

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Independent Evaluation Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted an independent country-level evaluation in Croatia. The Assessment of Development Results (ADR) attempts to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP contribution to development at the country level. This ADR examined UNDP Croatia's country programme for the period between 2007 and 2011, which was later extended by two years to 2013. The objectives of the ADR were to:

- Provide substantive support to the Administrator's accountability function in reporting to the Executive Board.
- Support greater UNDP accountability to national stakeholders and partners in the programme country.
- Serve as a means of quality assurance for UNDP interventions at the country level.
- Contribute to learning at corporate, regional and country levels.

The ADR was conducted in 2012 in collaboration with the Government of Croatia, UNDP Country Office and the Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS (RBEC). Given that Croatia was due to join the European Union (EU) in July 2013 and the UNDP country programme was to complete by the end of 2013, results of the ADR were expected to contribute to stocktaking lessons learned from the programme operations and provide an input to strategic decisions on UNDP operations in Croatia after the country's EU integration.

The ADR examined two key issues. First, UNDP's contribution to development results by programme outcome was examined by focusing on four criteria, including relevance, effectiveness,

efficiency, and sustainability. Second, UNDP's strategic position in the country was examined from three aspects: UNDP's overall responsiveness and relevance to meeting the development priorities of the country; its use of comparative strengths and partnership; and the degree to which UNDP has been able to promote core UN values such as gender equity, human rights and capacity-building.

UNDP PROGRAMME

Croatia has gone through a significant transition in the past two decades. The war between 1991 and 1995 left the country with heavy loss of life and severe disruptions to the socio-economic lives of the people. Croatia applied for EU membership in 2003, and through a series of negotiations that started in 2005, the country officially joined the organization as of 1 July 2013. The country programme examined in the ADR reflects six programme portfolios that were designed to meet the emerging needs of the country: social inclusion; regional/local development; environmental governance; business competitiveness; justice and human security; and support to national development priorities. The business portfolio phased out in 2011 and its activities were absorbed into other programme areas involving the private sector in the latter part of the country programme.

The Country Office carried out 47 projects between 2007 and 2012, accounting for a total expenditure of about US\$46 million. The programme expenditure was largest for environmental governance, with more than 50 percent of the total expenditure, followed by the local development portfolio, which represented about 25 percent.

FINDINGS

The country programme, delivered through its various portfolios, was relevant to meeting the emerging needs of the country.

Overall, the objectives of and approaches taken by each of the programme portfolios were in direct alignment with national development priorities, EU accession requirements and relevant UN conventions. For example, social inclusion aimed at the development of the Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM) and other social policies, with particular emphasis on the protection of persons with disabilities, minorities and victims of gender violence. It addressed critical concerns expressed in such major platforms as the National Strategy for Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Environmental governance had two outcomes: the climate-change component which focused on the use of energy-efficient technologies in the residential and service sectors; and the biodiversity component focusing on the promotion of green actions among key sectors driving the coastal development in the country. These efforts were in conformity with relevant national strategies, EU directives and supported implementation of Croatian international commitments set by the Kyoto Protocol.

The programme portfolios attempted to strategically choose their responses to meeting respective national development priorities. However, the degree to which they have achieved their intended objectives varied.

The preparation of the JIM pursued in the earlier phase of social inclusion was highly participatory, including both central and local administrations, and civil society organizations. The portfolio's second phase focused on the transformation of social-care system and the implementation of projects for persons with disabilities, Roma, women victims of gender-based violence, returnees, and HIV/AIDS. UNDP ensured that the needs of target groups were reflected in the process by conducting critical analytical-based work,

contributed to raising awareness and the visibility of the country's vulnerable populations. The integration of results into national strategies has been limited, however, due to limited capacity and resources at the national and regional government levels. With the slow progress in the development of the national policy for regional development, dozens of small-scale interventions under local development addressed direct needs of the war-affected and other underdeveloped regions of the country, including the successful introduction of the LEADER approach for rural development. The portfolio, however, lacked a clear linkage between the numerous outputs and the overarching national-level outcome aiming at socio-economic development of those regions.

