusion 1. UNDP has a well-regarded and wide-ranging development programme in Bangladesh which has produced some good outcomes overall. In disaster risk reduction, e-service delivery, informal justice, and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, UNDP is recognized as having made some major contributions to Bangladesh's development progress. In some areas, UNDP has played a constructive niche role. In yet others, outcomes have been more elusive, despite concerted efforts. This was the case in support for formal law and justice institutions and decentralization reform, which have been long-standing areas of focus.**

UNDP has made a substantial contribution to Bangladesh's improved capacity to manage the risks of natural disasters, as evidenced by dramatic reductions in disaster-related deaths. UNDP has had an instrumental role in underpinning Bangladesh's success in improving service delivery using e-governance. UNDP has supported the successful and ongoing expansion of a system of local dispute resolution, which is providing an alternative to the formal justice system for resolving minor criminal and civil disputes. UNDP has a long-standing and well-regarded role in supporting peace and development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, one of the most impoverished and disadvantaged regions in the country.

UNDP has played a constructive niche role in other areas, such as social protection, acting in concert with other donors. Overcoming significant challenges, UNDP has established the foundations for a useful role in the international response to the Rohingya crisis, focused on the long-term development implications of the crisis and its impact on host communities.

Outcomes have been less evident in improving access to justice and human rights through formal justice institutions, while the impact of local governance support has been bound by the limited progress Bangladesh has made in delegating additional resources and autonomy to local governments. This is also true in the area of climate change adaptation, mitigation and environmental protection, primarily reflecting the small size and scale of the projects in these areas, and the scale and complexity of the challenges they address.

- **Conclusion 2. The United Nations system – and UNDP as a key part of it – has continued relevance to Bangladesh. However, UNDP's relevance and influence have declined, and can naturally be expected to decline further as Bangladesh's economy grows larger. If it is to maintain its relevance and influence, UNDP needs to anticipate and adapt to the changes taking place in Bangladesh.**

Universally, government partners expressed appreciation for the support UNDP provided in many different areas and emphasized that UNDP and the United Nations system are still highly relevant in Bangladesh. Donors recognized that UNDP has close relationships at the highest levels of the Bangladesh Government and that its neutrality enabled it to work in areas that it would be difficult for them to support directly through bilateral projects. This includes, for example, work in areas of human rights strengthening and support provided in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

However, UNDP's relevance and influence have declined and can be expected to decline further. There are two main reasons for this. The first reason is that UNDP's programme and capability within the office has shrunk substantially in recent years. UNDP's core regular funding has declined,

and the organization has found it increasingly difficult to mobilize funding from donors at the level it has historically. The second reason is one that will affect all external actors. This is that declining influence will be the inevitable outcome of the increasing scale of the Bangladesh Government's own development resources. While Bangladesh is still a poor country, its economy is large, and based on current trends, it could become one of the world's top 25 economies in the next 15 years.

Relative to other international partners, and in the context of the scale of Bangladesh's economy, UNDP is not a significant source of finance. Its real value is as a source of ideas. To maximize its influence, there is scope for improvement in UNDP's role as a knowledge broker and provider, complementing the work of other donors, and seeking to improve the quality of the Bangladesh Government's policies and programmes.

- **Conclusion 3. Maintaining its historical programming footprint in the face of declining human and development resources is affecting the quality of delivery and UNDP's influence. The country programme has become increasingly fragmented, and resources are spread too thinly across too many different projects and areas of focus. This needs to be addressed.**

Over a period where delivery has declined, the number of projects in the portfolio has continued to increase. The outcome is that UNDP resources, in terms of both staff and programme resources, are being spread increasingly thinly across the areas covered by the CPD, which are essentially the same ones covered under previous CPDs.

Fragmentation of the portfolio combined with reduced staffing is stretching the country office's management capacity and has undermined quality. Evidence of this exists in a number of

different areas. First, UNDP is struggling to provide adequate performance reporting to partners with weak reporting being a problem in almost half of the projects in the evaluation's scope. This was reflected as a key concern by donor partners, who also expressed concern about the openness and frequency of communication from UNDP on key performance issues.

Second, partners expressed related concerns that did not always have confidence UNDP desk officers fully understood key details about the projects they managed. They also observed that UNDP displayed a lack of openness and proactivity to coordination and collaboration with key actors in the areas UNDP works in. A large number of UNDP's most important new programmes have been affected by lengthy delays in receiving government approvals, which suggests insufficient time has been invested in ensuring key partners are fully briefed and supportive of new proposals.

Third, there are too many examples of activities being implemented on a micro-scale, that provide only limited short term benefits and do not have a plausible approach to generating real learning and influence beyond project boundaries. This reflects the lack of a clear and disciplined focus in most projects, in establishing objectives for policy influence against which the quality of work can be judged.

There are currently too many pilot projects that are likely to either terminate with no measurable long-term results or fail to grow to a size where they have any relevance. The combination of a declining budget and pressures from many different agencies and geographical regions means that the UNDP programme includes many very small programmes that operate in widely scattered locations. It could be argued that many of these are too small to be relevant or useful.

