

Evaluation Brief: Mauritius

Country context and UNDP programme

Over the past decade, Mauritius has achieved sustained improvements in Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, which currently stands at \$12,050. This places Mauritius in the top tier of upper-middle-income economies, and it is pushing towards the World Bank's threshold for high-income status. Mauritius has also done well on many social indicators, and absolute poverty is minimal. Reflecting this, Mauritius is ranked 65 in the world in the 2018 Human Development Index, and second in Africa (behind Seychelles).

The upper-middle-income status and small population of Mauritius constrains the resource base for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). UNDP core funding to Mauritius is just \$150,000 annually, and with no donors active in the country and few alternative sources of finance available, there is almost exclusive dependence on vertical funds for programming. Within these constraints, the UNDP country office has been successful in mobilising resources from the Global Environment Facility, Adaptation Fund and Green Climate Fund for work to address climate change mitigation and adaptation, energy efficiency, biodiversity protection and the management of chemicals and hazardous waste.

Findings and conclusions

Government partners were complimentary about the quality and influence of UNDP work, and stressed the continued relevance and value of UNDP assistance. Government informants highlighted specific problems where technical support of the kind that UNDP is capable of sourcing would continue to be valuable. They emphasized that graduation to higher income status had not fundamentally altered the value they placed on external assistance and the importance, for a small island state, of help to access specialised skills which are in short supply locally.

The strongest results of UNDP have been its contributions to improved environmental management. In particular, it has provided momentum to the Government's efforts to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels and jump-start the solar photovoltaic (PV) energy sector. It has enabled the Mauritius Government to conduct a more comprehensive consideration of options for protecting coastal communities and assets than it could have achieved on its own, and supported it to incrementally adapt to rising sea levels caused by climate change. Overall, UNDP was recognized as playing an important role in smoothing and facilitating access to funding available through global environmental and climate change organisations. Government partners expressed that, without local UNDP presence, it would have been much harder for the Government to have accessed the quantum of support that it has.

Though the environment programme is performing well, its reliance on external funding sources constitutes a key risk and constraint. In particular, there is a risk that the programme will become fragmented, and Government partners will be overwhelmed with the task of managing multiple environment projects. This risk is increased by a lack of flexible resources to offset the limitations of working to the parameters and requirements of external funders. Given that the environment portfolio is projected to expand from a portfolio value of \$26 million in 2015 to over \$100 million by 2020, there are also some significant emerging risks related to procurement. This was one of the few areas of complaint about UNDP support from the Mauritius Government.

The programme has done some useful work in the governance area in the past, but the scale of the current programme is very small, and UNDP influence has reduced with declining resources. Currently, none of the governance activities managed by the

country programme are operating at a large enough scale to be able to produce development results that can be readily attributed to them. Unless the limited Target for Resource Assignment from the Core (TRAC) resources can be used to leverage external resources for a long-term programme of work on governance, the transaction and opportunity costs of the current TRAC-funded governance engagement will be increasingly hard to justify.

The UNDP country programme document (CPD) for Mauritius is not realistic about the capacity and influence of UNDP, and does not prioritise sufficiently. Existing human resources are too thinly spread across too many partners and activities, and performance frameworks and reporting promote an overly optimistic representation of UNDP capacity to influence change. This tendency to spread resources thinly helps to generate goodwill across

government, but limits UNDP capacity to increase its role as a knowledge provider and broker, where it can be of greatest value, given the country's stage of development.

Overall, resource constraints have limited the country programme's scope to have a significant impact on gender equality. What's more, there are no realistic mechanisms for the country office to pursue the corporate target of allocating 15 per cent of all budgets to work which has a principal objective of advancing gender equality and/or empowering women (GEN3). The use of the gender marker substantially overstates the programme's contribution to gender equality. Current coding practices present a risk that the UNDP management and board will be misled about the extent to which UNDP programmes are effectively promoting gender equality.

Recommendations

- The next Mauritius CPD should be far more focused and realistic than the current one, reflecting more accurately the country office's capacity and resources. CPD objectives, targets and indicators should only be included if there is a realistic prospect for UNDP to have a measurable influence over them. Results reporting should focus on indicators that have a moderate to high level of significance in terms of the scale or the substance of the social change they measure, and where UNDP has sufficient resources to make a substantive contribution to results achieved against them.
- In developing its next CPD, UNDP should position the programme - and align staffing structures and resources - to support and enhance the performance of its growing environment and climate change portfolio, and mitigate the risks associated with this growth.
- CPD core funding allocations for governance should be contingent on minimum levels of resource mobilisation, or the ability of these funds to leverage contributions from the global and regional UNDP networks or the UN system. If additional resources cannot be mobilised for existing democratic governance work, the country office should allocate its core resources to strengthen engagement in policy development relevant to the work being undertaken in the environment portfolio.
- The country office should develop a strategy for addressing gender equality that is founded on a clear assessment of the scope of its different activities to do so. This strategy should outline how gender equality will be addressed by different activities, and the extent to which these can reasonably be expected to produce significant and consistent gender equality outcomes. Gender marker coding should be reviewed annually, and coding updated where necessary to ensure that the data provides an accurate picture of the level of focus of UNDP programmes on gender equality.