Under economic governance, energy-efficiency efforts made strong input into national policies and strategies, and successfully distributed lessons learned from the Croatia experience to several countries in Europe and Central Asia. The biodiversity component of the portfolio actively engaged national and county-level efforts to support biodiversity-friendly development. Although there was progress with regard to commercial support on biodiversity, the results were still limited at the time of the ADR. Under the business competitiveness portfolio, tools such as the Corporate Social Responsibility Index and Regional Competitiveness Index promoted the concept of corporate governance and contributed to the overall outcome of the engagement of the private sector in national and regional sustainable development. But the use of these indices appeared limited among relevant counterparts.

Justice and human security focused on, among others, witness and victims support and capacity-building of the People's Ombudsman Office as part of the justice component, and community security, arms control and the state election process in the security component. The portfolio produced tangible results, which have been incorporated in national strategies and in lessons for other countries. The national development priorities portfolio initially aimed at the capacity-building of the Government to plan and implement effective

development policies. The portfolio appropriately shifted its focus in the latter part of the programme to regional knowledge sharing of Croatia's EU accession experience with other countries seeking to join the organization, including support to the 'centre of excellence' in the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. The evaluation noted that more sustained results may have been achieved if the needs of recipient countries were clearly identified and the effectiveness of capacity-building efforts was measured.

The portfolios were generally implemented in an efficient manner and demonstrated flexibility when met with operational challenges. Sustainability varied among portfolios.

The social inclusion portfolio was efficiently implemented and the planned outputs were delivered in a timely manner. At the same time, given the scale and complexity of social policy reforms, further capacity-building of national stakeholders, including civil society organizations, as well as their commitment would be needed to continue the reform process. UNDP staff's timely and professional responses under local development, its local presence with the field offices, and active engagements with local authorities have contributed to meeting the direct needs of local communities in the Areas of Special State Concern and other underdeveloped areas of the country. The portfolio represented a collection of dozens of diverse, small-scale activities, such as the provision of infrastructure-related and social services, as well as business development. Except for the establishment of local action groups, the portfolio lacked a coherent, long-term strategy that could strategically contribute to the socio-economic recovery of the target regions.

The energy-efficiency efforts have produced sustainable results with regard to public-sector energy management, with substantial buy-in from different levels of government. Support to biodiversity protection has been well adopted by county development agencies. Private-sector businesses have appreciated the additional funding channel presented by the project, but it is not

clearly established that this facility can be sustained or scaled up once project support is completed. Justice and human security has been able to maximize its results by utilizing various strategic approaches, including the establishment of strong partnerships with line ministries and focus its interventions on capacity-building and policy-oriented actions, as well as on local ownership. While the seminars, training and related activities conducted under the national development priorities portfolio were reported as having been received well by participants, lack of performance measurement tools made it difficult to measure the sustainability of the results.

UNDP's comparative strengths included its ability to identify and respond to the local needs, technical expertise, and partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders.

One of UNDP's recognized advantages over other development players in the country was demonstrated in the local development portfolio, where a combination of UNDP staff's expertise, local presence (e.g. Zadar Field Office) and critical partnerships with local stakeholders, including county government authorities, has produced successful activities to meet specific needs of local communities. It represented a good example of how a concentration of multiple activities and interventions in a single county can gradually create a trusting relationship with local communities and provides a promise for long-term cooperation. The portfolio supported regional cooperation in EU integration, including training on cross-border cooperation jointly organized with UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina.

UNDP has promoted various UN values from human development perspectives. Gender equality has been promoted with numerous advocacy activities, but its integration into the actual programming portfolio appeared limited.

All portfolios have addressed key UN values, which included the involvement of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the programme activities, support to human rights and equity issues,

regional sharing of lessons, and focus on capacity-building. The evaluation also acknowledged the Country Office's efforts in promoting gender equity, for example, through various high-level conferences and advocacy activities, including collaborative events held with the Office of the President, as well as a joint UN programme to fight against domestic violence. The social inclusion portfolio has visibly promoted the rights of women, persons with disabilities, Roma, children and other socially excluded groups. It worked on gender disaggregated data collection and support to vulnerable groups among women (e.g. elderly and those with disabilities) as well as on HIV/AIDS training with focus on gender-based discrimination. In more recent activities, the portfolio also focused on the inclusion of men as part of the campaign against gender-based violence. In other programmatic portfolios, however, there was limited evidence in the programme design of adopting a systematic, strategic approach to addressing gender equity as part of achieving their respective, intended outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 1. UNDP's relevance and efficiency over the programme period provide a foundation for continued work in Croatia. While effectiveness and sustainability have varied, sturdy building blocks have been put in place for the remaining programme period. UNDP has positioned itself well in the country, with some weaknesses in national policy impact, measurement of capacity-building performance and gender mainstreaming.

