

**ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT RESULTS:
MALDIVES**

Executive Summary

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Background and context

An Assessment of Development Results is an independent country-level evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) contributions to the development results of the country. The objectives of the Maldives Assessment of Development Results are:

- To provide an independent assessment of the degree of progress towards the expected outcomes envisaged in UNDP programme documents
- To provide an analysis of how UNDP has positioned itself to add value in response to country needs and changes in the country's development context
- To present key findings, draw key lessons and provide a set of clear, forward-looking options for management to make adjustments in the current country strategy and programme cycle

The period covered by this evaluation is from 2003 to the present. During this time UNDP-Maldives adopted two country programmes. Poverty reduction is at the forefront of activities, which is closely followed by democratic governance. The environment thematic area also features in both country programmes. However, in the current country programme, the area is broadened to encompass disaster management. This reflects the disaster which struck the Maldives in the form of the 2004 tsunami and which saw the UNDP country office spearheading an international and UN-wide relief effort many times the size of its normally modest country programme.

Methodology

In carrying out this Assessment of Development Results, the evaluation team has been guided by the UNDP Evaluation Office Method Manual and the norms and standards established by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). Team members have adhered to the ethical guidelines for evaluators in the United Nations system and the Code of Conduct, also established by UNEG.

The entire portfolio of 49 projects and six main clusters of non-project activities have been taken into account in the assessment. However, it was not possible to go into detail with all 49 projects. Therefore, a sample of projects and non-project activities was selected for deeper analysis. The sampling criteria applied by the evaluation team took into account the two country programmes, the six practice areas, types of outcomes targeted, different beneficiaries, execution modality, project status, and the geographic spread of the interventions.

Following the guidance in the Assessment of Development Results Manual, the evaluation criteria that were used were: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

The criteria that were used to assess UNDP's strategic positioning in the Maldives context were: strategic relevance, responsiveness, contribution to UN values, strategic partnerships and contribution to UN coordination.

Two basic tools were used in the search for primary data and information: document reviews and face-to-face consultations, including individual interviews, stakeholders group discussions and field visits. Face-to-face consultations were the preferred method of consultation.

Of the 260 persons met and/or consulted, 25 were from UNDP, 57 were from the central Government (ministries, departments and special agencies), 17 were from UN agencies, 9 were from other partners (e.g., embassies), 28 were from NGOs, 11 were project personnel, 90 were atoll and island officials, 19 were community members (beneficiaries and individuals), and four were from the private sector.

Triangulation was used to ensure that empirical evidence collected from one source (for example, documentation such as reports) was validated from at least two other sources (for example, through interviews or surveys).

The country programmes and the Assessment of Development Results were subjected to a number of influences during the past seven years. Of these, the tsunami response (by the Maldives and by UNDP) came in the middle of the Third Country Programme and commandeered all energies and attention. It transformed the country office function, galvanized the attention of Government and led to the suspension of many projects and other initiatives for a time. The team had to cope with the complexity of a country programme interrupted by such an event.

The political changes which came about with the change of Government created new priorities and demands for UNDP. They also led to very significant changes in personnel both in the Government as well as in UNDP, affecting corporate memory, commitments, etc., creating some difficulties for the team.

The geographical fragmentation of Maldives – 1,192 islands spread over 900km of the Indian Ocean – posed some challenges for the team and restricted field visits.

Key findings and conclusions

Development challenges and the development community response

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Maldives is vulnerable geographically and socio-economically. Taking the Sixth and Seventh National Development Plans together with the Government Manifesto and the Tsunami Recovery Plan, a number of salient development challenges emerge. These are economic vulnerability; environment; human rights/community empowerment; a free, fair and just nation; geographical fragmentation; youth issues; gender equity; poverty (especially the disparity between Malé/Atolls in lack of choice and opportunity).

