



INDEPENDENT
Evaluation Office

United Nations Development Programme

REFLECTIONS

LESSONS FROM EVALUATIONS:
LEARNING FROM PAST CRISES
FOR RECOVERING FROM COVID-19

REFLECTIONS. LESSONS FROM EVALUATIONS: LEARNING FROM PAST CRISES FOR RECOVERING FROM COVID-19

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ABOUT THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OFFICE OF UNDP

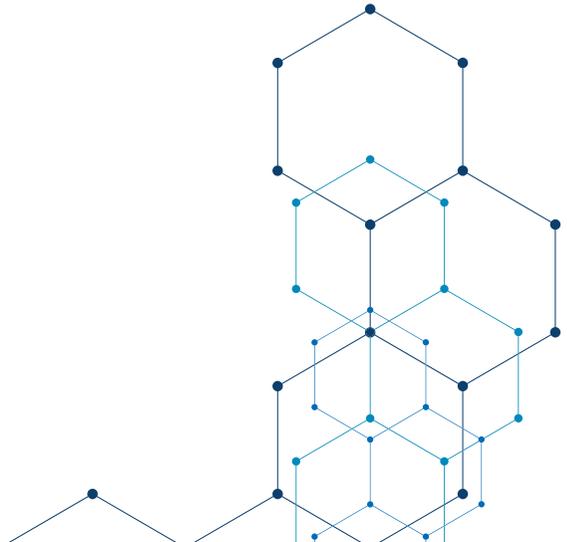
By generating evaluative evidence, the IEO supports UNDP to achieve greater accountability and facilitates improved learning from experience. The IEO enhances UNDP's development effectiveness through its programmatic and thematic evaluations and contributes to organizational transparency.

ABOUT REFLECTIONS

The IEO's *Reflections* series looks into past evaluations and captures lessons learned from UNDP's work across its programmes. These rapid evidence assessments mobilize evaluative knowledge to provide valuable insights for improved decision-making and better development results. This edition offers lessons from evaluations of UNDP's work in crisis settings to support UNDP decision-makers, especially at the country level, in their COVID-19 crisis response and recovery efforts.

REFLECTIONS

LESSONS FROM EVALUATIONS:
LEARNING FROM PAST CRISES
FOR RECOVERING FROM COVID-19





FOREWORD

This first volume of *Reflections*, a book by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), focuses on the lessons learned from UNDP's longstanding efforts and partnerships with countries to respond to crises.

That includes everything from our work to bolster health systems to efforts to boost environmental protection and accelerate digitalization. Founded upon a decade's worth of in-depth evaluations of UNDP's engagement in such critical areas, this volume has generated a total of 61 lessons that decision-makers can immediately leverage as they support communities to respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amongst a range of pertinent areas, *Reflections* identifies important lessons learned from the evaluation of UNDP support to health systems during and following humanitarian crises. That includes our extensive experience in the procurement of medicines and other health-care products during disease outbreaks such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), tuberculosis and malaria. Or look to the lessons learned from UNDP's support to strengthen the vaccine supply chain in India by digitizing information on vaccine stocks. It may hold key lessons to help ensure the supply and fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

In the context of 255 million full-time jobs lost in 2020 alone, UNDP's role in leading the United Nations socioeconomic response to the COVID-19 pandemic is a crucial one.* As of 1 February 2021, 144 socioeconomic impact assessments have been completed across 97 countries as a result of dedicated efforts of United Nations Country Teams, with the technical lead and support of UNDP. Those assessments have highlighted a series of impacts that urgently need to be

* https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767028.pdf.

addressed, from rising poverty and inequality to food insecurity and the shocking spike in gender-based violence. *Reflections* can help to shape sustainable *solutions* to these pressing needs. For instance, there is a need to implement shock-responsive social protection systems in many countries, including life-saving cash transfers. UNDP can share its longstanding expertise in this area – including our engagement in the aftermath of the 2016 earthquake in Ecuador and during the protracted conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, for instance. Based on data collected from our support to 41 countries, UNDP can also offer a range of best practices when it comes to designing gender-responsive social protection and implementing measures to support women-led businesses. Such areas will play a pivotal role in helping countries to *build forward better* from the pandemic.

As we embark on unprecedented efforts to support countries to get back on a positive development trajectory, this evidence-based advice gathered from in-depth evaluations will be invaluable in informing UNDP's crisis response efforts. Harvesting insights from evaluations is crucial not only to design and implement our programmes – but also to foster a continuous research and development *mindset* amongst our personnel. Indeed, *Reflections* itself will continue to evolve – for instance by leveraging the power of Artificial Intelligence to extract lessons from other open evaluation databases. This venture may open up new opportunities for collaboration with our United Nations sister agencies. In sum, as a knowledge product that is clear, concise and accessible, *Reflections* can help decision-makers to now make the *right choices* to get the global Sustainable Development Goals firmly back on track – towards that greener, more inclusive and more sustainable future.



Achim Steiner
Administrator
United Nations Development Programme



PREFACE

The COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global crisis of our time, with devastating social, economic and political consequences worldwide and the loss of over 2 million lives as of January 2021.

As a leading member of the United Nations family, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has played a key role in supporting countries during previous disease outbreaks, such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), tuberculosis and malaria. UNDP has also assisted economic recovery and job creation in countries following conflicts and natural disasters, supported the development and implementation of social protection-related policies for countries in crisis and provided a wide range of governance support to countries, both during and after crises. This wealth of experience can help UNDP to implement evidence-based decisions based on lessons learned from past experiences, as the organization is working with Governments in their response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and in laying the foundation for recovery.

Real-time sharing of experiences, lessons and insights is critical to an effective crisis response and to recovery efforts, and in identifying solutions that will lead to sustainable development results. The UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) plays an important role as a central knowledge provider. To support UNDP preparedness, response and recovery efforts, the IEO has undertaken a review of lessons from evaluations of UNDP work in crisis contexts over the past decade, which led to the current publication. This compendium is the first of a book series to be published annually – *Reflections* – using evaluative evidence to support those facing urgent policy decisions, especially at the country level. *Reflections* analyses UNDP independent and decentralized evaluations and present key lessons learned in a concise format. Given the urgency of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the first edition of *Reflections* focuses on UNDP support in crisis settings.

Reflections are the result of the hard work and dedication of the IEO team. I would like to take this opportunity to express appreciation to the acting Deputy Director Alan Fox and Senior Evaluation Specialist Tina Tordjman-Nebe for coordinating the 2020 papers and webinar series and for putting this publication together. Special thanks go to the IEO authors, Heather Bryant, Anna Guerraggio, Richard Jones, Fumika Ouchi, Tina Tordjman-Nebe and Vijaya Vadivelu, as well as external consultants, Claudia Marcondes, Sue Nelson and Peter Whalley, and co-authors and IEO Research Associates, Gilbert Adjimoti, Gédéon Djissa, Landry Fanou, Eduardo Gomez Rivero, Tobias Schillings, Claudia Villanueva and Elizabeth Wojnar. This book would not have come to life without the support of the IEO Communications Team, Sasha Jahic and Nicki Mokhtari, the IT/Evaluation Resource Centre team, Anish Pradhan and Yang Cheng, and Programme Associate Maristela Gabric.

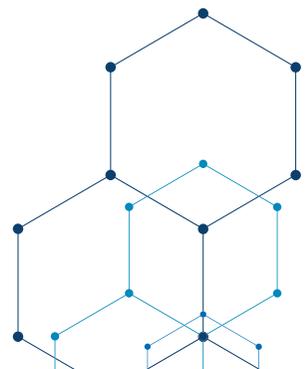
This unprecedented global crisis requires us not only to come together to combat the pandemic but also to find creative ways to build back better. Recovery from the COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to build a more resilient world for the future, with safer, healthier, more sustainable and equitable societies. The IEO stands ready to support UNDP and Member States with evaluative evidence to support and guide a green recovery that transforms the lives of the people we serve.



Oscar A. Garcia

Director

Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP



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1. REFLECTIONS

📖 Learning from past evaluations for improved decision-making and better development results 📖



INTRODUCTION

Anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and committed to the principles of universality, equality and leaving no one behind, the vision of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is to support countries in achieving sustainable development through efforts to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions, accelerate structural transformations and build resilience to crises and shocks.

UNDP is increasingly applying an evidence-based lens to the formulation of its strategies and approaches, drawing on lessons arising from programme and project implementation, analyses of results and performance factors and the findings, conclusions and recommendations of audits and independent and decentralized evaluations. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP plays an important role in this process, acting as a central and impartial knowledge provider helping UNDP to make decisions based on evaluative evidence.

In 2020, the IEO launched *Reflections* – a new knowledge product that captures lessons from past evaluations and provides valuable insights for organizational learning and improved decision-making towards better development results. The *Reflections* papers respond to long-standing requests from UNDP managers

for the IEO to provide syntheses and draw out lessons from the thousands of evaluations of UNDP development activities carried out over the past decades. The primary audiences for these knowledge products are UNDP Resident Representatives and their country-based teams, including monitoring and evaluation staff and policy practitioners. The lessons presented in this compendium of *Reflections* are expected to be useful for their dialogues with national counterparts on how to design and implement responses to the COVID-19 crisis



based on what has worked well in previous crises. Due to the broader nature of these lessons, the papers should be of interest to UNDP staff in regional and headquarters locations and to external stakeholders. All papers are available online, translated into the six official United Nations languages and disseminated broadly. The IEO encourages UNDP country offices and headquarters bureaux to share the lessons widely.

REFLECTIONS 2020: THE UNDP AND IEO RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



“In managing this crisis, we ... have a unique opportunity. Done right, we can steer the recovery towards a more sustainable and inclusive path... We must ensure that lessons are learned, and that this crisis provides a watershed moment for health emergency preparedness and for investment in critical 21st century public services and the effective delivery of global public goods.”

António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, 19 March 2020

With over 2 million lives lost to date and countless more people suffering from the long-term and as yet unknown effects of COVID-19, health systems are stretched thin across the globe. But the pandemic is much more than a health crisis: It is also a humanitarian, socio-economic and human rights crisis. According to the World Bank, as of October 2020, COVID-19 is expected to drive between 88 and 115 million people into extreme poverty in 2020, reversing more than two decades of progress in reducing poverty in the world's poorest countries. The pandemic is derailing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in almost all countries, pushing economic, social and environmental development targets beyond reach. Education has been disrupted by the closing of schools at all levels from pre-primary to university, and in countries/regions with inadequate or no Internet access, children and young people who lack resources are unable to

participate in distance learning and are falling further behind. Women carry multiple burdens, minding children who are not in school or are learning at home, possibly struggling with reduced income and acting as caregivers for their extended families, all while trying to do their own work, paid or unpaid. Gender-based violence has increased during the crisis and because of enforced stay-at-home measures, women can be locked in with their abusers and cut off from support services. With 400 million jobs lost due to the pandemic, young people are facing lost opportunities and reduced earning potential. All of these are happening against a background of increased State authority and shrinking “democratic space” as shown by lack of information about the pandemic, increased State regulation, government use of emergency powers and discriminatory application of lockdown measures.

UNDP is the technical lead for the United Nations socioeconomic response to COVID-19. Its country offices are working with United Nations country teams to assess the impact of the pandemic on economies and communities, to help Governments develop and implement effective strategies for



response and recovery. An analysis of the socioeconomic assessments undertaken to date reveals there are many challenges to be met if UNDP and the wider United Nations system are to successfully help countries recover and build back better. These include: a differentiated impact on countries; rising poverty and inequality; a disproportionate impact on women; weak social protection, especially for workers in the informal sector; inadequate social infrastructure; tourism dependency, especially among small island developing States; food insecurity; remittance dependence, as millions of migrants have lost their jobs and income, reducing their contributions back home; and a digital divide.

UNDP HAS SUPPORTED GOVERNMENTS BY:

- **Helping them maintain business continuity to provide services and “keep their doors open” to citizens during the pandemic**
- **Identifying the most vulnerable groups. For example, UNDP has prioritized gender-responsive social protection and women’s economic recovery in over 41 countries, including through cash transfers and supporting women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises**
- **Leveraging its limited resources to partner with Governments, businesses and civil society to design systemic investments such as digital finance or telemedicine that address underlying conditions**

At the outset of the pandemic, UNDP presented a three- to six-month response offer covering three thematic areas: health systems support; inclusive and integrated crisis management and response; and social and economic impact needs assessment and response. The COVID-19 Rapid Response Facility was launched in March 2020, funded by existing resources and capitalized with an initial \$20 million, enabling UNDP to offer immediate assistance to countries for their national response. The second phase of the response, “Beyond Recovery: Towards 2020”, is designed to help decision-makers look towards the horizon of 2030 by focusing on four main areas: governance; social protection; a green economy; and digital disruption. It encompasses the UNDP role in technically leading the United Nations socioeconomic response. Real-time sharing of experiences, lessons and insights is critical to an effective response to the ongoing crisis, to continued recovery efforts and in identifying solutions for sustainable development results.

Because the launch of the *Reflections* series coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for an immediate response by the United Nations system, this first series of papers focuses on lessons from evaluations of previous UNDP strategies, programming and activities during times of crisis. The purpose is to provide practical and timely insights to support UNDP decision-makers to prepare for, respond to and recover from the ongoing pandemic, focusing

particularly on the most vulnerable members of society. In establishing the topics for the first edition of the *Reflections* series, the IEO considered the UNDP development setting and the six “signature solutions” in the current UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021. The IEO identified the types of engagement for UNDP in crisis contexts and used this information as a mechanism to offer insights for the UNDP COVID-19 response effort, which meant paying special attention to lessons from UNDP support in economic and health emergencies. The IEO sought suggestions for topics not only from its evaluation staff and external advisors, but also from UNDP senior managers at headquarters and regional levels. Finally, the topics under consideration were reviewed in terms of whether there was sufficient evaluative information available in the Evaluation Resource Centre to provide meaningful lessons. The 2020 edition of *Reflections* therefore covers the following areas of UNDP support, where UNDP can draw on decades of practical experience in crisis response and recovery in line with the humanitarian-development nexus:

- **Health sector.** The COVID-19 pandemic has strained health systems in even the wealthiest countries, let alone those in developing countries. UNDP can apply its system-strengthening approach to help countries rebuild their health systems while focusing on vulnerable groups. 
- **Social protection.** The loss of jobs and income for millions of people around the world has highlighted the need for expanded social protection systems, especially cash transfers. UNDP can focus on inclusive social protection that includes carers and workers in the formal and informal sectors. 
- **Livelihood restoration and job creation.** Many of the jobs lost due to the pandemic will never come back. UNDP can draw on its experience in short-term measures and the transition to longer-term recovery. 
- **Governance.** Governments around the world have adopted a range of measures to contain the pandemic which have underlined the importance of good governance and rule of law. UNDP offers a wide range of governance support, ranging from electoral cycle support to justice system reform. 



- **Local governance.** The pandemic has highlighted the importance of local governance for provision of services even as many government offices were closed. UNDP can support local government institutions to stay open with e-governance and ensure the continuity of essential services.



- **Electoral processes.** The pandemic has disrupted or caused the postponement of elections in several countries. Even when they go ahead, they can risk public safety. UNDP works with Governments and electoral authorities in some 60 countries a year to ensure that elections are risk informed as well as free and fair.



- **Environment and natural resource management.** The pandemic has had positive and negative effects on the environment, from reduced emissions due to fewer people flying to increased waste from discarded personal protective equipment. Through its green economy pillar of “Beyond Recovery”, UNDP is helping countries to translate their Nationally Determined Contributions into solutions.



- **Waste management.** The need for disposable personal protective equipment was apparent from the onset of the pandemic, but also highlighted the need for safe means of disposal for medical waste. This is just one aspect of UNDP support for system strengthening for waste management, which can also be a source of green jobs as well as promoting a cleaner environment.



- **Digitalization.** Most of the world’s population lacks access to new technologies and the resources to acquire them, leaving them in danger of being left behind. UNDP can work with Governments to implement digital solutions for building back better, like biometric equipment for voter registration or digital finance to pay government workers’ salaries, all with the aim of narrowing the digital divide.

While each *Reflections* paper highlighted the lessons learned for the relevant topics, the IEO analysed and observed five key takeaways that cut across papers. The key takeaways can be of practical use to country offices as they prepare for and address future crises, and to the

organization as a whole as it positions itself to respond to upcoming shocks. As crises become increasingly complex, the need for a coordinated, multisectoral inter-agency response has never been more important. Identifying the UNDP niche is key to successful collaboration and to ensuring that UNDP adds maximum value in this concerted effort. The five overarching takeaways are outlined in section 3.

METHODOLOGY

From a methodological perspective, *Reflections* has been conceived as rapid evidence assessments (REAs). REA is a process of bringing together information and knowledge from a range of sources to inform debates and urgent policy decisions on specific issues. Like better-known systematic reviews, REAs synthesize the findings of single studies following a standard protocol but do not analyse the full literature on a topic. REAs make concessions in relation to the breadth, depth and comprehensiveness of the search to produce a quicker result.

For its 2020 edition, *Reflections* provide a synthesis of evaluative evidence posted to the UNDP [Evaluation Resource Centre](#) (ERC) over the past decade. Country-level and thematic evaluations conducted by the IEO are an important source, given their independence and high credibility. Additionally, high-quality decentralized evaluations commissioned by country offices have also been considered. Within each review, the emphasis is on identifying consistent findings, conclusions and recommendations that capture lessons relevant for UNDP, and on teasing out factors affecting performance in the given area of UNDP support for learning purposes.

WHAT IS A LESSON?

According to the [OECD/DAC Glossary](#), lessons or “lessons learned” can be defined as:

lesson

“Generalizations based on evaluation experiences with projects, programs, or policies that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths or weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that affect performance, outcome, and impact” (p. 26).

For the purposes of *Reflections*, lessons:

- Comprise both established “best/good practices” that are reported in more than one evaluation and “promising practices” identified in case studies or single project/programme evaluations. The latter is included particularly where referring to innovative programming or pilots, to spark the reader’s interest and the programmer’s desire to consider replication. “Emerging practices” (ideas or policies with little proof of results) are not used as evidence for lessons in the *Reflections* series.
- Include both positive and negative results, i.e., lessons on what worked (for whom, why, under which circumstances) as well as what didn’t work. Credibility would be at risk if *Reflections* papers only accentuated the positive.
- Pay attention to HOW the result came about: what implementation factors made UNDP interventions effective or hampered effectiveness? Which mechanisms did UNDP use to achieve good (or bad) performance?
- Avoid stating the obvious. Most well-established lessons are also typically the most redundant ones (e.g., national ownership increases sustainability). *Reflections* lessons are pitched at a high level of expertise and detail and avoid repeating truisms.

TOPIC SELECTION/REFINEMENT

Topics were proposed by the IEO Management Team based on environmental scanning, including consultation with intended users and UNDP management. Pre-selected topics address the main issues and risks faced by the organization. A final selection of topics was made once availability of a critical mass of evidence on the proposed topics was confirmed based on searching the UNDP [ERC](#).

INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Evaluations published in English, French and Spanish on the given theme over the period 2010 to 2020 were considered for inclusion. For the 2020 series, only evaluations conducted or commissioned by UNDP were included.

Emphasis was placed on higher-quality evaluation designs conducted by the IEO (e.g., thematic evaluations, independent country programme evaluations/reviews, assessments of development results), after which high-quality decentralized evaluations commissioned by country offices were considered (e.g., evaluations of outcomes, projects, United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, country and regional programmes and Global Environmental Facility (GEF) evaluations). Sampling followed a stepwise approach until saturation was reached and lessons could be derived. Non-evaluative documents (existing literature reviews, programmatic or policy papers, etc.) were excluded from the body of evidence used for synthesis/lesson generation.

