

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Assessment of Development Results (ADR) was conducted in Benin to assess United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) contribution to the attainment of national development results and to share the findings, conclusions and recommendations with the UN system, the population of Benin, its government and the international community. The ADR exercise is forward-looking and is aimed at drawing lessons for future UNDP programming in Benin.

DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Benin is threatened by the challenges of environmental depletion and constrained by a high population growth rate, a largely informal economy, and a weak and obsolete industrial and communication infrastructure. Recognizing such challenges, in 2006 Benin opted for fundamental changes that will transform it into an emerging country over the next twenty years. Through wide consultations and the participation of all constituents of its society, Benin acquired tools enabling it to face its future with more confidence. Major challenges threatening development have been identified together with corresponding actions to address them. In particular, the focus is on:

- **Political will**, through the commitment of the government to fully support the change process, including its engagement in large institutional reform; and
 - **Good governance**, through the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) process, by which the Government of Benin committed itself to improve its performance in what has been identified as priority obstacles to a transparent and accountable management of the state and the enterprise.
- Benin also defined a vision for its own future, fixed priorities and set up mechanisms to accompany the implementation of this vision. Although specific strategies still need to be defined in key sectors, the overall framework is set up and Benin is beginning to perform. The international community—in particular, UNDP and other UN agencies active in Benin—played an important role in helping prepare the country to engage in its new development agenda.

UNDP CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

During 2004–2008, UNDP focused its activities on contributing to four national priorities:

- Poverty reduction;
- The fight against AIDS;
- Access to social services; and
- The rule of law and peaceful social climate.

Poverty reduction. UNDP made a substantial, strategic and positive contribution to the national objective of reducing the proportion of the population living below the poverty line or suffering from malnutrition, in particular through its support of the Growth Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Benin's pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals. Almost all

UNDP interventions centred on this national objective: 30 of its 32 projects and 7 of 10 intended country programme outline (CPO) outcomes concentrated on this objective, and nearly 50 percent of its funds were channeled to poverty reduction support. Many UNDP interventions in support of this national priority also cover areas normally categorized as governance and the environment.

Broadly characterized by a twofold strategy of political support at the central level and experimentation at the local level, the main features of UNDP contribution to poverty reduction in 2004–2008 can be summarized as:

- Advising and supporting the government, which allowed for development plans and priorities to be identified and budgeted, experiments to be undertaken and brought to completion, and capacities of partner ministries to be reinforced;
- Supporting, demonstrating and promoting institutional reform through the small-scale implementation of decentralization and local development, with results that have now been replicated nationwide;
- Involving civil society in participatory planning and monitoring, with the result of supporting the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and liberties, social dialogue and the empowerment of a larger number of stakeholders in making them accountable for the development of their country;
- Greening of Benin’s main planning tool, the GSPR, which created an increased awareness of sustainable development and demonstrated that the environment can be an economically viable source of job creation and is a condition for sustainable food security;
- Costing of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which has had the effect of initiating ownership of the development process by national stakeholders at both central and decentralized levels;
- Advocating for alignment of donor assistance, which helped support—in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness—the alignment of donor assistance and aid flows with national priorities identified in the GSPR; and
- Partnering for better coordination among donors in the areas of governance and environment, the two UNDP sub-programmes supporting poverty reduction during the 2004–2008 CPO.

Fight against AIDS. UNDP contribution to this national objective has been inconclusive. Support to the national objective of “Fight against AIDS” was provided through one main project, which accounted for more than 50 percent of UNDP financial resources over the entire CPO period. By the end of 2006, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria transferred control of the project to the government. Although the final 2007 evaluation of the Global Fund identified positive results of UNDP interventions—such as funding, training and providing services to people living with HIV/AIDS—the evaluation team was unable to confirm that UNDP made a contribution towards the reduction of the level of HIV/AIDS prevalence. Moreover, ministry-level capacity-building provided by UNDP appears to have been insufficient to guarantee the efficient use of available Global Fund financial resources after UNDP withdrawal.

Social services, and the rule of law and peaceful social climate. These two national objectives stated in the CPO received meagre UNDP resources. Support to social services, broadly formulated by the government as the national objective of “reduction of maternal and infant mortality rates and to the improvement of health and education” took the form of promotion of human rights in the UNDP programme. After the first two years of the programme, UNDP reoriented its activities resulting in limited UNDP interventions in promoting human rights by the end of the CPO period. UNDP

contribution to the national objective of “supporting law, liberties and a peaceful social climate” appears paradoxical. If support to social dialogue constitutes a central UNDP achievement in Benin and a sector where UNDP was able to effectively use its comparative advantages, it is inconsistent that, with the exception of advocacy, almost no programme resources were formally dedicated to this national objective.