As an LDC, Maldives has relied to a great extent on development aid and Japan has been the Maldives' largest donor. It has provided support for seawall construction, fisheries, island electrification and other infrastructure projects. Other key donors and development partners over the past three years include the ADB, the EC, the Netherlands, IFAD, the Global Fund and UNDP.

Overall UNDP response

In the five years from 2004 to 2008, UNDP-Maldives had a portfolio of some 49 projects with a total core funds commitment of \$5.873 million. Over the same period, UNDP was able to generate \$6.818 million in non-core funding in addition to the tsunami funds of \$40.337 million.

The UNDP programme, like that of other UN agencies, is spread too thinly, thus reducing effectiveness. Partly because UNDP is one of the few international agencies in the country, it stretches too few human and financial resources over a very wide range of interventions. Although UNDP interventions are relevant and provide a justified response to national needs, they are sometimes not sufficiently fitted to ministries' priorities and they may also tend to over-stretch government capacity.

UNDP has provided some effective inter-agency support (within the UN Country Team) to national needs, including the Youth Report, support to the Human Rights Commission, and the MDG reports, which provide useful examples and experiences of collaboration. As the largest UN agency on site and given its multi-sectoral mandate, there is scope for greater UNDP support in knitting the country team together.

UNDP is a valued and trusted Government partner

Within the UN system, the presence and contribution of the UNDP country office is of paramount importance to the Government, especially given the fact that most donors do not prioritize the Maldives as a beneficiary country. UNDP support is viewed very positively by the Government, particularly at the central level. The most valued UNDP attributes include its longstanding presence, its flexibility and responsiveness, including to unplanned emergencies or changing development plans, and its ability to provide as well as to access international expertise. UNDP has over time evolved a very good sense of the challenges the country faces and is able to provide guidance and technical assistance from this standpoint. UNDP has forged strong working relations with government implementing counterparts, as well as some good private-sector and civil society partnerships.

UNDP's effective policy support covers the democratization process, the decentralization process, legislative reform, and environmental management. When it comes to governance, UNDP support to democratization, including support to new democratic institutions, is widely recognized. However, there is much more to be done to reinforce democratic gains, still considered as fragile by many, particularly as regards the country's capacity for tolerance of opposing viewpoints and beliefs. There is a pressing need to unblock the stalemate in parliament, and the capacity of key institutions such as parliament and the judiciary remains worryingly weak.

There are mixed results with regard to support in the area of livelihoods and post-tsunami reconstruction at the atoll and island level. While some individuals and communities benefited, others were not able to use or to sustain the benefits extended to them. In addition, there were many complaints of irregularity, lack of transparency, and wastage. Insufficient capacity has been developed to enable islanders to tap into regional or national systems – markets, transport, knowledge, and investment opportunities, among others – during these interventions. Such an objective cannot be achieved by one or more projects without a national policy framework and a government-led integrated effort supported by multiple agencies.

UNDP has been effective in advocacy, including through its support to interventions like the inter-agency MDG and Youth Voices reports. However, the reports of the independent UN-appointed Special Rapporteurs have not been utilized fully as advocacy tools.

Weak capacity and institutional frameworks are the most significant barriers to effective implementation and sustainability. There have been some positive results with regard to capacity development at the policy level, for example, in the area of energy, effective waste management, and climate change. However, opportunities to develop national capacities are sometimes missed through reliance on international rather than national consultants and the failure to pair nationals with internationals to enable learning.

The view of UNDP effectiveness at the island/atoll level is very different from that at the central level. The best example of this is the support that UNDP provides to disaster management. The central level believed that UNDP had responded well in its efforts to strengthen national capacity, including by integrating disaster risk reduction in the national building code, school curriculum, and enhancing national capacity. At the island/atoll level, however, there appeared to be little awareness of how to deal with disaster and much confusion about roles.

Gender equality and youth remain major areas for support

In spite of progress towards gender parity at primary and secondary levels, gender equality and the rights of women are a particular concern at many levels. This area has been one of the most impacted by the transition given institutional changes and loss of access to resources at a time when strengthening conservative trends threaten progress to date. At the same time, capacity for gender analysis and programming is limited within the country and appears insufficiently developed within UNDP. Gender stereotypes remain largely unchallenged whether through regular project or non-project interventions or disaster-response interventions such as those related to the tsunami.

