UNDP in Argentina has established clear development outcomes focused on achieving the MDGs and poverty reduction, fostering democratic governance and promoting energy and environment for sustainable development. An evaluation conducted in 2008 found that UNDP’s cooperation with Argentina was aligned to national priorities and showed a rapid capacity to respond to emerging development challenges such as the crisis of 2001. Also, UNDP’s positioning was recognized as a prestigious organization with the potential to bring legitimacy, neutrality, credibility and knowledge into the development process. However, there is still room for improvement in the area of assuring sustainability of benefits and results of the UNDP supported interventions.

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES
Since the early part of the 20th century, Argentina has had the highest per capita income in Latin America and one of the lowest levels of poverty in this region. Argentina maintained its high ranking in the Human Development Index during the second half of the 20th century, even though growth rates decreased and poverty levels increased. Today, the country still faces significant development challenges as the result of income and regional disparities.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS
UNDP cooperation programme in Argentina was aligned to national priorities and demonstrated a responsive capacity to emerging development challenges such as the crisis of 2001. UNDP’s cooperation frameworks and the objectives pursued were consistent with national development needs and were considered relevant. It has also demonstrated good capacity to adapt to changing development circumstances and flexibly adjusting the portfolio of projects to respond to the agreements emerged from the Argentinean Dialogue after the crisis of 2001.

When requested by national government, UNDP had the capacity to play a convener and honest-broker role by bringing together development actors from government, civil society and the political system at federal, provincial and municipal levels to face common challenges. The most important development actors of Argentina, including political parties, faith-based groups among Catholics, Jews, Muslims and Protestants, civil society organizations, academics and the media gathered to deliberate at the Argentinean Dialogue and found solutions to the political, institutional and economic crises facing the country. UNDP played a key role in that process. After the crisis the political system reassumed its capacity, however the culture of dialogue continued and permeated discussions at national, provincial and municipal level with the support of various UNDP projects reaffirming the democratic values of Argentinean society.

The technical and analytical capacity of UNDP staff is widely valued and recognized. Engaging in a policy dialogue in Argentina, a country with a sophisticated professional and intellectual capacity is challenging. UNDP had established not only a reputation of efficient project administration capacity but also a reputation of conducting significant contributions to the analysis of development challenges from a human development perspective.

Some development actors perceive UNDP mainly as a resource administrator, hence not recognizing its full potential role as development partner in Argentina.

Key partners acknowledge UNDP as a prestigious organization with the potential to bring legitimacy, credibility and knowledge into the development process. However, some partners expressed concern about UNDP’s concentration in the administration of government resources. This concentration poses risks since it may limit its advocacy role for promoting public policies with a human development perspective.
The sustainability of some UNDP interventions was questioned and these did not always develop sufficiently their exit strategies.

More attention needs to be paid to the sustainability of the benefits and results of UNDP supported interventions. In some cases it was identified that the benefits ceased after the conclusion of UNDP projects. The strengthening of administrative implementation capacities of institutions has been limited, in those cases, to developing the capacity to execute UNDP projects without clear exit strategies. That was particularly the case for projects of administrative nature.

The project portfolio dedicated to Development Support Services (DSS) did decrease significantly in the time under evaluation screening a positive trend towards a more value-added portfolio, in terms of technical assistance. Since 2003 UNDP has contributed to the formulation, and most importantly, to the execution of various government emergency programmes in response to the crisis. Many of these programmes had ended by 2005. In addition, the strategic turn implemented since 2005 has resulted in a more balanced programme portfolio, as the share of big DSS projects has diminished considerably.

The “giro estratégico” has been a positive shift into the right direction.

The direction of the strategic turn encompassed an institutional and capacity-building strategy, focusing on the articulation of demands for a greater and better quality social bond to human development; strengthening citizens capacities for action and participation in a more complex and uncertain context; and deepening a territorial presence particularly in those provinces and municipalities with greater disparities. These orientations together with more emphasis on designing exit strategies for new projects are seen as a positive shift.

LESSONS LEARNED

The work of UNDP in Argentina brings in two lessons learned for the organization:

1. The importance of a highly qualified human factor endowment for providing technical assistance in middle-income countries
2. The need of a strategic cooperation framework for the UN system, even if it is not a corporate requirement, enhances the opportunity for more coherent and effective UN cooperation.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- UNDP Argentina should support institutional capacity development with a long-term perspective of recovering the strategic role of the state in promoting inclusive and sustainable human development.
- Continue supporting dialogue and deliberative mechanisms among different levels of government and society (national, provincial and municipal) to reach agreements on how to reduce regional and local disparities under the MDG’s conceptual framework.
- Continue developing and fostering inter-sector initiatives such as the ones recommended in national Human Development Reports and MDGs reports based on new diagnoses and empirical evidence about the development constraints faced by Argentina.
- Deepen the “Girop Estratégico” and the policy advice and technical cooperation role played by UNDP in the formulation of public policies with a Human Development perspective.
- Ensure the sustainability of the benefits of UNDP interventions once they are finished by properly considering exist strategies.
- Support the systematization and lessons learnt from good practices undertaken by the Argentinean government in the framework of South-South Cooperation.
- Ensure the capacity response of UNDP to emerging consequences of global recession and its impact on Argentina by adopting a flexible approach to programming.