

## Chapter 2

# NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

This chapter provides an overview of the Republic of the Congo's recent history, its geographical and demographic situation, and its socio-economic environment. The evolution of human development and human security since 2000 is briefly analysed. In addition, this chapter looks at major UNDP partnerships and its role in their coordination.

### 2.1 GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

With a land area of 342,000 square kilometres, the Republic of the Congo borders the Central African Republic and Cameroon to the north, the Angolan enclave of Cabinda to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the east and the Republic of Gabon to the west. The coastline on the Atlantic Ocean accounts for 170 kilometres. The climate is equatorial, and the vegetation is mainly savannah and forests, the latter covering about 60 percent of the country. Only 2 percent of the total arable land is under cultivation. The country is rich in mineral resources. Its hydrographic network includes two major basins, the Congo and the Kouilou-Niari.

In 2006, the population of the Republic of the Congo was estimated to be 3.7 million inhabitants. People under 20 years old represented 55 percent of the population, and women represented 52 percent. The urban population was estimated at 60 percent, which is very high compared to the sub-Saharan Africa average of 35 percent. The demographic growth rate stood at just over

2 percent and the population density at 10 persons per square kilometre.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.2 POLITICAL CONTEXT

Recent history of the Republic of the Congo is characterized by a move from a Marxist one-party state system to liberal multiparty politics. Unfortunately, that transition resulted in three successive civil wars between 1993 and the end of 1999.

#### 2.2.1 SOCIALIST PERIOD

Following the overthrow of the first president elected after independence, the period from 1963 to 1990 was characterized by a one-party state system. It had two phases. During the first phase, 1963–1965, the dominating ideology was more socialist than Marxist. Marxism dominated the second phase, 1968–1990. During the second phase, development strategy focused on the state as the major economic actor with a central planning system.

In 1991, in line with reforms initiated in the Soviet Union and following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the government of President Sassou-Nguesso organized a national conference where political reforms were adopted. A democratic constitution was voted in on 15 March 1992. Pascal Lissouba won the first democratic election, though former allies who joined the opposition to constitute a new parliamentary majority soon contested the results.

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<sup>9</sup> Figures and statistics in this paragraph are drawn mainly from The World Bank Web site, Republic of the Congo – Data Profile, the *Human Development Report 2007–2008* (UNDP 2007) and the 2005 Household Survey in the Republic of the Congo.

### 2.2.2 CIVIL WARS

This marked the beginning of what the Congolese have called the 'democratic crisis'. The Congo has endured three successive rounds of civil wars (1993, 1997 and 1998–1999). Brazzaville and the southern departments of Pool, Bouenza, Niari and Lékoumou bore the brunt of fighting, violence and destruction. As in most internal conflicts, the civilian population was targeted, most often on a purely ethnic basis. In addition to numerous deaths, the wars also resulted in close to 800,000 persons being internally displaced or becoming refugees outside their country. The conflict cycle left a legacy of increased poverty, social and ethnic tensions, and economic decline. The chaos also gave rise to impunity, aggravating bad governance, corruption and fraud.

President Sassou-Nguesso returned to power in 1997. After several rounds of negotiations, a cease-fire agreement was signed at the end of 1999. It called for the re-establishment of political parties and the demobilization of ex-militia fighters. Although the Council for National Resistance (CNR)<sup>10</sup> of Reverend Ntoumi also signed the cease-fire agreement, his 'Ninja' militia retained control of large parts of the Pool Department and fighting continued, producing additional population displacement.

### 2.2.3 IMMEDIATE POST-CONFLICT PERIOD: 2000–2002

With the end of the conflict, the government and the international community worked towards restoring national institutions, re-establishing the rule of law, and reconstructing economic and administrative structures through an Interim Post-Conflict Programme (IPCP). In parallel, the government pursued a policy of reconciliation based on three pillars: negotiations with the rebellion, political inclusion and decentralization.

A new constitution was adopted in January 2002. Presidential elections were held in March, followed by legislative elections in May and June of the same year. These improved the environment for reconciliation and dialogue, despite criticism of the fairness of the electoral process. In 2005, exiled leaders began returning to the country and reorganizing their political parties.

