

Creating Connections

South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*



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Preface



If you take a drive towards the northern edge of the Cardamom Mountains, through the town of Pailin, Cambodia, you might see farmers tending to their cassava fields.

The farms, vast blankets of moss green, stretch for miles towards the foothills, creating a stunning vista. But about a decade ago, farmers in Pailin were struggling. Cassava – the second largest crop in terms of income, employment, and exports – was not doing well.

In some cases, yields were low, and farmers had to strive hard to make ends meet. They lacked technical expertise on how best to replace nutrients, in soil depleted by the cassava crop. They also needed support to package and market cassava and its byproducts and were seeking insights to increase exports.

In 2011, to boost sustainable cassava production, UNDP, along with China's Ministry of Commerce and Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture, developed a project, to help small producers and exporters of cassava. The aim was to improve farm productivity, increase revenues and exports, and create jobs in the cassava sector.

The project helped Cambodian farmers to draw on China's vast experience in cassava cultivation, to address challenges in production and marketing, and ultimately to fend off poverty.

As a bridge between Cambodia and China, this South-South and Trilateral Cooperation project has improved cassava productivity, conserved soil quality, and paved the way for direct exports of processed cassava to China. In pilot sites, productivity rose by up to 70 percent. And now, the private sector is stepping in.

Last year, UNDP and Green Leader Holdings, a Hong Kong-based industrial agriculture firm, signed a cost sharing agreement to further boost cassava exports – a US \$150 million commitment, for 10 starch making factories, in Cambodia.

This story of success and continual growth reflects the influence and significance of creating connections and the true spirit of South-South and Triangular Cooperation. It signifies that to tackle development's toughest challenges we must work together, and share resources, expertise, and knowledge.

The Cambodia-China story and other stories in this report exemplify how cooperation and collaboration are bringing about dramatic transformations, in countries across the region and beyond. I firmly believe such cooperation is critically important for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, to bring prosperity to all people, and to protect our planet.

Haoliang Xu

Assistant Administrator and Director

Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific United Nations Development Programme

Introduction

The genesis of South-South Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific dates back to the 1955 Bandung Conference, in Indonesia. At the meeting, the five sponsors – Indonesia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan – reflected their dissatisfaction with the perceived reluctance by the West to consult them on decisions affecting Asia. They were concerned about tensions between China and the United States, and they were opposed to colonialism. This period also coincided with the independence of some key countries and reflected the sponsors' commitment, to support others in their drive for freedom.

Asia and the Pacific has come a long way, since then. The region is the world's economic powerhouse. The tremendous economic, social, and technological progress over the last 50 years has led to many successes. People's average income levels have more than tripled, and life expectancy at birth has increased from 46 to 75 years. This progress has enabled the region's developing countries to be recipients of development cooperation, and active partners in providing technical assistance, innovation, and finance for sustainable development, to other countries in the South.

The twelve stories in this publication showcase the depth and breadth of South-South and Triangular Cooperation, across Asia and the Pacific. They illustrate how two or more developing countries, from within the region and beyond, are working to achieve development priorities. The examples also demonstrate how UNDP has played a pivotal role in these partnerships; helping countries share knowledge, expertise, development solutions, and resources.

Creating Connections

These promising connections driven by a common pursuit for peace, prosperity and protecting the planet, have fueled South-South and Triangular Cooperation initiatives, in Asia and the Pacific. For instance, UNDP built tertiary access roads to support Afghan farmers' desire to access markets in Tajikistan. Indonesia's peace and reconciliation efforts led to an exchange of organic farming methods with Timorese farmers; helping them to improve production, livelihoods, and nutrition. The visit of officials from Bhutan to the Philippines resulted in its government exploring innovative financing instruments, to protect biodiversity in Bhutan.

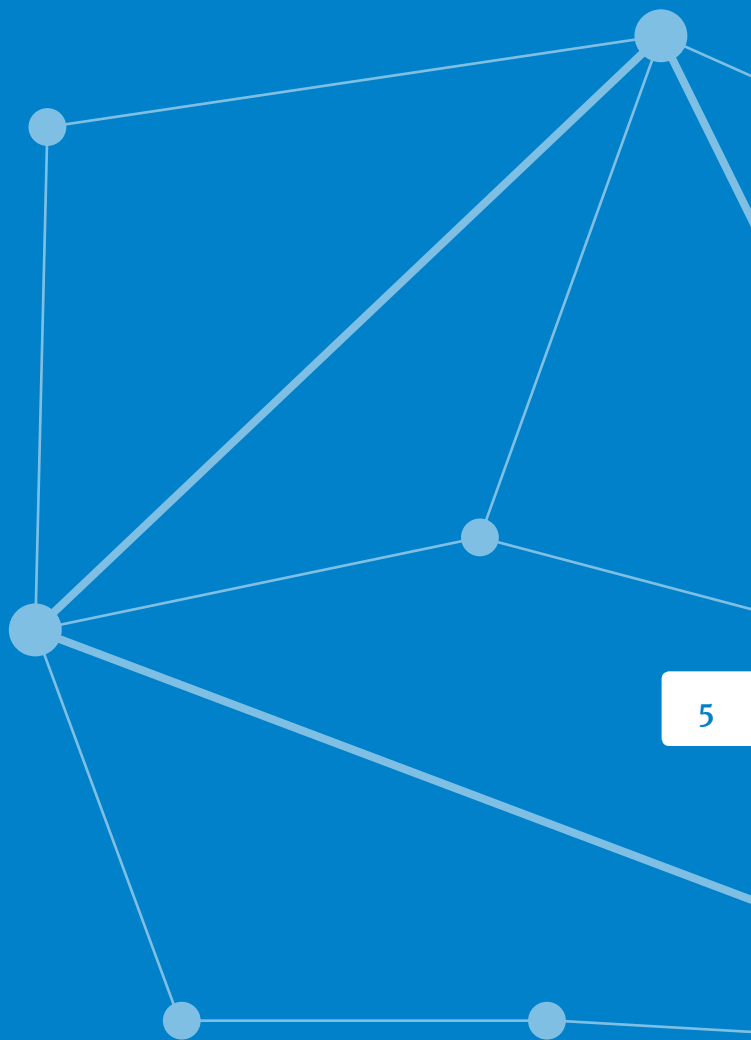
The most powerful examples of South-South Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific are driven by digital technologies that are transforming governments' work and people's access to services. Bangladesh's 'Access to Information' project – a2i – has inspired the Philippines, Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Somalia to reform public service delivery. And Papua New Guinea's "Phones Against Corruption" initiative has demonstrated how governments can create connections, and scale services to help reach the most marginalized and remote communities, while cutting costs and enhancing accountability.

Collaborations that Count

With more than 50 years of development experience and a network of offices, in 24 countries in Asia and the Pacific, UNDP is well positioned to facilitate and lead country collaborations in financing, technology and development programmes. The agency often goes beyond the conventional boundaries of projects, to provide platforms that unite economic, social and environmental actors, to co-create and harness integrated solutions.

UNDP's cooperative and collaborative approach is designed to introduce new services that are backed by evidence and experience. By working with partners and accelerating pilot projects and programmes, we disseminate a range of solutions across countries, tailored to deliver a government's priorities.

Strategic initiatives like the Country Support Platform and Country Accelerator Labs – together with innovative approaches like sense-making, solutions mapping, and experimentation – are part of UNDP's new offers to governments. Such initiatives will serve as key vehicles to replicate and scale cross-border South-South learning and collaboration that can help achieve the vision of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA), and other global development agendas.





Shoppers check out goods at the Tajik-Afghan Trade Fair in Khaton, Bokhtar city, Tajikistan.

