

Evaluation Brief: Brazil



The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted an Independent Country Programme Evaluation (ICPE) of UNDP Brazil in 2020. The purpose of the evaluation was to inform the development of the next UNDP country programme and to strengthen accountability to national stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board.

The evaluation was conducted amidst ongoing changes in Brazil's political, economic and social landscape. A decade of progress was halted by an economic recession in 2014-2016. Faced with a slow recovery, political transition and the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil ended 2020 with one of the poorest economic performances in recent history. Brazil has remained in middle-income status for decades, with resource-driven economic growth dependent on cheap labour and capital. Growth has been challenged by low performance in productivity. The economy is relatively closed to external competition and suffers from a heavy bureaucratic burden, as well as a segmented financial market with very high interest rates. Market integration and competition is constrained by inadequate infrastructure, particularly in transport and logistics, which is important considering Brazil is continent-sized. Brazil is also challenged by high structural inequalities along ethnic and racial lines, which were highlighted by COVID-19, with its disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations.

The ongoing UNDP country programme 2017-2021 provided development services support and technical contributions to national institutions at federal, state and local level in four broad thematic areas: social development, inclusive economic growth, natural resources management, and governance and justice.

Findings and conclusions

The evaluation concluded that UNDP adapted to the evolving context in the country and remained a strategic partner of the Government of Brazil.

Through engaging in implementation support to government programmes, UNDP provided relevant technical contributions, but there was scope to increase these. UNDP's engagement in policy advocacy was limited, particularly in the area of socio-economic development and governance. The reliance on government financing affected UNDP's engagement and advocacy role in these areas, which are important for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) achievement, but were under-represented in the country programme priorities. The evaluation found that UNDP's natural resources management portfolio remained highly relevant to Brazil's ongoing climate change and natural resource management challenges, making a significant shift from policy development to policy implementation. UNDP maintained an emphasis on private sector engagement in line with corporate priorities, however given the potential of the business and financial sector in Brazil, there is still a large space to be occupied. The country office articulated a well-defined private sector engagement strategy, but it is yet to unfold fully. Existing partnerships were relatively small scale and focused on funding opportunities. Strategic partnerships as outlined in the country office's private sector strategy, which go beyond funding opportunities and corporate social responsibility, are yet to emerge. Similarly, the UNDP programme incorporated efforts to engage civil society, end-users and beneficiaries in the implementation of initiatives, but these could have been more tailored and adapted to the context and capacities of these groups, which vary significantly between regions and states. The evaluation also concluded that UNDP's operational support, while instrumental in facilitating Brazil's technical cooperation initiatives, had scope to strengthen UNDP's role and access to its knowledge networks. Finally, the level of UNDP's contribution to the COVID-19 response and recovery effort was affected by the division of labour between United Nations agencies and available funding.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. It is recommended that UNDP makes a concerted effort to enhance its strategic focus and measure its impact with balanced programmatic portfolios. The evaluation recognizes that UNDP's programme responds to government requests. The evaluation also recognizes the challenges country offices such as Brazil face regarding balanced programmatic portfolios. In the forthcoming country programme, attention should focus on strengthening strategic planning to demonstrate high programmatic impact in the context of national implementation, particularly in the socio-economic and governance portfolio. In its results framework and reporting, UNDP should distinguish activities to which it contributes and where it has strong influence over their design and results. The evaluation recognizes the measurement challenges faced by UNDP, but greater effort should be exerted to define suitable measurement approaches to capture UNDP's efforts, including in advocacy, technical contributions and other intangible support to ongoing government programmes.

It is also recommended that UNDP strengthen research and policy analysis capacities to advocate for and help inform the medium- and longer-term socio-economic policy responses in the COVID-19 recovery phase. The pandemic and related economic and health crisis have aggravated the structural weaknesses faced by Brazil.

This requires attention and support from the corporate level.

Recommendation 2. Given the changes introduced by the new government and a shift in policy implementation in the natural resources management portfolio,¹ it is recommended that UNDP undertakes a review of policy/regulatory constraint analyses to determine what has worked, what has not, and how policy design and implementation in the future can handle external shocks. It seems that many of the assumptions about the programme in 2017 did not hold, and issues such as the change in government and economy-of-scale considerations were not factored into policies. The objective would be to better understand how to design initiatives that are more resilient to external forces.

Recommendation 3. The country office's collaboration with the private sector needs to be more systematic to reflect the ambitions articulated in its strategy. UNDP should consolidate its approach to private sector engagement. It should continue to collaborate with the private sector on thematic areas, leveraging its global knowledge to introduce innovation, technology and know-how for stimulating innovative financing mechanisms, particularly in areas with limited public resources. UNDP should also find mechanisms to sustain engagement and coordination with the private sector, individually and collectively after the end of its Global Compact Secretariat role.

Recommendation 4. It is recommended that UNDP leverage its convening power to facilitate dialogue between the government and civil society. UNDP can also leverage resources to develop the capacities of civil society organizations, especially in the context of SDG localization, with a consideration to address disparities in civil society capacity. In the context of the Leave No One Behind principle of the SDGs, civil society organizations have a key role in giving voice to vulnerable and marginalized communities, as well as monitoring progress of the implementation of the SDGs. The SDG localization agenda calls for inclusive approaches that utilize local knowledge to customize the SDGs to local situations. UNDP has a role to play in facilitating a broader dialogue on the role of civil society actors and their engagement in debates on development issues.

Recommendation 5. It is recommended that UNDP advocate for and pursue more strategic engagement in south-south cooperation, going beyond a facilitation role and contributing to strengthening the Brazilian Cooperation Agency capacity with regard to the systematization, mapping, codification and validation of Brazilian knowledge, to facilitate more structured and efficient knowledge transfer to other countries. UNDP should enhance its positioning as a knowledge organization.

¹ See Section 2.4.2, Biodiversity conservation, natural resource management and land use, for specific examples of unexpected policy changes, many associated with the new government in 2019.