



COUNTRY EVALUATION: ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT RESULTS

SYRIA



United Nations Development Programme
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Contents

Foreword	5
Glossary of Acronyms	7
Executive Summary	9
1. Introduction	17
2. Challenges of transition in Syria	29
3. National priorities and strategic positioning of UNDP	37
4. UNDP contribution to national development results	49
5. Key lessons learned and recommendations	61
Annexes	69
I. Terms of Reference	69
II. List of people met in New York and Syria	75
III. Documents reviewed	79
IV. Employment by sex, education and wage category	85
V. Map of intended development results for UNDP Syria (1997-2003)	87
VI. Approvals by SRF outcomes and source of funds	89
VII. Matrix of goals, programme objectives for UNDP & UN agencies, Syria (1997-2006)	91
VIII. Strategic goals and service lines for UNDP Syria (MYFF 2002-2007)	93
IX. Multi-year funding framework (MYFF) tree for UNDP Syria (2002-2007)	95
X. Organizational chart of UNDP Syria country office	97
XI. UNDP Syria country office team: reorganization in progress	99
XII. Overview of key staff competence & vacancies, UNDP Syria	101
XIII. Staff turnover since 1999 in UNDP Syria	103
XIV. Announcement of short-term UNDP assignments in UNDP Syria	105
XV. Generic Framework for an advocacy strategy	107

Foreword

This report presents an assessment of the contributions of the UNDP to the key development results in Syria in the last five to six years. The evaluation is one of independent country-level evaluations conducted by the UNDP Evaluation Office, called Assessments of Development Results (ADRs), every year. These are forward-looking exercises that seek to capture and demonstrate UNDP's contribution to national development results as well as serve as tools for accountability and quality assurance with regard to UNDP interventions, generating lessons learned and strengthening country-level programming.

Syria is at a crossroads, both economically and politically. The ADR for Syria is particularly relevant given the human development implications of the country's development experience since the early 1990s, when key reforms were first introduced after decades of inward-oriented economic policies, and the country's unique political and economic position in the Arab world.

Over the last seven years, UNDP has made significant contributions to the creation of the first national plan for environment, to the promotion of a stronger poverty focus, with particular attention to capability poverty, and to a greater emphasis on democratic governance and administrative reform. The significance of these achievements lies in the fact that they provided a basis for broader reform processes to promote human development. In recent years, the Government of Syria has engaged UNDP in its efforts to develop financial services for private sector initiatives and enhance international trade while maintaining a strong public sector through a gradual pace of reforms consistent with Syria's social and political systems.

The findings of the ADR also illustrate the challenges faced by UNDP in responding to policy developments and rapid changes within civil society. They suggest a need for redefining UNDP's role in Syria and supporting new partnerships between the public sector and the institutions of civil society to promote more accountable delivery of public services and ensuring the protection of the poor.

The ADR draws upon consultations with a wide range of actors in Syria—programme beneficiaries, citizens' groups, researchers and government officials at different levels as well as international donors and development practitioners. We wish to express special thanks to H.E. Mr. Abdallah Dardari, Head of the State Planning Commission; other government and deputy ministers, presidential advisors, parliamentarians, heads of government agencies, Syrian political leaders and many other officials for their valuable support and openness in discussing the past and present challenges of Syria as well as the UNDP response to them and its impact on shaping government strategies and policy-making.

We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of many civil society representatives, heads of non-governmental organizations and members of the communities assisted by UNDP in Syria. The meetings with these individuals were extremely useful in shedding new light on the work done by UNDP and national partners.

We are particularly indebted to Mr. Ali Al-Za'tari, Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative, and all his colleagues in the UNDP Country Office, whose cooperation and support made this ADR exercise possible. Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to Dr. Rima Khalaf Hunaidi, Assistant Administrator and Regional Director, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Regional Director, Ms. Kunzang Chungyalpa, Chief Country Operations Division and Ms. Maha Bahamoun, Programme Adviser, UNDP Regional Bureau for the Arab States, for their insightful advice and comments.

Professor Leif Ole Manger, University of Bergen, Norway, conducted the Syria ADR. Dr. Camillia Fawzi El-Solh, a political economist and gender specialist, served as the Principal Consultant for the evaluation. Dr. Warka Barmada, President of the Syrian Environment Association, was a National Consultant to the ADR Team. Mr. Khaled Ehsan, Evaluation Office, acted as task manager for the evaluation. The ADR analysis was based on a detailed desk review by Niclas Wigforss, a research analyst in New York, and an in-depth country study undertaken prior to the main evaluation mission, by ACUMEN, a non-governmental research agency in Syria.

We hope this independent evaluation will contribute to the ongoing process of analysis and reflection to clarify UNDP's future role in Syria. The results of this evaluation, including its findings and lessons learned, will be widely disseminated. The management response from the UNDP Syria Country Office on the recommendations of this evaluation can be accessed at www.undp.org/eo. The Evaluation Office is pleased to have led this initiative, and is thankful for the opportunity to work with strong national partners throughout Syria.



Saraswathi Menon

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Glossary of Acronyms

ACSS	Arab Centre for Strategic Studies
ACU	Agency for Combating Unemployment
ADR	Assessment of Development Results
AFESD	Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development
AGFUND	Arab Gulf Fund for United Nations Development Organizations
AHDR	Arab human development report
APR	Annual Programme/Project Report
CAWTAR	Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CCA	Common Country Assessment
CCF	country cooperation framework
CO	country office
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDI	Gender-Related Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GLO	Gender Liaison Officer
GUW	General Union of Women
HDI	human development index
ICARDA	International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
MDG	Millennium Development Goals

METAP	Mediterranean Environmental Technical Assistance Programme
MYFF	Multi-Year Funding Framework
NGO	non-governmental organization
NHDR	national human development report
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
RBAS	Regional Bureau for Arab States
RC	Resident Coordinator
SAR	Syrian Arab Republic
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPC	State Planning Commission
SRF	strategic results framework
TOKTEN	Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
UNV	United Nations Volunteer

Executive Summary

OBJECTIVE OF THE ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT RESULTS IN SYRIA

The Evaluation Office (EO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts a series of country evaluations—the Assessment of Development Results (ADR)—in order to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results at the country level. The ADR in Syria was initiated in April 2004 and concluded in November 2004. The methodology is based on guidelines issued by the UNDP EO. The main purpose of the evaluation was to assess the difference that UNDP's efforts have made to development in Syria, in particular whether UNDP is doing the right things in the right manner. Specific questions addressed by the evaluation included the following:

- How relevant was UNDP's response to the challenges of the transition process in Syria?
- What were the key results from UNDP partnerships, taking into account programme innovation, indicators of performance and national ownership?
- What were the results of UNDP measures to alleviate poverty and vulnerability of the poor?
- How effective were UNDP partnerships to address unemployment and social vulnerability?
- How was UNDP support used to leverage Syria's reform process in the area of governance?
- How successful was UNDP support to policy dialogue, aid coordination and brokerage in delivering development results?
- What are the most significant challenges for Syria and, by implication, for UNDP efforts to contribute to achieving national development priorities in the future?

NATIONAL CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES OF TRANSITION IN SYRIA

The situation in the country since 2000 is best described as one of cautious reform. Various quarters of Syrian leadership have recognized the need for economic reform, particularly in the unwieldy public sector. This sector can no longer be financed by an economy where a high percentage of revenue income derives from sectors that are stagnating or shrinking. Syria thus faces the challenge of reforming its economy in ways that allow for greater economic diversification and a more solid national economic base, while at the same time taking into account fluctuations in net official development assistance (ODA) flows and eventual dwindling reliance on the oil sector as a major foreign currency earner.

However, this process of change appears to lack clear direction and a timeline. Although there are signs of conditions improving for the private sector, it is still unclear what the process of economic liberalization really means in the Syrian context and how it will relate to broader issues of political reform. Rather, the Government continues to remain an important player in the economy.

The reform process and transition phase in Syria is not only relatively limited, but also appears to be rather precarious. The unstable situation in the region affects Syria's ability to focus its efforts on development issues. The influence wielded by various power groups within the Government is clearly related to regional dynamics and any dramatic developments in the region can thus affect the strength of the various players. Indeed, regional developments may turn attention away from internal reform and focus it instead on issues of national security. In such a situation the need to ensure stability and the status quo would necessarily override the need for any far-reaching economic reforms. Thus, Syria today is engaged in a balancing act, in which the need for economic liberalization is recognized, while at the same time the need for political reform is also being debated.

GROWTH WITH EQUITY

It is within this space that UNDP and the international community in Syria are operating. The overall strategy for UN agencies and multilateral as well as bilateral donors appears to focus on developing strategies that can positively support a gradual movement towards broader reforms, but without upsetting and destabilizing the current status quo.

For UNDP this strategy has been, and indeed should be, pragmatic and based on a step-by-step approach. Pragmatism implies an understanding and acknowledgement of the importance of national independence and national ownership of future developments to both Government and society in Syria. It should also include an understanding that even those actors in the Syrian arena who may appear less interested in reform may have legitimate concerns about the uncontrolled opening up of the Syrian economy to trade liberalization in particular, and to the forces of globalization in general. Lessons learnt from other regions and countries affected by the processes of transition must be taken into account when formulating strategies for contributing to national development results in Syria.

A strategy that favours liberalization and economic growth must contain a clear element of concern for human

development, as well as address the challenge of ensuring equitable social distribution. In short, the overall UNDP strategy must be to support a process characterized by 'growth with equity'. But such a focus will also imply major challenges in terms of a multitude of pressing needs. Though Syria is a middle income country, which by 2002 ranked 106th on the human development index (HDI) out of a total of 177 countries, with a HDI value of 0.710,¹ large disparities exist between geographical regions within Syria, as well as between urban versus rural areas. Experiences from processes of transition in other regions and the impact of globalization indicate that economic development may result in greater socio-economic inequalities. There is thus the challenge of balancing economic growth with effectively implemented poverty reduction strategies that are also gender equitable.

Major challenges also exist in the fields of government reform and decentralization, including a shortage of skills and capacities at all levels of the public administration. In spite of public expenditures on health and education, the quality of these services must improve significantly if they are to meet the future needs of the population. The lack of a concrete agenda and timetable for policy and institutional reforms in the judicial, economic and social arenas also constitute a problem for the future direction of reform.

In general, in spite of promising openings that UNDP has and should support actively, there is a need to develop strategies that will ensure that UNDP plays a key role in supporting Syria's ongoing move towards a more democratic system and also enable UNDP to strengthen its comparative advantage as a key promoter of human development. This process needs to include public participation, a sense of inclusion and ownership, transparency and accountability, as well as effective support to civil society and promotion of a development-oriented and independent non-governmental organization (NGO) sector.

NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF UNDP

The overall UNDP strategic areas of support where intended outcomes are planned in Syria include focus on poverty reduction and sustainable livelihood; sustainable use of natural resources and environmental conservation; and institutional development and good governance.

These strategic goals are and will remain relevant to the major challenges faced by Syrian society and economy. UNDP has generally responded to Syrian national priorities, and as such has positioned itself strategically to

¹ Source: Human Development Report, UNDP 2004. The average HDI value for Arab States in 2002 was 0.651.

contribute to national development results.

However, it is clear that UNDP's strategic position during the years 1997-2000 was largely affected by a 'business as usual' approach intent on not courting undue political controversy. The new, post-2000 opportunities presented by the Government have provided some impetus for change. The implications of and reactions to the signals inherent in the new President's July 2000 inaugural speech have been mixed. Although after 2000 UNDP did attempt to push the boundaries, which is reflected for example in the shift from 'economic' to 'good' governance, and continued to play a major role in promoting a public discourse on poverty, it could have been more proactive and innovative in seizing new opportunities.

Since early 2004, UNDP has demonstrated a more proactive management approach to the post-2000 transition phase in Syria, an approach conducive to further strengthening UNDP's strategic position in the areas of governance and poverty. This indicates that UNDP's ability to operate in Syria is not only dependent on what at any given time is deemed to be politically acceptable, but also on the development of clear long-term plans and policies.

However, there have also been missed opportunities. UNDP's primary focus continues to be on relationships and links with Government counterparts and stakeholders, and minimally if at all with the emerging NGOs that are trying to stake out a niche in Syria's development process. UNDP has thus largely missed an opportunity to promote civil society through such NGOs. Civil society is a relatively new concept in Syria, where the prevailing official attitude tends to be based on caution, if not suspicion. Linked with the above is the missed opportunity to support the judiciary in Syria, an area explicitly singled out in the President's July 2000 inaugural speech and one of crucial importance to the reform process.

Similarly, UNDP has missed the opportunity to stake out a strategic position in gender mainstreaming, which is an integral part of the organization's core mandate on human development. The post-2000 openings as well as the current more proactive approach pursued by UNDP Syria have not led to efforts on the part of the country office (CO) to explicitly address the lack of an effective gender strategy for development interventions in the country.

CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESULTS

An overview of various UNDP projects and related outputs clearly indicates that UNDP's contribution to development

results in the thematic areas of poverty, governance and environment has been mixed. The evaluative evidence suggests that while the UNDP Syria CO has 'done the right thing' in terms of focusing on strategic goals of relevance to Syria's development needs and priorities, it has not necessarily 'done things the right way' in its efforts to implement its strategic interventions in the thematic areas of its focus. To some extent this is linked to the reality that UNDP appears to be pursuing a project and sector specific approach to development interventions, rather than an approach focusing on the process of human development *per se*.

UNDP's approach to implementing its strategic goals requires what the Evaluation Mission has defined as specific 'adjustments'. These adjustments pertain to the need for the CO to develop a strategic approach that takes explicit account of the cross-cutting factors linking development interventions both within as well as between pertinent thematic areas. This strategic approach is crucial to strengthening UNDP's profile as a key player in promoting human development in Syria, a profile that does not appear to be always clear to various counterparts and stakeholders.

These adjustments are also required in terms of addressing a number of crucial issues and cross-cutting factors with implications for intended outcomes, such as improving targeting of the poor; timely exit strategies and more effective mobilizing of strategic partnerships; addressing weaknesses in data collection as well as monitoring and evaluation systems; mainstreaming gender; strengthening administrative reform interventions; promoting information and communication technology (ICT) as a cross-cutting intervention; and strengthening the efficiency of project management. These are imperative if the CO is to strengthen its strategic positioning as well as maximize its contribution to development results in Syria.

UNDP is faced with the 'double' agenda of supporting the Government's development priorities while at the same time promoting a process that ensures that its core corporate mandate of supporting human development is central to the development agenda in Syria. There is a temptation to invest efforts in developing and implementing projects that the Government signals as important, resulting in UNDP spreading itself too thin at the expense of focusing on its strategic strengths and expertise. Projects in the pipeline need to be re-evaluated with this caveat in mind, while the decision to continue or otherwise with ongoing projects should not be influenced by whether or not they are problematic to implement.

UNDP's advocacy strategy for projects and programmes clearly has limitations, which is reflected in an apparent ad hoc approach. Developing an effective advocacy strategy closely linked to development interventions is also imperative given that in terms of resources, and in spite of the commendable increase in the share of non-core funding and Government cost-sharing, UNDP is a 'small player' compared with the financial resources of other agencies and donors in Syria, in particular the European Union (EU).

UNDP is making laudable efforts to develop the organizational structure of the CO through team-building. Though this process has just begun, it can be expected to strengthen the CO's efforts to promote human development. Meanwhile, the CO needs to address the implications of the workload shouldered by staff, competence requirements and the link with recruiting external short-term expertise. The latter in particular needs to be more explicitly focused on recruiting skills specifically relevant to strengthening UNDP's strategic position and results-orientation.

A particular weakness relates to the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, which is largely informed by an ad hoc approach focusing on the project level and is largely perceived as a reporting exercise. These shortcomings need to be seriously addressed not only in terms of their implication for evaluating outcomes to ensure accountability, but particularly also in relation to using M&E to enhance learning from programme implementation. An effective M&E system is also relevant to developing effective advocacy strategies for promoting gender sensitive poverty reduction and democratic governance.

LESSONS LEARNT

Since 1997 UNDP in Syria has made significant contributions to processes leading to a strategic plan for environment, to placing poverty more explicitly on the Syrian development agenda, and moving towards a stronger focus on good governance and administrative reform. Such achievements indicate the positive role of the UNDP as a neutral partner in Syria, and as a promoter of human development. However, there are a number of challenges concerning the long-term maintenance of this position. The Evaluation Mission found that the new management in UNDP is already taking steps in the right direction to address these challenges.

Effective advocacy strategy There is a need to develop effective advocacy strategies in relation to project and programme interventions that calls for identifying and nurturing strategic partnerships in support of such efforts.

One apparent result of this pertains to the opportunity for agencies to more directly address the issue of income and capability poverty, compared with the recent past when the political leadership tended not to officially acknowledge the problem of poverty as a Syrian concern, but rather focus more narrowly on unemployment.

Similar advocacy processes are being sought in the field of governance, building on the rights-based approaches emerging in global discourses, and including human rights and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Yet results appear to be rather varied. A national report on MDGs has been produced and given some coverage in the Syrian press and the 10th Five Year Plan is expected to reflect the MDGs. However, it is not clear to what extent the MDGs have been internalized in the society in general. Also, the national human development report (NHDR) has not been endorsed and a new one is being prepared.

The field of broader advocacy that touches on democratic governance is arguably the most difficult task facing UNDP in Syria, where a clearer focus needs to be developed to address the challenge of how to improve performance. As indicated earlier, this entails ensuring that the requirements of focusing on specific projects do not preclude pursuing a broader human development related policy perspective. In other words, it implies ensuring that a narrow technocratic and economic perspective of reform is not at the expense of advocacy—through demonstration—for broader reform processes conducive to human development.

Defining clear strategic goals In selecting interventions that UNDP aims to develop or support in the near future, its strategic goals need to be more clearly defined in terms of stronger emphasis on the human dimensions of development. This includes focusing on crucial issues such as income and capability poverty and the links with unemployment, as well as the social and gender dimensions of economic growth. By implication there is a need to move beyond a narrow focus on economic growth limited to concerns over trade liberalization. Parallel efforts are required to effectively advocate for and promote awareness of crucial issues such as social policies in the context of rapid economic transformations; securing social and legal conditions that support gender equitable access to the labour market; and securing access of the poorest segments of the population to affordable resources and services.

Spreading UNDP interventions 'too thin' The issue of spreading projects 'too thin', reflected both in the number and diversity of projects, is generally evident and needs to be addressed as part of UNDP's effort to strengthen its strategic positioning. Obviously, UNDP needs to take note

of priorities identified by the State Planning Commission (SPC). However, in choosing among potential projects proposed by the SPC, the UNDP should draw upon its past experiences with successful and less successful projects. Such a strategic awareness should guide not only the choice of type of projects to engage in, but also the choice of projects that are best left to other strategic partners operating in Syria. The limited strategic awareness of earlier experiences is clearly related to the weak M&E system currently in place.

Exit strategies and sustainability Sustainability and exit strategies remain a general problem. For example, there is a need to look at UNDP's involvement in the environment sector, where various projects were initiated some years ago. Discussions with the Government on this issue do not appear to be initiated by UNDP in a timely manner, and furthermore, in various cases, counterparts do not commit personnel and resources for the continuation of projects.

UNDP is also piloting efforts such as the Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II project, which focuses on providing credit to poor families to promote income-generation opportunities. The project is perceived to be a success, and will provide a model for the establishment of a Centre of Excellence, which will support its replication in other areas of Syria, such as Zeyzoun. This success should be further consolidated before any extension is initiated. Preliminary findings show that the project does not lead to a decrease in resorting to private credit sources, and might be contributing to further indebtedness. Moreover, evidence indicates that the credit schemes do not reach the poorest among the poor, nor have female target beneficiaries been empowered. In addition, the institutionalization and sustainability of the model is not clear and might require new mechanisms, such as allowing the establishment of local community-based organizations, or alternatively, registering the local *sanadiq* (village development funds) and according them legal status, all of which requires reviewing and reforming existing regulatory frameworks. The latter is an area where UNDP can and should play a strong advocacy role.

Managing processes One of the key strategic challenges facing UNDP Syria is how to handle the broader processes of development beyond just programmes and individual projects. UNDP also faces the challenge of various balancing acts: between a project focus and a policy focus; and between technocratic perspectives and a narrow focus on economic development on the one hand, and advocacy on the human and social dimensions of the same development processes on the other hand.

The CO needs to decide which programme area of activities it will expend its human and limited financial

resources on. This is critical if UNDP is to effectively address a multitude of challenges including: balancing the available financial and staff resources of the CO against effective programme implementation leading to intended outputs and outcomes; balancing the need for a broader perspective on management and on M&E that includes counterparts as well as beneficiaries against the different dynamics inherent in the technical execution of projects; and balancing the broader political dimensions of projects, including potentially controversial political issues, against the need to strengthen the mechanisms of national execution (NEX).

FORWARD-LOOKING RECOMMENDATIONS

Supporting the reform process It is important to note the precariousness of the current transition process in Syria. Regionally, there are several political problem areas that, should they develop in negative directions, can directly affect internal dynamics in Syria. The Government is trying to consolidate and address competing demands and expectations in the country. Thus, while it seems that the current transition phase is opening up some space for cautious reform, there are checks and balances in place that need to be taken into account.

Given this situation, this is not the time for a radical change in UNDP strategy in Syria. Since a new UNDP country programme will begin in 2007, the intervening time should be spent on consolidating the strategy of the relatively new Resident Representative (RR), and concluding the formulation of the new Common Country Assessment (CCA) and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), as well as on the launch of the NHDR. The latter, together with the Syria MDG Report, are important advocacy tools for UNDP Syria.

Addressing the challenges of transition UNDP must continue its focus on strengthening the executive. This implies supporting the SPC in terms of administrative support and competence-building, as well as improving its capacity for coordination. This strategy should also be extended to include other ministries pertinent to UNDP's strategic goals, an approach with potentially positive implications for promoting inter-ministerial coordination. However, in addressing these challenges there should be a clearer focus on team building, both at the top leadership as well as middle management levels.

Parliament as a legislative assembly is a strategic institution that UNDP is supporting through increasing the capacity of various committees to make informed decisions. Continuing to support the legislative is of interest to

UNDP's strategic position in Syria, given the Parliament's key role in passing legislation relevant to economic and social reform. Since members of the Assembly represent social forces operating in Syrian society, there is also a basis for UNDP to relate to emerging leaders and new voices through an effective advocacy strategy.

The judiciary is of crucial importance to the reform process and to promoting the rule of law, and thus the CO needs to identify opportunities to contribute to this area. Partnerships with ongoing French-supported interventions, as well as soliciting Arab legal expertise from the region, are possible UNDP points of intervention.

Integrating regional perspectives and transition experiences UNDP is in a unique position to help raise awareness of lessons learnt from countries that face similar challenges to those of Syria, both from within the Arab region and beyond. A conscious strategy on how to make such comparative examples relevant to Syrian development should be developed.

Consolidating UNDP's strategic goals A major issue of relevance to UNDP's strategic position and implementation of its strategic goals is the establishment of a clearer profile for the CO on the basic issues of human development not only within Government circles, but also within the expanding private sector and among elements of civil society that are striving to emerge and gain a voice. Such a profile requires building on existing as well as developing new strategic partnerships with relevant international and national organizations; highlighting UNDP's comparative advantages; and including lessons learnt from a human development perspective.

UNDP as key advocate for human development UNDP should improve its advocacy strategy in Syria by linking it more clearly to its corporate mandate of promoting human development, in which it enjoys a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other development and donor agencies operating in the country. Indeed, an effective advocacy strategy needs to build on UNDP's capacity and capability to provide policy advice and upstream engagement in legal and judicial reforms, areas that have hitherto not been accorded much attention, although they are of crucial importance to the reform process and supporting the rule of law.

The field of broader advocacy that touches on democratic governance is arguably the most difficult task facing UNDP in Syria, and a clearer strategy needs to be developed to address this challenge. This also entails ensuring that requirements for focusing on projects do not contradict pursuing a sustained broader policy perspective towards

development effectiveness. In other words, it implies ensuring that a narrow technocratic and economic perspective of reform does not ignore advocacy for broader reform processes conducive to human development.

At the same time, UNDP needs to further consolidate its strategic position as a key contributor to macroeconomic discourses evolving in Syria, both among Government counterparts as well as with pertinent UN and donor organizations. This entails consistently advocating for the 'human face of development', while promoting and supporting policies conducive to economic growth with equity in Syria.

Stronger focus on social aspects of national poverty reduction There is a need to strengthen the focus on the social dimensions of economic growth, and to avoid limiting the public discourse to narrowly defined economic issues. Social dimensions must include a focus on issues such as the risk of increasing child labour—both boys and girls—in the context of rapid economic transformation and the possible erosion of social safety nets; promoting equitable employment conditions for men and women in the labour market; and ensuring access to basic social services and income generation opportunities for the poorest segments of the population irrespective of ethnic or religious affiliation, gender or age group, rural or urban background.

UNDP also has an important role to play in advocating for demand-driven data collection, focusing on poverty and gender sensitive indicators conducive to effective development planning. Appropriate quantitative and qualitative indicators provide the information essential to strengthening UNDP's advocacy messages, and support efforts to mobilize strategic partnerships.

The reform process also requires advocacy for the development of gender and poverty sensitive labour policies, if the narrow focus on economic growth is to be avoided. This is also relevant to the informal sector where income and capability-poor labour, and also child labour, is more likely to seek employment and income-generating opportunities. Such labour policies are also relevant to ensuring that both women and men in the private sector enjoy equitable opportunities and are equally protected by social security laws; and providing for equal opportunities for men and women in the civil service and public enterprises. Linked to this is the crucial need to develop a labour market information system, the outputs of which are relevant to a developing market economy where the State is not the main employer.

Strategic support to civil society initiatives UNDP should further support the NGO sector as a means for widening the space for civil society and linking this with the concept of democratic governance. This is where the development of strategic partnerships becomes particularly crucial, since it increases opportunities for UNDP's cooperation with NGOs with similar outlooks on development 'with a human face'.

Strategic partnerships focused on ideas and values Partnerships around ideas and values are as important to UNDP's corporate mandate to support human development as is securing funding for supporting the reform process in Syria. Thus, while UNDP should actively mobilize strategic partnerships to solicit non-core funding for crucial development interventions, it also needs to seek partnerships with key organizations with visions similar to those of UNDP.

Generally and at the political level, the partnership with the EU is deemed important and can be further consolidated through the recent corporate agreement between UNDP and the EU (signed in June 2004). But UNDP should stretch this partnership further by raising issues like human rights and democratic governance, however sensitive they may be. Similarly, strategic partnerships should be forged with key organizations that are promoting, or can be encouraged to promote, social concerns relating to, for example, the labour market, the general policy of privatization and trade.

Supporting effective national M&E systems A strong M&E system needs to be developed at the national level to ensure clarity and relevance of programme outputs and outcomes, which can provide relevant information to assess UNDP's contribution to development results in Syria. There is a need, however, to be realistic and flexible about what indicators of results are appropriate in a given context. There is also a need to keep in mind what measures are critically required for the CO to substantially strengthen its M&E approach as well as its mechanisms for programming. Effectively addressing these issues can also lead to greater coherence in CO actions, providing the opportunity for continual learning and necessary adaptation for future interventions and strengthening UNDP's support to programme and project implementation.

Addressing crucial issues cross-cutting UNDP's thematic areas and intended outcomes While UNDP's strategic goals are relevant to Syria's national development priorities, the CO needs to develop a strategic approach to

implement its development objectives and achieve intended outcomes. This requires improving UNDP's implementation of its development interventions, based on an explicit recognition of the complexity of cross-cutting factors. ICT is one such factor.

UNDP must not only view ICT-related interventions as a technical means, but must also use ICT tools for promoting the dissemination of the concept of democratic governance and the link with a rights-based approach to development. This also includes linking concepts of transparency and accountability with both citizens' rights as well as citizens' responsibilities, an important dimension of a vibrant civil society. Last but not least, such an approach can support widening access to information and knowledge conducive to improving male and female citizens' labour market opportunities. A cultural change of this order takes time and commitment; even in industrialized countries, the realization of the productivity benefits of ICT has taken a generation. Problems of security and confidentiality have to be tackled. The very high costs of e-connectivity and the very low-level of Internet use in the Arab states, including Syria, have to be tackled aggressively if the digital divide is to be converted into digital opportunities.

Another cross-cutting factor is gender mainstreaming, which not only addresses gender gaps reflecting bias against girls and women and promotes more equitable gender relations, but also addresses the gender needs and priorities of boys and men affected, for example, by income and capability poverty, lack of social security, and/or socio-economic marginalization of certain groups in the society. In view of UNDP's holistic approach to development, where human needs and priorities are central to the development agenda, it is necessary for UNDP to develop an effective gender mainstreaming strategy, which is currently missing.

1

Introduction

This introductory chapter presents the rationale for the Syria country evaluation, the country profile and context, the methodology used, and a brief description of the UNDP programme in Syria. The rest of the report is divided into four key sections: Chapter 2 presents the national development priorities and key challenges facing Syria; Chapters 3 and 4 highlight UNDP's strategic positioning and contribution to national development results, respectively; and Chapter 5 provides key lessons learnt and recommendations from the country evaluation.

1.1 RATIONALE FOR THE EVALUATION

The purpose of this independent evaluation is to demonstrate key development results achieved in Syria through UNDP support and through partnerships with other development actors since 1997. It further provides an analysis of UNDP's strategic positioning to respond and add value to national development priorities. Although the Assessment of Development Results (ADR) gives a comprehensive picture of UNDP's contribution to development in Syria, special attention is given to the areas of democratic governance and poverty reduction in view of their relevance to the country's transition process. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation are included in annex I. Box 1 highlights specific questions that the evaluation has tried to answer.

