

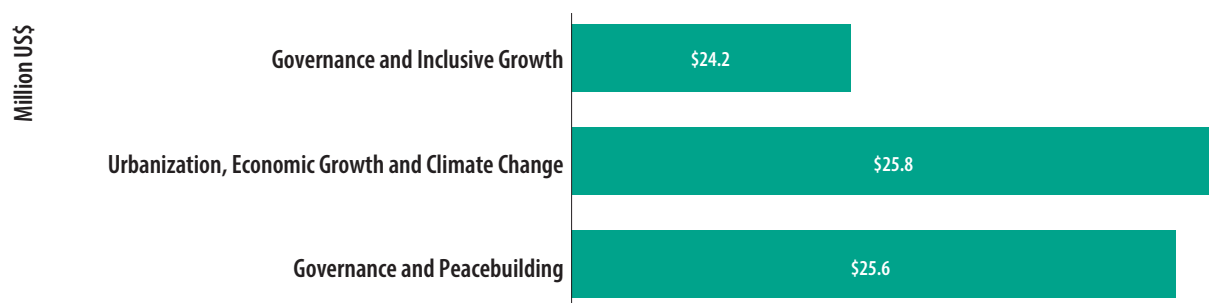
Evaluation Brief: Philippines

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted an Independent Country Programme Evaluation (ICPE) of UNDP work in the Philippines in 2022. The evaluation covers the programming period of 2019-2023. This is the third assessment carried out by IEO for the country; the previous was conducted in 2017. The purpose of the evaluation was to strengthen accountability to national stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board, promote organizational learning, and inform the development of the next UNDP country programme.

The Philippines is a lower-middle income country and one of the most dynamic economies in the East Asia Pacific region. The country is in the medium human development category and despite notable poverty reduction achievements; inequality in the country is widespread. Much of the country's chronic conflict is located in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), where 45.8 percent of the population lives below the national poverty line. The Philippines was amongst the countries hardest hit by COVID-19 in Southeast Asia. A major governance challenge in the country has been weak government institutions, especially at subnational levels, which contributes to poor service delivery.

The Philippines has one of the longest and most biologically diverse coastlines in the world, which is of great economic importance. The country is committed to global environmental efforts and party to major international environmental treaties and agreements. The Global Climate Risk Index identifies the Philippines as the third most climate change-affected country from 2000-2019.

The current UNDP country programme in the Philippines (2019-2023) is guided by the United Nations Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development and subsequently the United Nations Socioeconomic and Peacebuilding Framework. UNDP focused on three outcomes: Governance and Inclusive Growth; Urbanization, Economic Growth and Climate Change; and Governance and Peacebuilding. Expenditure was similar across the three outcomes.



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation found that UNDP built on the previous programming cycle to support the strengthening of national and local capacity to deliver results. UNDP also demonstrated its comparative advantage in accelerating progress toward complex national processes, especially in peacebuilding. UNDP has been highly responsive to the needs of its partners, and many interventions have had strong government ownership. UNDP delivered results through key partnerships with government counterparts, civil society organizations and academia. But the integrator role of UNDP, to connect national stakeholders

and development partners, could have been better realized. Cross-outcome linkages have been limited during the Country Programme Document (CPD) period. The country office has been in a long transition period, including a change management exercise followed by a realignment exercise, which has resulted in reduced capacity to deliver on the country programme. The sustainability of UNDP work was impacted by limited resource availability, limited focus on long term institutional strengthening, and inadequate scale-up.

In the **Governance and Inclusive Growth** portfolio, UNDP successfully supported the capacity-building of the national Government for evidence-based policy, evaluation practice and integrated planning. But an overall capacity-development plan or roadmap was often missing. UNDP capacity-building and technical support to the Government contributed to a strong geographical reach of services, and helped to initiate e-governance for administrative procedures. UNDP direct engagement in procurement had varying degrees of success, in part due to gaps in project design and management. UNDP also contributed to enterprise development and citizen engagement by: strengthening capacity for entrepreneurship; supporting the use of social networking in development planning; and supporting community-based monitoring of governance infrastructure programmes. UNDP influence has yet to be established in policy advisory work aimed at governance reform. Compared to the last programme cycle, there was a shift away from some relevant areas of standalone programming such as strengthening access to justice and human rights, and deepening democracy.

