

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted a country evaluation, called an Assessments of Development Results (ADR), in Malaysia in 2014. The ADR covered the previous country programme 2008–2012 and as much as possible of the ongoing country programme 2013–2015. There is a large degree of coherence in the programme structure over the two programme periods, with three outcomes defined for each programme period in the areas of inclusive growth; environment, energy and climate change; and global partnership for development (South-South cooperation).

The ADR examined the UNDP strategy and performance from two perspectives. First, UNDP's contribution to development results through programmatic areas was assessed according to four criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Second, UNDP's positioning and strategies were analysed from three perspectives: relevance and responsiveness of the county programme as a whole, UNDP's use of its comparative strengths, and the promotion of United Nations (UN) values from a human development perspective. Specific attention was given to UNDP's support to furthering gender equality in Malaysia. Furthermore, the ADR reflected on other factors influencing UNDP's support, including Malaysia's status as an upper middle-income country and UNDP's role in middle-to-high income countries, Malaysia's complex federal-state relations, and UNDP's engagement with civil society.

The evaluation used a mix of data collection methods, including desk reviews, individual and group interviews, telephone interviews, e-mail exchanges and direct observations during site visits. The evaluation teams sought to obtain a wide range of views from men and women, Government officials, UN agency representatives,

international organization and donor community representatives, academics, civil society representatives (including from indigenous communities), and private sector representatives. During analysis, data from various sources were triangulated and cross examined.

KEY FINDINGS

UNDP's interventions addressing inclusive growth have been highly relevant: they target both specific issues in Malaysia's unfinished development agenda and emerging human development challenges. Their overall objective has been to advance the inclusive growth agenda articulated in the Tenth Malaysia Plan, and, in particular, to enable policy interventions that improve the livelihoods and socio-economic status of the bottom 40 percent of households. UNDP approaches, models and conceptual frameworks, and resources have been highly relevant to achieving planned outcomes in this programme portfolio. UNDP's niche expertise in specific aspects of inclusive growth (dimensions of inequality, social mobility and inclusion, the urban poor) and human development coincides strongly with the Tenth Malaysia Plan's emphasis on reducing relative poverty and inequality, and with the focus on the 'People Economy' to be proposed in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan. UNDP's approach in facilitating high-quality empirical research and providing evidence-based policy advice has been very relevant to Malaysia, which has relatively high levels of capabilities within its technocracy and policymakers to absorb these findings. At the same time, UNDP's capacity-building approach has helped fill skills gaps in the technocracy; many of these technical and evidence-based interventions might have been difficult without UNDP support.

In terms of effectiveness, UNDP's interventions addressing inclusive growth have led to

the identification of gaps in Malaysia's development and to analytical outputs such as reports and research papers, which the evaluation finds to be overall of good quality. These have in turn contributed to the evidence base for serious policy discussions at federal and state levels and to the development of action plans or programmes. In many cases these technical outputs have also served as inputs to the Economic Planning Unit and relevant Ministries for the development of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan. This has the potential to bring about longer term human development outcomes of better access to services by the bottom 40 percent of households and reduced inequalities that cannot currently be predicted or measured. Other interventions have been effective in providing concrete inputs into potential policy reforms. UNDP's notable contribution has been to highlight inequalities in all aspects of its work, for example, focusing on pockets of poverty in the states of Sabah and Sarawak, on the indigenous Orang Asli, and on people with disabilities.

UNDP interventions in the environment, energy and climate change portfolio were found to be aligned with the priorities of the Ninth Malaysia Plan, its mid-term review, and the Tenth Plan, as well as with Malaysia's international obligations. However, despite the relevance of most individual projects to either a national development plan or policy or international commitment, there has been some lack of cohesiveness in terms of the overall UNDP programme direction, as translated through the choice and design of projects. Opportunities were not taken, particularly in the earlier years of the period under review, to align interventions in this portfolio with broader human development and inclusive growth objectives, nor to fully reflect these elements where they in fact existed when reporting on results.

With respect to the effectiveness of UNDP's interventions in the environment, energy and climate change portfolio, the evaluation found that overall, UNDP's interventions have contributed to better governance and conservation of Malaysia's natural capital. They have helped Malaysia to both better meet socio-economic development

and ecological demands on resources and fulfil international commitments. Furthermore, the interventions have helped ensure risks are managed, reducing threats and impacts to both man and environment, and improved energy security. In addition, elements of equity and inclusivity were also built into interventions, particularly in the biodiversity cluster, where community interests were emphasized to ensure that project outputs would benefit people directly, and not just improve government systems.

