

Evaluation Brief: Republic of Serbia

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Programme Document (CPD) for 2016-2020 in the Republic of Serbia is underpinned by an overarching theory of change that, by 2020, people in Serbia would have better opportunities for political, economic, cultural and social participation and would live in communities that are more resilient to economic, environmental or other sources of stress. The four CPD outcome areas include:

- Democratic Governance;
- Environment and Energy (low-carbon and climate-resilient development);
- Inclusive and Sustainable Growth; and
- Gender Equality (equal participation for women and lives free from violence).

The UNDP programme in Serbia experienced financial growth during the period under review, with the initial indicative budget increasing by 15 per cent midway through, from \$40.8 million at the outset to \$46.3 million in 2018. Democratic Governance and Environment and Energy constituted the two largest outcome areas. The Government of the Republic of Serbia is the main contributor to the CPD, with government cost-sharing representing 59 per cent of all expenditure recorded in the first three years. This includes contributions from local authorities involved in UNDP projects, with substantial co-financing from municipalities such as Belgrade and Čajetina. Donor agencies from various countries contributed about a quarter of the CPD budget (\$9.4 million), the largest being the Swedish and Swiss aid programmes. UNDP Serbia has extensively used funding from the Global Environment Facility, which contributed almost 13 per cent to the CPD budget (\$5.1 million). UNDP contributed \$1.1 million from its regular resources.

Findings

A dozen findings are set out in the evaluation, covering each of the four CPD outcome areas, as well as cross-cutting issues such as gender, portfolio and results management, and joint programming with other United Nations entities. Key findings include that UNDP support for democratic governance has contributed to making government institutions more open and effective. UNDP support to increase the transparency and accountability of the Serbian Parliament has had a measure of success, but progress has been slow. UNDP involvement in the promotion of human rights and rule of law issues, such as the fight against corruption, has decreased during the period under review.

UNDP support on climate change, energy efficiency and disaster risk reduction has helped the Government to improve policy implementation. UNDP contacts and networks have been valuable in the context of Serbia's implementation of international conventions and compliance with the European Union acquis, particularly in the area of climate change and energy, although the resources mobilised are too modest to address the full scale of challenges in the sector. UNDP in Serbia has demonstrated flexibility and agility in response to natural disasters, helping the Government to strengthen its rapid response systems.

UNDP efforts for gender equality in Serbia have focused needed attention on zero tolerance for, and the eradication of, violence against women. Working within significant budget constraints, UNDP has also made important efforts to raise awareness and mainstream gender issues, including through joint programming with other United Nations country team members.

Conclusions

The evaluation includes the following four main conclusions:

1. Overall, UNDP has made important contributions to Serbia's development in line with government priorities. UNDP project management capacity and technical expertise are valued by Serbian partners, enabling UNDP to maintain an active presence in the country, with significant government cost-sharing.
2. The UNDP programme in Serbia has seen a budget shift towards programming in the governance and environment and energy areas. This shift highlights its strengths in these areas, but also a diminishing level of support to livelihoods and economic development, as well as programming related to the rule of law.
3. Efforts have been made in the current CPD to build greater coherence across the project portfolio, though this remains highly fragmented, including many small stand-alone projects. Such fragmentation runs the risk of obscuring the UNDP value proposition and diminishing its impact.
4. Sustainability has not received sufficient attention, as evidenced by the lack of articulated plans to ensure a gradual disengagement of UNDP and expansion of national ownership as programmes wrap up.

Recommendations

Corresponding to these conclusions, the following four recommendations are set out in the evaluation:

RECOMMENDATION 1. The next CPD should continue to support Serbia with high-level innovative advice and expertise to address its development needs, with increased emphasis on integrated and cross-cutting reforms, linked to the Sustainable Development Goals.

RECOMMENDATION 2. UNDP should redouble its efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and continue to engage the Government on human rights.

RECOMMENDATION 3. As UNDP looks to expand its funding base in Serbia, decisions on new programming opportunities should serve to strengthen the role of UNDP as a provider of strategic advice.

RECOMMENDATION 4. Improvements in project design should be launched during the next CPD to strengthen impact and sustainability.