The ADR covers the period 1997–2006. This includes the first country cooperation framework (CCF 1997–2001). Where relevant, UNDP interventions before 1997 are analysed to draw their relevance to current achievements. It also covers the intended results in the current CCF (2002–2006) and its corresponding strategic results framework (SRF)/ multi-year funding framework (MYFF), as indicated in the ToR.

The change in political leadership in Syria in 2000 set in motion certain political and economic dynamics that have significant implications for the Middle East region as a whole. Ensuring national security and economic growth, maintaining influence among its Arab neighbours, and achieving a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement over Palestine, which includes the return of the Golan Heights, have been the primary goals of the Syrian Government, which has played a strategic role in major political events in the Middle East over the last four decades.

Box 1: Specific Evaluation Questions

- How well did UNDP respond to the challenges of the transition process in Syria?
- What were the key results from UNDP partnerships, taking into account programme innovation, indicators of performance and national ownership?
- What were the results of UNDP measures to alleviate poverty and vulnerability of the poor?
- How effective were UNDP partnerships to address unemployment and social vulnerability?
- How was UNDP support used to leverage Syria's reform process in the area of governance?
- How successful was UNDP support to policy dialogue, aid coordination and brokerage in delivering development results?
- What are the most significant challenges for Syria and, by implication, for UNDP efforts to contribute to achieving national development priorities in the future?

Syria experienced an economic growth rate ranging from 5-7 percent between 1990-1995, largely due to certain reform measures adopted by the Government during the early 1990s and the discovery of oil.² However, economic growth slowed significantly, with negative growth in 1999 and 2000 of about 1.5 percent,³ rising to 3.0 percent in 2001. Since then, the growth rate has improved, but is still insufficient given the country's rapidly growing population and workforce (see Table 1). It is estimated that a growth of over 5 percent is required to significantly improve the country's economy. In spite of various achievements over the last decade, there remains the question of how the Government can support national strategies that adequately tackle continuing socio-economic disparities in the society, in particular among the income and capability poor within the state, and improve the accountability of institutions for implementing more equitable laws and regulations that are necessary for an emerging civil society and a growing informal market economy.

While there is a certain momentum for change and reform in Syria, this process has been predominantly focused on developing the economic sectors of the country. The urgent need for economic reform is officially recognized but without any clear indication of how to proceed towards a formal market economy that promotes economic growth with equity, i.e. growth that preserves past social achievements in citizens' access to services and social security; and where economic liberalization is also matched by developments in the political sphere. Key challenges to the reform process are the weak social base and continuing state control over the economy, issues of governance, as well as the implications of regional political dynamics.

Therefore, the current transition phase in Syria provides UNDP with opportunities to support the reform process and to advocate for policies and solutions that may help move Syria further towards democratic governance and human development. It is also important for UNDP and its partners to draw lessons from past experience in order to address new challenges. UNDP can legitimize its strategy on the basis of the Arab human development reports (AHDR) 2002 and 2003, as well as the strategic direction signalled by the Syrian Government in recent years. The Arab region's limited social and economic development record with respect to the general absence of democracy, alongside the marginalization of women and the failure to adequately invest in knowledge, are also development challenges faced in Syria.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The methodological framework used for this country evaluation is based on UNDP's results based management approach, which focuses on determining 'higher level' results by evaluating development outcomes, i.e. changes in specific development conditions through the contributions of a number of development actors. The emphasis on higher level results is intended to improve understanding of the outcome, its status, and the factors that influence or contribute to change. The analytical focus of the evaluation was designed to facilitate the identification of different outcomes and their interrelationships, which in turn should expedite the assessment of the overall achievements in a given country—whether at the outcome or longer-term impact level. Following from this, the evaluation attempts to explain UNDP's contribution to results. The aim is to

² By 2000, the agricultural sector of Syria directly generated 30 percent of GDP and over half of the country's total export earnings (70 percent) were derived from crude petroleum.

³ The poor performance in 1999 was in part due to a severe drought.

Box 2: Criteria used to measure UNDP results

- Positive perception of UNDP's relevance and strategic role in national development efforts
- High level of national ownership of UNDP programmes
- Strategic resource mobilization, coordination and application in programmes
- Strategic links between UNDP interventions and macroeconomic policies and the MDGs
- Strong programme inter-linkages for learning and enhancing scope of replication
- High quality (i.e. transparent, accountable and innovative) partnerships
- Credible relation of evaluation findings with the strategic positioning of UNDP
- Positive perception of UNDP's contribution to national level policy analysis, planning and decision-making processes
- Positive perception of UNDP's contribution to capacity-building for sustainability
- Timely response to lessons learnt, including failures and lost opportunities, to improve development process at all stages

draw a credible link between overall results and UNDP contribution.

The evaluation was initiated in April 2004 and concluded in November 2004. The preparatory work for the evaluation started with extensive desk research including programme mapping and documentation review by the UNDP Evaluation Office (EO). This was followed by an exploratory mission by the Evaluation Task Manager to Syria that consisted of direct consultations with UNDP country office (CO) and key stakeholders. This helped determine the focus of the evaluation as a basis for the ToR. The exploratory mission was also used to engage a national institute, ACUMEN, to undertake in-depth local research on the chosen thematic areas for the ADR (i.e. democratic governance and poverty reduction). This work entailed the review of additional documentation, select interviews, focus group discussions, and field visits to develop an analytical report for the ADR team. The main evaluation by the ADR team was conducted over two weeks in May 2004. A large number and a wide range of stakeholders were consulted during the local study and the main evaluation.⁴

The evaluative evidence was gathered through three major sources of information: perception, validation and documentation, in keeping with the concept of 'triangulation', i.e. balancing perceptions with other methods of corroboration.⁵ The evaluation used different criteria (see Box 2) to assess results.⁶ Qualitative and quantitative information was analysed around some key variables to enable a distillation of issues drawn from different sources and perspectives. The evaluation focused on three levels of

the development context (i.e. national, district and community) in order to identify contextual variables (e.g. inhibitors and enablers) that could clarify the degree to which UNDP interventions contributed to positive change in that environment. At the macro or national level, the focus was on policy choices and investment priorities. At the meso (district) and micro (community) levels, the focus shifted to how the policy choices and investment priorities were translated into actual services and programmes. At the community level, attention was given to UNDP pilot projects in terms of their local, regional and national effects to assess their strategic value, sustainability, scope for learning and replication.

1.3 COUNTRY PROFILE AND CONTEXT

The Syrian Arab Republic is in the eastern (*mashreq*) part of the Arab region, covering around 185 thousand square kilometres, and sharing borders with Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Syria has a population of 18.6 million, with a population growth rate of 2.5 percent in 2003. This has implications for increasing pressure on its economic base and natural resources, further affected by the reality that in 2003, 38.8 percent of the total population was under 15 years of age (see Table 1). The fastest growing population age bracket is 15-29 years, averaging a growth rate of 4.7 percent annually. Around 75 percent of the country's population live in the six largest cities.

Syria is a middle income country, ranking by 2002 106th on the human development index (HDI) out of a

⁴ See annex II for a list of people consulted by the Evaluation Mission; the most essential documents consulted by the evaluation are listed in annex III.

⁵ See UNDP/EO, 2002b.

⁶ An explanation of the UNDP results chain used (input-output-outcome-impact) can be found in UNDP/EO, 2002c.

TABLE 1. SELECTED INDICATORS FOR SYRIA

Size	185,180 sq km
Arable land (1998)	26.0 %
Population (2004)	17.98 million
Population under 15 years (2004) (% of total)	40%
Annual population growth rate (2003)	2.5 %
Total fertility rate (births per woman) (2002-2005)	3.8
Urban population (2001)	51.8 %
HDI rank (2004)	106 out of 177 countries
HDI value (2002)	0.710
GDI rank (2004)	88 out of 177 countries
Life expectancy at birth (2003)	71.0
Male (2002)	70.5
Female (2002)	73.0
Adult literacy rate age 15 and above (2002)	82.9 %
Male age 15 years and above (2002)	91.0%
Female age 15 years and above (2002)	74.2%
Net primary enrollment ratio (2001-2002)	98.0 %
Net secondary enrollment ratio (2000-2002)	39.0 %
Combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary level schools	
Male	62.0%
Female	57.0%
GDP real growth rate (2002)	3.3 %
GDP per capita US\$ (2002)	1,224
GDP per capita PPP US\$ (2002)	3,620
Public expenditure on education (% of GDP) (1999-2001)	4.0%
Public expenditure on health (% of GDP) (2001)	2.4%
Military expenditure (% of GDP) (2002)	6.1%
Unemployment rate (2002)	11.7%
Female economic activity rate	
age 15 and above (2002)	29.2%
as % of male rate (2002)	38.0%
Estimated earned income (PPP US\$) (2002)	
Male	5,496
Female	1,549
Population below poverty line	11.4%
Access to improved sanitation (2000)	90.0%
Access to improved water source (2000)	80.0 %
Personal computers in population (2001)	1.6%
Internet users in population (per 1,000 people) (2002)	12.9
Syrian exports to EU (2002)	Euro 40.33 million (60 % of total)
Total EC assistance in 2003	Euro 65.89 million

Source: UNDP HDR 2000, 2004; ILO, 2002; World Bank, 2003a; EU, 2000; and the 2004 Statistical Report of Syria.

total of 177 countries, with a HDI value in 2002 of 0.710 (average for Arab states in 2002 was 0.651, see Table 1). This is an improvement relative to 1998, when Syria ranked 111th out of a total of 174 countries, with a HDI value of 0.660.⁷ GDP per capita in 2002 amounted to US \$1,224 compared with an average of US \$2,462 for Arab States.⁸

In 2002, Syria ranked 88th out of a total of 177 countries in the Gender-related Development Index (GDI), a noticeable improvement over 1998, when it was ranked 111th relative to 174 countries (UNDP, 2002e: 163). Syria's GDI rank by 2002 placed it higher relative to some other Arab countries (e.g. Egypt, which by 2002 ranked 99th).⁹

By the end of the 1990s, Syria's economic growth rate slowed significantly, with negative growth of about 1.5 percent in 1999 and 2000, which was largely due to a severe drought, and rising to 3 percent in 2001. Since then, the growth rate has improved, but is still insufficient given the country's rapidly growing population and workforce. It is estimated that a growth rate of over 5 percent per annum is required to significantly improve the country's economy.

Over the last two decades, the Government has placed particular stress on education, reflected in the relatively high adult literacy rate for Syrians aged 15 years and above (82.9 percent by 2002). In recent years, the net primary school enrolment ratio has also improved (98 percent by 2001-2002). By contrast, the net secondary school enrolment ratio lags behind (39 percent by 2001-2002). Also, there is a discernible gender gap, with literacy rates for females aged 15 years and above reaching 74.2 percent by 2002 compared with 91 percent for males (see Table 1). During 1999-2001, public expenditure on education (as a percentage of GDP) reached 4 percent, remaining more or less unchanged relative to 1990.¹⁰

Similarly, the Government has, over the past decades, laid emphasis on improving public access to health services, although it is apparent that supply is unable to keep up with demand, including the provision of quality health services. Increasingly, the private sector has been filling the gap, though regional variations as well as urban/rural differentiations are apparent (EIU, 2003b: 16). By 2001, public expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP was 2.4 percent, relative to 0.4 percent in 1990.¹¹

These percentages need to be contrasted with trends in military expenditure, which in 2002 amounted to 6.1 percent of GDP (see Table 1). Military spending is affected by ongoing conflicts and political tensions in the region, such as the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the current instability in Iraq.

Syria has diverse climatic conditions and the country is divided into five distinct ecological zones. Only one third of the arable land is cultivated, and dependence on irrigated agriculture is relatively low in spite of the flow of two major rivers—the Euphrates and the smaller Orontes—through the country. Oil and gas resources, investment in power stations, and the relatively inefficient operation of various large industrial public sector concerns are among the complex factors that continue to have adverse environmental implications. As will be discussed later, Government recognition of this problem is reflected in various environment-related projects supported by UNDP and other donors.

Agriculture employs around 30 percent of the workforce; a further 26 percent are employed in secondary industries and construction; and 17 percent in trade (EIU, 2003b: 14-15). Latest available data on the age distribution of the Syrian population indicate that 40 percent are under the age of 15 years while 29 percent are aged 15-29 years (see Figure 1). The age group 15-29 years amounts to 48 percent of the labour force, constituting a serious challenge to the absorptive capacity of the labour market and thus to economic growth and human development.

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) estimated the labour force to be 4.4 million people by 1999, with an annual average growth rate of 4.3 percent (UN, 2000: 6). Gender gaps are reflected in the female economic activity rate, where by 2002 the female as a percentage of the male economic activity rate stood at 38 percent (see Table 1). International Labour Organization (ILO) data reveal that by 2001, the labour force participation rate (as percentage of the population aged 15-64 years) for females was 22 percent, down from 27.2 percent in 1995, and compared with 54.1 percent for males which remained unchanged (ILO, 2003; SAR/PMO/CBS, 2002).

The agriculture sector accounts for around one quarter of GDP (26 percent in 2001), almost equal to mining and manufacturing (27 percent of GDP), followed by wholesale

⁷ UNDP, 2000e: 159.

⁸ UNDP, 2004k: 187.

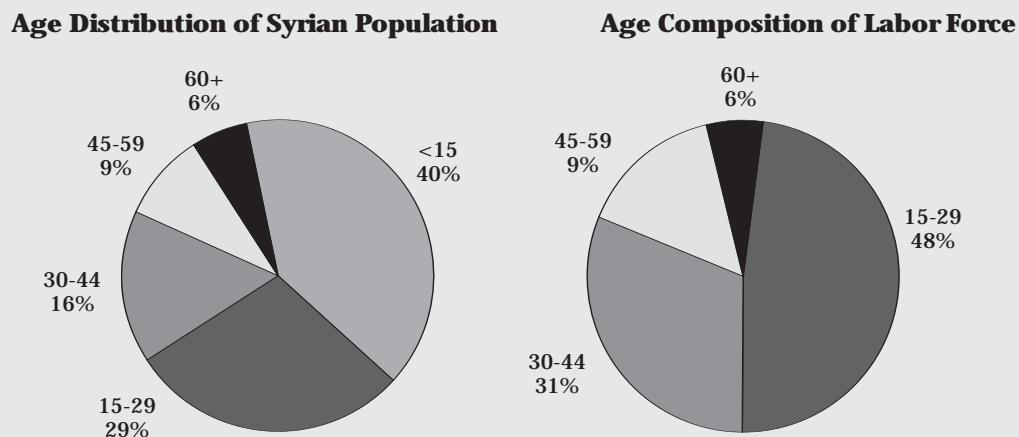
⁹ UNDP, 2004k: 219.

¹⁰ UNDP, 2004k: 174.

¹¹ UNDP, 2004k: 204.

¹² EIU, 2003b: 20.

FIGURE 1: COMPARISON BETWEEN AGE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND AGE COMPOSITION OF LABOUR FORCE (AT MID-YEAR 2002)



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract 2003 (cf. ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004).

and trade (16 percent of GDP).¹² Agriculture remains a backbone of the economy, and "...its production variations influence considerably the overall economic activity and GDP... (keeping in mind that) foreign trade in Syria depends to a very large extent on primary commodities."¹³ The Government's redirection of some economic development priorities in favour of the agriculture sector, including investment in large scale irrigation schemes, has increased food self-sufficiency and food-related exports. The rapid rise in domestic oil production (accounting by 2001 for around 77 percent of exports and 15 percent of GDP) as well as major gas finds have to some extent mitigated the slow-down in economic growth. However, there is awareness that this situation, which so far has secured important foreign reserve resources, is of limited duration.

Since the 1960s, Syria's economy has been dominated by the public sector. There is increasing recognition that the public sector is "...overstaffed and inefficient... soaking up government expenditure and foreign exchange."¹⁴ This is perceived to be linked to a Government policy that "...has created an overstaffed administration characterized by lengthy procedures and a highly inefficient bureaucracy with tremendous duplication of efforts."¹⁵ Low public sector wages and salaries are a major disincentive, perpetuating the perception that the public sector generally

attracts lower calibre employees and accounting for the serious shortage of qualified personnel in government administration (*Ibid.*: 4).

In fact, one of the major impediments to reform in Syria is perceived to be the lack of an effective human resource policy with a two-pronged approach: ensuring that new entrants to the labour market have the appropriate skills; and rehabilitating and upgrading the skill levels of the current labour force.¹⁶ As the 2002 AHDR reiterated, there is a serious knowledge deficit in the Arab region, giving rise to diminishing skill levels, which is also generally applicable to Syria (cf. Marzouk, 2000).

Though economic reform has been on the political agenda since the late 1980s, efforts have not been underpinned by strategic planning and are perceived to have been "...half-hearted and piecemeal at best".¹⁷ The momentum of economic reform decreased during the second half of the 1990s, leading to shrinking GDP growth and dwindling private sector investment. By the end of the 1990s, the Syrian economy was in recession, further affected by the Government's tight monetary policy and political upheavals in the region. From the mid-1990s to 2000, investment decreased by around 10 percent (from 27.1 percent of GDP to 17.6 percent), with a particular decrease in private investment (Arab Banker, 2001: 1).

¹³ FAO, 2003: 28.

¹⁴ EIU, 2003b: 20.

¹⁵ ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004: 5.

¹⁶ ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004: 11; cf. Sebaaly.

¹⁷ ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004: 6.

"THE REAL CHALLENGE IS TO SUCCEED IN THE TRANSITION TO A MARKET ECONOMY WITHOUT HAVING TO PUT HALF THE POPULATION OUT OF BUSINESS. THIS WILL INVOLVE JOB CREATION ON A LARGE SCALE AND SERIOUS INITIATIVES TO DEVELOP HUMAN CAPITAL."

Key informant, ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004: 8.

Though the Government does recognize that economic changes are imperative, strategic thinking on how to operationalize this objective and its related processes appears to be limited and ad hoc. So far, no serious attention has been accorded to dealing with the evident economic drain of public sector enterprises beyond the decision to discontinue investment. This is also reflected in the apparent lack of clarity on the rationale and objectives of economic liberalization. Nor has any serious attention been accorded to a much needed extensive overhauling of existing regulatory frameworks and the possible formulation of new frameworks appropriate to the development of a market economy.

The private sector has, over the past decades, continued to be more or less economically active, but factors such as high taxation, limited access to foreign exchange and credit constraints have adversely affected its performance and competitiveness (EIU, 2003b: 20-21, 25). This continues to have adverse implications for job security in private sector employment. Rigid labour legislation with implications for hiring labour, inflexible social security laws and tax disincentives (in spite of recent changes in the tax law) are among the factors that continue to perpetuate uncertainty in the private sector.

This uncertainty prevails in spite of promulgation of new laws, such as the 1991 Investment Law No.10, that have served to widen the economic space being afforded to the private sector; but this is generally in economic activities perceived to be strategically less important (such as tourism and the food industry). Recent amendments to the 1991 Investment Law aim to further support the investment climate in Syria and encourage the flow of foreign direct investment.

More recently, the Government has attempted to push forward economic reforms and attract more private sector participation; for example through the 2002 Banking Sector Reform Law No. 23, which for the first time in decades permits private sector involvement in the banking

"THE MAJORITY OF PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYEES ARE NOT REGISTERED IN SOCIAL SECURITY...IF YOU HAVE AN ARGUMENT WITH YOUR BOSS, YOU RISK LOSING YOUR JOB IN TEN MINUTES, WITH NO COMPENSATION WHATSOEVER."

Key Informant, ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004: 4.

sector. However, there is much uncertainty over the implications of opening up the economy and promoting trade liberalization. This is not helped by the reality that "Syrian industry suffers from larger tax and regulatory burdens (compared with) the main trading partners...", undermining the survival of small and medium enterprises.¹⁸

Limited information is available on the informal sector. By the early 1990s it was estimated that this sector accounted for around 24 percent of total non-agricultural domestic production and, more specifically, for 38 percent

"THE MOST IMPORTANT AMENDMENTS MADE ON THE INVESTMENT LAW ARE: THE CREATION OF A GENERAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION, UNIFYING THE INVESTMENT SUPERVISION BODY, AND THE UNIFICATION OF LEGISLATION THAT ORGANIZES THE INVESTMENT PROCESS."

*Interview with Head of the Investment Bureau,
Syria Times, No. 6361, 8 August 2004:7.*

employment in transport, 22 percent in services and 21 percent in manufacturing. It was also estimated that some 60 percent of economically active males (excluding agricultural workers) were employed in the informal sector, compared with 7 percent of the economically active female population. Female and male workers in the informal sector were more or less equally represented in manufacturing. But female workers were a small minority in informal sector services and transport, both of which remain male dominated economic activities.¹⁹

The urban informal sector in Syria is far from homogeneous. At one extreme are the large numbers of youth for whom work in the informal sector is a survival strategy. At the other end of the spectrum are micro-entrepreneurs and other groups who have demonstrated a capacity to accumulate capital, take advantage of market conditions—even during difficult economic circumstances – and expand their

¹⁸ ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004: 27.

¹⁹ UN, 2000: 7.

income-generating opportunities. Inequality of incomes, gender gaps and other disparities within the urban informal sector should be taken into account in future poverty reduction strategies.

Indeed, evidence suggests that the informal sector is absorbing a sizeable proportion of the economically active labour force, specifically the income and capability poor.²⁰ There appears to be a grey line between the informal and the formal private sectors, with some establishments in the latter apparently employing workers who are not registered. Reasons include the current social security law which discourages registration of employees, since "...the rate paid by employers increases as the number of employees increases."²¹

Dearth of data on the informal sector is an additional factor constraining the calculation of actual unemployment rates and makes it difficult to develop a poverty map showing trends for Syria. Available information on the unemployment rate is believed to be an underestimation. The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) carried out a survey in 2003 which concluded that unemployment stood at 11.7 percent, relative to 7 percent in 1995.²² Key informants met by the Evaluation Mission indicated that the unemployment rate may well be between 20 and 25 percent. Already by the mid-1990s the youth unemployment rate was estimated to have been 19.9 percent for females compared with 11.3 percent for males (CAWTAR/UNDP/AGFUND, 2001: 111). Some key informants pointed out that the scale of unregistered employees in the private sector and lack of accurate information on the informal sector, as well as unregulated (largely male) labour migration to some neighbouring countries, add to the perpetuation of contradictory information on unemployment trends and therefore poverty levels in Syria.

Rural annual per capita income is estimated to be around 65 percent of the national average, further compounded by relatively limited access to education and health services. Small-size and fragmented landholdings, large households with high dependency ratios, environmental degradation and inefficient water management, as well as limited employment opportunities for male and female youth, are among the complexity of factors that continue to have adverse implications for rural development

in Syria, specifically in the northern and eastern parts of the country.²³

Information on poverty in Syria is largely based on estimates or extrapolated from other data, such as household surveys. According to the poverty diagnostic study that was conducted by UNDP in collaboration with the State Planning Commission (SPC) and the CBS, almost 2 million individuals in Syria (11.4 percent of the population) in 2003-2004 could not obtain their basic food and non-food needs. Using higher expenditure poverty line, overall poverty in Syria rises to 30.1 percent, representing almost 5.3 million individuals. The study also found that, while poverty was generally more prevalent in rural than in urban areas (62 percent in rural areas), the greatest differences were geographic. The north eastern region (Idleb, Aleppo, Al Raqqa, Deir Ezzor and Hassakeh), both rural and urban, had the greatest incidence, depth and severity of poverty; the southern urban region had very low levels of poverty; and the central and coastal regions had intermediate levels of poverty.²⁴

In terms of correlates to poverty, the study found that education had the strongest correlation to poverty risk in Syria. More than 18 percent of the poor population was illiterate, and poverty was highest, deepest and most severe for these individuals. Poverty was inversely correlated with educational attainment, so that even a moderate improvement in education could reduce the ranks of the poor. Poverty interacted with gender to produce large gaps in educational enrolment among the poor. Occupationally, the highest poverty rates were among those self-employed in marginal and unskilled activities, or those who were unpaid workers. Agriculture and construction were over-represented (compared to their population share) within poor groups. Moreover, the poor were more likely to work in the informal sector, which employed 48 percent of the poor. Finally, widows as heads of household, with children, are very likely to be poor, and thus can be considered as especially vulnerable.

1.4 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF UNDP IN SYRIA

UNDP started operating in Syria in 1962, providing a range of technical assistance to the Government. In recent

²⁰"The total number of workers in 1999 in Syria was estimated at 4,095,000 (male and female) of which no less than 43 percent are in the informal sector...Precise data on public versus private employment was not available but the state remains the main employer in the country",ETE, 2002: 9.

²¹ ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004: 26.

²² Marzouk, 2004.

²³ IFAD, xxii-xxiii.

²⁴The Scoping Mission commissioned by UNDP Syria to "...identify the interaction between macroeconomic policies and complementary policies to reduce poverty in the medium-term in Syria" will identify characteristics of the poor on the basis the 2003-2004 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. The study relied on data from the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys that were conducted by the CBS in 1996-1997 and 2003-2004 (see Abdel-Fadil, 2004: 4).

Box 3: Overview of CCF resources 1997-2006 (US\$'000)

CCF-1 (1997-2001)		CCF-2 (2002-2006)	
UNDP Core Funds	6,617	UNDP Core Funds	5,894
Non-Core Funds	9,860	Non-Core Funds	15,300
(Govt. cost-sharing of non-core funds 1,500)		(Govt. cost-sharing of non-core-funds 6,000)	
Total CCF-1	16,477	Total CCF-2	21,194
Total CCF Resources		1997-2006	
		37,671	

years, UNDP's support has focused more on human development issues with the Government's SPC as its main counterpart. UNDP's overall key objectives in Syria focus firstly on meeting the increasing demand for policy advice and capacity-building in support of the Government's economic and social transformation; and secondly, on positioning UNDP in its rightful place among United Nations (UN) agencies and the donor community as the proponent of human-centred, participatory and sustainable socio-economic development.

As reflected in the first UNDP CCF (1997-2000, extended to 2001), UNDP's programme in Syria focused on capacity-building for sustainable human development, sustainable use of natural resources and environmental conservation, and economic governance (UNDP, 1997). The second CCF (2002-2006) addressed a number of lessons learnt, highlighting certain tangible benefits such as the Government's increased attention to Syria's economic and development problems (UNDP, 2001).

Total planned resources for the first CCF (1997-2001) were US \$16.477 million, and US \$21.194 million for the second CCF (2002-2006). Total planned CCF resources for the period 1997-2006 thus amount to US \$37.671 million. There is a perceptible increase in the amount of non-core funding, as well as in the Government's cost-sharing therein (see Box 3). In effect, UNDP – in terms of financial resources – is a relatively 'small player' in Syria, especially when compared with the European Union (EU). Nonetheless, its continuous policy dialogue with the Government of Syria on the adoption of a human development perspective has situated UNDP in a unique position among other donors and international organiza-

tions in the country. UNDP has been approached by the Government to specifically provide support on policy issues related to governance and poverty. Indeed, UNDP support has contributed to shifting public discourse from a relatively narrow focus on unemployment to wider poverty-related issues and concerns. In the area of governance, there has been a notable shift from 'economic' to 'good' governance and more recently, though so far cautiously, to 'democratic' governance.

The geo-strategic and political context in Syria, as well as the socio-economic challenges of transition, have implications for UNDP operations and thus for its strategic position. Since 2000, the Government's efforts to introduce reforms have been slow. Moreover, there is an apparent resistance to linking economic and political reform, or recognizing the wide-ranging importance of this linkage for human development. In turn, this process and its directions are closely linked to Syria's development prospects, its strategic role in the political dynamics of the Arab region in particular, and the Middle East in general.

The current transition phase in Syria brings with it many challenges, providing UNDP with major opportunities to contribute to the national reform process and thus to human development. This ADR aims to analyse how and to what extent UNDP has addressed available opportunities and related challenges, and how this is reflected in its strategic position as well as in its contribution to overall development results in Syria. More specifically, what should UNDP's role and contribution be in a country like Syria that is currently at a crossroads, and where it remains unclear how the actual process to achieve development goals and priorities will play out strategically and politically.

²⁵ This includes ESCWA, ILO, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) that provide technical assistance.

1.5 UNITED NATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS IN SYRIA

Currently the UN system in Syria is represented by 10 agencies with specific programme mandates, though their focus of intervention and activities overlap in various cases (see Box 4). There are also other UN agencies providing technical assistance to Syria, but without a country presence.²⁵ Generally in Syria, UN agencies are perceived to be neutral and impartial partners. This affords them a strategic niche not necessarily enjoyed by other multilateral and bilateral donors operating in Syria, and this has also been of strategic benefit to UNDP.

Funding for development is scarce in Syria for various reasons, which include the unstable political situation in the region, as well as Syria's external debt and debt servicing burden (UNDAF, 2001). By 2002, total debt service as a percentage of GDP amounted to 1.2 percent (see Table 1). Nonetheless, Syria has decided to formulate its economic and development policies without assistance from Breton Woods Institutions. Development aid therefore constitutes a relatively small proportion of Syria's spending on development.