In the South-South cooperation component of the programme, UNDP's support has been in line with Malaysia's commitment to South-South cooperation and has been designed to strengthen Malaysia's engagement in the global partnership for development in areas of importance to the UN, notably peacekeeping and anti-corruption. UNDP has adopted a dual strategy, on the one hand supporting strategic thinking for new directions in South-South cooperation, and on the other working to develop the capacities of institutions to provide in-depth training on specific topics of interest to both national and international participants. In terms of effectiveness, results have been mixed. While UNDP has provided effective support to individual institutions, which have in turn provided training opportunities to participants from Southern countries, progress towards the intended programme outcomes—increased engagement in the global partnership for development, including efforts to accelerate global MDG achievement—has been limited.

In terms of the overall strategic relevance of UNDP's programming, UNDP has positioned itself well. UNDP's programmes have been closely aligned with national priorities and have shifted from responding to national strategies to helping to articulate them, as the current close involvement with the preparation of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan demonstrates. UNDP has also carved out a niche as a source of intellectual capital on issues of inclusive growth and reducing inequalities for key policymaking units in Malaysia. UNDP has been able to bring to the table potentially politically sensitive issues

and to stimulate debate that has the potential to lead to policy change. UNDP is seen as source of ideas, rather than as a source of funding, which is appropriate in this upper middle-income context.

In the area of environment, energy and climate change, a shift can be observed from earlier sector-specific projects towards interventions that take a more integrated approach, addressing ‘connectors’ between the environment and other human development issues. However, UNDP’s niche in these areas is still not clear to many stakeholders, and UNDP is perceived less as a thought leader and more as source of support for facilitating access to and implementing projects under the Global Environment Facility. In addition, UNDP may have missed opportunities to generate synergies and connections between interventions in the environment and energy portfolio.

Another element of strategic positioning in a country such as Malaysia may be finding an appropriate balance between federal and state level initiatives. The evaluation did not gather enough evidence to make a critical assessment of UNDP’s position in this regard; however, it offers a number of observations. For example, in the inclusive growth portfolio, regional poverty studies in the states of Sabah and Sarawak demonstrate that examining the structure of poverty in a given state is likely to lead to greater accuracy and deeper understanding of local issues than a nationwide study.

The evaluation found that despite the intentions articulated in the country programme documents, gender perspectives have not been mainstreamed across the programme. A review of the gender marker scores (a corporate tool designed to track financial allocations and expenditures contributing to gender equality and women’s empowerment) assigned to the 61 projects considered as within the scope of the evaluation shows that only four (7 percent) of the projects were considered to have gender equality as a main objective, and these were all in the inclusive growth portfolio. Seven projects (12 percent) had gender equality as a significant objective. Nearly half of

the projects were expected to contribute in some way to gender equality, but not significantly, and nearly one third, all in the environment portfolio, were not expected to contribute to gender equality. Three projects specifically targeting women were found to be highly relevant for women in Malaysia, and they all resulted in an analysis of the situation and the generation of gender-disaggregated data and action plans. However, adoption and implementation of actions plans has been limited, and overall the contributions to gender equality and women’s empowerment by these three projects have been slight. With respect to the other projects with gender-related outputs, these include disaggregated data sets (in the health sector) and trainings (for example, on gender in peacekeeping operations), where the direct or effective impact on gender equality or women’s empowerment could not be observed. Community-level interventions in two environment projects provided direct opportunities for women’s empowerment at a local scale, but one of the newest community-level interventions, part of the access to benefit-sharing project, had not succeeded in involving women in any significant way in activities.

Overall, assessments of the gender outcomes of projects show that gender has not been treated as a key development priority nor does it appear to be cross-cutting across all outcomes. There also seems to be a limited understanding overall that gender programming does not simply mean projects targeting women, but requires a thorough analysis of the effects on both men and women in terms of understanding the potential benefits and drawback of a programme’s interventions.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 1: Over the past two programme periods, UNDP has been a dependable, trusted and responsive development partner, supporting Malaysia in selected sectors.

Conclusion 2: In this upper middle-income country, UNDP has emphasized policy advice and is increasingly seen as a thought leader

on inclusive growth, human development and equity issues. UNDP-supported interventions have been at a strategic level, which is reflected in the types of policy debate and change that have resulted.