### 2.2.4 TRANSITION AND STABILIZATION: 2003–2007

The first cycle of elections under the new Constitution marked the beginning of a period of transition and stabilisation. In March 2003, another agreement was signed with the CNR of Reverend Ntoumi to define the conditions for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of about 5,000 militia fighters. Although this agreement was not implemented, President Sassou-Nguesso appointed Reverend Ntoumi to the position of Minister in Charge of the Promotion of Peace Values and Rehabilitation in the Aftermath of War<sup>11</sup> after further discussions in 2007. By March 2008, Reverend Ntoumi had not yet taken up his new functions, and his return to Brazzaville was still under discussion.

The legislative elections of 2007 marked the beginning of the second electoral cycle. Parties supporting the presidential majority won over 90 percent of National Assembly seats, leaving the opposition holding only 11 seats. Several parties of the majority and some independents later joined the President's party to constitute a new Union for the Presidential Majority,<sup>12</sup> in preparation for a second presidential election scheduled for 2009.

After years of conflict, distrust and suspicion, the country has made significant progress on the path to reconciliation. The situation, however, remains fragile. Factors contributing to this fragility include increasing impoverishment, high

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10 Conseil National de la Résistance.

11 Ministre Délégué Chargé de la promotion des valeurs de paix et de la réparation des séquelles de guerre.

12 Rassemblement pour la Majorité Présidentielle.

unemployment, disparities between the poor and the affluent, and continuing political tensions.

## 2.3 ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The Congo experienced a GDP real growth average of 5.8 percent during 2004–2006, slightly higher than the sub-Saharan Africa average. In an economy dominated by the oil industry,<sup>13</sup> the country benefited from the global soaring of oil prices. The resulting increase in public income enabled the country to show primary-balance surpluses<sup>14</sup> every year, culminating in a projected surplus of some \$1.5 billion in 2007. The government has set aside the surpluses resulting from higher fiscal income from oil in a stabilization fund held at the Bank of Central African States. Observers estimate the value of that account at some \$3.56 billion.

According to widespread consensus, several factors drive economic growth in the Republic of the Congo. These include:

- *Oil production.* Coupled with increasing international prices, there has been a continuing increase of activities in this sector since 2000;
- *Wood industry* is the second main source of income and exports;
- *Sugar production*, although currently limited, has high economic potential and could generate important employment opportunities;
- *Telecommunications* is growing. Two mobile telephone networks have expanded their coverage throughout most of the country, investing some \$10 million in 2004–2005; and
- *Public investments* have been made in large infrastructure projects, such as the Imboulou dam project representing an investment of

some \$330 million over a six-year period (2003–2009).

After a decrease in both 2002 and 2003, non-oil income started rising again, reflecting increased economic activity. However, the increase is insufficient. If calculated using only non-oil income, the primary balance would equal a negative \$702 million in 2007.

This situation is illustrative of one of the many contradictions that characterize the Republic of the Congo. Two parallel economies exist. The first comprises mainly the oil and wood industries. It is modern, dynamic, competitive and export-oriented. The second economy is more traditional and is largely based on subsistence agriculture, small and often informal businesses and a plethoric civil service. There is little interconnection between the two economies, and the wealth of the first has little effect on the economic and human security of the majority of the population.

The Republic of the Congo is also highly indebted.<sup>15</sup> In March 2006, it qualified for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries facility of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The government has yet to complete the reforms it committed to as pre-conditions for debt relief in its discussions with IMF. The agreement included three pillars to allow the country to move towards sustainable growth:

1. A sustainable medium-term fiscal strategy that takes into account the country's limited oil resources;
2. An improvement in the quality of public spending, including an increase in pro-poor spending, and of the transparency and accountability in the budgetary process; and

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13 2006 figures from ADB/ADF show that the oil sector accounted for 64 percent of GDP, 85 percent of exports and 71 percent of fiscal revenues. See 'Country Strategy Document based on Results', DSPAR 2008-2012 (ADB/ADF, December 2007).

14 The primary balance is defined as "revenue (excluding grants) minus non-interest current expenditure minus domestically financed capital expenditure and net lending". See 'Country Report no. 06/262' (IMF, July 2006).

