

EVALUATION BRIEF

JUNE 2009



A major success of UNDP programme in the countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and Barbados (2001- 2007), is its strong focus on human and social development. UNDP presence in the subregion is reflected through a commendable programme, which ensures UNDP's role as providing the "big picture" response to development challenges. Since 2001, UNDP has been the lead actor in the region on issues of small islands developing states, regional economic integration, the MDGs and climate change adaptation fulfilling effectively different roles in a responsive and demand-driven manner. In addition, UNDP's ability to have an effective and coordinated response to the many development challenges allows it to play a key strategic role in the subregion.

Yet, in spite of these achievements the country-level evaluation of UNDP contribution to national development results in the subregion indicates a moderate overall performance in terms of measurable results reached. Its broad scope of intervention across ten countries and territories has, however, also placed high demand on the agency's limited resources, and led to a perception that UNDP tries to be "all things to all people". UNDP should continue to focus strongly on advocacy, knowledge building and coordination and networking efforts, while also define more clearly its comparative advantage in the areas of poverty reduction and social vulnerabilities.

A DEVELOPMENT PARADOX

While most countries in this sub-region have achieved relatively high levels of economic growth and political stability, poverty levels still remain high. Underemployment, gender and social inequities and institutional capacity weaknesses coexist with high level of GDP per capita and financial prosperity. Moreover, vulnerability to extreme weather events, weak government accountability and poor economic diversification challenge the sub-region in balancing prosperity and risk.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Useful short-term results (outputs) achieved yet moderate progress made towards longer term results (outcomes).

The ADR documents many strong features of the UNDP subregional programme. UNDP was quite successful in maintaining its relevance over time, responding to evolving partner needs and maintaining key partnerships. However, the ADR concluded that the overall development performance and effectiveness of the subregional programme varied, especially in terms of the degree to which long-term, measurable and sustainable

results were achieved. While many short-term results were achieved, the level of outcome progress appeared to be less than expected for a programme more than halfway through its cycle. For example: A combination of qualitative and document based evidence collected through the ADR revealed generally good progress at the output level of the UNDP subregional programme. Key immediate effects included: institutional capacity development for the OECS Secretariat; knowledge exchange among stakeholders on poverty and social development issues; research/statistical skills for poverty monitoring; and enhancement of policy/advocacy expertise for social development. Also, progress towards broader subregional development outcomes as formulated in the UNDP subregional programme was much more difficult to judge with the available evidence, and the level of outcome achievement appeared to be relatively modest. There were limitations on overall development effectiveness of the subregional programme due to a lack of coherence in terms of which specific investments to support, for how long, with which partners, and at what levels (i.e., up- or downstream). There appeared to be low likelihood of

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sustainability of results for some UNDP funded initiatives due to the lack of clear exit strategies to ensure that development activities continued after UNDP intervention ended.

Comparative advantage of UNDP remains in addressing social development issues across the subregion, mainly in areas of leadership, policy consultation, advocacy, technical capacity and networking.

This comparative advantage exists mainly in the context of the geographic scope of the subregion and the difficulty of working in depth on a country-by-country basis with limited programme resources. A complete withdrawal from direct implementation within countries (i.e., downstream initiatives) could lead to a decline in visibility—one of the factors underlying UNDP credibility in some areas. However, too much involvement in direct project support in small countries did not seem feasible given the large number of countries, their widely differing development status and the relatively small amount of available resources.

Missed opportunities for UNDP in establishing effective development partnerships with Net Contributors Countries, NGOs and the private sector.

The missed opportunities with Net Contributor Countries* were related to the potential ability of these countries to contribute more fully to the subregional programme (not only monetarily, but also in knowledge sharing). The subregional approach to development gives UNDP an opportunity to capitalize on South-South knowledge exchange opportunities and potential synergies available where countries are at various levels of economic growth and development.

Weaknesses in UNDP subregional programme management systems.

Absence of adequate internal monitoring and evaluation across the programme affected the possibility of critically measuring and analysing progress towards development results. Also lack of available overheads from project based work for the subregional office appeared to lead to chronic understaffing, overwork and unsustainable overworking. The financial sustainability of the subregional programme appeared to need more attention, given the UNDP subregional office's dependence on a single cost-sharing.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Standard country ranking systems tools, while useful, also appear to be lacking to accurately capture the unique development status of many countries, especially in terms of climatic, human and/or economic vulnerability.
- While there is a clear value-added of a subregional programme approach, it also requires additional investment in complex partnership transactions related to coordination, harmonization, alignment and oversight, as well as a willingness to take risks and creatively approach programme funding and management.
- Specialized or unique programme structures may require extra corporate investment.

*Countries with a GDP per capita above a certain threshold that are not eligible for core UNDP programme resources.

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maintain a focus on upstream activities that will address poverty and vulnerability issues.
- Integrate climate change issues across all other programme areas.
- Improve south-south cooperation strategies.
- Fully engage with the NCCs in a strategic manner.
- Help convene and coordinate key stakeholders in order to support the creation of a standardized vulnerability analysis tool or index.
- Strengthen partnerships with the private sector and NGOs.
- Focus on well defined exit strategies for country programmes.
- Develop a resource mobilization strategy that reduces its dependence on a key regional initiative.
- Formally designate UNDP Barbados as a sub regional office rather than a country office (UNDP headquarters).
- Improve the capacity of the sub regional office to utilize results-based management.
- Selectively increase its on-the-ground presence in countries receiving target for resource assignment from the core (TRAC) funds.



The UNDP Evaluation Office (EO) provides systematic assessment of UNDP's contribution to development results by conducting independent thematic and programmatic evaluations.

Contact us at:

UNDP Evaluation Office (EO) • One United Nations Plaza • DC1-4th Floor • New York, NY 10017
Telephone: (212) 906 5095 • Fax: (212) 906 6008/6627 • evaluation.office@undp.org • www.undp.org/eo