



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

United Nations Development Programme

CASE STUDIES OF SUSTAINED AND
SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE





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**United Nations Development Programme
October 2011**

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Foreword



UNDP is proud to have supported national development processes around the world for more than fifty years. This work supports the principles of the United Nations Charter and the “Peoples” of the individual programme countries. It catalyses reduction of poverty, improvement of lives, and expansion of choices, in keeping with the human development paradigm and with UNDP’s overall mission to empower lives and strengthen the resilience of nations.

Guiding principles of our work have been national ownership of the development process and the conviction that international partnerships can play a valuable role. Our goal is to support transformational change which brings about real improvements in people’s lives. The human development perspective, the values of the Millennium Declaration, and the results orientation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed goals help shape our contribution to development.

Development is neither simple nor straightforward. It is a complex and long-term undertaking which embodies a range of challenges for all concerned. In the course of our work, we and our partners have experienced both successes and disappointments. Along the way we have learned many lessons, and we endeavour to incorporate those in our work in order to better serve our national partners and get results.

The purpose of this publication is to reflect honestly on this experience. It presents seven case studies where sustained development cooperation has enabled programme countries to make a real difference to the lives of their citizens. It also offers lessons learned to help improve our day-to-day work.

I hope that development practitioners will find this publication useful to their work in promoting sustainable human development and enabling the achievement of the MDGs.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Helen Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Helen Clark
UNDP Administrator

Our goal has always been to **support transformational change** which brings about real improvements in people’s lives.

Supporting Transformational Change

UNDP has been engaged in development cooperation for more than 50 years. While the modalities of its projects and programmes have evolved, the ultimate purpose of its work has remained the same: to assist UN Member States to improve the living standards and life opportunities of their citizens (empowered lives) by supporting the development of national capacity so that member states can manage their own development programmes (resilient nations). To be sure, UNDP has not been the only development agency which has worked towards this objective, and indeed it has always worked as an integral part of the wider UN System in each country, as well as alongside many other multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental practitioners. Nonetheless, UNDP is one of those with the longest engagement, the broadest mandate, the most partner countries and the most extensive country representation.

The value of development cooperation is under renewed challenge and UNDP is embarking on a process of institutional renewal. The time is ripe, therefore, for UNDP to identify and document examples of successful and sustained development cooperation that have contributed to transformational change at the country or subregional level. These examples — presented here — help to identify generic lessons for successful development cooperation that can be applied in future programme design and implementation.

Transformational change defined

Transformational change is the process whereby positive development results are achieved and sustained over time by institutionalizing policies, programmes and projects within national strategies. This embodies the concept of institutionally sustained results — consistency of achievement over time. It excludes short-term, transitory impact.

Positive development results are real and sustained improvements in the lives of people, households and communities. Such improvements are measured not merely in terms of per capita gross domestic product but in a variety of indicators, such as those relating to the Human Development Index, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their related targets and indicators. They include the process freedoms and enabling factors (e.g. human rights, democratic governance, participatory and

If transformational change is to be sustained it must be **nationally owned** and **achieved**.



A group of girls at a day-care centre in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. © Teizo Taniguchi / UNDP

inclusive processes) that are central to the Millennium Declaration but which are not captured in the Goals themselves.

Partnerships that support national processes for transformational change

Transformational change can only be achieved by national players, not by external partners, however well intentioned. Such change will usually depend on the political will of governments — national, regional and local — which have the power to legislate, develop policies and programmes, and to allocate resources — financial and human — to implement them. Nevertheless, in order to be successful and sustainable, truly transformational change must also embrace both for-profit business and civil society stakeholders, including community-based organizations.

International organizations like UNDP can work to influence and support these processes, but they cannot lead them. These external partners' main contribution must, therefore, take the form of supporting the

Transformational change

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development of national capacity within an overall framework of national ownership of the development process. Where such capacity already exists, external support can simply take the form of financial support. However, this is not the role of UNDP.

A common thread running through the stories presented here is the value of international partnerships — with UNDP, with the UN more generally or with other international players — and the role they can play in supporting national processes of transformational change. In this context, distributing the credit between international agencies is beside the point. What matters is that the international partnerships reinforce national processes, rather than subverting or distorting them. The case studies presented here are at their heart stories of successful nationally driven and owned economic, social and political change. UNDP is proud of its contribution in supporting such a process.

Identifying examples of transformational change

The cases studies included here were selected based on the following criteria:

- **Transformational impact.** To qualify as transformational, development cooperation must have contributed to significant, sustainable and sustained change for the better, at the policy, programme and/or institutional level. Continuation of a policy and/or programme in itself is not sufficient; there must be measurable — and sustained — change for the better in people's lives, at the level of the household and/or community.
- **Human development, the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs.** Transformational change should contribute to human development, as analysed in the global reports and numerous country versions, and measured by the Human Development Index. It should also contribute towards achievement of elements of the Millennium Declaration, or one or more of the MDGs, including the related targets and indicators. There should be special emphasis placed on those who are marginalized, excluded or vulnerable.



Elected women representatives in India use locally available resources to draw social maps and other micro planning tools. © Sephi Bergerson / UNDP India

- **National or subnational impact.** Development impact must be visible at least at a regional level, i.e. subnational, if not at a national level. Regional level is a possibility in larger countries where regional differences can be significant or where there is distinctive regional governance. Impact may also be found at the intercountry level, given UNDP's natural affinity for intercountry cooperation.
- **National ownership and political will.** Transformational change can only be achieved with a high level of national engagement and commitment. National ownership, of course, is not necessarily synonymous with government ownership, but may include regional and local government, civil society and the private commercial sector. Nevertheless, it is expected that evidence of national ownership would come primarily from the demonstrated actions of government at the policy and/or programme level, including, for example, legislation and/or budgetary allocations.
- **Sustained and sustainable development results.** Significant development results should be demonstrably sustained over a period of time. This is an important measure of real transformational change and embodies the concept of *institutionally sustainable results*, as distinct from environmental sustainability.

Development cooperation must contribute to **significant, sustainable** and **sustained change for the better** to qualify as transformational.

- **Time-frame of 10 to 20 years.** Given the need to establish demonstrable and consistent transformational results, a successful UNDP-supported development programme has usually been in gestation for at least 10 years. In most cases, UNDP's support would probably have continued throughout this period, but not necessarily: a catalytic contribution at the outset could have resulted in national achievements over time.
- **Independent evaluation.** Validation of successful outcomes should be bolstered by a UNDP Evaluation Office-sponsored report on development results, or other independent evidence, and it should not be challenged by significant external research or observers.
- **Project, programme or cluster of interventions.** The terms 'project' and 'programme' are regarded here as interchangeable. They both represent a set of interrelated activities with shared overall objectives, and both must comprise an important part of a larger whole, with higher-level objectives.
- **Replicable approaches.** The selected case studies illuminate generalized lessons for application elsewhere. Programme success always has certain unique elements that are difficult if not impossible to repeat elsewhere, but a wholly unique success story would not be useful as a replicable example.