26

Official development assistance (ODA) to Syria comprises both loans and grants made by donors to countries in Part 1 of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD list of Aid Recipients. Net ODA to Syria fluctuated significantly in the early 1990s reaching a high in 1994 of US \$745 million or 7.4 percent of GDP. Since 1994, net ODA has dropped and remained low, down to US \$81 million in 2002, and accounting for only 0.4

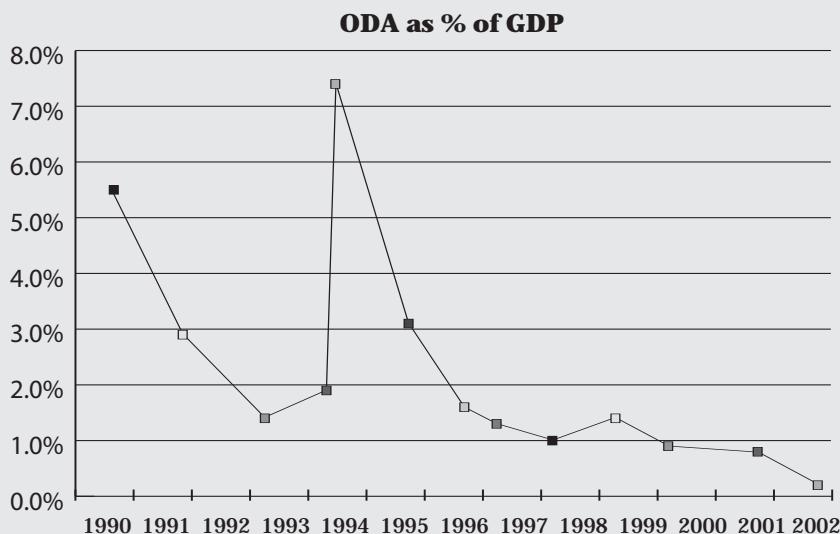
percent of GDP (see Figure 2). In terms of sources of ODA (see Figure 3), assistance stemming from Arab countries ranks the highest. However, if one pools the European sources, then the EU becomes the largest assistance provider, with Germany, France and Italy providing the largest bilateral contributions respectively. With the Euro-Med Partnership now agreed²⁶, the net contribution from the EU can be expected to increase. Japan is also an important donor to Syria with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) as well as the Japanese Government via its Embassy in Syria active in providing technical assistance in the fields of health, agriculture and industrial development.

Box 4: Multilateral, regional and UN agencies in Syria

Multilateral	Regional
European Union	Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD)
	Islamic Development Bank (ISDB)
UN System	
FAO	UNDOF & UNTSO (Peacekeeping)
IFAD	UNHCR
UNDP	UNRWA
UNICEF	WFP
UNPA	WHO

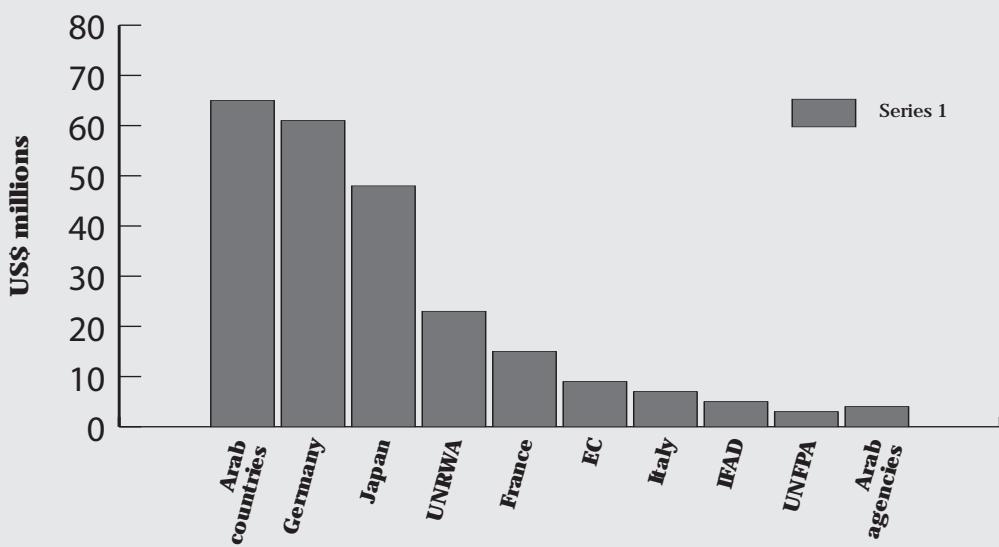
²⁶ Euro-Med Partnership: Syria - National Indicative Programme, EU, 2005-2006.

FIGURE 2: ODA AS PERCENTAGE OF GDP IN SYRIA (1990-2002)



Source: World Bank, OECD data. Compiled from World Bank, WDI website (accessed March 2004): <http://devdata.worldbank.org/dataonline/>

FIGURE 3: TOP TEN DONORS OF GROSS ODA IN SYRIA (2001-2002)



Source: World Bank, OECD. Compiled from OECD website (accessed March 2004): <http://www1.oecd.org/dac/images/AidRecipient/syr.gif>

2

Challenges of transition in Syria²⁷

2.1 CAUTIOUS REFORM PROCESS

Since 2000, the situation in Syria is best described as one of cautious reform, where there are some signs that a climate for reform is being allowed to develop. Various quarters of Syrian leadership have recognized the need for economic reform, particularly in the unwieldy public sector. This sector cannot be financed by an economy in which a high percentage of revenue income derives from stagnating or shrinking sectors. Agriculture, though still a significant sector, is also shrinking, and oil is no longer viewed as a reliable long-term revenue earner. Furthermore, as indicated earlier, ODA to Syria constitutes a relatively small proportion of the country's spending on development, and has in fact been decreasing over the past years. Syria is thus challenged with reforming its economy in ways that allow for greater economic diversification and a more solid national economic base, while at the same time taking into account fluctuations in net ODA flows and an eventual dwindling reliance on the oil sector as a major foreign currency earner.

However, this process of change appears to lack clear direction and a timeline. Although there are signs of conditions improving in the private sector, it is unclear what the process of economic liberalization really means in the Syrian context. Private sector reaping of the benefits of reform is seemingly linked to the political arena, thus reproducing the Government's central position in the process of establishing a market economy. This example is typical of the dilemmas confronting the reform process in Syria. On the one hand the Government is pursuing and promoting a pragmatic and technocratic process of change with a relatively narrow management orientation; on the other hand it is trying to limit the implications of such change for processes of broader democratization and empowerment of new social groups. Thus Syria today is best characterized as being subject to a balancing act, in which the need for some economic liberalization is recognized, while at the same time political liberalization is highly contested. Key actors within the Government no doubt see the balance between economic and political liberalization in different ways. Nonetheless it should be realized that a new space is beginning to emerge, and key figures acknowledge that there must be some sort of balance between the two directions of liberalization.

The most visible change in the current situation in Syria is President Bashar Al-Assad's efforts to introduce political reforms. This was clearly

²⁷ In addition to key informants during the Evaluation Mission, sources for this section include George, 2003; Hinnebusch 1989, 1990, 1993, 2003; IFAD, 2001; Perthes 1992, 1995, 2004a, 2004b; and IFAD, 2001.

demonstrated during the so-called ‘Damascus Spring’, which encouraged a wave of political meetings and civil society-based activities following the inaugural speech by the new President when he took the Constitutional Oath in front of Parliament in July 2000. What seemed during the early days of his presidency to be an impetus for a genuine process of reform has since slowed down to a less dynamic process of development. True, there are some signs of reform, but the current transition period is perhaps better described as one of ‘cautious give and take’. As indicated earlier, there is clear recognition within the Syrian leadership that economic reform is necessary. However, there seems to be less certainty regarding how best to integrate economic liberalization with the pace and scope of political reforms.

The outcome of political reforms will also be strongly affected by the dynamics of regional politics, which remains a basic factor in Syrian politics. Regional political strategies relating to Syria as a leading Arab power were an important building block for the late President Hafez Al-Asad, as have been various regional political crises. These include the wars with Israel, the civil war in Lebanon, the Gulf Wars and the current situation in Iraq and Palestine, all factors that have profound effects on the possibilities for future reforms in the country. Dramatic developments in the region outside Syria will have internal implications, and can be expected to divert attention away from internal reform to national security concerns. In such a situation the need of the army and the security services for stability and thus for maintaining the status quo may well override the need for wide-ranging economic and political reforms.

2.2 WEAK SOCIAL BASE FOR REFORM

A second obstacle is the weak social base of those groups who are willing to push for reforms in Syria. The early years of President Hafez Al-Asad’s rule saw some liberalization policies. New alliances emerged in 1971 with the partial liberalization of trade and abandonment of total control of the economy, which in turn legitimized the role of the private sector. At the same time, many Syrians achieved greater independence from the State through labour migration, largely to the Gulf economies but also to Africa and beyond. These developments helped produce new types of institutions alongside peasant associations and chambers of commerce. Small-scale, family-based enterprises grew and filled the gaps left by reduced state control. Family-owned light industries developed, technology and capital flowed in from abroad through migration links, smuggling from

Lebanon overcame raw material constraints, and selection of product lines focused on those outside state price control. There were limits to how far such enterprises could grow given the overall control by the State. Nonetheless, this trend helped foster the proliferation of social forces enjoying wider access to resources and also produced a more diversified society. The professional and working classes proliferated, as did membership in syndicates and associations, increasingly occupying a space affected by the declining ability of the State to maintain direct control.

Currently, actors in the private sector seem to focus not only on the increasing space for private business, but also on the need for political stability to reap the benefits from this opening. Hence there appears to be little pressure for reforms that go substantially beyond those that are currently emerging. Two segments of the new bourgeoisie, namely domestic entrepreneurs and expatriates, have the particular potential to widen the space within which civil society may operate. The former can combine private enterprise and a welfare network outside of the Government’s control; the latter can exploit the State’s interest in investment capital from abroad to call for greater economic and political liberalization.

However, as yet there is no independent bourgeoisie in Syria that can launch capitalist market-oriented development, since these groups cannot move beyond what is currently permitted by the State.²⁸ Moreover, these groups continue to depend on state-controlled monopolies, contracts and protection, and, in spite of some liberalization of the banking sector through establishment of the stock market and foreign banks, continue to be hampered in accessing viable financial markets.

2.3 ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION (*INFITAH*) AND STATE CONTROLLED CAPITALISM

Economic liberalization has always been under the strict control of the State, a situation that seems set to continue. The late President Hafez Al-Asad supported economic policies that opened up a space for private business and encouraged links with the West. Compared to Egypt for example, the *infitah* in Syria has been more state-capitalist with continued Government control of foreign trade. The State played a leading role in industry, and State-financed programmes largely directed the course of development. Yet, *infitah* did lead to some changes; for example, restrictions on imports were removed, and investments in tourism and the transport sector were encouraged and expanded.

²⁸ Euro-Med Partnership Syria. Country Strategy paper 2002-2206, and National Indicative Programme 2002-2004, European Union, 2002.

While the 1970s saw considerable economic growth, the 1980s saw a period of stagnation, particularly in the commodity producing sectors of agriculture and industry. Construction, trade and services have exhibited varied development trends, but here also stagnation became evident by the second half of the 1980s. In fact, this stagnation was the result of certain conditions prevalent during the previous decade, whereby, for example, foreign exchange shortages led to smuggling and black market activities. To deal with this the Syrian Government resorted to a 'policy of necessity', reducing public investment, introducing restrictive wage policies and subsidy reduction, and instituting a step-by-step liberalization process.

This was a new phase of the economic *infitah*, different from that of the 1970s. At that time public resources seemed almost unlimited and the State could more or less afford to cover the costs of economic development. In the 1980s, however, public funds decreased and the Government needed to mobilize private capital, which benefited the private sector. The rate of private investment increased, not in absolute terms but in relation to decreasing rates of state investments. Syria's private sector is dominated by trade and related businesses such as finance, commission trade, real estate and tourism, i.e. sectors not perceived to be of paramount strategic interest to the Government's control over the economy.

Developments from the 1990s to the present are more or less a continuation of the process embarked upon in the previous decade, influenced by various measures intended to liberalize investment policies and to some extent the banking sector, and generally encouraging private production and investment, particularly in the manufacturing industry. The 1991 Investment Law No.10 opened the door for private capital investment in enterprises above a certain size. As mentioned earlier, since 2000 there has been a revision of this law, as well as some further opening up of the economy.

This brief overview of Syria's recent history provides insights into the forces behind the resurgence of the private sector, the dynamics of which are defined both politically and economically. The rent-driven expansion of the State during the 1970s exceeded Syria's economic base. When rent and growth declined in the 1980s, the State began to shed some of its economic responsibilities and private business had to be given concessions to fill the economic gap. By the 1990s the regime regarded the private sector not

just as an auxiliary to the public sector, but as a second engine of growth. The 1990s was characterized by the State's increasing withdrawal from public sector trade and production monopolies, by a deregulation of trade and currency regimes, and by the encouragement of large private investments.

While all this has limited the State's ability to determine what is to be produced, sold and consumed in the country, the Syrian Government to a large extent remains in control of economic developments, reflected in the fact that global actors such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have not been able to influence economic policies in the same way as they have done elsewhere in the region. But positive as national control over economic developments may be, it may also be perceived as a problem, in that it has retained a high degree of control on the bureaucracy, on the public sector and also on the private sector. The last is politically weak, as it is dominated by small-scale enterprises that do not represent clear-cut interests. The limited number of big production units largely represent their own narrow interests, rather than the broader interests of the private sector. Groups at the losing end of the scale include the lower echelons of the bureaucracy and public sector employees with fixed wages, small and landless peasants with limited access to affordable credit and production inputs, and members of the marginalized urban strata with low skill levels and limited income-generation opportunities.

2.4 ISSUES OF GOVERNANCE—KEY CHALLENGES

The problems outlined above make it clear that economic and political reform are major challenges facing the Government in Syria. A political system with well-established checks and balances has developed, with the State in close control since the Ba'ath Party was given a key role through the 1973 Constitution. Agencies were set up to shadow government ministries in their field of activities, and popular organizations were established to function as links between Party, State and society. A Parliament was established in 1971, where the Ba'ath Party plays a significant role.²⁹

The legal system is also strongly influenced by the Government, and rule by administrative decree is as important as rule by law. This leaves little freedom for judges to

²⁹ The legislative branch is composed of a unicameral chamber, the People's Assembly. Members of the People's Assembly must be at least 25 years of age. In 1980, the government decided that independent candidates could hold up to 83 seats in the legislature. The remaining 167 seats are reserved for parties that are members of the National Progressive Front. Article 53 of the Constitution of 1973 states that half of the 250 seats are reserved for workers and peasants. Article 8 of the Constitution declares the Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party to be the leading party in the state.

³⁰ The Emergency Law introduced in 1962, for instance, can override all other legislative measures.

decide against decision-makers in the State.³⁰ Corruption in the judiciary is widely rumoured, and the media is mostly state-run. Since 2001, there have been some openings for private media ownership, but with little space to express views not accepted by the Government, a situation that has led to self-censorship among journalists.

In effect, rather than independent institutions, the Syrian system is characterized by personalized relationships, whereby individuals and groups have attached themselves to power wielders within the State apparatus. These issues pose important challenges to reforming the economy and providing institutional space for the private sector and civil society.

2.5 SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

An important element in the further liberalization of Syrian society and economy is the evolving of a constructive arena for civil society organizations that are independent both from the State and from the primordial social ties of kinship and ethnicity (cf. Hinnebush, 1993). Part of the challenge of promoting such an arena is encouraging a public discourse to define the concept of civil society and reach a consensus on its main constituents. The concept of civil society,³¹ which encompasses groups and associations outside the market and state, including for example non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based associations, cooperatives and trade unions, the media, peasant, women and youth organizations as well as research institutions, is relatively new in Syria.³² A key virtue of civil society is its ability to act as an organized counterweight to the state apparatus, working openly through democratic processes and having the ability to reach decision-makers in order to influence national events and priorities.

As indicated earlier, the Presidential inaugural speech of July 2000, with its promises of reform, was a turning point for development in Syrian society. It encouraged various individuals as well as competing groups to stake out a niche to participate in the development process, thereby reflecting the heterogeneity of civil society in Syria. A number of new NGOs were established, which sought registration in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA). Parallel to this development, a civil society forum movement emerged, which called for political liberalization and the lifting of the Emergency Law. This movement

provoked a backlash by the authorities, contributing to the perception that civil society was a ‘negative’ entity aiming to usurp political power. Not surprisingly, this had adverse implications for the newly emerging NGOs whose efforts to secure licenses were thwarted. It was only in late 2001 that the first ‘new’ NGO (the Syrian Environment Association) obtained its license to operate. Currently, around 12 new NGOs have secured their license from the MLSA.³³

Indeed, until 2001, the official understanding of an NGO was restricted to two specific types. The first consisted of welfare organizations soliciting donations to provide services for specific target groups (such as orphans or the disabled), in effect reducing reliance on the Government to provide such services. The second type involved popular organizations following the Soviet and Eastern Bloc models in existence at the time. The latter are in fact quasi-governmental—such as the General Union of Women (GUW), trade unions and the Revolutionary Youth Union—and are funded by the State. The new NGOs currently face a multitude of constraints, including a time-consuming registration and licensing process requiring authorization from various bodies other than the MLSA, such as the Security Services; an outdated NGO law dating back to the 1958 union with Egypt; and rigid by-laws that NGOs are not allowed to adapt to their specific aims and objectives (the exception being membership fees).

Another constraint pertains to receiving foreign or donor funding, which is complicated by two inter-linked factors. First, some donors lack clarity on the Government’s stance vis-à-vis NGOs and may take the path of least resistance, i.e. avoid dealing with them. Second, other donors appear to believe that any NGO that has to secure prior permission from the authorities to receive foreign funding is not ‘really an independent organization’, overlooking the regulation that all NGOs must be registered with the MLSA, and have to inform the latter of foreign donations received, irrespective of who their patrons may be.³⁴

There is still therefore a long way to go in Syria for civil society in general, and the new NGO sector in particular, to establish their credentials. The business bourgeoisie appears to be more interested in stability than in reforms, even though they are gradually being accorded some access to the arena of decision-making. Parliamentary elections are

³¹ For which there is an Arabic term *al-mujtama’al-madani*.

³² See UNDP 2004o.

³³ Apart from the NGO mentioned above, there are six other NGOs focusing on environment, which is a ‘neutral’ term facilitating registration. Some of these NGOs also focus on consumer protection, rural development and young entrepreneurship.

³⁴ However, it should also be noted that due to inexperience and lack of appropriate skills, NGOs may fail to follow the required procedures for receiving foreign funding. Furthermore, the current political climate in the region sets its own constraints to approaching some bilateral donors.

controlled, but may eventually be opened up for some venting of political aspirations. The affluent elite and representatives of the new bourgeoisie may also enter the People's Assembly, and work towards liberalization. Hence there is currently a balance in Syria between a State that needs wealth generation and conservative social and political forces, and a bourgeoisie that needs the economic opportunities and political protection provided by the State. All these groups may tend to agree that political reform should be halted if it is at the cost of socio-economic stability. However, the momentum for change is there, albeit so far limited. The Government is currently pursuing a strategy of controlled and calculated policy reform which may increase the space for civil society. Indeed, with the collapse of socialism there is no ideological alternative to widening the space for civil society and the private sector.

The conclusion is that pluralism is not necessarily an outcome of modernization. Civil society may be denied an autonomous status, which would curtail a fledgling NGO sector aiming to move away from traditional welfare to participation in development. There is also the reality based on experience elsewhere that the State may transfer some or maybe even most of its responsibilities to civil society and the private sector, though ultimately still remaining in control. Time will tell whether civil society and the new NGO sector in Syria will be able to stake out a constructive and unique niche for themselves.

2.6 GENDER IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSITION

The quasi-governmental GUW, established in 1967, plays an important role in promoting Syrian women's social status and economic participation (SAR/GUW, 2003). There is general acknowledgement that the GUW has contributed to changes and adaptation of some laws and regulations that have to varying extents narrowed gender gaps in social and economic life, as well as in political representation.³⁵

Moreover, around 12 percent of Parliament seats in Syria are held by women, the highest percentage in the Arab region (followed by Jordan with 7.9 percent and Bahrain with 7.5 percent)³⁶, a notable development considering that there is no women's quota in the Syrian

Assembly. However, in recent local administrative council elections, the number of women running for office decreased following the decision to drop the practice of presenting candidates' lists endorsed by the ruling party.

It should be noted that Syria only signed the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2003 but to date it has not been ratified by the People's Assembly.³⁷ The 1973 Syrian Constitution decrees that "...citizens are equal before the law in their rights and duties..." (Article 25/3); the "...State ensures the principle of equal opportunities for all citizens..." (Article 25/4); and that "...every citizen has the right to participate in political, economic and social life..." (Article 26; SAR, 1973). In fact, Syrian women won the legal right to vote and run for office as early as 1949. Civil laws are to some extent also gender equitable; for example, Syrian women have the legal right to conclude contracts without any prior authorization from male kin or husbands; trade with their own capital; establish and manage their own economic enterprises, as well as open bank accounts and apply for credit in their own names (Civil Law, Articles 40, 46). Women can register their names in the employment offices, established by Law 3/2000, and, furthermore, their testimony in front of the civil court is considered to be equal to that of men (Moussa, no date). In contrast to various other Arab countries, Syrian women can work as lawyers and be appointed as judges.³⁸

Syria has signed a number of ILO Conventions of relevance to women in the labour force; for example, the 1957 ILO Convention on equal pay for work of equal value is enshrined in Article 130 of the Syrian Labour Law. Labour legislation also lists the type of hazardous work in which women may not be engaged (for example mines and quarries), but also establishes constraints on women's night work (between 8 p.m.-7 a.m.), such as in the leisure and tourism industries, and telecommunications. Article 54 in the Law Governing the Public Sector and Article 52 in the Law Regulating Agricultural Activities decree the duration of maternity leave to which Syrian women are entitled (75 days paid followed by additional time with lower pay).³⁹

A 1989 Decree stipulates that ministries, schools, industrial enterprises and public sector institutions must provide childcare facilities where female employees number more than 15. The Social Insurance Law of 1972 and

³⁵ This is reflected, for example, in the National Strategy for Women in Syria, as well as in the Beijing +5 Syrian National Report (SAR, 1998; 1999).

³⁶ UNDP, 2004k: 221-223.

³⁷ This remains the case at the time of writing this Report. Neither has Syria to date submitted its Country Report to CEDAW.

³⁸ WB, 2003c: 101.

³⁹ WB, 2003c: 79.

⁴⁰ WB, 2003c: 112-113.

various amendments also ensure women's entitlements, such as to their spouse's pension if they do not have their own pension rights, and granting children's allowances to women workers.⁴¹

However, as in the majority of Arab countries, there are inherent contradictions between Syrian women's rights as enshrined in the Constitution, and the Personal Status Law that is applied in practice. This pertains, for example, to inheritance, divorce, maintenance and custody of children. Various regulations affect a wife's economic entitlements, with implications for residence obligation in the conjugal home and physical mobility beyond, including obtaining the husband's permission to work outside the home.⁴²

Similarly, the Criminal Law is relatively lenient on men committing 'honour crimes', though women are subject to harsher treatment than men in the case of adultery (Moussa, no date). Furthermore, women do not enjoy equal rights under the 1969 Nationality Law (foreign husbands of Syrian women are not entitled to Syrian citizenship). As is generally the case in the Arab region, women in Syria may not be aware of their legal rights or of gender inequitable laws until they find themselves in a situation revealing these gender gaps and their adverse implications.

Post-Beijing activities on women's rights and gender issues include appointing Gender Liaison Officers (GLOs) in all ministries. So far they have not been very successful in mainstreaming gender in their respective ministries; nor are there indications of gender sensitizing budgets and planning tools. This is partly due to the reality—encountered elsewhere in the Arab region and beyond—that GLOs do not occupy senior positions, but it is also due to weak networking mechanisms between GLOs and the GUW, though post-Beijing activities have raised some awareness on gender gaps in legislation.⁴³

There are indications that in spite of relatively progressive labour and social security regulations and civil laws, in practice Syrian 'women's empowerment' continues to be among the deficits identified by the 2002 AHDR, as well as by other agencies that are promoting gender equality in the Arab region.⁴⁴ For instance, working women may not necessarily control their earnings. Also, not all workplaces

provide childcare facilities for women, who in any case may not be registered by employers and may forego social security entitlements. Women's employment in agriculture is predominantly as unpaid family labour. Their limited qualifications, lack of experience, and administrative obstacles account for the relatively small percentage of women owning and running their own businesses. Indeed, it was only in 1999 that the National Business Women's Association established the Industrial Women's Committee in the Chamber of Industry. The female members of this group are perceived to be atypical, given that their social background and economic status facilitates their business connections, which may be inherited from fathers or spouses.

Relative to other world regions, the Arab world has not experienced a 'feminization of the labour force', though there are indications that there is a trend towards the 'feminization of unemployment' as reflected in the increasing number of unemployed women.⁴⁵ In fact, the Arab region continues to have among the world's lowest female economic participation rates: 33 percent in 2002 compared with 55.8 percent for developing countries and 64.2 percent for Least Developed Countries.⁴⁶

Although the 1991 Syrian Investment Law explicitly emphasizes small enterprise development for rural women, implementation is constrained by socio-cultural and economic factors, including rural women's low literacy level and limited knowledge of their legal rights. It should also be kept in mind that available labour force data do not accurately reflect the actual number and percentage of the economically active female labour force, given their statistical invisibility as unpaid family labour in the agricultural and informal sectors. As previously mentioned, the female economic activity rate (ages 15 years and above) in Syria is relatively low—29.2 percent by 2002, constituting 38 percent of the male economic activity rate.⁴⁶ However, it should be noted that around 45 percent of unpaid labour on family farms is provided by women, and that livestock care is an almost exclusively female activity, and is also largely unpaid. Rural women's control over resources in the agricultural sector is low, amounting to around 5 percent of land and less than 10 percent for livestock ownership. Moreover, rural women are generally minimally involved in marketing,

⁴¹ Articles 73, 74 and 75 in the Personal Status Law; El-Alami and Hinchcliffe, 1996.

⁴² cf. Shaaban, 1996, 1998.

⁴³ Notably ESCWA, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNFPA and the World Bank, as well as various bilateral donors and the EU.

⁴⁴ CAWTAR/UNDP/AGFUND, 2001: 89, 122.

⁴⁵ UNDP, 2004k: 232.

⁴⁶ UNDP, 2004k: 231.

⁴⁷ IFAD, 2001: xxiii.

⁴⁸ CAWTAR/UNDP/AGFUND, 2001: 223.

with obvious implications for their control over the use of income and profits.⁴⁷

Generally in the Arab region, women seeking paid employment tend to be attracted to the civil service and public sector enterprises, largely due to job security, shorter working hours and the social benefits this affords. In the case of Syria, there is an evident increase in women's economic activity rate in the public sector from 1.6 percent in the 1970s to 6.2 percent by the mid-1990s.⁴⁸ Latest available data reveal that by 2002, around 32 percent of all female employees worked in the government sector, compared with around 23 percent for male employees.⁴⁹

Available data also reveal that the percentage of female government employees holding degrees from intermediate and higher education institutions is higher than is the case for male government employees (see annex IV/Graph A). This seems to confirm that in spite of the Government's policy of guaranteeing employment for university graduates, public sector employment is not perceived by higher educated males to be the ideal, unless a private sector job cannot be secured. However, in spite of laws and regulations, available data show that the higher the bureaucratic status of employees (reflected in the wage and salary structure), the more likely they are to be male (see annex IV/Graph B).

However slow and uncertain the pace of the current transition period and reform process may be, it is eventually expected to become more entrenched in the public sector and lead to the development of a market economy in Syria. This will have various implications for the status of both men and women in the labour market. Generally, the male labour force with low skill levels and/or skills not in demand in the newly developing economic climate may nevertheless face relatively less constraints to pursuing income-earning opportunities, including labour migration to neighbouring countries. For the female labour force, a complexity of gender-specific constraints will tend to impede them from taking advantage of newly emerging economic opportunities. With economic restructuring, growing participation of the private sector and trade liberalization in the era of globalization, Arab women in general and Syrian women in particular are likely to find it

"OUTMODED DEFINITIONS OF MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD ... (PERSIST) ... DESPITE THE ACTUAL DRAMATIC CHANGES IN WOMEN'S LIVES. CONSEQUENTLY, WOMEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN EDUCATIONAL, CULTURAL, AND ECONOMIC FIELDS ARE NOT YET REFLECTED IN A NEW CULTURAL EXPRESSION, PERHAPS BECAUSE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS HAVE FOCUSED ON IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN, WITHOUT PAYING AS MUCH ATTENTION TO ALTERING INHERITED PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN TO FIT A MUCH IMPROVED REALITY."

Shaaban, 1998: 115.

even more difficult to enter the labour market under terms and conditions that are equal to those of their male peers. In spite of current examples,⁵⁰ gender stereotyping of jobs continues to be pervasive, and is further perpetuated by media portrayals of working women.⁵¹

⁴⁷ SAR/PMO/CBS, 2003a: 87.

⁴⁸ For example, the current Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Information in charge of ICT is female, and the number of women occupying General Director posts in non-traditional ministries – i.e. beyond social affairs, education and health etc. – is steadily growing.

⁴⁹ SAR, 1999.

3

National priorities and strategic positioning of UNDP

This chapter aims to analyse how the UNDP CO in Syria has positioned itself strategically in order to respond to national development priorities during the period under review—i.e. did UNDP do the right things in Syria? The analysis thus focuses on how UNDP positioned itself strategically up to 2000 and how it responded to the dynamics of the post-2000 transition phase, especially the development vision set for the country by the Government, including how it handled its strategic partnerships during the period under review.

3.1. RESPONDING TO THE NATIONAL CONTEXT: 1997–2000

By 1997, UNDP identified intended outcomes in three areas, namely environment, governance and poverty, as the focus of its strategic development interventions in Syria. With respect to environment, for which the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and donor resources were mobilized, this particular focus is not surprising, given global focus shifts following the 1992 Earth Summit.⁵² Environment was also perceived as an important development issue by the Syrian authorities. Though the thematic areas of poverty and governance were no doubt informed by UNDP's corporate mandate to promote what during the 1990s was referred to as 'sustainable human development', such a focus also responded to emerging national development concerns in Syria, even if these were not explicitly spelt out politically and strategically in pertinent policy statements.