Conclusion 2. The social inclusion portfolio has played a significant role in the development of informed and participatory approaches to strategic planning and a systematic approach to monitoring the implementation of social inclusion policies in Croatia.

Conclusion 3. The local development portfolio has successfully responded to the urgent needs of less-developed areas. UNDP's overall effects on the development of a long-term strategy and capacity-building were more evident during the

second half of the programme, when support to preparing rural areas for EU accession became the focus of the portfolio.

Conclusion 4. The environmental governance portfolio has provided valuable and effective support to the Government and other partners to address important issues in the fields of biodiversity and climate change.

Conclusion 5. While the business competitiveness portfolio provided moderate effectiveness and sustainability, the Corporate Social Responsibility Index it created, along with the Regional Competitiveness Index, provided important tools towards measuring development progress and meeting outcomes.

Conclusion 6. The justice and human security portfolio has made a substantial contribution to the creation of national capacities in fulfilling Croatia's obligations deriving from the negotiation process with the EU in Chapters 23, 24 and 31. It has also addressed national priorities in the post-conflict transition (e.g. disarmament, control over legal and illicit weapons, community policing etc.) and the EU accession process in areas of judiciary, fundamental rights and security.

Conclusion 7. The change of focus from a nationally oriented capacity development in the early programme period to a more regional-based knowledge-sharing focus in the later programme was appropriate for the national development priorities portfolio – and in compliance with UNDP's regional policies, national needs and needs of neighbouring countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. UNDP should prepare for transitioning its development activities in Croatia during 2013.

Recommendation 2. UNDP activities in Croatia beyond 2013 should continue only in areas where Government, central, local or regional, or other relevant partners: (i) demonstrate their strong

endorsement and active engagement for sustainable results through institutional and/or financial commitments; and (ii) request UNDP's technical assistance to carry out agreed activities within a time-bound framework. East-East knowledge sharing and supporting absorption capacity for EU funds should be a priority.

Recommendation 3. UNDP should strengthen its capacity to effectively apply performance monitoring and results-based frameworks, and, when embarking on new projects, encourage Croatian partners to embrace robust performance monitoring and results-based frameworks.

Recommendation 4. Following this ADR, UNDP should undertake an analysis of its capacity-building strategy for the country programme, with a view to strengthening its portfolio outputs and outcomes for the remainder of the programme period.

Recommendation 5. With regard to the social inclusion portfolio, UNDP should increase the sustainability of its activities by focusing on the strengthening of capacity-building among national institutions for the implementation of planned reforms in social policies.

Recommendation 6. UNDP should promote the work done so far in war-affected and less-developed areas under the local development portfolio, and focus further on advocating at the central political level for the need to prepare those areas to make use of the challenges and opportunities that await after EU accession through, for example, case studies, absorption capacity analysis, and public debates.

Recommendation 7. UNDP should find a way to promote the model of long-term local support in the area of local development by its field offices that have been successfully developed during the programme and encourage the Government to treat the model as a pilot for areas where local needs for support are specific.

Recommendation 8. The environmental governance and climate change team should build upon its current portfolio, by taking appropriate measures to help ensure the sustainability of its results.

Recommendation 9. The Corporate Social Responsibility Index and Regional Competitiveness Index produced as outputs in the country programme should be made continuous use of and promoted across portfolio activities and beyond.

Recommendation 10. The justice and human security portfolio should focus on ensuring the sustainability and 'irreversibility' of finalized reforms and those in progress. This should be done through: (i) further capacity-building of key national stakeholder institutions; (ii) strengthening of the partnerships with and transfer of UNDP legacy to civil society organizations active in this sector; and (iii) by involving national partners in the dissemination of good practices to other countries in the region.

Recommendation 11. Continued support should be provided to the fledgling 'centre of excellence' established by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs as well as to other Croatian institutions seeking to share best practices.