

# Evaluation Brief: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan



When UNDP Afghanistan's current country programme was conceived in 2014, there was significant optimism about the prospect for development in the country, following the withdrawal of international military forces and the presidential elections. However, the erosion of security since then has brought significant challenges to UNDP's programme operations. UNDP has also gone through a series of internal and external reviews, with the aim of becoming leaner and more centralized. It aims to increase its focus on adding value in supporting Afghanistan's self-reliance-based development priorities.

The evaluation examined UNDP's progress towards its objectives under the country programme 2015–2019 as well as its strategy for achieving programme effectiveness in the changing environment. The country programme had four components – accountable governance, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis (the Global Fund), rule of law and human security, and livelihoods and resilience – with an average annual expenditure of \$513 million.

## Findings and conclusions

Afghanistan entered a protracted crisis immediately after the launch of the country programme document (CPD), reducing its relevance and value as a planning and accountability tool. While insecurity was always recognized as a risk in the country, the CPD was not designed to reflect Afghanistan's fragility.

UNDP Afghanistan was in a full transitional phase at the time of the evaluation. Various programmatic and operational adjustments were under way, stemming from its recent change management and reviews. The adjustments brought about positive changes (e.g. improving programme management structure and increasing field presence), but signs of volatility/distress were also observed (e.g. varying programme delivery rates and staff workplace issues).

The Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA) – accounting for about 85 percent of the total programme expenditure – remained UNDP's flagship work. During the period under review, UNDP contributed to systems development and more efficient

police payroll management functions. It also secured a steady national police workforce, including a crucial female force. UNDP's support to institutional development was limited, however, due to a midcourse design change. The timing of LOTFA's full transfer of the payroll management function to the Government remained a contentious issue during the evaluation, after the initially agreed timelines were missed. LOTFA entered a new phase in 2018 with an ambitious multi-partner trust fund scheme. It aims to cover Afghanistan's entire security and rule-of-law reforms, signalling the need for significant, well-coordinated efforts with all relevant partners.

In other programme areas, UNDP continued to bring credibility and legitimacy to Afghanistan's election process; managed Global Fund projects now in their second grant cycle; increased livelihood opportunities; and enhanced legal aid support. UNDP's ability to utilize its position for high-level government access, establish effective partnerships with relevant development players, and use of innovation were among the driving factors contributing to positive results.

At the same time, UNDP was hampered by a weak programme framework, limited results reporting (including challenges in remote monitoring), insufficient ability to bring livelihood-related efforts to scale by engaging with entities operating similar but larger programmes, and lack of an evidence-based approach. In Afghanistan's rule-of-law and justice sector, where stakeholder coordination is said to be highly complex, UNDP's visibility and technical engagement with partners need to increase, including in support to anti-corruption.

UNDP Afghanistan appointed a full-time gender focal point during the current programme cycle to accelerate its promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, in both its workplace and its programming. Given Afghanistan's deep-rooted cultural challenges, continued efforts are required at the office level. Gender parity remained consistently low, and some programmes were not based on evidence and lacked effective collaboration with partners.

UNDP's leadership and coordination efforts during preparation of the One UN framework were highly appreciated by UN partners. However, while Afghanistan's self-reliance is the cornerstone of the government's national development strategy, UNDP's institutional capacity development efforts were generally limited, often lacking engagement with critical partners such as civil society organizations (CSOs).

UNDP has the opportunity to improve its strategic position by exploiting its comparative strengths (e.g. proximity to government partners); improving its sector-level policy influence in collaboration with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other large-scale players; and supporting

government efforts to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by providing reliable funding and technical support.

UNDP's current partnership and resource mobilization strategies are outdated, limited in scope and inadequate for Afghanistan's context. They need greater engagement with CSOs, which often have better access in hard-to-reach areas, and UNAMA, which increasingly operates as a key development actor. They also need to reflect donors' underlying government support architecture, guided by a mutual accountability framework, and underscore the mandate and ongoing work of UN agencies under One UN, including humanitarian actors.

## Recommendations

- Revisit the approach to operating in Afghanistan as a fragile and protracted-conflict country, focusing on strategic analysis when conceptualizing the country programme. Use the SDGs to position UNDP in the country, ensuring its development work is informed by the triple nexus approach bringing together development, humanitarian and peacebuilding, complementing the efforts of other partners. Key areas of concern from the evaluation should be addressed, including the need for (i) risk-informed, evidence-based programme design emphasizing capacity development to foster Afghanistan's self-reliance; (ii) improved regional operation capacity (using the sub-offices to inform programme design and engage in field oversight); (iii) inclusion of substantive policy-level dialogue in all programme areas; (iv) improved transparency in use of donor funds; and (v) continued strategic communication activities.
- Ensure that institutional capacity development in the Ministry for Interior Affairs (MOIA) remains an important objective under LOTFA. The new LOTFA multi-partner trust fund (MPTF) should establish strong linkages with the governance programme, especially in anti-corruption efforts; strengthen collaboration with existing and potential partners in the rule-of-law and security sectors; and fully roll out its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy.
- Continue to explore avenues for solidifying its country programme portfolio. In addition to a continued focus on governance and rule of law, the livelihoods and resilience programme should be strengthened to ensure its contribution to national development priorities is relevant and at the proper scale. The emerging initiatives launched in the current cycle under the governance portfolio (e.g. Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and the Global Fund) should be fully mapped under clear, dedicated CPD outcomes. The governance programme should ensure programmatic synergies and linkages with other programmes (e.g. the new LOTFA and livelihoods initiatives).
- Develop a robust partnership and resource mobilization strategy to strengthen UNDP's role in the country, ensuring the involvement of major players in this fragile State (e.g. international financial institutions such as the World Bank, as well as UNAMA and CSOs) and reflecting resource mobilization opportunities.
- In close consultation with RBAP, examine and address workplace matters at UNDP Afghanistan (e.g. office-wide communication, staff learning and development) arising from the fast-paced changes in its business model in the midst of an active conflict. Ensure that the gender strategy is fully implemented with sensitivity, and that the office addresses its low gender parity, particularly at the management level.