SEARCHING AND SCREENING

The source for gleaning lessons for *Reflections* was the UNDP repository of evaluation information – the [ERC](#). For each *Reflections* paper, an initial long list of evaluation evidence was assembled by conducting key word searches in the ERC in the three target languages, identifying related thematic evaluations through title searches, and finding independent country programme evaluations/reviews and assessments of development results published since 2010. Authors also accessed the current and past UNDP strategic plans and other relevant UNDP planning documents, identified outputs that relate to the theme under scrutiny, and searched the ERC for evaluations related to these outputs.

The resulting long list of available evaluation evidence was narrowed down by title screening, or by screening executive summaries, until the target sample size of 40-60 evaluations was reached. If the ERC yielded too large a body of knowledge, midterm evaluations and other lower-impact/lower-quality evaluations were set aside. In certain cases, the IEO decided to limit its selection to a number of focus countries, with information relating to others being dropped. Focus countries were identified based on long lists drawn up by three independent judges, mindful of regional coverage.

The search function is likely to undergo revision during 2021, with the advent of new search capabilities through augmented intelligence systems now under development.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

All evaluations synthesized in *Reflections* must be of high quality and in some cases, vetting was needed prior to inclusion. In particular, the use of decentralized evaluations was limited to those that have been quality assessed at a rating of (4) moderately satisfactory or higher within the IEO quality assessment mechanism. In the future, the IEO may create its own tool for quickly considering the certainty of evidence for use in the *Reflections* series.

DATA EXTRACTION AND CODING

Once a finite body of evidence was identified for synthesis, most authors imported reports into [NVivo](#) in their entirety. In the software, further key word searches can be carried out to extract relevant text portions, if preferred.

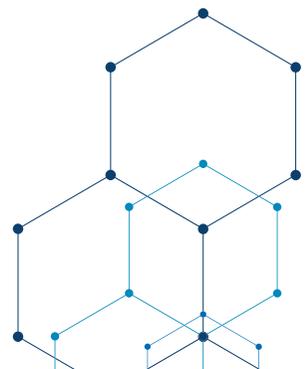
Coding for *Reflections* was both deductive and inductive, i.e., using a pre-identified set of core codes and supplementing these with new, emerging ones as coding moves along. By analysing and sorting codes into categories, authors were able to detect consistent and overarching themes within the data.

SYNTHESIS

Themes identified in the body of evidence were synthesized narratively in the form of five to eight lessons, not to exceed six pages in length, excluding references.

The selection of lessons followed both a top-down and a bottom-up logic. Bottom-up, recurring themes from the coding exercise described above were analysed through qualitative content analysis (computer-assisted or not). Top-down, authors considered the UNDP Strategic Plan, relevant thematic strategy documents and some drew on key informants to identify key areas of interest to the audience. Corresponding materials from the bottom-up synthesis was then prioritized in the write-up.

Lessons were presented going from the general to the specific. Where lessons are particularly applicable to a certain development context or time frame, this is noted.



2. LESSONS FROM EVALUATIONS

📖 To inform the UNDP COVID-19 response the first edition of *Reflections* focuses on UNDP support in crisis settings as presented in the following papers 📖

HEALTH SECTOR

Heather Bryant* and Gédéon Djissa**



According to the World Health Organization (WHO), COVID-19 has revealed critical gaps in health systems in areas such as surveillance, diagnostics, essential medicines, protective equipment, supply chains, infection prevention and control, water, sanitation and hygiene and the health workforce.

Health systems support was one of the key components of the initial UNDP crisis response offer to Governments. Of the initiatives supported through the Rapid Response Facility, 26 percent focused on health. As part of its immediate crisis response in the health sector, UNDP supported 88 Governments to procure personal protective equipment and medical commodities worth over \$80 million. UNDP worked with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in 13 countries to mobilize over \$10 million by reprogramming and using savings from existing grants.¹ UNDP support included procuring much-needed medical supplies, strengthening health infrastructure, managing health waste, quickly leveraging digital technologies and ensuring that health workers were paid. UNDP has played a key role in supporting countries during previous disease outbreaks such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS, SARS, tuberculosis and malaria. Drawing on its experience and history of working with the private and public sectors, UNDP will help countries to urgently and effectively respond to COVID-19 as part of its mission to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities and build resilience to crises and shocks.

UNDP support for health system strengthening will continue under the “Beyond Recovery” offer as part of the focus on social protection. This will include advancing universal health coverage and supporting health-care systems and services, including for key populations and

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people living with HIV, in partnership with WHO, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Global Fund and other partners.

This paper focuses on health system support. It identifies important lessons learned from evaluating past UNDP support to health systems during and following humanitarian crises.

AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

1	Procurement services often require complementary capacity development.	2	Strengthening health infrastructure has multiple entry points.	3	Strengthening capacities to manage health waste requires strong technical support.
4	Mobilizing local capacities to leverage digital technologies can contribute significantly.	5	Ensuring health workers are paid in time expands care with positive effects on local economies and access to financial services.	6	Focusing on local health services reduces barriers to access for women.
7	Engaging people with disabilities in the development of strategies helps ensure barrier-free services.	8	Engaging with penitentiary systems can help reach at-risk groups during health crises.	9	Collaborating beyond traditional health sector partners can bring additional benefits.

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Procurement services often require complementary capacity development.

UNDP has extensive experience in procurement of medicines and other health-care products, especially through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, in many countries (for example Angola, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Zimbabwe). A key benefit of this support is a significant reduction in prices² and even lowering transaction costs throughout procurement lines and the health services chain.³ Evaluations also highlight the importance of providing support beyond procurement, for example to inventory management services for medicines and supplies,⁴ including overseeing internal distribution of drugs to eliminate drug stock-outs⁵ and addressing weak infrastructure (electricity, storage facilities).⁶ A recurring theme is the need for

sufficient capacity development to ensure sustainability: even in crises, country offices should focus not only on the efficient delivery of medicines and other goods to counterparts, but also on supporting the establishment of robust national procurement systems that are open, transparent and bring savings to the country.⁷

2 Strengthening health infrastructure has multiple entry points.

UNDP provides a range of support to health infrastructure. In Argentina, for example, UNDP contributes to the improvement of provincial health-care services by supporting the modernization of health systems and the interconnection of the health care network, primarily by recruiting experts and advising on the procurement of equipment and supplies.⁸ In Somalia, UNDP contributes indirectly by encouraging women to take part in community discussions on ways of spending infrastructure fund allocations, resulting in an increase in projects supporting schools and health clinics.⁹ Many evaluations point to the work UNDP has done to strengthen civil society organizations (CSOs) which complements the formal health sector through critical community outreach, especially to vulnerable groups, communications and advocacy, and even data collection and monitoring which can help track, prevent and treat outbreaks.

Lessons from work on anti-corruption and improved service delivery point to multiple potential benefits. In Tunisia, as part of an “islands of integrity” initiative, an assessment of health-care services revealed deviations. It recommended setting up a queue system at the Djerba general hospital, which is expected to improve patient reception and minimize bribery risks.¹⁰ Similarly, pilot efforts to apply new norms for quality services in the emergency hospital in Yaoundé, Cameroon to improve communication and transparency,¹¹ suggest that support to health infrastructure can include new standards for service delivery that have both immediate health benefits including mechanisms ensuring social distancing and longer-term improvements to service delivery. Again, a critical message is that even in responding to a crisis, UNDP must plan for sustainability. Multiple evaluations highlight weaknesses in preparing national counterparts to take over the

management of Global Fund grants or cite regression after UNDP withdrawal.¹² Extensive training and close engagement with national partners throughout are essential to help bridge the response to the crisis to longer-term development.

3 Strengthening capacities to manage health waste requires strong technical support.

Health care waste management is a highly technical area of intervention, and evaluations of support to these systems point to challenges in procurement such as drafting the technical specifications, and to production, where even with the development of a local prototype, not all countries have industries with the technical capacities to produce according to specifications.¹³ For example, in 2014 in the United Republic of Tanzania, local manufacturers lacked the capacity to produce the autoclaves that had been designed. This led to the identification of an industrial partner in South Africa that was able to produce the machines. UNDP then provided the autoclaves to the three Ebola-affected countries.¹⁴ On-site technical experts are crucial to ensuring proper installation and management of waste and training of all stakeholders in the waste management chain (i.e., not just doctors and nurses, but also cleaners and other hospital workers). Regional projects may provide advantages: economies of scale in purchasing autoclaves and other equipment lower unit costs and sharing of training materials and lessons learned may help to resolve difficulties.¹⁵

4 Mobilizing local capacities to leverage digital technologies can contribute significantly to improved health system management, with positive side effects.

In adopting digital technologies, it is essential to keep in mind that not everyone has equal access to technology. UNDP has supported the integration of new technologies into health systems in a wide range of contexts. An electronic patient management system to capture information on perceptions of HIV-positive patients (patients on antiretroviral therapy) has been introduced in Zimbabwe.¹⁶ A hospital in Tunisia has been equipped with information technology to improve management

of the appointment system and digital media files.¹⁷ Guinea-Bissau is using mobile tablets to conduct real-time monitoring of local health centres to help map, track, prevent and treat malaria outbreaks and coordinate rapid responses as well as improve overall national data collection.¹⁸ UNDP support has enabled the development or implementation of local solutions using new technologies. For example, in Bangladesh, UNDP supported the implementation of a telemedicine solution developed by a group at Dhaka University. Thirty “Union Digital Centres” now offer medical consultations through computer or smartphone (an interesting model for first consultations in case of suspected COVID-19 infection, instead of a patient travelling to and waiting in a health clinic).¹⁹ In India, UNDP supported the establishment of an electronic vaccine intelligence network (eVIN), modelled on the existing vaccine stock management and supply chain system. The eVIN digitalizes entire vaccine stocks and tracks their movement to all the cold-chain points in the country, along with their storage temperature. This latter intervention resulted in a decrease in the stock-outs of vaccines from 10 percent to 1 percent and in considerable savings by substantially reducing the number of out-of-date vaccines wasted. In addition, the project had positive side effects in terms of better record keeping, promotion of a transparent and accountable real-time system, use of the management information system for decision-making and older women learning information technology (IT) through smartphones, among others.²⁰ However, in other situations, access to technology, infrastructure and/or literacy levels have made it more difficult to reach women and vulnerable groups, including people living with disabilities, with digital solutions.²¹ Finally, digital technologies need to be introduced in line with country capacities. On the one hand, an interesting lesson from Argentina was that the full use of new health exam equipment was constrained by the lack of digital medical record keeping, which likely could have been integrated.²² On the other, in Afghanistan, the push to create biometric identification to reduce electoral fraud led to delays in elections, which is counter-intuitive when even highly developed countries were not yet adopting these technologies.²³

5 Ensuring health workers are paid in time expands care with positive effects on local economies and access to financial services.

UNDP gained significant experience with emergency public service sector payments for health care workers in West Africa in the response to the Ebola crisis. The programme retained health workers during the epidemic by ensuring that timely payments and hazard incentives were provided to about 50,000 community and health care workers on the front lines. Zimbabwe's Harmonized Health Worker Retention Scheme also demonstrated that retention allowances reduce vacancies and allow expansion of care.²⁴ The digitized payment system used also had the unintended benefit of bringing health workers into the formal banking system. Receiving payments required them to open bank accounts,²⁵ which points to the significant potential to coordinate with existing programmes on inclusive finance and mobile money. In addition, ensuring payments to local health workers can help boost the local economy, as demonstrated by support to police and gendarmerie salaries in the Central African Republic.²⁶

6 Focusing on local health services reduces barriers to access for women.

Health crises hit women especially hard. The Ebola crisis, for example, affected women in particular, as they played the role of health workers, caregivers and heads of household.²⁷ In health crises, women often take on unpaid caregiver roles at the expense of their own careers and personal well-being, with impacts on the family and local economies.²⁸ Many barriers to gender equality exist in the health sector, including a shortage of female staff, limited transportation options, the need for women to travel with male escorts in certain contexts and limited decision-making power including on decisions regarding their own health.²⁹ Strengthening local health clinics,³⁰ promoting engagement of female health workers and volunteers,³¹ ensuring that communication strategies use inclusive language (including acknowledgement of transgender people) and address stereotypes, stigma and socio-cultural patterns³² all have helped women to access health services in Afghanistan, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Mali.

7 Engaging people with disabilities in the development of strategies helps ensure barrier-free services.

In the past, minimal efforts have been made to integrate persons with disabilities into UNDP activities related to health, including work related to HIV/AIDS and projects funded by the Global Fund. Development initiatives in health-care settings are often ill-attuned to the necessity of creating barrier-free facilities and services. Most efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria have not actively included individuals with disabilities as part of their core beneficiaries. They often produce materials on ways of reducing the risk of contracting these diseases in inaccessible formats.³³ There are some positive examples: in Rwanda, UNDP supported the Rwanda Union of the Deaf to train sign language interpreters for health facilities to assist deaf patients access health services.³⁴ Support to the COVID-19 response should be disability-inclusive. The formulation of effective disability-inclusive strategies requires consultations with people with disabilities and their representative organizations and their participation in the development of responses.³⁵

8 Engaging with penitentiary systems can help reach at-risk groups during health crises.

In Sierra Leone, correctional services were highly impacted by the Ebola crisis. With the assistance of Prison Watch, a non-governmental organization, UNDP helped prevent an Ebola virus disease outbreak in prisons.³⁶ The central prison in Freetown experienced not a single case of Ebola, due in part to UNDP-supported containment and sanitation measures implemented there.³⁷ In Armenia, an HIV/AIDS prevention system was established in penitentiaries and police units, with the military and at-risk groups participating in prevention activities.³⁸ Country offices with ongoing projects engaging with penitentiary systems – whether in governance or HIV/AIDS or other portfolios – have an opportunity to link with support to the health sector to prepare and protect vulnerable groups.

9 Collaborating beyond traditional health sector partners can bring additional benefits.

The UNDP COVID-19 response highlights the importance of working together for an effective response, “leveraging its longstanding partnership with the World Health Organization, the [Global Fund] and UNAIDS” and in partnership with “national, regional and global financial institutions and the private sector...” and of course national Governments.³⁹ Evaluations point to the importance of partnerships in the fight against HIV/AIDS, for example with United Nations partners such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund in Zimbabwe⁴⁰ or with CSOs for community outreach.⁴¹ Evaluations also highlight successful partnerships with other organizations not traditionally associated with work in the health sector. For example, UNDP successfully partnered with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) on the Ebola worker payments project. In Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, UNDP programme management skills were combined with UNCDF technical expertise and World Bank capital to provide a successful and innovative payment solution, in a situation where personal and fiduciary security were at risk. The project is widely recognized as having helped to maintain Ebola health worker services at a time when any interruption could have been catastrophic. Indeed, the project was so successful that Liberia and Sierra Leone have joined the Better Than Cash Alliance, in which they are working with UNCDF to digitize a wider band of government salary payments.⁴² In implementing health-care waste management technologies, ministries of health and environment had to work together, and UNDP used its convening powers to facilitate these interactions in Ghana, Madagascar, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.⁴³

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Vijayalakshmi Vadivelu* and Tobias Schillings**



In addition to the immediate impact on health and the resulting loss of some 2 million lives, the COVID-19 crisis is having drastic social and economic effects, resulting in loss of jobs and income. UNDP estimates that lost income in developing countries could amount to \$220 billion and that more than half (55 percent) of the global population has no access to social protection. This in turn will affect other sectors such as education and possibly basic food security and nutrition. Effective social protection and social safety networks are thus central to the UNDP COVID-19 crisis response. Such efforts can both support national preparedness efforts to strengthen policies, institutional systems and processes for social protection that would reduce the impact of the crisis on poorer sections of the populations, and to respond to the need for income during and immediately after the crisis.

The UNDP “Beyond Recovery” offer highlights the UNDP social protection focus as including work on cash transfers and financial inclusion options, in partnership with UNCDF and others; the future of work, with the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF, the United Nations Environment Programme and other partners; social protection measures and fiscal stimuli that reflect the care economy and are inclusive, reaching domestic and informal workers, people with disabilities, women migrants and other groups, working with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank and other partners; and advancing universal health coverage and supporting health care systems and services, as discussed in the previous chapter.

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This paper identifies some key lessons learned from evaluating past UNDP past social protection support, with a focus on the restoration and enhancements of social protection systems during and after crises.

AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

1 Strengthening social protection policies contributes to effective crisis response.	2 Targeting of vulnerable sectors, particularly those that generate employment, yields positive dividends for social protection efforts.	3 Institutionalization of social safety net measures and processes are fundamental to their success.
4 Using technology in the provision of social protection assistance improves efficiency and targeting.	5 Applying a gender lens to all elements of the social protection framework has positive impacts on inclusiveness and effectiveness.	6 Partnerships enhance the sustainability of social protection measures.

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Strengthening social protection policies contributes to effective crisis response.

Crises and corresponding immediate response measures can be an opportunity to expand and improve existing social protection policies and systems after the recovery. This includes building on the crisis response measures to improve the quality and coverage of existing systems in the long run, strengthening the preparedness for future crises, for example by embedding social protection in disaster risk reduction strategies to support long-term resilience and adaptive capacity; or social protection measures as part of national poverty alleviation programmes. Following the revolution and political crisis, Egypt adopted policy and institutional measures to strengthen national cash transfer programmes for vulnerable communities, including the elderly, people with disabilities and families living in poverty. Similarly, national social protection policies in Belize, the Gambia and United Republic of Tanzania promote social safety nets.⁴⁴ Although not in response to a crisis, Mauritius developed a “Marshall Plan” to combat poverty and social exclusion through an integrated social protection plan and set up a national social register to target and manage social

assistance.⁴⁵ The Marshall Plan is considered a social protection innovation in Africa, comprising 39 actionable and costed proposals to reach Mauritians living in absolute poverty – spanning a variety of support measures including cash transfers, educational support, skills training, job placement, small business development, social housing and child care.

2 Targeting of vulnerable sectors, particularly those that generate employment, yields positive dividends for social protection efforts.

Comprehensive social protection measures often do not succeed given the costs involved. Therefore, most countries specifically target vulnerable groups. Going beyond this, the sectors most impacted during the crisis need attention not only for revival but also to ensure that the jobs they provide are not lost. In the past, economic packages and social protection measures targeted at vulnerable sectors have been successfully employed to protect jobs during a crisis. For example, the Indian Ocean tsunami severely affected tourism in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia with significant consequences for jobs and livelihoods in the aftermath.⁴⁶ The three countries took measures to revive the tourism sector and reduce the impact of the crisis on the dependent communities. The success of these programmes was based on simultaneous infrastructure reconstruction and subsidies to the tourism sector as well as specific measures to accelerate the return of tourists through attractive packages.

Informal workers and wage labourers are more vulnerable to economic shocks and crises; hence, targeting such groups must be prioritized. National employment generation programmes in several countries, for example in India and Pakistan, are important mechanisms for targeting social assistance and guaranteeing minimum work.⁴⁷ Such programmes have shown themselves to be effective delivery mechanisms for cash transfers in a well-targeted manner during crises. A lesson from UNDP support across crisis-affected countries, for example in the Syrian Arab Republic, is that sustained efforts are needed to ensure that social safety nets are able to provide timely assistance to poor households to better cope with the crisis and minimize negative coping mechanisms, such as selling livelihood assets or extreme situations of youth radicalization.⁴⁸

3 Institutionalization of social safety net measures and processes are fundamental to their success.

Cash transfers and other social safety nets are critical to fulfilling basic needs during the crisis response. It is well documented that cash/conditional cash transfers play an important role in building resilience, maintaining social cohesion and protecting the most vulnerable, especially in the early stages of a crisis. Infusing cash reduces harmful coping strategies that negatively affect individuals' long-term opportunities and livelihoods, such as selling essential assets, undernutrition and debt. Although UNDP supported cash transfers in only a few countries, there are valuable lessons to be learned. UNDP support to cash transfers in Haiti shows how crucial it is to ensure feasibility in the design, given the institutional capacity and other factors.⁴⁹ For example, conditional cash transfers were found not to be the most appropriate tool in response to Hurricane Matthew, as the added burden of monitoring compliance delayed the response. While accountable targeting processes are important, the Haitian experience shows that care should be taken to ensure that such processes do not stall the implementation and drive up the cost of delivery. Also, the Haitian experience demonstrates that, in a humanitarian setting, the strategy adopted for risk prevention and mitigation, as well as the development of local capacities, improves the effectiveness of cash transfers.

