

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the result of an Assessment of Development Results (ADR) in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, conducted in 2012–2013. An ADR is a country-level evaluation conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Independent Evaluation Office to assess overall UNDP performance and contributions, and to draw lessons for the next programming cycle. The evaluation analysed UNDP’s direct and indirect contributions to Afghanistan’s development results in all thematic areas, as well as the strategies pursued by UNDP in the country from 2009 to 2014.

Specific criteria applied for the assessment included relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and strategic positioning. The ADR also identified significant cross-cutting factors that may explain the success or failure of a number of interventions, including the degree to which UNDP and its programmes addressed capacity development and gender, as well as the quality of management and oversight.

The evaluation process entailed background research, four country visits, and a ‘beneficiary assessment’—an in-depth qualitative survey of programme beneficiaries in 10 provinces. The beneficiary assessment was intended to compensate for the limited ability of international evaluators to assess programme results at the local level because of security constraints.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

In 1978, President Muhammad Daud was overthrown by the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan. One year later, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan to rescue the new communist regime, which was facing a growing rural rebellion. For a decade, conflict raged

between the Soviet-backed Afghan government and US-backed mujahedin rebel forces. Soviet troops withdrew in 1989, and a civil war ensued between mujahedin factions for control of the capital, Kabul. From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan came to control the centre and south of the country, and fought bitterly against the Northern Alliance for control of the north. In October 2001, following the 11 September terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC, the Northern Alliance and a coalition of international forces toppled the Taliban government.

A new constitution was adopted in 2004, creating a centralized, presidential form of government with a bicameral legislature. The president is elected through direct suffrage and appoints cabinet ministers and provincial governors. Two rounds of presidential and parliamentary elections were held with UNDP support in 2004/2005 and 2009/2010. In 2014, the country entered a new electoral cycle: a first round of presidential election as well as provincial council elections took place on 5 April 2014, with parliamentary elections planned for 2015. Since 2010, the Afghanistan Independent Election Commission (IEC) has organized the country’s elections.

While provincial councils were elected in 2005 and 2009, they suffer from a lack of capacity, lack of budgetary independence, confusion over their roles and authorities, and limited legitimacy. Although constitutionally required, district and village council elections have never been held. In the absence of formal district and village councils, the World Bank and UNDP have used *ad hoc* Community Development Councils (CDCs) and Districts Development Assemblies (DDAs) in their respective area development programmes.

Donors have generously funded Afghanistan’s reconstruction. A regular series of conferences

have been convened to review progress and pledge further assistance. The ‘Kabul Process’, established in 2010, gave rise to National Priority Programmes (NPPs) and an agreement that 50 percent of donor assistance should be ‘on budget’ (channelled through the treasury), and 80 percent aligned with the NPPs.

Afghanistan has seen undeniable progress, particularly in the areas of health, education and power supply. The gains in educational, professional and political opportunities for girls and women represent important achievements, and have served to reverse some of the injustices and human rights abuses perpetrated against women under the Taliban regime. However, the reach of the line ministries and their capacity to deliver services outside the main cities remains limited.

Approximately 42 percent of Afghans live below the poverty line, compared to 33 percent in 2005. Eighty percent rely on agriculture. Over the past decade, policy documents have consistently put agriculture at the centre of efforts to rebuild Afghanistan’s economy, but so far, the vision of an agriculturally led economic transformation has borne little fruit.

Poor security poses significant challenges, including for the United Nations (UN) and UNDP, making programme implementation more difficult and ramping up expenditures to reinforce offices, accommodations and vehicles.

UNDP’S RESPONSE AND STRATEGIES

Afghanistan is a UN integrated political mission. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is mandated by the Security Council to lead and coordinate international civilian efforts in Afghanistan. Important elements in UNAMA’s 2012 and 2013 mandates were its role in supporting the organization, integrity and inclusiveness of elections, and in fostering aid coherence. Recent UNAMA mandates also highlighted the need for an evolution in UNAMA’s and UN agencies’ roles in line with the transition process, from direct service

delivery to support and capacity-building for Afghan institutions.

The UNDP programme, originally dominated by its role as an administrator of funds channelled by donors, has gradually become more substantive, particularly in the governance sector. UNDP has been closely associated with major efforts to improve governance, including through its support to the electoral process, capacity development assistance to numerous institutions, and support to the national budget process.

