

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews the contribution of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to development results in the Republic of the Congo from 2004 to 2007. It examines the interventions of UNDP under the various thematic areas of the four-year country programme, with the aim of providing forward-looking recommendations meant to assist the UNDP country office and its partners in the formulation of programmes for the next programming cycle (2009–2013). This evaluation process, known as an Assessment of Development Results, was carried out on behalf of the UNDP Evaluation Office by three independent consultants working with Abacus International Management, L.L.C.

The report examines the context in which UNDP operates in the Republic of the Congo, mainly with regard to economic and human development. In addition, the report assesses the relevance of UNDP interventions to national priorities, as well as the role of UNDP within the national development aid community. UNDP programme components and themes are reviewed in terms of results achieved, effectiveness, sustainability and strategic positioning.

DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Since 1991, the Republic of the Congo has been engaged in a long transition towards multiparty democracy and a market economy. During the nineties, the transition was marked by repeated civil conflicts among largely ethnic-based militia groups. The country emerged from the civil wars only in 2000, when it started a reconciliation and rebuilding process.

While well advanced, this process has not been completed. Parts of the Pool Department, a south-eastern region hard hit by the latest conflict, remain under the control of militias, although violence has subsided. Under the

constitution adopted in 2002, a second round of elections started in 2007 with parliamentary elections. It should be followed by local elections in 2008 and a second presidential election the following year.

Reconciliation and peace remain fragile. However, it is hoped that the second cycle of elections will mark the definitive end of the transition period and indicate the strengthening of inclusive democracy and peace consolidation. This is conditioned on elections taking place without violence, as well as on the electoral process being perceived as fair and transparent.

The socio-economic situation of the Republic of the Congo remains grim, despite booming income derived from oil extraction and export. There is a disconnect between the two main economies. The first, comprising mainly the oil and wood industries, is modern, dynamic and export-oriented. The second economy is more traditional, based largely on subsistence agriculture, small businesses and services, and a large civil service. The result is a relatively good standing in the GDP per capita classification, under which the Republic of the Congo qualifies as a lower middle-income country, with an average income of US\$1,262. The reality behind the statistic, however, is one of acute poverty and a low human development index: the Republic of the Congo ranks 139th out of 177 countries.

The country is also highly indebted. In March 2006, the Republic of the Congo became eligible for debt relief under the International Monetary Fund Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative. As part of related discussions, the government committed to a number of reforms, particularly with regard to improving governance in all spheres of public life. Weaknesses in governance represent one of the major obstacles to development, together with human-capacity deficiencies within

the public administration. Reforms will only be possible with a strong political will and determined action on the part of government, as well as sustained international support.

There are major challenges facing the country in its furtherance of peace consolidation. On the socio-economic side, these include attaining sustainable growth and equitable redistribution of wealth. On the socio-political side, the challenge is to move beyond past conflicts and tensions by completing the transition towards an inclusive democratic system that protects the rights of citizens and ensures human security. Meeting these challenges will require far-reaching reforms promoting responsible and transparent governance, coupled with strong and determined political will on the part of leaders at all levels of authority.

UNDP ROLE

During and immediately after the civil conflicts, UNDP operated on an *ad hoc*, project-by-project basis. In September 2003, the Executive Board approved a four-year programme for the period 2004–2007. The programme was subsequently extended by one year for the purpose of harmonizing programming cycles among several United Nations agencies operating in the country.

The programme adopted in 2003 addressed three major themes: good governance, poverty reduction, and environmental and natural-resource management. In addition, three cross-cutting areas were identified for inclusion in all activities: gender, HIV/AIDS, and new information and communications technologies. The programme set out to:

- Increase the capacity of the principal governance institutions, mainly through support that addresses the needs of parliamentary institutions, local authorities and civil society;
- Strengthen capacity for reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on the part of the government and civil society; and

- Strengthen the capacity of national and sectoral authorities to plan and implement integrated approaches to environmental management and energy development that meet the needs of the poor.

RELEVANCE OF INTERVENTIONS

The evaluation team found that programmes were generally relevant to the strategies and policies of the government and to UNDP corporate objectives. The programmes addressed needs that are important for sustaining the country's efforts of pursuing and completing the transition towards democracy, a free-market economy and social justice.