The institutionalization of cash for work, particularly linkages with social and economic policies, helps reduce the extent of human loss and suffering during crises. Cash for work, although not feasible during the immediate response, can be blended into social safety net measures during the reconstruction phase. A cross-section of UNDP cash-for-work initiatives in crisis settings shows that when anchored in local development processes, the outcomes are more sustainable for improving livelihoods and maintaining essential infrastructure. An innovative example of this is the social protection component of the UNDP "3x6" approach, which has been piloted in countries like Burundi and Yemen.⁵⁰ Compared to standard cash-for-work programmes, the 3x6 approach focuses not only on generating immediate income and injecting capital into the local economy, but also encourages beneficiaries to save a small portion of their earnings to invest in assets or new business at the end of the programme. These programmes have

been successful in promoting social cohesion and stimulating local economic recovery. Another key lesson is that cultural factors need attention while implementing cash for work. UNDP support in Haiti, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen points out a reluctance by women to participate in the cash-for-work programmes.⁵¹ Alternative options should be explored to enhance women's access to jobs and livelihoods.

The disruption of livelihoods is at the core of most social and economic impacts of many crises. Integrating social protection programmes with livelihood support provides an opportunity to strengthen resilience and boost the post-crisis recovery. Hence, linking social protection measures with livelihood programming can be an opportunity for addressing both short-term vulnerabilities and boosting long-term recovery. Following the 2016 earthquake in Ecuador and the 2018 earthquake in Indonesia, as well as in the context of protracted Syrian conflict, cash-for-work initiatives were anchored in asset-creation programmes to restore damaged facilities and social infrastructures, such as schools, water networks and health-care centres.

4 Using technology in the provision of social protection assistance improves efficiency and targeting.

Advancements in technology facilitate the delivery of social protection in crises, for example, in the form of digital finance. In response to the Ebola crisis, UNDP implemented recovery cash transfers for affected survivors in Sierra Leone.⁵² These were administered using the existing electronic cash systems of a national telephone provider to achieve a secure and efficient delivery of assistance and, at the same time, strengthen financial inclusion. Similarly, the use of biometrics and blockchain technology in Jordan has improved the quality and cost-efficiency of social assistance while reducing opportunities for fraud, duplication of services and mistargeting.⁵³

Digitalization plays an essential role in monitoring and targeting social protection programmes. The Unified Beneficiary Registry in Malawi, which serves as a national social registry, is an example of the national identification system being used to improve targeting and as an effective information system for social protection.⁵⁴ In India, UNDP supported the operationalization of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the world's largest employment

guarantee programme. Worker rights assertion and transparency of the scheme were enhanced through the interactive information technology system established.⁵⁵

5 Applying a gender lens to all elements of the social protection framework has positive impacts on inclusiveness and effectiveness.

Despite the disproportionate impact of crises on women, social protection and social safety nets have yet to pay sufficient attention to this imbalance. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on women's economic needs and apply a gender lens to all elements of the social protection framework. The different social and economic risks that women face necessitate gender-sensitive social protection measures and social safety nets. While there are examples of women's issues and gender receiving sufficient attention, for example in gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of a gender dimension in the existing social protection system in the Dominican Republic, more sustained efforts are needed to improve the inclusiveness of social protection measures.⁵⁶

Across crisis countries that UNDP has supported, social protection programmes underscore the importance of understanding the context in which programmes are implemented, for example regarding cultural norms that pose constraints on women's work, the multiple social roles that women play and gender power dynamics. It is critical that social protection programmes be conceptualized, implemented and monitored to ensure women's economic participation. Therefore, it is vital to apply a gender lens to the analysis, design, and implementation of social protection programmes. A key lesson from both crisis and non-crisis contexts is that concerted efforts should be made to avoid gender stereotyping of social safety net interventions for women.

6 Partnerships enhance the sustainability of social protection measures.

Based on the UNDP experience, it has often proven challenging to implement novel social protection programmes without building on existing protection frameworks and strong local partnerships. Especially in times of crisis, when speed and scale-up of social assistance are top priorities, it is best to rely on existing inter-agency or joint government-United Nations platforms and tools that have been extensively tested and harmonized across implementation partners. The same applies to the post-crisis recovery: assets, systems and partnerships that have been developed as part of the immediate response provide an opportunity to be integrated into national social protection frameworks for long-term resilience building. While the importance of collaboration is acknowledged, international cooperation at the national level remains siloed. For example, UNDP efforts to strengthen social protection in countries like Angola or Guatemala have failed due to a lack of common resources and partnerships.⁵⁷

Private sector investments have the potential to advance social protection initiatives. UNDP country programme experiences demonstrate that government measures alone cannot sustain social protection measures and that private sector contributions are essential. Private sector and social protection are complementary but have yet to be harnessed systematically. For example, private sector insurance is seen as complementing government efforts in the area. Employment generation and strengthening livelihood infrastructure are areas where private sector participation is shown to have considerable potential. Although not in the social protection support area, UNDP programmes show that private sector participation is feasible in livelihood enhancement in crisis contexts. In Sudan, for example, private sector engagement in solar energy was transformative for agriculture sector livelihoods.⁵⁸



LIVELIHOODS RESTORATION AND JOB CREATION

Richard Jones* and Landry Fanou**

The ILO estimates that the equivalent of 400 million full-time jobs could be lost because of COVID-19. These losses disproportionately affect sectors such as tourism and the informal economy, where many women and young people are employed. In addition to expanding existing social protection systems (see previous chapter), UNDP has highlighted the need for expanding support for lost jobs, incomes and livelihoods.

In the area of economic revitalization and stabilization, this review draws on evaluative findings from several crises where UNDP served as the United Nations coordinating mechanism for early recovery; utilizing its SURGE (supporting UNDP resources on the ground with experts on mission) facility to offer rapid human and financial support. These lessons also take into consideration the UNDP “3x6 approach”, which outlines a strategy to address the initial crisis response and stabilization, followed by recovery support and finally integrated sustainable development focusing on long-term economic development and sustainable job creation.

This paper focuses on support to livelihoods restoration and considers lessons drawn from a wide range of crisis-response evaluations, including man-made (conflict and refugee responses), natural disasters (earthquake, landslides, typhoons and tsunami) and a health crisis (Ebola).⁵⁹

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AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

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|----------|---|----------|---|----------|---|
| 1 | Strategic livelihood interventions are best planned over the long term. | 2 | Frameworks for cooperation and coordination across UN agencies and other partners are critical. | 3 | Crisis-response interventions have a greater impact when coupled with a broad package of development support. |
| 4 | Clear transition from crisis response to recovery is essential. | 5 | Ensure a focus on building-back-better across livelihoods responses. | | |

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Strategic livelihood interventions are best planned over the long term.

Strategic livelihood interventions in response to a crisis are best delivered through long-term planning that extends beyond the initial response and stabilization period.

In the initial response phase, interventions work best when implemented in close coordination with partners, the Government and donors, to develop strategies that address immediate short-term response needs and then carry a longer-term needs assessment for recovery and normalization based on strategies of building-back-better (Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Syria).⁶⁰

Experience has shown that UNDP is best positioned when it establishes and clarifies its own offer in this process, identifying the organization's added value and comparative strengths in development and governance as well as linking UNDP crisis efforts to its mainstream development programme and the long-term development priorities of the affected country, while being mindful of complementarity and synergy with other existing organizations and partners (Bangladesh).⁶¹

In its crisis work, UNDP often provides assistance over the three stages of the 3x6 approach which outlines a strategy to address the initial crisis response and stabilization (often with cash injections through cash for work), followed by recovery support focusing on medium- and

long-term economic recovery and finally integrated sustainable development focusing on more long-term economic development and sustainable job creation.⁶²

The UNDP initial crisis-response stage and its livelihoods interventions often successfully establish interlinked strategies which include temporary employment through cash for work. This support provides initial cash injections to households, often linked to medium-term support activities such as household savings and income-generation schemes, including small business support and development and household credit. These work best when they take a medium- to long-term planning focus, linking response to the recovery stages and onwards to the stabilization of economic systems. However, evaluations show that most times, the focus of livelihoods responses are **short term**, for as little as one year limiting their impact and sustainability (Ebola responses, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria).⁶³

At the same time, approaches work best when they are implemented either at scale or are scalable in coordination with the Government and other donors. This coordination is difficult and livelihood interventions following a crisis are often both short-term and small-scale, limiting longer-term impact. Activities focused on employment or skills development, beyond immediate cash transfer or cash-for-work schemes, such as small business training and support, suffer considerably if not planned with longer-term support in mind (Ebola responses, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria).⁶⁴

Funding in the post-crisis context is often fragmented, unpredictable and dominated by initial humanitarian assistance (Ebola response, Afghanistan, Bangladesh).⁶⁵ Though this is a challenge, it also provides partnership opportunities for UNDP, sometimes with new partners and in new areas of emerging support. However, this can also push UNDP to select areas of work based on the likelihood of receiving funding rather than for its organizational comparative advantage and added value (IEO least developed country support evaluation, Ebola support, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen).⁶⁶ While UNDP is able to take up these new partnership opportunities to address crises, consideration should also be given to its own capacity to respond, including the availability of human resources to timely formulate, implement and coordinate early recovery and livelihood interventions (Yemen).⁶⁷

2 Frameworks for cooperation and coordination across United Nations agencies and other partners are critical.

The coordination of livelihood responses with other United Nations agencies and other partners works best when an integrated framework for cooperation is in place with clearly defined leadership and roles and responsibilities.

While this may be self-evident, experience has shown that this is not always the case. Early recovery and livelihood responses are often weakened by poor coordination, particularly with other United Nations agencies (e.g., UNICEF, International Organization for Migration, FAO, ILO) as well as with national institutions, CSOs and international non-government organizations. When national and local institutions are in place, coordination of livelihood responses and alignment of donor responses with these institutions are essential to ensure sustainability (the Philippines). Equally strong coordination of livelihood responses allows UNDP to be less involved in the initial humanitarian response and focus more on the development space and the promotion of the humanitarian-development nexus (Somalia, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Nepal).⁶⁸

3 Crisis response interventions have a greater impact when supported with a broad package of development support.

Livelihood interventions, such as cash for work, enterprise support and job creation, have a longer-lasting impact when linked with a range of other development support activities including enterprise development and capacity development, household and community savings schemes, and vocational training.

UNDP has been successful in using cash-for-work approaches in previous crisis responses and has linked this with a range of other support activities including business development services, household and community savings schemes and short-term vocational training, to address initial household needs and provide a basis for future recovery work (Typhoon Haiyan response, Uganda).⁶⁹ Cash transfers have also been shown to have an immediate positive impact on local economies, helping to stabilize communities that receive funds and tailor response actions to fit local needs (the Philippines).

In the Philippines, following Typhoon Haiyan, cash transfers were undertaken across a large scale with thousands of households to address immediate needs. This cash-based response (for cash for work and unconditional cash transfers) was possible due to three underlying and pre-existing factors: (i) an already operating and culturally accepted remittance economy; (ii) a strong system of financial service providers; and (iii) the pre-existence of a highly developed national cash transfer programme which included poverty targeting mechanisms.⁷⁰ However, cash for work and cash transfer systems are immediate interventions and must be anchored in a crisis response plan that uses this community engagement to build livelihoods over the medium and long term (Typhoon Haiyan response, Uganda).⁷¹

4 Clear transition from crisis response to recovery is essential.

Evidence indicates that recovery plans that clearly articulate the transition from response to recovery interventions are better able to support the change in approach and maintain effective partnerships with the Government, United Nations agencies, donors and communities.

Evaluations have shown that the strong UNDP positioning and focus on immediate stabilization and response stages have impacted its ability to transition from response to recovery support. A strong focus and package of support to stabilization and response as well as the allocation of resources for mostly short-term response activities, such as cash for work, microfinance and small-scale enterprise development, can build the foundation for longer-term recovery work and poverty reduction. However, UNDP has often found this transition difficult (Ebola in Sierra Leone and Liberia, Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, Pakistan).⁷²

Recovery support and longer-term livelihoods assistance can be overshadowed in the rush to respond to crisis. When UNDP articulates a suggested plan of transition from response to recovery early in the relief process, it can spur Governments to build more stable platforms for the restoration of local economies and government capacities, and hasten the return of men's and women's livelihoods (Sierra Leone and Liberia, the Philippines, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, Pakistan).⁷³

Strongly linked to the transition from stabilization responses to recovery is the need for a continued strong coordination and cooperation mechanism between Governments and donors that looks beyond the initial stabilization and response stages to longer-term recovery. Initially, humanitarian responses may be well coordinated among donors, such as early recovery clusters with partnerships from United Nations agencies (Yemen). However, despite the existence of such clusters and even agreed frameworks between agencies around response and recovery and the humanitarian-development nexus approach, this does not guarantee actual cooperation and coordination on the ground, especially in recovery work (Jordan, Yemen).⁷⁴

5 Ensure a focus on building-back-better across livelihoods responses.

Livelihood recovery interventions work best when they are based on “build back better” approaches, ensuring the inclusion of broader development perspectives that capture synergies across different programme areas. Crisis response and recovery works best when it is not seen singularly as a programme or silo operating within itself but is also able to leverage the experience of all programmes and activities working towards an approach of “building-back-better”. It should not be perceived as just a strategy of returning communities and vulnerable groups back to the pre-crisis livelihood levels, which may include continued vulnerability to future crises and instability. In the Philippines, communities impacted by Typhoon Haiyan were vulnerable and marginalized from the broader economy prior to the typhoon. The post-crisis period was an opportunity to reconfigure the area’s economy to strengthen opportunities and livelihood of communities (the Philippines).

Community-level livelihoods recovery work is strengthened when it integrates a broad range of developmental issues such as disaster risk reduction strategies, climate change adaptation, social protection, health, infrastructure and local economic development (the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Jordan).⁷⁵

When support to employment and enterprises takes a strong consideration of systemic weaknesses, including local governance and capacity and economic recovery, business development services,

access to formal microcredit markets, property and land-rights issues as well as capacity-building, vocational training and employment support for enterprise owners, youth groups, women and vulnerable groups, it has a greater chance of sustainability (Syria, the Philippines).⁷⁶ Equally, the scale is important, especially where there is considerable post-crisis unemployment.

When undertaking support for women, it is essential that interventions are transformative in structure and not just inclusive of women. Gender analysis should inform employment creation and livelihood activities, avoiding gender stereotyping and ensuring that livelihood interventions are meaningful. In the Philippines, participants sometimes criticized livelihoods intervention as being too small to have any meaningful impact on their lives. In other cases, interventions did not consider gender dynamics and cultural appropriateness for women, such as in cash for work linked to infrastructure and rubble removal (Syria).⁷⁷

Equally, one-off, short-term and fragmented interventions for youth employment have proven to be insufficient to sustainably address the scale and depth of socioeconomic challenges for youth in the post-crisis context (Syria, the Philippines).⁷⁸ Experience in this area – both in crisis response and in general – has shown that youth employment support activities need to be built around demand based on labour market skill needs. This will increase employment opportunities. Internships and partnerships with the private sector have also been successful in linking potential youth employees with employers, again increasing opportunities (Jordan and Sierra Leone).⁷⁹

Evaluations have found great benefits for UNDP in having a field presence when undertaking recovery and livelihoods work, as this ensures greater responsiveness to meet community needs, working closely with local governments and other partners which strongly supports coordination (Syria, Yemen, Bangladesh).⁸⁰ In Bangladesh, the establishment of a well-staffed UNDP sub-office in Cox's Bazar allowed UNDP to lay the foundations for future collaboration in the humanitarian-development nexus in response to the 2015 Rohingya refugee crisis.⁸¹

GOVERNANCE

Fumika Ouchi* and Eduardo Gómez Rivero**



In many countries, the measures taken by Governments to stop the spread of COVID-19, such as curfews, lockdowns, travel restrictions and temporary closure of non-essential businesses, have demonstrated the importance of effective and inclusive governance in ensuring public buy-in and solidarity. At the same time, in some cases these measures have revealed how vulnerable the democratic space is to potential abuse in the name of crisis response/prevention. As Governments scramble to respond to different waves of the pandemic, good governance can help to ensure the credibility and legitimacy of the State and boost compliance with efforts to contain the virus.

Governance is a critical component of UNDP support to Governments and is one of the signature solutions (Governance for peaceful, just and inclusive societies) anchored in Sustainable Development Goal 16 and the fundamental role that governance and rule of law play in peaceful, just and inclusive societies. It was the largest area of investment for UNDP during 2018-2019, focusing on accountable, responsive institutions at national and local levels. Indicating confidence in UNDP, this area received the largest proportion of resources from programme Governments. UNDP is working to create governance systems of the future, including through digitalization and closing gaps between people and government.

Forty-four percent of the initiatives supported by the Rapid Response Facility had a governance strengthening function and governance is one of the four pillars of the “Beyond Recovery” offer. Well-functioning government institutions are critical to preparing for, responding to and recovering from crises. Working with national and subnational

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government partners, UNDP offers a wide range of governance support, including electoral cycle support, parliamentary development, rule of law and justice system reform.

This paper identifies some key lessons learned from evaluating past UNDP governance support in crisis contexts. The lessons are drawn from countries that have undergone devastating natural and/or man-made disasters. The lessons are distilled by examining how UNDP has supported those Governments to continue to promote and strengthen the governance agenda during and after their national crises.

AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

1 The UNDP policy-influencing role remains relevant and critical during and after a crisis.	2 A well-designed crisis response can provide an entry point for strong partnerships.	3 Corruption and limited transparency and accountability can pose a threat to society during times of uncertainty.
4 UNDP work with non-State actors needs a strong engagement strategy for scale and sustainability.	5 The effective use of technology and innovation can accelerate government efforts in improving transparency and accountability.	6 The promotion of gender equality should be at the cornerstone of UNDP efforts.
7 For fragile States and situations, advance risk analysis can help UNDP prepare for the possibility of future crises.		

LESSONS LEARNED

1 The UNDP policy-influencing role remains relevant and critical during and after a crisis.

UNDP work in the area of governance (e.g., ensuring inclusive political processes, rule of law and justice) remains relevant during times of crisis. This is demonstrated in, among others, the organization's support for the smooth delivery of elections in the midst of a civil war or active conflict (Somalia, Afghanistan)⁸² and the fight against corruption to ensure transparency and accountability in the public sector (Kyrgyzstan, Timor-Leste, the Philippines, Rwanda).⁸³ Other examples are the promotion of justice and human rights, including advocating

for the protection of the vulnerable groups in society and enforcing legislation against discrimination (e.g., revision of laws that stigmatized and discriminated against persons with HIV/AIDS in public and private institutions (United Republic of Tanzania, Mozambique)⁸⁴ and the elimination of violence against women (Afghanistan).⁸⁵

2 A well-designed crisis response can provide an entry point for strong partnerships.

A well-designed crisis response plan that includes a multidimensional and participatory approach aiming at recovery and State-building provides an entry point for establishing strong partnerships. With a strong injection of SURGE (supporting UNDP resources on the ground with experts on mission), UNDP prepared a two-year resilience programme in Yemen, which eventually set the stage for the strong partnership with the World Bank (Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project).⁸⁶ One of the key ingredients for a successful partnership was the UNDP resilience plan that reflected multidimensional interpretation of resilience (e.g., restoring livelihoods, social cohesion and security) and engagement of community and key institutions for stabilization and recovery, based on which UNDP articulated its role and engaged the international community for coherent humanitarian and development interventions. In the Philippines,⁸⁷ UNDP and the European Union entered into a contribution agreement after Typhoon Haiyan to restore the capacity of local government, yielding a similar lesson that disaster risk reduction and management are not narrow sectoral concerns, but also a cross-cutting issue, requiring integration in all aspects of recovery and development planning.