CONCLUSIONS

Key factors affecting UNDP contributions to the attainment of national development results during the CPO period are discussed below.

STRATEGIC POSITIONING

On the whole, UNDP made adequate use of its comparative advantages, such as its perceived neutrality in the championing of delicate and sensitive macro-level policy subjects, its acceptance by both donors and the government as a leader in development dialogue, and its credibility in resource mobilization. These assets have enabled UNDP to contribute positively to two national objectives: poverty reduction and support to social dialogue.

The neutral status of UNDP helped Benin take a step forward in combating poverty and reinforced Benin’s aid absorption capacity. UNDP advocacy resulted in resource mobilization from multiple donors, channelled in direct support for key activities related to democracy, civil participation and human development. Such activities ranged from elections to a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, GSPR and Millennium Development Goal monitoring, and participatory decentralized development planning. Based on its strategic positioning, UNDP can play a major role in supporting national objectives and strategies that the Ministry of State in Charge of the Economy, Planning, Development and Evaluation of

Public Policies (MECEPDEAP) has to manage simultaneously with limited human resources.

UNDP established an example of good practice in the creation of strong partnerships. For example, in its environment programme, UNDP has contributed positively to the capacity-building of the Ministry of Environment, at both the central and deconcentrated levels, to manage issues of environmental protection and climate change. This has been accomplished by linking UNDP regional expertise, UN mechanisms and institutions, international donors, local stakeholders and UNDP projects.

The UNDP coordination role provides opportunities, challenges and potential pitfalls. UNDP established an example of good practice in its environment programme by linking UN regional bureau expertise via the Subregional Resource Facility, UN mechanisms and institutions (the Drylands Development Centre,¹ Global Environment Facility and UN Volunteers), international donors (the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, International Land Coalition, United States Agency for International Development Peace Corps), Ministry of Environment’s central and decentralized services, and local stakeholders. Leading by example, such partnerships support effective implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and contribute directly to a better utilization of resources in favour of the poor.

Working with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) model and technical support, UNDP contributed to establishing an example of good practice in its governance programme. Through the Support to Municipalities’ Development and Self-Help Project in Borgou project (ADECOI), the central government, supported by an effective knowledge management strategy, adopted decentralized and participatory mechanisms that

1. The Drylands Development Centre, formerly called the United Nations Office to Combat Desertification and Drought, was designed to provide a linkage to the overall UNDP practice network. UNDP moved the global headquarters of its Drylands Development Centre from New York, USA, to Nairobi, Kenya, in July 2001.

qualitatively improved its capacity to develop pro-poor policies. UNDP contribution has been determinant on various strategic occasions in its governance programme. Such instances included the presidential elections, elaboration of 'Emerging Benin',² priority projects and the Employment for Youth project. All of these directly contribute to establishing a foundation for the national objective of poverty reduction.

However, the UNDP coordination role and related contributions risk dispersing the organization's interventions. UNDP involvement in small arms control as an example of such dispersion. It is not clear how other regional projects, such as the Inventory of Governance in Africa or the Niger River Basin, managed directly by the New York headquarters, contributed to UNDP effectiveness in supporting national objectives. Finally, both internal and independent evaluations of projects under the governance and environment programmes reported dispersion of efforts and mixed results for the cross-cutting sectors of gender and human rights, which have been managed without sufficiently clear indicators, directions or responsiveness.

RELEVANCE

Almost all projects were linked with national priorities and designed jointly by Benin and UNDP. For the Ministry of State in Charge of the Economy, Planning, Development and Evaluation of Public Policies and the Ministry of Microfinance, Small and Medium Enterprises, and Youth and Women Employment, the contribution of UNDP has been highly strategic, particularly the support provided to major policy documents, such as 'Emerging Benin', 'Benin's Strategic Directions', and the GSPR. UNDP support to the national economic development frameworks and mechanisms such as Employment for Youth and to priority projects also contributed to a behavioural change in public service.

Less positive is the relevance of UNDP strategy to increase the use of social services (under the

overall objective of reducing maternal and infant mortality rates and improving health and education). The same observation applies to some regional projects managed by UNDP headquarters, where no impact was readily evident to the evaluation team. Examples include the Small Arms Proliferation project, which was not linked to a CPO outcome, and the Inventory of Governance in Africa project.

UNDP dependency on external funding, which represents over 70 percent of total 2004–2007 UNDP programme expenditure, may have influenced its strategic choices and threatened the optimal alignment of its interventions to its internal capacities, though not necessarily to Benin's needs.