UNDP Photo

Advancing Economic Success Across the Afghanistan-Tajikistan Border

During fall season in Afghanistan's Yage Qala district, the trees droop with ruby red pomegranates. Less than five years ago, Hayatullah Khaksar and his fellow farmers would pluck the leathery skinned fruit filled with juicy, sparkling red seeds, and load it along with other produce on mules.

Then in a thick darkness, well before dawn, they would head to the market near the Tajikistan border; about a seven-hour trek over treacherous terrain, carefully avoiding pockets of conflict between Taliban militias and government forces.

Sometimes the farmers would lose their loads when crossing the rapidly rushing Panj river, a swirling cement colored mass of water that separates Afghanistan from Tajikistan. Sometimes a mule or two would be swept away, at other times they would stumble while navigating narrow mountain ledges.

At the border market, the farmers would sell their produce to locals and Tajik traders, making just enough money to break even, and then they would hurry back home.

“Since we are a family of eight, it was very hard for me to meet the basic needs of my family,” says Khaksar.

For many villagers on either side of the border, especially women, it is hardscrabble existence. Nearly 75 percent of the population lives in poverty, and most scrape out a living tilling fields that lie in the shadow of fortress like mountains.



45
Entrepreneurs from Afghanistan and Tajikistan, including 11 women, attended the trade fair to showcase their products and seek new business opportunities.

Despite the challenges, enterprise persists. Artisans design a range of handicrafts. And farmers produce a bounty of vegetables and fruit, on farmland made fertile by nutrient rich sediment and organic material deposited by the Panj river.



Watch video:
**Afghanistan's OVOP
Life Cycle**

<https://youtu.be/c2vPaV5bDYM>

For farmers such as 35-year-old Khaksar, the main challenge was access to markets. Although training and better irrigation helped increase yields, like most other farmers he was not able to cash in on the rising harvests.

It is a long way from these border villages to the bustling markets of Kabul and Dushanbe. And both farmers and artisans have little knowledge of how to market their products, and boost commercial enterprise.



70%
**of the products displayed
by Afghan traders were sold
during the trade fair.**

Then four years ago, the Yage Qala district government with support from partners and the UN Development Programme constructed dirt roads, and bridges over canals. The plan was to help connect villages to border markets and the district center, to help transform the lives of people in the region.

Vehicular access slashed the seven-hour journey to just two hours. Now, with increased harvests and better access to markets, Khaksar and his fellow farmers tally sales of about US \$60,000 a season, making nearly US \$25,000 in profit, says Roshan Safi, a UNDP project manager, with the cross-border livelihoods improvement project.

“With vehicles we can transport our products much more easily and sell them in several more markets and districts,” says Khaksar. “Now, I can better fulfill the needs of my family.”



Goods were selling fast at the Tajik-Afghan Trade Fair in Khatlon, Bokhtar City, Tajikistan, in October 2018.

UNDP Photo

In October 2018, UNDP organized a cross-border trade fair involving dozens of entrepreneurs from Tajikistan and Afghanistan, which opened up even more opportunities to advance trade. It was an occasion for entrepreneurs from both countries to showcase their products and develop new and stronger business ties.

28

Business contracts worth more than US \$1 million were agreed to at the exhibition.

The goods presented by Afghan and Tajik entrepreneurs – eleven of them women – included pomegranates, dried fruits, carpets, perfumes, gemstones, and handmade leather goods. The exhibition that lasted five days was attended by more than five thousand people and resulted in 28 business contracts, totaling nearly one million US dollars.

“The quality and price of products was satisfactory for Tajik customers, and Afghan traders sold around 70 percent of their products,” said Abdul Rouf Qazizada, an official with the Livelihood Improvement Tajik-Afghan Cross-Border Areas project.

For Khaksar, it has provided impetus to expand. “Besides crop farming, I have recently opened a bee farm. I now sell organic honey in the markets, this is an extra source of income,” he says.

UNDP’s Nilofer Malik adds that the success of the trade fair is simply a first step. “Cross-border trade is vital to regional cooperation and is an essential component for Afghanistan’s economic growth.”

UNDP has planned even more trade fairs this year, one in Afghanistan and two in Tajikistan, in June and September. The aim is to promote stability and security in the bordering provinces of Tajikistan and Afghanistan, by reducing poverty and supporting economic development and cross-border collaboration between communities.

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Now, I can better fulfill the needs of my family.

The socio-economic project, now in its second phase, is funded by the Government of Japan through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). It is executed by UNDP and Afghanistan’s Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation. Based on the ‘One Village, One Product’ (OVOP) model, first developed by Japanese women, the project has been reframed in Afghanistan, as ‘Our Village Our Pride.’

Partners: USAID, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Bangladesh, Global Alliance For Improved Nutrition, ILO and ActionAid International



A man accesses services from a Universal Digital Centre, in rural Bangladesh.

UNDP Photo

Innovations from Bangladesh are Transforming Public Service Delivery in the Philippines

In the city of Cotabato, Philippines, there is plenty of food and medicine for the old and the infirm, but accessing it is a challenge.

The bureaucratic hurdles to obtain a senior citizen's card or a grocery booklet can leave many short of food and susceptible to illness. There is only one government office that serves a wide region, which provides the card and booklet. For many it is a journey that can take several hours, and when they get there, they may still not get what they came for.



6.5 million
People in rural and remote areas are able to access vital services from digital centres, within a walking distance of four kilometres.

Now, that lethargic bureaucracy in Cotabato could soon be a thing of the past, as the country adopts lessons from a new leader in innovative public service delivery: Bangladesh.

Over the past decade, the 'Access to Information' (a2i) project, set up by the UN Development Programme in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh, has been driving innovation in public service delivery.

It has dramatically cut down the time, cost, and number of visits required to access services, while hacking away at bureaucracy and corruption. Now, millions of Bangladeshis, even in the country's remotest areas, can easily obtain a range of public services, such as birth certificates and land records, through digital centres.

The centres, located in hundreds of villages across the country, are used by more than two million people each month. Another a2i scheme that provides online training has helped over 17,000 youth develop skills for specific jobs, through an apprenticeship programme.

"Our strong projects have revolutionized public service delivery across Bangladesh and can serve as models for countries around the globe," said Anir Chowdhury, a2i's chief policy adviser.



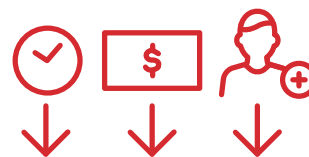
Watch video:

**Digital Bangladesh:
The Wind of Change**

https://youtu.be/aRWRL_-179o

"This is an opportunity for us to share innovative solutions and for countries to tap into digital experiences, so that we can collaborate and cooperate on social empowerment initiatives."

From the Philippines to Fiji, from Peru to Somalia, countries across the world are seeking better ways and means to deliver public services to their citizens. They are looking for solutions to fix acute problems that fit specific situations, with the aim of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – a plan agreed to by world leaders to protect the planet and bring prosperity to all peoples, by 2030.



On average, service time has declined by 65%, cost by 73% and the number of visits by 51%. A study of 85 services over a period of nine years reveals that simplification and digitization saved citizens about US \$8.14 billion.

Now, with the support of UNDP, a2i is spreading its innovative solutions to several countries. It is working with local authorities in the Philippines, where public service delivery in small cities and towns faces multiple challenges. These challenges include bureaucratic rules, a lack of technology, and poor decision-making. The country's decentralized structure has spawned diverse administrative systems that are poorly managed and don't link-up with one another.



Innovation in service delivery provides easy access to public services within a 4 km radius. Easy access to essential public services saves the day for the women with other domestic responsibilities.