3 Corruption and limited transparency and accountability can pose a threat to society during times of uncertainty.

UNDP programme operations indicate the need for various types of support to Governments to address transparency, accountability and corruption, which can affect both public and private institutions in the time of a crisis. In addition to supporting the establishment of a national anti-corruption strategy, efforts are required for strengthening transparency and accountability, including preventive measures (e.g., risk assessments), law and judicial enforcement (e.g., protection

of whistle-blowers law), public participation, promotion of national integrity institutions and work with the international community (Timor-Leste, Kyrgyzstan, United Republic of Tanzania and Tunisia).⁸⁸

Through its legal reform initiatives in the sector, UNDP has helped position the media in Rwanda as a self-regulated platform for democracy and strengthened its oversight role in society. UNDP governance work in the country, however, has primarily focused on supporting central government entities, leaving more room for engagement with subnational authorities and partners.⁸⁹

4 UNDP work with civil society and other non-State actors needs a strong “engagement strategy” to promote impact at scale and sustainability.

CSOs and religious groups are often mobilized as implementing partners during and after a crisis, given their ability to reach deeper into communities, often with their trusted, influential status. They support State actions in several ways, including monitoring of fair and peaceful election processes; raising awareness on protecting vulnerable groups; overseeing the use of public funds; and facilitating the delivery of public services in support of local governments. However, the lack of a clear engagement strategy with non-State actors can be an issue. For example, sustainability is threatened by financial constraints affecting community-based organizations or a lack of systematic plans to strengthen their capacities. Overall efforts are limited in scale as their activities are often uncoordinated or managed in isolation, missing a link with a larger programme effort; and design issues (e.g., disagreement in selection of specific organizations) arise due to lack of buy-in from or clear agreements with local/national governments and donors on the purpose and process of UNDP engagement with them (Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania, Rwanda, the Philippines, Sierra Leone).⁹⁰

5 The effective use of technology and innovation can accelerate government efforts in improving transparency and accountability.

UNDP support for the introduction and enhancement of e-governance systems in Bangladesh and Kyrgyzstan⁹¹ has facilitated improved transparency and accountability in public service delivery. In Nepal, the use

of Geographical Information Services (GIS) technology has helped to improve the Government's capacities for election planning, logistics and security.⁹²

Key elements of success in the use of innovation also include the linking of a growing youth population in a society and the private sector, a "solving problems in the society" approach (rather than one of procurement of "new technology"), and the ability of UNDP to provide a bridge between local challenges and global expertise. With the strong engagement of technology-savvy youth and the international business community in project design, UNDP in Afghanistan, for example, raised social awareness through events such as a hackathon ("Hack4Integrity" – technology-based solutions against corruption).⁹³ By utilizing its corporately available innovation facility, UNDP Rwanda has organized a competition to improve public service delivery (Mobile App Connection for Service Delivery) and a public planning workshop (Rwanda foresightXchange workshop). The YouthConnekt initiative has leveraged innovations in information and communication technology for youth unemployment, youth citizenship and engagement in local and national policy dialogue and has now become a regional effort.⁹⁴

6 The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment should be at the cornerstone of the UNDP crisis response.

In Rwanda,⁹⁵ women have played a significant role in rebuilding the society after the major loss of life, particularly of men, during the genocide. With a concerted government-wide effort, Rwanda is one of the most advanced countries in demonstrating efforts to reduce gender gaps, with 64 percent of parliamentary seats being held by women. It has included the strengthening of women's leagues within political parties, enhancing youth participation in politics, and strong engagement with the gender-sensitive media industry that would hold the Government accountable.

In Somalia,⁹⁶ stronger engagement by women at the local level led to a substantial increase in the number of projects supporting schools and health clinics, rather than road building and improvements, the number one priority for men. In Iraq,⁹⁷ the community centres constructed to be a safe place for promoting social cohesion have provided community

engagement activities (e.g., from vocational training to the creation of a women's football team) and psychosocial support to victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

As long-term development support, UNDP gender efforts are manifested in a wide range of governance areas. This has required a series of concerted efforts with a cross-cutting approach: e.g., enhancement of women's political processes through support for elections; elimination of discriminatory laws through women's caucuses; and positioning gender-based violence as a crime and improving access to justice among women for settling disputes (with rule of law and justice partners). Similar efforts include the development of national or local policies for gender-sensitive planning and budgeting with central/local government authorities; and raising awareness through the mobilization of religious leaders, CSOs and youth. Notable challenges include ensuring political will (Somalia)⁹⁸ and designing projects based on research and data so that the efforts (e.g., local mediation) do not negatively impact women (Afghanistan).⁹⁹

7 For fragile States and situations, advance risk analysis can help UNDP prepare for the possibility of future crises.

In some countries, UNDP was insufficiently prepared at the onset of additional crises, lacking an appropriate conflict risk assessment, through which to inform country programme strategies (e.g., deterioration of security in Yemen,¹⁰⁰ Afghanistan).¹⁰¹

A tendency towards ad hoc and overly ambitious plans can also negatively affect the organization's performance. Therefore, a prioritized approach to interventions will be needed in its well-positioned areas, e.g., anti-corruption (Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Somalia, conflict evaluation).¹⁰²

LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Claudia Marcondes* and Claudia Villanueva**



Local governance is the “little sister” to “governance” as described in the previous section. The latter focuses on national and regional institutions, policies and laws while local governance addresses more day-to-day concerns of citizens. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vital role of local governance in daily life. Now more than ever, citizens throughout the world depend on local governments – as the face of government closest to them – to deliver essential services to ensure that people are safe and secure through this pandemic (clean water, sanitation, housing and citizen security). In addition to deep increases in expenditures and decreases in local revenues, governments at all levels continue to deal with fiscal decentralization and power devolution issues. The pandemic also brought additional challenges to the private sector and civil society at the local level, which also play a key role in promoting economic development and ensuring transparency and accountability of government action. The “Beyond Recovery” offer includes supporting local government institutions to keep their doors “open” with e-governance; manage crisis and uncertainty; develop and implement emergency policies, regulations and contingency planning; ensure the continuity of essential services; tackle corruption; and address misinformation.

This paper identifies some key lessons learned from evaluating past UNDP local governance support in crisis contexts. The lessons are not extensive and are drawn from some countries that have undergone devastating natural and/or man-made disasters. They reflect a

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small range of the vast work undertaken by UNDP to support local governments as well as opportunities and challenges to move the agenda forward during these times of crisis.

AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

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|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | Local governance programming is an effective way to build blocks and assist in crisis recovery and prevention efforts. | 2 | A holistic approach to local governance programming works well to reduce fragmentation, create synergies and enhance efficiencies at the local level. | 3 | Improving local infrastructure and capacities is critical to enable host communities cope with demands created by refugees and internally displaced persons. |
| 4 | Rapid assessments of local needs are good tools to prioritize needs and develop appropriate responses in the aftermath of crisis. | 5 | Decentralization reforms are important investments towards better-structured municipalities to address crisis but require an early start and long-term commitment. | 6 | Linking successful individual interventions at the local level to national policy reform is an effective way to scale up interventions and enable wider impact. |
| 7 | Inclusive and bottom-up approaches promote the engagement of local stakeholders in planning and build back better processes and contribute to achieving lasting results. | | | | |

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1** Local governance programming is an effective way to build blocks and assist in crisis recovery and prevention efforts.

The local level is where the recovery of societies deeply affected by crisis takes place, and where the resilience of communities is ultimately built.¹⁰³ Accountable and inclusive local governance systems are building blocks that can not only help restore services and infrastructure, but also foster social cohesion in divided communities, facilitate participation in public life, distribute resources and opportunities equitably and safeguard minority rights.¹⁰⁴

UNDP local governance programming is comprehensive, involving work with local governments and other stakeholders (e.g., national governments, the private sector and civil society) in several areas to help address local needs and recovery, prevent violent conflict and

ensure that responses are locally owned and effective.¹⁰⁵ UNDP has supported improvements in service delivery and revenue collection and simplification of government services (e-governance) for peace and development at the local level, such as work in post-conflict areas in Bangladesh.¹⁰⁶ It supported local communities directly for the building of low-income housing and basic services through participatory processes in Nicaragua¹⁰⁷ after the devastating Hurricane Mitch; and for water supply management and building resilient communities in the Kyrgyz Republic¹⁰⁸ to prevent conflict. In Afghanistan, UNDP efforts focused on increasing awareness among civil society and subnational governments, and on technical and capacity-building support to municipal and district levels, enhancing public oversight of budgeting (revenue generation) and local development planning.¹⁰⁹

UNDP has also supported livelihoods through work with communities for better income and strengthened resilience, such as the creation of the one-stop shop for government services in Cameroon;¹¹⁰ or contributed to the strengthening of municipal police services and solid waste management, such as the work in Lebanon,¹¹¹ in the context of host community response to the refugee crisis. Other examples exist of UNDP assistance to central governments in support of local-level decentralization and power devolution, through draft legislation or analysis and/or inputs to policymaking, as in Turkey,¹¹² where policy-related contributions led to strengthening the loan system of local authorities as well as increasing revenues and intergovernmental fiscal transfers to local authorities.

2 A holistic approach to local governance programming works well to reduce fragmentation, create synergies and enhance efficiencies at the local level.

The extensive range and types of services needed at the local level during a crisis provide opportunities to integrate efforts and combine projects, which can generate synergies and enhance efficiencies in UNDP local governance programming. UNDP adopted a holistic approach towards building communities in Tajikistan¹¹³ with a combination of economic development projects and investments in governance and (re)constructing social infrastructure (schools, medical centres, water supply systems, electric power supply). This

has brought significant results in improving the livelihoods and well-being of the local population, drawing on continuous engagement with local authorities and citizens. However, consideration needs to be given to properly resourcing these interventions as for example in Bangladesh,¹¹⁴ where despite designing a comprehensive programme of about 57 activities of assistance in several areas of support in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the scope of UNDP activities was substantially narrowed due to lack of funding. As a result, important work such as support to local government authorities, construction of shelters for women victims of violence, improving policing and land administration, was not implemented.

3 Improving local infrastructure and capacities is critical to enable host communities cope with increased demands created by refugees and IDPs.

Providing essential services and improving governance and social infrastructure at the local level in host communities are critical as crises are exacerbated by the new and additional demands to address needs of refugees and/or internally displaced persons (IDPs). For example, the large-scale human migration in Syria led to a large number of refugees living in cities and towns in neighbouring countries,¹¹⁵ in areas where basic municipal services are not available. This led to the overstretching of the local infrastructure to the breaking point. UNDP has helped Governments to rapidly expand essential services such as energy, solid waste, job creation and social protection services to cope with this huge influx of displaced persons through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and country programmes in Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon.¹¹⁶ In Turkey,¹¹⁷ for example, UNDP played a key role in strengthening municipal capacities in environmental conservation and solid waste management in response to the priorities of Turkey's national plan to address the challenges of the Syrian population and the host community.

Other examples exist of increased demands due to conflict-related vulnerabilities, where there are losses of physical infrastructure and livelihoods and added pressure in women-headed households in particular. To address these challenges in Sri Lanka,¹¹⁸ UNDP supported community-focused housing and livelihood-related social

infrastructure to enhance opportunities for vulnerable communities, including women and IDPs. These were vital to the recovery process of communities and effective in helping communities regain livelihoods as well as their sense of dignity, confidence and stability. Another example of UNDP work to improve living conditions of IDPs and returned refugees is found in Somalia,¹¹⁹ where the focus was on the establishment of governance systems, increased housing, land and property rights and social, economic and political inclusion to enhance conditions for local integration of IDPs in two Mogadishu settlements.

However, the influx of additional people, the overstretched infrastructure capacity and the increased demands for services can lead to increased tensions among the local population competing for resources. This points to the need to also build capacities at the local level to deal with tension and conflict. In Lebanon,¹²⁰ UNDP is making contributions to the reduction of tensions among the host and refugee populations through the establishment of Mechanisms for Social Stability) which consist of working groups or committees with the mandate to monitor tensions and intervene whenever needed. This creates a positive environment at the local level through dialogue and activities. Social stability is promoted by addressing social and cultural challenges faced by both Lebanese communities and displaced Syrians while fostering the roles of local actors and local authorities as inside mediators in their communities.

4 Rapid assessments of local needs are good tools to prioritize needs and develop appropriate responses in the aftermath of crisis.

Generally, it is challenging to identify and prioritize local priorities in times of crisis, which in turn can delay responses, and recovery and reconstruction efforts. In Bhutan,¹²¹ UNDP has shown a high level of responsiveness to disaster events at the local level by providing expeditious support for recovery and reconstruction in the aftermath of earthquakes in 2009 and 2011¹²² and a rapid post-disaster needs assessment and recovery of infrastructure that was damaged by floods in the summer of 2016.¹²³ The effort also laid the foundation for effective work to strengthen capacity for climate change adaptation and disaster risk management at both national and local levels. However, it is important to coordinate rapid assessments with those of other agencies to avoid

raising unrealistic resource expectations among the local population and, in certain cases, delaying responses. In Uganda,¹²⁴ UNDP worked towards building local capacities for disaster risk reduction and both national and district officials were trained to carry out gender-sensitive assessment of the effects of the earthquake in 2016. However, there were a large number of government agencies and non-governmental organizations involved in similar disaster assessments exercises, which led to increased expectations at the community level and slower disaster response.

5 Decentralization reforms are important investments towards better-structured municipalities to address crisis but require an early start and long-term commitment.

Helping countries to decentralize, devolve responsibilities to municipalities and improve their capacities is key to setting the stage for better-structured municipalities, capable to respond rapidly and recover when crisis strikes. However, these efforts take time, need continuity and should be part of a long-term strategy at the national level to be implemented well in advance of a crisis. For example, UNDP has a long-standing engagement in Somalia,¹²⁵ where State-building work started in 2009¹²⁶ and continues to be challenging. Over the years, progress has been made towards the formation of State structures and governance processes at three levels of government. UNDP work supported the Somali Government to extend governance, services and reconciliation to areas newly liberated from al-Shabaab through stabilization and is considered a crucial part of the national and international community's strategy in Somalia. Progress is being made in the building of local government structures and district councils through a systematic approach to capacity development so that new local institutions are able to perform essential devolved governance functions. Among the challenges that continue to persist at all levels is the need for a long-term capacity development strategy.

In many cases, national government commitment is slow, and it takes time to engage centralized States resisting to transferring resources and autonomy to local levels of government. In Bangladesh,¹²⁷ UNDP achieved good results in assistance and support to national policy-making by drafting policy studies, strategies, regulations, rules and

guidelines to support improved implementation of local government acts. These included improvements in revenue collection and execution of budgets at the local levels, with the value-added of allocation of resources targeting gender equality activities, as well as e-governance with better service delivery, simplification of government services and also targeting core development issues. However, these incremental improvements were bound by the limited progress the country has made in delegating additional resources and autonomy to local government institutions.

Similarly, UNDP public modernization efforts in Iraq¹²⁸ initiated in 2010 brought important contributions to the simplification of working systems and procedures and service delivery models across national, subnational and local levels of government over time.¹²⁹ However, once a strong and influential part of the programme in the early days, the governance programme became fragmented and diminished. Despite being a critical factor in building stability and confidence in Iraq's Government, decentralization of public services is challenging, as Iraq has traditionally been a centralized State and there is resistance to relinquishing power to the provinces.

6

Linking successful individual interventions at the local level to national policy reform is an effective way to scale up interventions and enable wider impact.

UNDP programmes tend to support many diverse and small-scale activities that are individually successful but do not add up to systemic change or have links to policy reform.¹³⁰ Adequately leveraging government policies or institutionalizing successful pilot initiatives is critical for broader application by Governments and development agencies, especially in times of crisis.

In disaster risk management for example, while national processes establish the framework that guide actions during national emergencies and natural disasters, it is also important to work at the local level to validate strategies, strengthen local regulatory frameworks and build local capacities to implement actions. In Ecuador, UNDP, jointly with partners at the national and subnational levels, worked with the municipalities of Cuenca and Quito to strengthen urban risk management in these cities and test disaster risk management methodologies and

tools applicable to urban contexts, with expectations that the learning will constitute benchmarks for work with other urban municipalities.¹³¹ In Sri Lanka,¹³² UNDP promoted and supported mainstreaming of disaster management into development plans, land-use plans and building codes at the local level with significant achievements and improvements towards an effective disaster management system. UNDP worked to build capacities for effective preparedness, mitigation and response to natural and man-made disasters at national and subnational levels.

In many situations, addressing structural barriers that hinder transformation requires broad and sustained efforts. Good work at the local level can be leveraged to promote wider reach and create greater impact. For example, in Turkey,¹³³ UNDP has contributed to local administration reform processes and the establishment of a civilian oversight mechanism for internal security at the local level, among other interventions, through support for several studies which contributed to identifying institutional capacity gaps and strengthening policies and processes. But while there is momentum for the local administration reform processes, UNDP has yet to go forward and leverage its subnational level initiatives for a structured engagement in local administration reform issues. Similarly, in Guatemala,¹³⁴ UNDP made relevant contributions to enhancing institutional frameworks for attention to victims of violence and sexual abuse and promoting greater participation by women and indigenous peoples in local development processes. However, the issue requires a broad, sustained and concerted effort to address the structural barriers and achieve transformative gender and rights results.

7 Inclusive and bottom-up approaches promote the engagement of local stakeholders in planning and build back better processes and contribute to achieving lasting results.

In many intervention areas, good results have been achieved through inclusive and bottom-up approaches to local governance. In Lebanon,¹³⁵ UNDP was able to bring communities together to undertake conflict assessments and identify solutions to address some of the conflict drivers. Months were spent in discussions and negotiations to

guarantee buy-in and ownership from stakeholders, with good progress achieved in the design of components for the professionalization of municipal police in that country. In Iraq,¹³⁶ UNDP ensured ownership of partners, such as governorates and the government administrations (water, electricity, etc.), as well as stakeholders through their involvement in the identification and prioritization of basic service projects and successfully addressed the needs of IDPs, refugees, returnees and vulnerable host communities, providing them with the basic necessities of living (electricity, water, housing and other infrastructural projects). Similarly, in the Kyrgyz Republic,¹³⁷ UNDP involved communities in water supply management and obtained positive results in increasing their ownership and accountability both on water supply and the demand side with positive impacts on the building of more resilient communities. In the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua,¹³⁸ UNDP used a bottom-up approach to provide direct support to the building of 400 low-income housing units and basic services for victims affected by the catastrophe. In cooperation with the municipality, a participatory process was used to select beneficiaries and the local population was involved in housing design and construction processes. This presented an opportunity to also build the capacity of a small number of people in construction management and building maintenance practices.¹³⁹ In Timor-Leste,¹⁴⁰ using a bottom-up planning and budgeting process at the local level, UNDP contributed to developing capacities, systems, tools and processes for local planning, programming, implementation and management (public expenditure management) of local development projects. Area-based, rights-driven and bottom-up approaches were also used by UNDP to provide innovative multisectoral solutions in response to challenges of internal displacement in Somalia.¹⁴¹



ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Sue Nelson* and Claudia Villanueva**

Credible and inclusive electoral processes are critical components of peaceful, sustainable and inclusive societies. They allow for citizen participation and voice, hold Governments accountable for their policies and actions and provide the political legitimacy that underpins stable States. It is becoming increasingly clear that even the democratic process is not immune to disruption from COVID-19. Elections postponed due to the pandemic span the globe. Several countries and territories have rescheduled elections in both bona fide democracies and authoritarian States. In other settings, elections go ahead but under tight regulations that make it difficult for opposition parties to campaign and that have diminished voter turnout. Holding elections during a pandemic not only poses risks to public safety, but can also undermine the legitimacy of the outcome with low and uneven turnout.