Case Studies of Transformational Change



Microfinance in Mongolia

A nation in transition

In the 1990s Mongolia transformed from a centrally planned to a market-driven economy. By 2004 the private sector's share of GDP had risen to 75 percent and since 2000 the average annual GDP growth rate has been above 5 percent. Not everyone, however, has benefited from this growth. With more than a third of Mongolians living below the poverty line, poverty remains a challenge.

To support its less advantaged population, the Mongolian Government initiated an experimental micro-finance programme in 1997 with support from UNDP's global MicroStart programme. Its success exceeded all expectations and it rapidly developed into a nationwide programme.

Empowerment through microfinance

In the 1990s, MicroStart—which has since been absorbed into the UNDP-administered UN Capital Development Fund—provided seed money for microfinance programmes, focusing on those that could become self-sufficient. With an initial grant of US\$1 million, UNDP—in partnership with the Mongolian Government, several non-governmental organizations and a local management team—pioneered a microfinance initiative targeting those who had not benefitted from the national economic transformation. Mongolian leadership was central to the initiative's evolution into the country's first non-bank financial institution.

In 1999, Mongolia began registering non-bank financial institutions, such as those created through MicroStart. A microcredit regulatory framework and a national policy framework developed over the next years. In 2002, the Mongolian Parliament enacted laws prioritising inclusive economic growth, defining the roles and responsibilities of non-bank financial institutions and legalizing savings and loan cooperatives. By 2001, a consortium of these institutions had become XacBank, an independent commercial bank.

The newly opened banking and finance sector grew quickly, and by 2005 there were 17 banks, 126 non-bank financial institutions and 270 cooperative savings and credit associations. Mongolia's experience demonstrates some of the birth pangs of microfinance programmes. Adequately regulating entrants into the sector has been difficult, as has been ensuring a commercial interest rate that reflects the higher risk of loans while still permitting broad access.

Poverty is still a major challenge to Mongolia, with **more than a third** of the people **living below the poverty line.**



A young woman adds the finishing touches to handcrafted wheel in Mongolia. © UNDP Mongolia

UNDP's support concluded in 2001 but nationally driven momentum and private sector resources have moved the sector forward. And XacBank, once a UNDP beneficiary, is now an implementation partner.

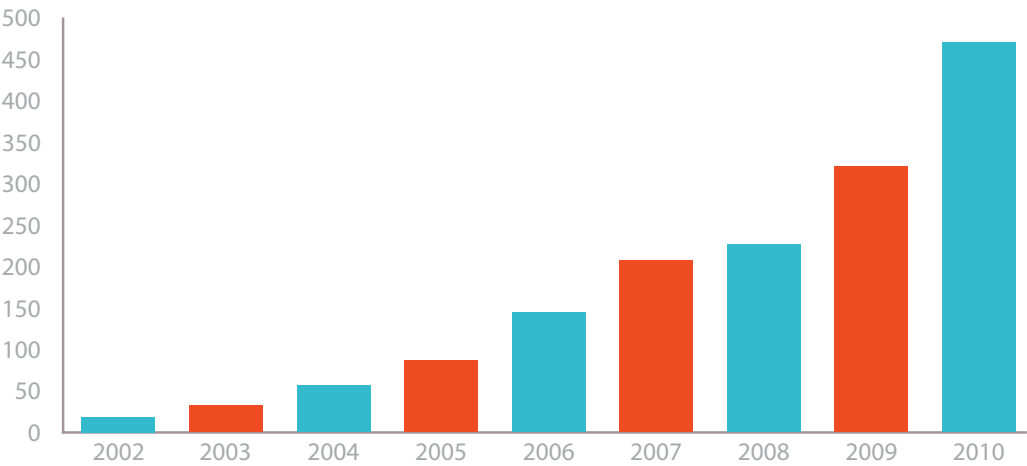
Making a difference: the transformational impact

There is little doubt that microfinance has transformed lives, both by creating economic opportunities and insulating many Mongolians from the uncertainties of a competitive market economy.

XacBank has made striking progress in becoming self-sustaining and in meeting client and national needs. By May 2010, it had 93,930 loans outstanding, with a dynamically varied customer base. In partnership with the Women's World Bank, XacBank has developed programmes targeting young women, who comprise half of its customers. It continues to channel loans to rural areas, which poses a special challenge in a country with a low rural population density. Although rural clients comprise about 47 percent of XacBank's clients, this represents less than 10.1 percent of the rural population.

XacBank's growth is observable in several performance indicators. From 2002 to 2010, its assets grew by 26 times, loans increased by 43 times and savings by 25 times. The initiative that started with \$1 million in 1998 now has assets over \$450 million.

XACBANK'S TOTAL ASSETS, 2002–2010



Source: XacBank Annual Report 2010

Lessons learned

Mongolia’s microfinance experience yields several lessons:

- **Mongolian leadership:** From the outset, the microfinance initiative was a joint government and UNDP programme, with support from the Central Bank of Mongolia. The initiative’s main characteristic was strong and visionary Mongolian leadership, which UNDP was proud to support with start-up funding and one international adviser.
- **Partnerships:** The Mongolian and UNDP initiative drew a range of national and international players, including non-governmental organizations. Not only did the programme access a broad base of knowledge and experience, but it ensured allies that would carry the process forward. Broad partnerships facilitated national as well as government ownership.
- **Strategic analysis of opportunities:** The decision to initiate MicroStart reflects a correct assessment of needs and opportunities in Mongolia in the mid- to late-1990s. MicroStart addressed groups that benefited less immediately from the surging economic growth, and it became critical with the economic setback of the 1997 East Asian Crisis. As a UNDP-supported global programme, MicroStart provided access to comparative experiences in other countries.
- **Timing is important:** Mongolia’s emergence from its earlier economic straightjacket into a market environment created opportunities — and a national openness to them — that are difficult to repeat in more stable situations. At a time of rapid change, a relevant initiative stood a good chance of being mainstreamed.
- **Success breeds success:** The development of microcredit benefited from progress in other sectors of Mongolia’s rural economy, and vice versa.
- **External force majeure:** The significance of external factors should not be underestimated. The liberalization of the Mongolian economy was made possible by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The East Asian Crisis gave impetus to the microfinance programme and the beginning of microcredit in the country. However, the global banking and economic crisis in 2007 precipitated a spike in rural poverty in Mongolia as unemployment rose and household income declined sharply.

Responding to the HIV Epidemic in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's HIV crisis

Ethiopia's first cases of HIV were reported in 1986 and the disease rapidly spread. By 2009, an estimated 1.1 million Ethiopians were living with HIV but the country had limited resources and capacity to address the epidemic.