This observation applies, for example, to the HIV/AIDS project, notwithstanding its alignment with the UNDP Corporate strategic goals for 2004–2007. The UNDP environment programme is also puzzling: external resources, except for one project, were channelled at the central and political level, while UNDP Target for Resource Agreement from the Core (TRAC) funds were channelled to the decentralized or local level. The latter was consistent with the expected country programme action plan (CPAP) outcome of increasing the capacity of local authorities, communities and the private sector. Although agriculture is also highly relevant for Benin, the increasing UNDP involvement in this sector—specifically, the new partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the multiple relationships supporting the new Songhaï project—raises questions of the internal relevance of UNDP presence even if UNDP intends to confine its interventions to consultancy, policy dialogue and job creation.

Given the importance of gender issues to Benin, it is surprising that the issue was not given sufficient priority in the country programmes. UNDP targeted women directly through two

2. 'Bénin Emergent'.

main interventions: microcredit as part of the ADECOI project, and Support to the Consolidation of Democracy through the Strengthening of Women's Representation in Decision-Making Bodies and Public Policy (PARPF), a pilot project in leadership training, representation and participation of women in public life. Although women participated and benefited from these projects, no transformation of their role in the Beninese society can be directly linked with UNDP support during the 2004–2008 period. In the case of ADECOI, the impact of microcredit on women's income and economic development remains low at the end of phase 1. In the case of PARPF, started in 2007, it is too early to identify impacts on women's representation and participation.

Gender has been taken into account at various degrees in other projects such as the Microfinance Programme of the Global Environment Facility or, at a more political level, UNDP support to the preparation of a national action plan for the promotion and protection of human rights. However, as discussed in the Effectiveness section, UNDP interventions lacked clear directions and indicators to make its contribution on gender issues truly effective. Moreover, the January 2008 APRM review suggests that increasing women's participation in decision-making at all levels of political and economical life is still a major development challenge in Benin.

RESPONSIVENESS

One of the better illustrations of UNDP responsiveness during the 2004–2008 period is the 2006 mid-term CPO evaluation. It coincided with the election of a new president, bringing with him an important message of change in governance. As a result, UNDP realigned its cooperation programme. Sectors of concentration were reviewed to give a more pre-eminent place to the environment, outcomes were reformulated and reduced from 10 to 8, and most importantly, new interventions were planned to support the priorities of the new government. However, if new

interventions constituted an adequate response to government requests, no indications of ongoing project restructuring to support the revised outcomes, identified in the 2006–2007 CPAP, were found during the ADR exercise. One exception was UNDP work in human rights, where UNDP repositioned its support at the central level in 2006 despite the Ministry of Justice's preference for decentralized partnerships (although human rights were later mainstreamed in the UNDP programme).

The timeliness of UNDP response would seem to be most appreciated by all, including donors in the area of election support. A lack of UNDP response could have reversed democratic advances in Benin. It is the same with the Concerted Governance project, though donors interviewed unanimously agreed that a lot of work remains to be done and that UNDP needs to improve its communications with partners.

EFFECTIVENESS

UNDP appears to have been effective in attaining most of its annual targets despite the unstable internal and external environment during the 2004–2008 period (e.g., changes in government, UN aid coordination experiments and internal country-office strategic repositioning). On the whole, UNDP interventions have been effective in making poverty reduction strategies a participatory national process. As a result of the APRM exercise, the governance sector was granted CFA 1 billion to carry out projects aimed at improving governance. In the environment sector, achievements include the greening of the GSPR, development of environmental profiles and improving Ministry of the Environment and Protection of Nature planning and monitoring capacities.

In partnership with UNCDF, UNDP established an example of good practice and had a significant impact on national policies. Through the ADECOI project, this partnership, in accelerating the process of decentralization, has had effects on micro-finance, local development, the empowerment of rural women, good governance,

and the fight against corruption. These results have been spread nationwide through an effective knowledge-management strategy. However, UNDP effectiveness has been flawed by:

- Its lack of leadership in supporting National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis (INSAE) ownership of the BenInfo database, as is necessary to ensure the monitoring of both the MDGs and the GSPR;
- The 2006 withdrawal of UNDP direct contribution to the fight against corruption;
- The inappropriate choice and location of its institutional project coordinator to support the implementation of institutional reforms that are still not making progress in sectoral ministries; and
- The lack of sufficiently clear indicators, directions or responsiveness in the management of cross-cutting sectors of gender and human rights, causing dispersion of efforts and inconclusive results.

