



Evaluation of UNDP Afghanistan CPAP Outcome 5 (Policy Dialogue)

Executive Summary

Outcome 5 of the UNDP Afghanistan CPAP

Outcome 5 of the UNDP Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) states: “**Greater** government capacity for formulating gender sensitive pro-poor policies and programmatic targeting taking into account human development concerns”. The corresponding CPAP output, Output 5.1 states: “**Enhanced** policy dialogue on poverty reduction and human development”.

An evaluation of the UNDP Afghanistan CPAP Outcome 5 was conducted between July and September 2008. Outcome evaluations in the UNDP are meant to assess the overall quantum of contribution of UNDP to the changes in conditions in the partner country. This outcome evaluation focused on the overarching themes of Outcome 5 (government capacity; gender sensitive policies; pro-poor policies, and; targeted human development programming). In addition, it focused on the specific projects that constituted UNDP efforts in pursuit of Outcome 5 (ANDS, CPHD, GM UNDP and ICB Gender). The evaluation sought to explore responses to a set of questions about the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, degree of change and sustainability of the UNDP actions in pursuit of Output 5.1 and Outcome 5.

Evaluation Findings: Projects

At the projects level, the evaluation found significant evidence of success, with a strong record of delivery of project outputs. Much of these successes were achieved however, in the absence of coherently formulated and measurable project results frameworks. The key weakness across the projects was the absence of a clear and coherent link between specific outputs, the vision for what the projects were contributing to Afghanistan overall development. The sum of the projects successes therefore did not have an apparent impact on the success of the UNDP in delivering either Output 5.1, or Outcome 5.

Evaluation Findings: Output & Outcome Indicators

There are three output indicators within the CPAP, and the evaluation found that of the three, two have been fulfilled or are very likely to be fulfilled by 2009. For the third there was little evidence of movement in either a positive or negative direction.

The Outcome 5 indicator in the CPAP results framework is: *“National policies/strategies incorporate human development concerns with special emphasis on gender”*. Again, based on the baselines and benchmarks specified, significant evidence of the benchmarks having been achieved was found.

Evaluation Findings: Gaps in the Framework

The evaluation found that the CPAP results framework and the definition of indicators, baselines and benchmarks for success are flawed. The CPAP results framework indicators (that indicate success in achieving both the output and outcome that were evaluated) capture only part of the essence of what the UNDP aspires to, as articulated in the CPAP. Since the evaluation sought to measure the overall quantum of contribution of UNDP to the changes in conditions in Afghanistan, the indicators (as formulated) are insufficient. Essentially, the indicators do not describe in enough detail, a set of circumstances that would fulfil the relationship between the achievement of indicators, and the achievement of the actual outcome. Another way to understand the gap within the CPAP results framework is that the indicators against Output 5.1 and Outcome 5 do not provide any important insights into the words “greater” (at the outcome level), or “enhanced” (at the output level).

Evaluation Findings: Generic Measures

Generic measures used to assess progress in Afghanistan conditions included a quantitative measure (the Human Development Index value for Afghanistan), a qualitative measure, (the International Crisis Group summary reports on Afghanistan), and a perception measure (The Asia Foundation annual perception surveys). From all three perspectives (quantitative, qualitative and perception) there was no substantial improvement in Afghanistan conditions, as they relate to government capacity to produce gender and poverty-centred public policy (Outcome 5). Even at the output level, which by definition should be more tangible, measurable and achievable than an outcome, it is difficult to conclude that there is enhanced policy dialogue on poverty reduction and human development.

Overall Findings

Therefore, despite strong progress in some areas (both in terms of project work, and as measured against the CPAP framework), the evaluation found that:

- At the output level, there has not been an “enhanced policy dialogue on poverty reduction and human development”.
- At the outcome level, since 2006 there has not been a significant and meaningful improvement in the Afghanistan government “capacity to formulate pro-poor and gender-sensitive policy”, nor has there been a significant or meaningful improvement in the ability of the Afghanistan government to ensure “programmatic targeting of human development concerns”.
- And that while gender-related issues are a much more visible part of the development discourse than they would have been in the absence of donor programmes of support, the discourse itself has limited participation from the Afghan people, is centred largely on Afghan government capacity, and is burdened by questions about sustainability and government ownership.

UNDP Afghanistan Strengths and Weaknesses

The evaluation found the UNDP Afghanistan Country Office to demonstrate a number of strengths, all of which represented potential areas of weakness as well. These can be described as follows:

Strengths	Weaknesses
UNDP enjoys a reputation for being responsive to Government needs	UNDP treads a fine line between support for government, and potentially failing to challenge government, when this is required or appropriate
UNDP work demonstrates its ability to negotiate working relationship with UNAMA	UN system may not enjoy the kind of clarity about policy areas, issues and appropriate agency roles as it would in a regular UNDP operations context
UNDP clearly has resource mobilization skills that enable the sustenance of a large programme	Incentives to mobilise resources, may distract from development objectives, and from unique UNDP / UN mandate viz. aid harmonization and coordination
UNDP projects manifest strong operational outreach	Multiple uncoordinated field project offices could suffer from a sense of lack of direction, without centralised UNDP field presence
UNDP clearly follows a piloting approach and demonstrates good project flexibility	Piloting and flexibility may be abused as shortcut approval mechanisms, rather than serving as instruments of innovation.