This approach is reflected in the objectives identified in the first CCF (1997–2000, extended to 2001).⁵³ Indeed, the country review held in July–August 2000 endorsed the relevance of the development objectives identified by the CO, noting the perceptible impact of UNDP support. The review concluded that in particular, UNDP's advocacy for poverty reduction had some positive implications for the Government's acceptance of the poverty concept (previously absent from official documents). The review also noted the strengthening of national ownership of UNDP cooperation.⁵⁴

However, UNDP's strategic position during 1997–2000 was also characterized by an approach best described as 'business as usual'. Clearly, this approach was affected by the decision not to unduly court political controversy,

⁵² The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.

⁵³ UNDP, 1997a.

⁵⁴ Thus by 2000, 10 out of 15 projects approved during 1997–2000 were nationally executed (NEX), a perceptible improvement relative to 1992–1996, when only six out of 32 operational projects were subject to NEX. UNDP, 2001a: 5–6.

reflected for example in the stress on ‘economic governance’. But there was at the same time some ‘pushing of boundaries’ with respect to poverty. UNDP can be credited with attempting to shift the discourse from a narrow focus on unemployment to the broader problem of poverty reduction, hampered though this was by unavailable (or inaccessible) up-to-date data on poverty, which remains problematic. UNDP also continued its focus on the environment, deemed politically least controversial and for which development of pertinent strategies was generally unproblematic.

Though generally endorsing UNDP’s stated development interventions, the 2000 country review also noted that expected outcomes (see annex V) were “far beyond the capacity of the CO to manage, particularly given the lack of clarity in the government policy on governance and poverty (which) contributed to the inability of the CO to implement several of the envisaged outcomes.”⁵⁵ More specifically, there were “lengthy bureaucratic procedures in approval of projects and implementation.” The political changes in 2000, including the appointment of a new head of the SPC, as well as personnel turnover at the project level, “further hampered implementation.”⁵⁶ Reference was also made to “insufficient emphasis of objectives, especially with regard to economic governance.”⁵⁷

3.1.A National instruments of planning: unclear development strategies

The conclusions of the 2000 country review reveal that overall, UNDP has ‘done the right thing’ in Syria with regard to its intended outcomes, specifically its focus on governance and poverty. These two areas are clearly of strategic importance to promoting human development in Syria, apart from being in accordance with UNDP’s corporate mandate. The Evaluation Mission generally endorses this view, with the caveat that UNDP has not strengthened its strategic position in order to better promote a space for civil society, strengthen the judiciary and support gender mainstreaming, all of which are also relevant to promoting human development.⁵⁸

UNDP was hampered not only by its own overcautious approach, especially in implementing governance-related interventions, but also by the fact that national development plans did not function as strategic instruments. As the 2000 country review concluded, the inability of the CO to

implement several of the envisaged outcomes was also due to the “absence of a clear and integrated national development plan”(UNDP, 2001a: 6).

Indeed, Syria’s development plans have had limited value as guidelines for actual economic policy and investment decisions. Rather, they should be read as reflecting debates on issues preoccupying the Government during the periods in question. Looking back at earlier development plans, the impression is that they are not expressions of systematic planning processes, but rather policy statements. The 1981-1985 Plan gave special importance to agricultural development, emphasized the need to establish labour-intensive projects, as well as to concentrate on industries using local rather than imported raw materials. But in practice, no new industrial projects were established in the 1980s and many other planned inputs were postponed due to economic difficulties.

The 1986-1990 Plan was rewritten several times, thus in effect reacting to ongoing developments rather than defining their direction. Only towards the end of this Plan were austerity measures employed to deal with the problematic economic situation, specifically by reducing public spending and shifting the focus towards export of oil and other raw materials such as cotton and phosphates. Much effort was invested in developing the 1990-1995 Plan, but it was never given any coherent and final form. By all accounts, the 1995-2000 Plan—which more or less overlapped with the first CCF—also did not have a clear strategy framework. The current one, the 9th Five-Year Plan 2000-2005 (SAR, 2002a), appears to be on hold as per the SPC and key informants met by the Evaluation Mission.

Moreover, the fact that the first national human development report (NHDR, 2000) for Syria was not endorsed by the Government and has by all accounts been quietly shelved, is further indication of the lack of clarity during this period, specifically with regard to Syria’s official policy on governance and poverty (UNDP/SAR, 2000). While it would be fair to say that the political climate was not conducive to governance-related interventions, the question remains whether UNDP made sufficient efforts to raise the debate on governance reform for promoting economic and human development in the country.

3.1.B Setting the scene for a new era

President Bashar Al-Assad’s inaugural speech of July 2000

⁵⁵ UNDP/EO, 2004a: 5.

⁵⁶ UNDP, 2001a: 6.

⁵⁷ UNDP, 2000a: 1.

⁵⁸ Points discussed later on in this chapter.

touched on many issues of basic importance to Syria's development, stressing the value of new ideas that need to be applied to emerging challenges in the country.⁵⁹ The importance of accountability at all levels of society, from the personal to the institutional, was underlined. Similarly, the need for transparency in the economy, the media as well as society was stressed. The President also emphasized the importance of responsibility and self-reliance in solving problems. Acknowledging that teamwork requires 'democratic practices' such as elections, free press and speech, as well as 'democratic institutions', the President however reiterated that Syria must develop its "own traditions in this field", rather than uncritically importing models from outside.

Another issue singled out by the President pertains to administrative reform, stressing that inefficient administration and corrupt practices are impediments to progress. Parliament and the judicial system were singled out as important corrective institutions, indicating that the President also sees himself as an advocate of the rule of law. Moreover, there was an explicit reference to the "desperate need for constructive criticism", requiring objective thinking.

With respect to the economic sector, the President gave several important signals about the need for improved competence, planning and data. Pointing out that unclear strategies are "particularly to blame for many of the difficulties from which we suffer today", the President stressed that "strategies are not available as ready recipes". Rather they require careful study, cooperation "as well as extensive dialogue". In this respect, the President mentioned the need for equal development in all regions of the country to effectively deal with the problem of unemployment, the need to focus on problems in the agricultural sector—both in terms of marketing of agricultural products as well as land reform—and also the need for sound economic policies in the face of the challenges posed by globalization.

3.2 CHANGING NATIONAL CONTEXT POST-2000: RESPONDING TO THE DYNAMICS OF TRANSITION

The change in political leadership in Syria in 2000 is seen as a turning point by UN organizations and donors operating in Syria. How has UNDP responded to the 'signals' in

President Bashar Al-Asad's inaugural speech, which clearly reflected a complexity of challenges? Challenges spelt out included: economic reform with a role for the private sector; administrative reform taking into account key concerns such as accountability and transparency and the problem of corruption; and the role of the judiciary in

IT IS "...NECESSARY TO MOVE IN STEADY, THOUGH GRADUAL STEPS, TOWARDS PERFORMING ECONOMIC CHANGES THROUGH THE MODERNIZATION OF LAWS, THE EROSION OF BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES STANDING IN THE WAY OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL INVESTMENT FLOW, THE RECRUITMENT OF BOTH PRIVATE AND PUBLIC CAPITAL, AND THE ACTIVATION OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND GRANTING IT BETTER OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK..."

(SAR, 2000: 15).

upholding the rule of law. But although the President mentioned 'democratic practices' and 'the need for constructive criticism', the speech also clearly signalled limitations to such a process. These limitations quickly became apparent with the political reaction to the so-called 'Damascus Spring'.

3.2.A Continuing focus on governance and poverty

Post-'Damascus Spring' political developments were clearly setting the tone, not only for UNDP but also for other UN and donor organizations operating in Syria at the time. Indeed, and as reiterated previously in Chapter 2, with regard to the challenges of transition in Syria, political uncertainty and at times conflicting messages from Government authorities continued to influence the extent to which existing boundaries could be pushed and, equally important, in which direction.

UNDP reacted to the changing political context by continuing, and in some respects increasing, its focus on poverty and governance, the two thematic areas perceived to be of strategic importance to emerging political and development trends in post-2000 Syria. Indeed, this is reflected in the second CCF for Syria (2002–2006), which acknowledges that UNDP has benefited from the political and economic changes signalled by the government. UNDP recognized that it would now be strategically better

⁵⁹ SAR, 2000. Quotes are from the English translation of the inaugural speech published by the *Syria Times*.

⁶⁰ UNDP, 2001: 7.

placed to support “greater public discussion of development issues and problems emphasizing economic reform, modernization and transparency in the Government”, and to discuss evolving national priorities with the Government.⁶⁰

Post-2000 UNDP strategic interventions in Syria generally took into account lessons learnt from previous years, specifically the need to define new priority areas “with a sharper focus and initiate programme development with a participatory approach” (UNDP, 2001a: 7; see also annexes V and VII). More explicit account of UNDP’s corporate mandates appears to have been taken, elaborating them to include a number of development interventions more focused on expected results for institutional development and good governance; poverty reduction and sustainable human development; and sustainable use of natural resources and environmental conservation. They are also more focused on the strategy of addressing upstream policy development and capacity-building, while at the same time aiming to support development interventions at the micro-level.⁶¹

Though UNDP Syria CO post-2000 continued to operate with caution and was clearly intent on avoiding undue political controversy, there was nevertheless some further ‘pushing of boundaries’ as reflected in various strategic interventions in support of intended outcomes. This has served to further strengthen UNDP’s strategic position in human development-related areas of relevance to the reform process in Syria. In governance, there was a shift towards explicit mention of ‘good’ governance rather than the hitherto narrow (and politically uncontroversial) focus on ‘economic’ governance. However, caution continued to prevail since ‘good’ governance was generally interpreted in terms of ‘good’ administrative and managerial reform—i.e. technically unthreatening interventions—rather than in terms of political liberalization and opening a space for political discourses based on transparency and accountability. The focus on supporting the executive through administrative reform—and specifically the SPC as UNDP’s main counterpart—thus continued.

UNDP also focused its attention on supporting the legislative, a strategic intervention of crucial importance to the reform process in Syria, and one that also strengthened UNDP’s strategic position as a key player in promoting

human development-related processes. Prior to 1990, the People’s Assembly, or Parliament, played a marginal role in Syrian economic policy-making. However, after the 1990 elections, the Assembly became more active and with President Bashar Al-Assad coming to power in 2000, there have been hopes that this process will be enhanced. This has been encouraged by statements in the July 2000 inaugural speech such as development “requires improvement of the accountability apparatus in the country in order to make it more effective (and here) comes the role of a revitalized Parliament” (SAR, 2000). Though the Syrian Parliament does not hold the type of power inherent in western democracies, it has gained a role in the economic decision-making process. Indeed, it has become an arena for interest articulation, and the Government will consult with Parliament if deemed necessary.

UNDP also continued to be perceived as an important contributor to the public discourse on poverty, specifically with its pilot initiative in Jabal Al-Hoss and its support to combating unemployment. This has contributed to making UNDP’s strategic position in an important human development-related area more visible. Indeed, in a development partner survey that was conducted, 50 percent perceived UNDP to be an organization that is ‘to a great extent’ associated with poverty reduction, while a further 50 percent perceived this to be ‘some extent’ (UNDP, 2003i: 2).

At the same time, environment, where UNDP did not have a leading strategic position given development interventions by other donors (for example the Japanese), was clearly not a growing development intervention. However, UNDP is credited for being instrumental in supporting the development of a National Environment Strategy and Action Plan. This positive perception of UNDP’s role in environment is also reflected in the responses to the previously mentioned development partners’ survey. Thus, around two thirds of respondents indicate that they associate UNDP ‘to a great extent’ with activities in the field of environment, with the rest perceiving this to be ‘to some extent’ (UNDP, 2003i: 3).

As Figure 4 indicates, allocation of resource approvals by SRF goals (2002-2007), which overlaps with the second CCF, are more or less equal for poverty and environment, followed by governance.⁶² However, if the period is divided

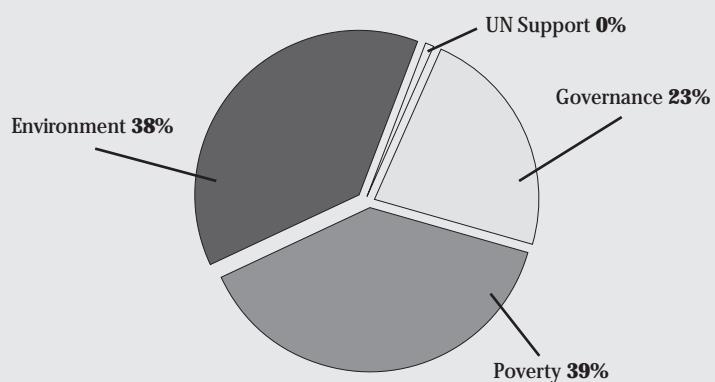
⁶⁰ UNDP, 2001a.

⁶² The SRF is a results-based planning and evaluation tool in all programme areas and in internal reporting on the annual results and the end-of-SRF cycle results through the Results Oriented Annual Report (ROAR).

⁶³ The MYFF is a corporate planning and monitoring results-based management tool that spells out the five strategic goals of UNDP and the relevant service lines around which the CO is expected to develop and formulate projects and programmes. As such, it provides the framework and the mandate for UNDP’s overall programme in the country.

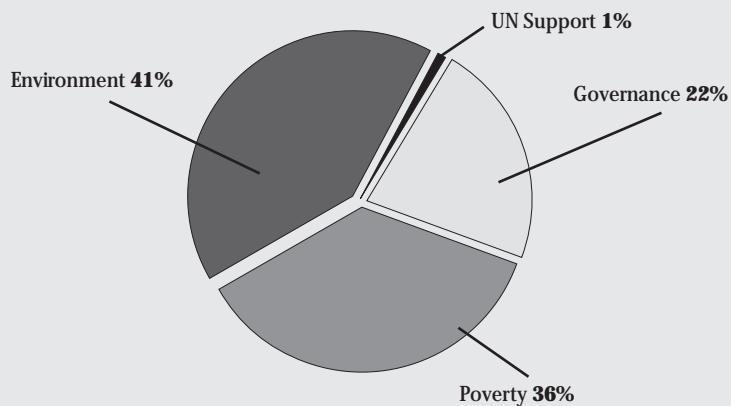
⁶⁴ Syria is part of the Dead Sea Fault System and thus falls within the earthquake hazard area. See: <http://www.kinematics.com>

FIGURE 4: APPROVALS BY SRF GOALS (2002-2007)



Source: UNDP Syria Country Office

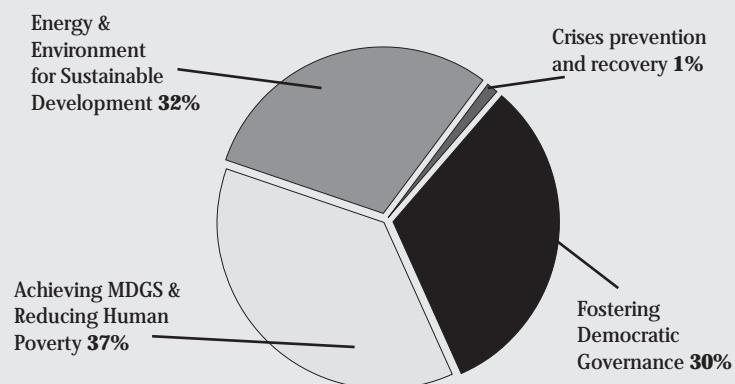
FIGURE 5: APPROVALS BY SRF GOALS (2002-2003)



Source: UNDP Syria Country Office

41

FIGURE 6: APPROVALS BY SRF GOALS (2004-2007)



Source: UNDP Syria Country Office

into two phases, i.e. approval of SRF goals for 2002-2003 and 2004-2007 respectively (see Figures 5 and 6), coinciding with two MYFF cycles (i.e. 2000-2003 and 2004-2007),⁶³ then it becomes evident that there has been a shift away from environment to an increasing focus on poverty and governance, and also a focus on crisis prevention and disaster management.⁶⁴

3.2.B Missed opportunities

UNDP post-2000 has strengthened its strategic position in two areas crucial to the reform process in Syria, namely governance and poverty, though it is debatable whether it pushed the boundaries to the extent possible. Either way, UNDP did not take sufficient advantage of a number of opportunities deemed crucial to addressing challenges posed by the transition process in Syria, and which were also of direct relevance to its corporate mandate to promote human development. Specifically, this pertains to civil society, the judiciary and gender mainstreaming.

Neglecting civil society

42

No doubt the concept of civil society is politically controversial in Syria, specifically among Government circles. Moreover, as mentioned previously, a development-oriented NGO sector, an important component of civil society, was almost non-existent until late 2001. Traditionally, NGOs have been welfare-oriented, serving to fill gaps in services not adequately provided by the Government.

UNDP in effect missed the opportunity to stake out a strategic position for itself in an area of crucial concern to both the reform process and to promoting human development. No specific attempts were made to define a strategic framework for supporting the development of a civil society which could constructively participate in the development process in Syria and elements of which could have become important strategic partners for UNDP. Feasibly, this has also been affected by the ‘business as usual’ approach affecting UNDPs’ strategic position up to the end of 2003. It is only relatively recently that UNDP Syria has begun to address this neglect with planned projects on supporting the media sector, and on NGOs’ transformation into development agencies.

Importance of the judiciary to the reform process

Linked to the above is UNDP’s inability to support the judiciary in Syria, an intervention area of crucial relevance to the current transition phase. Though UNDP is according attention to the legislative in Syria, surprisingly the integral link with an effective judicial system has not been pursued. Other factors apart, the reform process will depend on a transparent and efficient judiciary, which also implies improving the status and competence of judges, as well as the quality of legal education. Indeed, concern about the judiciary was clearly referred to in the President’s inaugural speech. Furthermore, supporting the judiciary is also important to strengthen UNDP’s strategic position in Syria given the links with human development.

Complacency on gender

The first CCF mentions gender equity and the need to enhance women’s status and access to resources, with emphasis on the “economic empowerment of women in rural areas” (UNDP, 1997a: 6; see also annex IV). However, apart from the Jabal Al-Hoss project, these aims do not appear to have been translated into specific projects to address gender gaps in access to and control over resources, and reinforcing the link with the promotion of human development.⁶⁵

The Evaluation Mission concludes that the UNDP CO appears to have been rather complacent about gender issues and concerns, even though one of the programme officers functioned as Gender Focal Point.⁶⁶ The influence and activities of the quasi-governmental GUW may well have contributed to such complacency; i.e. the status of Syrian women was perhaps perceived as ‘progressing’, and therefore not requiring much concerted effort on the part of UNDP Syria. Though it may also be surmised that there tends to be a time lag between corporate level gender mainstreaming directives and actual implementation by COs, a trend not confined to UNDP.⁶⁷

Moreover, UNDP’s strategic position post-2000 as an emerging ‘pusher of boundaries’ in the areas of governance and poverty was not matched by similar efforts in gender mainstreaming. Though there is mention of gender in the situation analysis of the second CCF, surprisingly there is no explicit mention of gender mainstreaming in

⁶⁵ While it is significant that women constitute 40 percent of the beneficiaries from the microfinance scheme (the national average for female beneficiaries from such a scheme does not exceed 20 percent), UNDP has not been able to develop a gender mainstreaming strategy based on this particular experience.

⁶⁶ At the time of the evaluation in July-August 2004, the UNDP Syria CO did not have a Gender Focal Point as the pertinent staff had resigned.

⁶⁷ At the time of writing the Syria ADR, UNDP was embarking on an internal evaluation of its gender mainstreaming strategy and achievements, which presumably will also cover the existence (or otherwise) of such a time lag and its implications for programme outcomes.

⁶⁸ UNDP, 2001a: 8, 9, 11.

the sections under ‘expected results’ of the various programme areas.⁶⁸

Expectations of UNDP Syria

Discussing ‘missed opportunities’ in the context of UNDP’s strategic position in Syria needs to be balanced against the following observation: it should be noted that irrespective of accessible UNDP documentation and the official views of various stakeholders and key informants, the Syria CO until end of 2003 was apparently “not expected to be a high achieving” programme. Rather, there appears to have been an unwritten diagnosis based on two inter-linked factors: first, to not unduly push existing boundaries beyond what was perceived as politically feasible during a period characterized by uncertainty, both prior to and post 2000. Second, the Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS) did not want to make undue demands on the Syria CO management. Both these factors played a role in the ‘business as usual’ approach characteristic of UNDP Syria until the end of 2003.

3.2.C Re-engineering UNDP Syria country office

With the change in leadership of the UNDP CO (the new Resident Representative assumed his responsibilities in January 2004) there is a noticeable increase in the pushing of boundaries. There are clear signals that the RBAS and the CO are intent on a much more proactive role in asserting UNDP’s strategic position in the areas of governance and poverty, and in moving into the new area of crisis prevention and disaster management as well as HIV/AIDS.

The public perception of UNDP being a ‘neutral’, ‘objective’ and ‘credible’ partner has served to strengthen its strategic position vis-à-vis promoting governance beyond the narrow focus on economic issues and managerial aspects of administrative reform (ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004: 20; cf. UNDP, 2003i). There is now more explicit mention of ‘democratic’ governance, even though the Evaluation Mission notes the term appears to be confined to English language UNDP documentation. ‘Democratic’ governance is moreover not explicitly referred to in discussions with key stakeholders such as the SPC, and other senior key informants.

However it is relevant to mention here that in the development partners’ survey referred to earlier, while respondents were equally divided between ‘to a very great’ and ‘to a great’ extent (22.2 percent respectively) to which they associated UNDP Syria with the thematic focus of governance, 33.3 percent perceived this to be only ‘to a little’ extent, while for 11.1 percent this was ‘not at all’.⁶⁹ These responses are instructive and largely correspond with the perceptions of various key informants analysed by the ADR In-depth Local Research, and need to be taken on board by UNDP.

Though hampered by conflicting political messages from the Government, clearly UNDP Syria needs to keep pushing the boundaries in the thematic area of governance. The crucial need for such persistence is reflected, for example, in the views expressed to the Evaluation Mission by the current advisor to the President on the 10th Five-Year Plan currently under preparation. While these views are interesting signals of the current central concerns of key political players in Syria, and in fact reiterate many strategic points mentioned in President Bashar Al-Assad’s inaugural speech, they also reflect the ambivalence towards political liberalization. Thus the subject of governance and the inter-linked need for defining a political framework was said to be ‘currently under debate’, and there was only cursory mention of the need for developing tools of governance and for administrative reforms that are appropriate to the executive, the legislative and the judiciary.

Instead, the President’s adviser focused mainly on economic imperatives of reform, including transforming the role of the State from major player to regulator of the economy; tackling important issues such as unemployment; opening the Syrian economy to the outside world; joining the World Trade Organization and contributing to the Great Arab Free Trade Area; concluding the Association Agreement with the EU; according attention to competence building in the civil service and in local administration; ensuring that fiscal and monetary policies do not overlook the importance of the social dimensions of development; promoting the reform of the judiciary; and focusing on regions that are socially and economically marginalized, such as the north-east.

With respect to the thematic area of poverty, UNDP has so far paid insufficient attention to the relationship between income and human poverty as part of a common

⁶⁸ UNDP, 2003i: 3.

⁶⁹ The Regional Cooperation Framework for the Arab States (2002-2005) has included Syria as part of a series of regional attempts to implement a project titled Macroeconomic Policies for Poverty reduction in Syria, initiated in October 2003. The project is expected to address policy implications that arise from recognizing inequality as a major impediment to poverty reduction and offer feasible options for more pro-poor economic policies to national policymakers.

⁷¹ Growth is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for poverty reduction.

strategy towards poverty reduction.⁷⁰ To do so would require, among other things, a sharper and more systematic focus on the impact of future growth (even at a modest level) on human poverty and income inequality among rural and urban populations over the longer term, and on ways to reduce under-employment.⁷¹ An important factor that will determine the level of human poverty and income inequality in Syria is the availability of opportunities for individuals to move out of the informal and into the formal sector. As the Government's attitude towards the latter becomes more supportive, the pace of growth in the formal sector is expected to accelerate, especially if this is in labour-intensive industries. Given the current poverty trends in Syria, economic growth can reduce poverty, but only with effective pro-poor policies. Such policies should include strategies for urban employment, especially in the informal sector, as well as specific policies that increase people's access to basic services.⁷²

3.3 JOINT UN STRATEGIES FOR SYRIA

Another factor relevant to UNDP's strategic positioning in Syria is the experience of joint coordination with other UN agencies operating in the country.⁷³ This pertains to the formulation of the first common country assessment (CCA, UN, 2000), followed by the development of the first United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF, UN 2001).⁷⁴

3.3.A Common country assessment

The CCA identified four broad development issues perceived to be priority concerns in Syria: demographic trends; employment and the labour force; income distribution and poverty; and the limited role of NGOs. The CCA also identified a number of key cross-cutting issues, including concerted efforts on the part of the Government to improve food security and the population's nutritional status; the empowerment of women; and children's rights and development (UN, 2000: 31-33).⁷⁵

An important issue raised in the CCA is the challenges and constraints faced during the process of data collection, which the Evaluation Mission singles out here given its

importance as a cross-cutting issue affecting UNDP's programme performance (this will be discussed in the following chapter of this report). The CCA drew largely on UN agency reports and national sources, but the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) encountered problems of reliability and quality of data. In fact, disparities between the two sources were evident with regard to literacy rates; primary school completion ratios; gross secondary enrolment ratios; labour force participation rates; and access to adequate sanitation, i.e. indicators that are also relevant to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

There were also weaknesses in availability of data on gender and regional disparities; poverty and income distribution; wages and rate of growth of employment; environment, especially water resources; and distribution/supply of food by urban/rural areas. Based on the identification of the core indicator set,⁷⁶ a database was created for Syria in 1998, with the recommendation that it be updated as part of the preparations for the UNDAF. Due to problems with the database, the UNCT recommended the complete revision and update of the CCA format and content to ensure that it conformed to the established guidelines.

3.3.B United Nations Development Assistance Framework

The CCA contributed to the formulation in 2001 of the first UNDAF for Syria (UN, 2001). But in fact, the latter did not proceed beyond its draft stage and, together with the CCA, has been quietly shelved. The Evaluation Mission learnt from various key informants that a major drawback was the limited participatory cooperation with the Government, though data concerns also appear to have been a problem. But it is also probable that in spite of President Bashar al-Assad's inaugural speech (SAR, 2000), the Government had not yet identified and formulated its own strategic directions at the time the UNDAF was being developed. It should also be kept in mind that the 9th National Development Plan (2001-2005) was only officially decreed as law in October 2002.⁷⁷

In any case, the first UNDAF reiterated a number of concerns identified in the first CCA, and echoed in

⁷² The East Asian economies have shown the way to relatively rapid poverty reduction with high economic growth without leading to high degrees of income inequality. This combination of rapid poverty reduction without income inequality was achieved through a strategy of relatively high levels of public spending on education, health and nutrition, making these services accessible to the poor.

⁷³ As mentioned in the Introduction of the report, currently there are 10 UN agencies based in Syria, eight of which are involved in humanitarian assistance and/or development.

⁷⁴ This is in accordance with the General Assembly Resolution 47/199 and 50/120 calling on all UN agencies to effectively coordinate their in-country activities.

⁷⁵ Syria ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 15 July 1993.

⁷⁶ Identified as minimum requirements of CCA for all countries; see annex B in UN, 2000.

⁷⁷ SAR, 2002a.

UNDP's second CCF, as well as in parts of the 9th National Development Plan (2001-2005). These were, namely, improving living standards through job creation and reducing socio-economic disparities; and strengthening institutional capacities to meet development challenges (UN, 2001: 8-9). The first UNDAF also identified several areas in which UN agencies could collaborate, including supporting a national labour and employment policy; income generating programmes for youth and women; new technologies in communication; mapping of poverty; development of administrative reform; and the development of an appropriate regulatory framework (see also annex VII).

In effect, both the first CCA and first UNDAF touched upon various important aspects of sustainable human development and economic growth. The latter clearly remain relevant to the mandates and common objectives of the UN system operating in Syria. More specifically, the general strategic directions presented above remain relevant to the outcomes identified by the UNDP CO in Syria in its MYFF (2002-2006; see annexes VIII and IX).

It may not be a coincidence that the first NHDR (2000) for Syria—although published in Arabic—also appears to have been quietly shelved. According to the second CCF document, the “report (NHDR) prepared by a team of national consultants is the first national independent report which gives a comprehensive portrait of human development in Syria from 1950-2000” (UNDP, 2001a: 5). However, key informants indicated that its shelving was also linked to the question of ‘inappropriate quality’. Whatever the case, as mentioned earlier, this was clearly also a reflection of the lack of Government clarity on strategic direction. The absence of clear and formally endorsed strategic directions for UN agencies operating in Syria during this period probably further reinforced the ‘business as usual’ approach pursued by the UNDP CO, which to some extent continued post-2000 and until relatively recently.

In any case, currently the UNCT is engaged in developing a new CCA and new UNDAF for Syria, which are expected to be completed by early 2005. By all accounts, Government counterparts are more directly involved in the preparation process, though the NGO sector appears to remain excluded. Clearly, UNDP as well as other UN agencies are missing the opportunity to support the participation of development-oriented NGOs in a process of strategic importance to national development in Syria.

Also of relevance here is the Syria MDG Report, which was completed in 2003 and endorsed by the Government. An important part of the preparation and implementation process was the involvement of Government stakeholders, with the aim of drawing their attention to “...gaps in planning procedures and resource allocation (to meet) development goals and targets... and produce strategies that try to maximize efficiency (and) having a more people-oriented focus...” (GOS/UNDP, 2002: 4). But here again the fledgling NGO sector has apparently not been actively involved, constituting another missed opportunity vis-à-vis UNDP's mandate to promote a participatory development process.