SUSTAINABILITY

A major weakness of UNDP contribution to national objectives resides in the sustainability of results achieved through its interventions. As discussed above, strategic positioning, relevance and responsiveness allowed for significant improvement in Benin's preparedness to confront development challenges. But the country remains poor, with insufficient human, technical and financial resources. Without the consolidation of results achieved by UNDP and more government effort to tackle institutional issues, benefits may not be maintained. This is exemplified by:

- The HIV/AIDS project, funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. A year after UNDP withdrawal, national capacities to maintain results remain weak, particularly in the management of drug procurement. Results already seem to be in regression;
- The support to Benin's autonomous national structure for the management of elections. Weaknesses in institutional design make the

structure dependent on state funding for the operationalization of its activities; and

- Support to the BenInfo database, which has not been updated since 2006, despite training and technical support. In addition, quality control seems weak, and there are doubts about the INSAE capacity to maintain the project.

The UNDP strategy of concentrating much of its programme on pilot projects constitutes a serious sustainability challenge. Successful pilot projects that are not followed by capitalization and replication are not a sustainable use of resources. African countries are awash with small development initiatives left to populations that are incapable of sustaining activities after the end of external support. One adverse effect of such experiments is demoralizing the local population.

EFFICIENCY

Although UNDP seems to have attained most of its annual targets, those identified in work plans were not clearly linked with CPO indicators and may have varied from year to year without any explanation. The analysis of the project planning process revealed a prevalence of an iterative mechanism. Considering the global programme architecture at the end of the CPAP period, project identification would seem to have been based more on *ad hoc* opportunities than on a systematic approach of dialogue with government. Such dialogue would have defined the nature and scope of outcomes to which UNDP may have contributed, which could have allowed the attainment of outcomes through targeted interventions. This suggests that results-based management is not integrated in the country office programme management toolbox.

Main planning tools used by UNDP Benin appear neither harmonized nor mastered by most programme officers. Although the 2004–2008 United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) was characterized by experimentation with new UN management tools, logical inconsistencies and terminology confusion were found among Benin's UNDAF, CPO, CPAP and reporting system.

A major threat facing UNDP contribution is the dispersion of its interventions. UNDP involvement in the health sector, specifically in combating HIV/AIDS, is an example of such dispersion. In time, UNDP involvement in agriculture could present a similar case if the role it plays in this sector exceeds its attribution as coordinator of development activities for the United Nations system as a whole in Benin. UNDP has demonstrated a high level of performance in governance, policy and social dialogue. The necessity to reduce dispersion and improve aid effectiveness may require a careful review of UNDP involvement in too many additional sectors.

UNDP Benin seems to have invested much effort in rationalizing its project and programme management and financial tools. However, annual CPAP reviews, conducted by the National Execution Modality (NEX) Unit and the country office in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007, consistently identified recurrent problems that went without solutions. These included:

- Delay in Annual Work Plan approval;
- Delay in mobilizing counterpart government funds;
- Weakness of the monitoring and evaluation mechanism;
- Lack of indicators;
- Appointment of a project coordinator from outside the project team; and
- Deficiency in communication on projects supported by UNDP.

The evaluation team sees the more effective use of management and financial tools used by UNDP as a solution to some of these recurrent problems. Streamlining management tools and the reporting system are key elements to increasing UNDP performance in transforming resources into useful development changes and facilitating aid absorption by its national partners through clear and simple lines of communication.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

On the whole, the assessment of UNDP contribution to Benin national development during the 2004–2008 CPO period has been positive. UNDP performance on five of the seven criteria used by the ADR methodology constitutes solid foundations upon which UNDP can build its new programme. UNDP strategic positioning in Benin allows it to play an appropriate role for the country's development and to establish a benchmark in sound partnerships, and its programme is relevant, highly responsive and effective. UNDP needs to improve the performance of two factors: programme efficiency and results sustainability. In order to improve capacity to support Benin face development challenges, UNDP has its own challenges to meet. Four UNDP challenges for its future programme, along with recommendations on how to meet them, are presented below.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS

Meeting the central challenge of improving UNDP contribution to national development results during the 2009–2013 CPO requires concentrating on sustainability and efficiency, the two main factors impeding UNDP contribution. The recommendations deemed necessary for UNDP to meet the four main challenges through strengthening sustainability and efficiency are:

CHALLENGE 1: AVOIDING RESOURCE DISPERSION, WHETHER HUMAN, TECHNICAL OR FINANCIAL

1. UNDP should place priority on sectors and themes where its expertise is recognized, rather than on those where fund mobilization alone is more feasible. This entails limiting the number of sectors/themes of UNDP activity in order to have a critical mass of interventions that are complementary, synergistic and clearly focused on making a long term difference to national development.
2. UNDP should strengthen linkages between strategic policy initiatives at the central level and operational interventions at local levels. It is this approach that has turned the joint

UNDP/UNCDF ADECOI project into a model of providing lessons that benefit the entire nation.

