

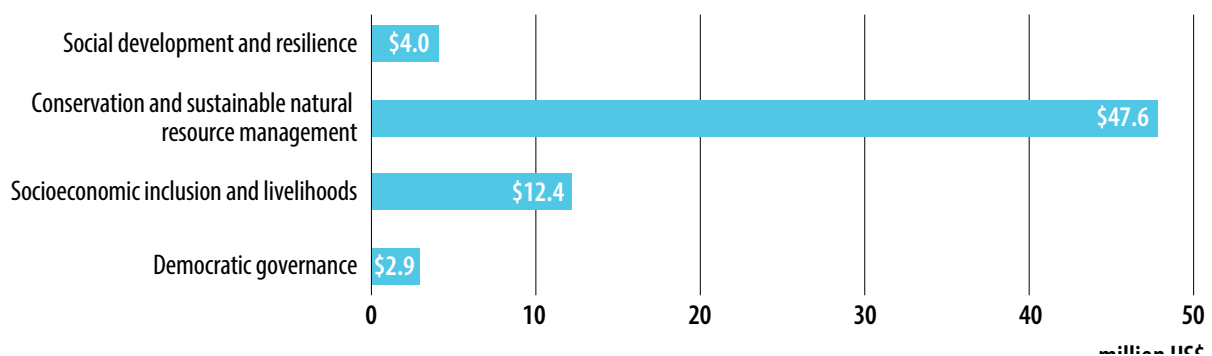
Evaluation Brief: Ecuador



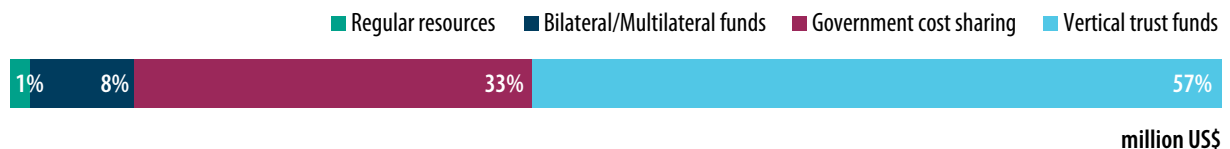
Ecuador is categorized as a high human development country with an upper-middle-income economy, and is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. Historically, the country has experienced economic volatility and structural unemployment, and has been highly dependent on oil exports. Since 2020, it has also been badly affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Socioeconomic inequality persists in the country, with significant differences in terms of poverty in rural areas, and for women and for indigenous people. Ecuador's environment and natural resources have also faced critical challenges, exacerbated by climate change. Multiple crises and high State indebtedness have exacerbated the existing challenges of institutional weakness, despite recent efforts to reform the State and its administration, such as the 2018 constitutional reform.

The current Country Programme Document 2019-22 is aligned with the UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-21 and emphasizes four main areas of intervention: (1) social development and resilience; (2) conservation and sustainable natural resource management; (3) socioeconomic inclusion and livelihoods; and (4) democratic governance.

Programme expenditure by thematic area, 2019-21



Country programme funding sources, 2019-21



Findings and conclusions

The evaluation found that UNDP is recognised for its neutrality, high credibility and ability to leverage multisectoral partnerships on a wide range of issues. By using its capacity to mobilize resources and its leadership to articulate joint responses, UNDP has expanded its programme and responded to emerging priorities for the country. However, by broadening its efforts across different thematic areas, UNDP may be at risk of spreading itself too thin, or being unable to ensure the sustainability of results. The structure and size of the country office is strained due to the current programme priorities and operational needs. Adjustments are ongoing, but the challenges generated by COVID-19 and the new dynamics of teleworking have impacted staff workloads significantly.

The breadth of the environment and sustainable natural resource management portfolio, and its contributions to both local and global environmental benefits, are highlighted in this programme cycle. Yet, the country context, institutional weaknesses and the long-term perspective of results call for greater efforts to monitor and ensure the sustainability of interventions. On the other hand, while UNDP work in governance achieved favourable outcomes in terms of support for strengthening democracy in Ecuador, results in economic development were more dispersed and in the area of social protection and social inclusion, limited.

UNDP effectively leveraged its comparative advantage in response to early needs in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its leadership and experience have enabled the Government of Ecuador to draw on the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment methodology to guide recovery. UNDP efficiency in fund management and procurement allowed it to address urgent needs of the vulnerable population.

UNDP has successfully mainstreamed gender throughout its programme and has fostered potentially transformative initiatives, yet the complex nature of gender inequalities requires additional efforts to address the root causes and achieve more far-reaching and sustainable results.

Recommendations

To strengthen UNDP work in Ecuador in support of national development priorities, the Independent Country Programme Evaluation made five recommendations:

Recommendation 1: UNDP should continue to capitalize on its positioning and added value in Ecuador, supporting the country in the identification, mobilization and execution of resources for the implementation of strategic interventions to address poverty reduction and the socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19, as well as upcoming fiscal and environmental challenges that pose a serious threat to social equity, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

Recommendation 2: UNDP should adapt its office structure to the realities of the programme it implements. It should consider strengthening the programme and operations areas to allow for more realistic distribution of workloads, avoiding the risk of bottlenecks and delays, and continue to look after staff health and motivation.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should leverage its unique strategic positioning on the environment to continue expanding and reinforcing biodiversity conservation, ecosystem management approaches, climate change interventions and the linkages between sustainable development, resilience and poverty reduction.

Recommendation 4: UNDP needs to build on the lessons and opportunities from the pandemic response to strengthen its programme offer and consolidate its governance and inclusive development area for greater effectiveness.

Recommendation 5: UNDP efforts and initiatives on gender should focus on policy impact, to address the structural barriers and root causes of gender inequality and contribute to changes in women's rights, gender norms and cultural values. In this respect, the country office should strengthen its programmatic focus on poverty, social inclusion, indigenous women's rights and young women's empowerment, drawing on lessons from current work in traditionally male-dominated sectors.