3.4 MANAGING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

UNDP's strategic position in Syria is also affected by its resource mobilization, which in turn has implications for developing strategic partnerships with other UN agencies and donors.

3.4.A Resource mobilization

Overall programme financial situation

Currently, total programme financial resources (core and non-core) pertaining to the current CCF (2002-2006) are US \$19.676 million. This amount consists of resources carried over from the previous cycle and resources allocated/mobilized during the current cycle. Of these resources, 90.84 percent (US \$17.874 million) are already programmed, i.e. committed in approved budgets. The remaining 9 percent of these resources (50 percent TRAC and 50 percent Government cost-sharing), amounting to US \$1.802 million, constitute what is currently available for programming.

During the first quarter of 2005-2006, the SPC, as the Government counterpart, is expected to pay the third and fourth installment of the CCF programme (i.e. Government) cost-sharing. Each installment is expected to be US \$1.042 million. Once these installments are received by UNDP Syria, the Government will have fulfilled its cost-sharing commitments of US \$3.8 million towards the current CCF. The current level of approvals is US \$17.874 million broken down into US \$5.712 million (32 percent) from core resources and US \$12.162 million (68 percent) from non-core resources. This achievement reflects the efforts of the CO to enhance its performance and management of programme financial resources. As mentioned earlier, these resources have been programmed

according to thematic areas covered by the current CCF (2002-2006), and relevant SRF goals and outcomes (see annex VI/Graph A).

Raising funds

UNDP's role as a catalyst for fund-raising has generally been an effective and successful part of its resource mobilization strategy. The general agreement with the Government of Syria on cost-sharing in projects was 25 percent, and very recently was increased to 32 percent (see annex VI/Graph B). This level appears to be currently adequate. However, while the Government's future cost-sharing will no doubt depend on the rate of economic growth and its social dimensions, as well as the extent to which dwindling oil resources are replaced by alternative sources of national income, it is suggested that, given its own limited resources, UNDP ensure that its resource mobilization strategy include the aim of eventually increasing the Government's cost-sharing.

Indeed, UNDP Syria intends to formally negotiate with the SPC to secure additional funding, given the expected cost of pipeline projects (see Table 3 in the following chapter). A verbal commitment to provide funds starting in 2005 in the range of US \$5 to 10 million above the initial commitment of US \$3.8 million towards the current CCF, and to ensure that relevant line ministries also allocate additional resources from their own US dollar investment budgets to programmes, is apparently already secured.⁷⁸

Non-core resources include Government funds and donations from bilateral and multilateral donors such as the Governments of Japan and Italy, GEF, Capacity 21, Energy Account, OPEC, EU and Thematic Trust Funds. Although some of these donors might not be explicitly mentioned, such as the Government of Japan (see annex VI/Graph B), they are among UNDP's main donors who channel their contributions either through cost-sharing from the Government of Syria, or through trust fund agreements. However, while the UNDP has generally been able to raise donor funds, it is also pointed out that there is a need to ensure that funds that are raised from donor embassies be linked to funds in kind from relevant technical agencies. A good example is JICA, where key informants expressed a keen interest in such resource pooling.

Of particular interest here is the recently introduced type of fund raising whereby UNDP provides services to 'clients', such as the World Bank, which may further

strengthen its strategic partnerships with the 'big players'. However, the apparent success in mobilizing such funds should not overlook the possibility that various aspects of this resource mobilization strategy may be problematic. Firstly, UNDP needs to ensure that soliciting such funding does not lead to a dilution of strategic development priorities. UNDP's strategic profile includes ensuring that the framework for reform and development in Syria are firmly based on a human development approach, a priority that may not necessarily be paramount for other strategic partners. In this respect, balancing this type of resource mobilization with persistent efforts to diversify funding sources, including increasing Government cost-sharing, is of crucial importance. Second, and as will be discussed in the following chapter, there is the question of the capacity of the CO staff to service current and potential clients without detracting from their efforts to achieve UNDP's core development objectives in Syria, with implications for its strategic position.

3.4.B UNDP's catalyst role: coordination with counterparts and donors

UNDP's role as a catalyst for coordination operates at different levels. To begin with, there is coordination with the Government through the SPC, UNDP's main counterpart. Apart from formal discussions and various workshops, a committee involving UNDP and SPC was recently established to support this important channel of communication and to discuss outstanding issues relevant to programme outputs and outcomes. It is fortuitous that the current head of the SPC is a former UN staff member, and thus understands how UNDP functions at the corporate level; in addition, there is an appreciation of the mandate and role of UNDP in Syria, which facilitates the task of the Resident Representative and CO staff. However, the situation may change over time. UNDP therefore also has to consider the crucial need to identify other strategic counterparts and stakeholders in order to broaden its link with governmental institutions at the macro level and beyond.

Of interest here is the previously mentioned development partners' survey, revealing that the majority of respondents perceive UNDP to be a leader in the area of coordination (55.5 percent answering 'to a very great' or 'to a great' extent; UNDP, 2003i: 4). Indeed, 89 percent of respondents answered favourably to the question on how active they thought UNDP was in working with other UN agencies (*Ibid.*: 6).

⁷⁸ Personal communication from UNDP Syria to the Evaluation Mission.

However, what appears to be missing is a concerted effort on the part of the CO to encourage multilateral and bilateral donors to also coordinate their efforts and development interventions with one another, with potentially positive implications for SPC's effectiveness in carrying out its tasks and responsibilities. True, world-wide experience indicates that bilateral donors make their own demands on bureaucratic processes, leaving recipients bogged down with additional work to satisfy donors' bureaucratic routines and demands, rather than coordinating their own efforts. But UNDP can nonetheless play an effective role in helping the SPC to improve its capacity for promoting such coordination, while at the same time advocating for such coordination in its contacts with donors. A particularly important role is played by the biggest donor in Syria, the EU. Here, UNDP can make active use of the new corporate agreement between the EU and the UN system (signed in June 2004), using this to further strengthen its own advocacy role on crucial topics such as human rights, gender and civil society.

Donor coordination acquires particular significance in relation to human resource development in Syria. This pertains to the practice among some agencies and donors to 'poach' skilled staff from one another, rather than investing in capacity and capability-building. From the point of view of the 'poached', diversification of job experience and presumably higher remuneration are understandable incentives. But in a context where particular skill levels, including foreign language proficiency, are not widespread, this apparent practice is not conducive to human resource development. Clearly, strengthening the capacities of the SPC to promote donor coordination would be a positive contribution to tackling such practices.

3.4.C The UN family: Role of Resident Coordinator

The UNDP Resident Coordinator (RC) wears 'two hats' simultaneously, that of being head of the UNDP CO as Resident Representative, and also functioning as coordinator of the UN family in Syria. The challenge is to achieve a realistic and pragmatic balance between these two roles and interests. The initiative to improve the process of developing the new CCA and new UNDAF is particularly important, given their relevance as 'steering instruments' during a period in which Syria is attempting to define its strategic goals and reform priorities. It may be assumed that the UN agencies involved have learnt from the shortcomings of the first CCA and UNDAF.

But there is also the need to establish constructive communication links that avoid the perception among various key informants that while UNDP tends to stake a claim in respect of positive results, it does not always share the blame when results appear to be less positive. Clearly, improving coordination mechanisms between UN agencies, as well as between the latter and donors would improve the effectiveness of strategic partnerships and help to strengthen UNDP's strategic position in Syria.

4

UNDP contribution to national development results

The following analysis focuses on how UNDP's interventions supported national priorities and contributed to development results. More specifically, from 1997-2004 (the timeline defined by the ADR), and given its strategic position analysed in the previous chapter, how and to what extent has UNDP been doing things the right way in Syria, in terms of its efforts to implement intended outcomes. The analysis also includes the implications of the UNDP CO operational management and capacity for implementing its development objectives.⁷⁹

By 2002, the CO had translated development objectives linked to the three thematic areas of poverty, governance and environment into seven outcomes (see annex V). Also in 2002, the new Government cabinet in Syria formulated a clearer mandate to focus on the areas of governance and poverty, with specific emphasis on institution-building. This allowed the CO to realign its intended outcomes with the MYFF (2000-2003), validated by the SPC through a workshop with UNDP.

Currently, UNDP aims to implement four strategic goals—poverty, governance, environment and crisis prevention—with a total of 11 outcomes (see Table 2). These were identified following consultations with the Government to ensure linkages with national development planning and evolving priorities. While the MYFF identifies a fifth area—HIV/AIDS—this is a new initiative in the pipeline (see annex IX).⁸⁰

The strategic goals and intended outcomes are conducive to further strengthening UNDP's strategic position in Syria and by implication, maximizing its contribution to national development results. However, the evaluative evidence also suggests that the UNDP Syria CO has not necessarily always 'done things the right way' in its efforts to implement its strategic interventions in the thematic areas of its focus.

More specifically, while UNDP's strategic goals are judged to be relevant and in line with national development priorities, the approach to implementing these goals requires what the Evaluation Mission has defined as specific

⁷⁹ It should be noted that the Syria CO could not undertake any outcome evaluation to date, which was introduced by UNDP Headquarters in early 2002.

⁸⁰ Although the CO is aware that fewer outcomes are a 'strategic way' to "...have a few focused outcomes that really reflect the development objectives of UNDP Syria and the evolving priorities of the Government", it has at present not been able to reduce the number of outcomes in line with the new format required by the SRF and as per UNDP Headquarters corporate directives. This is partly due to the challenge faced by the CO to apply the new SRF format along with a new list of outcomes in the middle of the current second CCF cycle. But the CO has also pointed to the difficulties encountered in attempting to subsume current and pipeline projects under the designated outcomes (personal communication to the Evaluation Mission from UNDP Syria).

TABLE 2. UNDP SYRIA STRATEGIC GOALS AND INTENDED OUTCOMES 2004-2007

Goal 1: Achieving MDGs & reducing human poverty	Goal 2: Fostering democratic governance	Goal 3: Energy & environment for sustainable development	Goal 4: Crisis prevention and recovery
<i>Outcome 1:</i> Statistical capacities established	<i>Outcome 6:</i> National governance programmes agreed by stakeholders	<i>Outcome 9:</i> Sustainable management of environment	<i>Outcome 11:</i> Expertise developed for planning and mitigation
<i>Outcome 2:</i> NHDR prepared	<i>Outcome 7:</i> Legislation promulgated	<i>Outcome 10:</i> Low emission energy technologies introduced	
<i>Outcome 3:</i> Poverty initiatives undertaken	<i>Outcome 8:</i> Public administration reform promoted		
<i>Outcome 4:</i> Human development reflected in policies and strategies			
<i>Outcome 5:</i> Increased integration of ICT			

Source: UNDP Syria CO

'adjustments'. These adjustments pertain to the need for UNDP Syria to develop a strategic approach that takes explicit account of the cross-cutting factors linking development interventions both within as well as between pertinent thematic areas. This strategic approach is crucial to strengthening UNDP's profile as a key player in promoting human development in Syria, a profile that is not always clear to various counterparts and stakeholders.⁸¹

Since most of these cross-cutting factors overlap, and in order to avoid repetition, the following analysis will address them as part of assessing how and to what extent UNDP has 'done things the right way' in its efforts to contribute to national development results in Syria in the thematic areas of its focus. Though the ADR methodology focuses on outcomes and processes, and does not extend the analysis to the project level, discussing the specifics of the proposed 'adjustments' to UNDP's approach to implementing its strategic goals requires mention of some projects as pertinent examples.

4.1 PROMOTING PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON POVERTY

Currently (see Table 2), there are five intended outcomes linked to various projects and expected outputs under the strategic goal of Achieving MDGs and Reducing Human Poverty.⁸² This strategic goal requires the strengthening of a number of cross-cutting factors. These pertain to targeting the poor more effectively; the timely development of exit strategies; mobilizing and strengthening strategic partnerships; addressing the problem of data; establishing effective M&E systems; and promoting gender mainstreaming.

4.1.A Targeting the poor more effectively at the micro level

A relevant starting point for analysis of UNDP's contribution to poverty-related development results in Syria is the effects of the Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II project at the national level.⁸³ The project has been identified as a 'success story' by various key informants in Syria, including Government

⁸¹ ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004.

⁸² MYFF Goal 1 projects include: Macro Poverty study; Community Development at Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II; Rehabilitation and Sustainable Livelihood in the Zeyzoun Disaster Area; Combating Unemployment; ICT for Socio-Economic Development; E-Strategy for Syria; TOKTEN; Women's Strategy Development; the National MDGs; Support to the CBS; Development of the NHDR and the Syrian Higher Education Research Network.

⁸³ The project was visited by the Evaluation Mission.

counterparts and stakeholders, UN agencies as well as donors.⁸⁴ Basic approaches used by UNDP were reviewed and a number of positive factors in the Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II project were noted, including an efficient project management team; high repayment rate, development of a model for accessing microcredit by the poor; focus on addressing women-related issues; and the effort to replicate this pilot project (SAR/UNDP, 2002g). In fact, a recent study reviewing microfinance in Syria concludes that the Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II project component on microcredit is "...sound and culturally appropriate, given the stated preferences of the community." (UNDCF, 2004: 5). In addition, it is worth noting that it is the only membership-based model in the Arab region paying dividends to its shareholders using a profit-sharing scheme.

However, a study carried out under the auspices of the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA)⁸⁵ with support from the Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II project management reveals that though the number of poor families in the sample villages had improved access to microcredit provided by the Village Development Funds (*sanadiq*, singular *sanduq*), and there are positive spill-over effects including access to training courses provided by the project, there are also indications that the poorest village households are not necessarily served. While this confirms a worldwide lesson learnt that microcredit programmes may not necessarily serve the poorest (cf. Johnson and Rogaly, 1997; UN, 1998), it is also important to note that the Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II project has not decreased reliance on informal moneylenders charging exorbitant interest rates, averaging around 76 percent per year (Buerli, 2004: 3).

The other key poverty-related UNDP-supported intervention is the Combating of Unemployment project, which aims to establish a sustainable institutional framework for promoting job creation through access to microfinance, executed through the Agency for Combating Unemployment (ACU).⁸⁶ An indication that poverty is now officially part of the national development agenda in Syria is the fact that the ACU is part of the structure of the Prime Minister's Office. Nevertheless, the findings and conclusions of the March 2004 Tripartite Review Meeting point to a number of factors negatively affecting intended outcomes, including lack of

clarity on job opportunities created and the link with poverty reduction (UNDP, 2004d).⁸⁷ In fact, the verdict of the previously mentioned microfinance study is that this UNDP-supported poverty-related intervention is currently not sustainable (UNCT, 2004: 6).

4.1.B Timely development of exit strategies

In the case of the Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II project, the project management is currently exploring the feasibility of establishing an umbrella NGO to function as a Centre of Excellence for managing and replicating the project model to ensure sustainability of the *sanadiq*. While this exit strategy may help avoid the red tape encountered in dealing with ministerial counterparts, it does not address the problem of ensuring that the necessary regulatory frameworks are in place. Although reform of regulatory frameworks is explicitly referred to in connection with poverty-related outcomes in the 2002 SRF, UNDP does not appear to have actively pursued this.

Another example is UNDP's information and communication technology (ICT) intervention, linked to supporting effective strategies and programmes for the poor. Though there are indications of developing an exit strategy for this project (for example, ensuring that Telecentres recover their overheads and other costs), the strategy does not appear to include any clear vision of how to ensure that, for example, other Government counterparts and public sector bodies benefit from this project, thus avoiding costly duplication. While operational self-sustainability is a desired objective, some centres in poor communities may well deserve continued subsidy of service rates as part of the efforts to develop the social infrastructure and provide access to women and youth in particular. Thus, an initial impetus from the top is valuable, but widening the base requires developing clear exit strategies.

4.1.C Mobilizing strategic partnerships

Here again the Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II project provides instructive insights. It appears that a project supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) that provides grants to selected poorest households in the Jabal Al-Hoss area is a chance intervention. It is not based on an

⁸⁴ ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004.

⁸⁵ The Regional Office of ICARDA is located in Syria.

⁸⁶ The ACU was established through Law 71/2001. Other components of ACU's programme are the Public Works and Housing Programme, and the Training and Community Development Programme. UNDP's support focuses on institution and capacity-building and microfinance. Apart from Government contribution, other funding sources include the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the German Debt Swap Government Programme (SAR/PMO/ACU, 2003).

⁸⁷ The Evaluation Mission was unable to secure a copy of the 'Map of Unemployment and Needs' which by all accounts was completed by the ACU, and notes that the current Scoping Mission for the Macro Poverty Study in Syria does not refer to this Map; rather it aims to use the two rounds of the 2003/2004 household income and expenditure survey to provide a sketch of the trends of poverty and poverty profiles in Syria (cf. Abdel-Fadil, 2004).

action plan to develop strategic partnerships to reach the poorest village households that are not being served by the *sanadiq*.⁸⁸ Thus important opportunities to further develop strategic partnerships appear to be missed. This includes the possibility of tapping into donor-supported technical assistance such as that provided by JICA.⁸⁹

4.1.D Problem of data

UNDP has since 1997 continued to support capacity development in the CBS. However, while various key informants in both UNDP Headquarters and in Syria indicated that the Syria MDG Report is relatively positive, there is clearly a problem in data collection and analysis. This raises some doubts concerning, for example, the accuracy and quality of various MDG indicators.

In this context, the requirement to develop CBS capacities and capabilities enabling it to identify and adapt appropriate indicators was a concern voiced by various key informants. Clearly, there is a need to support the CBS to more effectively address requirements for 'data on demand', i.e. data relevant to Syria's strategic socio-economic development directions, rather than remain confined to the traditional role of supplier of data that tends to be sector specific and may not reflect the type of information required for formulating development strategies and programmes. This is particularly crucial for ensuring that policies to be identified in the 10th Five-Year National Plan are translated into strategies based on accurate information.

Also, there may be a missed opportunity in the collection of poverty-sensitive data, as well as indicators relevant to the transition to a market economy providing a wider space for the private sector. This pertains to the apparent lack of an effective labour market information system in Syria, which could have been linked to strengthening CBS capabilities to carry out labour force surveys. Such a system could also have been an important component of, or directly linked to, the UNDP-supported Combating Unemployment project. It would also be crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of employment offices and providing an opportunity to strengthen strategic partnerships, for instance, with the ILO.

4.1.E Monitoring and evaluation

Linked to the previous point on data availability and accessibility is the inadequate development of an effective M&E system. There is an insufficient distinction between M&E as a means, ends or process, as well as lack of clarity on, and general neglect to invest in, baseline indicators. Moreover, project staff and managers generally lack solid grounds to measure consistency between activities, outputs and outcomes. Project monitoring appears to function as an end in itself to satisfy the requirements of annual reports and tripartite reviews.

For example, while the Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II project has made laudable efforts to carry out various studies on the villages in which *sanadiq* have been established, the titles of some of the project documents give the impression of an ad hoc rather than a systematic approach to monitoring project implementation. In fact, the study carried out under ICARDA's auspices provides M&E data crucial to effective and sustainable project implementation, as well as insights into requirements for strengthening the project's outputs. It also appears to be a chance rather than a planned effort to develop strategic partnerships that may contribute to development results.

Another relevant example is the ICT project discussed earlier. A recent Annual Project Report reveals the difficulty of obtaining accurate information on local communities where telecentres are to be established. It is not clear how these communities would be monitored once the programmes have started and how results would be evaluated (UNDP, 2003e). Clearly, results would depend on knowing from the very outset if and to what extent rural communities can actually access these telecentres and the effective linkages with poverty reduction strategies. Therefore, simply expanding the number of telecentres is not enough; the quality of instruction, content, gender issues, utility and relevance to end-users have to be enhanced for achieving longer term outcomes.

4.1.F Mainstreaming gender

There is an apparent absence of an explicit gender strategy in various poverty-related interventions supported by the UNDP. For example, the previously mentioned ICT project

⁸⁸ Information obtained from an FAO key informant.

⁸⁹ Indeed this was raised during the meeting that the Evaluation Mission held with JICA.

⁹⁰ Although no sex-disaggregated data is available on access to ICT in the Arab region, the general trend that can also be applied to Syria points to gender gaps in this area (cf. Amin, 2001).

document uses gender neutral language and does not identify a specific strategy to ensure that gender gaps in access to and use of ICT opportunities are effectively addressed.⁹⁰

In the case of the Jabal Al-Hoss/Phase II project, though there are genuine attempts to address women's issues, the previously mentioned ICARDA-supported study reveals that women's empowerment is not linked to any gender analysis. Though project records indicate that female borrowers are numerically well represented, in fact it is male family members who control the loans. Thus, the ICARDA sample reveals that one exception apart (female-headed household) "...not one woman was controlling the profit from investment made with the money she borrowed in her name..." (Buerli, 2004: 43). Indeed, this supports the observation in the previously mentioned microfinance review that the percentage of female clients is relatively low (UNCDF, 2004: 35). The apparent focus on 'women' rather than on 'gender' is further reflected, for example, in the apparent overlooking of school dropout trends among boys and the link not only with household poverty but also with availability and quality of schools in the villages of Jabal Al-Hoss. Obviously there is also a link with child labour (see also UNICEF, 2002; 2003d; SAR/PMO/CBS/UNICEF, 2000).

Similarly, though the ACU project aims to target both male and female beneficiaries, here again there does not appear to be any explicitly formulated gender strategy that could address possible gender gaps in access to microfinance, including control over income and financial profits accruing from access to employment opportunities. In fact, the project and programme documents tend to be couched in a gender neutral language (UNDP, 2002e). Nor is there an explicit link with the UNDP-supported Women's Strategy Development project.

In the case of the UNDP-supported project on Rehabilitation and Sustainable Livelihood in Zeyzoun, it is laudable that the transition from a disaster to a development oriented project appears to have been successful. However, there are indications that not only is the microfinance component not sustainable, but also that here too there is no explicitly defined strategy to mainstream gender in this poverty reduction intervention (UNDP, 2002f; UNCDF, 2004: 9).

4.2 SHIFT TO 'DEMOCRATIC' GOVERNANCE: PUSHING BOUNDARIES

Moving on to the strategic goal of Fostering Democratic Governance, UNDP has identified three intended outcomes, linked to a number of projects and outputs (see Table 2).⁹¹ Here again adjustments in UNDP's approach to implementing this strategic goal are required. As in the case of the strategic goal of reducing poverty, more attention needs to be accorded to timely development of exit strategies; developing and strengthening strategic partnerships; the problem of available and accessible data; as well as establishing effective M&E mechanisms.

In addition to the cross-cutting factors identified above, the following adjustments to UNDP's strategic approach in governance-related interventions are necessary: strengthening the effectiveness of interventions supporting administrative reform; promoting ICT as a cross-cutting intervention; developing an effective advocacy framework; and strengthening the efficiency of project management.

4.2.A Strengthening administrative reform interventions

Administrative reform cuts across a number of UNDP interventions in the thematic area of governance, focusing on building capacities, capabilities, and institution-building. It is also indirectly relevant to intended outcomes of the other strategic goals. As such, various outputs linked to administrative reform provide important strategic entry points for UNDP in Syria. Given that UNDP is a 'small player' in terms of its financial resources (core as well as non-core funding), this is all the more important for supporting efforts to maximize its contributions to development results in Syria.

This pertains, for example, to the UNDP-supported projects Support to Parliament, and the Decision Support, Unit in the Prime Minister's Office, as well as to interventions aimed at strengthening the capacity and capability of UNDP's main counterpart partner, the SPC. It is important to emphasize that adjustments to the approach of implementing this strategic goal pertain to being more proactive in operationalizing the concept of governance not only with respect to its explicit link to democratization, but also in terms of including important variables such as

⁹⁰ MYFF Goal 2 projects include: Reform of Public Industries; Support to the Parliament, to the Central Bank and to the Decision Support Unit in the Prime Minister's Office; Support to Aid Coordination and to the Association Agreement with the EU; Administrative Development; Computer Managed Maintenance, Capacity-Building in Debt and Financial Management; Development of Syria 2020 (see annex VI).

transparency and accountability. These two key terms were explicitly referred to in the President's inaugural speech, and are crucial to development results at both the upstream as well as the micro levels.

Though it is relegated under the strategic goal on poverty, there is also a link with the UNDP-supported Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) project. Qualified expatriates who are not subject to the language barrier may be well placed to promote the concept of governance in ways that non-nationals may find more difficult to achieve. By taking on longer-term missions, qualified expatriates could also contribute to on-the-job training of national counterparts. As one key informant put it, "We do not need ready-made models of development. What we need are the experiences and tools to develop our own development mechanisms."⁹²

Another suggested adjustment to UNDP's approach to implementing its strategic goals is to focus more explicitly on the need to develop a conceptual framework for effective team-building. A crucial problem identified by many key informants pertains to the struggles of individual leadership and decision-makers who often function in isolation. However efficient and dedicated the leadership may be, without an equally efficient middle management cadre, efforts towards administrative reform are unlikely to achieve intended results. The problem becomes even more acute with the frequent turnover of leadership, with implications for loss of institutional memory and ripple down effect of accumulated experiences. Promoting an efficient middle management implies its effective involvement in the decision-making process, if expectations of transparency and accountability are to be meaningful.

Indeed, changes to the scope of the Decision Support Unit project is an illustrative example of how to strengthen and incorporate the decision-making process as part of administrative reform. The scope of the project was reduced, with the planning support group now confined to the role of providing but not analysing relevant information, thus reducing the project to a technical instrument.

4.2.B Limitations of advocacy efforts

Linked to the above defined adjustment to UNDP's approach in implementing its strategic goal on governance is the apparent absence of a comprehensive advocacy strat-

egy which includes making more explicit the rationale behind the shift from 'good' to 'democratic' governance.

Though advocacy efforts appear to have been more successful in the programme area on poverty, which is reflected in the fact that Government documentation now explicitly acknowledges this problem rather than limiting it to unemployment, here too it is noted that this appears to be more ad hoc rather than based on a well-defined strategy. The same situation is perceived in the area of environment, although the development of the strategic action plan at the national level was a successful advocacy effort.

Equally crucial, UNDP does not appear to have really developed advocacy efforts within the context of the complexity of issues cross-cutting all UNDP supported interventions in Syria. Given UNDP's limited financial resources, such a strategy becomes even more crucial for capitalizing on its comparative advantage in the field of human development. This comparative advantage needs to function as the umbrella for strengthening UNDP's strategic positioning and maximizing its actual and potential contribution to development results in Syria.

Advocacy is also intricately linked with M&E. Indeed, insofar as assessing development results implies measuring processes and outputs of development initiatives, advocacy efforts are closely tied to effective development and application of measuring instruments and tools. In addition, an effective advocacy strategy is important for the dissemination of information and building knowledge. It is also crucial for avoiding costly duplication of development interventions. This in turn highlights the importance of effectively mobilizing and developing strategic partnerships, another cross-cutting issue relevant to UNDP's efforts to strengthen its strategic position in Syria.

4.2.C Missed opportunity: promoting ICT as a cross-cutting intervention

Another cross-cutting issue deemed relevant is ICT. Government circles and members of the private sector in Syria are acutely aware of how far behind Syria lags in the fields of information and knowledge management.⁹³ The UNDP strategic goal on poverty links ICT interventions with other key development strategies such as job creation and small and medium enterprise development, with special focus on rural areas. There is also a clear (though not

⁹² ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004:15.

⁹³ For example, there are around 36 Internet users per 10,000 persons in Syria relative to a ratio of around 237 for the Middle East and north Africa region (METAP, no date). Crucial investment is required in upgrading national networks, tele-density improvements, enhanced national connectivity and improvement of the Internet provider system.

⁹⁴ UNDP, 1999c.

articulated) link with the Syrian Higher Education and Research Network project.⁹⁴

But various outputs identified under the strategic goal on governance are also clearly linked to ICT; for example, UNDP support to Computer Managed Maintenance, the Central Bank, and Capacity-Building in Debt and Financial Management. Yet the connection between them is not explicitly made either in programme documents, or during the process of project implementation. One influencing factor here is the relative rigidity of intra as well as inter-ministerial communication channels. But there is also a tendency on the part of the UNDP CO to focus more on projects and less on development processes.

Last but not least, there is also a clear link with developing an effective advocacy strategy conducive to encouraging strategic partnerships. These can provide the required technical assistance that may be beyond UNDP's current financial resources. But here again no explicit link appears to have been recognized and pursued by the Syria CO.

4.2.D Strengthening the efficiency of project management

Interventions linked to the strategic goal on governance reveal the problem surrounding national execution (NEX). This pertains to identifying qualified government counterparts who are able to accord the necessary effort and time to project implementation. There is also the question of remuneration, whereby national project managers are paid differently, depending on whether they remain part of the pertinent ministerial staff, or are recruited from outside. Understandably, this creates resentment.

A committee has recently been established, involving the SPC and UNDP, to address this as well as other outstanding issues. This is an important step, reflecting the UNDP CO's proactive effort to address a concern that is inadvertently acting as a disincentive and thus affecting programme implementation. In addition, it has implications for the perpetuation of the red tape referred to earlier, not to mention for efforts to develop and implement effective administrative reform strategies. Explicit procedures need to be put in place to ensure that the NEX mechanism is supported by motivated and fairly remunerated project management staff.

4.3 SHRINKING FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENT

With respect to the UNDP strategic goal of, and intended outcomes for, Energy and Environment for Sustainable Development, interventions include projects that are both nearing completion as well as those that are ongoing.⁹⁵ An overview of ongoing projects reveals that there is a trend towards reducing the focus on this programme area in favour of governance and poverty (see Figure 6). Moreover, there is an apparent trend towards a focus on projects linked to energy rather than on environment per se.⁹⁶

Here again various cross-cutting factors are relevant. For example, the Mission visited the UNDP-supported Agro-Biodiversity project (Sweida) and noted the recurrent problem of timely exit strategies. Apart from ensuring the capacity and capability of Government counterparts to continue to manage this development intervention, there is also the question of how to ensure that local communities remain motivated in maintaining achievements even when project related funding (for local labour employment) ceases. In turn, mobilizing local communities as part of promoting civil society is relevant to the development of an effective UNDP advocacy strategy.