The current UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD, 2010–2014) closely reflects the national development priorities articulated in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), and focuses on the first two United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) outcomes: 1) fostering good governance, peace and stability; and 2) promoting sustainable livelihoods. These outcomes are being pursued through the following interventions:

- **Support to the rule of law**, through the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), which helps the Government pay and train the national police force, and through projects targeting corruption (the Accountability and Transparency Project, or ‘ACT’) and improved access to justice and human rights at the central and district levels (Justice and Human Rights in Afghanistan, or ‘JHRA’).
- **Demobilization and disarmament**, through the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), and the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programmes.
- **Direct support to key democratic milestones and events**, through the ELECT project (Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow).
- **Institutional development and capacity-building** to the legislature, judiciary, key ministries, agencies and commissions at the national level, mainly through the National

Institution-Building Project (NIBP), as well as support to subnational governance levels (provinces, districts), mainly through the Afghanistan Subnational Governance Programme (ASGP).

- **Poverty reduction and provision of basic social services**, mainly through the National Area-Based Development Programme (NABDP), which provides infrastructure, social services and economic projects through District Development Assemblies.

Afghanistan is the largest UNDP country programme by far, representing approximately 15 percent of UNDP expenditures worldwide. Resources have grown year after year over the reviewed period, driven by the continuous rise in police numbers. Over 2009–2013, UNDP spent approximately US\$3.34 billion in Afghanistan, three quarters of which were incurred by LOTFA. As of September 2013, 580 national staff and 121 international staff were on UNDP’s direct payroll, plus an estimated 2,233 ‘non-*Tasbkeel*’ (externally funded) personnel spread among various national institutions supported by UNDP.

As a result of a strategic review conducted in 2011, a change in Country Office management occurred in April 2012. A number of strategic changes followed, including new units to reinforce the Country Director’s office, including units focused on risk management, communication with donors and policy. The new management has also tried to strengthen programme coherence and prepare for the next CPD by drafting cluster (i.e. thematic) strategies.

OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT RESULTS

UNDP delivered important, visible contributions to Afghanistan’s development during the period under evaluation. Notable examples include:

- Despite some significant lapses in oversight, LOTFA has helped Afghanistan develop and operate a growing police force. Newly

recruited police officers have followed a diversified training effort, even if many police officers hired in previous years remain illiterate. The steady growth of the police force over the years—and hence the remarkable growth of the LOTFA project—is linked to what an interlocutor called a “perverse metamorphosis” of the police into a counter-insurgency outfit, at the expense of community policing. LOTFA has introduced a modest community policing component in recent years and has helped increase the representation of women within the police services in order to facilitate women’s access to the police. However, a more systemic reorientation and retooling of the Afghan National Police may be in order.

- Over 2,000 micro-projects have been implemented by the NABDP, from roads and bridges to schools and health centres, irrigation works and river protection walls. Results are visible and generally useful, although geographically concentrated around provincial capitals, which raises inequity concerns. The District Development Assemblies (DDAs) with which the programme works benefit from the generally positive perception of indigenous governance systems and may soon receive formal legal status. Nonetheless, the DDAs need greater support from a programme that has primarily focussed on brick-and-mortar and has paid insufficient attention to community organization issues.
- UNDP has funded equipment, buildings, furniture and a large number of national and international technical assistance personnel to strengthen the capacity in various governmental units, including the President’s Office, Parliament, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission, and the Independent Electoral Commission. While it was useful to stop-gap capacity, the

sustainability of UNDP's approach has been questioned. Few initiatives were based on a thorough capacity assessment.

- The presidential and provincial council elections in 2009 proved extremely controversial and demonstrated that little progress had been made in building national capacity at the time. The IEC required significant international support to implement the election, the quality of the election was arguably inferior to that of 2004, and costs were not reduced. The 2010 election was a much improved electoral event, and did manage to save costs compared to 2009. So far, the 2014 presidential and provincial council elections seem to be unfolding satisfactorily. However, the lack of an accurate voter registry indexed by voting station remains a concern.
- In the critical area of subnational governance, policy and legislative support was provided to the drafting of the country's Subnational Governance Policy and related legislation, and capacity-building support was extended to provincial and district governor offices and municipalities, notably in the area of revenue collection.
- In the area of gender, women's participation in national and local elections and their presence in the national parliament and in provincial councils, when they could not even leave their houses before 2001, send a powerful message about political equality. Results of UNDP's gender-dedicated programmes include contributions to gender-responsive budgeting, the increased capacity of the Ministry of Women's Affairs to interact with line ministries and monitor the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, support to a few provincial Departments of Women's Affairs offices, and engagement with religious leaders on the issue of the rights of women. However, cultural sensitivities proved a significant constraint. Several generations will likely pass before deeper changes can begin to take root.