Surprisingly, the approved country programme did not address conflict prevention and recovery as a separate category of support. Although a number of activities fell under this programming theme, they were subsumed under the theme of poverty reduction. The programmes would have been more coherent, had conflict prevention and recovery been addressed either directly or through an approach that emphasized peace consolidation in all areas of intervention, particularly in governance.

In this respect, it should be noted that the UNDP country office adopted a new approach in an internal restructuring at the beginning of 2007, when it entrusted a dedicated Governance and Peace Consolidation Unit with management responsibility for governance and post-conflict projects.

In addition, the country office had limited UNDP core resources at its disposal. This made it more difficult to use such resources as seed money to attract contributions for important but under-funded activities, particularly the environment programme. In response, the office developed an aggressive and successful fund mobilization strategy. However, some UNDP partners—among the donors and within the government—consider this emphasis on fund mobilization to be excessive.

The government and aid-community partners recognized a number of UNDP interventions as particularly relevant. Projects and areas of activity that represent comparative advantages and should be built upon in the next programme cycle include:

- **Support to the formulation of key national documents related to poverty reduction.** This included two National Human Development Reports and, in close partnership with The World Bank, the interim and final Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. UNDP also assisted the government in producing the 2004 National MDG Report and the near-final national strategy for achieving them;
- **Support to parliamentary institutions** and the effective advocacy it allowed UNDP to mount among parliamentarians on a number of cross-cutting issues, such as gender, HIV/AIDS and the environment;
- **Effective assistance in the development of legislation on political parties and the role of women in politics.** On the legislative side, support was accompanied by concrete operational programmes to train the cadre of political parties and to help establish networks promoting the role of women in politics;
- **Innovative environmental programme** to support conservation, alternative sources of energy and sanitation in large urban areas;
- **Judicious use of high-visibility initiatives and field offices,** such as the public burning of collected weapons as instruments for signalling a return to normalcy across the country (including in more troubled areas) and, despite several operational weaknesses, the continued presence of the United Nations alongside the population; and
- **Effective advocacy campaign,** which used the media, civil society and key institutions, such as the Parliament, to promote a pro-poor agenda.

OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The UNDP country office has implemented a sound and balanced approach that combines upstream

and downstream interventions. The programme also demonstrated a degree of operational synergy, particularly in support provided to parliamentary institutions, which, in turn, became powerful advocacy vehicles. Similar synergies were also evident in several community development projects and the small arms collection programme, which were conducted in Brazzaville and the Pool Department.

Weaker points include:

- *Mainstreaming cross-cutting issues into programming.* There was a deficiency in the inclusion of cross-cutting themes in the initial design of certain projects, although corrective action was generally taken at a later stage;
- *Unfavourable local perception of UNDP.* Despite important efforts towards improving programme delivery, UNDP is viewed as slow to disburse funds, deficient in reporting quality and heavily bureaucratic in management style; and
- *Lacking clarity of outcomes and indicators.* The definitions of outcomes and their indicators remained weak. Available financial and human resources were not sufficient to undertake the monitoring needed for on-demand programme adjustments or meaningful final evaluations. This weakened the capacity of the office to illustrate results and justify donor trust.

SUSTAINABILITY OF RESULTS

Programme sustainability remains the major weakness of UNDP operations in the Republic of the Congo. Numerous projects achieved generally positive results and produced pre-defined material outputs; however, many such projects also failed to produce the intended outcomes or to develop mechanisms that ensure long-term result viability.

With reference to achieving result sustainability, there is a need for a distinction between upstream and downstream interventions.

In many cases, upstream support provided by UNDP had been successful in putting in place the strategy and policy frameworks or the plans of action required. Since the expected outcomes will materialize over time, upstream projects and programmes are sometimes referred to as ‘dormant successes’.

In contrast, the sustainability of downstream projects often depends on the availability of dedicated national or local budgets, the capacity of managers and beneficiaries to develop independent sources of income, and the capacity to manage projects with the goal of maintaining initial results. Most often, such resources and capacities are absent. Consequently, a number of projects, particularly those dealing with infrastructure rehabilitation, are destined for rapid deterioration due to lack of maintenance or the collapse of local management committees.

UNDP needs to address sustainability through a persistent and structured effort at developing and maintaining realistic and measurable means to foster national ownership. Concrete measures are needed to ensure that the country’s institutions and community groups have both the willingness and the capacity to take over long-term responsibility for programmes. In particular, new initiatives are required to cultivate a higher level of government commitment through increased government cost sharing.