In the late 1990s the Government launched a major HIV programme with support from UNDP's Leadership Development Programme and Community Conversations approach. By 2008, the prevalence of HIV had been reduced and 53 percent of people needing treatment were receiving it.

Engaging with people and communities

As a co-sponsor of UNAIDS, UNDP works to help countries respond to the development and social dimensions of HIV. It recognizes that action in social protection, gender, human rights and the environment can contribute to better health outcomes. UNDP helps countries integrate HIV priorities into national planning processes, strengthen governance and coordination of HIV responses and promote human rights and gender equality.

In the 1990s UNDP launched the Leadership Development Programme and Community Conversations methodologies to promote partnerships and encourage strategic multisectoral responses to HIV. The Leadership Development Programme unites leaders from across sectors, empowering individuals to develop organizational cultures that can generate transformational change. Community Conversations is a community-based programme that facilitates dialogue and decision-making, enabling communities to generate their own responses to the HIV epidemic. Both approaches aim to develop leadership at different levels of society; they are mutually reinforcing.

In Ethiopia, UNDP's approach began with advocacy and support to the Ministry of Public Health in planning a nationwide response. UNDP later became operationally involved by supporting the introduction of Community Conversations. Applying expertise developed around the world, UNDP trained local facilitators to initiate community conversations across four provinces, with striking results. Communities were enabled to acknowledge the HIV epidemic and to explore harmful norms or practices that fuelled its spread. Women in particular were empowered to address issues such as gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health.

In 2004, the Government adopted the Community Conversation approach as part of its national strategy. The methodology was mainstreamed throughout the country and used not only to stimulate open discussion and behavioural change, but also to help prioritise within the national AIDS programme.



Students in North Gondar, Ethiopia participate in a sex education class. © Adam Rogers / UNCDF

In 2009/10, 89.3 percent of *kebeles* (Ethiopia’s basic administrative unit) conducted community conversations, and 24,723 community facilitators were trained. An equally impressive performance was reported for school-based community conversations. The number of engaged communities continues to increase.

Making a difference: the transformational impact

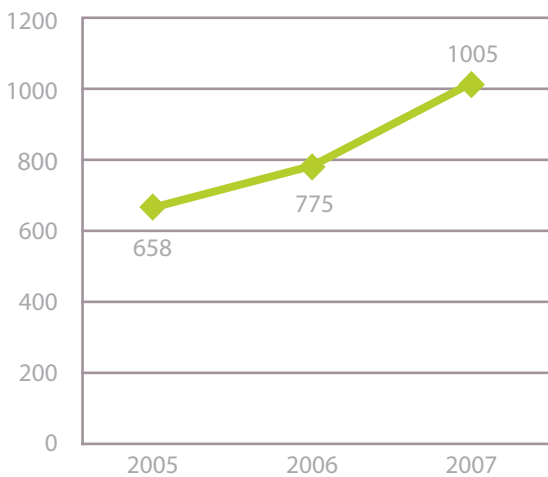
Ethiopia’s achievements in stemming the spread of HIV are impressive. Not only has incidence of the disease been controlled and reversed, but the country’s ability to treat those already infected has grown (see graphs below). Life expectancies have increased, reducing the economic consequences of early death.

Major achievements include:

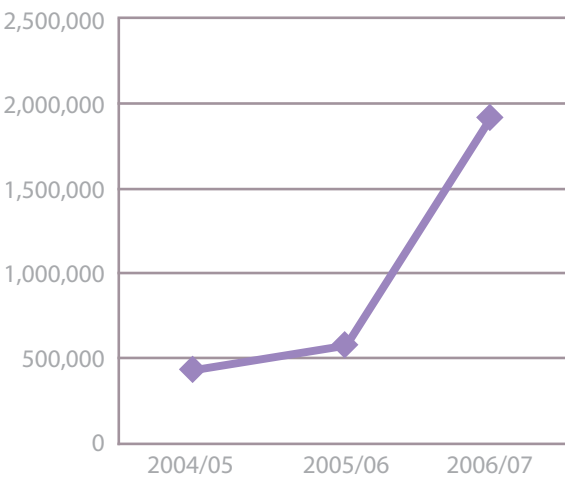
- increased demand for voluntary counselling and testing;
- increased condom use;
- integration and expansion of voluntary counselling and testing;
- initiation of prevention of mother-to-child transmission and antiretroviral services; and
- encouraging trends in the involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS to strengthen local engagement.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. A high turnover of key government staff and tensions between local and national institutions complicate the sustainability of progress. Extending the national programme to sparsely populated areas stretches available resources to the limit and sustainable funding remains a challenge.

HIV TESTING CENTRE EXPANSION



RISE IN HIV TESTING POPULATION



Lessons learned

There is little doubt that UNDP’s Leadership Development and Community Conversations programmes contributed significantly to the success of Ethiopia’s HIV programme. A number of factors influenced this outcome:

- **Strategic positioning of HIV in the wider public health and development arena:** HIV was not treated as an isolated health sector issue but as a challenge requiring a concerted effort among health and non-health sectors.
- **Government leadership:** From the outset, the Government responded to the HIV challenge. It put in place a national institutional framework to manage a national programme. Faced with the early success of the Community Conversation methodology, it quickly financed and mainstreamed the methodology nationwide.
- **Applying global programmes at a country level:** At the time they were introduced in Ethiopia, UNDP’s Leadership Development Programme and Community Conversations were global programmes. This enabled Ethiopia to share its experience and benefit from similar work in other countries.
- **International partnerships:** UNDP was one of a range of actors who complemented each other in supporting national programmes. To its credit, the Government was open to these international partnerships. This ensured the necessary financial resources to address the HIV challenge.
- **Paving the way with institutional development:** The flow of international funds required empowered and responsive institutions. While there were tensions between national institutions at different levels of society, overall national capacity to design and implement programmes has been greatly enhanced over the past 15 years. There was a steady escalation of capacity development policies and programmes during the 1990s and early 2000s, of which the Leadership Development Programme and Community Conversations were an important part. This paved the way for major resource flows starting in 2005, from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and from the US President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

Beautiful Bulgaria

A nation challenged

The first decade of Bulgaria's transition to a market economy was marked by political, social and economic turmoil. The economy effectively collapsed in 1996 under massive inflation and a failed banking system, and the unemployment rate reached 16.9 percent.

The Beautiful Bulgaria programme was born in 1997 at the height of this turmoil. It addressed several challenges, most notably unemployment. The programme contributed to Bulgaria's transformation: by 2007, Bulgaria was on its way to a democratic market economy and was admitted to the European Union.

Public works as national therapy

Beautiful Bulgaria started as a joint UNDP and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy project in Sofia, financed by Sofia's municipal government and UNDP. With funding from the European Union, the programme expanded to five cities. By 2003, it operated throughout the country, with funding from national and municipal budgets.