- **Conclusion 4.** There is significant room for improvement in results-based management practices. Too many projects currently have unclear results and accountability frameworks, which do not provide a basis for routine reporting and attribution of outcomes to UNDP. Insufficient attention is given to the quality of results and to the articulation of challenges and risks.

Weak performance reporting often reflects underlying weaknesses in accountability frameworks. Almost one-third of the project documents and associated results frameworks covering the projects in this evaluation's scope had weak relevance to the work undertaken. This was due to a combination of factors, including projects being approved with substantial unfunded components, delays in government approvals, and lack of flexibility of some development partners to update approved results frameworks. While government ownership is a strength of UNDP's projects, there is a consistent failure to be clear about the extent to which results can be attributed in UNDP. There are cases where big results claims are made that are only weakly attributable to UNDP. There is too much focus on numbers, at the expense of indicators that capture the quality and impact of activities and results. Performance reports display a reluctance to reflect on challenges or failures, and consistently display an overly positive picture.

- **Conclusion 5.** The country programme needs to strengthen its focus on promoting gender equality in the context of the projects it delivers, and in modelling its commitment to gender equality.

Coding of spending using the gender marker suggests the share of programme expenditure on outputs marked as promoting gender equality in a significant and consistent way ('GEN2') or as having had gender equality as a main objective ('GEN3') declined from 83 percent to 65 percent. The current tendency to exaggerate the gender focus of the programme (a problem across UNDP) means this figure substantially overstates the actual focus of the programme and its influence on gender equality. Analysis by the evaluation team suggests close to one-third of the projects covered by the evaluation have inflated gender marker ratings. In addition, evidence of gender results, in terms of meaningful impacts in women's lives, and changes in gender relations on the ground is thin.

Internally, the country office needs to do more to model UNDP's commitment to gender equality. There is a large gender imbalance in staffing in the country office and project offices. Marked differences in the responses of men and women to the UNDP staff survey underline the challenges that face the country programme in ensuring it is an attractive place for women to work.

3.2 Recommendations and management response

Recommendation 1:



The country office should address fragmentation in its portfolio by:

- minimizing the number of small projects that rely mostly or exclusively on core funding;
- reducing the number of projects it manages;
- developing larger, more integrated and more flexible programmes.

In developing its next country programme document, UNDP will need to consider how many different agendas it can effectively pursue with the resources it has to work with, and be more disciplined in its choice of objectives to pursue, and partners to work with. Fragmentation of the programme is affecting the quality of delivery and partnerships, factors that will reduce the attractiveness of UNDP as a development partner over the long term.

UNDP should use its SDG platform as a basis for the consolidation of its governance support within a single governance project. The design for this work should be flexible but underpinned by an analysis of what UNDP considers to be the highest priority areas for investment, given the prevailing political economy and constraints of Bangladesh, and the role that UNDP can realistically play given available resources.

In the expansion of its work on the Rohingya crisis, UNDP should be mindful of the need to work within the scope of the expertise and capability it has built within its existing programme, rather than risk over-extending itself into too many new or different areas. UNDP should seek to integrate the focus on the development needs of host communities within its major development programmes and look for opportunities to complement and enhance the work being undertaken by other donors, rather than focusing too heavily on resource mobilization and delivery.

Consolidating the portfolio will require working with the Government of Bangladesh and donors to buy into larger, more flexible integrated programmes.

Recommendation 1 (cont'd)

**Management
Response:**

Agree.



The country office (CO) is progressively moving towards a more integrated programming approach. However, given certain operational realities of programming and resource mobilization, it is unable to make a quick and full transition. These realities include: 1) numerous pilots/preparatory grant initiatives under various vertical funds, which are corporate priorities; 2) demands from donor partners to have contribution-specific projects and thereby ensuring complete visibility for them; 3) requests from the client government for urgent support, which are normally funded through core resources and are relatively small scale. Therefore, the CO is currently trying to reduce transaction costs by pooling resources, especially in areas such as M&E, Communications and certain areas of the Operations.

To ensure more integrated approaches for achieving outcomes/delivery results, the CO has been taking a portfolio approach of programming, such as in climate change adaptation and mitigation. The CO is also trying to build more synergies between projects operating in the same geographical location and/or same authorities. For example, targeting the same beneficiary households/communities is also being considered to maximize collective impacts. The CO is also using harmonized approaches across the projects to common processes, such as cash transfers. The CO will expand such efforts, taking the new CPD development as an opportunity to strengthen the programme approach.

Key Actions	Time-frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
Adopt integrated programming approaches for planning and implementation more systematically in the new CPD currently under formulation	July 2020	CO CPD Core team	Initiated	
Conduct a portfolio analysis for clustering of projects under the same themes/geographic areas/partners for maximizing synergies and adopting common approaches to programming and implementation and for sharing and mobilizing resources	August 2020	CO Working Group/CO M&E Network Group	Initiated	

Recommendation 2:



The country office should improve the quality of project monitoring and evaluation by:

- increasing investment in ensuring high-quality monitoring and evaluation expertise is available for supporting implementation across the programme;
- ensuring all projects have results frameworks that reflect approved funding allocations, to provide a basis for monitoring and accounting for results;
- establishing a standard format for performance reporting that clearly distinguishes between inputs and activities, and the outputs, outcomes and impacts they underpin, and only includes results that can be reasonably attributed to UNDP's contributions;
- ensuring appropriate attention is paid to the quality of outcomes achieved, rather than simply numbers of results achieved (i.e. people trained), and to challenges.