15 According to The World Bank's Country Brief (see [www.worldbank.org/cg](http://www.worldbank.org/cg)), the external debt corresponds to 806 percent of budgetary income, 338 percent of exports and 235 percent of the GDP.

**Table 2. Evolution of select indicators for the period 1998 and 2002–2005**

Indicator / year	1998	2002	2003	2004	2005	Average sub-Saharan Africa (2005)
Human Development Index	0.507	0.494	0.512	0.520	0.548	0.493
Life expectancy at birth	48.9	48.3	52	52.3	54.0	49.6
Adult literacy rate (%)	78.4	82.8	82.8	83	84.7	60.3
Children underweight for age (%)	17	25	14	14	15	n/a
Population with access to safe water (%)	34	49	46	58	58	55
Gender-related Development Index	0.499	0.488	0.507	0.519	0.540	n/a
Women in Parliament (% of seats) <sup>16</sup>	n/a	12	12	12	12	n/a
GDP per capita (purchasing power parity US\$)	995	980	965	978	1.262	1.998

Source : UNDP Human Development Reports 2000 and 2004–2007

3. Measures to reduce the cost of doing business, including governance measures aimed at tackling corruption.<sup>17</sup>

There is no doubt that the reforms envisaged would go a long way in solving the country's problems and allowing citizens to benefit from growth much more than they have so far.

## 2.4 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

As discussed in section 2.3, there is a contradiction between the wealth derived from oil extraction and the relatively poor performance of the country in terms of human development. According to the UNDP *Human Development Report 2007–2008*, the Republic of the Congo ranks 139th out of 177 countries. More than 50 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.<sup>18</sup> Social security for the most vulnerable persons remains weak, and basic social infrastructure

and services destroyed by war have not been fully re-established.

Nevertheless, there has been marked progress, evident to the extent of reliability of official data. Table 2 illustrates this by showing the evolution of select human development indicators from 1998 through the end of the civil war cycle and the years 2002 to 2005.

Currently, the situation in the health sector is characterized by the deterioration of services, the increase of communicable diseases, and the excessive concentration of health personnel and services in urban areas.

The education sector has been severely affected by the civil wars and resulting population displacement. Gross primary school enrolment dropped almost by half, to 57 percent in 1999, before beginning to rise again in 2002. It reached 92 percent in 2004 and an almost pre-war level of

16 The parliamentary elections held in 2007 actually resulted in fewer women holding seats.

17 IMF, 'Country Report no. 07/206', June 2007.

18 A figure of 50.1 percent is given in the 2005 nationwide household survey. See National Centre for Statistics and Economic Surveys, 'Enquête Congolaise auprès des Ménages pour l'Évaluation de la Pauvreté (ECOM 2005)', Brazzaville, April 2006.

111 percent in 2005.<sup>19</sup> As in the health sector, there is undue concentration of personnel and services in urban areas. The six grades of a rural primary school are often covered by only two teachers.

Gender equality is enshrined in the 2002 Constitution, and existing legislation for employment, education or politics does not contradict that principle. However, powerful social and traditional forces contribute to negating gender equality. Women represent less than 14 percent of the Council of Ministers. They also hold 15 percent of Senate seats, 9 percent of the National Assembly and less than 9 percent of local councils. The situation is better in the National Economic Council, where women represent 33 percent. Women also have 30 percent of the seats on the National Commission on Human Rights.

Two major factors hamper the efforts of the Congo to ensure that its relative wealth translates into significant improvements of human development indicators: the continued effects of the social tensions, disruptions and destruction caused by the civil wars, and generally weak governance. These points represent important challenges for the future of the country.

#### **2.4.1 MOVING BEYOND THE POST-CONFLICT PERIOD**

The wars of 1993, 1997 and 1998–1999 resulted not only in immense human suffering, but also in the destruction of the economic and social infrastructure in the Congolese departments affected by violence. In the most affected areas, the wars led to the destruction of 50 percent of the food production capacity and 90 percent of the livestock. Schooling was interrupted in four regions and in Brazzaville, and 50 percent of national medical facilities were destroyed or looted. The damage inflicted will take years to

repair, and full rehabilitation will depend on complete reconciliation and a more efficient use of national resources.