UNDP Photo

The application generates auto notifications, an SMS or email, and processes and delivers services online, reducing time, cost, and visits needed for securing a service.

In 2018, UNDP's 'Innovate for Somalia' project invited a2i to conduct a series of workshops, to explore how digital applications can reform delivery of public services. Officials from the Prime Minister's office and multiple ministries explored opportunities for transforming services, using digital technology.

Geography creates another set of hurdles, as many people live on remote islands or in mountainous regions. Some areas are prone to natural disasters and some are plagued by inter-religious strife, further compounding the situation.

Now, inspired by a2i's solutions, the Philippines has introduced a '4D' design and development programme, to transform traditional services into efficient digital services. The process involves four steps: diagnose, design, demo, and develop. The first three steps are completed within 10 days, and digital services are developed and delivered within six months.

In a workshop organized by UNDP in the city of Cotabato, politicians, citizens, and bureaucrats identified 4D as the best solution for local government, to overhaul unresponsive and unaccountable public service delivery. The aim is to ensure efficiency and effectiveness through new services that are user-centered, simplified, integrate digital tools, and use data, when available.

Meanwhile, in the Pacific region, the Government of Fiji is adopting a2i's '4D' system, to track countrywide delivery of a Poverty Benefit Scheme. The result, a web application called the 'Start-to-Finish (S2F) Service Delivery Tracker.' The tracker, also available as a mobile app, allows citizens to submit online service requests and to track the progress of delivery.

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Inspired by a2i's solutions, the Philippines Start-to-Finish Service Delivery Tracker allows citizens to submit online requests and track delivery reducing time, cost, and visits needed for securing the service.

The discussions led to Change Lab, an online platform, where Somalis can quickly access a host of public services, such as: business, vehicle and property registrations, passport requests, and access to IDs and birth certificates.

At the UN World Data Forum in Dubai, in 2018, a2i signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Peru's National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (INEI), to share expertise and develop a 'SDGs Tracker.'

The tracker sets targets and follows the progress of each SDG indicator. It is expected to lead to efficient and effective policy making, for inclusive and sustainable development.



Officials from Bhutan on a visit to the Philippines. During the exchange, the teams reviewed recommendations from Policy, Institutional and Expenditure reviews, and exchanged lessons about financing solutions.

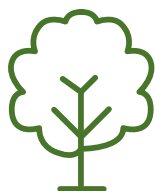
UNDP Photo

Bhutan, Philippines and BIOFIN: Mobilizing Innovative Financing to Protect Biodiversity

The drive from Bhutan's capital Thimphu to Haa is described by some as mesmerizing, panoramic, and heavenly. The road twists and turns through Chelela Pass – the highest in Bhutan at nearly 4000 meters – threading across lush green mountains, and pine forests dotted by rhododendron blooms.

For Lam Dorji it was, for so many years, a routine drive. Nothing more than a journey back to his home, in the village. "I never realized I was traversing biodiversity," he says. "It is what most of us simply call nature."

The awareness of Bhutan's rich biodiversity came in 2016, after he left his government job as secretary of the Ministry of Finance and began working with the UN Development Programme's Biodiversity Finance Initiative – BIOFIN. The project needed an advisor with a background in finance, and Dorji says, he was "in the right place at the right time."



6.3 million tons
of carbon dioxide can be sequestered
in Bhutan's forests – four times
what the country emits. It is the first
country in the world to be carbon
neutral, and is a global leader
in conservation.

He is candid about having little knowledge about the complexity of nature, while he worked in government. He recalls being in meetings with officials of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and hearing about the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan, but its significance didn't sink in.

"We don't know many things that are quite important for our country. After I joined this (BIOFIN) project, I look around me at the mountains, rivers, water, and I realized they are much more important than just money."

But in the face of competing priorities, as governments across the world put more money towards issues such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare, funding for biodiversity is falling short. BIOFIN is an attempt to bridge that funding gap.



Watch video:

BIOFIN Philippines

<https://youtu.be/BkCwptPlk9k>

The UNDP initiative implemented in 35 countries explores and identifies innovative financing strategies. Its aim is to raise funds to achieve a country's biodiversity goals, by measuring past expenditures and future needs.

BIOFIN has become even more crucial in the face of climate change, as forests are ravaged by fires, and thousands of species are threatened by extinction. To meet the enormity of the challenge, countries such as the Philippines, that adopted BIOFIN early, are sharing experiences with other countries.

When government officials from Bhutan visited the Philippines, on an exchange organized by UNDP, they witnessed how BIOFIN influences government policy and planning processes. Departments of Environment and Natural Resources, and Local Government Units, can seek financial assistance from a range of sources, to implement environment and biodiversity projects.



US \$15.5 billion
That is the value of all of
Bhutan's ecosystem services,
according to recent studies.

They learned how Philippines formulated a debt-for-nature swap with the governments of Italy and the United States of America. "I had never heard about a debt swap before. It is very interesting to see that interest payments for loans are being waived off so that the debtor country can spend it for biodiversity," said Sigyel Delma with Bhutan's Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. "It is a very good strategy for financing conservation activities, which can support both biodiversity and livelihoods."



The delegation from BIOFIN Bhutan visited the Philippines and Thailand under a south-south exchange programme between the BIOFIN countries. The delegation was led by Norbu Wangchuk from the Gross National Happiness (Planning) Commission, with key officials from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, and UNDP Bhutan.

UNDP Photo

The debt-for-nature swap provides financial assistance to strengthen and support NGOs, peoples' organizations, and communities, to enable them to be agents of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

Bhutan's constitution requires that it maintain 60 percent of its forest cover, but a funding shortfall means it won't meet targets of the national biodiversity plan.

Despite its reputation as a conservation leader – the world's first carbon neutral country - Bhutan has one of the highest per capita consumptions of wood for fuel, globally. Nearly 70 percent of the population relies on agriculture to earn a living; and economic growth is heavily dependent on hydropower.

While it seeks lessons from countries such as the Philippines, to conserve its biodiversity, Bhutan is also sharing its own lessons. The Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation – an endowment with an initial investment of around US \$21 million, set up in 1996 – has tripled. This has provided long-term financing for biodiversity projects, and the communities that depend on it.

Last year, in a visit supported by UNDP, government officials from Mongolia and Kyrgystan visited Bhutan, to learn from its experience. Both countries are planning to set up similar conservation trust funds. And in lessons learned from other countries, BIOFIN Bhutan has come up with several new plans.

They include generating extra revenue from ecotourism to protect natural resources, exploring local financing options, maximizing returns from forest carbon stocks, and using hydropower royalties to conserve watersheds.

BIOFIN funds are channelled to ministries such as agriculture and forests, as well as to local governments, to manage and

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I look around me at the mountains, rivers, water, and I realize they are much more important than just money.

maintain parks and forests, and for activities such as planting trees and fighting forest fires.

For Dorji, the calculation is simple. Most of the country's population depends on natural resources – water, timber, food and medicine – for its survival. “Maintaining the ecosystem is very important for Bhutan,” he says. “I hope that down the road future generations will accord biodiversity the same degree of concern and importance.”

Partner: China



People in the flood affected areas use items from the recovery packages they received.

UNDP Photo

China's Aid brings Relief and Hope Following Floods in Nepal

In 2017, the monsoon season brought rainfall that the Tarai region hadn't seen in 60 years. So heavy, incessant, and terrifying, it flooded 80 percent of the nearly 34,000 square kilometre area, in Southern Nepal, which borders India.

Fields turned into pools, streets were transformed into rivers, and raging rivers sprang their banks, adding to the tide of fast rising waters.

