Civil Society and UNDP

Changing socio-economic and political contexts in countries worldwide call for a greater emphasis on civic engagement and for accountability in governance and effective delivery of development results. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) countdown and the global discussions on the post-2015 development framework show that civil society is key to supporting local development and also fundamental in provoking policy change. Social action favouring human development is often spurred by civic groups spearheading change. Civil society actors work with governments and development organizations as facilitators, conveners and innovators as well as service providers and advocates.

UNDP’s Approach

UNDP works with civil society organizations that demonstrate their commitment to internationally recognized human rights principles and accountability to their constituents. UNDP seeks to empower civil society to achieve both ‘downstream’ local development results and ‘upstream’ policy impact. UNDP believes civil society can contribute to build nations that can withstand crisis, and to drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for all. UNDP focuses on three goals in its engagement with civil society: invest in civil society and civic engagement; facilitate citizen action for democratic governance and development; strengthen civic engagement for multilateralism and human development.

UNDP in Action

UNDP partners with a wide cross-section of local, regional and global CSOs in programme implementation and policy advocacy. At headquarters, the Civil Society Advisory Committee interacts with UNDP senior management on issues of policy and strategy. As part of its global engagement with civil society, UNDP fosters strategic alliances and issue-based partnership with civil society to co-convene initiatives, amplify voice, undertake joint research and tap expertise. Underlying the UNDP Strategy on Civil Society and Civic Engagement (2012) is the understanding that civic engagement is intrinsic to the work of UNDP in all its core areas:

Fighting Poverty

Poverty reduction that brings about real improvements in people’s lives is at the core of UNDP’s work. In Colombia, UNDP supports the scaling-up of proven approaches to increase employment and income-generation opportunities for vulnerable populations, including poor women, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. In the occupied Palestinian territory, UNDP partners with civil society and local organizations in the Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Programme. The programme has changed the lives of almost 10,000 Palestinian households, 47 percent of them headed by women, by supporting self-employment through the provision of seed capital, technical assistance and micro-finance.

Building Democratic Societies

UNDP helps countries to strengthen their electoral and legislative systems, improve access to justice and public administration and develop a greater capacity to deliver basic services to those most in need. In China, UNDP helped to scale up a legal empowerment network of 31 organizations which settled more than 19,000 cases for migrant workers, resulting in more than $40 million paid to them in owed salary, and workplace injury and other forms of compensation. In Sri Lanka, UNDP’s Equal Access to Justice Project works with a range of partners including ministries, the Bar Association, the Legal Aid Commission and CSOs to support justice systems and has helped over 37,000 individuals as of 2012.
Preventing Crisis, Enabling Recovery
Disasters have killed more than 1.3 million people and affected an average of 220 million people each year over the past two decades. UNDP is guiding policy, training communities and first responders and integrating disaster risk reduction strategies into national development plans. In Haiti, CSOs build community disaster resilience and support local-level implementation. UNDP has trained civil society in debris management, recycling, earthquake-resistant construction, riverbank protection and watershed rehabilitation. In Guinea-Bissau, UNDP provided technical expertise and other support to Lutamos todos contra as minas, a national NGO charged with removing mines across the country. In part, as a result of this work, by June 2012, an estimated 75 percent of rural inhabitants living in mined areas regained access to water, safe agricultural land, and livestock.

Protecting the Environment
UNDP is committed to realizing the potential of all actors to reduce risks from climate-related disasters through ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation, and to generate sustainable sources of income and livelihoods for the poor. Through the Equator Initiative, UNDP has documented and promoted good practices taking place at the community level in 66 countries, creating opportunities for global South-South knowledge exchange. The GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP), now operational in 128 countries, has funded over 16,500 civil society projects on biodiversity, climate change, land degradation, international waters, and sustainable forest management. The SGP has a particular focus on Indigenous Peoples’ and Community Conserved Territories and Areas to spearhead conservation and recognize human rights.

Halting and Reversing HIV/ AIDS
UNDP works with countries to understand and respond to the development dimensions of HIV and health, recognizing that action outside the health sector can contribute significantly to better health outcomes. In Latin America, UNDP has supported the Regional Network of Transgender People (REDLACTRANS) to develop leadership skills and mobilize resources to advance legal protection for transgender people. As a result, in 2012 the Argentinian senate unanimously approved a new Gender Identity Law that makes sex reassignment surgery a legal right. In India, UNDP supported the creation, expansion and reform of multiple HIV-sensitive social protection programmes, reaching over more than 400,000 people by the end of 2012. UNDP launched a multi-pronged strategy of advocacy and technical support involving the National AIDS Control Organization, state agencies and CSOs, including networks of people living with HIV.

Empowering Women
UNDP works to ensure that women have a real voice in all governance institutions so that they can participate equally with men in public dialogue and decision-making. In Mongolia, the Joint UN Programme on Prevention of Violence against Women and Children facilitates concerted efforts by government and civil society to prevent violence and improve counseling services for and legal redress of victims, particularly women and children. In Afghanistan, UNDP supported a dialogue between community leaders and the police to ensure daily protection for girls on their way to school in Guldara district, which resulted in a 60-80 percent increase in the number of girls enrolled in the tenth to 12th grades. UNDP also helped to recruit over 300 female police officers in 2012, bringing the number of policewomen over 1,400.

Fostering knowledge, innovation and capacity development
UNDP promotes collaborative practices to harness the energy, creativity and knowledge of citizens, researchers and entrepreneurs for mutual learning. In 2012, UNDP and the Government of Brazil co-organized the Rio+20 Dialogues prior to the UN Conference for Sustainable Development. About 1.4 million votes were cast on this virtual platform, and recommendations presented to leaders in Rio. Building on that experience, UNDP partnered with youth groups, the private sector and civil society to launch My World, a global survey that enabled people to choose their priorities for a better world, as part of global discussions on the post-2015 development framework. In Kosovo, UNDP partnered with civil society and the Government to create an interactive platform that allows people to report cases of corruption, some of which have already been prosecuted.

For more information, visit: www.undp.org
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