At the end of the civil wars, there were between 15,000 and 25,000 militia fighters in the Republic of the Congo, and there were an estimated 41,000 serviceable small arms and light weapons.<sup>20</sup> The social fabric of the country was also affected, as the militias were largely created along ethnic lines.

In a post-war 12-point platform called ‘New Hope’,<sup>21</sup> President Sassou-Nguesso stated his determination to build a lasting peace, to organize political life in a stable institutional environment, to promote a dynamic and prosperous economy and to ensure that each Congolese benefits from security, welfare and social justice.

Significant progress has been achieved in the process of reconciliation and reconstruction. Following the adoption of a new constitution in 2002, presidential elections were held, followed by parliamentary elections. A law on political parties has been adopted, and a second round of parliamentary elections was organized in 2007. These elections should be followed by local elections in 2008 and a second presidential election in 2009. Despite claims of irregularities, elections have taken place without violence. Opposition parties—although with only 11 members—are represented in the Parliament. Journalists are allowed some leeway for criticism, and the activities of human rights NGOs are tolerated.

Despite such progress, political reconciliation is not yet complete, as areas of the Pool Department remain under NRC control.

The vast majority of the persons displaced by war have now returned or settled in a new—generally urban—environment. Most of the militias have

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<sup>19</sup> The value of gross enrolment ratios can vary from less than 10 percent to more than 100 percent, reaching 130 percent in some countries when there are sizeable under-aged and/or over-aged enrolment.

<sup>20</sup> Small Arms Survey, ‘Small Arms Availability, Trade and Impacts in the Republic of Congo’, Special Report, April 2002.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Nouvelle Espérance’, issued for the presidential election of 2002 by President Sassou-Nguesso.

disbanded, although large quantities of weapons are still held by the remaining active militia or by civilians.<sup>22</sup>

After a transition period, beginning immediately following the end of hostilities and ending in 2002, the country entered a phase of stabilization, reconciliation, and re-establishment of institutions and rule of law. For many observers of the Congolese environment, the second cycle of elections now under way should mark the end of the post-conflict phase, provided that such elections are fair, transparent and violence-free. Most emergency-oriented international NGOs have now left the country, as the UN OCHA did in May 2007. The International Committee of the Red Cross has already closed two offices in the Pool Department and will have withdrawn from the last one by the end of March 2008. It will continue to operate from Brazzaville and is confident that the Congolese Red Cross can effectively take over most of its Kinkala-based activities.

#### 2.4.2 IMPROVING GOVERNANCE

Through the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP) of 2004, the government acknowledged a number of problems and issues related to governance. These included:

- The crisis of administration, state authority and control;
- Erroneous and inadequate allocation of available human, material and financial resources;
- Worsening corruption and fraud;
- Lack of coordination among the various administrations involved in economic management; and
- Inappropriate contract awarding procedures.<sup>23</sup>

This meant that the pro-poor expenditures planned in successive national budgets were often

not used or were simply siphoned away for other purposes. The only budgets that show important overspending have been the political and security allocations.

In an assessment at the end of 2007, the African Development Bank/African Development Fund (ADB/ADF)<sup>24</sup> noted some progress towards good governance, particularly concerning transparency in the oil sector. Such observations included the creation of a national commission to fight corruption and fraud, as well as a separate observatory on corruption, the latter with the participation of members of the civil society. The report also noted that although the principle of decentralization had been accepted, the transfer of resources to local administrations had not taken place, except for an *ad hoc* flat transfer of some \$2.3 million to each department. Remaining high priorities include further improvements in governance, capacity building within the civil service, and fostering a stronger political will to reform.

## 2.5 ACHIEVING PROGRESS ON THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The scarcity of data renders monitoring indicators for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) difficult. The tracking of indicators made by The World Bank<sup>25</sup> indicates that by 2005, most of the indicators related to social and community services had barely reached their pre-war levels of 1990, a sad illustration of the consequences of repeated conflicts of the nineties.

Published in 2004, the latest National MDG Report estimated that the achievement of MDG targets was unlikely for the elimination of gender disparity in secondary education, reversal of the incidence of malaria and other diseases, and significant improvement of the lives of slum

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22 Survey undertaken in 2007 by the NGO Small Arms Survey.