The programme initially focused on vocational training for the unemployed, targeting reconstruction in urban centres. It also provided training to small and medium enterprises and start-up financing for small businesses. In the early 2000s, the programme expanded to renovating tourism sites, sporting facilities and playgrounds.

From its inception Beautiful Bulgaria worked with municipal authorities, a level of government previously constrained by centralized government policy. Structural reform delegated greater authority to city governments, including the right to raise revenue. As municipalities exercised these powers, they became open to new approaches for addressing prevailing problems.

Beautiful Bulgaria provided thousands of jobs, mostly for the unskilled and long-term unemployed. It led to broader urban revival and boosted tourism development and incentives for hundreds of new businesses. The programme's most important contribution was the renewed sense of nationhood and hope experienced by Bulgarians as a result of the changes they saw around them.

A national transformation

Beautiful Bulgaria's impact falls into four categories:

- **The impact on people:** 45,609 temporary jobs were created, 27 percent of which went to minority groups. When these numbers are translated into families, the multiplier effect is much larger.
- **The impact on national infrastructure:** 1,688 sites were refurbished, including historical places, schools, hospitals, churches and other public buildings. The indirect beneficiaries of these projects comprise most, if not all, Bulgarians.
- **The impact on institutions:** The programme is ongoing, with funding from the national budget. Beautiful Bulgaria has become a nationwide phenomenon, embracing the private and public sectors.



Before and after: the restored municipal building in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. © UNDP Bulgaria

- **The impact on the national psyche:** Although difficult to measure, this is widely regarded as Beautiful Bulgaria’s most important transformational effect. 1997 was a turning point for the country, when — after a tumultuous period — people began to believe that real improvement could occur. Beautiful Bulgaria contributed to this change.

National regeneration is a long-term process and Beautiful Bulgaria remains a work in progress. The project’s impact was particularly strong in its initial years, when the country was recovering from the financial crisis of 1997. Eleven years later, the country again dipped into crisis following the 2008 global downturn. In 2008, the Government reinforced its commitment to the programme with a budget of US\$40 million — almost half the total project budget over the preceding years.

The project’s impact is not limited to Bulgaria. During the last several years it was adopted in Kosovo, Romania and Serbia. Armenia, Bolivia and Moldova have also expressed interest.

Beautiful Bulgaria gave Bulgarians **a sense of nationhood, self-confidence** and **hope** for the future.

Lessons learned

Beautiful Bulgaria is an exception to UNDP's normal programming approach. In accordance with its strategic plans and practice architecture, UNDP characteristically offers a menu of development cooperation from which programme countries can choose.

In Eastern Europe during the immediate post-Soviet period, UNDP adopted a more pragmatic approach, focused on 'being useful.' UNDP's contribution was to create an enabling framework within which a national initiative could take root.

The main lessons are:

- **Principled opportunism:** An opportunistic approach can be effective. Although somewhat outside UNDP's normal parameters, Beautiful Bulgaria embodied UNDP's programming values: human development, poverty reduction, decentralized governance, participatory processes and national ownership.
- **Timing is everything:** The programme was the right idea at the right time. In 1997, political leaders were looking for practical, effective ideas and were open to whatever would work. The political will to innovate existed, and the European Union brought the pilot funding required. UNDP's role was that of broker in the process.
- **Pragmatic programme design and implementation:** The programme was developed to be practical and useful to communities under stress. Vocational training for the construction industry had long since ceased to be a specialized programme area for UNDP. Nevertheless, UNDP programme designers were able to continually adapt the programme to reflect evolving needs.
- **Decentralized national ownership:** The programme relied on municipal ownership. This was facilitated by the programme's visible benefit to the people. In this respect it differed from UNDP's 'upstream' policy-driven programmes.
- **Building absorptive capacity:** UNDP effectively performed its traditional role of building national capacity to absorb larger funding than it could have provided. Funds initially came from the European Union, as well as other major donors. Later on they came from the Government, including central and local authorities. UNDP's capacity development assistance was a prerequisite for the effective application of these funds.

Managing the Black Sea and the Danube River Basin

An ecosystem at risk

The Danube River flows through many Eastern European countries before reaching the Black Sea. For decades, the discharge of polluted water into the Danube resulted in nutrient over-enrichment in the Black Sea, affecting fish stocks, beaches and the incidence of waterborne disease.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity for countries in the region to launch a collaborative endeavor to address this issue. With support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and UNDP, countries collectively identified their transboundary problem and agreed to environmental programmes that led to measurable improvements in the Danube and Black Sea.

A joint response to a shared challenge

In 1993, the Bucharest Convention on Protection of the Black Sea led to the first UNDP/GEF project: a transboundary diagnostic analysis to inform a rehabilitation and protection programme for the Black Sea. The environmental plan, called the Strategic Action Programme, was adopted by six countries in 1996. In the following decade a coordinated series of intergovernmental programmes supported regional and national implementation of environmental programming for both the Black Sea and the Danube River.

UNDP worked closely with the GEF in its Danube and Black Sea programmes, benefiting from GEF's financial resources and methodology for addressing the ecological challenges of shared water systems. For its part, UNDP brought extensive experience and neutrality in convening governments, building national and international institutional capacity, and coordinating partners to advance multi-country governance reforms. Along with the GEF, the European Union, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development funded the programmes.

The steady **increase in pollution** in the Danube/Black Sea basin was a result of **excessive agricultural, industrial and poorly or untreated wastewater discharge.**



Healthy wetlands provide countries with clean water, vital wildlife habitats and tourism revenues.
© UNDP Belarus

Between 1991 and 2000, two UNDP/GEF-led Danube River Basin Programmes drove the Danube side of the integrated approach, while another two programmes addressed the Black Sea. In 2001, a strategic partnership was established, bringing together the key stakeholders in a ‘basin-wide approach’ with three components:

- **The UNDP/GEF Danube Regional Project** was implemented by UNDP and involved the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River.
- **The UNDP/GEF Black Sea Ecosystem Recovery Project** was developed under the GEF and involved UNDP, the UN Environment Programme and the UN Office for Project Services.
- **The World Bank/GEF Investment Fund for Nutrient Reduction** was an investment fund created by the World Bank to provide GEF grant support to leverage World Bank financing for nutrient reduction investments.

Deterioration reversed and prospects transformed

The Danube and the Black Sea countries now have legal, institutional, policy and financial mechanisms in place to manage nutrient pollution. Specific achievements include:

- The GEF Strategic Partnership for the Black Sea and Danube Basin — a \$US97 million framework providing investment finance and capacity-building support to 17 countries.