UNDP and the UN system have played an important role in drawing national attention to youth issues through their support for the Youth Voices report and the laudable participatory process this followed. However, this has not been followed through. While youth – nearly 50 percent of the country's population – face serious challenges, there is inadequate national or UN system response. This bodes ill for the country's future political and socio-economic development.

Although HIV/AIDS is recognized as a threat of potentially disastrous proportions at the central level, there is little awareness of the problem at the local level, even though there is widespread concern among the population in both Malé and the atolls about drug use and unsafe sexual behaviour. The effectiveness of the HIV/AIDS programme is limited due partly to the Global Fund's focus on numerical targets rather than qualitative results and partly due to lack of clarity regarding roles and ownership, although this issue may be on the way to being solved. However, the HIV/AIDS initiative may not be sustainable after the out-posted project personnel leave because limited capacity has been built and the Government would not be able to match their salaries.

UNDP programme design and implementation need to be more robust

It is difficult to establish a logical flow in the thematic areas between government priorities, UNDAF outcomes and the UNDP country programme. The reasons, some of which are beyond the country office's control, include changes in national plans, broad UNDAF statement of outcomes, and the fact that project reporting does not generally trace the link from outputs to outcomes using baselines and indicators.

UNDP-hosted cross-sectoral and thematic meetings that bring counterparts together as part of mid-term and other review processes have been useful learning opportunities. UNDP has also facilitated project implementation by enabling partners to address lack of clarity and tensions through joint task forces and other mechanisms. In the case of the important Atoll Ecosystem-based Conservation Project, the mid-term evaluation findings were used to support a participatory revision by project management and stakeholders, leading to valuable intermediate results.

The practice of embarking on projects with budgets that are partly unfunded on the basis that the remainder would be raised while implementation proceeds, is a risky one.

In general, risk factors are identified at the project formulation stage, but it is not clear that the mitigation strategies proposed would effectively deal with the risks or that key barriers have been identified and addressed.

Few projects had developed exit strategies with serious implications for sustainability of interventions. Where there are clearly defined exit strategies, there are question marks as to whether they will work. Some projects rely on further funding to become available for continued interventions or replication.

Partly due to the impact of the tsunami, there was insufficient documentation to fully assess development results, particularly in the area of poverty reduction. There seemed to be better availability of reporting and evaluation documents in the case of the environment and HIV/AIDS projects where globally mandated criteria appear to be more strictly enforced.

5.2 Recommendations

The evaluation team addresses the following recommendations primarily to the UNDP country office for action, but they are equally of interest to the Government in its role as beneficiary and other stakeholders and agencies as partners with UNDP. This section is organized in three clusters of recommendations. The first one focuses on the strategic level, the second on the components of the UNDP country programme, and the third on project design. All clusters are considered of equal importance and priority. However, within each cluster, the recommendations are in order of importance.

5.2.1 At the Strategic Level

Recommendation 1: UNDP should continue to provide support to the small UN Country Team to strive towards a higher level of joint planning, implementation and monitoring.

For a small country such as the Maldives with only four UN agencies on the ground, and with a very modest resource base, UNDP as part of the UNCT will be more effective if agencies increased the proportion of truly joint interventions. It is not enough to simply avoid duplication or exchange information; there is a need to further complement and achieve an enhanced level of synergy between the respective country programmes of the UN agencies active in the Maldives particularly given the small resource base.

Recommendation 2: UNDP must adopt a more strategic approach in its country programme – an approach which has a sharp focus on a narrower range of themes while addressing the main barriers of weak policy and weak capacity.