As part of its overall response to COVID-19, UNDP is providing guidance to Governments and electoral authorities on ensuring that electoral decisions are well informed, take all risks into account and are based on assessments of the impact of the pandemic on each phase of the electoral process. It is essential that electoral authorities put in place the necessary measures to protect the health and safety of the public while ensuring the integrity of the process. UNDP supports a wide range of electoral cycle areas including national efforts for electoral reform; electoral administration; participation of women and marginalized groups; voter and civic education; prevention of electoral conflict and violence, and coordination of electoral assistance. UNDP does this through technical assistance, capacity-building, procurement of

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electoral materials, coordination of electoral assistance and efforts and managing electoral basket funds. UNDP supports electoral processes in about 60 countries a year.

This paper identifies some key lessons learned from evaluating past UNDP electoral assistance in crisis contexts. Some are from countries affected by natural disasters; however, most are those affected by conflict or political crises. The lessons are distilled by examining how UNDP has supported these countries to strengthen their electoral processes during and after crises.

AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

<p>1 More effective interventions use fast-track mechanisms, existing relationships, and electoral cycle approaches.</p>	<p>2 More strategic UNDP engagement and coordinated efforts and standards can improve the credibility of the electoral process and reduce the potential for violence.</p>	<p>3 Focusing on inclusive electoral processes gives voice to marginalized people and strengthens women's political participation.</p>
<p>4 UNDP support is more effective and sustainable when it uses a capacity-building approach and is flexible.</p>	<p>5 Investing in electoral technology can improve the quality of the processes if done strategically and through context-appropriate solutions.</p>	<p>6 Supporting risk analysis and early warning systems can help anticipate and reduce violence around elections.</p>

LESSONS LEARNED

1 More effective interventions use fast-track mechanisms, existing relationships, and electoral cycle approaches.

Elections are large-scale, time-sensitive and expensive operations that are difficult for many crisis-affected countries to implement on their own. Many of the problems faced are systemic in nature and require a longer-term developmental approach to address. UNDP electoral cycle programming, with assistance provided before, during and after an election, reaches the broader range of actors and elements needed for credible and inclusive processes, helps electoral management bodies (EMBs) and national stakeholders to deliver their elections and strengthen the technical and normative quality of their processes. This is especially important in the uncertainty of a crisis and the level

of mistrust in post-conflict environments.¹⁴² The UNDP electoral cycle programme in Nigeria focused on supporting institutional and legal reforms as well as strengthening the capacity of key stakeholders and processes in the years leading up to its 2015 elections. Its broad scope of stakeholders and interlinking efforts helped bring different institutions together, building consensus on needed reforms and increasing their capacity and knowledge around electoral processes, which was notable at technical levels once the elections were held.¹⁴³

UNDP support for infrastructure development after the earthquakes in Haiti and Nepal helped restore the essential structures of the EMB needed to administer the elections, store electoral material, house polling stations and disseminate information to voters. UNDP surge capacity and long-term procurement agreements for electoral commodities allowed for the rapid and flexible response needed to deliver logistically complex operations and meet the time-bound demands of the electoral processes in places such as in Kyrgyz Republic, Haiti, and Afghanistan, among others.¹⁴⁴ In Yemen, the UNDP rapid gear-up and support for the 2012 early presidential elections called with a three-month notice, enabled a critical component of the negotiated agreement to be fulfilled and averted a worsening of the political crisis. Its previous experience and relationship of trust with the EMB facilitated this process.¹⁴⁵

The use by UNDP of the electoral cycle approach in Burkina Faso, which provided technical assistance, mobilized funds, facilitated dialogue among electoral actors and supported voter education efforts, was crucial to building the credibility of the EMB and the holding of elections, contributing directly to the acceptance of results and the peaceful conclusion of its 2013 - 2017 electoral process.¹⁴⁶ In Timor-Leste, UNDP capacity-building for the EMB, support for voter education and strengthening the political engagement of women, youth and persons with disabilities contributed to the effective conduct and management of the electoral process, and generally high levels of participation which strengthened the integrity and legitimacy of its broader democratic process, resulting in a more stable political environment and the peaceful transfer of power.¹⁴⁷

2 More strategic UNDP engagement and coordinated efforts and standards can improve the credibility of the electoral process and reduce the potential for violence.

Elections can be a means to exit a crisis and restore state legitimacy as was done in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and Mali. However, unresolved or underlying issues can still drive election and post-election conflict as found in those same countries as well as in cases such as Libya, Yemen and Côte d'Ivoire. Programme evaluations, including the UNDP thematic evaluation of its electoral assistance,¹⁴⁸ recommend that UNDP make better use of its comparative advantage to focus more strategically on the critical issues underlying electoral instability and violence, and leverage its convening capabilities to promote dialogue and build consensus for needed reforms (Haiti, El Salvador, Mozambique and others).

In Sierra Leone, the proactive coordination efforts of UNDP with the broad range of electoral stakeholders at technical and policy levels helped improve the credibility of the processes, reduced the potential for violence, increased participation and inclusion, and encouraged the peaceful acceptance of the results. In this case, UNDP, with the office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the Government, successfully developed a tiered system of joint technical and political coordination platforms to share information, develop common strategies, assess and mitigate political and security risks and ensure that gaps were covered by national and international institutions. This continuous multi-layered and multi-sectoral engagement, which also emphasized adherence to standards, was a key factor in keeping the process on track, holding peaceful, timely and credible elections and ensuring the transfer of power.¹⁴⁹

In El Salvador, UNDP was central to the EMB achieving consensus on the residential voting system eliminating a contentious element of the process.¹⁵⁰ In Mali, the ability of UNDP to coordinate and work with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and other partners was a determining factor in the conduct of peaceful elections and higher voter participation,¹⁵¹ while in Nepal, UNDP close coordination and synergistic programming with

other electoral assistance providers avoided duplications of effort and ensured complementarity of their technical approaches that strengthened the integrity of the process.¹⁵²

In the United Republic of Tanzania, results were more evident in the uptake of the normative suggestions of UNDP on inclusive participation, than for other parts of the electoral process receiving less attention, such as the quality of the electoral process and EMB independence.¹⁵³ The use by UNDP of basket funds helped ensure coordinated use and messaging for donor funding and programmes in contexts such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Yemen. In Sierra Leone, this process was used to track delivery of government funding commitments for EMB administration that were critical to the holding of timely elections.¹⁵⁴

3

Focusing on inclusive electoral processes gives voice to marginalized people and strengthens women's political participation.

The 2012 evaluation of UNDP support to conflict-affected countries in the context of United Nations peace operations found that UNDP electoral support programmes can give voice to previously marginalized people and make notable gains in engaging women in political processes around post-conflict elections.¹⁵⁵ In the Republic of Congo, UNDP helped increase women's representation among political party candidates through advocacy for electoral reform and leadership training for female candidates.¹⁵⁶ In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNDP built support for female candidates among CSOs and women's groups through information exchanges, while in the Solomon Islands, UNDP helped to increase the visibility of female candidates in the media through journalist training that contributed to improving their coverage. It also continued its voter education efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic through affixing voter information to commercial bags of rice for sale throughout the islands to extend its reach to geographically marginalized groups.¹⁵⁷ In Somalia, the UNDP women's political participation project engaged women leaders before the elections with training in political advocacy and campaigning to encourage their participation as candidates, which helped Somalia to reach 24 percent women's representation in the 2016 elections.¹⁵⁸

In Afghanistan, UNDP supported the EMB to develop gender-responsive policies, undertake targeted outreach campaigns for women candidates and voters, and increase the proportion of women working with the electoral administration, which increased the percentage of women in the EMB and in voting in 2015. However, the turnout gains were not sustained in the most recent election, which had a lower turnout overall.¹⁵⁹ The online courses supported in El Salvador and the Republic of Moldova allowed for an expansion of the EMB training programmes beyond parties and poll workers to interested persons and included modules on gender and participation that encompassed the importance of women's participation as well as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community and persons with disabilities, increasing their access to information on the process and voting procedures.¹⁶⁰

UNDP Nepal expanded the concept of inclusion to address gender equality and social inclusion, working with the EMB to adopt a policy and raising awareness of gender equality and social inclusion issues in the electoral process, and providing civil society groups with small grants for voter education targeting first-time voters, women and marginalized groups, including persons living with hearing and visual disabilities. UNDP Nepal continued to facilitate EMB outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic through sharing virtual learning programmes with their CSO partners. These efforts resulted in the equal participation of women as poll workers and voter educators during the elections, and the development of new sign language versions of electoral terms for use in voter education for the hearing impaired, which encourage the first deaf candidate to run for office.¹⁶¹

In Sierra Leone, UNDP raised the profile and participation of persons with disabilities within the electoral process by hiring individuals with a disability to work within the EMB as advisers and grass-roots voter educators, improving the physical access to electoral sites and developing a tactile ballot guide. These measures strengthened the confidence of some persons with disabilities to participate in the process and helped ensure the confidentiality of their vote.¹⁶²

4 UNDP support is more effective and sustainable when it uses a capacity-building approach and is flexible.

The human and physical toll caused by a natural disaster or conflict can change the cyclical nature of assistance from strengthening national capacities to a more hands-on operational effort focused on getting the job done (Afghanistan, Nepal, Haiti, Indonesia, Yemen). These short-term solutions can be technically and politically expedient in the crisis context. Still, evaluations have found they are not sustainable if they do not include capacity-building, needed reforms and the development of context-appropriate systems.

Embedding technical experts within the EMB has proven effective in transferring skills and increasing mutual accountability and ownership and led to more positive and sustainable programme outcomes (Jordan, Nepal, Haiti, Sierra Leone, El Salvador). Differences in outcomes between the cycles supported were notable in some of these same countries when the assistance was not embedded.¹⁶³ Being on site and working as a team with counterparts increased the transfer of knowledge and institutionalization of practices within the EMB, and in many of these cases reduced the scale of assistance needed for the next cycle. The level of national ownership made a notable difference in UNDP programme outcomes. In the Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, the increase in ownership in the most recent cycles was notable and helped generate needed institutional change and receptiveness to the capacity-building elements offered by UNDP. This led to increased professionalism and more sustainable results. The use of national technical experts also strengthened EMB engagement in programme efforts in Jordan, Lebanon and Nepal, where national experts were seen to have the language skills and knowledge of the context needed to facilitate interaction.¹⁶⁴ National ownership was more limited when national counterparts were not included in the programme identification and design phases (Libya, Aceh).¹⁶⁵

Flexible programme designs and implementation have allowed UNDP to adapt its programmes and remain relevant within the volatile and uncertain nature of the electoral processes in a crisis context as noted in cases such as Liberia, Lebanon, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Nepal, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This enabled UNDP to

adjust its support to changed election dates or commissions, and late decision-making. In Liberia, during the Ebola crisis, UNDP was able to adapt its in-person training and assistance to include the health and safety precautions needed, including taking hygiene measures and voter temperatures at the polling sites, and social distancing in polling.¹⁶⁶ In Lebanon, flexibility on the part of UNDP and donors was critical to being able to extend the project's resources out for several years while the date of the elections was being set. In the interim, UNDP used its cycle approach to build the capacity of electoral administrators which included developing an electoral timeline of tasks, the forms needed for election day and regulatory input so that they would be ready once the date was set.¹⁶⁷ Flexibility also allowed UNDP to adjust its support to the changing security environment in Libya, managing its assistance at times from out of the country.¹⁶⁸ In the State of Palestine, where local elections were repeatedly delayed, UNDP anticipated the support needed by the EMB to carry out its work once the elections were scheduled. This required remaining responsive, committed and engaged with key stakeholders as well as keeping politically informed so that the technical assistance could respond to political developments. Its evaluation found this approach to be one of the most successful elements of its programme and proved to be a worthwhile investment in the process and in building the institutional strength of the EMB.¹⁶⁹

5 Investing in electoral technology can improve the quality of the processes if done strategically and through context-appropriate solutions.

A lesson from the UNDP thematic evaluation of its electoral assistance (2012) was that the building of cost-effective, context-appropriate and sustainable IT solutions was not consistently prioritized in programmes, and limited the effectiveness of UNDP in building national ownership and sustainable systems. Despite increased attention by UNDP to cost and sustainability, this can still be an issue, especially in a crisis context. A lesson from Nepal, where a multi-year effort to develop a software system update has yet to be accepted by the EMB, is to ensure that larger and/or sensitive procurements incorporate a dedicated risk analysis with timelines for decision-making and development, mapping of financial interests in the various systems,

and identification of mitigation measures.¹⁷⁰ System development also needs to fit within the budget and time frame of electoral support projects. In Sierra Leone, UNDP was unable to complete its work on a civil registration system, from which the voter registry was to be extracted, as it required a more comprehensive approach, and time to implement, than could be accommodated in the project.¹⁷¹

In Haiti, UNDP successfully developed an innovative e-system that was context-appropriate and easy for the EMB and stakeholders to use. This included an online registration system for candidates, poll watchers and observers that increased EMB administrative efficiency, standardized systems and reduced space for preferential treatment, human error and fraud. This contributed to a more level playing field and depoliticized some aspects of electoral administration. The use of a cloud-based system also allowed direct interface of the database with the printer, enabling last-minute changes in ballots. UNDP coupled this with the distribution of cell phones to poll workers to immediately capture and post the results sheets, speeding up the release of preliminary results, and enabled observers and monitors to check results in real time. This increased the transparency of the results process with 4.3 million hits in 2015, and limited opportunities for altered results or excuses to reject the election results.¹⁷² In the Kyrgyz Republic, UNDP successfully introduced a biometric voter identification system that was used in the 2017 elections; however, the storage and maintenance of the software and hardware required attention, as did the inclusion of information about the system and the privacy of the data in voter education efforts.¹⁷³

Accurate voter registration lists are problematic in a crisis context and can lead to delays in the electoral process (Côte d'Ivoire) or accusations of fraud (Afghanistan). In Afghanistan, biometric voter verification machines were introduced for the 2018 elections as a means to reduce opportunities for fraud, given the widespread perception that the voters' lists were unreliable. However, decisions on the systems were taken late in the process, not leaving enough time for testing, training or stakeholder familiarization, resulting in their limited use on election day. Their use was mandatory for the 2019 elections, with more training and spare batteries provided, but their use slowed polling, deterred some women from voting and led to delays in the announcement of the

results.¹⁷⁴ In Yemen, UNDP engaged only four months before the election, which did not allow enough time for the problems with its registry to be addressed or for new technology to be introduced. To avoid disrupting polling and to ensure that all citizens were able to vote, UNDP supported the use of indelible ink to prevent multiple voting and provided polling staff training on its proper application.¹⁷⁵

6 Supporting risk analysis and early warning systems can help anticipate and reduce violence around elections.

The level of risk for the security and integrity of the processes and for UNDP engagement in electoral support increases in a crisis context. This can stem from poor planning, misinformation, implementation problems, inequitable systems and lack of political will, among others.

UNDP support for early warning systems for the EMB and CSOs helped anticipate and prevent electoral violence and contributed to peaceful elections in cases such as in Côte d'Ivoire. In Nepal, UNDP support for a joint operations centre facilitated close working relationships between the EMB and other agencies responsible for security, providing focal points for the collection and sharing of information from field offices, with GIS mapping that fed into wider electoral risk and mapping efforts. This centre was replicated by the EMB without UNDP support for subsequent elections.

In Sierra Leone, the multi tiered steering committees, which UNDP coordinated at the technical level and provided technical assistance for the policy level, and which included the police and national security agencies, were also designed to identify and manage risk. This integration of efforts resulted in a comprehensive and integrated risk management and electoral security plan that was updated regularly and implemented across technical sectors, policy levels and stakeholders.¹⁷⁶ In the Gambia, UNDP strengthened national capacities for election risk mapping and management through training and deployment of conflict monitors and domestic observers, conflict data entry clerks and police commissioners. The development of its National Election Early Warning and Response Group of prominent citizens and persons from the EMB, police and CSOs was cited as a best practice.

This group developed strategies and made recommendations to mitigate and resolve election-related violence and threats. The use of a WhatsApp group as an early warning platform allowed for real-time reporting.¹⁷⁷ Cooperative efforts with other UNDP projects focusing on social cohesion and peacebuilding strengthened efforts for peaceful elections and countered misinformation (Nepal, United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya) but are not uniformly done. Missed opportunities to link these programmes with voter education efforts were noted in cases such as Mozambique, Liberia, Afghanistan and El Salvador. Efforts for peaceful processes were also strengthened in the United Republic of Tanzania through the programme's engagement with religious leaders for widespread dialogues for peace, which helped to identify and mitigate potential problems.¹⁷⁸

Deployment of Peace and Development Advisers through the joint UNDP Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs programme strengthened country-level risk analysis and mitigation efforts of the United Nations and UNDP, and contributed to violence-free elections in Sierra Leone, Kyrgyz Republic and Solomon Islands. Election scenario planning done by the advisers with national authorities in Sierra Leone and elsewhere strengthened national stakeholder contingency planning, preventive action and mitigation.¹⁷⁹

Collaborative programmes between UNDP and UN-Women, with other national and international stakeholders, focused specific attention on the issue of violence against women in elections which can be more pronounced in a crisis context, and becomes an act of political violence when it impacts on women's participation in the process.¹⁸⁰ UNDP and UN-Women supported women's situation rooms in Sierra Leone and Liberia to mitigate violence against women in elections through the engagement of stakeholders in peace advocacy and to coordinate information and action with electoral stakeholders and security agencies. This included tracking incidents and developing mitigation and messaging activities. In the United Republic of Tanzania, UNDP provided peer-to-peer professional training of police trainers on human rights, gender, including violence against women in elections, and the role of the police in elections. This helped improve police capacity for electoral security and observers noted a reduced number of police incidents and increased police professionalism around election security.¹⁸¹

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



Peter Whalley* and Gédéon Djissa**

There has been much speculation about the positive impacts of the pandemic on the environment, due mostly to restricted movement of people and the steep decline in air travel. However, use of disposable personal protective equipment and increased use of chemicals for sanitizing purposes have resulted in large amounts of medical waste. It is possible that after strict restrictions are lifted, countries will focus on restarting their economies by increasing industrial production. The COVID-19 pandemic has preoccupied the world and perhaps the biggest environmental impact of the crisis is the loss of traction in addressing longer-term issues such as climate change and biodiversity. With the postponement and cancellation of several environmental events and conferences including the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26), maintaining political will and momentum will be at the heart of the environmental agenda.

Drawing on over 40 years of experience in sustainable development, UNDP assists countries to implement their obligations under multilateral environmental agreements and to integrate environmental concerns into national and sectoral plans and strategies; secure resources; and implement programmes that advance inclusive, sustainable development and strengthen livelihoods. UNDP is a leading provider of environmental services globally, with projects in 170 countries, and a founding implementing agency for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Green Climate Fund.

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A green economy is one of the four pillars of the UNDP “Beyond Recovery” offer”. This focus includes working with United Nations agencies and other partners to boost green and resilient recovery by helping translate countries’ Nationally Determined Contributions and adaptation plans into urban planning, agriculture and land-use climate solutions; and promoting community-based and -owned solutions and approaches, especially in indigenous communities.