- Over \$3.5 billion in investments in pollution reduction and habitat restoration, including municipal wastewater treatment, agricultural nutrient management, industrial pollution reduction and wetlands restoration.
- Demonstrable reductions in pollution loads resulting from nutrient reduction investments and implementation of reforms targeting the management of nutrient pollution sources.
- Demonstrated improvement in the ecological status of the Danube River and the Black Sea, including the return of a number of key species.
- Development of pilot monitoring exercises, capacity-building workshops, quality assurance guidelines, and acquisition of equipment that can monitor nutrient levels.
- Development and involvement of a Black Sea non-governmental organization network.

Monitoring and enforcing the nutrient management commitments of each country requires continued attention, and capacity development and national programme development has not been wholly successful in all 17 countries. Nonetheless, real, transformational progress has been made.

Lessons learned

The 15 years of UNDP/GEF support to improving multi-country environmental governance in the Danube River and Black Sea basin offers an array of lessons:

- **Intergovernmental processes take time and sustained support.** Intergovernmental programmes are more complex than national ones. Donors should expect a long-term investment if they hope to successfully foster and sustain the multi-country governance reforms and investments needed for sustainable management regimes for shared water bodies.
- **Political will born of national ownership is essential for sustained intergovernmental collaboration.** This can be driven by substance or by political context. In this case, the severity of environmental deterioration may not have been sufficient without the drive of post-Soviet countries to integrate with Western Europe.
- **Multiple partnerships are essential.** Each national and international partner brought something to the table. UNDP played an important facilitative and coordinating role. The partnership approach from the initial phases onward was key to ensuring that each organization played its role towards the overall objective.
- **Robust technical analysis is the starting point.** The longer-term UNDP/GEF engagement was based on a transboundary diagnostic analysis that GEF and UNDP uses for ‘fact-finding’ and priority-setting in most international waters programmes. The methodology provides a technical basis for identifying and prioritizing transboundary issues and ensures a strategic approach to addressing root causes of pollution. This analysis set the direction for the next 15 years of national actions, international collaboration and UNDP cooperation.
- **Capacity development is at the heart of successful development cooperation.** From the outset, the Danube and Black Sea programmes focused on national and regional capacity development. Without this, the extensive funding from the GEF and others could not have been effective.

Bangladesh: Disaster Risk Reduction as Development

A country of exceptional vulnerability to natural hazards

Bangladesh has a long history of natural disasters. Between 1980 and 2008, it experienced 219 natural disasters, causing over US\$16 billion in total damage. The predicted effects of climate change will only compound these impacts.

UNDP has long supported Bangladesh in addressing its vulnerability to disaster. For over two decades, it has helped Bangladesh shift from reactive relief to proactive risk reduction. The results are apparent in the fewer number of lives and livelihoods destroyed by natural disasters. Today, Bangladesh is a global leader in disaster management and risk reduction.

Towards a comprehensive programme of disaster mitigation

Following colossal floods in the 1980s, Bangladesh — with support from UNDP — developed a flood action plan that initiated a proactive culture of disaster management and risk reduction. It established disaster-focused institutions such as the Flood Forecasting Warning Centre, introduced pilot projects to reduce vulnerability and developed policy and planning guidelines.

A catastrophic cyclone in 1991 spurred additional action. With help from UNDP, the Government established the Disaster Management Bureau. Tasked with reducing the human, economic and environmental costs of disasters, and strengthening national capacities and cross-sectoral partnerships, the new Bureau became the institutional foundation of an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction, response and recovery. Between 1994 and 2002, UNDP supported the development of policies that empowered disaster management committees at all levels of government to plan and coordinate risk reduction and emergency response.

In the early 2000s this approach was consolidated. The Government established the National Disaster Management Council along with coordinating structures that embraced civil society organizations and local government authorities. UNDP supported this consolidation through the multi-donor Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme. This Programme led to revised policies, strategies and mechanisms that began to screen development programmes through a 'risk-lens.' Bangladesh became a pioneer among least developed countries in prioritizing disaster risk reduction in national fiscal planning. With assistance from the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme, Bangladesh adopted a



Community volunteers warn fellow villagers of cyclone threats in Bangladesh's vulnerable areas.
© UNDP Bangladesh

general risk reduction model that encouraged national stakeholders to consider existing disaster risks as well as the risks of projected climate extremes in building national and community resilience. UNDP also supported the development of early warning systems and the introduction of innovative technology, including the construction of 15,000 disaster-resilient homes and the development of drought- and saline-resistant crops.

Making a difference: the transformational impact

UNDP helped Bangladesh to develop the physical assets, knowledge and human capacity — and the planning, coordination, finance and implementation mechanisms — that underpin its disaster management and risk reduction system. These investments contribute to a transformed disaster scenario.

Fundamental to this transformation are:

- **A fresh approach:** Lessons from previous decades led to the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme and a national risk reduction agenda.
- **Leadership:** Bangladesh's coordination framework stretches from the National Disaster Management Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, to a network of over 2,000 village disaster committees, 40 district Disaster Management Committees, 12 directly involved line ministries and six donor partners.

Arguably, the **most significant measure** of Bangladesh's success is the **dramatic reduction in lives and livelihoods destroyed** when natural disasters strike.

• **Capacity development:**

Training programmes. Over 60,000 government officials were trained in emergency response. Cooperation with civil society and volunteer organizations has mobilized an even greater pool of knowledgeable first responders.

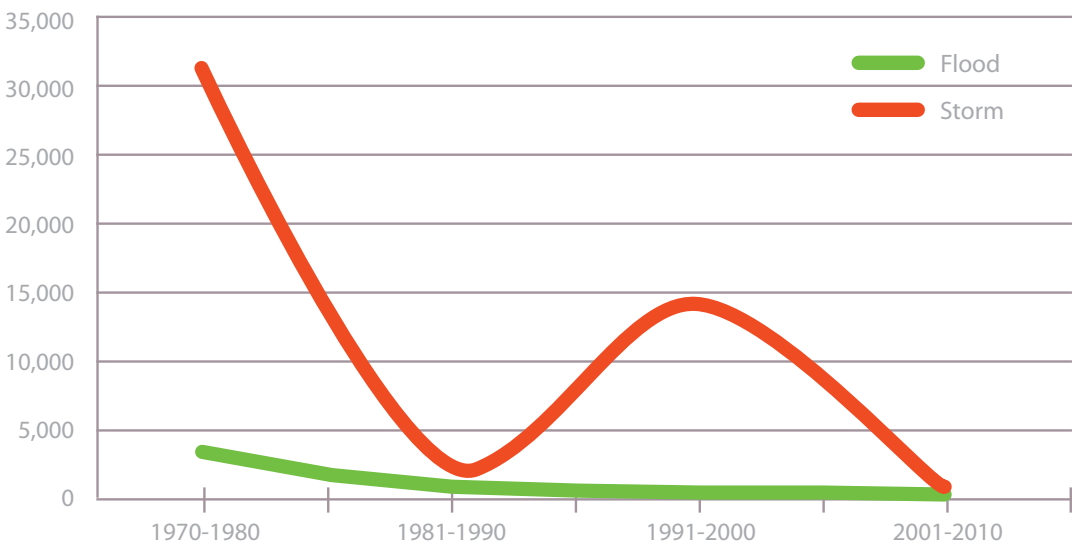
Institutions and policies. Dedicated institutions with clear mandates provide focal points for development partners. With UNDP support, national institutions have become proactive, using early warning systems and mitigation strategies.

