

Evaluation Brief: Syrian Arab Republic



The nine years of crisis in Syria have severely impacted human development. The devastating toll of human casualties, displacement, and deteriorating living conditions have reversed the country's development gains by three decades. Over half of all Syrians have been displaced at least once; over 5.5 million Syrians have sought asylum in the neighbouring countries, and nearly 6.5 million are internally displaced. The social and economic consequences are large and growing, with most households in extreme poverty. The war has destroyed housing, infrastructure, and hundreds of hospitals and schools. The impact of the crisis has been severe on the social fabric of the country.

UNDP's programme assistance in Syria predates the conflict. The organization has adapted its programming in the country to meet basic needs of the people, providing the groundwork for community recovery. The 2016-2018 country programme, extended to 2020, seeks to enhance the resilience and socio-economic stabilization of individuals and communities by revitalizing disrupted livelihoods and restoring, rehabilitating and maintaining sustainable basic services and infrastructure in damaged areas and host communities. To this end, UNDP has opened seven field offices and partnered with over 50 community organizations.

Given the international isolation of Syria, there are restrictions on UNDP's formal development engagement and partnerships with the national institutions. This programme context had significant consequences for UNDP's role and engagement, more oriented to humanitarian support.

UNDP has contributed to the most significant priorities of early recovery and resilience in Syria while working under challenging circumstances. UNDP has emphasized integrated support for

local communities that build on the UN humanitarian efforts. UNDP supported rehabilitation of critical infrastructure essential to normalization. Contributions were made to the restoration and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and services and livelihoods, which enabled the initial return of some internally displaced persons and refugees from the region. UNDP's infrastructure and basic services rehabilitation efforts contributed to the reactivation of local services (primary education and health services, sewage and water networks, local markets). Debris clearance has been important as it is a prerequisite for infrastructure rehabilitation. Restoration of power plants, grid system repairs, and installation of affordable heating and solar lighting units contributed to efforts towards normalcy in crisis-affected areas. While solid waste management made urban areas more accessible and liveable, the short-term nature of the support and one-off initiatives did not contribute to community service resilience. Recovery of livelihood assets and employment linkages, although of a small scale, added to the ongoing efforts towards economic revitalization. A substantive engagement in economic revitalization to promote medium to longer-term solutions, institutionalizing rehabilitation of infrastructure or waste management is lacking given the humanitarian mode of support.

The embargo by some countries on Syria was a factor for not formally partnering with the national entities and, as a consequence, the limitations in the institutionalization of the outputs and progress made. Despite the evolving security and stability on the ground, a strong focus on the humanitarian response remains, with UN agencies largely responding individually to the situation. The pause on development programme support for nine years has undermined UNDP's positioning and programme contribution.

Recommendations

The implications of providing humanitarian support in an evolving context has received attention but was not addressed because of the restrictions on development support. In providing the recommendations the evaluation takes this into consideration.

RECOMMENDATION 1: UNDP should start planning on how it can transition to more sustainable development support while it continues to work within the existing programming parameters, seeking to deepen and expand its local community resilience efforts. UNDP should implement a multi-track strategy to address simultaneously areas still in crisis and those which are moving out of conflict.

RECOMMENDATION 2: UNDP should invest in efforts to promote a UN common vision for integrated local resilience to serve as a platform for rehabilitation

and institutionalized early recovery. UNDP should leverage its area offices to develop a more comprehensive local resilience programme beyond project implementation.

RECOMMENDATION 3: UNDP should pay specific attention to youth employment. Jointly with other UN agencies, UNDP should take concrete measures to address the gender implications of the crisis in select sectors. The demographic imbalance after the crisis presents a renewed opportunity to further pursue gender equality and women's empowerment at the policy level.

RECOMMENDATION 4: UNDP should further develop and institutionalize stronger partnerships with other UN agencies in complementary areas of employment and livelihoods, service delivery and women's empowerment.

RECOMMENDATION 5: UNDP should ensure conflict sensitivity and gender analysis inform programme interventions. Further emphasis should be given to strengthening the programme and management efficiencies.