“People were screaming and crying for help,” recalls Bimala Devi Khang of Sakarpura village, in the Saptari district. “Those who had concrete houses climbed onto rooftops, but my husband, kids and I just huddled together on our bed. There was water everywhere.”



US \$17 million
has been channeled through China’s South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund, to partner with UNDP to support recovery and reconstruction efforts in five countries: Bangladesh, Nepal, Antigua and Barbuda, and the Commonwealth of Dominica.

The family clung to each other for nearly two hours until they were rescued by police forces, who arrived by boat and transported them to safety. “We wouldn’t have survived if not for the police,” she says.

When the rains stopped and the water subsided, Bimala Devi returned home to a scene of devastation. The floods had swept away everything inside her home, damaging the toilet, and destroying the water pump. In the months that followed, the family struggled for resources while they tried to rebuild their life.



Watch video:
Post-Flood Recovery in Nepal

<https://youtu.be/zvnlvAYPfy8>

“What little we had to begin with was all gone or rendered unusable,” says Bimala Devi. “I had no idea how we could possibly manage.” She heard talk about assistance but being a Dalit – from the lowest caste – Bimala Devi didn’t expect anything.

Then one day in the new year, in 2018, a young man showed up at her door with a mobile phone, seeking details of her situation, and he snapped her photo. Before he left, he handed her a card, which he said would allow her to claim a package, in a few weeks.

When the parcel arrived, it contained a raft of items, including mosquito nets, blankets, shawls, cooking utensils, a water filter, a smokeless cooking stove and hygiene kits, among other essentials. For Bimala Devi, it felt like a new beginning. She says, it was the first time she had smiled in a long while.

The parcel was part of an aid package from the People’s Republic of China, aimed at strengthening communities and helping them to recover from natural disasters. Since 2018, China has provided US \$17 million in support of reconstruction efforts in five countries, including Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

The money comes from a US \$3 billion South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund that China created in 2015, part of a concerted effort to foster cooperation among countries in the Global South. To further advance its mission, it also launched the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), in 2018.



Flood-affected people showing the QR code card that was used to streamline the distribution system.

UNDP Photo

Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan have each received packages of US \$4 million, to support recovery efforts, which are being managed in partnership with the UN Development Programme. In Nepal's Tarai region that funding reached nearly 36,000 households, in two provinces.

In 2017, both Nepal and Bangladesh sustained heavy rainfall, creating the worst flooding in decades. Hundreds of people lost their lives, and more than 8 million were affected, many of whom lost their homes, belongings, and livelihoods.

The aid from China was a critical step in the rebuilding process. For Bimala Devi it has been a source of great relief. "These are all things we use on a daily basis and having them has created a sense of normalcy, where before there was only panic," she says. "More than the objects themselves, it's that feeling of starting to put our lives back together that we are most grateful for."

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This support has helped families rebuild and overcome months of uncertainty.

Ayshanie Labé, UNDP's Resident Representative in Nepal, echoes Bimala Devi's sentiments. "The support received from China's South-South assistance fund was very critical, and timely," she says. "It has helped thousands of families overcome months of uncertainty."



Kirti Pal, an Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), at work during an immunization drive, in Sitapur district, Uttar Pradesh.

UNDP Photo

India's eVIN App Improves Efficiency of Vaccine Systems and is now Having an Impact in Indonesia

Back when he was a medical student, in 1973, someone plastered a sticker outside Santosh Shukla's hostel accommodation, it read: "You can get ideas from this room."



eVIN now reaches 21 states and union territories in India, and is on track to reach all 36 states and union territories by 2020. While it is in the pilot phase in a few districts of Indonesia, other countries such as Afghanistan, Malawi and Sudan are considering its use.

About 30 years later in 2002, Santosh Shukla's mind was racing for ideas. A polio epidemic was spreading across India, affecting hundreds of children. Now a pediatrician, he was among 50 doctors selected to halt the spread of the virus.

He says, he was sent straight into the hot zone: the districts of Azamgarh, Ghazipur, and Mau, in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The districts were the perfect crucible for the virus; a mix of poverty, illiteracy, a growing population, and an over-burdened public health system.

There were entire villages that would not permit him and his team to administer the vaccine. It was a time for ideas and improvisation, says doctor Shukla. He would find a village influencer, coax and negotiate, and use the person to break through the barriers of ignorance and superstition. In two years, his team halted the spread of the virus.

From the time he attained his medical degree, immunization held a special fascination for doctor Shukla. While he achieved much success in his field, one problem continued to vex him and other medical practitioners. To ensure no child was left unimmunized, they were looking for a way to better monitor vaccine supplies, to administer them in time, and to track the cold chain process in real time. The cold chain is a series of steps that includes, refrigerated production, storage, and distribution activities, along with necessary equipment and logistics, to maintain vaccine stocks at a specific temperature range.



Watch video:
A 2-minute Tour Through Vaccine Innovation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_5zWsrHpWM&t=1s

Despite improvements in the health sector, millions of children in India still go unimmunized. The factors limiting vaccinations include large mobile and isolated populations, low demand from communities who fear side effects, and lack of a quality supply chain that leads to a huge waste of vaccines; a challenge for developing countries across the world.

As a State Immunization Officer in Madhya Pradesh, doctor Shukla struggled to manage the vaccine cold chain, from the state's crowded cities to its remotest corners.



20,000 +
vaccine stores and cold chain points across India have digitized their inventories and record-keeping.

Then in 2014, India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare designed and implemented an innovative pilot project called the Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN), to support the country's Universal Immunization Programme. eVIN digitized vaccine stocks and provided real-time information on vaccine quantities and storage temperatures.

The results of the pilot project conducted in Bareilly and Shahjhanpur districts, in Uttar Pradesh, were dramatic. The mobile cloud-based app allowed health workers to update information on vaccine stocks through their smartphones, following immunization sessions. This allowed health officials to track vaccine stocks and the cold chain process in real-time.

Now, officials could monitor vaccine stocks and flows and check the temperature of the cold chain, even in remote villages, thousands of kilometres away. It was a solution that doctor Shukla and his colleagues had long sought after.



A mother and child wait for their turn at an immunization session, in Sitapur district, Uttar Pradesh.

UNDP Photo

But to expand eVIN would require technical expertise and a support network that could manage vaccine cold chain points across India. The UN Development Programme presented the government a plan to manage and strengthen those systems. And it began working closely with state governments and health officials, to improve and upgrade the app.



30,000+
Government staff, including vaccine store keepers, data entry operators and cold chain handlers, have been trained in India on electronic vaccine management.

With support from Gavi – The Vaccine Alliance – UNDP has rolled out eVIN in more than 500 districts, across 21 states and union territories, in India. The agency has trained more than 30,000 government staff – including vaccine store managers and cold chain handlers – on the mobile and web-based app. The programme is set to expand even further, across all 36 states and union territories.

Monitoring vaccine stocks has led to massive savings, in the millions of dollars, as it has allowed medical teams to use vaccines before they expire. Almost all vaccine cold chain points are now equipped with essential antigens – substances

that induce an immune response in the body. In addition, eVIN has led to better procurement, improved policy-making in vaccine delivery, and planning for new antigens, to strengthen the vaccine supply chain.

The success of the programme in India has gained widespread attention. Now, UNDP is sharing eVIN's success, by introducing it to other countries.

In Indonesia, a UNDP supported pilot programme – dubbed SMILE – is underway in two districts: Bogor, in West Java, and South Tangerang, in Banten. The pilots have been running successfully, with an over 90 percent reduction in vaccines running out of stock.

Since its inception, in July 2018, SMILE has recorded high user satisfaction, and adoption of the application. Management of the vaccine cold chain has significantly improved, with a dramatic reduction in data entry errors. It has resulted in vaccine coverage for over 800,000 infants, school-aged children, and women of reproductive age, across the districts of Bogor and South Tangerang.