Civil society engagement. UNDP support and advocacy has helped empower civil society organizations to work for change.

- **A multi-hazard focus:** The focus in disaster management and risk reduction now includes a broader range of potential hazards, including the impacts of climate change.

The most significant measure of Bangladesh's success is the dramatic reduction in lives lost to natural disasters. Historically, deaths from single events reached the hundreds of thousands. But with the exception of two unusually violent cyclones in 1995, the recent trend has been steadily downwards.

TOTAL NUMBER OF DEATHS BY FLOOD AND CYCLONE, 1970 TO 2010



Source: EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database – www.emdat.net – Université catholique de Louvain – Brussels – Belgium



Bangladeshi women work together to improve community infrastructure, including roads.
© UNDP Bangladesh

Of course, challenges remain. Ensuring uniform levels of capacity throughout the country and maintaining focus in the ‘normal’ periods between disasters remain problematic. Mainstreaming disaster considerations and integrating them into development planning is a continual process in Bangladesh, as in other countries.

Lessons learned

Bangladesh’s experience offers the following lessons:

- **Sustained engagement:** UNDP’s engagement extends over several decades. Given the complexity of the issues and the institutional challenges, there is no ‘quick fix.’ Bangladesh’s experience highlights the importance of gradual and self-supporting change. Engagement is most effective when spread across a range of stakeholders, from government bodies to civil society organizations.
- **Disaster risk assessment and mitigation requires community engagement:** The risks that communities face vary. An effective response requires community action to address local needs, contexts and aspirations. Bangladesh demonstrates that a standardized framework can be managed through a national programme while accounting for local-level variations.
- **Partnership frameworks:** UNDP has successfully leveraged its impartial ‘knowledge-broker’ status to bring together a vast partnership network.
- **Institutional reform and capacity building:** With support from UNDP and others, Bangladesh became a leader in its institutional framework for disaster risk reduction and sustainable development, with a number of core government policies and programmes incorporating risk reduction from their earliest stages.

El Salvador: An Early Example of Peacebuilding

A country in transition

The armed conflict that raged in El Salvador from the late 1970s through the 1980s ended in 1992 with the Chapultepec Peace Accords. In the ensuing years, UNDP helped to rebuild institutions and address the underlying causes of post-conflict societal violence. While not all causes of the conflict have been eliminated, it is a significant achievement that conflict resolution and policy and programme development now take place within a democratic framework.

Rebuilding institutions and addressing societal violence

In the immediate post-conflict period, UNDP's assistance focused on rebuilding institutions through consensus among parties to the conflict. UNDP was active in a variety of interdependent institution-building activities that involved political manoeuvring to ensure the trust of all parties. It supported the creation of a national civilian police force and a human rights ombudsman's office, and provided judicial reform support that ultimately led to a more politically independent, pluralistic and professional justice system. To address the challenge of integrating ex-combatants into civilian life, UNDP participated in 'consensus roundtables' with representatives of the Government, the opposing Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front and the UN Observer Mission. By 1997, 36,691 beneficiaries had received land, including many thousand ex-combatants and demobilized soldiers.

Despite this progress, the consolidation of democratic governance remained impeded by persistent challenges. These included a fragile human rights protection system; an outdated electoral system; a highly polarized political culture; a cumbersome, centralized state apparatus; and a lack of capacities

The armed conflict in El Salvador cost **75,000 lives**, left almost a **million people displaced** and provoked a mass migration out of the country of an estimated **one fifth of the entire population**.



A voter casts a ballot in San Miguel, El Salvador. Since the end of El Salvador's armed conflict, UNDP has helped rebuild democratic institutions to promote peacebuilding. © Milton Grant / UNDP

to negotiate and resolve social conflicts. Moreover, progress was undermined by widespread social violence. Addressing this violence was a focus of UNDP's programmatic efforts for the next 14 years.

UNDP began by developing a greater understanding of the violence. It conducted a series of conferences and workshops, drawing on the knowledge of a range of Salvadoran professionals. The participatory analysis identified a variety of factors, including weak institutions, the after effects of civil war, the easy availability of weapons, psycho-social factors, cultural patterns and international organized crime in narcotics and arms trafficking. Although this diagnosis highlighted many facets of the violence, programmatic responses focused on the most visible manifestation: firearms. UNDP supported strengthening the legal framework for arms control and the administrative mechanisms for implementing it. Some projects addressed the issue at a national level, while others tested approaches on a pilot basis at a local level.

One of UNDP's greatest contributions has been to inform the national debate on violence with research, operations testing and participatory discussion. A UNDP study on firearms and violence in El Salvador was critical to the Government's formulation of proposals to amend existing firearms laws and regulations. The study involved 70 researchers, 35 supervisors and police data on 80,000 crimes. The study provided information to support policy options for prevention and control, and baseline data for tracking progress.

Assessing the transformational impact

Negotiating a peace settlement is one thing; it is quite another to ensure that democratic institutions and human rights take root. Transformational change in post-conflict settings should, therefore, be judged over a long time-frame.

Addressing El Salvador's societal violence is difficult, and changing people's attitudes about firearms is a long process. UNDP's interventions have contributed to the reduction of armed violence and prevention at the local level by creating knowledge, developing institutional capacities, designing policy frameworks and contributing to legislative agendas.

Although these interventions have not had a quantifiable impact on violence at a national level, they provide frameworks that have been nationally adopted. In the municipality of San Martin, a 49 percent reduction in lethal violence and 24 percent decrease in the number of criminal acts committed with firearms was tied to the UNDP Arms-Free Municipalities pilot project. In 2007, a national commission on citizen security recommended that the programme be extended to the 20 most violent municipalities.

Similarly, in 2009, mayors from the San Salvador metro area worked with the national Government to implement a weapons ban. By February 2011, local homicides had dropped by 19 percent, robberies by 78 percent and gun injuries by 68 percent. The Government recently announced the extension of the ban to 27 municipalities.