3. The current strategy of concentrating much of the programme on pilot projects constitutes a threat to sustainability. Although unsuccessful pilot projects can provide important lessons, successful projects that are not followed by capitalization and generalization are bound to terminate prematurely. UNDP should concentrate on expanding and networking its existing successful interventions by limiting short-term interventions to those that impact ongoing ventures. It should also invest in projects' second phases, with clearly defined activities based on previous accomplishments and a progressive transfer of ownership to the partner.
4. UNDP experience demonstrated the need for better preparation and capacity-building of the partner before ownership of donor-driven activities is transferred. UNDP project exit strategies should be planned and calculated to ensure that the partner can sustain key project components, without which the gains will disappear with the exit of UNDP.

CHALLENGE II: MAKING FULL USE OF ITS ASSETS

5. UNDP should make full use of its strategic positioning in handling subjects in which it has a comparative advantage and is trusted as a neutral party. In this regard, UNDP should consider positively a request formulated by the Minister of MECEPDEAP during the evaluation mission concerning a support from UNDP in setting up a common strategic platform among donors, which will ease the donors' pressure on public administration.
6. UNDP should reinforce its knowledge management practices in order to systematically identify and reinvest best practices in all its supported projects. Moreover, objectives and results of specialized studies carried out by the UNDP regional centre and independent experts through UNDP special funds should be

better integrated into the country programme through the knowledge management system. Specifically, these activities should be communicated to all country office staff and national counterparts, and findings incorporated in regular projects.

7. UNDP should capitalize non-project activities. Advocacy activities, even if conducted outside of projects, should be more focused on common government and UNDP strategic objectives and be results-oriented. Specifically, advocacy objectives should be explicit and measurable with unambiguous indicators to ease assessing UNDP performance; their follow-up and reporting should be integrated into the work plan; and good practices and lessons learned from them should be identified.
8. UNDP should reinforce synergies available from existing expertise inside its own structure by:
 - De-compartmentalizing country office divisions by systematically organizing briefing sessions between sub-programme personnel and by encouraging the integration of cross-cutting sectors in project teams' work plans;
 - Integrating regional bureau experts in project planning and monitoring through mandatory information sessions; and
 - Encouraging regular participation of programme officers in the UNDP network on good practices.

CHALLENGE III: STRENGTHEN MANAGEMENT TOOLS AND RESULTS ORIENTATION

9. UNDP should update the practical knowledge of results-based management, including risk management, among programme officers, project partners and the NEX Unit. It should also facilitate the creation of a 'results culture' among its staff and project implementation partners leading to greater utilization of capacities and tools in this area. Moreover, it should set appropriate SMART indicators (evaluation indicators that are specific,

measurable, action oriented and time-linked) of results to ensure effective monitoring and facilitate future evaluation of its efforts.

10. UNDP should obtain a clear and gender-sensitive mapping of its interventions in the different sectors supported by the programme, objectives, outcomes, results, target populations, and partners of different projects. In doing so, UNDP would avoid duplication of activities, identify potential synergies and better plan project extensions.

CHALLENGE IV: DEVELOPING SYNERGETIC PARTNERSHIPS

11. UNDP should strengthen and be more proactive in its communication with partners, particularly in relation to Concerted Governance, as mandated by the novelty of this concept and the need to galvanize the development efforts of partners around the initiative.
12. UNDP should develop alternative models of providing development assistance, such as public-private partnerships, especially in key sectors for Benin's economic and human

development. In supporting linkages between the state, donors and the private sector, UNDP could play a major role in mobilizing additional contributions for development and in establishing more indigenous, autonomous and sustainable partnerships.

MAIN ADR LESSON

In addition to these specific recommendations, there is an important lesson not only for UNDP Benin, but also for UNDP at the corporate level. Although UNDP should preserve its flexibility in responding positively to requests from ministries in host countries, when confronted with a growing number of such requests, such flexibility should not become a management style characterizing the partnership between host governments and UNDP. Strengthening partnerships implies commitment and mutual risk-taking with the aim of attaining change as desired and defined by both parties. Such partnerships, based on a common understanding of a problem and its solution within an agreed time frame and investment plan, ought to govern occasional requests for development partnerships.