POSITIONING AND COORDINATION

UNDP has made judicious decisions in selecting programme interventions. Now that it is time to move forward and adapt to the changing reality of the country, the continued relevance of post-conflict interventions should increasingly be questioned. New interventions should focus on the major challenges faced by the Republic of the Congo a decade after the end of active conflict. Peace consolidation, mainly through focused governance and community development interventions, represents a key requirement in order for the country to move beyond the post-conflict period and the current stabilization phase.

To accomplish this, UNDP needs to be more forceful in building on its comparative advantages in the areas of community development and governance.

A major effort will be required to develop—and at times, mend—relationships with certain members of the development aid community. Current coordination mechanisms should be examined with a view towards improving efficiency and complementarity. This can take the form of a participative exercise among partners.

The accomplishments of the United Nations (UN) Country Team during the preparation of the next United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) can prove particularly meaningful for UNDP efforts to improve its performance in developing results-based programmes for the next cycle. For monitoring and evaluation in particular, the UNDAF should provide opportunities for a clearer identification of measurable outcomes and indicators, as well as for joint programme evaluations with UN partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Twelve recommendations are derived from the analysis contained in this report. These are:

GENERAL AND STRATEGIC ISSUES

1. The next Republic of the Congo country programme should build upon demonstrated UNDP comparative advantages. These include UNDP support for good governance, pro-poor and community development approaches, a regional approach to environmental issues and strong advocacy capability. UNDP should gradually phase out post-conflict activities.
2. In order to ensure lasting stability and sustainable development, peace consolidation should become the central focus and underlying theme for most UNDP activities, particularly those in good governance and poverty reduction.
3. UNDP should continue to emphasize the linkages between upstream and downstream

approaches, intervening at both political and operational levels in all programmes.

4. Based on experience in other countries, UNDP should engage the government in negotiations aimed at increasing national cost-sharing contributions to at least equal the resources allocated by UNDP.
5. Particular attention needs to be devoted to fostering national ownership and ensuring sustainability. This could include:
 - Greater attention during the project design phase to incorporating a sustainable exit strategy, based on identifying the national mechanisms expected to take over, defining conditions of an effective management transfer and establishing benchmarks for monitoring relevant preparations and the capacity of the chosen national entity;
 - Intensified efforts in national capacity-building through establishing a comprehensive and structured programme in close coordination with the government and other development actors;
 - Continued gradual and prudent approach to increasing the national execution component of programmes; and
 - A clear demonstration of the political will of national authorities in addition to their commitment to assuming ownership of programmes, in particular through increased cost-sharing as outlined in recommendation four above.
6. In close consultation with all partners, UNDP should start to reflect on ways to improve coordination among development actors. This is of particular importance for good governance initiatives, in view of the UNDP intent to further develop its support to some financial oversight and administrative institutions.

OPERATIONAL ISSUES

7. The UNDP country office in the Republic of the Congo should vigorously pursue its efforts to improve programme delivery. In addition, measures of rewarding staff efficiency should be established, and the new Centre for Project Execution and Support¹ should be independently evaluated in 2009, after two full years of operation.
8. The formulation of outcomes, indicators and means of verification should be improved. In possible collaboration with donor-partners, the UNDP country office must ensure that sufficient financial and human resources are devoted to monitoring outcomes as well as outputs. In defining outcomes for the next UNDAF, UNDP should build upon inter-agency work and encourage the development of a system-wide approach to outcome monitoring and evaluation.
9. The country office should engage partners in discussions geared towards improving the performance and efficiency of Project Review Committees and Steering Committees.
10. UNDP offices outside Brazzaville need to develop their services for the benefit of both UN agencies and non-governmental organizations. This should include creating open and inclusive coordination hubs at the local level, promoting cross-fertilization, and undertaking activities such as mapping development and humanitarian actors, which was previously done through the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
11. More attention should be given to the mainstreaming of gender and HIV/AIDS considerations into the country programme during its initial design phase.
12. While direct environmental interventions should continue, particularly in subregional contexts, the country office's intent to treat such concerns as cross-cutting should be encouraged.

1 Centre d'exécution et d'appui aux projets.