Lessons learned

El Salvador's experience offers the following lessons:

- **Post-conflict transformations take a long time:** Institutional capacity building takes time in post-conflict settings. Even after the cessation of armed conflict, underlying social tensions complicate political, judicial and administrative processes. Decades — not three to five year project cycles — are the expected time scale for sustained transformation.
- **Strategic visions matters:** UNDP's focus first on institutional capacity building for democratic governance, and later on endemic violence, reflected a correct prioritization of issues.
- **Flexible implementation is essential:** The programme developed across a variety of projects, at both national and local levels. While each project was self-contained, they complemented and reinforced each other.
- **The importance of partnerships:** UNDP's resources are modest and must be complemented by other donors, whose support brings different experience and political support to a sensitive process.

Local Governance in Cambodia

A nation in need of reconstruction

Few countries have faced such monumental challenges as Cambodia following the Khmer Rouge regime. Shattered infrastructure, hundreds of thousands of displaced persons and limited subnational governance capacity remained barriers to stability long after the 1993 elections.

As Cambodia rebuilt, UNDP provided support through a programme that began with refugee resettlement and evolved into a nationally owned, decentralized governance programme focused on participatory local development — an initiative that became enshrined in law.

A flexible and progressive partnership

From 1992 – 1995, UNDP collaborated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to promote peace, reconciliation and the reintegration of displaced people. Targeting the communities where the displaced were being resettled, the project focused on rehabilitating infrastructure; improving basic services; and increasing employment, food production and income-generation opportunities.

In 1996, UNDP shifted its focus to the longer-term challenge of local governance, sustainability and participation. The Seila Programme — a UNDP partnership with the UNDP-administered UN Capital Development Fund and the UN Office for Project Services — began as a policy experiment to help subnational authorities assume ownership of a participatory and transparent local development process. By 2002, the programme had supported the election of commune councils in all 1,621 communes (district subdivisions) in the country. Within two years, the Government extended the systems and capacity development mechanisms developed under the programme to the entire country. By 2004, over 2,000 subnational officials and 12,000 commune counsellors were performing functions focused on governance, capacity development and the delivery of local infrastructure and services.

The underlying objective was **building the national capacity** of the Cambodian people and of the country's institutions – virtually destroyed in the 1970s and 1980s – **to enable full national management.**



Cambodians exercise their right to vote in the 2008 National Assembly elections. Compared with previous elections, the 2008 elections were marked by lower levels of violence and fewer spoiled ballots, and by a better understanding of electoral processes among officials and the general public. © UNDP Cambodia

As commune-level reforms deepened, the demand for reform at district and provincial levels increased. In 2005, the Government adopted a strategic framework for decentralization, including a national decentralization committee. By May 2008, 106 of the 193 district governments were receiving block grants, setting priorities with the commune councils in their jurisdiction and overseeing implementation of infrastructure and service delivery projects. One year later, subnational councils were elected in all provinces and districts. Since then UNDP has supported the design of a 10-year national programme on democratic development at the district level.

Throughout this process UNDP helped build an impressive international partnership. While the annual programme grew from US\$15 million in 2001 to \$90 million in 2010, UNDP's financial contribution averaged 3 percent throughout, while it continuously provided the bulk of technical assistance.

Making a difference: the transformational impact

UNDP assistance led to real improvement in local lives. Vastly improved access to markets and services resulting from thousands of small-scale commune projects has contributed to the decrease in poverty from 35 percent in 2002 to 25.8 percent in 2010.

A programme-based approach was adopted in Cambodia to reduce the transaction costs of aid management, incorporating many of the systems and procedures developed by UNDP. As UNDP's own support is phased out, its advisers have been directly contracted by the Government, extending UNDP's legacy into the future.

The complexity of democratic development reforms — which involve both political and administrative dimensions — requires a transformation in attitudes and practices at higher levels of government, and well-designed capacity development strategies to support the gradual transfer of functions to district administrations. While the Government's own financial contribution to the new programme has increased to 70 percent, substantial international funding is still required for the early phase, until domestic resources can adequately cover needs.

Lessons learned

Several lessons emerge from Cambodia's experience:

- **A strategic analysis and vision carried the programme:** From the outset, there was a consistent two-pronged vision: improving the relationship between civil society and the local state, and local-level poverty alleviation. This vision was articulated at the community level, in national policy and in the international community.
- **A chain is as strong as its weakest link:** The programme continuously worked at all levels of administration to ensure that roles and functions were appropriately assigned and to engage all levels of government in the reform process. The programme acknowledged that local political processes could not be divorced from national process.
- **Holistic programmatic thinking:** UNDP worked simultaneously on three interrelated dimensions: concepts, systems and structures, and delivery of investment and services.
- **Flexible implementation within a strategic focus:** Starting small, the programme consistently aimed at subnational governance reform, while piloting approaches that moved the agenda forward and upwards. International experience was modified to fit local circumstances, informed by input from stakeholders. The result was a high degree of national ownership.
- **A flexible and learning-oriented management style:** 'Learning by doing' was practiced in virtually all areas and phases of the project. Given the unstable context, and the original low knowledge base, this approach was a necessity.
- **Donors willing to take risks:** Beginning with UNDP, and later with the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, flexibility and responsiveness to evolving opportunities and challenges were permitted, without the restrictions often imposed by design and logical frameworks.
- **The value of decentralization in post-conflict countries:** Both in Cambodia as a whole and particularly in the former Khmer Rouge-held territories, decentralized and participatory planning, decision-making and implementation contributed to local-level peace and reconciliation.

UNDP and Human Development

Human development is about much more than national incomes. It is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests. It is about expanding people's choices to lead lives that they value.

The first annual global Human Development Report (HDR) was published in 1990. At its heart is the Human Development Index, which measures human development not merely in terms of per capita GDP but for its impact on people's life possibilities, as measured in purchasing power, life expectancy and educational attainment. Since 1992, the global HDR has been complemented by a number of regional, national and even subnational HDRs. These are powerful tools for raising development policy issues and can be transformational in their impact.

Subnational Human Development Reports in India

India prepares subnational HDRs to help operationalize the human development approach in planning processes. To date, India has produced 1 national, 26 state, 19 district and 1 municipal HDRs. Led by federal, state and local authorities, HDRs collect socio-economic indicators mandated at the provincial level by national development plans.

The preparation of HDRs in India involves multiple layers of capacity development to allow the participation of different strata in society. For example, a Human Development Research and Coordination Cell was established in the planning department of the Government of West Bengal to mainstream human development, undertake sensitization and capacity development on human development and guide districts in preparing HDRs.

Botswana's National Human Development Report

Botswana's National HDR in 2000 focused on HIV/ AIDS. Its publication stimulated national debate and contributed to an understanding that HIV/AIDS is a challenge to governance, not just public health. It led to a redefinition of the Ministry of Health's sexually transmitted diseases unit and supported a more participatory, decentralized national response to sexually transmitted diseases. It even contributed to the

Human development
is about **expanding people's choices** to
lead **lives that they value.**



Village government representatives engage in a Human Development training programme in India.
© UNDP India

President's decision to chair the National AIDS Council, which strengthened the Council's coordinating role and helped ensure a multidisciplinary approach to HIV/AIDS.