Recommendations: Projects

Based on these findings, the evaluation makes the following project-specific recommendations:

For ANDS:

- The closure of the ANDS project.
- A review and comparative analysis of the role played by the UNDP in Afghanistan PRSP process with the role played by the UNDP in PRSP processes in other countries.
- The transfer of the ANDS monitoring and oversight process, which would be the natural domain of a sustained ANDS project, to UNAMA. There is no added value of offering UNDP funds and expertise for a function that entails across the board monitoring capacity in government, and the coordination of all donors to it. In fact the best contribution the UNDP can make to that process is through the holistic nature of support that it provides to ministries and sub national levels through other projects. In that way, in fact, the ANDS offers a great test case for the different roles mandated to the UNDP and to UNAMA.

For CPHD:

- The formulation of a new results framework and project document that builds on the CPHD successes (the currently formulated project, on paper, must not be extended).
- The new CPHD must have a duration of ten years, must be present in at least three, if not more universities other than U of Kabul, and must make investing in Afghan nationals' capacity a core element of its work.

For ICB Gender and GM UNDP:

- The merging of the GM UNDP and ICB GE projects into one coherent gender focused project, with two key thrusts. The first being capacity building of all government departments and ministries on gender equality issues, and the second being the harmonization of existing donor initiatives.
- The acquisition of UNAMA endorsement to lead donor harmonization, or the inclusion of the top UNAMA gender position in the active governance of the newly formed gender project.
- The absorption of the GM UNDP project manager and project team into the Country Office as Country Office staff, with a mandate to mainstream and standardize gender across the UNDP project portfolio (a role already being fulfilled, but without the "authority" of being an element of the Country Office).

Overall Recommendations

1. Portfolio Rationalization

There are far too many projects in the portfolio—given the number of staff members available to the UNDP Afghanistan Country Office. Too often there are projects in the same generic thematic area that should not exist as separate entities, but as coherent components of a holistic single intervention.

2. Log frame Rationalization

UNDP Afghanistan Country Office project results frameworks are a study in the very real link between incomplete and inadequate project formulation, design and approvals processes, and the incomplete nature of development work that such processes lead to. If an output cannot be measured, it should not be attempted. If the metrics for measurement are not obvious, development actors have a responsibility to develop them, collect the relevant data and then use it. However ill defined activities and outputs, with no defined performance criteria and vague definitions of what constitutes accomplishment is a recipe for incomplete development.

3. Staff Function Rationalization

The twin functions of a regular donor or UNDP office are being fulfilled by only one set of staff members — the two functions being operational and programme management, and technical development expertise. The UNDP Afghanistan Country Office has one in-house technical specialist (or advisor), who is almost entirely dedicated to servicing corporate needs (M&E). Of the most pressing issues in Afghanistan, none are addressed by the UNDP at an agency level.

4. Investment in Capacity to Produce Credible Log frames

The UNDP Afghanistan Country Office needs to invest in the skills of its programme staff to develop and monitor credible log frames. In making this investment, it is vital that a concurrent investment be made in project partners' staff, whether that is with government agencies or civil society.

5. Follow the Guidelines on Capacity

A full throttled UNDP capacity assessment of the UNDP Afghanistan Country Office is an urgent necessity. Both the Capacity Building Guideline and the Capacity Assessment Guidelines issued by UNDP HQ in NY offer clear and comprehensive solutions to the issues of both UNDP Country Office capacity constraints and the capacity challenges posed by a post-conflict rebuilding government, as is the case in Afghanistan.

6. Figure out what UNDP does well

UNDP cannot be the most capable agency in all sectors all the time. There are some areas in which it has clear competitive and comparative advantages, and some in which it does not. Conducting a competitive and comparative advantages assessment will enable the UNDP to make better decisions about project work that it takes on, and project work that it passes onto other multilateral mandates agencies (such as the ARTF for example).

7. Making sure it happens

The only realistic way that the currently configured UNDP Country Office will be able to undertake a rationalization of portfolio, and log frames, and an investment in the analysis necessary to improve internal efficiencies and effectiveness is through the dedication of a senior staff resource for the purpose. The UNDP Afghanistan Country Office will need to hire full-time programme strategy advisor, reporting to the Country Director. This position would undertake internal programming changes, and would fulfil the programme management oversight function.

8. Limit Short Term Fixes

The UNDP Afghanistan Country Office should issue an immediate moratorium on the approval of any project proposal of less than 48 months, without a written certification from the Country Director, and ideally a senior government official that a short intervention is a legitimate development response to whatever problem the proposal identifies and seeks to address.

9. *Limit Unrealistic Budget Formulations*

The significant gap between Outcome 5 projects projected budgets and the money that was eventually available to the projects reflects either poor design skills, or poor persuasion of donors to finance interventions in the appropriate manner. One way to resolve this issue is to enforce a more rigorous internal process. For example, the UNDP Afghanistan Country Office could issue a moratorium on project approvals unless 75% of total budget identified in the project proposal is committed to in principle, by donors.

10. *Project Documentation*

There is no clearinghouse mechanism for the UNDP existing or closed project portfolio. The UNDP Afghanistan Country Office should therefore immediately establish a PDF and Word-based database for UNDP Afghanistan project portfolio, that enables a browser to track changes to a project document, changes in the financing and the original and current project documents and results frameworks.