The success achieved during the pilot has prompted the Jakarta Provincial Health Office to expand SMILE to 6 new districts. More countries are considering adopting eVIN, they include Afghanistan in South Asia, and Malawi and Sudan, in Africa.



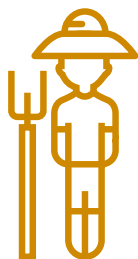
Farmers pick organic tomatoes on their farm, in Oe-Cusse, Timor-Leste.

UNDP Photo

Indonesia Seeks to Achieve Economic Success and Peace Through Cross-Border Organic Farming with Timor-Leste

From the time they were young and even after they got married, Jachinta Colo says, her parents tilled small plots of land, in the district of Oé-Cusse, Timor-Leste. It was an occupation of a lifetime.

Colo attended elementary school with dreams of carving out a new career, but any chance of achieving those dreams was snuffed out by poverty. Her parents couldn't afford to pay for a higher education. So, Colo would follow in their footsteps, becoming a farmer herself. And she too would end up marrying a farmer.



200

Indonesian and East Timorese farmers, including Colo, took part in the one-year programme, which is supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy under UNDP's South-South Triangular Cooperation initiative.

In a plot of land, in the village of Saben, just outside their weathered home, Colo and her husband continue that farming tradition. These days they also raise pigs, to try to earn extra income, for the family of eight, three of whom are her grandchildren.

The Colo family's fortunes have not changed much over the years. Despite efforts by Oé-Cusse's regional government to spur economic development through basic infrastructure projects, the opportunities have yet to trickle down.

Oé-Cusse is a geographic anomaly. A district governed as a Special Administrative Region, it lies completely cut off from Timor-Leste, encircled by Indonesian West Timor and the Ombai Strait. Timor-Leste gained independence from Indonesia in 2002, but in Oé-Cusse relationships remain strong between families and friends, divided simply by a porous border.

People cross over for festivals, marriages, and to trade goods, but economic progress has been slow to come. With parts of the border still to be defined, there are concerns that the odd minor dispute between neighbors across borders, or frictions over commerce, may produce tensions. And that these tensions could put a halt to trade and travel, and in the worst-case scenario lead to conflict.

Now, Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UN Development Programme are supporting a cross-border organic farming programme. Its objective is to boost livelihoods and trade, but also to support peacebuilding and prevent conflict. The one-year programme, that involves training 200 Indonesian and East Timorese farmers, is funded by Norway and supported by the Government of Timor-Leste, under UNDP's South-South Triangular Cooperation initiative.

On the West Timor side of the border, Antonious Anton, along with other farmers from his village, now grows organic water spinach and green beans. The new crop can be harvested at an unusual time, the monsoon season. The rainy months are traditionally considered out of bounds for farming, as wet conditions hamper the quality of crops.

“

There is a demand for organic vegetables, as they taste better.

The new crops, sold in the local market, netted Anton's group 500.000 rupiah, about US \$40. It may not seem like much money, but it is extra income they did not make before. It has been put into a group savings account, for future purchases of communal farming needs.



An East Timorese farmer speaks at a session on organic farming, organized by the Government of Indonesia and UNDP. UNDP Photo

“We also ate the vegetables, they taste different,” says Anton, adding that organic vegetables tasted better than those grown with chemical fertilizers.

On the Timor-Leste side of the border, Colo’s life too has taken a turn for the better. There is demand for organic vegetables, as they taste better, she says. The training has also taught her to better package and market her vegetables. Most of all it has increased her income, allowing her to meet the needs of her family, and send her children and grandchildren to school.

The exchange of knowledge has revealed a new “spirit of farming,” she says, strengthening her relationships with neighbors across the border, some of whom are her relatives.

For Indonesia, empowerment of local communities is a key objective of the South-South Cooperation programme, and a way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As communities on both sides of the border reap better harvests, they are also beginning to partner in business ventures.

Economic growth has provided an opportunity to formalize exchanges and to bring order to the informal import-export trade in the region; benefitting both the people and governments of Indonesia and Timor-Leste.

For Colo it is a time of change. She is hoping her children and grandchildren will have better opportunities and a better life. “I hope that my organic farming efforts are more successful,” she says, “so that I can continue to send my children to college.”

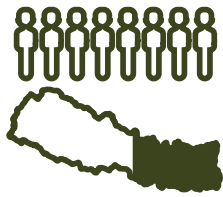


Workers in Kathmandu sift through the debris, following the earthquake in Nepal.

UNDP Photo

Thailand's Aid Effort Spurs Reconstruction of Homes and Livelihoods in Nepal

Ashmita Chaulagain had taken her 10-year-old son to see the doctor, as he was suffering from a fever. On the way back, as they neared their home, the ground suddenly started shuddering.



40%

of the land area in Nepal was hit by the earthquake, affecting an estimated 8 million people and damaging 800,000 structures.

"I stood in the middle of the road clutching my son and praying for our lives. In a few seconds, I could see the entire village covered in a cloud of dust," she says. "The road cracked down the middle. I saw many people die in front of my eyes."

As the quake continued to rumble across her village of Melamchi, in Nepal, she watched houses collapsing, cattle being buried under debris and people crying, as they fled from their homes.

"It was unbearable. I felt sad and hopeless. I thought it was the end of the world and the only survivors were us – me and my son."

For Ashmita and her husband Dol Madhav Chaulagain, both dairy farmers, the 2015 earthquake in Nepal caused immense emotional and economic turmoil.

In the village of Melamchi, in the district of Sindhupalchok, where the family lives, the quake struck with tremendous power. The Chaulagain's family home and barn were destroyed by rocks rolling down the hillside; but they were fortunate to escape unhurt. In Sindhupalchok alone, 3,500 people died and more than 1,500 were injured.



Watch video:

Thailand's Ambassador commends UNDP for bringing Thai aid to Nepal

<https://youtu.be/Om7SodfKGj8>

Across the country, the quake damaged or destroyed more than half a million homes and buildings, crushing stores and levelling government offices. In total, it claimed nearly 9,000 lives, and left about 22,000 injured. The damage to homes and infrastructure is still being repaired.

For the dairy farmers of Melamchi, the quake was devastating. "I used to sell 5 cannisters of milk every day before the earthquake," says Dol Madhav. "It went down to 1.5 after the quake, because people lost their homes, family members, barns, and livestock."

Reconstruction has been slow, but as Nepal rebuilds it is leapfrogging development and constructing more modern infrastructure. For Melamchi, it has meant a brand new milk collection centre.

Its construction is being implemented by the UN Development Programme and is funded by the Royal Thai Government. The US \$2 million in aid is being spent on rebuilding projects in Melamchi, and across the district of Sindhupalchok. Local governments are contributing an additional 30 percent of that amount, in co-financing.



US \$2 million

Provided by the Royal Thai Government for reconstruction, in the districts of Melamchi and Sindhupalchok, in Nepal.



Women engaged in the rebuilding effort, in Sindhupalchok district, under UNDP's cash for work programme.

UNDP Photo

With that funding, UNDP's Community Infrastructure and Livelihoods Recovery Project is engaged in the construction of 200 projects including, roads, bridges, market facilities, irrigation canals, and micro hydro plants.

On a visit to Melamchi and Helambu villages earlier this year, Bhakavat Tanskul, Thailand's Ambassador to Nepal, inaugurated the new milk collection centre, and commended the reconstruction effort.

"I am pleased to see the support of the Thai people reaching the people of Nepal through the United Nations Development Programme," said Mr. Tanskul.

