

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE:

This outcome evaluation (OE) for UNDP's decentralized governance and livelihoods programmes is to enable stock taking and lesson learning contributing to the future country programmes that continue to focus on these thematic areas. With a sharper focus on social inclusion and disadvantaged regions, this evaluation is also expected to provide recommendations for better linkages between these two thematic areas. Relevant to this OE are two Multi-Year Funding Framework (MYFF) goals namely, achieving the MDGs and reducing human poverty and fostering democratic governance. Each of these goals have been broken down into service lines which represent specific areas in which UNDP will contribute to development results at the country level

The terms of reference for this outcome evaluation cover two service lines for the India MYFF. These are: 1.3: Local poverty initiatives, including microfinance and 2.6: Decentralization, local governance and urban/rural development. The expected outcomes under these service lines include gender equitable and community-driven approaches to poverty elimination and sustainable livelihoods demonstrated for strengthening public policy and enhanced capacity of institutions of decentralized governance for local level planning, service delivery, and ensuring participation, transparency and accountability. These outcomes are sought to be achieved through effective implementation of well designed projects, mostly through partners identified for the purpose. This OE, in addition to reviewing the relevant projects and their contribution to national priorities on decentralized governance and livelihoods, also seeks to assess the extent to which UNDP outputs and implementation arrangements have been effective for strengthening linkages between the outcomes.

FACTORS CRUCIAL TO THE OUTCOMES:

UNDP's focus on livelihoods, its intent of catalyzing appropriate and effective policy and programming that can strategically impact poverty in India on a significant scale, and specific attention to two key dimensions in democratic and sustainable development – gender equity and effective decentralized governance – have been perfectly aligned to the development context in India, and will remain so in the near future. The relevance of the priorities and conceptual framework within which these are chosen are unquestionable. There has also been substantial progress towards outcomes in several areas, such as through the RMOL, EWR and the NSUP. Where this has been more modest, it is due to some gaps and misalignments in strategically adopting a portfolio of projects and structuring implementation so as to most effectively achieve the desired outcomes. While some are due to circumstances and events beyond UNDP's sphere of influence, some of them are internal to UNDP, as narrated below.

Choice of Project

Selection of projects, as means to achieving the desired thematic outcome of policy impact through demonstration of innovative/ new models, is puzzling in some cases. While projects such as NSUP and RMOL (and to an extent, SKILLS) are clearly aimed at

policy change, others such as Social Mobilization and the JBF project are surprising choices for the objective of policy or program influence. Additionally, in JBF which no doubt yields critical life-support outputs, activities for generating sustainable livelihoods are not part of the design of the project. In themselves, some projects are important and relevant to the situation in the country, but as vehicles for strategic impact, they are unsuitable. They do not involve new or innovative models that can attract policy attention, and there is no roadmap as to how any village-level improvements in the model or implementation effectiveness that is seen would be linked to policy or program advocacy.

Design and implementation

The strategies adopted to achieve the pre-determined outcomes through the projects appear inadequate in some cases. For instance, the decentralized plan to be prepared by the panchayats with technical support from the NGOs should have to take into consideration both the sector plans prepared by departments at higher levels of governance and also efforts like the NREGP and the PPCP and dovetail them with the relevant plans at the appropriate level. This is possible only if the coverage of the decentralized planning project is extended at least to a block if not to the entire district.

Monitoring and documentation of ground level work in many projects to obtain the policy gaps and address them during the life of the projects is also absent. Hence, the gap remained even when it could have been addressed, such as the inability of women's collectives to enforce the entitlement in NREGA of guaranteed 100 days employment. The fact that in some cases, as in JBF, the exclusion of certain groups is more consistent than in others, reveals that inclusion was not a variable that was being monitored closely or if it was, the partners were apparently not made accountable for it.

Time frame

In a few cases, the time frame of the projects is too short for any models to emerge. For instance, in the social mobilization program, the intent of the government was apparently to use flexible financing such as that available with UNDP to demonstrate models for reaching underserved communities, which government programs could then incorporate. But the time frame for such demonstration was short and partner capacity was uneven.

Partner capacity/understanding

The most critical factor in the achievement of project outcomes is, clearly, the capacity of the partners. Among some NGO partners, there appears to be a lack of clarity on what is expected of community-driven initiatives and who constitute the "community". Lack of capacity of local partners to place a value on community-driven and inclusive initiatives and lack of capacity of others to actually operationalize the concepts could be reasons for the lack of substantial and demonstrable movement forward on this front across all the projects/locations/initiatives.

Gender Equity

The primary factor in determining the extent to which gender-equitable approaches have been used or demonstrated is partner capacity. Working towards equity is a slow and difficult task at best, but when undermined by lack of conceptual clarity or commitment to the task, even reasonable efforts can be misplaced. Women have no doubt benefited to an extent in every field-based project in the livelihoods portfolio. Despite these gains, there is overall a gender role stereotyping such as women being trained in cuisines and appropriate housekeeping in home-stay initiatives in tourism rather than in planning and management of the homestay as a whole. The main reason for this lack of innovativeness and proactiveness on gender is the lack of orientation/capacity of key partners to design and monitor their projects appropriately.