Conclusion 3: Despite UNDP's commitment to inclusion, its intentions to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment as stated in the country programme documents, and staff awareness of the importance of gender equality for development, gender has not been integrated as a development concern across the programme. UNDP has made some specific, modest contributions to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Conclusion 4: UNDP has made significant contributions to results in the environment, energy and climate change sectors. UNDP is an appreciated partner who facilitates elaboration of project concepts, access to international funding, and project implementation. Greater attention could have been given to demonstrating linkages between achievements in the environment sectors and human development and inclusive growth targets. This could have been done in both the articulation of project frameworks and the communication of results. Moreover, UNDP could have done more to profile itself as a source of innovative ideas and expertise in this domain.

Conclusion 5: South-South cooperation is a highly relevant area of engagement given Malaysia's interest, past history in, and potential for increasing its engagement in the global partnership for development, as well as UN commitment to promoting South-South cooperation. However, results achieved with UNDP support have been at the level of individual institutions providing training opportunities to participants from partner countries, sharing lessons at international forums, and facilitating bilateral technical cooperation, rather than at a strategic level.

Conclusion 6: UNDP has progressively sharpened its focus, strengthened its programme management, and addressed implementation

challenges to increase its value added. However, reporting has not been consistently focused on results and contributions to outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: As Malaysia prepares to launch its final five-year plan designed to achieve Vision 2020 and high-income status, UNDP should continue to identify gaps and challenges faced by the poorest and most excluded groups to assist Malaysia in reducing inequalities. At the same time, UNDP should help Malaysia look beyond 2020 to continue and/or begin addressing other challenges to sustainable human development that are likely to remain even as economic targets are met.

Management Response: *The CO accepts the recommendation. CO development activities in 2015 will continue to prioritize 10th Malaysia Plan priority to address the multiple deprivations and improve the well-being of low-income households and vulnerable groups and to reduce inequality in all its forms. The new CPD 2016–2020 will be fully aligned to the 11th Malaysia Plan's priorities/game-changers, which emphasize inclusiveness and enhancing the well-being of the bottom 40 percent of the population. The new country programme also will address remaining development challenges (identified from the MDG 2015 achievement status and Post-2015 Development Agenda's National Consultations, and through the national development planning process and discussions around the emergent SDGs) and integrate 11MP thrusts of sustainability, risk reduction and resilience building in all development activities. In looking ahead to new SDG commitments, programme design for the CPD 2016–2020 will also seek to support a development agenda that goes beyond 2020.*

Recommendation 2: In determining specific areas of intervention for the next country programme, UNDP and the Government should identify where UNDP's Strategic Plan 2014–2017, UNDP Malaysia's comparative expertise, the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, and the Government of Malaysia's priorities

intersect, to ensure that the country programme is focused and designed to ultimately address the opportunities and capabilities of the poorest and most excluded, as well as promote sustainability.

Management Response: *The CO accepts the recommendation. The linkage to the 11th Malaysia Plan's priorities/game-changers and remaining development challenges (identified from the MDG 2015 status and Post-2015 Development Agenda's National Consultations, and the emerging SDGs) will be operationalized in the design of the new Country Programme Document 2016-2020 emphasizing active voice and participation of non-state actors and vulnerable groups, inter-institutional and state, federal and local level coordination and coherence, and strategic South-South cooperation.*

Recommendation 3: UNDP should build on its work on reducing inequalities, its reputation as a trusted development partner, and its mandate as a member of the UN system to continue to advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment, and to more systematically use gender analysis and disaggregated data in programme planning and implementation. The country office should develop a gender strategy to inform its own programme design, appraisal, monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, in terms of ensuring a broad-based understanding of gender mainstreaming within the office, the country office may wish, as a first step towards more effective programming, to volunteer for the Gender Equality Seal Assessment.

Management Response: *The CO accepts the recommendation that greater emphasis for gender main-*

streaming be undertaken effectively across programme design and implementation. Country office will ensure gender agenda is operationalized with a comprehensive gender equality strategy supported by strengthened CO technical capacity and gender analysis and across all programme outcomes.

Recommendation 4: Given that spatial inequalities remain, UNDP may consider, in consultation with the Government, a stronger state-level engagement in the next country programme, focusing on the states with the highest rates of multidimensional poverty and/or the greatest inequalities.

Management Response: *The CO accepts the recommendation to strengthen engagement with all relevant stakeholders at the state level to address remaining development gaps with an emphasis on greater voice and participation of local communities and community-led development solutions.*

Recommendation 5: UNDP should continue to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation systems, as well as its reporting and communication on results and contributions to outcome-level change.

Management Response: *The CO accepts the recommendation. Building upon the current monitoring and evaluation systems, the CO will further supplement its sources and modalities to further strengthen oversight, participation of stakeholders and assessment of progress towards development results as outlined by the CPD and CPAP Outcomes, 11th Malaysia Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals.*