Melamchi Mayor, Dambar Bahadur Aryal, said the new centre will provide an economic boost for the area's 2000 dairy farmers. "The refrigeration facilities will help local dairy farmers get a better price for their milk, said Aryal. "The well-equipped collection center will help increase their bargaining power."

Renaud Meyer, former Country Director UNDP Nepal, emphasized the importance of local ownership, and the benefits of collaboration between countries in Asia.

"The earthquake took a serious toll on local communities and reversed many of their development efforts. There is an immense need for partnerships, including through South-South Cooperation, for countries like Nepal that are particularly

vulnerable to natural disasters," said Meyer. "We wish to see this as a new era of partnership with the Government of Thailand that can expand to sharing technical expertise and lessons on building back better, which will contribute to a more resilient and prosperous Nepal."

“

There is an immense need for partnerships, including through South-South Cooperation, for countries like Nepal that are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters.

For Ashmita and Dol Madhav Chaulagain, that cooperation and funding has provided a fresh start. The family has rebuilt their home and is encouraged that their little business now rests on a more solid foundation. "We don't have to waste milk due to the lack of a storage facility, when we could not transport it to Kathmandu," said Ashmita. "There is new hope and enthusiasm, slowly people are returning to milk production."

Partners: New Zealand, Australia, Japan and European Union



The Honourable Mona Ioane makes a point during one of the training sessions, for Members of the Cook Islands' Parliament.

UNDP Photo

Fiji and a Host of Pacific Nations support the Advance of Democracy in the Region

On the green blue canvas of the South Pacific, that seems to stretch forever, the Cook Islands are almost invisible specks. Home to about 17,000 people, scattered across 15 islands, the country is a haven for scuba divers and beach lovers.

While it is a destination for tourists and fun-seekers, this tiny nation takes it politics seriously. To keep it pristine and exclusive, strict laws and policies are necessary. The country has 24 parliamentarians and more than 370 standing orders – rules, regulations, and procedures of Parliament.

Such orders may seem arcane, but if you are not careful when making a motion, amending a law, or voting on a bill, you might unravel critical procedures, says Niki Rattle, Speaker of Parliament for the Cook Islands. Phrase a motion the wrong way or give in to jovial banter and your words could come back to haunt you, she adds.



+12

Pacific Parliaments have been supported. They include, Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Samoa, Marshall Islands, Fiji, and Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia.

For instance, a Member of Parliament (MP) might jokingly suggest that a person in charge of a committee be paid extra, for doing the job. However, the nominated person could ask for a raise because it is part of the motion, and he or she would be entitled to it.

“Parliamentarians need to know why a motion is being made, what is expected, and it has to be precise,” says Rattle. “It can’t be general because you could run into trouble.”

While politicians in larger countries have bureaucrats and staff that deal with political matters, smaller developing countries across the Pacific lack such resources. Several island countries must contend with formal institutions of governance imposed during colonial times, on top of traditional governance structures. So, they need time to adapt and develop their own parliamentary systems.

To impart that knowledge, the UN Development Programme is training parliamentarians, bureaucrats and secretariat staff, in several Pacific countries, to make parliaments effective and efficient.

Parliamentarians are educated on a range of issues such as roles and rules of parliament, budget processes and financial oversight, how to enact legislation, and how to connect, consult and work with citizens, especially on important development issues.

404

Parliamentarians have enhanced their understanding of legislative, oversight and representative functions.

The programme to build stronger democracy in the Pacific began in 2014, with UNDP’s Fiji Parliament Support Project. Since then, it has spawned a chain effect involving several countries, and is being funded by New Zealand, Australia, Japan and the European Union.

Additional funding from New Zealand, has allowed UNDP to provide support to the Parliaments of Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Tonga.

Japan is also providing funding enabling UNDP to support the Parliaments of Samoa, Republic of Marshall Islands and Federated States of Micronesia, and to expand support to the Parliaments of Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji.

Besides training, the programme has facilitated several learning exchanges, including placing staff from one parliament in another country's parliament. It has also promoted peer-to-peer exchanges between MPs, where a MP from one parliament spends time shadowing a peer from another parliament.



UNDP mobilized resources and technical assistance from New Zealand, Australia, Japan and the EU, in support of Pacific Parliaments.

“In some places it is very challenging to get things going; in Fiji for example, with no parliament, no building, no MPs, and no staff, you had to put things in place starting from scratch,” says Dyfan Jones, leader of UNDP’s Effective Governance Team, in the Pacific Office in Fiji. “In other countries, MPs may have received no induction or training before being expected to pass laws or provide oversight of policies that can change the lives of citizens.”

While Cook Islands has had a government since 1965, its parliamentarians and staff still need training, says Speaker Niki Rattle.

“We’ve had a great capacity building programme with UNDP,” she adds. “Getting Members of Parliament, especially new ones to know their jobs, procedures of parliament, and give them a better understanding of how to debate, is important.”



We’ve had a great capacity building programme with UNDP.

Rattle and her fellow female MP’s recently visited Fiji, on a tour organized by UNDP, to discuss how to increase and support women’s participation in politics. And Cook Islands, with the support of UNDP, recently produced its first handbook for parliamentarians – a primer on how to craft motions, amendments, and bills.

Such training provides “better knowledge about an issue so MPs can ask better questions when they debate a bill.” says Rattle. “In the past, government would introduce a bill, debate it, and while they knew the content, the opposition would be in the dark.”

Partners: Japan, Australia and New Zealand



The Prime Minister for the Government of Fiji, Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama, in a budget debate in the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

UNDP Photo

Pacific Countries Band Together on Innovative Floating Budget Office to Strengthen Accountability

As Josua Namoce tells it, his job needs a delicate touch, which calls for a fine balance, and sometimes nerves of steel.

When you're a stranger rifling through someone's books, delving into their money matters, examining who is spending what and where, people tend to get upset, he says. Especially, if those people are powerful politicians.

Namoce is a member of an elite economic team. It can be deployed quickly, to select countries across the Pacific, to analyze and provide understanding of national budgets. The service is designed for members of parliament – the ruling party and opposition – as well as citizens, to provide a clear picture of how a budget will be spent.



5

Parliaments – Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga – have benefitted from the Floating Budget Office.

The elite economic team is dubbed the Pacific Parliamentary Floating Budget Office. “It is the only initiative of its kind, particularly for commonwealth countries,” says Namocce, the Head of Library and Research with the Parliament of Fiji.

Most countries have budget offices staffed by economic and finance researchers, who scrutinize the national budget and provide parliamentarians with independent analysis. Such insight allows politicians to easily comprehend the budget, amend it if necessary, and vote on it.

But in the Pacific where countries are small, and Parliaments modest, a lack of resources and expertise to provide budget analysis can leave parliamentarians lost, in tables and numbers. This lack of analysis can also keep citizens and civil society organizations in the dark, about where money is being spent.

“Our job is to simplify the complex information that comes from Ministries of Finance, as most community leaders have little knowledge of budgets and spending trends,” says Namocce. “You are dealing with high expectations from politicians who want good information, to use in debates. The opposition sometimes has even higher expectations, to investigate and find out where money is going.”

At times, Namocce says, there is mistrust about outsiders going through budgets, which politicians believe should be examined only by national staff.

The idea for a floating budget office emerged when the UN Development Programme was supporting Fiji in setting up its parliamentary system, in 2016.



This is an excellent example of regional information exchange and knowledge sharing.

“The Parliament of Fiji needed a team of researchers to analyze the government’s budget, but the country lacked in-house expertise,” says Jean-Raphael Giuliani, a Parliamentary Development Specialist, with UNDP. “So, we brought together a team of people from Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Wales, and Scotland, to work under leadership of the Fiji Parliament’s secretariat.”