External Factors

There have also been a few factors, over which the UNDP has very little control, but which have contributed to the achievement levels of the desired outcomes. These include: the establishment of an independent Ministry of Panchayatiraj (MoPR) in the Govt. of India; the creation of a fund for backward districts under the MoPR to be routed through the PRIs and allocated for their programme implementation on the basis of a devolution index; the bifurcation of the Urban Development Ministry with one dealing with urban development and the other with urban poverty eradication; the establishment of two major urban schemes (JNNURM and UIDSSMT) providing substantial funding to the ULBs; increasing acceptance of PPPs by the Central and State Governments not only for urban infrastructure but also for general economic growth; and the uneven progress made in several States in operationalizing decentralization brought about through the Constitution Amendments. While the contributions of some of these factors to the desired outcomes have been positive, some others have in reality posed more challenges than opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS:

While commending the substantial efforts made by UNDP in achieving the targeted outcomes under both these themes, we wish to make the following recommendations to fine-tune the projects and enhance the quality of outcomes:

For the sustainable livelihood theme

- Project design, timeframes and monitoring arrangements need more detailed attention. Roadmaps must include last-mile activities, and strategies and action-plans for policy influence.
- Issues that have emerged through UNDP work over the last 3 years in empowerment and social mobilization should be carried forward to policy levels building on partnerships already forged. These partnerships could also be extended to PRIs, to build their capacity and stake in policy advocacy.
- The MLA Forum developed in Orissa should be replicated in all focus States.
- Development of State-level Livelihood Strategies – on the RMOL model – should be supported in all focus States.

- Identification of strategic gender requirements and qualitative indicators proactively as a part of the project framework and design should be done rather than only vetting individual projects from a gender lens *after* they have been designed in draft.
- Capacity- building of local NGO partners to develop their understanding and skills in gender-equitable and inclusive approaches must be undertaken.

For the decentralized governance theme

- The decentralized planning project should be the bedrock of all projects under the decentralized governance theme. It must also encompass livelihood promotion activities as well as delivery of basic services.
- Even though the UNDP plays only a supportive role in operationalising the NREGA and the RTI Act, the emphasis in both these projects should shift to the State and local levels which have the primary responsibility of implementation. It may perhaps be desirable to link them with the decentralized planning project so that provision of needed employment and access to information get built into the local plans.
- Both the projects on PPCP as well as on urban governance do hold a lot of promise. They are in their initial stages of implementation. Both of them can be linked to the decentralized planning project, so that besides ensuring convergence in the implementation of the projects, the much needed urban-rural linkages can also be provided for. The composite district plan so prepared can be the basic document for detailed planning under PPCP.
- Dissemination of experience gained under the EWR project among other districts within the focus States through the SIRDs will ensure the sustainability of UNDP efforts even beyond the project period.
- Separate capacity building programmes may have to be designed for the chairpersons among the EWRs with special focus on the dalit and the marginalized groups among them.
- Schemes may have to be designed to strengthen the capacities of the gramasbhas as they constitute the foundation of the entire PRI structure. This can be done by suitably expanding the scope of the EWR and the decentralized planning projects.

For Convergence

We see a need for three kinds of convergence – coordination and convergence of projects at the UNDP level, convergence with other donor or government programs at the project locations, and not the least, convergence of related projects within a selected jurisdiction.

All the concerns of the UNDP country program are closely interwoven and mutually reinforcing. Therefore, most effect can be achieved if the various related projects were converged in an area. The Constitutional mandate of decentralized planning and stronger local governments accords well with this framework. However, appropriate methodologies, administrative arrangements, governance systems and capacities at various levels militate against an easy transition to multi-tier bottom-up planning. But UNDP can very significantly aid the process if its programming, project design and implementation and locale selection were to be systematically guided by this

understanding. UNDP could select a few districts in each one of the focal States and endeavour to make a substantial difference in 4 to 5 years in the areas of its concern. To do this, the best way is to implement all its various projects through a multi-sectoral integrative and convergent approach at the local level, even though the projects may be sectorally split in various departments and ministries at the State or national levels. This may be best achieved by placing a cell at the district level perhaps in the office of the Zilla Parishad.

A WAY FORWARD:

We recognize certain distinct advantages UNDP has in achieving the identified outcomes. It has credibility with a variety of state and non-state actors; it is considered neutral; government pays attention because of its long association and close relationship; it can raise key issues at national and international levels raising the visibility of outcomes. However, its key limitation is that it does not have much money for India. With substantial funds available even with government, available funds with UNDP have to be consolidated and focused rather than be spread out. UNDP's positioning to address issues has to reflect more squarely its comparative advantages as noted above. It is better placed to be an institution that is an effective facilitator of dialogue and action at the national, State and district levels. This facilitation role has to be planned strategically and be issue-based with a road map for policy change on those issues. The current strategy of dotting of the development landscape with various small and discrete initiatives spread across States and districts, with varying durations, without a connection among them and a clearly defined trajectory towards a finite and logical conclusion has not done justice to UNDP's strategic capacity and influence.

UNDP's primary role, the one which it is best positioned for, is to work towards making governments more responsive, through documentation of successful models, and identifying obstructions and contentious issues that need resolution at the policy level. This should form the basis for supporting advocacy for policy and administrative reforms. In the projects which are to be implemented at the village/panchayat level, the appropriate PRI should be the prime partner, with NGOs/district level (UNDP) cell providing technical support and handholding.

UNDP should decentralize most of its actual program administration to State and district levels, targeting State-level policy and district-level implementation structures. The results of policy-support will be more directly measurable at these levels. UNDP should converge all its related projects in selected districts in its focal States. It would be useful to select districts with different economic and social profiles so that both generic and contextually appropriate methodologies/ systems could be identified. Identifying and reviewing existing/ ongoing government programs in the relevant sector/ subject, and, to reiterate, developing a roadmap for policy/ program influence must precede implementation of projects. The programming and project selection process should be augmented with an externally facilitated strategic-planning exercise. Greater proportion of partnerships should be with larger/ higher-level institutional partners with proven track record.