Moreover, there is a need for developing effective M&E systems, which in turn require the appropriate database, as well as making the link with ICT. For example, the effects of environment projects on poverty reduction remain unspecified. There is also the need to identify new and also strengthen existing strategic partnerships, an issue of particular relevance to UNDP-supported environment-related interventions.

Clearly, UNDP does not have sufficient funding resources to support the necessary but relatively costly technical and infrastructure requirements for energy related projects. However, UNDP can instead focus more concretely on its comparative advantage with respect to ensuring that the 'human factor' in interventions related to the strategic goal on environment is explicitly articulated and integrated in the advocacy strategy of the Syria CO.

4.4 NEW STRATEGIC GOAL: CRISIS PREVENTION AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

UNDP's new strategic goal of Crisis Prevention and Recovery currently covers one UNDP-supported project on

⁹⁵ MYFF Goal 3 projects include: Desertification; Integrated Water Resources; Efficiency and Energy; Dryland and Agro-Biodiversity; Protected Area Management; Capacity-Building for Environment; and Photovoltaic Rural Electrification (see annex VI).

⁹⁶ In this context it should be mentioned that various key informants identified management of water resources as the most important environmental concern in Syria, followed by industrial pollution (ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004: 13). This is a response that UNDP should take into account, though it may also reflect the Government's national strategic priorities, which may not necessarily overlap with perceived priorities at the downstream level.

National Capacity for Disaster Management (see Figure 6). Executed through the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment, objectives include developing capacities for institution building and management and establishing a disaster management information and data exchange system.

Clearly there is a link with some of the interventions linked to other strategic goals; for example, ICT and Support to Statistics; Administrative Reform and Support to the Decision Support Unit; and environment-related interventions aiming to combat desertification, and manage water resources and protected areas.

However, while this strategic goal is important in a country like Syria where preservation and management of natural resources are a particular development problem, it is important to ensure that UNDP does not digress from its comparative advantage. This implies not neglecting advocating for human development, while strategizing to mobilize effective partnerships with other actors that have the funding capacities to support the technical and infrastructure requirements of disaster management. It also implies ensuring that UNDP is a key partner in macro-level policy dialogues in both economic and social spheres.

4.5 PLANNED STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS: CHALLENGE OF STRIKING A BALANCE

Analysis of the various issues cross-cutting the implementation of UNDP's strategic goals and intended outcomes reveals that UNDP must recognize that while it may have 'done the right thing', it has not always 'done things the right way'. In effect, to what extent is UNDP focusing on its comparative advantage as a means of strengthening its strategic position, and thus maximizing its contribution to development results in Syria?

As mentioned earlier, various key informants indicated that there is a general impression that UNDP enjoys a comparative advantage in terms of being 'politically' acceptable to the Government. But some also noted that UNDP was at risk of 'spreading itself too thin', i.e. there is a need for it to be more focused in terms of the type and number of projects being developed and implemented under its various programme areas.⁹⁷

In fact, UNDP appears to be widening its operations to include a number of interventions that do not necessarily contribute to strengthening its strategic position in Syria.

This is also reflected in the perception of various key informants that development assistance has so far "...been mainly dictated by what the government requests on an ad hoc basis, and not by a carefully thought-out reform agenda." Other key informants tend to believe that the "...formulation of assistance received by Syria so far has not been based on a thorough needs assessment, but rather follows donors' agendas." (ACUMEN, 2004: 18.) Though these observations may be contradictory, they should provide some food for thought for the UNDP Syria CO.

The perception that UNDP Syria is 'spreading itself too thin' has implications for the capacity and capability of the CO to efficiently handle its programme portfolios (a point discussed further on in this chapter). This conclusion is further reinforced by some of the new projects in the pipeline, some of which have reached the stage of ready formulated project documents (see Table 3; also annex IX).

There is a clear shift towards increasing the number of outputs linked to the strategic goal on governance, as reflected by the 10 ongoing and nine pipeline projects. Poverty as a strategic goal ranks second with 12 ongoing and three new pipeline projects, followed by environment with seven ongoing and five pipeline projects. By contrast, crisis prevention and disaster management, and the cross-cutting goal on HIV/AIDS, lag far behind in terms of ongoing and pipeline projects. Significantly, there is no mention of gender as a cross-cutting theme.

4.6 PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

4.6.A UNDP Syria and the corporate context

The UNDP CO in Syria has to deal with a threefold dynamic. The first pertains to UNDP New York Headquarters (HQ), from which corporate and procedural directives emanate. This dynamic has been undergoing many changes over the past few years, to which the CO is expected to respond in a timely manner. The second dynamic involves the RBAS, also based in HQ, from which region-specific and operational directives are conveyed to the CO. Last but not least is the in-country dynamic that the CO needs to constantly address, keeping abreast of changes and also attempting to influence the direction of these changes as part of strengthening its strategic positioning in Syria and maximizing its contribution to development results.

⁹⁷ ADR In-depth Local Research, 2004.

⁹⁸ ATLAS is UNDP's new Enterprise Resource Planning tool, intended to simplify business practices at the corporate level to help staff plan, monitor and implement resource allocation more efficiently. However, UNDP Syria has experienced substantial delays in processing documents pertaining to projects and procurements due to certain limitations in the application of this new system, which has been raised as an issue by the Government.

TABLE 3. UNDP SYRIA CO PROJECTS IN THE PIPELINE

Strategic Goals	Projects in the Pipeline
Goal 1: Achieving MDGs & reducing human poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Eastern Region Economic Development Scheme ■ Agropolis ■ National Strategy for Statistical Capacity-Building
Goal 2: Fostering democratic governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support to local electoral system reform ■ Support to Ministry of Foreign Affairs ■ Support to the media sector in Syria ■ Public administration reform ■ Capacity development of the SPC and assistance in formulation of Five-Year Plan ■ Support to Awqaf ■ Modernization of customs directorate ■ Syrian expatriate's conference ■ Transformation of NGOs into development agents
Goal 3: Energy & environment for sustainable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Protected area management ■ Environment information management system ■ Solid waste management ■ Capacity self-assessment ■ Support to Ministry of Oil
Goal 4: Crisis prevention and recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Disaster mitigation and capacity-building ■ Sub-regional disaster management capacity-building ■ Disaster Management Training Programme
Cross-Cutting Goal:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ HIV/AIDS preventive indicators survey

Source: annex IX.

Notwithstanding the revolution in cyberspace communications, the communication distance between New York and Damascus can be as great as the geographical space separating the two. Indeed, ease and swiftness of communication does not necessarily imply that levels of understanding are proceeding at the same pace, or even direction. To which may be added the inevitable dynamics of bureaucracy—and the UN system is by no means immune from this—which may pose its own constraints in the dissemination of information.

A particular example is the newly introduced ATLAS system, which the CO staff has apparently yet to fully master.⁹⁸ Another example is the recent change in the MYFF format to better reflect UNDP's strategic direction

and the organizational and resource strategies supporting this direction, as well as changes in the number of outcomes under which UNDP COs must now subsume their programme activities and outputs. While the Syria CO staff has clearly attempted to cope in a timely fashion with the new requirements—and indeed UNDP has provided relevant induction training courses—there is some struggle with dealing with the multitude of new directives emanating from UNDP HQ, which could be more harmonized.

4.6.C UNDP Syria country office

Re-Profiling the CO The UNDP CO is currently in the process of reorganization (see annexes X and XI). This is

⁹⁸ See annex XIII for an overview of staff competence.

Box 5: Range of M&E Practices**Country Level:**

- CCA and UNDAF provide assessments of the country's situation, as well as of the development work by UN agencies including UNDP and other donors
- CCF reviews
- ADR

Programme & Outcome Levels:

- MYFF
- SRF
- ROAR
- Outcome evaluations (not yet undertaken by CO)
- Evaluation plan

Project Level:

- Management Results Framework (MRF)/balanced scorecards (newly developed)
- Mid-term project evaluation
- Terminal project evaluation
- Annual audit of NEX
- Annual project report, Tripartite review meeting progress reports
- Quarterly operational reports for UNDP-GEF
- Project implementation report for UNDP-GEF
- Field visits
- Steering and technical committee meetings
- Regular meetings with project staff, accountants, consultants, national UNVs
- Project work plan (comprehensive and annual)

not only as a result of new leadership under the Resident Representative, but also in recognition of new challenges to UNDP's strategic positioning in Syria. This process of change has only recently been embarked upon with support from a management consulting team. It involves re-orienting CO staff towards working in teams rather than focusing on sector or theme specific projects, with the aim of improving strategic and operational performance.

This is a positive organizational development with important implications for strengthening UNDP's strategic role as a key advocate of human development. It also has positive implications for building the competence of CO staff, ensuring institutional memory and encouraging a more proactive approach to reaching counterparts and partners.⁹⁹ But it is also important to give the new leader-

ship the opportunity to develop the CO organizational structure, and prepare for the new country programme starting in 2007.

Competence and workload of CO staff The Syria CO staff is making positive efforts to improve performance. Thus, apart from the previously mentioned team-building to improve internal mechanisms and organizational aspects in the office, staff competence gaps are addressed by training. Competence gaps are also bridged by recruiting national United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) and short-term consultants. While this is a positive strategy, it is also noted that in the case of recruitment of temporary staff, the focus is mainly on competence in the economic sphere, and less on human development related expertise.¹⁰⁰ There is moreover a preference for a broad coverage of many types of

¹⁰⁰ For example, a recent advertisement placed by the CO to recruit short-term consultants focuses on expertise in public administration, banking and financial studies, economy/development planning, statistics, urban planning, media and advocacy (see annex XV).

competences, rather than focusing on key strategic areas of expertise that are important to strengthening UNDP's profile and strategic positioning.

In terms of motivation of staff and overall organization, there is generally a positive impression of the CO. However, concerns over the limited number of international staff and the fact that not all national staff may have the requisite expertise, have also been voiced. It is positive that UNDP encourages staff with a multi-task orientation, but the absolute workload may limit the potentially positive effects of this. It should be added that vacancies in several posts (see annexes XII and XIII) have increased the workload on individual staff and inadvertently promoted processes of improvisation rather than longer-term strategizing. Currently, there is also a trend towards non-core funding of staff posts. While this may have positive implications in terms of recruiting additional CO staff, it also bears the inherent risk of undue dependence on external funding. There may also be the implications referred to earlier, whereby UNDP may need to balance its strategic goals and mandate of advocating for prioritization of human development with the priorities of donors contributing to its non-core funding resources.

It should also be noted that there appears to be a bias towards projects rather than a focus on the broader development process; and towards internal (i.e. CO) M&E rather than an outreach strategy that effectively involves counterparts.

M&E practices UNDP Syria has a range of M&E instruments at its disposal, relevant to the country level, to programmes and outcomes, as well as to the project level (see Box 5). As noted previously, the M&E system currently in place is beset by various shortcomings. For the most part, the CO and its management have been project-focused, with M&E being mainly perceived as a 'reporting' exercise.

Indicators based on national legislative changes, achieving benchmarks, optimizing returns on resource allocation, staffing levels and training, and gaining the most appropriate level of leverage for advocacy with key national players have not been sufficiently linked to a systematic M&E process—one that is based on the principle of managing for results. Moreover, M&E has been used in different ways within the organization and with national partners, and without a clear or shared understanding.

There are several reasons for the apparently ad hoc approach to M&E. One reason is that among CO

programme staff, insufficient distinction is made between M&E as a means, ends or process and it is not clear whether it is intended to improve things within the organization itself, within the society at large (i.e. development effectiveness), or both. In addition, there is a lack of benchmarks against which to compare performance. This is compounded by a lack of clarity on how to develop baselines and undertake outcome evaluations.¹⁰¹ As a result, the extent to which M&E practices have built on or are linked to the SPC as well as other national agencies has been relatively weak in practice. In general, during the process of programme implementation, discussions are regularly held with Government counterparts to ensure linkages with M&E tools and mechanisms, and this is clearly indicated in all project documents. However, while these tools have been explained to Government counterparts and recorded during meetings and in documents, there does not appear to be any sustained engagement or follow up of the process. This pertains specifically to the middle management tier of Government where it is crucial to demonstrate the relevance of M&E to the results chain, i.e. activities, outputs and outcomes.

¹⁰¹ Requiring programme managers to set outcome targets before they have at least a year of baseline outcome data can be counterproductive. Country programmes with no experience in outcome measurement generally have no basis for setting an appropriate target, and their targets will likely be little more than guesses. If actual performance falls below uninformed targets, there is a potential for unwarranted negative consequences.

5

Key lessons learnt and recommendations

5.1 UNDP'S CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT RESULTS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

A. Evident achievements UNDP has made perceptible efforts to address its strategic goals, and the overall intended outcomes reflect the Government's development priorities. These efforts are important elements of a UNDP programme in Syria conducive to strengthening its strategic position.

More specifically, since 1997, UNDP's development interventions indicate significant contributions, including being instrumental in supporting the process of developing a strategic plan for environmental development; contributing to placing poverty more explicitly on the Syrian development agenda; and pushing forward the process of moving from a narrow focus on 'economic' governance to widening the discourse to include the concept of 'good' governance, and more recently, albeit still cautiously, to 'democratic' governance. These achievements in turn reflect UNDP's ability to consolidate its position as a neutral partner and promoter of human development, with positive implications for strengthening its strategic position.

There are also successful initiatives and outcomes in the building and maintaining of strategic partnerships, particularly in the field of fund-raising, but also to some extent in obtaining support for advocacy on specific upstream issues such as poverty. Last but not least, there is a clear contribution to the field of administrative reform, in which UNDP is assisting the Syrian Government in key areas of the reform process relevant to the executive and the legislative.

B. Outstanding challenges The Evaluation Mission also notes that notwithstanding the assessment that UNDP's strategic goals are relevant to national priorities, and that it has contributed to some key national development results, there are a number of problematic issues concerning the longer-term maintenance and further strengthening of this strategic position. The evaluative evidence derived from the ADR in Syria points to lessons learnt and outstanding challenges in the following areas:

Effective advocacy for supporting the reform process UNDP development interventions generally face the inherent challenge of contributing to positively changing dynamic processes and roles involving institutions of state and market, and also within civil society and the informal sector, where dynamics are played out politically, socially and economically at the micro level. UNDP is also expected to contribute to the capacity-building of its

partners, using its global knowledge networks, information sources and expertise, and play an effective role in supporting the process of gender mainstreaming.

Addressing all these challenges in ways that reinforce past achievements and lay the groundwork for future successful interventions that maximize UNDP's contribution to national development results requires an effective framework for advocacy. This framework needs to be clearly linked to UNDP's strategic goals and to its comparative advantage as a key player in promoting human development.

Though UNDP has undertaken advocacy activities, in particular in the thematic area of poverty and environment-related interventions, such efforts have largely been ad hoc and not based on a comprehensive advocacy strategy. Efforts also tend to be focused on making UNDP more visible within the Syrian arena (for example through logos and websites) rather than defining a coherent strategy framework for advocacy activities. In fact, it is primarily through the effectiveness of its advocacy role that UNDP can strengthen its strategic positioning in Syria, as well as maximize its contribution to development results in terms of promoting human development while at the same time participating as a key partner in macro-policy discourses conducive to supporting growth with equity. This is particularly crucial in a context where UNDP is a 'small player' in terms of its core and non-core resources.

Strengthening UNDP's strategic focus A major challenge facing UNDP in Syria is how to effectively link its development interventions with the priorities of the reform process in the country. This requires defining and strengthening UNDP's strategic position among the various internal and external actors active in the development arena in the country. It also implies guiding the ongoing transition process in directions that ensure that the concept of human development remains firmly entrenched in the development agenda and is not submerged by the focus on economic and technical requirements of the reform process. Such support needs to be balanced by the equally important challenge of ensuring that UNDP remains a key partner in macroeconomic discourses that have implications for ensuring economic growth with equity.

Economic development trends in Syria reveal the necessity of scaling down the public sector. This implies the need for some retreat by the State, allowing space for new social and economic forces to contribute to the country's development. It is also clear that such processes face great challenges. Thus, assuming that strengthening the private sector and moving towards a market economy would solve

Syria's economic problems is not realistic. As experience in other regions and transition economies has demonstrated, the trend towards economic liberalization in Syria needs to be matched by political liberalization. Social forces outside the State need to be accorded the chance to organize and voice their opinions. This not only consolidates national ownership but also the sustainability of development interventions. UNDP clearly has an important advocacy role to play in this respect, which needs to be reflected in the strategic focus of its activities.

Although support for civil society is important, another challenge is addressing the assumption that civil society and NGOs would automatically provide answers to the complexity of development problems facing Syria. Even if the State is not a major actor in the economy, it has an important role to play as regulator of economic processes and as implementer of social distribution policies, ensuring that economic development benefits the population at large and does not increase social and economic inequity. Democratization processes may bring new organizations and new voices into the public arena. But the State has a responsibility, indeed a legitimate right, to define and implement priorities that decrease socio-economic inequities for all its citizens. Indeed, this is among the issues raised by President Bashar Al-Assad in his inaugural speech, reflecting awareness of the challenges facing Syria.

Need for stronger thematic focus UNDP must accord attention to the needs, priorities and suggestions identified and presented not only by the Government, specifically its main counterpart, the SPC, but also by various other key ministries. Indeed the new Resident Representative has held numerous formal meetings with many of the authorities concerned, which by all accounts were perceived to be constructive. This effort has resulted in the identification and, in some cases formulation and development, of a number of new projects. Assistance in providing consultants to develop ideas into project documents is also appreciated by Government counterparts. Here again UNDP's role as a neutral and objective partner is an important factor.

However, it is also maintained that there is the problem of UNDP 'spreading itself too thin on the ground' by taking on a diversity of projects that may divert attention and limited resources away from its thematic focus and mandate. Apart from the link with its available resources, this also has implications for the CO staff capacity and workload.

Concern for sustainability and replicability Sustainability and weakly developed exit strategies appear to be a general problem. Discussions with the Government on this issue are seemingly not initiated by UNDP in a

timely manner; not to mention the fact that the Government in various cases does not appear to be committing the required staff and resources for continuing projects beyond their official termination.

This increases the risk of reducing local ownership, and encouraging a 'dependency syndrome' on external assistance. It also encourages a pattern whereby more attention is accorded to initiation of new projects rather than to institutionalization, replication and 'scaling-up' of positive project results. Though various UNDP initiatives (which are part of the second CCF) are in an early phase of implementation, there is nevertheless an urgent need to address this problem.

Managing processes Various lessons learnt discussed in previous sections point to a number of critical issues pertaining to managing processes. Indeed, one of the key strategic challenges facing UNDP Syria is how to handle the broader processes of development, rather than merely handling programmes and individual projects. UNDP also faces the challenge of handling various balancing acts: between a project focus and a policy focus; and between technocratic perspectives and a narrow focus on economic development on the one hand, and advocacy on the human and social dimensions of the same development processes on the other hand.

UNDP Syria has made some serious efforts to tackle aspects of these challenges. But in the final analysis, the CO needs to decide on which programme area of activities it will expend its human and limited financial resources. This is critical if UNDP is to effectively address a multitude of challenges including: balancing available financial resources and the capacities of CO staff against effective programme implementation leading to intended outputs and outcomes; balancing the need for a broader perspective on management and on M&E that includes counterparts as well as beneficiaries against the different dynamics inherent in the technical execution of projects; and balancing the broader political dimensions of projects, including potentially controversial political issues, against the need to strengthen the mechanisms of NEX.

An effective M&E system is an integral part of managing processes as described above. Because of the weaknesses inherent in the current M&E system both within the UNDP CO and beyond, it has been a challenge to develop an effective information system that uses lessons learnt from monitoring, evaluation and organizational review with the Government in a systematic way. It has also been a challenge to effectively use this as a means to refine the focus on outcomes and forge stronger links between micro

and macro-level interventions. National staff and managers generally lack solid grounds to judge consistency between activities, outputs and outcomes and make sound decisions in choosing among conflicting alternatives. There is also the need to ensure that ownership of interventions remains with the most relevant stakeholders through clear exit strategies, which need to be included in programme design from the outset and monitored regularly.

Managing processes also implies strengthening the implementation of UNDP's strategic goals through an approach that is aware of the complexity of factors cross-cutting various programme areas and outputs. This helps avoid getting immersed in a project or sub-sector focus at the expense of a holistic approach to human development.

5.2 FORWARD LOOKING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Supporting the reform process In translating the above lessons learnt into forward looking recommendations, some key points need to be reiterated. First, it is important to note the precariousness of the current socio-political and economic situation in Syria. Regionally, there are several political problem areas that may directly affect the transition process in Syria. Internally, President Bashar Al-Assad is in the process of consolidating his various roles as Head of State, as Party Leader and as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. In spite of the ambiguity in the directions and timeline of reforms, there is recognition that economic and social challenges need to be addressed, a reality clearly signalled in the inaugural speech of the President. The transition process provides UNDP as well as other UN agencies and donors with important opportunities to contribute to strengthening the reform process in ways that promote economic growth, political stability and human development.

Second, UNDP itself has been dealing with wide-ranging changes, including new leadership with the relatively recent appointment of the Resident Representative; the strategic and programmatic shifts from the first to the second CCF and addressing the requirements of the MYFF; intra-office organizational changes aiming to establish a team approach to management and programming; as well as corporate level changes emanating from UNDP New York HQ with implications for management and intended outcomes.

Given this situational context, the Evaluation Mission concludes that this is not the time for recommending changes in the UNDP strategy in Syria. A new UNDP programme will be embarked upon in 2006, preparations

for which can be expected to include the re-evaluation of UNDP's strategic goals and, if deemed necessary, effecting changes.

However, given the imperative for UNDP to continue its efforts to further strengthen and consolidate its strategic position, as well as the clearly proactive approach of the current CO management, UNDP can address a number of issues that are of crucial relevance to its current and future efforts to contribute to national development results in Syria.

Addressing the challenges of transition UNDP needs to continue its focus on strengthening the executive. This implies supporting the SPC in terms of administrative support, competence-building, as well as improving capacity for coordination. This strategy also needs to be extended to include other ministries pertinent to UNDP's strategic goals, an approach with potentially positive implications for promoting inter-ministerial coordination. However, in addressing these challenges, there should be a clearer focus on team-building, both at the top leadership as well as middle management levels. Such team-building efforts must be broadened to include individual projects that UNDP is supporting. In fact, team-building should become a basic strategic approach, in support of which UNDP can forge strategic partnerships and solicit donor assistance. This also touches on administrative reform and the link with governance, allowing new groups and voices to engage in the decision-making process as a means of promoting transparency and accountability. In effect, this would support the process of empowerment, the promotion of which is crucial for human development.

Parliament as a legislative assembly is a strategic institution that UNDP is supporting through increasing the capacity of various committees to make informed decisions. Given the Parliament's key role in passing legislation relevant to economic and social reform, continuing to support the legislative is of interest to UNDP's strategic position in Syria. Since Members of the Assembly represent social forces operating in Syrian society, there is also a basis for UNDP to relate to emerging leaders and new voices through an effective advocacy strategy. But UNDP's support to Parliament requires improving the organizational framework of this intervention.

The judiciary has hitherto been neglected by UNDP, and the CO needs to identify opportunities to contribute to this area of crucial importance to the reform process and to promoting the rule of law. One possibility is forging a

partnership with ongoing French-supported interventions; another initiative is to solicit Arab legal expertise from the region. A third possible point of intervention is supporting improvement of the competence of judges by assisting an institute already established for this purpose, and possibly developing a strategic partnership with French development initiatives or with the EU to support these efforts.

Integrating regional perspectives and transition experiences An important issue raised by various counterparts, stakeholders and key informants is the need to link Syria with lessons learnt from similar experiences in the Arab region. The AHDRs have served to underline that many countries and societies in this region face similar challenges, and region-specific experiences relevant to the reform process in Syria provide valuable lessons learnt. Indeed, various workshops held in Syria to help disseminate the messages in the AHDRs have, to some extent, raised awareness on the similarity of the social and economic challenges facing the Arab region (ACSS/ UNDP, 2002; ACSS, 2004), and have been particularly important in the absence of an officially sanctioned NHDR.

But UNDP is also in a unique position to help raise awareness of lessons learnt from countries in other regions—for example, Central and Eastern Europe—that have undergone or are undergoing socio-economic and political transition processes. Developing a strategy to disseminate the experiences of countries such as Bulgaria and Vietnam, that have experienced transition and where, moreover, the UNDP EO has carried out ADRs, would be a valuable contribution to raising awareness of lessons learnt from these experiences.

2. Consolidating UNDP's strategic goals A major issue of relevance to UNDP's strategic position and implementation of its strategic goals is to work out a clearer profile for the CO on the basic issues of human development within Government circles, within a private sector that is in the process of expanding, and among elements of civil society that are striving to emerge and gain a voice. Such a profile requires building on existing partnerships as well as developing new strategic partnerships with relevant international as well as national organizations; highlighting UNDP's comparative advantages; and including lessons learnt from a human development perspective.

UNDP's partnership with SPC provides a strategic opportunity to promote such a profile, particularly in connection with the development of the new 10th Five-Year

¹⁰² The Evaluation Mission suggests a generic framework for an effective advocacy strategy linked with strengthening M&E. This framework may also be used to mobilize strategic partnerships around the thematic focus on human development and its link with economic growth with equity, as well as function as a training tool for advocacy (see annex XV).

Plan. Similarly, the planned NHDR and improving the quality of MDG indicators provide strategic opportunities to develop a more visible profile within these fields, and to further push the boundaries of public discourse on gender sensitive poverty reduction and democratic governance.

UNDP as key advocate for human development In line with the above, UNDP needs to enhance its capacity for effective advocacy by developing a strategy in line with its strategic goals, while at the same time supporting national development priorities.¹⁰²

An effective UNDP advocacy strategy in Syria must be based on strengthening its strategic position in areas linked to its corporate mandate of promoting human development, and in which it enjoys a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other development and donor agencies operating in the country. Indeed, an effective advocacy strategy needs to build on UNDP's capacity and capability to provide policy advice and upstream engagement in legal and judicial reforms, areas that have hitherto not been accorded much attention though they are of crucial importance to the reform process and supporting the rule of law. The evident hesitation on the part of the Government to tackle reform of regulatory frameworks that impede the development of civil society in general, and the NGO sector in particular, indicate that this is an area where UNDP can further strengthen its comparative advantage and develop its strategic position as a key organization for advocacy on human development and its complex dimensions.

The field of broader advocacy which touches on democratic governance is arguably the most difficult task facing UNDP in Syria, and a clearer strategy needs to be developed to address this challenge. This also entails ensuring that requirements for focusing on projects do not contradict pursuing a sustained broader policy perspective towards development effectiveness. In other words, it implies ensuring that a narrow technocratic and economic perspective of reform does not ignore advocacy for broader reform processes conducive to human development.

At the same time, UNDP needs to further consolidate its strategic position as a key contributor to macroeconomic discourses evolving in Syria, both among Government counterparts as well as with pertinent UN and donor organizations. This entails consistently advocating for the human face of development, while promoting and supporting policies conducive to economic growth with equity in Syria.

Stronger focus on social aspects of national poverty reduction

UNDP can play a key role in supporting the ongoing reform process in Syria in ways that are conducive to attaining economic growth as well as human development, and to encouraging public discourse on the necessity of according equal importance to both.

UNDP has played a positive role in raising awareness on poverty and supporting the explicit inclusion of this term in official Government policy declarations and documents. But there is a need for increasing the emphasis on the human dimensions of development. Specifically in terms of focusing more explicitly and effectively on crucial issues such as income and capability poverty and not diluting poverty-related messages by a singular focus on alleviating unemployment levels and access to microcredit.

There is also a need to strengthen the focus on the social dimensions of economic growth, and to avoid limiting the public discourse to narrowly defined economic issues. Social dimensions must include the focus, for example, on the risk of increasing child labour—both boys and girls—in a context of rapid economic transformation and the possible erosion of social safety nets; promoting equitable employment conditions for men and women in the labour market; and ensuring access to basic social services and income generation opportunities for the poorest segments of the population, irrespective of ethnic or religious affiliation, gender or age group, rural or urban background.

UNDP must also play an important role in advocating for an approach encouraging demand-driven data collection, focusing on poverty and gender sensitive indicators conducive to effective development planning. Appropriate quantitative and qualitative indicators provide the information essential to strengthening UNDP's advocacy messages, and support efforts to mobilize strategic partnerships.

The reform process also requires advocacy for the development of gender and poverty-sensitive labour policies, if the narrow focus on economic growth is to be avoided. This is also relevant to the informal sector where income and capability-poor labour, and also child labour, is more likely to seek employment and income-generating opportunities. Such labour policies are also relevant to ensuring that both women and men in the private sector enjoy equitable opportunities and are equally protected by social security laws; and providing for equal opportunities for men and women in the civil service and public enterprises. This is also linked to advocating for gender balance

in decision-making, not only in the People's Assembly but also at the local governance levels.

Linked to this is the crucial need to develop a labour market information system, the outputs of which are relevant to a developing market economy where the State is not the main employer. An effective labour market information system is of particular importance to the private sector, where newly emerging enterprises require relevant skills if they are to be competitive in a globalizing world. While the technical aspects of improving the capacity and capability of the CBS should be left to other development partners, UNDP has a unique opportunity to advocate not only for improving the relevance and quality of data, but also for its effective dissemination, which in turn contributes to efficient development planning. Such efforts are also conducive to strengthening the quality and impact of MDG indicators, as well as the usefulness of the NHDR as an advocacy tool.