23 Republic of the Congo. 'Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP) for the Congo', 27 September 2004.

24 ADB/ADF. 'Country Strategy Document Based on Results' (DSPA 2008-2012), December 2007.

25 As posted on The World Bank Web site; see <http://go.worldbank.org/JE0BPHWUT0>.

dwellers. Only two targets were considered likely to be achieved: achieving universal primary education and dealing comprehensively with the debt problem. Table 3 represents a governmental assessment of the likelihood of reaching, by 2015, the goals presented in the 2004 National MDG Report.

Progress towards attaining the MDGs remains at the heart of the government's strategy for reducing poverty. With support from UNDP, the government is finalizing a national strategy for

the attainment of the MDGs.<sup>26</sup> The authors of the latest draft have identified the necessary conditions of success, including the promotion of good governance, a diversification of the national economy, a dynamic policy of employment and training, the allocation of resources to pro-poor activities and their actual disbursement, an equitable repartition of national wealth and, lastly, a strong political will to respect commitments.

Two important features of this draft MDG strategy are that its activities are budgeted and

<b>Table 3. Likelihood of achieving MDG targets (2004 estimates)</b>	
<b>Goals / Targets</b>	<b>Likelihood of achieving</b>
<b>Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</b> Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger	Potentially Potentially
<b>Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education</b> Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling	Likely
<b>Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women</b> Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015	Unlikely
<b>Goal 4: Reduce child mortality</b> Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate	Potentially
<b>Goal 5: Improve maternal health</b> Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio	Potentially
<b>Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases</b> Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases	Potentially Unlikely
<b>Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability</b> Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources Target 10: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation Target 11: Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of slum dwellers	Potentially Potentially Unlikely
<b>Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development</b> Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term	Likely

Source: Government of the Republic of the Congo, National MDG Report, 2004.

26 Republic of the Congo. 'National Plan for attaining MDGs in the Congo' (sixth draft), December 2007.

that it includes a realistic mechanism for the monitoring and evaluation of the national plan. The monitoring plan is based on recent surveys constituting a baseline, although incomplete, and on a programme to strengthen the national statistical and monitoring and evaluation capacity.

## 2.6 UNDP IN THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

The Ministry of Planning,<sup>27</sup> the principal national partner of UNDP in the Republic of the Congo, plays a central role in discussions with different members of the international aid community. The Ministry of Planning approves the major agreements and strategy documents governing the activities of UNDP. UNDP cooperates closely with the ministry and provides financial and technical support in order to strengthen ministerial capacity and assist in the elaboration of national strategy documents. UNDP also works closely with several line ministries, particularly the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Close links have been developed with the National Assembly and the Senate and with a number of other national institutions.

The major international development actors present in the Republic of the Congo are the Bretton Woods Institutions, France and the European Union. China has also become an increasingly prominent partner of the country. Major donors to UNDP programmes in 2006 and 2007 include The World Bank (\$4.2 million),<sup>28</sup> Japan (\$2.2 million), the European Union (\$2 million), Sweden (\$1 million) and ADB (\$0.1 million). The Government of the Republic of the Congo has contributed \$0.4 million from national resources under a cost-sharing formula during the same two-year period.

Unlike many other countries, the Republic of the Congo does not have an elaborate and compre-

hensive coordination mechanism, which is typically composed of thematic groups and an overseeing body. The likely explanation is that the number of resident bilateral and multilateral agencies is limited, with many countries covering the Congo from another base in the region, and several UN organizations not being represented on a permanent basis. Coordination therefore remains largely *ad hoc* and linked to punctual requirements.

Temporary coordination or consultation mechanisms have been put in place for exercises such as the preparation of the I-PRSP, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), the National Human Development Report and the National Plan for the MDGs, as well as for preparations for particular events or meetings. Recently, the European Union and the French Embassy have been jointly convening coordination meetings in preparation for a forthcoming meeting in Accra under the framework of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. In the absence of other initiatives to structure coordination among donors, that particular group is considering pursuing the effort beyond the immediate objective of the Accra meeting.