This paper focuses on UNDP environmental interventions in crisis contexts, and the lessons provided here have been extracted from a wide selection of evaluations of UNDP programming and interventions related to disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and management of natural resources.

AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

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|---|---|---|
| <p>1 Environment projects benefit from broad stakeholder engagement to manage expectations, utilize local knowledge, and integrate rights and culture of local populations.</p> | <p>2 Engaging the private sector with attention to conflict of interest creates opportunity for long-term sustainability of environmental interventions.</p> | <p>3 Building effective crisis management and recovery systems requires an integrated and targeted approach to capacity and institutional strengthening.</p> |
| <p>4 Environment and natural resources programmes taking a value chain approach, including encompassing ecotourism benefits, are likely to achieve more sustainable results.</p> | <p>5 Adopting context-sensitive gender approaches and strengthening the resilience of women are crucial, especially in the aftermath of crises.</p> | <p>6 Leveraging national and local resources and capacities is important for the success of disaster risk management and climate change adaptation interventions in crisis contexts.</p> |
| <p>7 Addressing global and regional environmental issues requires a multi-country and multi-sectoral approach with high-level coordination and management.</p> | | |

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Environment projects benefit from broad stakeholder engagement to manage expectations, utilize local knowledge, and integrate rights and culture of local populations.

The broad stakeholder involvement in UNDP environmental interventions has long been stressed as being of critical importance for successful interventions, from concept to finalization through a well-managed stakeholder engagement that does not overpromise deliverables.¹⁸² Evaluation lessons from regions experiencing previous crises indicate that there is still room for further improvement in stakeholder engagement. Local communities' knowledge to address climate change impacts, disaster risk reduction and natural resource management needs to be adopted in interventions to promote ownership and achieve results (e.g., Bangladesh, China, Syria, Indonesia, Chad).¹⁸³ Evaluations emphasized the need to be sensitive to ethnic minorities and to the rights, culture and knowledge of indigenous people in the design and implementation of environmental projects (China, Guatemala).¹⁸⁴ Strong political and senior government support, together with private sector and community involvement, is essential, especially where policy reforms are required (e.g., Iraq, Mali, Guatemala).¹⁸⁵ Effective stakeholder engagement has multiple benefits including, but not limited to, creating space for flexible approaches to better respond to needs and circumstances related to the country context,¹⁸⁶ and to facilitate implementation even in situations of instability and fragile ecosystem (Mali).¹⁸⁷ Overall, the need for strong stakeholder involvement to strengthen national/local ownership and long-term sustainability of project interventions is confirmed by multiple evaluations (Philippines, Iraq, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Mali, Mozambique, etc.).¹⁸⁸

2 Engaging the private sector with attention to conflicts of interest creates opportunities for long-term sustainability of environmental interventions.

The private sector has a critical role in assuring the long-term sustainability of environmental interventions (e.g., China, Timor-Leste, Guatemala, UNDP/GEF large marine ecosystem projects,¹⁸⁹ etc.). In Guatemala, an evaluation highlighted the involvement of the private

sector in an ecotourism programme which increases the chances of sustainability of actions initiated as the private sector applies them in practice and is less affected by political changes.¹⁹⁰ In China, partnership with private sector actors, including those commercially dependent on clean water, helped to leverage conservation and social development finance needed to ensure the sustainability of the project in a global context where biodiversity conservation projects often face a financial crunch after the external funding stops.¹⁹¹ An evaluation in Timor-Leste highlighted the importance of enhanced technical and operational capacities of private sector actors alongside the Government for the phased transfer from external implementation of projects to national responsibilities.¹⁹² There might be potential negative effects from the involvement of the private sector linked to conflict of interests (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina)¹⁹³ that require careful analysis and management.

3 Building effective crisis management and recovery systems requires an integrated and targeted approach to capacity and institutional strengthening with attention to the long-term sustainability of these acquired skills.

UNDP has long experience of implementing ecosystem and natural resource management projects in crisis-prone regions that have institutional and individual capacity-building at their heart, usually supported by extensive awareness-raising and education activities (e.g., Burkina Faso, Mali, Guatemala, Mozambique, Honduras, etc.).¹⁹⁴ Examples in post-crisis regions include capacity-building of national and local institutions in charge of disaster risk reduction and resilience-building (Burkina Faso, Guatemala, Mozambique)¹⁹⁵ and managing and analysing information on climate events, e.g., floods and droughts (Mali, Nepal, Timor-Leste).¹⁹⁶ Experience from South Sudan¹⁹⁷ indicated the importance of tailoring capacity-building to existing capabilities. Experience also shows that targeted technical training is essential in areas such as post-disaster needs assessments,¹⁹⁸ environmental monitoring and enforcement (State of Palestine, Philippines),¹⁹⁹ borehole maintenance (South Sudan)²⁰⁰ and hazardous waste management (Honduras).²⁰¹ It is beneficial to complement technical capacity-building with focused training to help translate science to policy (Philippines)²⁰² and strengthen individuals and institutions engaged in decision-making (Mali).²⁰³ Experience from Sri Lanka²⁰⁴ and

Burkina Faso²⁰⁵ also showed that capacity-building could not be limited to training and technical assistance, and that more attention should be paid to developing enabling systems and adequate institutional capacity. In Burkina Faso, UNDP helped to strengthen capacities of the National Council for Emergency Relief, but the lack of mechanisms to assess the level of adoption of disaster management techniques made it impossible to assess the UNDP contribution to disaster management in the country, demonstrating weak uptake.²⁰⁶ Individual and institutional capacity strengthening are considered to be the enabling conditions to achieve long-term sustainability of projects interventions and results.

4 Environment and natural resource management programmes taking a value chain approach, including encompassing ecotourism benefits, while sensitive to socioeconomic inequalities, are likely to achieve more sustainable results.

Livelihood activities in environmental and natural resource management interventions are critical in many contexts and can help to change practices and achieve results (e.g., Haiti, Afghanistan, Ethiopia).²⁰⁷ UNDP has implemented multiple projects in post-crisis regions where improving the environment and livelihoods have been closely integrated. Lessons from Haiti²⁰⁸ have emphasized the importance of job creation linked with natural resource management. In Ethiopia, an evaluation highlighted that alternative livelihoods are an integral part of any conservation programmes to provide the basis for restricting unsustainable traditional practices (fuelwood cutting, charcoal production, open grazing pressures on watersheds, etc.). It was observed that where land-use restrictions are imposed and support to livelihoods is not available, some of the restricted practices move to adjacent areas.²⁰⁹

In addition, an example from Eritrea showed that increasing productivity should be accompanied by enhancing marketing components²¹⁰ which was also identified as critical in other contexts (e.g., Burkina Faso).²¹¹ In Mozambique,²¹² the lack of appropriate value chains in community development initiatives jeopardizes their potential to generate income and promote food security. UNDP also has experience in supporting the development of tourism as an alternative livelihood source for local communities through biodiversity

conservation projects (Egypt, Namibia, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, etc.).²¹³ In Uganda, UNDP supported a community-based organization, the Kibale Association for Rural and Environmental Development, to develop ecotourism enterprise around the protected area, generating income that allowed communities to build schools, support scholars and undertake other projects.²¹⁴ The evaluation highlighted that geographical and socioeconomic status affect the extent to which different groups benefit from alternative livelihood opportunities. Individuals who had a higher economic status and educational level tended to be in a better position to exploit opportunities than others. Also, community members who benefited from GEF support and other donor interventions were able to leverage this support in their tourism enterprises, while members of the communities without initial resources were not able to take advantage of the tourism influx.²¹⁵ Although tourism is an alternative livelihood source for communities, it requires high-level management to ensure that the biodiversity conservation objective is pursued.²¹⁶

As noted in Nepal,²¹⁷ not all livelihood interventions bring conservation benefits. Care should also be exercised not to overestimate the benefits of alternative livelihood community-scale programmes with respect to reducing ecosystem resource pressure²¹⁸ as the lack of economic opportunity of communities and groups whose activities have a negative impact on environment contributes to a persistent illegal exploitation of natural resources (Chad).²¹⁹ On the livelihood activities, experience from Niger²²⁰ showed that in-kind support to develop economic activities in the environmental sector proved to be more effective than financial support in some cases. For sustainability of livelihood interventions, attention should be paid to expectations generated in communities about potential economic and environmental benefits.

5 Adopting context-sensitive gender approaches and strengthening the resilience of women to negative impacts on ecosystems are crucial to the success of environmental programming, especially in the aftermath of crises.

Gender equality is a critical issue in the environmental sector as women remain the most affected by climate events and disasters. UNDP has a wealth of experience through projects linking environment and gender,

including in regions impacted by crisis. Much of this work is directed at enhancing quality of life and livelihood opportunities by strengthening the resilience of women to negative impacts on ecosystems. The UNDP Disaster Risk Resilient Livelihoods project in Mozambique²²¹ changed the lives of the targeted population by empowering community groups, especially women, through active engagement in the project interventions such as the disaster risk management committees, agriculture and small livestock keeping. Experience has shown that women's involvement should be context-adapted. In a UNDP project in Afghanistan,²²² women in remote areas were not allowed to meet project staff. UNDP adapted its strategy by training women to train other women in the remote areas and found that women generally showed more responsibility in income-generation activities than men. Critical for the achievement of results, women should be identified as direct beneficiaries (Eritrea, Nepal).²²³ In Niger,²²⁴ the evaluation lessons emphasized the important role of women in the decision-making process and not only in participating in activities. In Guatemala,²²⁵ successful integration of gender aspects in interventions at the local and institutional levels helped monitor the implementation of the national environment gender policy and the development of a course with the inclusion of gender considerations for sustainable forest management. Through this work, important messages were conveyed about the role of women and men in the sustainable management of natural resources.

6 Leveraging national and local resources and capacities is important for the success of disaster risk management and climate change adaptation interventions in crisis contexts.

UNDP has extensive experience in addressing environmental issues in crisis-prone regions (e.g., Burkina Faso, Bangladesh, Mozambique, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Somalia, Mali, Niger).²²⁶ UNDP disaster risk management support to Governments focuses on policy and legislative support and disaster risk management planning at national and subnational levels.²²⁷ This support includes providing operational frameworks and mechanisms (e.g., early warning systems and climate-related data collection and dissemination mechanisms) in many countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, North Macedonia, Niger, Mali, etc.²²⁸ Successful examples were

found in countries where UNDP was able to leverage available technical resources and local capacities to adapt. In North Macedonia²²⁹ UNDP worked with the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje to develop a mobile application to present citizens with real-time information on natural disasters (floods and droughts). This application has been replicated in Kosovo²³⁰ and is being considered as a regional platform for risk management. In Mali,²³¹ the meteorological agency has designed a low-tech rain gauge in collaboration with local manufacturers combined with training of local farmers on reading and recording rainfall data. These experiences were evaluated as successful. An important lesson in Niger,²³² where the use of mobile phones to gather information on weather data was being explored, is that the illiteracy of the farmers observing rain gauges was a barrier, and the weakness of telephone coverage in certain project intervention areas was also a major constraint. In Burkina Faso,²³³ the lack of partner coordination led to failure in the establishment of an effective mechanism aiming at collecting and disseminating climate information to the most vulnerable.

Moreover, disaster risk reduction should be addressed as a cross-cutting issue in development programming (Philippines).²³⁴ This requires closer coordination with poverty reduction and environment programmes and new partnerships with different government agencies and stakeholders.²³⁵

7 Addressing global, regional and transboundary environmental issues requires a multi-country and multisectoral approach with high-level coordination and management.

UNDP has been responsible for multiple global, regional and transboundary projects addressing environmental problems including the GEF International Waters projects. It is recognized (Bangladesh)²³⁶ that UNDP should play an important role in promoting regional cooperation on environmental and disaster management programmes. Environment projects require multidisciplinary/multisectoral approaches (Chad,

Mali, Niger, Guatemala).²³⁷ Interministerial cooperation must be integrated into multisectoral policies (to sustain resilience/livelihoods) (Haiti).²³⁸ Regional projects, in particular on transboundary or shared water resources, offer advantages for countries to *jointly* address common problems within rivers/lakes, large marine ecosystems and groundwaters (aquifers). River projects have assisted regional bodies to be strengthened to address pollution and floods/droughts (e.g., Danube and Amazon Rivers). In large marine ecosystems, multiple countries (including small island developing States²³⁹) are working to reduce illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing to reduce pressure on the living natural resources (e.g., UNDP projects in the East Asia Sea – PEMSEA²⁴⁰ – and the Caribbean Sea²⁴¹) and to establish coordination mechanisms between the countries and other actors in the region. The PEMSEA project identified key lessons from execution including inclusive, multilevel partnerships; active stakeholder participation sustained through appropriate incentive mechanisms; science-based management support, etc. The four countries (Chad, Egypt, Libya and Sudan) dependent on the “hidden” water resources of the Nubian Aquifer (a non-replenished groundwater) project, were trying to strengthen a “Joint Authority” to manage the resources, but recognize that further effort is needed to establish a coordination mechanism. The UNDP/GEF Nubian project²⁴² demonstrated that the development of an aquifer model served as a useful instrument to bring countries together. This led to the countries agreeing on data and scientific approaches that can minimize management conflicts among countries sharing water resources.

The management of regional projects is necessarily more complex²⁴³ and transboundary project management must be backed by enough financial resources to allow adequate administration and management.²⁴⁴ Viable transboundary water projects can take decades before necessary structures, policies and practices are in place.²⁴⁵ Regional and transboundary interventions addressing complex issues have a clear role in helping countries work together to reduce tension to address ecosystem and resource management problems.



WASTE MANAGEMENT

Anna Guerraggio* and Gilbert Adjimoti**

Waste management plays an important role in environmental resources conservation and the reduction of threats to human health and climate change mitigation that can derive from inappropriate practices with hazardous substances. Economic and demographic growth, combined with rapid urbanization processes around fewer and larger agglomerates as well as displacements induced by human and environment-related crises, are putting increasing pressure on national and local government capacities for adaptive and innovative waste management practices that promote healthy livelihoods and a more sustainable use of limited resources.

Waste management can, at the same time, provide a valuable source of income and green jobs for vulnerable communities. With adequate technology available, agricultural waste can also offer an alternative, low-cost, and sustainable source of energy for local communities in rural areas. UNDP waste management support to local and central governments in crisis-affected contexts encompasses: (i) providing emergency employment creation through cash-for-work schemes; (ii) building/rehabilitating infrastructures; (iii) developing small-scale business opportunities and re-establishing markets for waste-derived products; (iv) strengthening capacities for local service delivery, including through public-private partnerships; and (v) enhancing policy and regulatory frameworks. This paper focuses on UNDP support to waste management.

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AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

<p>1 Waste management can benefit the most vulnerable and promote social inclusion and cohesion.</p>	<p>2 Risk management built on previous projects' lessons learned and the establishment of capable project units in vulnerable areas promote efficiency.</p>	<p>3 UNDP support to waste management is most effective when a capacity development approach is adopted, promoting positive systemic changes and sustainability.</p>
<p>4 Support to the disrupted capacities of local councils for waste collection and disposal can contribute to enhanced decentralized governance.</p>	<p>5 Public Private Partnerships and tariffs for improved service delivery provide valuable avenues to recover costs.</p>	<p>6 Economic and proximity incentives can help the sustainable management of the higher quantity of medical and electronic waste likely generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Waste management can benefit the most vulnerable and promote social inclusion and cohesion.

In the aftermath of crises, UNDP support to debris removal provides immediate relief and much-needed income to vulnerable populations through cash-for-work. To foster social inclusion as part of the recovery efforts, the involvement of local authorities (including religious leaders) and partnerships with other United Nations agencies have helped to target initiatives so that benefits accrue to the most vulnerable.²⁴⁶ Relying on the existing networks of national employment programmes can be an efficient solution, although attention needs to be paid to avoid payment disbursement delays when directly working through them.²⁴⁷

Gender bias and cultural sensitivities affect the involvement of women in some waste management activities, particularly around debris removal and construction. The percentage and experience of women involved in cash-for-work and waste recovery activities varied across countries, with higher sensitivities reported in Indonesia and Syria than Haiti or African countries (e.g., Malawi, Gabon, Ethiopia). When planning interventions, it is important to consider how local cultures, practices, and biases around women's involvement in waste management can generate stigma, or instead propel their employment as a fallback solution when men consider it 'dirty work'.²⁴⁸ When the gender lens is appropriately applied, the waste sector can, however, represent

an important avenue to enhance women's economic livelihoods and strengthen their empowerment. Dedicated attention needs to be paid to ensuring equal working conditions, supporting female workers' negotiation skills, and promoting the use of technology suitable to women's capacities.²⁴⁹

As geopolitical realities continue to strongly influence the effectiveness of development cooperation, technical solutions (including around waste management) represent important avenues to foster dialogue around the needs of vulnerable populations. In the communities that host Palestinian gatherings in Lebanon, for example, the involvement of different groups in activities – such as waste collection and sorting – proved effective in promoting collaboration through practical work.²⁵⁰ Encompassing community clusters that have been negatively affected by the additional garbage accumulation in landfills following the influx of Syrian migrant groups in Jordan was also key to preventing any further tension that the reliance of a higher number of people on limited local service provision can generate.²⁵¹ This experience showed that, in vulnerable contexts and prolonged crises, damage and needs assessments can be used to preserve social cohesion when they extend beyond beneficiaries' vulnerabilities and cover a crisis' externalities to proximate (host and neighbouring) communities.

2 Risk management built on previous projects' lessons learned and the establishment of capable project units in vulnerable areas promote efficiency.

In crisis settings, waste management interventions seldom benefit from a long preparation phase, which has proved to be highly effective in enhancing shared ownership and trust between stakeholders. Learning from past experiences and continued engagement with key stakeholders in the country can enhance the ability to "hit the ground running". Operational lessons learned from interventions in crisis settings that should be appropriately considered when planning include:

- a) Introducing technologies for enhanced productivity in waste management can encounter some resistance by vulnerable populations, who may see a risk of reduced job opportunities. This can be countervailed with capacity-building support to promote skilled work;

- b) Access to pre-certified vendors for debris clearing and personal protective equipment, letters of agreement with local contractors, the use of on-site engineers to oversee and guide unskilled labour, and the adoption of best practices for civil engineering work²⁵² can help to mitigate the impact of procurement delays and capacity issues on delivery;
- c) Creating interim landfills can provide safe and controlled waste disposal sites in the medium term, while allowing time for permanent landfill construction and adequate training for relevant personnel;
- d) Sharing equipment that is not fully used among nearby disposal facilities, the acquisition of larger vehicles to transfer waste, and use of compactors to extend the life of landfill sites can all improve efficiency.²⁵³

UNDP has engaged more effectively with partners and stakeholders when it established project support functions/units in vulnerable areas. When this occurs, it is important that project teams be given sufficient autonomy to manage the delivery of activities, while ensuring continuous communication with, and guidance from, UNDP central offices. More attention must be paid to ensuring that outposted staff have adequate management skills and are of sufficient calibre to gain the confidence of local stakeholders.²⁵⁴ Assigning project personnel to the country office headquarters can facilitate support and national coordination, reducing the risk of misalignments between field and central functions. Inter-office communication is key to fostering multidisciplinary teamwork required by waste management projects.²⁵⁵ If the national implementation mechanism is preferred, political will, dedicated national capacities and leadership to guide governance measures across multiple ministries are all factors for enhanced effectiveness.

3 UNDP support to waste management is most effective when a capacity development approach is adopted, promoting positive systemic changes and sustainability.