On **Urbanization, Economic Growth and Climate Change**, UNDP support has allowed national government agencies and local government units (LGUs) to integrate evidence-based climate change adaptation and mitigation and disaster risk reduction and mitigation in planning and resilience-building. UNDP contributed more to early recovery work than to resilience-building. In the climate change mitigation and Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) commitments work, UNDP supported the readiness of key government agencies and other sectors stakeholders through: strengthening access to financing; supporting planning and development strategies; connecting diverse partners; and supporting projects and policies on the use of renewable energy. However, several projects faced delays because of issues including programme management challenges; COVID-19; changing partner priorities; and issues with securing authorizations. UNDP support to strengthening national and local capacity for biodiversity conservation resulted in improvements and expansions in protected area management, and stronger policies and regulations governing ecosystem resource management. UNDP also helped to improve biodiversity financing through empowering biodiversity-friendly enterprises and helping to redirect public and private sector investments. The management of numerous smaller biodiversity projects by a small number of staff contributed to inefficiencies in the use of staff time. UNDP work across different outputs tended to be siloed, despite the close thematic linkages.

For **Governance and Peacebuilding**, UNDP support has been instrumental in keeping the peace process moving forward and ensuring the successful achievement of key transition milestones for implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. The implementation of key security arrangements for decommissioning and joint peacekeeping benefited from UNDP operational support, but suffered some efficiency challenges. UNDP contributed significantly to the foundations for new political and governance institutions, including the launch of the School for Peace and Democracy, and helped government institutions to revamp their organizational structures and efficiently on-board newly recruited cadres. However, there was no long-term capacity-strengthening strategy outlining core institutional tasks and processes. In terms of enabling a peace infrastructure, UNDP support empowered communities as engines for peace and social cohesion. Innovative early warning and planning tools for strengthening community resilience were piloted, with varying levels

of progress. UNDP has contributed to the preparatory steps for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front Camp Transformation Plan, which aims to cover the social, economic and governance needs of 15,000 people, though COVID-19 slowed progress. Additionally, social entrepreneurship has been developed with UNDP support. While this led to a generally positive impact on social cohesion, and some opportunities for business creation and expansion, the work faced sustainability challenges because of insufficient attention to market integration and access to finance. Although UNDP was responsive to partner needs, it has worked with over 60 different partners, which risks spreading its support too thin.

Attention to gender has varied across the portfolios. Gender-responsive and potentially -transformative work was visible in the Governance and Peacebuilding portfolio, while the other portfolios tended to be gender-targeted. To a large extent, UNDP interventions, especially those focused on socioeconomic empowerment, targeted and generated results for those most likely to be left behind. A human rights approach was visible across different initiatives, but the country office lacked comprehensive gender and Leave No-one Behind strategies, and did not directly support standalone Philippine institutions, such as human rights commissions.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The country office should revisit its overall programme delivery strategy to identify entry points for its democratic governance work, promote cross-outcome synergy, and strengthen its integrator role. The pivot to LGUs will be important in coming years, accompanied by clear communication to development partners on UNDP results. Further consideration should be given to the programme delivery strategy given changes in resource availability and country office staffing.

Recommendation 2: To consolidate outcome-level achievements, UNDP should coordinate efforts with national stakeholders to bring about sustainability plans that will further bolster technical capacity and replicate good practices related to evidence-based policymaking, evaluation and e-governance. Fundamentally, UNDP procurement contributions should support the Government to act as the primary delivery agent. In the next cycle there should be a stronger focus on policy work..

Recommendation 3: UNDP is well positioned to play an integrator role for resilience-building programmes, to build LGU preparedness while continuing to work nationally at the policy level. It should integrate urbanization, economic growth and climate change processes more holistically. UNDP should further engage with the private sector in biodiversity management and development financing.

Recommendation 4: UNDP should update its conflict-and-development analysis for BARMM and consider anchoring its new programme in three main results areas: responsive and accountable institutions; inclusive political processes; and community resilience and stabilization. Peacebuilding approaches piloted in this cycle should be mainstreamed across all three workstreams.

Recommendation 5: UNDP should focus on an area-based approach in BARMM, supporting the local governance transition and SDG localization while targeting a few strategic areas, including MILF camps and beyond, and island provinces. Designed as a cross-outcome programme and implemented in partnership with United Nations agencies, this approach will help UNDP to capitalize on the unequivocal trust built with the Government in BARMM, to fully assume its integrator role for developing an integrated and scalable model of intervention on the peace-development nexus.

Recommendation 6: The next CPD should be accompanied by a gender strategy identifying areas where UNDP can contribute to gender-transformative and -responsive change. The CPD should also be more systematic in its approach to targeting those left behind. UNDP should also consider feasible entry points to support human rights responsive Philippine institutions.