Currently, accountability at the project and programme level is being undermined by weak results frameworks and poor quality of reporting. Reporting exhibits an excessive preoccupation with numbers, at the expense of a focus on the quality and relevance of the results achieved against objectives.

Management Response:

Agree.



This was a priority consideration in the 2020 annual work planning process. A planning workshop involving all project managers and M&E specialists was organized. This has helped to not only improve quality of annual work planning with proper M&E framework but also maximize operational synergies such as joint field visits for monitoring. While resource constraints will not allow expansion of M&E capacities at the CO level, investments will be made in training and capacity enhancement of the existing M&E staff at all levels. Further, the office is already mobilizing short-term supports of senior professionals drawn from the Bangkok Regional Hub and elsewhere.

Key Actions	Time-frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
Revise ToR of M&E network for increasing its effectiveness	May 2020	CO M&E	Not Initiated	
Make capacity-building investment for M&E staff	July 2020	CO M&E Network Group	Initiated	It is an ongoing initiative
Enhance practice of peer review system of results frameworks and project reports	August 2020	CO M&E Network Group	Initiated	
Develop a standard approach for project progress reporting	January 2020	CO M&E	Completed	

Recommendation 3:



To maximize the potential impacts of programme interventions, especially, but not exclusively in the case of pilots or geographically delimited interventions, UNDP should:

- avoid engaging in small pilots of untested interventions that have limited prospects of influencing Bangladesh Government policies or programmes;
- increase attention to the feasibility of increasing the scale of proven interventions, reflecting on the institutional capacity to replicate them at a larger scale.

In the case of the village courts and SWAPNO programmes, UNDP has developed effective models that have relevance to, and could potentially provide a basis for system-wide impacts. To maximize the potential system-wide benefits of its work, UNDP needs to move beyond simply testing the effectiveness of its interventions, to focus on the feasibility of adopting proven interventions at a larger scale. Currently, there is too much focus on implementing small-scale pilots of unproven interventions that are not accompanied by a sufficient focus on learning, thus limiting prospects for achieving a wider impact. Looking forward, UNDP should only get involved in service delivery projects if there is a strong learning dimension to them, and prospect to use this as a way to influence delivery at scale.

**Management
Response:**
Partially agree.



We still see value in conducting pilots to test proof of concepts and ideas and will continue to do so given the rapidly changing development contexts. At the same time, scalability will be considered as one of the major assessment criteria while designing pilots.

Key Actions	Time-frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
Introduce more systematic approach to lesson learning and incorporating lessons from pilots in: a) new programme formulation; b) revision of existing projects	July 2020	CO Strategy & Policy unit/ CO M&E	Not Initiated	
Revise current practices of project appraisal/review to include specific criteria on lesson learning from pilots	April 2020	CO Strategy & Policy unit/ CO M&E	Not Initiated	
Conduct a systematic review of the past pilots to examine design thinking behind the pilots	July 2020	CO Strategy & Policy unit/ CO M&E	Not Initiated	

Recommendation 4:



The country office should increase its focus on promoting gender equality in its programmes, and in its business environment. To ensure it has a foundation for doing so, the country office should:

- increase the resources it commits to ensuring appropriate attention to gender equality in programme design and delivery and in its business environment;
- ensure active measures are taken to address the imbalance in staffing, and marked differences in the satisfaction of male and female staff evident in staff survey results;
- annually review and update gender marker coding so that the data provides an accurate picture of the level of focus on gender equality of the country programme.

There is strong evidence that the country office needs to make a more concerted effort than it is currently making, to address gender imbalances in staffing, and workplace satisfaction.

**Management
Response:**
Fully agree.



The CO will expand its efforts to enhance gender equality in both programme and operations. The CO will increase investment in gender-related activities, including deployment of dedicated gender expertise at the CO. The CO will also continue its efforts to improve gender parity at all levels, especially in the field where it is difficult to attract and retain women in the workforce. This will require innovative approaches, including introduction of incentives.

Key Actions	Time-frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
Create a full-time gender specialist position in the CO	May 2020	CO Management	Initiated	
Undertake gender audit for both programme and operations	August 2020	CO Gender team	Not Initiated	
Make recruitment processes flexible and work environment more conducive to attract and retain female candidates	August 2020	CO Operations/ HR unit	Not Initiated	

* The implementation status is tracked in the UNDP Evaluation Resource Centre

Annexes

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the Independent Evaluation Office at:

<https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12265>

Annex 1. Terms of Reference

Annex 2. Project List

Annex 3. CPD Results Framework and Status of Indicators

Annex 4. CPD Results Framework and Status of Output Indicators

Annex 5. Persons Consulted

Annex 7. Documents Consulted



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