Several evaluations agreed that the most value added by UNDP in the area of waste management lies in working on the capacity development continuum, from absorption to adaptation and transformation.²⁵⁶ Infrastructure rehabilitation and cash-for-work to promote emergency employment can be an important entry point to support longer-term

economic recovery and development, but need to be thus conceived from the early stages of the response. When this does not occur, debris clearance can appear as an end in itself and unintendedly impedes the pursuit of the UNDP role to foster the restoration of local economies and governance systems.²⁵⁷ Evaluation recommendations often included the early definition of an appropriate theory of change, based on a sound understanding of what is within the control of UNDP, as enabler for the optimization of gains made from short-term initiatives and enhanced influence at the policy level.

Adopting a flexible project design, recovery interventions can be a relevant platform for longer-term support to sustainable waste management systems, translating emergency employment into market-relevant skills and occupations. The engagement of the same community groups that had been involved in debris clearing activities as livelihood programme beneficiaries has worked well for continuity and to enhance community ownership.²⁵⁸ Recycled debris was used for reconstruction work and propelled the creation of business opportunities in Iraq.²⁵⁹ In Indonesia, after the tsunami, coconut husks provided fibre for industrial use, metal cans were used for manufacturing oil lamps, and waste wood supported furniture making.²⁶⁰ Landfill rehabilitation in Jordan allowed the exploration of opportunities for jobs creation and improved the working conditions of waste pickers.²⁶¹ In non-crisis contexts, commercial opportunities around waste reuse can have important benefits for livelihoods and environmental conservation. In Ethiopia, organic waste – including from flower farms – has been effectively used for compost making in support of urban green infrastructures and peri-urban forest development. Composting also allowed saving landfill space, which is becoming scarce in most countries.²⁶² The use of agro-waste as an alternative energy source can also have a positive impact on gender equality, for it saves mostly women's time required for fetching firewood.²⁶³

4 Support to the disrupted capacities of local councils for waste collection and disposal can contribute to enhanced decentralized governance.

Inappropriate collection, storage, and disposal of waste often result from both limited awareness of the risk to human health and sustainability of environmental resources as well as limited capacities to adopt effective measures. To enhance ownership and overcome behavioural barriers to change, it is important to both strengthen the technical and managerial capacities of local governments and promote a more active participation of communities. Technical training has proved more effective when: (i) it directly targeted specialists and waste workers and included a certification/accreditation process; (ii) it planned for multiple training opportunities, including training of trainers and/or practical sessions where participants have the chance to apply skills learned in the class environment; and (iii) it was conducted in parallel with operational interventions and was accompanied by the provision of operations and infrastructure maintenance manuals.²⁶⁴ Management training (including on planning, procurement, and finance), the development of integrated/cross-sectoral management plans and the installation of geographical information systems to map routes and coordinate the use of large waste collection trucks alongside smaller carts in narrower roads²⁶⁵ all contributed to enhanced long-term capacity for better service provision, helped to enhance the accountability of local governments as duty-bearers, and allowed some access to funding opportunities.²⁶⁶ Other incentives that proved effective to promote behavioural change around waste management practices included: the construction of waste banks in schools to influence family behaviours, the organization of separate collection and transportation systems by type of waste, and easing access to sorting/recovery centres.²⁶⁷ Having a site gatekeeper tasked to direct waste also reduced indiscriminate land disposal.²⁶⁸ The creation of mechanisms for communities to report ineffective and polluting waste management can enhance the space for environmental justice for the most vulnerable.²⁶⁹

The following factors can instead hamper the effectiveness and sustainability of UNDP capacity development work, if not properly considered during the project's design and execution: (i) the development of general education and communication strategies

that do not target the specific needs of municipalities; (ii) the absence of political support for decentralization of the waste management sector and/or limited cooperation between municipalities affected by cross-boundary waste issues; (iii) the lack of sector-specific budget allocations and risky financial planning only relying on the municipalities' own resources (see also lesson 5); (iv) the absence of secure land titling for areas assigned to host waste management sites; and (v) the late development of exit strategies that include key milestones for handing over activities and detailed operation plans for the functioning of waste infrastructures and processes.²⁷⁰

5 Public Private Partnerships and tariffs for improved service delivery provide valuable avenues to recover costs.

In the waste management sector, Public Private Partnerships (PPP) can provide remedial solutions to face the limited availability of local resources to support service delivery in vulnerable communities and promote sustainability. The UNDP experiences in Nepal and Bhutan showed that strong partnerships between the private sector and the Government can lead to more competitive prices and high profit margins for informal waste collectors, as companies in turn benefit from advantageous leasing conditions for their plants. The experience showed that a gradual approach to PPP – which can represent a complex change process – is important for gaining a deeper understanding of institutional relationships, streamlining public decision-making processes, and mitigating any risk derived from possibly divergent interests (profit vs. pro-poor approaches).²⁷¹ Whether managed by waste producers or specialized waste management firms, regular communication with regulatory government agencies helps to safeguard the respect for environmental standards. Advocacy for improved occupational health and safety conditions for waste pickers is also an important, but at times neglected/not adequately enforced, element.²⁷² The creation of public waste sector investment policies and funds, as well as investment support facilities for infrastructure and sewage treatment systems, can meet the interest of both private sector and commercial banks, while allowing to keep tariffs low.²⁷³

While payment for waste collection fees by households remains a challenge, particularly in vulnerable areas, the introduction of gradual tariffs, combined with awareness initiatives, can help to change prevailing attitudes on community responsibility towards environmental projects, embracing an approach that reinforces the importance of payment for more reliable waste collection services and better land disposal operations, while rejecting free use as a driver of waste and contamination. The reliance on cart men directly collecting fees at the point of service delivery in Nicaragua proved effective in regaining the communities' trust, which was low as a result of general tax collection for public services not resulting in reliable waste pickup.²⁷⁴ It must be ensured, however, that vulnerable communities in project areas do not end up paying for waste collection services while more affluent neighbourhoods are served for free by the municipalities.²⁷⁵

6

Economic and proximity incentives can help the sustainable management of the higher quantity of medical and electronic waste likely generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As many countries lack policies and specific guidelines for the management of medical and e-waste, UNDP support to national regulations is key to promote sustainable practices, increase the volume of waste appropriately processed, and contribute to the formalization of the sectors. In case of medical waste, setting up treatment facilities can significantly contribute to reducing high export costs that can incur when acting in compliance with the Basel Convention. Economic incentives and close engagement with businesses proved effective in increasing the private sector's interest and investments, including for new waste management technology.²⁷⁶ On the contrary, the low allocation of resources for technology investments can significantly constrain the achievement of project objectives.²⁷⁷

Public awareness to incentivize the release of unused electronic products and the creation of efficient collection models through community-based mechanisms and intermediary collection points can importantly contribute to improve e-waste management.²⁷⁸ In countries where medical waste management initiatives succeeded, teaching hospitals were the best pilot sites as they have highly professional staff and facilities for system experimentation.²⁷⁹



DIGITALIZATION

Tina Tordjman-Nebe* and Landry Fanou**

COVID-19 has accelerated countries' reliance on digital technology – from e-commerce to tools for teleworking and e-learning to virus tracing and vaccine research. To be fit for purpose, UNDP has fast-tracked digital collaboration and investments in digital public goods throughout 2020. As part of its [Digital Strategy \(2019\)](#), UNDP invests in conceptual clarity, building a global network of “digital champions” and implementing rapid digital demonstration projects to showcase the potential of new technologies to staff and partners. Digital solutions are expected to revolutionize how people access basic services, including health, and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the pledge to leave no one behind. Crucially, this involves addressing the digital divide between those on and offline, which according to the United Nations Secretary-General is threatening to become “the new face of inequality”, reinforcing the social and economic disadvantages suffered by women and girls, people with disabilities and “minorities of all kinds”.²⁸⁰

This paper focuses on lessons from past UNDP digitalization support to countries, both as drivers for development and as accelerators for preparedness, response and recovery from crises. The lessons draw broadly on 42 evaluations of digital initiatives uploaded in the ERC, regardless of setting, but emphasize UNDP work in crisis contexts as available. Lessons regarding UNDP efforts to digitally transform itself internally are not covered.

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AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

1	Noteworthy digital initiatives in crisis countries remain undocumented and unassessed.	2	Supporting connectivity and open access is good. Supporting 'meaningful connectivity' is better.	3	Collaborating with the private sector is a 'must', provided ethical dilemmas can be resolved.
4	Digital transformation is about sourcing, connecting and developing talent – more than it is about technology.	5	Successful digitalization takes time and must carefully consider local readiness and culture.	6	Digitalization benefits from risk taking and collaborating with local digital disrupters.
7	Mind the gap. The 'digital divide' is real and growing.	8	Acting on data insights is key, especially for decisions around scale-up and replication.		

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Noteworthy digital initiatives in crisis countries remain undocumented and unassessed.

The body of evidence reviewed shows that digital solutions are part and parcel of many UNDP development interventions, across focus areas. The most well-documented examples refer to development (not crisis) settings and the areas of e-governance and support to electoral processes, digital health and disaster preparedness (early warning systems). Applying digital solutions in countries affected by crises is hard as government may be weak, divided or absent, resources scarce and other needs more pressing. There appears to be much need for documentation, knowledge exchange and learning about digitalization in crisis settings, to avoid merely extrapolating lessons from development contexts to those affected by crises.

Noteworthy digital initiatives in crisis countries that were captured in evaluations include UNDP support to electoral processes to reduce opportunities for fraud (biometric equipment for voter registration in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau) and digital finance to transfer salaries to health workers (Sierra Leone during the Ebola crisis) and the police (Afghanistan, Central African Republic) to reduce corruption, reduce vacancies and allow expansion of services. In settings prone to natural disasters, UNDP supported early warning systems and

other climate monitoring techniques that routinely employ digital technologies (Barbados, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Liberia, Malawi, Sao Tome and Principe, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia). Other well-known initiatives were never evaluated. These include a number of stalled pilots, such as using drones and satellite imagery to provide real-time monitoring data that could inform relief efforts (Syria, Mali)²⁸¹ and a cryptocurrency called CedarCoin backed by blockchain technology intended to promote the reforestation and protection of Lebanon's ancient cedar forests (Lebanon).²⁸²

Evaluations suggest that UNDP-supported digital solutions in crisis settings emphasized automation or converting physical information into digital formats for efficiency gains (early warning systems, digital finance for salary payments, digitization of voter registration systems) or to demonstrate the way an innovation works (drones, blockchain). Less frequently, UNDP used digital solutions in crisis countries to optimize and streamline service delivery, with a view to increasing quality (support to e-governance systems). As a forthcoming thematic evaluation points out, in conflict settings such initiatives add a level of sophistication to UNDP operational support but overall appear out-of-date, as they focus mainly on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and show little success in longer-term application and scaling-up.²⁸³

2 Supporting connectivity and open access is good. Supporting 'meaningful connectivity' is better.

Critical infrastructure is needed for the roll-out, scaling and sustainability of digitalization efforts. For example, early warning systems that rely on automated weather stations need reliable mobile network coverage to collect raw climate data and disseminate processed climate information to end-users, such as farmers (Liberia,²⁸⁴ Tanzania,²⁸⁵ Zambia,²⁸⁶ Malawi,²⁸⁷ Ethiopia²⁸⁸). In Ethiopia, the lack of reliable access to Ethio Telecom's mobile data network hindered the transmission of climate data and the effectiveness of the established early warning system. An e-governance initiative in Bhutan was hampered by lack of reliable Internet connectivity. Out of 101 access points established, only 23 had Internet access. As a result of this and other issues, analog services such as photocopying was

the most commonly availed service in the 'digital' access points for government services, followed by printing, lamination and passport photos – as opposed to the intended ones such as birth registration, land records, or life insurance.²⁸⁹ Since connectivity depends not only on government policy (keeping social media and Internet access open and free of interference) but also on private sector providers (usually providing the hard- and software), a key element for UNDP support in digitalization processes is leveraging the private sector (see lesson 3).

Yet, connectivity is not the end of the story. In order to ensure connectivity is meaningful, governments and their development partners must champion the development of digital literacy and skills (lesson 4) and ensure the instrumental use of ICTs throughout society. UNDP can support roadmaps for the digital future (Bangladesh,²⁹⁰ Uzbekistan,²⁹¹ Kazakhstan²⁹²), help build stronger national ecosystems of innovation (Serbia²⁹³) and shed light on the 'inclusion dynamic' (lesson 7) to encourage more inclusive, diverse and equitable post-COVID societies that partake fully in the digital world.

3 Collaborating with the private sector is a 'must', provided ethical dilemmas can be resolved.

The coverage, reliability and quality of Internet and mobile phone networks is a key success factor for the roll-out and scaling-up of national digitalization efforts. The principal developers of networks and data typically are private sector players. There are examples from the fields of health (Sierra Leone²⁹⁴), e-governance (Bangladesh²⁹⁵) and financial inclusion (Pacific Island countries,²⁹⁶ Zimbabwe²⁹⁷) showing how UNDP leveraged private sector actors to advance digitalization. In Sierra Leone, UNDP relied on an established mobile network and used privately owned local kiosks to distribute hazard pays to 16,000 Ebola workers. In an access to information programme in Bangladesh, UNDP relied heavily on a network of over 5,000 Union Digital Centres, established by the Government and run by entrepreneurs, to ensure the delivery of free public e-services to local populations (e.g., land records, birth registration, issuance of passport and even telemedicine), along with private services (mobile financial services).²⁹⁸ Through collaboration in the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme, UNDP contributed to helping nearly 2 million low-income Pacific

islanders gain access to financial services and financial education. In Sierra Leone, recovery cash transfers for affected survivors of Ebola achieved efficiency gains and strengthened financial inclusion.²⁹⁹ Similarly, in Zimbabwe, UNDP-supported emergency public service sector payments for health care workers had the unintended benefit of bringing health workers into the formal banking system as they were required to open bank accounts to receive the payments.³⁰⁰ This points to the opportunities of linking mobile money programming with inclusive finance.

All the above, however, throws up important ethical questions that are not fully covered in the body of evaluations reviewed. UNDP must invest in research that gauges the prospective impact of digital technologies. Government regulations have been developed in many countries in the areas of privacy and data protection. For example, the evaluation on the UNDP-supported automation of voter registration in Kyrgyzstan notes that, in line with international norms and standards, commercial entities such as banks need citizen's consent to access the data contained in the system, e.g., to obtain basic info on citizenship and passport details.³⁰¹ Evaluations are silent on other ethical issues that may go hand in hand with digitalization such as human dignity and autonomy or discrimination and unequal balance of power. It is unclear if government supervision in these areas is incomplete or lacking, and whether this has been flagged by UNDP which typically positions itself as a rights-based organization.

4 Digital transformation is about sourcing, connecting and developing talent – more than it is about technology.

Governments can now buy any given technology, but their ability to adapt to an even more digital future depends on developing the next generation of skills. Countries need to close the gap between talent supply and demand, sometimes referred to as 'future-proofing' of human resources. Evaluations show that UNDP-supported digital transformation initiatives that build on or are accompanied by investments in capabilities to effectively use, manage, and maintain associated technology are more likely to succeed. Key capabilities include concrete ICT competencies and skills (Republic of Moldova),³⁰² being able to speak from actual experience with the methods (Europe

and the Commonwealth of Independent States region),³⁰³ ease at using the digital equipment and at trouble-shooting, in real-time and during ‘dry-runs’ (Kyrgyzstan),³⁰⁴ ability to maintain and update a data portal and capacities of decision-makers to use complex data and knowledge (Papua New Guinea).³⁰⁵ UNDP has effectively supported the development of these skills on and offline, e.g., through training-of-trainers seminars followed by local training, through deploying experts or through communities of practice that utilize digital technology to bring people together (India).³⁰⁶

The sourcing of experts deserves special mention. The UNDP ability to provide a bridge between local challenges and global expertise is emblematic, and regional experts who broker knowledge across UNDP country offices play a key role here.³⁰⁷ By providing technical expertise, UNDP can respond to stakeholder needs while influencing the design of digital solutions (e.g., keeping data protection and the needs of vulnerable groups in mind; Kyrgyz Republic,³⁰⁸ Uzbekistan,³⁰⁹ Kazakhstan³¹⁰) and improving effectiveness and efficiency (Bangladesh,³¹¹ India,³¹² Jordan,³¹³ Haiti³¹⁴ and Nepal³¹⁵). To support the flagship programme ‘Digital Bangladesh’ which created digital access points for government services at the local level, UNDP facilitated access to national and global expertise. This has increased the speed and quality of progress made in the digitalization of public services. Social assistance programmes in Jordan were more cost-efficient by employing biometrics and blockchain expertise. This helped reduce opportunities for fraud, duplication of services and mistargeting. In Haiti and Nepal, UNDP provided technical assistance to election planning, logistics and security through e-systems. This included online registration portals for candidates as well as hiring and training poll watchers equipped with cell phones. UNDP-sponsored expertise in these and other cases contributed to increasing administrative efficiency and reducing the space for preferential treatment, human error and fraud, thus contributing to the fight against corruption by enhancing transparency and accountability. Accelerator Labs were found to effectively support knowledge facilitation and exchange in terms of what kinds of digital solutions work and how to adapt them to other contexts. They were deemed less successful in originating new digital solutions for use in UNDP programmes in conflict countries.³¹⁶

5 Successful digitalization takes time and must carefully consider local readiness and culture.

To adapt to a continually changing and disrupted present, UNDP is rightly speeding up. Yet, evaluations point to a trade-off between speed and quality when it comes to digital solutions. Failure to make adequate time for digitalization is one of the most recurrent challenges reported.³¹⁷ In Sierra Leone, UNDP started but did not complete work on a civil registration system, from which the voter registry was to be extracted, as it became clear that a more comprehensive approach, and more time, was needed than foreseen in the project.³¹⁸ In Guinea-Bissau, there was a lack of political consensus about the technical prerequisites for voter registration equipment and absence of a clear and adequate legal framework to establish the independence and respective competences of the electoral management bodies. This ultimately meant that UNDP procured biometric equipment for voter registration so late that it was not available in time for the March 2019 elections.³¹⁹ While digitalization can strengthen the UNDP brand and efficiency gains can be made in the longer-term, additional time, effort and capacities are needed at the programme design stage to get digital initiatives right.³²⁰

Digital solutions need to be introduced in line with country capacities and readiness, and respect local cultures. To break the pattern of development agencies flying in experts from the global North, and more generally the global North developing digital solutions to test in the global South, digital solutions must be adapted (if not developed) locally to solve problems within the society. Some positive examples (albeit with their own challenges) were found in the field of digital health, where appropriate digital solutions were developed in partnership with local actors and as part of larger initiatives. These include the use of mobile tablets to conduct real-time monitoring of local health centres to track malaria outbreaks and coordinate the rapid responses in Guinea-Bissau³²¹ and a telemedicine solution offering medical consultations through computers or smartphones in Bangladesh.³²² In contrast, evaluations noted cases of programme countries being invited to adopt technologies not yet used in highly developed countries, such as the biometric equipment for voter registration,³²³ not sufficiently adapted to take local users' perspectives into account³²⁴

or not fully aware of context. For example, new diagnostic equipment was procured in Argentina that could not be used fully due to the lack of digital medical record keeping.³²⁵ In those cases, UNDP support to digitalization did not lead to lasting change.