There are also areas where UNDP's engagement has yielded limited results so far:

- Notwithstanding a few interesting initiatives with line ministries and support to the independent Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, anti-corruption efforts supported by UNDP have so far suffered from insufficient political commitment, even as progress against corruption was listed at the London and Kabul conferences as a key condition to further international assistance.
- Results in the justice sector have also fallen short of expectations. Despite new legislation and some modest physical and individual capacity created, the Afghan judiciary remains one of the least trusted among government institutions. Traditional justice systems, analysed in a UNDP National Human Development Report in 2007, remain dominant in rural Afghanistan, but unattended by UNDP programmes.
- The effectiveness of the demobilization process is open to question. Years of demobilization and disarmament efforts have led to mediocre results, due to the lack of an overarching peace agreement and overly complex, unpractical programme design, where a plethora of institutions and ministries are involved in the reintegration process. Similarly, anti-narcotics efforts have had little positive impact, as poppy cultivation is reaching record levels.
- Natural resources and disaster risk management received some 0.1 percent of the resources channelled through UNDP in Afghanistan during the period under review. These resources were used to strengthen the capacities of the National Environment Protection Agency and the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority.

In terms of capacity development, UNDP has mainly supported the central and executive branch of government. Paradoxically, scarce support went to the weakest pillars of the Afghan state: local governments, the legislature and the

judiciary. As is often the case, there were no in-depth capacity assessments to ensure that each capacity development response would target pertinent capacity gaps. UNDP has approached its massive capacity development portfolio in a disjointed manner, attempting to stop-gap institutional capacity rather than supporting the resolution of structural issues faced by the civil service. It is high time to rationalize this area of support, e.g. through closer collaboration with the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) and the Public Administration Reform (PAR), which provides the only holistic process of review and reform of the Afghan public sector.

In terms of programmatic areas, UNDP achieved little in the area of poverty reduction and income generation. The main project listed under this outcome is the NABDP, which has had good results in delivering transport, irrigation and social infrastructure, but stopped working on private enterprise development at the beginning of the review period. Of all the programmes reviewed, only the Rural Enterprise Development project in Kandahar and the Gender Equality Project provided some modest support to agro-industry and cottage industry development. This insufficient attention to poverty alleviation and economic development deserves to be corrected.

EFFICIENCY

The early years of the period under review saw the development in the UNDP Country Office of a management culture characterized by frequent interference in individual programme management; flexible support extended to key officials through a liberal use of Letters of Agreement; rapid promotion of relatively junior national staff in posts of responsibility within the Country Office; long and opaque recruitment processes leading to long periods of vacancy in some key programme positions; and attempts to control the message to donors rather than report transparently on achievements and challenges. These management issues gravely affected the efficiency and delivery of key programmes. Important

donors have reduced or in some cases withdrawn their support, and programmes were cut short as a result of management disputes and misunderstandings between partners. The recently investigated LOTFA procurement fraud was in all likelihood a symptom of this more general management problem.

From 2009 to 2011, Afghanistan did not receive significantly more attention from headquarters than much smaller programmes in other countries. Until mid-2012, only one programme officer was responsible for backstopping Afghanistan in the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP) in New York. Other UNDP units, such as the Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) and the Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), reported feeling excluded.

In 2011, UNDP commissioned a Strategic Review of its Afghanistan country programme, which led ultimately to the appointment of a new Country Director in April 2012. Since his appointment, the new Country Director has attempted to restore both the normal functioning of a Country Office and good working relations with the Government and donors, radically improving the image of UNDP in country in a matter of a few months. However, the process of reforming the administrative, logistic and oversight mechanisms of the Country Office will clearly take more time. The current Country Office management has raised the bar in terms of accountability, but also needs to instil a greater *esprit de corps* and mutual understanding between the programme staff and the staff of the Country Office.

UNDP headquarters has also remobilized around the Afghanistan programme. A new division focused specifically on Afghanistan has been established in RBAP at headquarters and a high-level Inter Bureau Task Force on Afghanistan now coordinates the inputs of various bureaux and units. An appropriate level of headquarter oversight has been restored and more substantive support is now provided. Two auditors were hired solely for Afghanistan and many more audits have taken place than in the past.

UNDP's efficiency in Afghanistan should be viewed through the lens of a country embroiled in conflict for the last 30 years. Poor security has strong effects on timelines and costs, with multiple staff evacuations, restrictions of staff movement, threats, and periodic attacks on soft targets at the provincial and capital levels, leading to interruptions in activities. Running costs are exceptionally high, as are turnover rates among both national and international staff. As a result of poor security, UNDP's ability to monitor and evaluate the performance of service providers outside Kabul remains very low, weakening UNDP's capacity to report to donors and the Government about programme results and challenges.