Members of the Pacific Floating Budget Office, in Fiji, for its National Budget presentation.

UNDP Photo

The crew they had put together realized “great success,” in Fiji, says Giuliani. And the initiative was recognized as an innovative approach in parliamentary development, by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, in London.

The floating budget office provided a forum to bring together individual researchers scattered across the Pacific. It also afforded them an opportunity to enhance their skills, while providing small nations a crucial service, to strengthen democracy, accountability, and transparency.

The success of the budget analysis in Fiji is now being replicated in other Pacific countries, with UNDP’s support, says Namoce. And politicians in the Pacific say that the floating budget office provides an invaluable service.

Since its inception, the office has provided services to Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. This year more Pacific countries – such as Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Cook Islands – have expressed interest in the services, says UNDP’s Giuliani.

As demand grows, more staff are being recruited from smaller Pacific island countries, and UNDP is providing support and training to enhance their skills; creating teams of researchers that can be mobilized quickly, to fly in and provide expert support.

“The budget briefings are very useful for members of Parliament who do not always understand the technical aspects of the national budget,” said Derek Sikua a former MP and member of the Solomon Islands’ Public Accounts Committee. “It is simple and quite easy to follow.”

“This is an excellent example of regional information exchange and knowledge sharing,” said New Zealand’s High Commissioner to Fiji H.E. Johnathan Curr, whose country is among several others providing funding for the project. “Budget transparency is an important element of democracy around the world.”

For Josua Namoce, it is a big leap from his former job, as a researcher with Fiji’s Consumer Affairs office. It is much more exciting, he says.

“It is interesting to see what the priorities are for different governments in a Pacific setting, and the influence of communities and constituencies. For some, it is health, for others it is the environment.”

Namoce adds that it is an initiative with great impact, because it makes Parliament more inclusive; providing for better engagement with citizens, especially communities that are marginalized.

Partner: China



Students were forced to sit outside on the ground during school hours, at the Government Girls Middle School, in Bagan Baba.

UNDP Photo

China's South-South Fund Paves the Way for a Better Education in Pakistan

In 2011, around the time Shama was born, in the town of Bagan Baba, Pakistan, torrential rains triggered massive floods that damaged the school she would eventually attend.

The water rose so fast that it turned the town of Bagan Baba, in the Jafarabad district of Balochistan, into a series of lakes; marooning people on rooftops and little patches of land. Across the province, the flooding devastated tens of thousands of homes, and damaged hospitals, government buildings, and hundreds of schools.

Bagan Baba is among the poorest towns, in one of the poorest districts of Pakistan. While the water subsided after a few days and short-term aid dwindled, the challenges wrought by the flood persisted. There were shortages of food, clean drinking water, and infrastructure remained damaged.

At the best of times, it is a challenge to secure a decent education in Jafarabad, a town intersected by dusty roads and ringed by farmland, for as far as the eye can see. The literacy rate in the region is amongst the lowest in Pakistan, for women as low as 15 percent. Government schools here lack basic facilities and are hard pressed to provide a quality education. But with around one million people rendered homeless, the rehabilitation of schools was not a priority.



80,000+

People in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas were helped by US \$4 million in aid from China. The money also supported the refurbishing of 423 schools in Balochistan that received new furniture and education kits, benefiting 18,750 students.



Watch video:

China South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund for the Recovery Project in FATA and Balochistan

<https://youtu.be/85m7KmHMeQo>

So, seven years later when little Shama went to school, not much had changed. The classrooms stayed stuck in time, since when they were swamped by the flood.

“Our school had no chairs, so our only option was to sit outside on the ground during school hours,” said Shama. “Each morning my mother washed my clothes to remove dirt from them, but to no avail, because the very next morning my clothes had mud all over them.”

Shama, along with most of the other students, had to make do with sitting on rags. It was hard to focus on what was being taught and it was difficult to write, she says. It got even tougher in extreme weather conditions, during the hot summers and harsh winters.

Like most people here, Shama's family leads a simple life, making just enough money to keep up with everyday expenses. The floods further affected their quality of life. Yet, Shama is among the fortunate few to have a chance to attain a formal education.

Early last year, that education took a turn for the better.

The Government Girls Middle School that Shama attends, was among 423 schools, in three districts, to receive aid from China's South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund. The fund is supporting recovery projects in Balochistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

The schools received new furniture and educational kits, including chairs and tables, blackboards, cupboards, and school bags. The walls were repaired and painted, vastly improving conditions in the schools.



The school was provided furniture and educational kits including, chairs and tables, blackboards, cupboards, and school bags for the students, under the China South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund.

UNDP Photo

The reconstruction is being implemented by the UN Development Programme, under the FATA Transition and Recovery Programme. Through the programme, China has provided US \$4 million to support education in Balochistan, and to provide assistance to vulnerable families in FATA.

The objective is to invest in sustainable reconstruction and development of basic services and infrastructure, to improve learning conditions for students, develop skills, and restore livelihoods. So far, the refurbishing of schools has benefited nearly 19,000 students.

“UNDP is committed to helping countries in the Global South to share resources and expertise, and to collaborate on solving development challenges, so they can achieve the SDGs,” said Ignacio Artaza, UNDP Resident Representative in Pakistan. “This ground-breaking partnership between the two countries and UNDP is a win-win form of cooperation, to help some of Pakistan’s most vulnerable communities and to establish a peaceful and prosperous future.”

“

This ground-breaking partnership between the two countries and UNDP is a win-win form of cooperation.

For Shama and her fellow students, the future already looks brighter. The new desks are much more comfortable than sitting on the ground, and paying attention in class is much easier, she says.



Award winners with the PM of Malaysia and Emir of Qatar

UNDP Photo.

Papua New Guinea's Innovative Drive Against Corruption is a Spark for Change in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

In Papua New Guinea, they call it the 'wantok system.'

Wantok derives from 'one talk,' the language of a tribe, to which a person belongs. More significantly it means that a person who achieves success must take care of his tribe or clan, especially relatives and friends.



The initiative has received interest from Fiji, Bangladesh, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, who are planning to adopt the system.

"In PNG (Papua New Guinea) relationships are very important in the 'wantok system,' to keep ethnic and cultural ties intact," says Sam Erepan, manager of a provincial capacity building programme, with the government of PNG. "People taking care of others, looking after their relatives, this is the way to maintain strong bonds in Melanesian society."

But the 'wantok system' also has a negative side.

It has been cited, as a major impediment in exposing corruption that bedevils PNG. Transparency International ranks the country 136 out of 176 countries, in its 2016 Corruption Perception Index. It falls below satisfactory levels of the UN Convention Against Corruption. And the World Bank's Global Governance Corruption Index has it among the lowest 15 percent of countries dealing with corruption.



6000+
Activities of corruption reported since the launch of Papua New Guinea's Phones Against Corruption programme, in 2014. Over 250 cases are being investigated and five are awaiting trial. Two government officials have been arrested for mismanagement of US \$2 million. With UNDP's support, the initiative is being expanded to other provinces.

But over the past five years an innovative programme, known as Phones Against Corruption, is trying to dent the narrative of corruption, in PNG. The UN Development Programme in partnership with PNG's Department of Finance launched the programme, in 2014.

The initiative provides a safe space to report corruption in government. Citizens can simply send a text about what they have witnessed to a specific number, using even a basic cell phone. They must respond to three questions: what is the case, when it took place, and where it took place.

Most importantly it is free and anonymous, says Erepan, whose office oversees the Phones Against Corruption initiative. The programme is funded by the Government of Australia, as part of an anti-corruption project, in Asia and the Pacific.