6 Digitalization benefits from risk taking and collaborating with local digital disrupters.

Innovators appreciate risk-taking and see failure as a strategy for achieving success in the long run. UNDP can support Governments in trying out new digital solutions and exposing themselves to risk. In Kazakhstan, a UNDP-supported e-application called 'Digital Agent' enables citizens to assess the quality of public services and provide feedback, including reporting on inaccessible buildings and spaces that limit the mobility of persons with disabilities.³²⁶ UNDP also successfully supported the creation of enabling environments for local digital disrupters. In Serbia, UNDP spearheaded a major initiative to help implement the government strategy for digital transformation which included the development of new e-services, awareness-raising and the use of open data. According to a recent evaluation, this opened new opportunities for economic actors and strengthened the software development industry.³²⁷

Failing fast means having a culture in place that tolerates quick pilots and, should they fail, is ready to learn the lessons to become stronger and smarter. Direct engagement with youth and young innovators plays a key role in this regard. In Honduras, to support the reintegration of young victims of violence, UNDP partnered with social entrepreneurs through the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to develop orthopaedic hand prostheses in 3D with a useful life of five years when used daily.³²⁸ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNDP hosted a Global Crowdsourcing Academy to spark employment ideas for flood-affected municipalities that are home to large returnee populations.³²⁹ In Afghanistan, UNDP organized a hackathon, 'Hack4Integrity', which allowed youth to develop technology-based solutions against corruption.³³⁰ In Rwanda, the 'YouthConnekt' Initiative leveraged ICT innovations to address youth unemployment, citizenship and engagement in national policy dialogue.³³¹ In India, well-qualified youth moderated and synthesized discussions on a web-based development

solution exchange platform which helped produce reference materials in crucial policy areas now used by the Government and development practitioners.³³² Evaluations found that, through these and other examples, UNDP fuelled youth entrepreneurship and helped demonstrate the potential of homegrown innovation and the power of youth to shape their digital future.

7 Mind the gap. The 'digital divide' is real and growing.

Digital technology is not neutral, nor is it a mirror – it is a magnifier of existing inequalities. Digital solutions are most accessible to those with good ICT skills, who have access to the necessary technology or infrastructure and who are literate (often English is required). These tend to be younger, more affluent persons living in cities, without disabilities, and male. Several evaluations noted that it had been harder to reach women and vulnerable groups, including people living with disabilities, with digital initiatives.³³³ Other evaluations showed that digital solutions failed to reach intended beneficiaries altogether. For instance, climate information from UNDP-supported early warning systems in Uganda and elsewhere was poorly disseminated from district to sub-county to parish to farmer.³³⁴ Digitalization efforts that contributed to closing the digital divide, or at least not exacerbating it, were those that explicitly included the most vulnerable as part of their core beneficiaries at the design stage, produced materials in accessible formats (translation into local languages, braille, voice-assisted technologies, etc.) and ensured that communication strategies use inclusive language, including in terms of gender.³³⁵

Limited access to quality education, affordability and cultural norms still prevent women and girls from entering the digital world. UNDP-supported programmes such as 'Forsati for her' in Bahrain specifically target women for digital literacy and coding backed by Microsoft certifications.³³⁶ The more expansive 'IT for Literacy' programme in Egypt has shown some positive results but would need to be scaled up significantly to make an appreciable dent in female illiteracy or access to digital services.³³⁷ During times of crisis, women and girls often play the role of (unpaid) caregivers and heads of household at the expense of their own careers and personal well-being, with

impacts on the family and local economies.³³⁸ In this context, requirements to use new technologies have been reported to overburden some women, such as in the case of Afghanistan, where biometric voter verification machines introduced for the 2018 and 2019 elections reportedly deterred female voter turn-out.³³⁹

On the flip side, digital technologies have been reported to make indirect contributions to the empowerment of women, such as in the realm of digital finance and vaccines. Women were a viable market segment in the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme (PFIP) given the high labour participation in sectors like agriculture, but very few products and services were especially designed for women and their needs. Initiatives like SolaPayGo in Papua New Guinea have shown that uptake of solar products helped women find ways to budget their time in the evenings for household chores using the solar-powered lights, leaving them with more time for work and other economic pursuits in the morning. However, these outcomes are incidental and few and far between within the larger financial innovation portfolio under PFIP II.³⁴⁰ India's electronic vaccine intelligence network (eVIN) digitalizes entire vaccine stocks and tracks their storage temperature and movement to cold chain points in the country. The intervention contributed to reducing waste of expired vaccines as well as stock-outs, while improving record-keeping and promoting transparency and accountability. As part of UNDP support, women (including older women) were trained to contribute to the real-time vaccine management information system via smartphone, thus enhancing their IT literacy.³⁴¹ While not itself an example from a crisis-setting, this has clear relevance in terms of designing gender-responsive digital initiatives to support recovery from COVID-19.



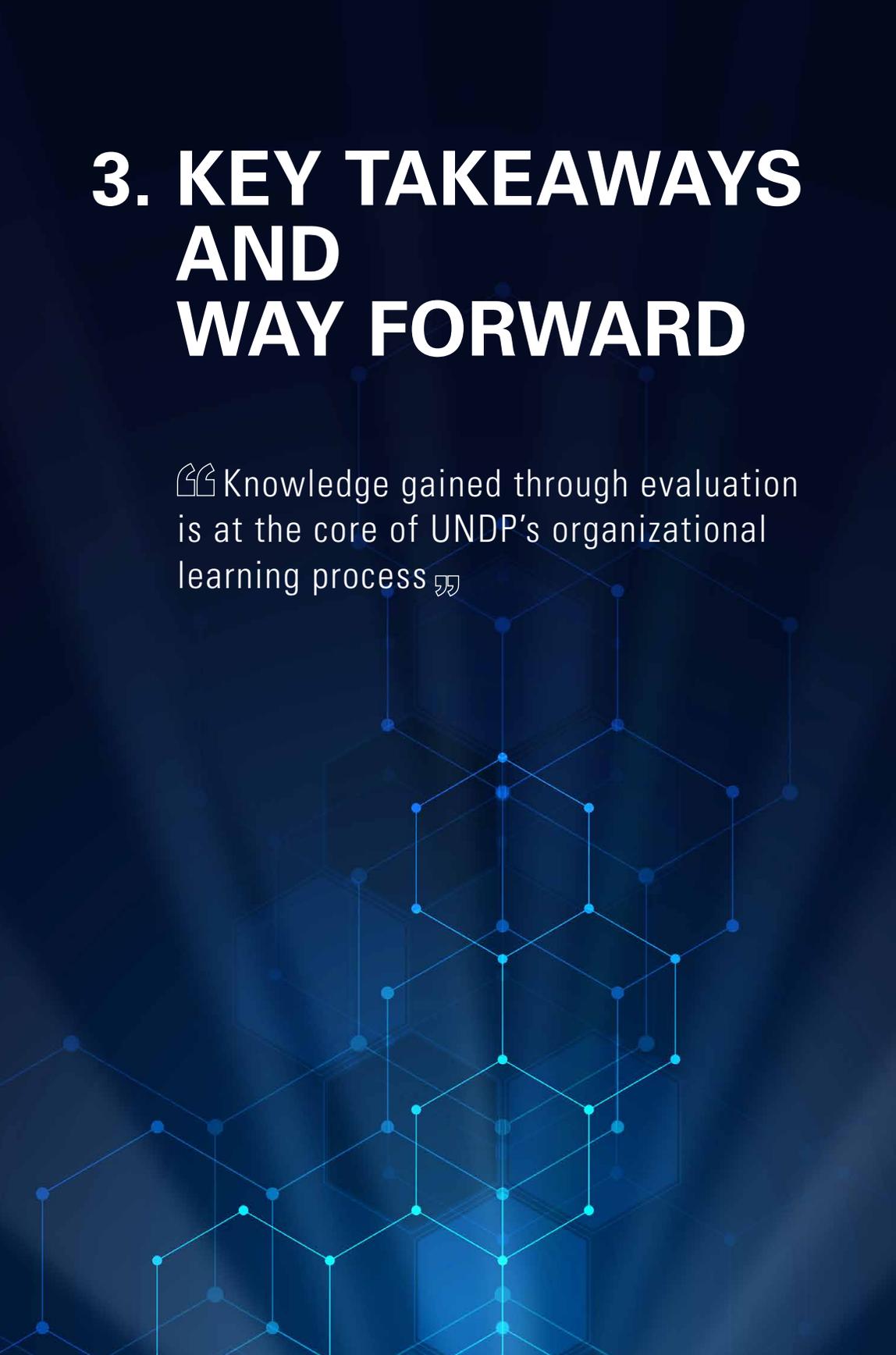
Acting on data insights is key, especially for decisions around scale-up and replication.

Scale-up and replication of digitalization initiatives hinge on early investment in documentation and assessment, including measurement of unintended effects. To date, evaluations note widespread lack of systematic collection and reporting of performance data on digital solutions³⁴² – at worst, inviting replication based on anecdotal evidence. Many digitalization initiatives lack theories of change and measure few

intermediate results, e.g., of rapid prototyping, along the results chain. Measurement tends to take place either against quantitative activity indicators or against long-term, aspirational goals which make it hard for UNDP to demonstrate its contribution at the level of changes in attitudes or capacities.³⁴³ Where UNDP supported digitalization projects as part of larger national initiatives, reporting sometimes failed to differentiate between the two, thus inflating the UNDP impact.³⁴⁴ In general, reporting lacked an identification of ongoing challenges and adverse effects, thus failing to advance organizational learning about digitalization, both internally³⁴⁵ and with partners.³⁴⁶ Further reflection is needed to understand how to capture very recent or ongoing initiatives in evaluations. While they may not be ripe for evaluation in the traditional sense, by leaving them out the evaluation function misses opportunities to weigh in and support evidence-based decision-making on taking digitalization pilots to scale or replicating them elsewhere.

3. KEY TAKEAWAYS AND WAY FORWARD

📖 Knowledge gained through evaluation is at the core of UNDP's organizational learning process 📖



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1



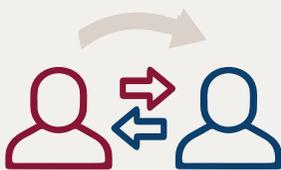
Leveraging new technologies, in line with local capacities and knowledge, is increasingly critical to achieving results in crisis settings.

2

UNDP efforts to empower women and marginalized groups as rights holders are key to ensuring no one is left (even further) behind in crises.



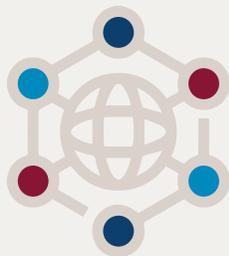
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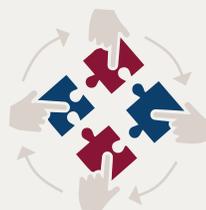
UNDP has an edge at the local level, and its development and conflict-prevention work adds real value to what humanitarian actors do in countries affected by crises.

4

Leveraging its global network to fill capacity gaps and ensuring the existence of enabling systems is essential to UNDP success.



5



UNDP makes valuable contributions when it collaborates widely, going beyond its traditional partners, but continues to link crisis interventions to the long-term development priorities of the affected country or countries.

The nine *Reflections* papers above generated a total of **61 lessons** for UNDP decision-makers to consider as the organization continues to manoeuvre the COVID-19 pandemic. By clustering the 61 lessons into recurring themes, the IEO identified five higher-level takeaways that cut across the nine topics.



1. Leveraging new technologies, in line with local capacities and knowledge, is increasingly critical to achieving results in crisis settings.

UNDP is increasingly using new technologies in its interventions in countries affected by crises. Examples include biometric equipment for voter registration systems to reduce fraud; digital finance to transfer salaries to health workers and to the police to reduce corruption; digital health and health information systems; and early warning systems for climate information. Technology-enabled solutions were more effective, efficient and sustainable when they included local adaptation, were accompanied by capacity development initiatives and involved collaboration with local innovators to spark homegrown experimentation (youth, entrepreneurs, private sector, etc.). UNDP failed to sustain change where digital technologies were out of tune with country capacities and users' abilities to repair and maintain the hardware and software, or where project timelines were too short to train users and develop oversight systems. Limited access to technology and infrastructure and/or low literacy levels made it more difficult to reach women and vulnerable groups, including people living with disabilities, through information and communication technology solutions. Ethical issues that may require government regulation – going beyond data protection to include considerations such as increasing gaps in access to technology, human dignity and discrimination – are potential areas for UNDP investment in the future.



2. UNDP efforts to empower women and marginalized groups as rights holders are key to ensuring no one is left (even further) behind in crises.

Crises hit the most marginalized hardest. By paying explicit attention to the needs and vulnerabilities of those most at risk and by mainstreaming this perspective into its programming in crisis settings, UNDP was able to mitigate shocks at least to some degree. Good examples highlighted in evaluations include engaging with penitentiary systems to reach at-risk groups during health crises; the inclusion of disability-sensitive strategies to strengthen the integrity of democratic processes after crises; creating opportunities around waste management to benefit the most vulnerable and promote social inclusion; and enhancing institutional frameworks for social protection to open up access to social safety nets. Similarly, a strong gender lens helped boost the effectiveness of UNDP support in crisis contexts, to ensure that that benefits reach women and girls equally. Attention to victims of gender-based and other forms of violence resulted in greater participation of women (and, incidentally, indigenous peoples) in response, recovery and ensuing local development processes. Advocating for electoral reform and training female candidates helped support women's political representation in many countries emerging from crises. Strengthening women's resilience to negative impacts on ecosystems was equally crucial in the aftermath of crises. In all these interventions, a key success factor was the consideration of cultural factors, including ethnicity, and a clear focus on the differing needs and abilities of rights holders and duty bearers alike.



3. UNDP has an edge at the local level, and its development and conflict-prevention work adds real value to what humanitarian actors do in countries affected by crises.

Its strong field presence and established portfolios such as local governance, waste management and livelihoods make UNDP an important player at the local level. When a crisis hits, humanitarian actors are quickly mobilized and support much-needed relief efforts. The local level is where societies deeply affected by crises recover, and where community resilience is built. In trying circumstances, UNDP has often been effective in supporting accountable and inclusive local

systems, restoring services and infrastructure and fostering social cohesion in divided communities. For instance, evaluations show that improving local infrastructure and capacities is critical to enable host communities cope with increased demands created by the inflow of refugees and internally displaced persons. Similarly, UNDP can play an important role in bringing communities together to undertake conflict assessments and identify solutions to address drivers of conflict. While the UNDP niche is moving “upstream” overall, concrete work with rights holders on the ground helps guarantee UNDP a seat at the negotiating table in crisis contexts and boosts its credibility as an organization that can produce results relatively quickly. Support at the local level is most successful when informed by pilot initiatives demonstrating what works in context. Where a plethora of small projects takes UNDP in too many different directions, its strategic and normative voice diminishes.



4. Leveraging its global network to fill capacity gaps and ensuring the existence of enabling systems is essential to UNDP success.

UNDP support to countries affected by crises was most successful where it included the provision of targeted technical training and tailored capacity-building to bolster local capabilities. Building on existing talent and motivation from design through to implementation and knowledge exchange was key to building back (or forward) better and achieving long-term results. Embedding technical experts with national counterparts has often proven to be effective in transferring skills, increasing mutual accountability and institutionalizing programme outcomes. Evaluations show that technical assistance by UNDP can be an important vector for change with regard to bolstering transparency and accountability but also a focus on leaving no one behind. Where UNDP was able to bring its own regional experts or broker knowledge across country offices, this was often considered the most effective way to fill capacity gaps. A particular added value was noted where UNDP supported countries in strengthening enabling systems and adequate institutional capacity, including for decision-making at the highest levels. Linking successful individual interventions at the local level to national policy reform was

an effective way to scale up interventions and enable wider impact. Examples include road maps for digital futures and green recovery, particularly in post-crisis settings.



5. UNDP makes valuable contributions when it collaborates widely, going beyond its traditional partners, but continues to link crisis interventions to the long-term development priorities of the affected country or countries.

The UNDP impact in crisis settings is greatest where it is mindful of complementarity with other organizations and partners and acts on its comparative advantages. UNDP is at its best where it brings analytical work connecting immediate crises with longer-term development issues faced by multiple countries, such as climate change, global migration, groundwater and global health. Another forte is the UNDP capacity to understand and support the long-term development priorities of programme countries, and to bring this understanding to concerted action for crisis response. Its interventions work best where UNDP has an integrated framework for cooperation in place, with clearly defined leadership, roles and responsibilities. Where such frameworks allow UNDP to partner with non-traditional actors, results are often amplified. For example, UNDP has helped to track, prevent and treat disease outbreaks via the inclusion of community outreach through youth peer educators, local media and religious leaders, community-based data collection and monitoring as well as support to the formal health system. In other instances, the lack of a clear engagement strategy identifying strategic allies from the gamut of actors engaged in crisis settings, hindered achievement of results by UNDP.

THE WAY FORWARD:



FROM HINDSIGHT TO INSIGHT TO FORESIGHT

Knowledge gained through evaluation is at the core of the UNDP organizational learning process. UNDP country offices are eager to learn what worked—and did not work—in order to ensure better progress towards sustainable and inclusive results. Evaluative evidence can help UNDP use information generated from experience to influence the way in which appropriate policies and programmes are developed, or the way in which projects are managed. The goal of *Reflections* is to harness existing evaluative evidence and translate that data into **meaningful insights** that decision-makers can act on.

Going forward, the IEO will publish new papers that expand on the nine *Reflections* included in this volume. The 2021 series will go beyond a focus on crises to include lessons from non-crisis development settings. The Sustainable Development Goals and UNDP “signature solutions” will continue to drive topic selection. Lessons on cross-cutting issues will be introduced and the possibility of deriving lessons jointly with other United Nations agencies will be explored. The *Reflections* lessons will inform scoping for future evaluations, and key takeaways will be summarized in the annual reports on evaluation provided to the UNDP Executive Board.

The medium-term ambition is for *Reflections* to move **from insight to foresight**, i.e., to predict what UNDP will need in the future and provide tailored lessons in anticipation. Key to this are ongoing efforts to identify likely challenges for upcoming UNDP operations, and to detect related lessons through artificial intelligence-assisted document searches of past experience. The IEO will draw on artificial intelligence to prepare the next series of papers and extract lessons from other open evaluation databases which will broaden opportunities for collaboration with other United Nations agencies.

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Claudia de Barros Marcondes is a former local government practitioner in the developing world. She has more than 10 years of experience managing international development projects in the sector and lecturing at the Universities of Toronto and Ottawa. An Independent Evaluator with over 20 years of professional evaluation experience, she is currently an Evaluation Quality Assessment Reviewer. Since 2012, she reviewed the quality of more than 300 evaluations produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UNESCO - UNEG Peer Review process and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Sue Nelson is the author of the *Reflections, Lessons Learned from Evaluations of UNDP Support to Electoral Processes*. As an independent consultant advising on democratic governance and electoral assistance programmes, she led the thematic evaluation of UNDP's contribution to strengthening electoral processes, systems and institutions (2012) and the evaluation of its electoral contribution to the UNDP Strategic Plan 2014- 2017 as well as undertaking numerous regional and country-level evaluations, assessments and case studies for UNDP and other organizations. She also evaluated ACE, the Electoral Knowledge Network and its global efforts, and was the author of the first edition of Electoral Integrity for ACE's electoral Encyclopedia. Before consulting, Ms. Nelson was the Director a.i. of the Democracy and Governance Office for USAID/Cambodia and a Senior Electoral Advisor to several USAID missions and the U.S. State Department.

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Claudia Villanueva has over 10 years of international development experience with the UN System in the fields of evaluation, monitoring, research, and programme management focused on gender equality, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. At the IEO, Claudia has been instrumental in completing country programme evaluations, corporate thematic evaluations, capacity development initiatives, and quality assessment of decentralized evaluations. Prior to joining UNDP, Claudia led an assessment of UN Women's planning and reporting, and RBM, and provided technical guidance for the implementation of the UN-SWAP. Before this position, Claudia worked at the UN Independent System-Wide Evaluation Coordination Secretariat, and contributed to various evaluations at UNICEF, UNOCHA; and CARE International in Kenya, Burundi, and Tanzania. Claudia holds a Master in Business Administration and a diploma in European Management.

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