A perceived lack of synergies between parallel programmes has affected the Afghanistan country programme for some time. Potential for collaboration between programmes is perceived as greater at the provincial level, between ASGP, NABDP and APRP. Synergies among programmes implemented at the local level could also result from the consolidation of project presence in the provinces into UNDP sub-offices led by individuals with the capacity and authority to represent UNDP at that level. Presently, UNDP's regional offices are project offices, ill-equipped to foster collaboration, and poorly supported administratively and logistically by the Kabul office.

SUSTAINABILITY

Very few of the results described above are sustainable beyond the end of international support. The lack of clear and credible exit strategies is noted in numerous thematic areas. Even NABDP, admittedly one of the best programmes, pays insufficient attention to operation and maintenance issues. Elections have been undertaken in a manner that leads to unsustainable costs, sending the message that Afghanistan cannot afford democracy. Reliance on the donor-funded 'second civil service' (non-*Tashkeel* personnel) to stop-gap capacity in various institutions was useful at first, but has grown into a problem. These staff generally perform

core institutional functions rather than train regular civil servants, but they are almost never transferred into the civil service. Absent continued external support, there is no assurance that such capacity will be retained by the relevant public agencies. Similarly, there is no economic scenario, however optimistic in its assumptions, leading to a future where Afghanistan could afford the massive police force it has developed with donor support over the past decade.

STRATEGIC POSITIONING

Over the evaluated period, UNDP's programmes have been clearly focused on national priorities articulated in the ANDS. This document, which UNDP help draft in the previous programming period, served for the period in review as a 'blueprint', approved by both the Government and the international community, for the development of a democratic and stable Afghanistan. The ANDS was a turning point in that it allowed the Government to assert its leadership over a development agenda hitherto dominated by donors. The ANDS has since been further delineated in the NPPs. Although UNDP was not significantly involved in the development of the NPPs, its programmes align well with them.

UNDP has displayed in Afghanistan a genuine commitment to national ownership and leadership. UNDP programmes have in their overwhelming majority reflected this commitment, and have associated national institutions as partners and in various implementation roles, whether individual projects happen to be under direct implementation by the Country Office or under national implementation. This commitment to national ownership is not always recognized, and tends to be blurred by a still excessive focus on service delivery. In Afghanistan, UNDP has been able to leverage its neutrality relative to the different donors and the legitimate political forces in the country to act as a non-politicized conduit from donors to government. One could argue that UNDP has been all too happy to accept this service delivery role and should have resisted it more often. Some of these delivery

mechanisms, such as LOTFA, have also proven less reliable than they were claimed to be. But in most cases, UNDP did try to use its strategic position to defend national priorities, develop national capacities and progressively transfer responsibilities to national institutions. Electoral assistance is a good example of this transition.

While UNDP in Afghanistan has been able to leverage strong partnerships with the Government and donors, its relations with UN sister agencies, the World Bank, civil society and the private sector have tended to be weaker. These partnership patterns are consistent with the image of a UNDP chiefly concerned with service delivery at the expense of high-level policy dialogue. Reorienting the programme towards more substantive support is therefore likely to require better coordination within the UN Country Team and broader partnerships.

In a country where poor security and difficult terrain combine to hamper access to most valleys and villages, the massive international development assistance, including that of UNDP, has tended to remain in the capital city with limited trickle-down to the provincial, district and village levels. In particular, UNDP programmes have paid limited attention to Afghan indigenous governance systems, which remain a bedrock of Afghan society. Nonetheless, reconciling the central government with traditional governance and conflict resolution systems could hold one of the keys to future political stability in the country.

CONCLUSIONS

1. As UNDP approaches the multiple transitions ahead, it brings with it significant assets, including its long association with Afghanistan, widespread geographic coverage, access to key government institutions, and potential access to significant resources.
2. UNDP also has to overcome a number of disadvantages, including the perceptions that it is accustomed to the role of service provider, that it competes with the Government

for donors' funds, that it lacks substance and independence, and has insufficient capacity to demonstrate tangible results.