All texts to the anti-corruption hotline go through Digicel, a service provider in PNG. Digicel encrypts the numbers and forwards the text messages to a database in the Department of Finance, which investigates the incidents.

To date, over 6000 text messages of corrupt activities have been reported. About 3,700 have been tagged by Erepan's staff for further screening, and more than 900 cases are being examined to determine whether they need deeper inspection. So far, the Department of Finance has begun investigations into more than 250 cases of alleged corruption.

Authorities have arrested two government officials for mismanagement of funds totaling more than US \$2 million; and five people are awaiting court verdicts.



Award winners at the ROLACC ACE monument in Kuala Lumpur parliament.

UNDP Photo

Setariki Waqanitoga, a policy advisor with Vanuatu's Ministry of Justice said his government would also consider incorporating the initiative into his country's anti-corruption plans.

For Sam Erepan, the success of the initiative has been overwhelming. He says, he has travelled to more than 10 countries to receive awards for the anti-corruption initiative. It has received recognition for tackling corruption from as far away Bahamas to the most recent accolade in Malaysia, the Sheik Tamim Hamad Al Thani International Anti-Corruption Excellence Award, for Anti-Corruption Innovation.

The anti-corruption initiative has expanded to include all government departments in PNG. Now text messages that have been screened and verified are directed to audit committees of specific departments, for further deliberations.

Erepan who comes from the province of Enga, in the northern highlands, says anonymity is vital, to combat the 'wantok system.' "If it was not anonymous, I doubt it would work because in a country where relationships are tight people won't report on friends or relatives, if they are doing something wrong."

The success of the program has not gone unnoticed. At a recent anti-corruption workshop on the initiative co-hosted by UNDP, Barnabas Anga, High Commissioner of the Solomon Islands in PNG, expressed interest in replicating the "Phones Against Corruption" initiative.

"South-South Cooperation is an important forum whereby PNG can share its experiences, challenges, and successes in the 'Phones Against Corruption' initiative to other Pacific countries and provide support to them in establishing a similar tool," said Anga.



South-South Cooperation is an important forum whereby Papua New Guinea can share its experiences, challenges, and successes.

"I never expected to travel these places," says Erepan. "So many people are so keen to know about this and would like us to share PNG's experience." As recognition of the initiative and its impact grows, Erepan hopes PNG will soon set up an independent commission against anti-corruption.

"I want this initiative to be regulated by the government and to be well resourced so that it is effective," he says. "It will also need a central independent commission to regulate it, which should be at arms-length from the government."

Partners: Japan and European Union



Presidential Peace Adviser Carlito Galvez Jr. at the Interfaith forum for Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), held in Isabela City, Baslin, in 2018.

UNDP Photo

Indonesia and the Philippines Share Ideas for Peace in Volatile Bangsamoro

By the time he was 10, Mahir Gustaham says, he knew how to use weapons and make explosives.

His father would force him to fight by his side. His mother would plead with him to attend school. Caught in between those parental appeals, Gustaham would try to please both.

He would attend school in Zamboanga City, a day's journey from his home in the Sulu archipelago. But when he came home for the holidays or even a weekend break, he would pick up a M-16 rifle and join his father and relatives. As separatists with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), fighting against the Philippine army in Mindanao, they would wage guerilla warfare, across islands, in communities, and in the mountains.



From August 2017 to August 2018, the UNDP-supported Insider Mediators' Group played a vital role in creating consensus around the Bangsamoro Organic Law by facilitating conversations, conducting advocacy and contributing 'bridging language' to overcome obstacles, leading to the law's passage and helping the peace process move forward.

He was enraged, as he watched his uncles, cousins, and friends die. "You want to get revenge, you become more radical," Gustaham says. But his mother kept pressuring him to study. He would eventually graduate and move to Sudan, to study Sharia law. Even then, some of his relatives pressed him to get back to the battlefield.

When he finally returned home, he saw young children trapped in the cycle of violence he had managed to leave behind. He realized that had he not gone to school, he could well be dead.

"I saw the orphans," he says. "I wanted to cut the cycle of violence, to put a stop to it."



Watch video:
#ExtremeLives

<https://www.facebook.com/undpasiapac/videos/271043830489112/>

The resistance in Mindanao dates back over 400 years when Gustaham's ancestors waged an armed struggle against the Spanish, then the Americans, the Japanese, and more recently the Philippines military. Since the late 60's, the battle evolved with demands for a separate Muslim region. The MNLF itself splintered, resulting in a new leading faction called the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Then in 2014, after years of negotiations, the MILF and the Government of the Philippines signed a Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB); a peace deal that led to the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, in February 2019. However, a five-year delay in the implementation of the agreement gave rise to more rabid ISIS-linked organizations, which took the place of the mainstream MNLF and MILF, in some areas.

After centuries of fighting, demilitarization in Bangsamoro has become a challenge. ISIS-linked groups, as well as the Abu Sayyaf Group that broke away from the MNLF, have now developed causes and loyalties that go beyond the Moro identity, and tap into global narratives and grievances. So, bringing lasting peace to the region will require a sustained effort.

To contribute to this effort – at the request of the Chair of the MILF, now the interim Chief Minister of Bangsamoro – the UN Development Programme has supported a series of learning exchanges between key actors in Indonesia, specifically Aceh, and the Philippines. One such effort, the Interfaith Platform for 'Preventing Violent Extremism' (PVE) is bringing together a diverse group of people from both countries. These learning exchanges explore concrete options of how religious leaders can help prevent violent extremism.



One activity conducted during the Nahdlatul Ulama learning exchange, last November 2018, was a bitiala (dialogue) session on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. It was co-hosted by the Al-Qalam Institute of Ateneo de Davao University.

UNDP Photo

He is not always successful.

His student and close friend, Mohammad Reza Kiram, would leave his side and become one of the most radicalized foreign fighters of ISIS. He was blacklisted as a global terrorist by the United States of America. It was a blow to Gustaham.

"I cried. Where did I go wrong, how did I leave him behind," says Gustaham. "I did not see the signs within him."

"The objective of the series of exchanges is to share experiences and strategies to help unify religious leaders and develop positive narratives of Islam, as an alternative to violent extremism," says UNDP project officer Judith De Guzman. "The aim is to build resilience to violence and promote peaceful engagement through dialogue."

The PVE initiative is part of a wider UNDP-supported programme, funded by Japan and the European Union. It aims to help civic and religious leaders, local governments, and security personnel, to identify and address factors causing an increase in violent extremism. It is also designed to help the new Bangsamoro administration, to secure a stable environment for peace and development.

"Even as the 2014 agreement is finally being implemented, the security situation in conflict affected areas in Mindanao is potentially volatile," says UNDP Resident Representative Titon Mitra. "Active, timely, and capable engagement by local governments and communities will be vital to securing the peace."

Gustaham has engaged in the Interfaith Dialogues, and he says, such exchanges are the only way to bring about understanding and peace. Now, as an imam, he discourages youth from joining radical groups and shows them that there are means other than violence, to address social injustice.

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**I wanted to cut the cycle of violence,
to put a stop to it.**

So, he is well aware of the challenges that lie ahead. Destruction is easy, but to build something, to build Bangsamoro will take years, he adds.

"For me, dialogue is one of the best solutions, we need respect. We need tolerance so you can live with people who you differ with," says Gustaham. "We can be different in faith and ideas, but we need to respect each other."

For his children, two boys and two girls, he says, he wants a different upbringing. "I want them to live peacefully with others, I don't want them to follow my experience, when I was young. I want them to go to school and be educated."

Credits

Coordinator: Faiza Effendi

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Writer/Editor: Cedric Monteiro

Sub-Editor: Duarte Branco

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