Strategic support to civil society initiatives UNDP has the prerequisite corporate experience to support the development of civil society in Syria, including supporting the capacity and capabilities of emerging NGOs to develop into effective development partners.

It is thus important to incorporate in UNDP's advocacy strategy the aim to mobilize and support the NGO sector as a means for widening the space for civil society and linking this with the concept of democratic governance. This is where the development of strategic partnerships becomes particularly crucial, since it increases opportunities for UNDP's cooperation with NGOs with similar outlooks on development 'with a human face'. UNDP is ideally placed to engage members of emerging NGOs in dialogue conducive, for example, to promoting the concept of social responsibility and accountability in the private enterprise sector. In turn, these efforts are conducive to promoting human development in Syria.

In order to enhance its role as a key advocate for promoting civil society, the UNDP must mobilize strategic partnerships to join in its efforts to address gaps in knowledge and skills of NGOs via training and other interventions. It also includes advocacy efforts targeting the private sector to influence the direction of economic development ensuring that social dimensions remain an integral part of economic development.

The recent UNDP focus on supporting the media sector in Syria is of crucial importance to widening the space for civil society, but needs to be explicitly linked to promoting the concept of democratic governance.

Strategic partnerships focused on ideas and values

Partnership around ideas and values are as important to UNDP's corporate mandate to support human development as is securing funding for supporting the reform process in Syria. Thus while UNDP should actively mobilize strategic partnerships to solicit non-core funding for crucial development interventions, it also needs to seek partnerships with key organizations with similar visions of supporting a reform process 'with a human face'.

UNDP's strategy of maintaining and further developing partnerships for raising funds has been relatively successful, reflected in the level of non-core relative to core resources respectively. The Government's current cost-sharing reflects its interest in and willingness to commit itself to its partnership with UNDP. The latter can capitalize on this by promoting concerns that are crucial to furthering human development, such as gender sensitive poverty reduction, as well as democratic governance and its link with administrative reform.

Strategic partnerships are also important for mobilizing necessary financial resources; for example for training the NGO sector to develop into genuine partners in development and identifying key constraints in regulatory frameworks that cut across various sector or thematic specific development interventions.

Generally and at the political level, the partnership with the EU is important and can be further consolidated through the recent corporate agreement between UNDP and the EU (signed in June 2004). But UNDP should also stretch this partnership further by raising issues like human rights and democratic governance, however sensitive. Similarly, strategic partnerships should be forged with key organizations that are promoting, or can be encouraged to promote, social concerns relating, for example, to the labour market, to the general policy of economic liberalization as well as to trade.

Supporting effective national M&E systems

Improving the relevance, quality and dissemination of data is intricately linked to M&E. A strong M&E system is required to ensure clarity and relevance of programme outputs and outcomes, which can provide relevant information to assess UNDP's contribution to development results in Syria. There is a need, however, to be realistic and flexible about what indicators of results are appropriate in a given context. There is also a need to keep in mind what measures are critically required for the CO to substantially strengthen its M&E approach as well as mechanisms for programming.

Indicators pertinent to national legislative changes; to achieving benchmarks in the areas of poverty and governance; to optimizing returns on resource allocation; to staffing levels and training; and to gaining the most appropriate level of leverage for advocacy with key national players need to be clearly linked to a systematically developed M&E process—one that is based on the principle of ‘managing for results’.

Effectively addressing these issues can lead to greater coherence in CO actions, providing the opportunity for continual learning and adaptation for future interventions, as well as strengthening UNDP support to programme and project implementation.

An effective M&E system has major implications for UNDP in the context of its increased focus on pushing the boundaries of governance reform in Syria, as well as ensuring that poverty reduction remains an integral part of the national development agenda. Lack of demonstrated achievements or results may weaken grounds on which to resist or negotiate alternatives to mainly state-centred policies and practices. Engaging in capacity-building of social institutions in the country requires getting optimally involved in a complex set of interactions outside the UNDP CO and at many different levels. This is where the development of an effective advocacy strategy becomes crucial.

Addressing crucial issues cross-cutting UNDP’s thematic areas and intended outcomes While UNDP’s strategic goals are relevant to Syria’s national development priorities, the CO needs to develop a strategic approach to implementing its development objectives and achieving intended outcomes. This requires adjustments in the UNDP’s implementation of its development interventions, based on an explicit recognition of the complexity of cross-cutting factors.

ICT is one such factor. As reiterated earlier, much effort is required for Syria to catch up with ICT developments in a globalizing world. Commendably, UNDP has recognized this gap and is supporting the development of ICT in Syria, linking this with poverty reduction interventions and capacity-building. However, in addition, ICT-related interventions must be used as a means of establishing or strengthening inter-ministerial communication links at the upstream as well as at the downstream levels.

These links are relevant for the efficient use of resources to decrease the risk of duplication. They are also important as means to an end, for example the use of ICT tools for the dissemination of the concept of democratic

governance and the link with a rights-based approach to development; linking concepts of transparency and accountability not only with citizens’ rights but also with the concept of citizen’s responsibilities, an important factor in developing a vibrant civil society; and widening access to information and knowledge conducive to improving male and female citizens’ labour market opportunities. A cultural change of this order takes time and commitment; even in industrialized countries, the realization of the productivity benefits of ICT has taken a generation. Problems of security and confidentiality have to be tackled. The very high costs of e-connectivity and the very low-level of Internet use in the Arab states, including Syria, have to be tackled aggressively if the digital divide is to be converted into digital opportunities.

Another cross-cutting factor is gender mainstreaming, which includes addressing gender gaps reflecting bias against girls and women, and promoting more equitable gender relations. It is also about addressing the gender needs and priorities of boys and men affected, for example, by income and capability poverty; lack of social security; and/or socio-economic marginalization fed by ethnic and religious affiliation. UNDP’s focus on a holistic approach to development where human needs and priorities are central to the development agenda are intricately linked with, and affected by, the development of an effective gender mainstreaming strategy.

ANNEX I: TERMS OF REFERENCE COUNTRY EVALUATION: ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT RESULTS

Syrian Arab Republic

1. BACKGROUND

The Evaluation Office (EO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) carries out a series of country evaluations, called Assessments of Development Results (ADRs), in order capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results at the country level. Undertaken in selected countries every year, the ADRs focus on outcomes and critically examine achievements and constraints in the UNDP thematic areas of focus, draw lessons learnt and provide recommendations for the future. The ADRs also recommend a strategy for enhancing performance and strategically positioning UNDP support within national development priorities and UNDP corporate policy directions.

The overall objectives of the ADR are to:

- Support the Administrator's substantive accountability function to the Executive Board and serve as a vehicle for quality assurance of UNDP interventions at the country level.
- Generate lessons from experience to inform current and future programming at the country and corporate levels.
- Provide to the stakeholders in the programme country an objective assessment of results (specifically outcomes) that have been achieved through UNDP support and partnerships with other key actors for a given multi-year period.

An ADR is planned for Syria beginning in spring 2004. It will cover the period 1997-2001, i.e. the first country cooperation framework (CCF) and the current CCF (2002-2006). The assessment will, however, attempt to point out where support prior to this period may have served as a foundation for current achievements. The UNDP strategic areas of support where intended outcomes are planned in Syria are outlined in the table on the next page.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE ASSESSMENT

The evaluation will review the experience of UNDP in Syria and the results (outputs and outcomes) achieved for

the period 1997-2004. The evaluation will also be forward-looking and the analytical exercise will focus on capturing the development approach and added value of UNDP to Syria's development challenges, and take account of intended results as expressed in the current CCF and MYFF, until the end of the current CCF in 2006. The evaluation will consider the totality of the key results and goals in this period with the main intended objectives described in the various planning instruments of UNDP (UNDP, CCF, and Millennium Development Goals—MDGs) and the UNDP programme portfolio. The in-depth and independent results assessment would provide a measure of the development effectiveness of UNDP's interventions in the country, draw lessons learnt and recommend improvements for future programming. Specifically, the ADR will cover the following:

- Provide an overall assessment of the results achieved through UNDP support and in partnership with other key development actors during 1997-2006 (i.e. the current and the previous CCF) with particular in-depth assessment within **poverty** and **governance**. The evaluation should also bring out the value added from UNDP's presence in Syria and draw links from current achievements to UNDP interventions before 1997, as appropriate. The evaluation will also take account of **intended results** as expressed in the current CCF and SRF, until the end of the current CCF in 2006. It will consider the totality of the key results and goals in this period with the main intended objectives described in the various planning instruments of UNDP (UNDAF, CCF, MDGs) and the UNDP programme portfolio. The analysis should focus on how and why the results were achieved to draw lessons, with particular attention to:
 - a. how effective UNDP support was in contributing to poverty reduction and sustainable use of natural resources and environmental conservation;
 - b. how UNDP support was used to leverage Syria's reform process in the area of good governance; and
 - a. the contribution of UNDP support to policy advice

Achieving the MDGs and Reducing Human Poverty	Fostering Democratic Governance	Energy and Environment for Sustainable Development
MDG country reporting and poverty monitoring	Support to strategy development and national dialogue	Frameworks and strategies for sustainable development
Pro-poor policy reforms	Parliamentary development	Effective water governance
Information society	Decentralization, local governance and urban/rural development	Access to sustainable energy services
E-government and public services	Public administrative reform	Sustainable land management to combat desertification and land degradation
ICT for SME support and job creation		Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity
		National/sectoral policy and planning to control emissions of ozone depleting substances and persistent organic pollutants

Source: RBMS, SRF 2002-5 according to MYFF 2004-7.

and dialogue, aid coordination and brokerage in delivering development results.

- Provide an analysis of how UNDP has positioned itself strategically to add value in response to national needs and changes in the national development context, with particular attention to:
 - a. The entry points and strategy selected by UNDP in support of (i) reducing poverty and vulnerability at the national level; and (ii) promoting good governance for sustainable development—and their implications for the other main UNDP themes of sustainable use of natural resources and environmental conservation and ICT for development.
 - b. The key current strategies of the second CCF: partnerships for development, moving to upstream policy support, results orientation and intended entry points for (i) developing a national poverty reduction strategy; (ii) generation of employment; (iii) community development intervention; (iv) strengthening national capacity for environmental management; (v) support to implementation of international conventions and agreements; (vi) promoting sustainable management of energy and water; (vii) promoting an enabling environment for good governance; and (viii) improving and strengthening institutional capacities for administrative reform—within the current framework.
 - c. The cooperation with different groups of development partners.
- Based on the analysis of achievements and positioning above, present key findings; draw key lessons and provide clear and forward-looking recommendations in order to suggest effective and realistic strategies for UNDP and partners towards intended results.

3. SCOPE OF THE ASSESSMENT

The evaluation will undertake a comprehensive review of the UNDP programme portfolio and activities during the period of review, with more in-depth focus on poverty and governance. The focus will be on key observable results, specifically outcomes (anticipated and unanticipated, positive and negative) and will cover all UNDP assistance (funded from both core and non-core resources) in terms of an assessment of UNDP's strategic positioning, and the development results in the country and UNDP's contribution to them. Specifically, the ADR will cover the following:

Strategic positioning

- Ascertain the bearing of UNDP support on national needs, development goals and priorities, including relevance, linkages with the goal of reducing poverty and other MDGs. This may include an analysis of the perceived comparative strengths of the programme, and a review of the major national challenges to development. The evaluation will take account of, inter alia, the national reform process since 1997 and key challenges (e.g. the country's economic and social situation, including the human rights situation, progress towards the MDGs and the Barcelona process for Syria's EU-Mediterranean partnership on political and economic cooperation); analyses from assessments undertaken by the World Bank, IMF, the EU and other major donors and partners, and the national human development reports (NHDRs). This aims to ascertain the added value of UNDP support in effectively influencing national development results, through, for example, prioritization, selection of strategies and entry points.
- Assess how UNDP has anticipated and responded to significant changes in the national development context, affecting poverty reduction and governance reform for sustainable development. The evaluation may, for example, consider key events at the national and political level that influence the development environment; the risk management of UNDP; any missed opportunities for UNDP involvement and contribution; efforts of advocacy and policy advice; UNDP's responsiveness vs. concentration of efforts etc. The evaluation will specifically bring out the choices made by UNDP in response to the Government's national plan for economic development in the context of the main challenges facing Syria, such as governance reforms, the diminishing oil reserves, rapid population growth, environmental degradation, and the effects and future implications of political conflict in the region.
- Review the synergies and alignment of UNDP support with other initiatives and partners, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF); the Global Cooperation Framework (GCF) and the Regional Cooperation Framework (RCF). This may include looking at how UNDP has leveraged its resources and that of others towards results, the balance between upstream and downstream initiatives and the work on MDGs. The Evaluation will take account of, inter alia, the UNDAF/Common Country Assessment (CCA) exercises undertaken to ascertain how UNDP has leveraged other initiatives for results.

- The evaluation should consider the influence of systemic issues, i.e. policy and administrative constraints affecting the programme, on both the donor and programme country sides, as well as how the development results achieved and the partnerships established have contributed to ensure a relevant and strategic position of UNDP.

Development results

- Provide an examination of the effectiveness and sustainability of the UNDP programme, by: (a) highlighting main achievements (outcomes) at the national level in the last five years or so (some results may have their origin in efforts prior to 1997) and UNDP's contribution to these in terms of key outputs; (b) ascertaining current progress made in achieving outcomes in the given thematic areas of UNDP and UNDP's support to these. The evaluation should qualify UNDP contribution to the outcomes with a fair degree of plausibility, and consider anticipated and unanticipated, positive and negative outcomes. It should also gauge the contribution to capacity development at the national level to the extent it is implicit in the intended results, as well as national ownership as a success factor. The assessment will cover the key results and support in all thematic areas of programming (poverty reduction, institutional development and good governance, sustainable use of natural resources and environmental conservation, ICT and any other areas, if appropriate).
- Identify and analyse the main factors influencing results, including the range and quality of development partnerships forged and their contribution to outcomes, the provision of upstream assistance and how the positioning of UNDP influences its results and partnership strategy. In assessing development results, the ADR should take into account the following issues (among others) and their influence on UNDP's priorities and intended results for strengthening the state's institutional capacity:
 - i) the ability of government institutions to ensure effective citizens' participation in national decision-making processes;
 - ii) the government's promotion of competition and a market based economic system to generate employment;
 - iii) the ability of government institutions to effectively plan government expenditure and the delivery of public services (e.g. health, education) at both the central and local government levels;

- iv) the public sector's aid absorption and programme implementation capacity;
- v) the effectiveness of government institutions to implement administrative reforms;
- vi) the establishment and operation of appropriate regulatory frameworks by the government for small and large companies and banks;
- vii) the enactment and enforcement of rules and laws and judicial reforms by the government to protect human rights;
- viii) the enactment and implementation of a comprehensive social reform programme that takes into account measures to cope with the initial negative consequence of reform;
- ix) the ability of government institutions to improve education skills and technology upgrading at the national level; and
- x) the range and quality of government's partnerships with civil society institutions in implementing national development plans.

- Assess the anticipated progress in achieving intended outcomes, with regard to the SRF outcomes (see annex); the 2002-2006 CCF objectives and proposed future programmes and objectives and the MDGs.
- Provide an in-depth analysis of the following, and identify the key challenges and strategies for future interventions in each area:
 - a. Analyse the achievements, UNDP efforts and strategies for poverty reduction and sustainable livelihood. This should include a review of UNDP's poverty and environment portfolios, namely, support to National Programme to Combat Unemployment; the Rural Community Development in Jabal Al-Hoss; Strategic ICT Programme; support to Rehabilitation and Sustainable Livelihood in Zeyzoun; Conservation and Sustainable Use of Dryland Agro-biodiversity; Integrated Water Resource Management in Syria; Supply-Side Efficiency and Energy Conservation and Planning; and their effects on advocacy and policy advice.
 - b. Analyse the achievements, UNDP efforts and strategies within institutional development and good governance. This should include the effects of support to Development Monitoring and Decision

(previously Management of National Reform Programme); E-strategy; support to the Strategy of the 2020 Vision; Reform of Public Industries; support to Parliament; support to Administrative Development; support to Aid Management and Coordination in Syria; Policy and Technical Support to the Central Bank of Syria; and support to the Syrian Government in the Association of the EU on national policies and plans.

These two broad areas (where key environmental interventions are subsumed as part of poverty reduction efforts) are principally selected due to a notable UNDP involvement in the past, their complexity in terms of inter-linkages and synergies with other areas, and the growing challenges expected in the next stage of national reforms. Both the poverty and governance strategies of UNDP in Syria include partnerships for development, flexibility to address emerging national priorities, moving to upstream policy support, results orientation and special focus in the relevant service areas.

Lessons learnt and follow-up

The ADR is expected to provide an opportunity for the CO to cement its position and vision vis-à-vis partners, and can be used as a tool for advocacy, learning and buy-in with stakeholders. Therefore, the evaluation will identify key lessons in the thematic areas of focus and on positioning that can provide a useful basis for strengthening UNDP support to the country and for improving programme performance, results and effectiveness in the future. Through in-depth thematic assessment, it will present good practices at the country level for learning and replication and, where possible, draw lessons from **unintended results**.

4. METHODOLOGY

The assessment will employ a variety of methodologies including desk reviews, stakeholder meetings, client surveys, and focus group interviews and select site visits. The Evaluation Team will review all relevant national policy documents, including current national plans and strategies of the Syrian Government and all other relevant documents that give an overall picture of the country context.¹⁰³ The Team will also consider any thematic studies/papers, select project documents and programme support documents as well as any reports from monitoring and evaluation at the country level, and available documentation and studies

¹⁰³ A web-based document repository for the ADR will be accessible by the Evaluation Team.

¹⁰⁴ See ADR methodology paper, Evaluation Office, UNDP.

from other development partners. Statistical data will be assessed where useful. The empirical evidence will be gathered through three major sources of information: perception, validation and documentation, in accordance with the concept of 'triangulation'.¹⁰⁴

A wide stakeholder consultation and involvement is envisaged. The Evaluation Team will meet with Government ministries/institutions at the central and province level, research institutions, civil society organizations, NGOs and private sector representatives, UN Agencies, Bretton Woods Institutions, bilateral donors, and beneficiaries. The Team will visit field/project sites as required, and as decided by the Evaluation Team and the Evaluation Office in consultation with the CO.

In terms of methodology, the ADR will follow the guidelines issued by the Evaluation Office, and will consist of preparation (with preliminary desk review, programme mapping, TOR proposal, exploratory mission to the CO, theme-specific desk research and local studies and research); conducting the ADR by the country evaluation mission; and use of the ADR and follow-up (dissemination, corporate discussions, CO management response, stakeholder consultations, learning events). Preparatory work at the local level will be carried out in advance to provide a substantive background for the Evaluation Team. This will include an analysis of achievements and challenges in poverty reduction and local good governance. These studies will be conducted by local research institutions and companies. A Syrian national institute/company will also be charged with conducting select surveys of key partners through questionnaires. This work may entail the review of available reports, collecting additional documentation, conducting select interviews, field visits and analysis and brainstorming. This work will be based on specific TOR in addendum to these generic terms of reference.

5. EVALUATION TEAM

The composition of the Evaluation Team should reflect the independence and the substantive results focus of the exercise. The Team leader and all the members of the review Team will be selected by the UNDP Evaluation Office in consultation with the Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS), UNDP, New York and the CO.

ANNEX II: LIST OF PEOPLE MET IN NEW YORK AND SYRIA¹⁰⁵

UNDP/NEW YORK

Mr. Nurul Alam	Deputy Director, Evaluation Office
Ms. Maha Bahamoun	Focal Point for Syria, Regional Bureau for Arab States
Ms. Marcia De Castro	Former Deputy Director, UNDP Syria
Mr. Khaled Ehsan	Evaluation Adviser, Evaluation Office
Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco	Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Regional Director, Regional Bureau of Arab States
Ms. Fadzai Gwaradzimba	Senior Evaluation Adviser, Evaluation Office
Ms. Nicola Harrington	Director, Department of Resource Mobilization, Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships
Ms. Diane Kepler	Chief, Internal Audit Section, Office of Audit and Performance Review
Ms. Rima Khalaf Hunaidi	Assistant Administrator and Regional Director, Regional Bureau for Arab States
Mr. Jocelyn Mason	Institutional Development Group, Bureau for Development Policy
Ms. Sarawasthi Menon	Director, Evaluation Office
Ms. Bharati Sadasivam	Policy Adviser, Civil Society Organization Unit, Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships
Mr. Jan Vandemoortle	Principal Advisor and Group Leader, Bureau for Development Policy

75

UNDP/SYRIA

Ms. Rasha Akel	UNV, UNDP Support to Parliament Project
Ms. Huda Al-Hassan	UNV, UNDP Support to Parliament Project
Ms. Rima Al-Hassan	Transition Team Leader
Ms. Shaza Al-Jondi	Environment Associate
Ms. Salma Al-Mufti	UNV, UNDP Support to Parliament Project
Mr. Ali Al-Za'tari	Resident Representative/Resident Coordinator
Mr. Hisham El-Naggar	IUNV/ICT Associate
Ms. Fumiko Fukuoka	Deputy Resident Representative
Ms. Huda Khattab	Programme Finance Associate
Ms. Roula Koudsi	Programme Associate
Ms. Omaya Noufouri	Programme Associate

¹⁰⁵ In alphabetical order. In Syria, unless otherwise indicated, meetings took place in Damascus.

GOVERNMENT OF SYRIA

Mr. Akram Abaza	Director of Agriculture (Sweida)
Ms. In'am Abbas	Member of People's Assembly
Ms. Nashwa Abdul-Karim	Rural Women Specialist, Head of Training Programme, Rural Community Development Jabal Al-Hoss project (Aleppo)
Mr. Talal Aboud	National Project Director, UNDP Decision Support Project
Mr. Hussein Abu Hamza	UNDP Agro-Biodiversity Project staff (Sweida)
Mr. Mahmoud Al-Asaad	Head of Micro-Finance Programme, Rural Community Development Jabal Al-Hoss project (Aleppo)
Ms. Kawkab Al-Daiah	Syrian Women's Union
Mr. Erfan Ali	Director of Systems & Plans, Ministry of Local Administration and Environment; National Project Director, UNDP Disaster Management Project
Mr. Ibrahim Ali	Director, Central Bureau of Statistics
Mr. Henein Al-Nimr	Member of People's Assembly, UNDP National Project Director, Support to Parliament Project
Mr. Bassam Al-Sibai	Deputy Head, State Planning Commission
Ms. Sulaf Al-Sufi	Fund Planning Secretary, Agency for Combating Unemployment, Prime Minister's Office
Mr. Samer Al-Taqi	Adviser on Health Sector to the Prime Minister
Mr. Alaa Al-Yassin	Data Researcher, UNDP Decision Support Project
Mr. Hussein Amach	Managing Director, Acting Minister for Agency for Combating Unemployment, Prime Minister's Office
H.E. Mr. Abdallah Dardari	Head, State Planning Commission
Mr. Abdul Razzaq Duksi	National Director, Rural Community Development Jabal Al-Hoss project (Aleppo)
Mr. Nebras El-Fadel	Advisor to H. E. President of Syria
Mr. Akram El-Khoury	General Director, General Commission for Environmental Affairs
Mr. Fadi Hajjar	National Specialist in Data Base Management, UNDP Decision Support Project
Mr. Ahmad Hassan	Director of International Cooperation, State Planning Commission
Mr. Gomaa Hijazi	Media Focal Point, State Planning Commission
Mr. Imad Hassoun Homsi	Deputy Minister of Local Administration and Environment
Ms. Nidal Idlebi	Deputy Minister, Ministry of Communications & Technology
Mr. Nidal Kabalan	Chief Executive, TV Channel 2

Ms. Hana' Kaddourah	Syrian Women's Union
Mr. Hazar Kassem	Government staff, UNDP Decision Support Project
Ms. Hanadi Khaimeh	NGO Registration, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
Mr. Alfred Kraft	Advisory Services to the State Planning Commission, German Technical Cooperation (GTZ)
Ms. Mai Mahayni	Member of People's Assembly
Ms. Rita Merzaayo	Managerial Assistant, UNDP Decision Support Project
Mr. Maher Mujtahid	Secretary General, Prime Minister's Office
Ms. Fadia Nezami	Administrator, UNDP Decision Support Project
Mr. Adnan Saad	National Project Manager, UNDP Agro-Biodiversity Project (Sweida)
Ms. Maysa Salman	Responsible for International Cooperation & Funds, Agency for Combating Unemployment, Prime Minister's Office
H.E. Ms. Bouthaina Shaaban	Minister, Ministry of Expatriates
Mr. Camille Shanan	Head of Agricultural Research Centre (Sweida)

UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATIONS

Ms. Iman Bahnassi	UNICEF, Assistant Project Officer
Mr. Fouad Moujallid	WHO, Resident Representative
Mr. Lex Takkenberg	UNWRA, Deputy Director
Mr. Salim Zahoueh	FAO, Assistant Representative

Donors

Ms. Fabienne Bessonne	First Secretary, Social & Human Development, Delegation of the European Commission to Syria
Mr. Andrea Cascone	Counsellor for Economic Affairs, Embassy of Italy
Mr. Shigeru Otake	Deputy Resident Representative, Japan International Cooperation Agency
Mr. Ronald Seeger	Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
Mr. Ammar Waqqaf	Programme Officer, Economic Sector, Japan International Cooperation Agency

Other

Mr. Marcus Buerli	ICARDA, Junior Professional Officer-Agricultural Economist, Natural Resource Management Programme (Aleppo)
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Private sector

Mr. Rateb Al-Shallah	President, Federation of Syrian Chambers of Commerce
Mr. Abdel-Rahman Attar	Secretary General, Federation of Syrian Chambers of Commerce
Ms. Rima Ballout	Member of Board of Industrial Business Women's Committee

Mrs. Sylvie Betinjaneh	Member of Board of Industrial Business Women's Committee
Mr. Mohammad El-Marei	General Federation of Trade Unions, Secretary of Labour Policy
Mr. Ahmad Habbab	General Federation of Trade Unions, Secretary of Arab and International Relations
Ms. Reem Khaddam	Head of Board of Industrial Business Women's Committee
Ms. Sama Khanjee	Member of Board of Industrial Business Women's Committee
Mr. Abdallah Lahham	Member, Federation of Syrian Chambers of Commerce
Ms. Salwa Mallouha	Member of Board of Industrial Business Women's Committee
Mr. Hayssam Midani	Director General, Chamber of Industry
Mr. Murhaf Sabouni	Secretary General, Arab Federation of Railways (Aleppo)

CIVIL SOCIETY / NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Ayman Abdel-Nour	Journalist
Mr. Hussein Al-Odat	Journalist and Publisher
Dr. Warka Barmada	President of Syrian Environment Association
Mr. Jaques El-Hakim	Professor Law Faculty, Attorney at Law
Mr. Youssef El-Hakim	Attorney at Law
Mr. Issam El-Zaim	Chairman, Syrian Economic Society
Mr. Fawaz Ghanem	Mukhtar, Al-Rashida Village (Sweida)
Mr. Abdul-Salam Haykal	General Secretary, Founding Board Member, Syrian Young Entrepreneurs Association
Ms. Iman Mardini	Headmistress, First Cycle School in Old Damascus, Syrian Environment Association School Project
Mr. Basil Nasri	President, Syrian Young Entrepreneurs Association
Mr. Hani Tarabichi	Vice President, Syrian Young Entrepreneurs Association
Mr. Radwan Wetti	Coordination Manager, Syrian Young Entrepreneurs Association

RESEARCHERS

Mr. Bassam Abidin	ADR Local Research Partner, ACUMEN
Mr. Karim Malas	ADR Local Research Partner, ACUMEN

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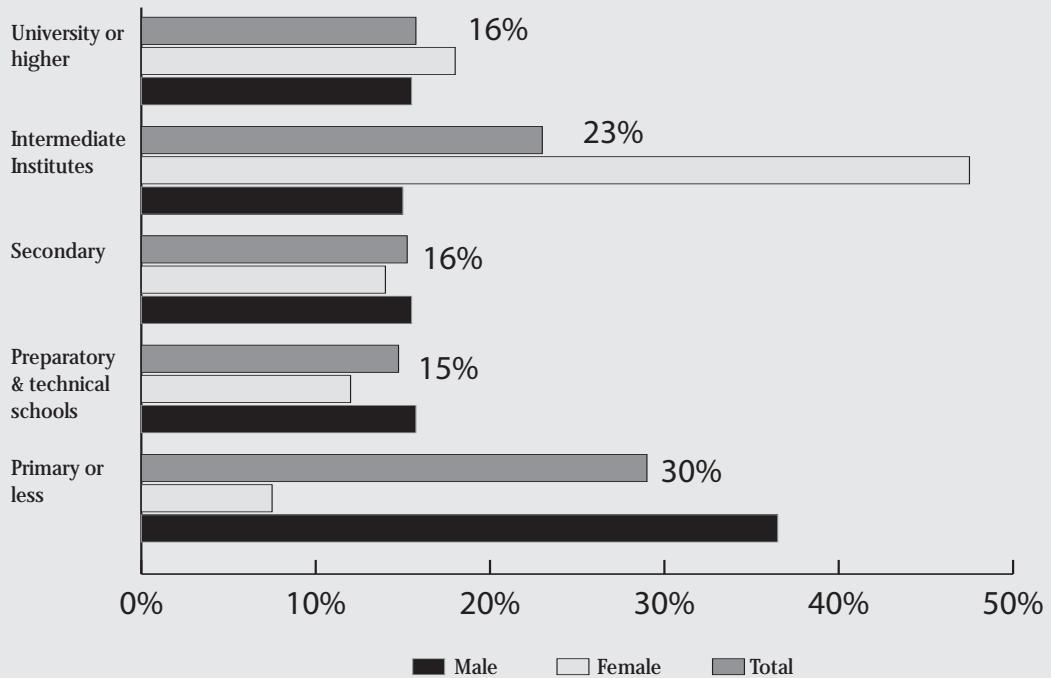
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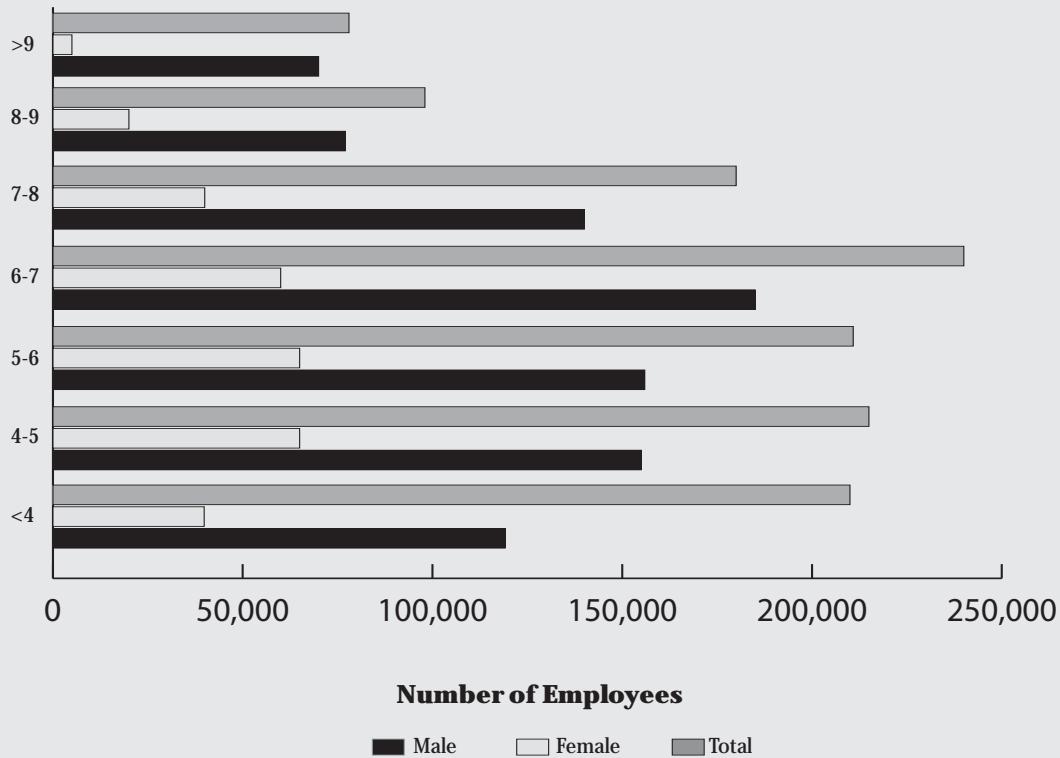
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ANNEX IV: EMPLOYMENT BY SEX, EDUCATION AND WAGE CATEGORY

GRAPH A: DISTRIBUTION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES BY SEX AND EDUCATION, 2002



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract 2003, derived from table 4/3 (ACUMEN, 2004).