3. UNDP's goals during the 2010-2014 CPD would have been ambitious in normal circumstances; it was inevitable that the programme would fall short in a number of aspects given the difficult security conditions and complex political situation in the years following the design of the CPD. Important achievements have been made and are described in this report. However, there remain strong imbalances in terms of programme areas, geographic distribution of assistance, and types of beneficiaries.
4. Very few of the key development results UNDP contributed to are sustainable beyond the end of international support. Overall, UNDP programmes have relied on the assumption that they are in Afghanistan over the long term. The lack of clear and credible exit strategies is noted in this report in numerous areas.
5. During the first years of the period under review, and before a new Country Director improved leadership and oversight from UNDP headquarters, efficiency suffered from the development in the UNDP Country Office of a questionable management culture.
6. Efficiency needs to be considered in the context of a country in the midst of perpetual conflict over the last 30 years. Running costs are exceptionally high and poor security has strong effects on timelines—stronger than generally recognized.
7. Many donors appear to be open to increased financing of development activities through UNDP, recognizing that there are limited alternatives if they are to deliver the resource commitments made at the Tokyo conference (July 2012). Yet the trust of some important donors in UNDP's capacity to effectively deliver quality programmes on a national scale has been undermined during the period under review. Winning back their confidence

will be necessary if UNDP is to be successful in re-casting itself as a substantive partner.

8. UNDP's close association with the Government corresponds to the organization's mandate and approach, and is aligned with the principles of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, which recognizes national leadership and transparency as critical for success.
9. Over the reviewed period, UNDP has had insufficient ties with civil society, including civil society organizations and NGOs. At this critical juncture, the Afghan nation requires strong public pressure and active civil society organizations to lobby for improving education and health, gender equality, accountable government, and the battle against corruption.
10. Greater coherence and collaboration among UNDP programmes active at the subnational level, such as ASGP and NABDP, would be desirable to heighten impact and help save personnel, financial and logistic resources. The Country Office's genuine efforts in this direction have met with little progress thus far.
11. Opportunities for synergies between UNAMA and UNDP have not been systematically pursued, beyond their effective collaboration on elections. Over the years, an unfortunate distance or disconnect seems to have persisted between UNAMA and the UNCT. The UN mission in Afghanistan has been and remains one of the organization's most difficult. Progress has been frustratingly slow, and the numerous setbacks along the way, in particular the 2009 elections, have put the Integrated Mission model to serious test.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. UNDP needs to continue to rebuild confidence with the Government and its donors so that they will be more likely to support the ideas, frameworks and directions promoted by the organization.

2. During the next country programme, UNDP should continue to prioritize democratic governance and the rule of law, where it brings to bear a clear comparative advantage. However, the next country programme must devote greater attention to the weakest pillars of Afghan democracy (local governments, the legislature and the judiciary) and should try to contribute more convincingly to the fight against poverty and (where possible) environmental protection, in accordance with its poverty-environment nexus strategy.
3. UNDP should examine the possibility of setting up additional multi-donor, multilateral trust funds in support of the transition.
4. UNDP should strengthen its involvement in aid coordination forums and processes.
5. UNDP Country Office management should, as a matter of priority, improve operational capacity and programme effectiveness by rebuilding a cohesive team of national and international staff committed to achieving results for Afghanistan.
6. Subnational governance and service delivery should continue to be a major component of the UNDP Country Programme. To that end, UNDP should also establish regional offices that can better integrate UNDP project activities.
7. Given the extensive *de facto* local autonomy that has been a feature of Afghan governance in the past, specific attention needs to be paid to engaging with customary Afghan governance and judicial systems, which may not be up to international standard but have the important advantages of legitimacy and efficacy, and could play a useful role in the edification of the Afghan state.
8. The strategic coherence of UNDP's capacity development initiatives should be strengthened through stronger support to the Public Administration Reform process. Sustainability of capacity-building results needs more serious consideration in programme design and during implementation.

The recourse to large numbers of non-*Tashkeel* staff as a stop-gap measure must be reduced, and UNDP should consider a gradual increase in the use of national implementation to help raise capacity in a sustainable manner.

9. UNDP should make preparations to reduce its exposure to poor security conditions, by outsourcing some activities, in particular monitoring and evaluation, and by moving some administrative functions outside the country. It could also consider disengaging itself responsibly from its riskiest programme, the largely ineffective APRP, or radically simplifying its institutional arrangements.
10. The Country Office urgently needs to expand its communications capacity to ensure that the Afghan Government, Afghan citizens as well as development partners are aware of UNDP's goals and the impact its programmes have on helping improve the lives of average Afghan people.
11. UNDP should reach out to civil society, including through regular information events during the build-up to the elections and by involving carefully selected NGOs as programme implementers, primarily at the provincial and district levels, but also in lobbying, awareness-raising and civic education efforts.