

Evaluation Brief: Kazakhstan

UNDP has been present in Kazakhstan for over 20 years during which its programme has been shaped by the country's development priorities and challenges. Its current programme (2016-2020), which is under review, responds to the national priorities identified in the Nurdy Zhol medium-term plan and Kazakhstan-2050 vision, reflected in the 2016-2020 United Nations Partnership Framework for Development. UNDP's programme strategy seeks

to address the nexus between inclusive growth and sustainable development, governance, and regional cooperation, playing the role of convener and facilitator between the Government, private sector, non-governmental organizations and communities, as well as United Nations organizations and other international bodies. The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP conducted an independent country programme evaluation of Kazakhstan in 2019.

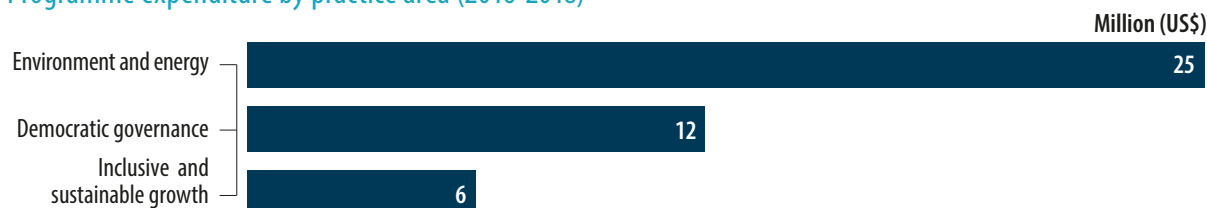
Total programme expenditure (2016-2018)

US\$42,606,567

Funding sources, 2016-2018



Programme expenditure by practice area (2016-2018)



Key findings and conclusions

UNDP has maintained a close relationship with the Government of Kazakhstan and is strategically positioned to respond to the needs of the government institutions. However, the demand-driven nature of its work results in a multitude of interventions within a loosely defined theory of change and limited cross-sectoral linkages. These weaknesses undermine its outcome-based programmatic approach, thus limiting the overall effectiveness of UNDP's country programme.

UNDP has made notable contributions in promoting and supporting institutional and policy reforms

around public administration, civil service and environmental governance, creating an enabling environment for improved public services and resilience to climate change. UNDP has modelled a number of approaches, mechanisms, services and demonstrated important results in experimental settings and pilots across all sectors of its support. Significantly more sustained work is required to take advantage of the momentum created for institutionalizing and upscaling to ensure the sustainability of results.

UNDP has invested moderate efforts in coordination with UN agencies, resulting in partial utilization of the partnership potential. The

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) process has brought agencies together. The UNDP-facilitated SDG national platform, launched recently, which includes a broad range of stakeholders, including UN agencies, international financial institutions (IFIs), the Government and civil society organizations (CSOs) provides an excellent opportunity to enhance coordination and explore synergies to enhance the cumulative impact of interventions in the country.

UNDP has made commendable progress in bringing about system-level changes in the manner the Government addresses issues of gender and rights of most vulnerable groups, particularly persons with disabilities (PWD), as well as empowerment and inclusion of CSOs in decision-making processes to promote and protect their rights. UNDP's work in these areas has been commendable and brought important results in the way the Government views, addresses and protects rights of PWD and integrates gender in policies. These results are still delicate and dependent on political and institutional commitment, resources and willingness to invest in addressing long-rooted practices and social norms.

UNDP has been effective in fostering regional, South-South and triangular cooperation modalities to enhance Kazakhstan's profile as a regional actor by sharing its best practices, experiences and results. While this has strengthened Kazakhstan's positioning and recognition as a regional and global player in line with Kazakhstan's ambition to join the family of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development states, the sustainability of these efforts, which are still in their early stages, remains a question.

Kazakhstan's upper-middle-income country status, declining core resources, shrinking landscape of donors and development partners and unpredictable government cost-sharing presents UNDP with a demand to be innovative and diversify its resource portfolio. While the Government remains UNDP's largest contributor, government funding often comes with delays and has seen significant variations over the recent years. This makes UNDP's country programme vulnerable from the standpoint of financial stability.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1. UNDP needs to consolidate its country portfolio and ensure support is provided in the areas where it has the strongest comparative advantages. The demand-driven nature of its work will remain, but responsiveness to government demands needs to happen within the parameters of outcome-level results and a well-defined theory of change with proper analysis of causal assumptions and risks. UNDP should ensure that piloting and modelling of services and/or approaches is done within this larger institutional framework to ensure the sustainability of results.

RECOMMENDATION 2. UNDP should invest strongly in gathering and utilizing evidence towards improved programming and knowledge management in the country office. This should be supported by a cross-portfolio knowledge platform for regular reflection on results, synergy and coherence within and across the country office portfolio.

RECOMMENDATION 3. UNDP should continue investing in social, public administration and civil service reforms, particularly in the areas in which support was initiated during this country programme cycle, such as meritocracy, anti-corruption and social service delivery.

RECOMMENDATION 4. UNDP needs to continue spearheading initiatives for empowerment of women, the most vulnerable groups and civil society to take a more active role in decision-making processes based on lessons learned and results of interventions in these areas achieved thus far.

RECOMMENDATION 5. UNDP should build on the achievements in the energy and environment sector and deepen its engagement to upscale and institutionalize the results by strengthening existing partnerships and engaging with non-traditional partners.

RECOMMENDATION 6. UNDP should develop an exit strategy and engage with the Government to discuss the sustainability, institutionalization and future of services and approaches modelled by UNDP across its portfolio, most notable of all being the Astana Regional Hub and support to the national official development assistance system.

RECOMMENDATION 7. UNDP should develop and proactively pursue a long-term resource mobilization strategy and implementation plan that includes a predictable government cost-sharing agreement and innovative financing mechanisms, including partnerships with the private sector and IFIs.