

# REFLECTIONS

## LESSONS FROM EVALUATIONS: UNDP SUPPORT TO LIVELIHOODS RESTORATION AND JOB CREATION IN CRISIS COUNTRIES

### 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 support to livelihoods restoration 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

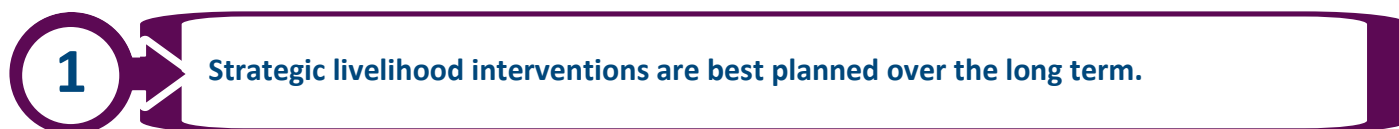
In the area of economic revitalization and stabilization, this review draws on evaluative findings from several crises where UNDP has often served as the UN coordinating mechanism for early recovery; utilizing its SURGE (supporting UNDP resources on the ground with experts on mission) facility to offer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

crisis-response evaluations, including man-made (conflict and refugee responses), natural (earthquake, landslides, typhoons, and tsunami) and health crisis (Ebola).<sup>1</sup>

## AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

- 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



**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).<sup>2</sup>

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's 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).<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

UNDP's 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).<sup>5</sup>

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).<sup>6</sup>

**Funding in the post-crisis context is often fragmented, unpredictable and dominated by initial humanitarian assistance** (Ebola response, Afghanistan, Bangladesh).<sup>7</sup> 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 LDC support evaluation, Ebola support, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen).<sup>8</sup> 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).<sup>9</sup>

2

**Frameworks for cooperation and coordination across UN agencies and other partners are critical.**

**The coordination of livelihoods responses with other UN 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 sister UN agencies (e.g. UN Children's Fund, International Organization for Migration, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Labour Organization) as well as with national institutions, civil society organizations and international non-government organizations. When national and local institutions are in place, **coordination of livelihoods 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).<sup>10</sup>

3

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

**Livelihoods 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 crises 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).<sup>11</sup> **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.<sup>12</sup> 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).<sup>13</sup>

4

**Clear transition from crisis response to recovery is essential.**

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

Evaluations have shown that UNDP's strong 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).<sup>14</sup>

Recovery support and longer-term livelihoods assistance can get 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 and women's livelihoods (Sierra Leone and Liberia, the Philippines, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, Pakistan).<sup>15</sup>

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 UN 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).<sup>16</sup>

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 livelihoods 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).<sup>17</sup>

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).<sup>18</sup> 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 livelihoods interventions are meaningful. In the Philippines, participants sometimes criticized livelihoods interventions as being too small to have any meaningful impact on their lives. In other cases, interventions did not consider gender dynamics and cultural appropriateness of women, such as in cash for work linked to infrastructure and rubble removal (Syria).<sup>19</sup>

Equally, one-off short-term and **fragmented interventions for youth employment** have proven to be insufficient to sustainably address the scale and depth of socio-economic challenges for youth in the post-crisis context (Syria, the Philippines).<sup>20</sup> 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).<sup>21</sup>

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 the communities' needs, working closely with local governments and other partners which strongly supports coordination (Syria, Yemen, Bangladesh).<sup>22</sup> In Bangladesh, the establishment of a well-staffed UNDP sub-office in Cox's Bazaar allowed UNDP to lay the foundations for future collaboration in the humanitarian-development nexus in response to the 2015 Rohingya refugee crisis.<sup>23</sup>

## REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> [UNDP Global Toolkit on the 3x6 approach: building resilience through jobs and livelihoods \(2016\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Bangladesh ICPE \(2019\)](#); [Afghanistan ICPE \(2020 - forthcoming\)](#); [Syria ICPE \(2020 - forthcoming\)](#); [BICOL Recovery project – Evaluation report \(2011\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> [Iraq ICPE \(2019\)](#); [Outcome evaluation-UNDP Sustainable economic transformation pillar Liberia \(2018\)](#); [Mid-term review Country Programme Liberia \(2015\)](#); [Reintegration of Sierra Leone Red Cross Society \(SLRCS\) Volunteers Burial Teams-Evaluation report \(2017\)](#); [ICPE Afghanistan \(2020 - forthcoming\)](#); [Jordan ADR \(2017\)](#); [Syria ICPE \(2020 - forthcoming\)](#); [Evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan and Global and Regional Programmes \(2017\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> [Outcome evaluation-UNDP Sustainable economic transformation pillar Liberia \(2018\)](#); [Mid-term review Country Programme Liberia \(2015\)](#); [Reintegration of Sierra Leone Red Cross Society \(SLRCS\) Volunteers Burial Teams- Evaluation report \(2017\)](#); [Afghanistan ICPE \(2020 – forthcoming\)](#); [Evaluation of UNDP Support to Poverty Reduction in the Least Developed Countries \(2018\)](#); [Evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan and Global and Regional Programmes \(2017\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Evaluation of UNDP Support to Poverty Reduction in the Least Developed Countries \(2018\)](#); [Final evaluation of the Social Rehabilitation and Payment to EVD Survivors project \(2017\)](#); [Iraq ICPE \(2019\)](#); [Afghanistan ICPE \(2020 - forthcoming\)](#); [Yemen ICPE \(2019\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Yemen ICPE \(2019\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Joint Programme on Youth Employment, Somalia \(2019\)](#), [Iraq ICPE \(2019\)](#); [Yemen ICPE \(2019\)](#); [After Action Review for Philippines Haiyan Typhoon \(2014\)](#); [Syria ICPE \(2020 - forthcoming\)](#); [Jordan ADR \(2017\)](#); [Nepal ADR \(2012\)](#)

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<sup>16</sup> [Jordan ADR \(2017\)](#), [Yemen ICPE \(2019\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Philippines ICPE \(2017\)](#); [Indonesia ADR \(2010\)](#); [Bangladesh ADR \(2011\)](#); [Evaluation of UNDP Support to Poverty Reduction in the Least Developed Countries \(2018\)](#); [Jordan ADR \(2017\)](#)

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#### **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.