Relations between UNDP and international donors are often characterized as a collaboration of equal partners in the global development effort and the unequal partnership between a donor and UNDP as fundraiser. Occasionally, temporary tensions resulted from such situations. For example, long and difficult talks with The World Bank took place to re-negotiate an overhead percentage under a school rehabilitation project. Similarly, the European Union was critical of implementation delays and financial reporting for two projects it financed.

Coordination within the UN system is naturally greater than with other partners. The UN Country Team (UNCT) meets regularly and cooperates in the formulation of common assessments and

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<sup>27</sup> Ministère du Plan et de l'Aménagement du Territoire.

<sup>28</sup> Funds contributed to the Government of the Republic of the Congo but managed by UNDP under agreement with The World Bank.

strategy documents. Two types of regular meetings exist. The first concerns general substantive coordination among UNCT members and addresses common concerns, such as administrative and management issues, programme strategies and policies or common communication strategies. The meetings are convened on what appears to be an *ad hoc* basis, and some participants have expressed the wish to have them at fixed intervals. These substantive meetings are supplemented by thematic groups and as well as 'Communities of Practices' that deal with programme sectors and themes. In addition to UNCT members, national counterparts and donors often participate. The second type of UNCT meetings deal with security issues and are used to advise the UN Resident Coordinator in his capacity as designated official responsible for UN security.

The UNCT in the Republic of the Congo consists of eleven members, including the nine UN agencies and programmes with local offices, the IMF and The World Bank. All UNCT meetings are chaired by the UNDP Resident Representative, acting in his capacity as UN Resident Coordinator. In his absence, a representative of one of the participating agencies acts as chair. The Deputy Resident Representative sits for UNDP in these meetings. As UNDP operations in the Republic of the Congo are too small to justify the creation of the post of Country Director, as is now done in some other situations, the roles and responsibilities of UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative are often confused. The UN coordination effort now benefits from the presence of full-time, dedicated staff to assist the UN Resident Coordinator.

UNCT is now engaged in the preparation of a United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the period of 2009–2013. Following two UN plans for the period of 2000–2002 and annual Consolidated Humanitarian Appeals through 2006, this will be the first comprehensive UNDAF process developed for the Republic of the Congo since 2000. The last Common Country Assessment

(CCA) prepared by UNCT dates back to 2005. For the ongoing UNDAF process, it was decided to forego the preparation of another CCA, as the recent PRSP, supplemented by complementary analysis, was judged to have provided a sound basis for developing the UN framework.

A review of activities in the immediate post-conflict period resulted in the recommendation for UNDP to strengthen relations with civil society, NGOs and the private sector. The country office has established some successful private-sector partnerships through a project to support the development of strategies for addressing HIV/AIDS in some 30 large manufacturing and business firms. UNDP also signed a framework agreement for a partnership with Total, the largest oil company operating in the Republic of the Congo. The agreement opens the way for partnerships in a number of areas, including HIV/AIDS, the environment, poverty reduction, micro-finance programmes as well as new information and communication technology (NICT). Representatives of the manufacturing and business communities are regularly invited to participate in consultations organized by UNDP.

Relations with NGOs and members of the civil society, on the other hand, were less intense than during the preceding period. During the immediate post-conflict period, UNDP developed operational relationships with several NGOs and local associations for the implementation of emergency recovery projects. In the new programming cycle, more emphasis was gradually put on execution through national institutions, and direct operational relationship with NGOs became an exception to the rule. Nevertheless, UNDP continued to consult with civil society, including some national NGOs, as part of its support for the elaboration of major reports and strategy documents.

Until May 2007, when OCHA withdrew its presence, there existed a humanitarian coordination hub. The hub, located in the premises of UNDP, enabled members of the UN system, donors, NGOs and relevant national institutions

to share information on their respective activities. This avoided unnecessary duplication of effort and allowed newcomers to build upon the experience and knowledge of other organizations. These coordination meetings were highly appreciated, and a number of participants felt they should have been continued after the departure of OCHA. UNDP lost an opportunity to capitalize on that success in 2007 by failing to take over the

coordination meetings (albeit with a different development emphasis).

Among the general public, the UNDP image is relatively positive, benefiting from high-visibility reconciliation and peace-building operations, such as the collection and public burning of weapons. UNDP activities are well covered in the national media.