

REFLECTIONS

LESSONS FROM EVALUATIONS: UNDP GOVERNANCE SUPPORT TO COUNTRIES IN CRISIS

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time, with devastating social, economic, and political consequences worldwide, and a tragic loss of life. As a central actor in the United Nations Development System, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is playing an important role in shaping and driving the United Nations response to the crisis.

To support the UNDP response to COVID-19, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) has undertaken a review of lessons from past evaluations of UNDP's work in crisis contexts. The purpose is to provide evidence-based advice to UNDP country offices that are responding to requests to help prepare for, respond to, and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing particularly on the most vulnerable.

This paper focuses on governance support and is one in a series of knowledge products from the IEO focusing on important areas of UNDP support to countries in crisis.

METHODOLOGY

This is a rapid evidence assessment, designed to provide a balanced synthesis of evaluative evidence posted to the UNDP [Evaluation Resource Centre](#) over the past decade. Country-level and thematic evaluations conducted by the IEO were an important source, given their independence and high credibility. Additionally, high-quality decentralized evaluations commissioned by country offices were considered. Within each review, the emphasis was on identifying consistent findings, conclusions and recommendations that capture relevant lessons for UNDP. The analysis seeks to offer practical and timely insights to support UNDP decision-makers for effective crisis response. It is not a comprehensive study of the general and scientific literature on crisis support.

CONTEXT

Well-functioning government institutions are critical to preparing for, responding to, and recovering from crises. Working with national and subnational government partners, UNDP offers a wide range of governance support, including electoral cycle support, parliamentary development, rule of law and justice system reform.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not just a public health crisis but also a humanitarian and development crisis with broader governance concern. This paper identifies some key lessons learned from evaluating UNDP's past governance support in crisis contexts. The lessons are drawn from some 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 UNDP's 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's 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

UNDP's role in influencing policies remains relevant and critical during and after a crisis as part of its response efforts.

UNDP's 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 to the smooth delivery of **elections** in the midst of a civil war or active conflict (Somalia, Afghanistan)¹ and the **fight against corruption** to ensure transparency and accountability in the public sector (Kyrgyzstan, Timor-Leste, the Philippines, Rwanda).² 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 discriminations (e.g. revision of laws that stigmatized and discriminated against persons with HIV/AIDS in public and private institutions (Tanzania, Mozambique)³, and the elimination of violence against women (Afghanistan).⁴

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).⁵ Of the key ingredients for a successful partnership was UNDP's 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. UNDP Philippines⁶ 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 is not a narrow

sectoral concern, 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 **prevention 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, Tanzania, and Tunisia).⁷

UNDP, through its legal reform initiatives in the sector, has helped position the **media** in Rwanda as a self-regulated platform for democracy and strengthened its oversight role in society. UNDP's governance work in the country, however, has primarily focused on supporting central government entities, leaving more room for engagement with **subnational authorities** and partners.⁸

4

UNDP work with civil society and other non-state actors needs a strong 'engagement strategy' to promote impact at scale and sustainability.

Civil society organizations and religious groups are often mobilized as **implementing partners** during and after a crisis, given their **ability to reach deeper into the communities** and 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 the 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 the non-state actors can be an issue. For example, **sustainability** is threatened by **financial constraints** of those community-based organizations or lack of systematic plans to strengthen their **capacity**; 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, Tanzania, Rwanda, the Philippines, Sierra Leone).⁹

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 Kyrgyzstan¹⁰ has facilitated improved **transparency and accountability in public service delivery**. In Nepal, the use of Geographical Information Services technology has helped to improve the Government's capacities for **election planning, logistics and security**.¹¹

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 UNDP's ability 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).¹² 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**, which has now become a regional effort.¹³

6

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

In Rwanda,¹⁴ women have played a significant role in rebuilding the society after the genocide with a major loss of life, particularly of men. With a government-wide concerted effort, Rwanda is one of the most advanced countries in demonstrating efforts to reduce the 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,¹⁵ **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,¹⁶ the construction of **community centres established as 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's 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 election support; elimination of discriminatory laws through women's caucus; 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, civil society organizations, and youth. Notable challenges include **ensuring political will** (Somalia)¹⁷ and **designing projects based on research and data** so that the efforts (e.g. local mediation) do not negatively impact women (Afghanistan)¹⁸.

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,¹⁹ Afghanistan)²⁰.

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)²¹.

REFERENCES

- ¹ [Somalia ICPE \(2019\)](#) and Afghanistan ICPE (2020 - forthcoming)
- ² [Kyrgyzstan ADR \(2017\)](#), [Timor-Leste ICPE \(2018\)](#), [Philippines ICPE \(2017\)](#) and [Rwanda ICPE \(2017\)](#)
- ³ [Tanzania ADR \(2015\)](#) and [Mozambique ICPE \(2019\)](#)
- ⁴ Afghanistan ICPE (2020 – forthcoming)
- ⁵ [Yemen ICPE \(2018\)](#)
- ⁶ [Terminal Evaluation ‘Recovery and Resilience in Selected Typhoon Yolanda Affected Communities in the Visayas’, Philippines \(Project RECOVERY\) \(2017\)](#)
- ⁷ [Timor-Leste ICPE \(2018\)](#), [Kyrgyzstan ADR \(2017\)](#), [Tanzania ADR \(2015\)](#) and [Tunisia ICPE \(2018\)](#)
- ⁸ [Rwanda ICPE \(2017\)](#)
- ⁹ [Tunisia ICPE \(2018\)](#), [Tanzania ADR \(2015\)](#), [Rwanda ICPE \(2017\)](#), [Philippines ICPE \(2017\)](#) and [Sierra Leone ICPE \(2018\)](#)
- ¹⁰ [Bangladesh ICPE \(2019\)](#) and [Kyrgyzstan ADR \(2017\)](#)
- ¹¹ [UNDP Nepal ‘Electoral support project phase II - Final evaluation report’ \(2018\)](#)
- ¹² Afghanistan ICPE (2020 - forthcoming)
- ¹³ [Rwanda ICPE \(2017\)](#)
- ¹⁴ [Rwanda ICPE \(2017\)](#)
- ¹⁵ [Somalia ICPE \(2019\)](#)
- ¹⁶ [Iraq ICPE \(2019\)](#)
- ¹⁷ [Somalia ICPE \(2019\)](#)
- ¹⁸ Afghanistan ICPE (2020 - forthcoming)
- ¹⁹ [Yemen ICPE \(2018\)](#)
- ²⁰ Afghanistan ICPE (2020 – forthcoming)
- ²¹ [Timor-Leste ICPE \(2018\)](#), [Tunisia ICPE \(2018\)](#), [Somalia ICPE \(2019\)](#) and [Evaluation of UNDP Support to Conflict-Affected Countries \(2013\)](#)

ABOUT THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OFFICE

By generating objective evidence, the Independent Evaluation Office (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. It mobilizes evaluative knowledge to provide valuable insights for improved decision-making and better development results. This edition highlights lessons from evaluations of UNDP's work in crisis settings.