GRAPH B: DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES BY WAGE CATEGORY, 2002

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract 2003, derived from table 10/3 (ACUMEN, 2004).

ANNEX V: MAP OF INTENDED DEVELOPMENT RESULTS FOR UNDP SYRIA (1997-2003)

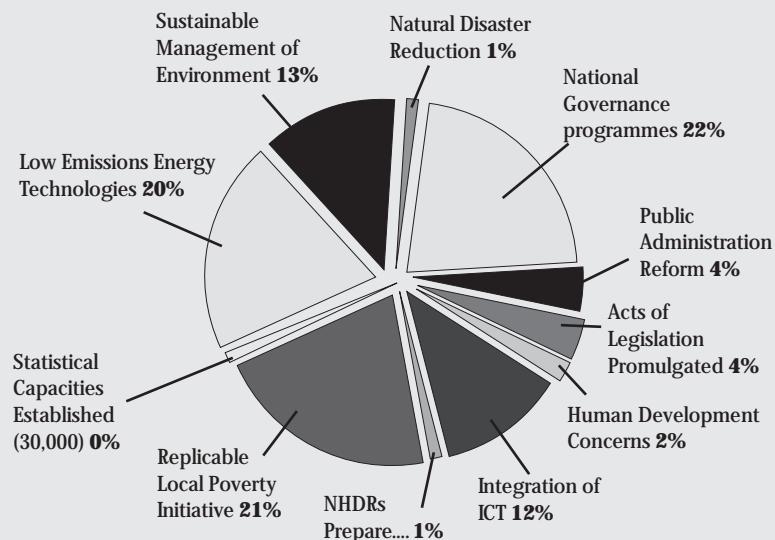
OUTCOMES	OUTPUTS
<p>G1 GOVERNANCE</p> <p>SGN1 Dialogue that widens development choices</p> <p>SASN1 Globalization: National policies address the social impact of economic liberalization more effectively</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Policy support to Syrian government in developing, managing and mitigating the negative social impact of economic reform and trade liberalization ■ Broadened dialogue on good governance resulting in the establishment of a better information system and a website for Parliament ■ A strategic vision for the introduction of e-governance developed ■ Increased capacity of Ministry of Administrative Development to implement its national administrative rehabilitation plan in other ministries ■ A comprehensive strategic development vision, Syria 2020, will have been created as a master plan for development assistance ■ Improved management of aid through establishment of aid coordination unit within SPC ■ Development of reliable and comprehensive statistics system of socio-economic indicators ■ Improved competitive position of textile and leather sectors
<p>G2 POVERTY</p> <p>SGN2 Access to assets</p> <p>SASN1 Productive resources and assets: The policy and regulatory framework reformed to provide the poor with expanded access to financial services</p> <p>SASN3 Access to technologies: The policy, legal and regulatory framework reformed to substantially expand connectivity to ICT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The creation of a network of microfinance institutions in Jabal al-Hoss ■ Development of a national poverty reduction action plan ■ Building of a comprehensive information base on poverty conditions ■ Launch of NHDR ■ Development of a master plan dealing with labour and employment policies and a monitoring system ■ Establishment of a TVET centre ■ Development of a microcredit project for promoting local handicrafts aimed at tourism sector ■ Expansion of Jabal al-Hoss into second phase and developing a policy framework for replicating the programme in other rural areas ■ Identifying a coherent strategy to use information and its underlying technologies, including the Internet, to further the socio-economic development of Syria

(chart continues on the next page)

OUTCOMES	OUTPUTS
<p>G3 ENVIRONMENT</p> <p>SGN1 Environment and energy for livelihoods</p> <p>SASN2 Institutional framework: Improved capacity of national/sectoral authorities to plan and implement integrated approaches to environmental management and energy development that respond to the needs of the poor</p> <p>SGN2 Instruments for environmentally sustainable management</p> <p>SASN2 Global conventions and funding mechanisms: Global environment concerns and commitments integrated in national development planning and policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Design of Environmental Information Management System at the Environment Ministry completed and implementation of the system initiated (30% of Environment Ministry staff and other concerned authorities given training on conducting environmental impact assessments and on introduction of economic incentives to enforce environment law) ■ Policy papers on renewable energy at both the national and rural levels developed and adopted by the Government (introduction of renewable energy technologies on a pilot scale in 10% of Badia region) ■ Strengthening of national, basin, and local level institutional and technical capabilities in integrated water resource planning and management (an integrated water resources management plan adopted) ■ Introduction of sustainable conservation practices of agro-biodiversity ■ Phasing out of the use of CFCs in the manufacture of domestic and commercial refrigeration at 11 refrigeration plants ■ Preparation of a national biodiversity strategy and action plan ■ Preparation of a National Action Programme to combat desertification (at least 25% of local communities are following more sustainable dry-land management practices and using sound irrigation and farming practices) ■ Creation of a system to disseminate and update environmental information
<p>G6 UN SUPPORT</p> <p>SGN1 Global conference goals</p> <p>SASN2 RC global agenda: Collaborative UN system support for monitoring progress towards MDGs</p> <p>SGN2 Effective operational activities</p> <p>SASN2 RC system: Mobilization of UN partners to adopt a strategic, results-oriented and collaborative approach to the UNDAF</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Collaborative UN system support for monitoring progress towards MDGs; UNDP to lead the process of preparing the MDG Report for Syria ■ Mobilization of UN partners to adopt a strategic, results-oriented and collaborative approach to the UNDAF and implementation of specific objectives ■ Support the global compacts and translate their goals into concrete field interventions where possible
<p>Source: Syria SRF/ROAR 2002, RBMS Analysis Module.</p>	

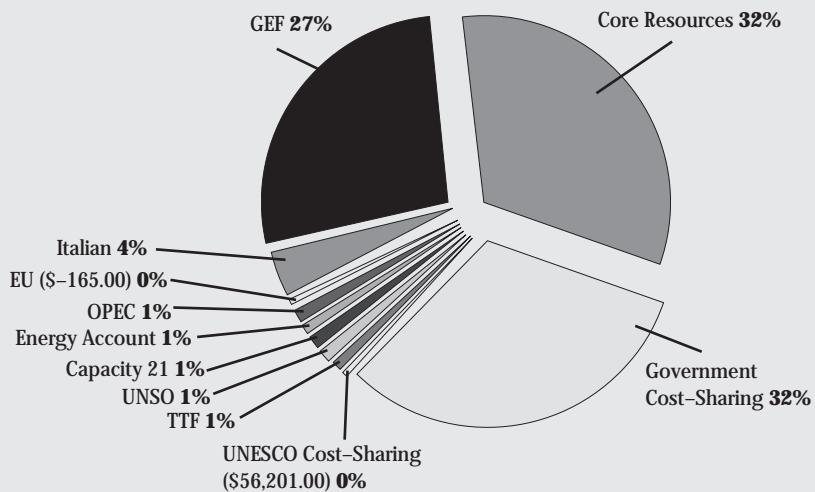
ANNEX VI: APPROVALS BY SRF OUTCOMES AND SOURCE OF FUNDS

GRAPH A: APPROVALS BY SRF OUTCOMES (2004-2007)



Source: UNDP Syria Country Office.

GRAPH B: APPROVALS BY SOURCE OF FUNDS UNDP SYRIA (2002-2007)



Source: UNDP Syria Country Office

ANNEX VII: MATRIX OF GOALS, PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES FOR UNDP & UN AGENCIES, SYRIA (1997-2006)

CCF 1 (1997-2001)	CCF 2 (2002-2006)	UNDAF*
<p>Goal Capacity building for sustainable human development</p> <p>Programmes National poverty mapping and goal setting</p> <p>Job creation and sustainable livelihoods</p> <p>Community development interventions</p> <p>Goal Sustainable use of natural resources and environmental conservation</p> <p>Programmes Enhancement of capacities in environment and natural resource management</p> <p>Goal Economic governance</p> <p>Programmes Improving the management of public enterprises</p> <p>Export promotion</p> <p>Sustainable energy</p>	<p>Goal Poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods</p> <p>Programmes Monitoring and supporting implementation of the MDGs</p> <p>Developing a national poverty reduction strategy</p> <p>Promoting a comprehensive information base on poverty conditions</p> <p>Generation of employment</p> <p>Community development intervention</p> <p>Goal Sustainable use of natural resources and environmental conservation</p> <p>Programmes Strengthening national capacity for environmental management</p> <p>Support for the implementation of international conventions and agreements</p> <p>Promoting sustainable management of energy and water</p> <p>Goal Institutional development and good governance</p> <p>Programmes Promoting an enabling environment for good governance</p> <p>Improving and strengthening institutional capacities</p>	<p>Goal Improve living standards by reducing socio-economic and regional disparities</p> <p>Objectives Contribute to job creation and reduction of unemployment among youth and women in rural and urban marginalized areas</p> <p>Contribute to Government goals of improving access to and quality of basic services in rural and urban marginalized areas</p> <p>Goal Strengthen institutional capacities to meet development challenges</p> <p>Objectives Enhance national and sub national capacities for policy formulation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to improve human development and promote a human rights approach in Syria</p> <p>Support Government efforts to pursue the institutional reform and modernization of the public sector to meet development challenges</p>

ANNEX VIII: STRATEGIC GOALS AND SERVICE LINES FOR UNDP SYRIA (MYFF 2002-2007)

Strategic Goal	Service Line
1. Achieving the MDGs and reducing human poverty	1.1 MDG country reporting and poverty monitoring 1.2 Pro-poor policy reform to achieve MDG targets 1.8 Making ICT work for the poor
2. Fostering democratic governance	2.1 Policy support for democratic governance 2.1 Parliamentary development 2.5 E-governance and access to information 2.6 Decentralization, local governance and urban/rural development 2.7 Public administration reform
3. Energy and environment for sustainable development	3.1 Frameworks and strategies for sustainable development 3.2 Effective water governance 3.3 Access to sustainable energy services 3.4 Sustainable land management to combat desertification and land degradation 3.5 Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity 3.6 National/sectoral policy and planning to control emissions of ozone depleting substances and persistent organic pollutants
4. Crises prevention and recovery	4.5 Natural disaster reduction
5. Responding to HIV/AIDS	5.3 Advocacy and communication to address HIV/AIDS

Source: Syria MYFF 2004, provided by UNDP Syria country office.

ANNEX IX: MULTI-YEAR FUNDING FRAMEWORK (MYFF) TREE FOR UNDP SYRIA (2002-2007)

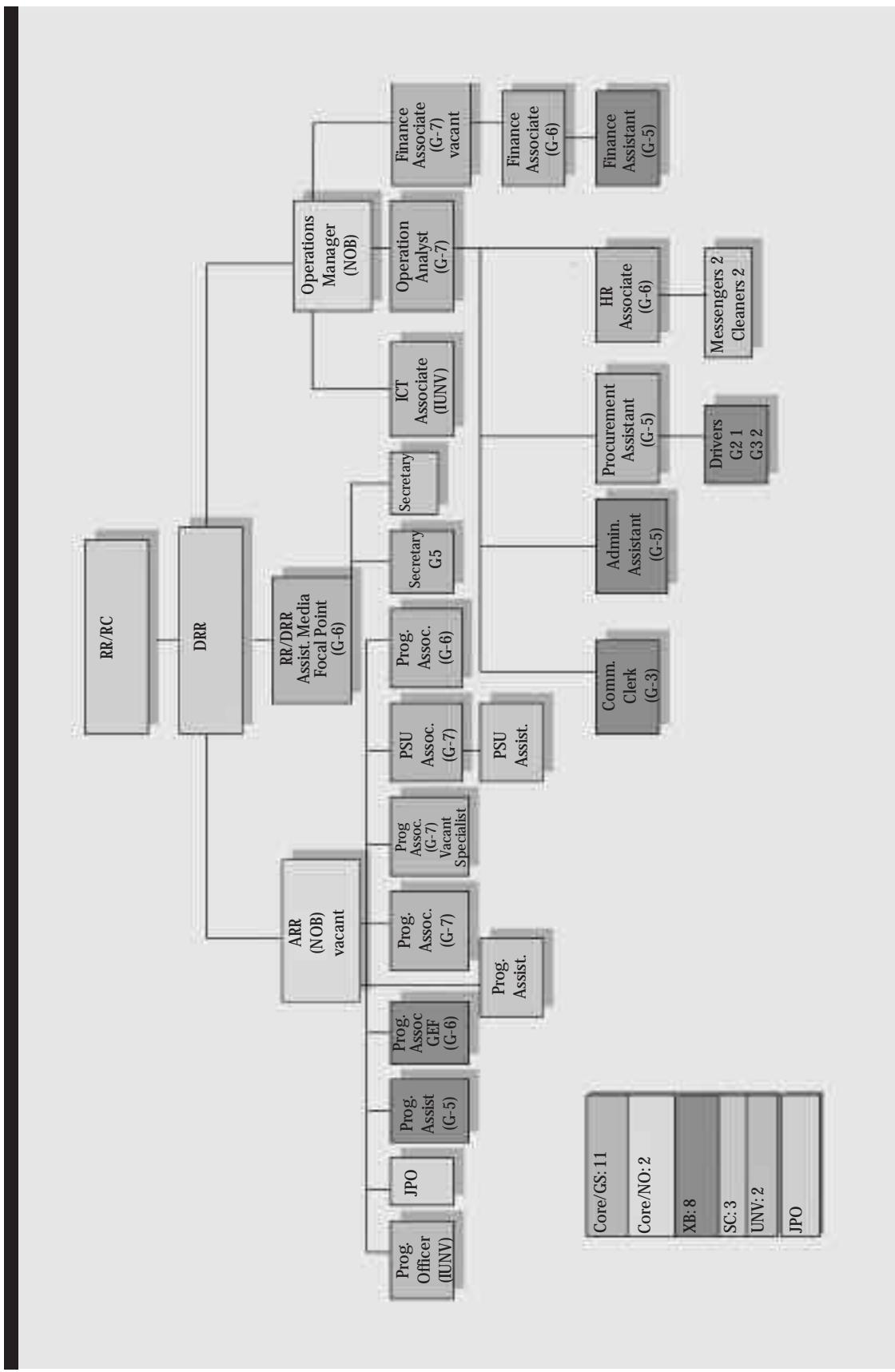
GRAPH A: APPROVALS BY SRF OUTCOMES (2004-2007)



Source: UNDP Syria Projects Tree

ANNEX X: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF UNDP SYRIA COUNTRY OFFICE

■ ANNEX X: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF UNDP SYRIA COUNTRY OFFICE

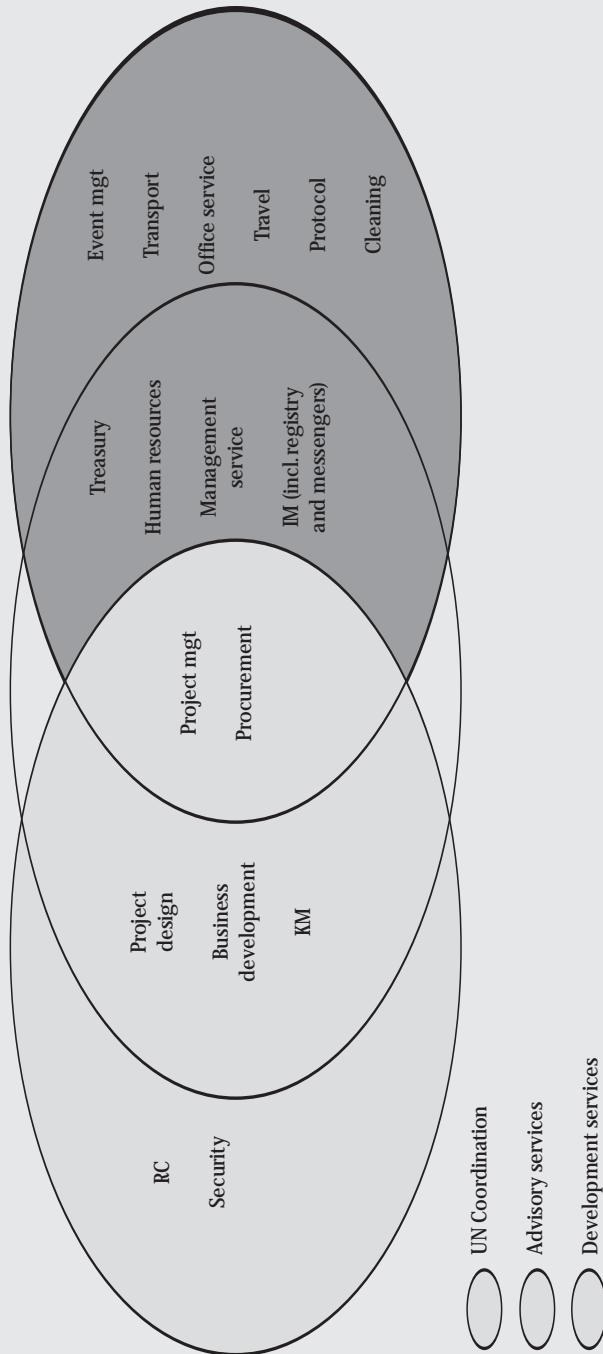


ANNEX XI: UNDP SYRIA COUNTRY OFFICE TEAM: REORGANIZATION IN PROGRESS

■ ANNEX XI: UNDP SYRIA COUNTRY OFFICE TEAM: REORGANIZATION IN PROGRESS

The UNDP Syria Team

UN Coordination Team	Advisory Service Team	Development Service Team	Management Service Team	Office Service Team
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UN Coordination

Advisory services

Development services

ANNEX XII: OVERVIEW OF KEY STAFF COMPETENCE & VACANCIES, UNDP SYRIA

Proposed Title	Level	University Degree	Post Graduate Degree	Others
Vacant—assistant Resident Representative / Programme Specialist	NO03			
Vacant—Poverty Alleviation Associate	GS07			
Environment Associate	GS07	BA Environmental Health	MSC Environmental Management	
Programme Associate	GS06	BA English Literature		
GEF Associate	GS06	Bsc. Civil Engineering	Certificate in Environmental Impact Assessment	
Programme Assistant	GS05	BA English Literature	MA in Political Science (under preparation)	
Programme Secretary		BA Economy and Business Administration		
Programme Finance Associate	GS07	BA Accounting	Msc Financial Management (under preparation)	
PSU Assistant		BA ACCOUNTING		
Vacant - Operations Analyst	NOB			
Operations Analyst	GS8/NO	BA English Literature	MA Business Administration (under preparation)	
Human Resources Associate	GS06	BA English Literature	HR Certificate (under preparation)	
Finance Associate	GS06	-	CMA Certificate (under preparation)	
Procurement Assistant	GS05	BA English Literature	MA Business Administration (under preparation)	
Personal Asst. to RR / Media Associate	GS06	BA English Literature		
IUNV/ICT Associate	International UNV	BA Communication		
DRR Sec/ IT Assistant	GS05	BA English Literature		

ANNEX XIII: STAFF TURNOVER SINCE 1999 IN UNDP SYRIA

Area of Intervention	Local Staff/ Academic Background
National Programme Officer	Ph.D. Economics (resigned)
IT & LAN Manager	B.A. Information Management (resigned)
Programme Officer/UNIDO	B.A. English Literature (agreed separation)
GEF Focal Point	B.A. Petro-Engineer (resigned)
Finance Officer	B.A. English Literature (agreed separation)
National Programme Officer	M.Sc. Economics (resigned)
E-Strategy/ICT	Junior Programme Officer (JPO) (end of assignment)
Web Master	B.A. Information Technology (resigned)
International Staff	
	Resident Representative
	Deputy Resident Representative

ANNEX XIV: ANNOUNCEMENT OF SHORT-TERM UNDP ASSIGNMENTS IN UNDP SYRIA

UNDP Syria is seeking to recruit highly qualified national consultants for a period of 6-9 months in the following areas:

1. Public Administration
2. Banking and Financial Studies
3. Economy/Development Planning
4. Statistics
5. Urban planning
6. Media and Advocacy

The consultants will be expected to assist the office develop concept notes and documents on a number of related fields.

Basic required qualifications:

1. At least a Master's degree in either public administration, governance, law, sociology economics, finance and banking studies, urban planning, architecture, civil engineering, statistics, media and communications.
2. Minimum of 5 years of responsible professional experience in above mentioned fields. Experience in multinational settings, such as the UN, is highly desirable.
3. Fluency in English and Arabic.
4. Ability to use relevant computer technology.

Qualified women and men are encouraged to apply (Syrian national only) and may submit a well written covering letter and a detailed curriculum vitae with supporting documents to: Ms. M. Siada, UNDP, P.O. Box 2317, Damascus, and the envelop should be clearly marked with the needed area. The deadline for receiving applications is 25 August 2004.

**APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AFTER
THE DEADLINE WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.**

ANNEX XV: GENERIC FRAMEWORK FOR AN ADVOCACY STRATEGY

IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY

UNDP development interventions face the inherent challenge of contributing to positively changing dynamic processes and roles involving institutions of state and market, and also within civil society and the informal sector where dynamics are played out politically, socially and economically at the micro level. UNDP is also expected to contribute to the capacity-building of its partners, using its global knowledge networks, information sources and expertise, and play an effective role in supporting the process of gender mainstreaming.

Addressing all these challenges in ways that reinforce past achievements and lay the groundwork for future successful interventions that maximize UNDP's contribution to national development results requires an effective framework for advocacy. This framework needs to be clearly linked to UNDP's development objectives and to its comparative advantage as a key player in promoting human development. In fact, the Evaluation Mission would point out that it is primarily through the effectiveness of its advocacy role that UNDP can strengthen its strategic positioning in Syria, as well as maximize its contribution to development results.

FRAMEWORK FOR AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY STRATEGY

The analysis of UNDP's strategic position and contribution to development results has revealed the need to develop a framework based on an approach that explicitly recognizes the following requirements:

- Develop a stronger strategic focus based on UNDP's core mandate of promoting human development and its comparative advantage in global experience and expertise, as well as its track record in Syria.
- Develop a stronger thematic focus on human development-related areas such as gender sensitive poverty reduction and democratic governance, and avoid supporting projects that are better left to other development partners, either because of funding concerns, or due to technical reasons.
- Define and develop the cross-cutting linkages identified in Part IV of the Report, and which the Evaluation Mission deems necessary as 'adjustments' to UNDP's strategic direction to support achievement of intended outcomes.

An important entry point for developing this approach is formulating an advocacy strategy that effectively functions as an 'umbrella' that addresses the linkages between these cross-cutting factors: building capacities and capabilities at leadership and middle management levels; addressing weaknesses in the M&E system and in the quality of data; developing strategic partnerships and resource mobilization; mainstreaming gender; promoting ICT; and addressing gaps in regulatory frameworks.

An effective advocacy strategy needs to be clearly based on UNDP's strategic strengths to achieve intended outputs and outcomes. Identifying strengths implies also recognizing weaknesses in terms of areas where UNDP does not have a strategic advantage, and where development interventions are best left to other strategic partners with the necessary expertise and funding means.

A second important step is to make a distinction between advocating at the macro versus the micro levels respectively. Focusing on the upstream level is crucial to support reform of the regulatory framework; advocate for poverty and gender sensitive policy formulation; and promote participatory decision-making processes based on the principles of transparency and accountability. Advocacy at the downstream level requires supporting decentralization, effective local governance and community participation. This in turn ensures involvement of the 'voiceless', be it based on such variables as ethnic and/or religious affiliation, gender, age, and limited or non-existent access to productive resources. Part of this step is to identify the groups at both the upstream and downstream levels that are to be the targets of advocacy efforts and which the UNDP aims to influence in directions that ensure that sustainable human development remains central to the development agenda in Syria.

A third step is to make a distinction between advocacy tools and objectives. Promoting brand name and logo, or distributing posters, are all tools that help raise UNDP's visibility in the public arena. Similarly, developing and updating websites serves as means to an end, both in terms of adding to UNDP's visibility, as well as disseminating information on its programmes and activities. By contrast, the objective of an advocacy strategy is to develop the messages through which UNDP aims to influence, promote and support specific strategic aims that are linked to its corporate mandate and profile, namely supporting human

development. This implies lobbying in support of achieving intended outcomes, and disseminating relevant knowledge and information on the basis of which counterparts and other relevant stakeholders can make informed choices and decisions.

The fourth step involves identifying and eliciting the support of strategic partners, who in turn can be divided into two groups: partners whose development objectives and activities overlap with and support UNDP's own development interventions; and partners who have hitherto not been much involved in supporting a sustainable human development agenda and therefore need to be convinced of its importance. A further distinction needs to be made between, on the one hand, strategic partners from among UN agencies, as well as multilateral and bilateral donors; and, on the other hand, local partners from among government counterparts and other stakeholders. Soliciting the involvement of the latter is an essential part of supporting the concept of national ownership and promoting sustainability of development interventions.

Advocacy as a means of achieving UNDP's strategic goals also requires seeking new partnerships that can support national development objectives. This could include potential partners such as the Chambers of Commerce and Industry respectively, as well as quasi-governmental partners such as the GUW, all of which can play a constructive role in the reform process. In particular, partnerships need to be forged with the newly emerging development-oriented NGOs, as well as with associations such as the Syrian Young Entrepreneurs, where advocacy on labour and women's rights, as well as on the socio-economic security of the income and capability poor, can be the focus of advocating for a pro-poor development agenda. This will represent a type of partnership that is not about raising funds, but rather about promoting UNDP's core mandate of achieving human development.

Last but not least, an effective advocacy strategy needs to address the process of resource mobilization. This is particularly crucial for UNDP Syria, where core funding is limited and non-core funding is expanding. Keeping in mind the previously mentioned advantages and disadvantages of this situation (see the section on resource mobilization above), the point is that since reliance on non-core funding makes the UNDP susceptible to the wishes and priorities of its donors, advocacy efforts are important to ensure that achieving human development remains firmly entrenched in the development agenda. But as indicated earlier, it is essential for UNDP to keep its attention on the rationale for its advocacy activities, i.e. that it concerns lobbying on ideas and values.

GENERIC MATRIX FOR AN EFFECTIVE UNDP ADVOCACY STRATEGY (SUGGESTED FORMAT)					
Programme Area/ Cross-Cutting Issue	Poverty	Governance	Environment	Disaster Management	HIV/AIDS
Building Capacities & Capabilities in Leadership & Middle Management					
M&E and Quality of Data					
Strategic Partnerships & Resource Mobilization					
Gender Mainstreaming					
ICT					
Regulatory Framework					