The Arab Regional Human Development Reports

The first Arab Regional HDR was published in 2002. It framed its findings around three regional development deficits: freedom, knowledge and women's empowerment. This diagnosis faced criticism within the region and triggered a debate about human development, particularly the relationship between democracy and development. Subsequent reports explored those gaps in greater depth and traced their origins to domestic policy failures, the challenged architecture of Arab states and recurring patterns of external intervention in the region. These findings were legitimized by the report having been prepared by regional — not external — actors.

The regional HDR also created an opportunity for programmatic initiatives. For example, the Centre for Arab Women Training and Research, which became an independent institution in 2006, gained impetus from the 2005 Arab Regional HDR, which discussed gender issues and women's rights. Indeed, the Arab HDR has been at the forefront of advocacy and debate on many sensitive topics, like democratic governance, transparency, accountability, gender equality and HIV/AIDS.

Common Themes and Findings

The case studies presented here highlight 10 common themes that underpin the lessons of UNDP's experience. These themes can be grouped into three headings:

- **Back to basics.** Successful development cooperation rests on national ownership, capacity development, leadership and partnerships.
- **Principled opportunism.** UNDP seeks opportunities to support transformational change within a value-driven normative framework defined by UN Member States.
- **The larger context.** Transformative development cooperation depends on the larger context. This is especially true of post-conflict situations.

Back to basics

1. The centrality of national ownership

Transformational change cannot be achieved without a high level of national engagement and commitment. This will normally include government ownership, since only governments have the capacity to legislate, implement policy and finance national programmes. However, local government, civil society and the private commercial sector must frequently be co-opted if a programme is to be sustainable. Among other things, sustainable national funding depends on domestic resource mobilization — including taxation — which requires national consensus. The term 'national' ownership is, therefore, used advisedly.

2. Developing national capacity

Capacity development is indispensable to successful development cooperation. Easier to prescribe than to achieve, it is also indispensable to a country's ability to effectively use large-scale development funds. UNDP's capacity development support is characteristically followed by a larger inflow of resources than UNDP itself could have provided — for example, from the World Bank or even the private commercial sector. A country's ability to use funding effectively to bring about true transformational change hinges on the effectiveness of capacity development programmes supported by UNDP and others. Design of development cooperation programmes benefits from a close partnership with prospective funders from the outset.

To be successful and transformative,
development cooperation depends in
no small part **on the larger context.**



In the aftermath of Cyclone Aila in 2009, rural villagers walk to and from a water well in Shatkhira, Bangladesh. © Mohammad Rakibul Hasan / UNDP

3. Individuals and leadership matter

The quality of leadership makes a difference, which is why UNDP and others focus on leadership development as an integral part of development cooperation. Truly transformational change depends on leadership, and institutional capacity is sometimes best reflected in the ability to deploy these resources on a consistent basis over time. Development programmes cannot be designed around specific individuals, but individuals can make the difference between success and failure.

4. The partnership principle

The range of national and international actors helps determine successful transformational change. Breadth of engagement ensures diverse ideas, experience and expertise and a reservoirs of finance, which is particularly important given UNDP's relatively shallow pockets. It also ensures a broad base of consensus and support for the programme being implemented.

UNDP's principal partnership is naturally with the host government. UNDP's intergovernmental character enables a special relationship with host governments, which makes it different from bilateral donors. UNDP's other indissoluble partnership is with the agencies of the UN System. This starts with the UN country team but includes all the non-resident agencies. The UN Development Assistance Framework provides a collaborative framework and a division of labour between agencies.

An opportunist with principles

5. The importance of strategic analysis

The starting point for successful development cooperation is a sound understanding of the politico-economic context. Although aid resources are characteristically allocated according to need rather than opportunity, successful programme design must align need with genuine opportunity for beneficial change, championed by national actors.

Strategic analysis also benefits from comparative experience, so that a given country can benefit from lessons learned elsewhere. UNDP terms this ‘knowledge management:’ a process of ensuring that programme staff can access experience gained throughout the organization.

6. The value of tactical responses

UNDP has been described as an ‘opportunist with principles,’ identifying opportunities for successful development cooperation within a principled framework. Many of its most successful programmes have grown from practical responses to real world problems. They began by ‘being useful’ and became transformational. These programmes start without grand designs but can greatly exceed initial expectations.

7. Consistent, sustained and flexible support

Implementation is as important as initial design, and there must be a balance between sustained support and flexibility. Even a badly designed project can achieve success if managed well, and re-framed and revised as it moves forward. By the same token, the best designed development cooperation will founder on poor staffing and rigid implementation. Development cooperation has a tendency to demand high standards at the design stage but to neglect the practicalities of management and implementation. Experience also suggests that an exit strategy for UNDP and other international partners is important. Development cooperation that outstays its welcome can undermine the very national capacity it is intended to develop.

The larger context matters

8. Success breeds success

Programmes are seldom, if ever, transformational in isolation. Their success depends on other, parallel programmes and processes with which there is a synergistic relationship. All the case studies here benefited from an overall supportive context, despite the occasional setback. Achieving a virtuous cycle that reinforces progressive change requires an element of coincidence and luck. And the converse is often equally true: a well-conceived and -implemented programme can fail to achieve transformational impact for reasons beyond its control.

UNDP has sometimes been described as being an ‘**opportunist with principles**,’ identifying opportunities for **successful development cooperation** within a **principled framework**.

9. External force majeure

External factors are sometimes a major ingredient in — or an impediment to — a programme's success. Such factors may be economic or political, and national, regional or global in scope. National calamities, regional conflicts and global economic crises can all disrupt the best-designed development programmes. Achievement of sustained transformational change depends in part on the absence of negative 'externalities'. On the other hand, some external factors can provide an opportunity for innovation. Under such circumstances, well-positioned development cooperation can receive a boost in effectiveness.

10. Post-conflict time-frame

All of the above lessons apply in equal measure to development cooperation that addresses peace-building and institutional development in a post-crisis setting. However, the time-frame for achieving transformational change is characteristically longer than for more conventional development situations. The political convulsions and violence that characterize most crises take time to dissipate. Addressing the underlying causes as well as building trust and confidence takes time and can experience setbacks.

In an ideal world, these factors would be designed into development programmes at the outset. In reality, most are difficult to anticipate, and their influence is often only apparent in retrospect. UNDP has documented seven cases of successful development cooperation that contributed to transformational results, but it could equally well have documented seven initiatives that foundered for various reasons.

It is in the DNA of UNDP to energetically seek ways in which to advance human development and the Global Agenda set out in the Millennium Declaration, the MDGs and many other international treaties and declarations. Indeed, it is its *raison d'être*.



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