Such an approach is more effective if UNDP and the UN system in the Maldives can revert to a five-year cycle thus ensuring a more predictable timescale within which to plan strategically. The UNDP effort is currently spread too thinly and its work at the atoll/island level is patchy and not very effective. Furthermore, the two main barriers to sustainable development (lack of capacity and lack of policy) still present a challenge. Attempts to harmonize UNDP's planning cycle with that of the Government are not possible since the latter tends to change at different frequency.

Recommendation 3: The focus of the UNDP country programme should continue to be upstream, at the central and (eventually) provincial level.

At a minimum, all interventions should have a strong policy component or arise directly from one.

5.2.2 On the UNDP country programme components

Recommendation 4: UNDP should reduce its effort in the poverty alleviation thematic area at the community level and concentrate instead on the policy level.

It should focus initially at central Government level and eventually at provincial government level (not activities at the local level) when the decentralization policy starts showing results. Addressing poverty upstream can set the foundations for follow-up work by the likes of the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

Recommendation 5: The country programme should continue to focus on governance/human rights as a flagship theme at the central level, with particular emphasis on the judiciary and parliamentary development; and it should move into provincial government support as and when the decentralization policy starts showing results.

UNDP has a comparative advantage in the area of governance; it has credibility, and it has some successes – it should build on these positives.

Recommendation 6: UNDP should refocus environment work on climate and biodiversity while broadening the resource base beyond the Global Environment Facility and exploring the possibility of support from the private sector.

Adaptation to climate change (not a focus on reducing carbon emissions) is a matter of survival for the Maldives. This is also true for protection of the coral reef ecosystems and coastal vegetation – both from the point of view of physical protection, and as the main attraction for the tourism industry.

Recommendation 7: Pass on the coordination and initiative on disaster and risk management activities to the National Disaster Management Centre, ensuring that it is strengthened as part of programme implementation.

This is a core function of the Government and UNDP should be enhancing Government capacity to take it over rather than carrying out the function.

Recommendation 8: Develop Government capacity to manage the HIV/AIDS programme with a view to handing over the programme to the Government and giving the lead within the UNCT to UNFPA and WHO.

UNDP's involvement was brought about because of the lack of capacity in Government. The aim of the organization should therefore be to remove this barrier by building the capacity and handing the programme back to the Government.

Recommendation 9: UNDP should adopt and support a strategic approach to gender equality.

It should address gender stereotypes that promote the empowerment of women through greater opportunity for participation of women at senior levels in government, access to non-traditional occupations (in particular out of Male), equality within the family, and access to justice. UNDP should build on the successes achieved through the reform of the Constitution and other human rights initiatives.

Recommendation 10: While not necessarily taking a programme lead on youth, UNDP should facilitate UNCT action so that it, together with other relevant agencies, can support a sustained and strategic national intervention to tackle this pressing concern.

Addressing the challenges facing youth is one of the most pressing needs of the Maldives. As demonstrated by the Youth Voices Project, Youth is a good area for a joint UN approach with each agency contributing from its area of comparative advantage. UNDP should lead through facilitation and funding.

5.2.3 On project design

Recommendation 11: Except for one-off responses to emerging needs, UNDP must ensure that right at the project design stages, a project fits within the strategic framework of the Country Programme Document outcomes which in turn should fit with the UNDAF.

Each project must be within the adopted intervention strategy, building on previous work and leading to the next. To the extent possible, UNDP projects should seek to complement and

cooperate with projects of UNCT partners, focus on the country's strategic needs, build on earlier results and lead strategically to new ones.

Recommendation 12: All interventions must aim to increase local capacity (a main barrier to sustainable development) and enhance empowerment.

All interventions must leave behind enhanced capacity and indicators should be created to ascertain this. In seeking always to enhance local capacity, project consultants should be sought first at the local level and all international consultants should be twinned with locals. Projects must be designed to address barriers (such as capacity and policy gaps) more overtly and more directly.

Recommendation 13: Engage in effective performance monitoring for adaptive management and make exit strategies and sustainability plans an essential element of all projects

Structured monitoring informs management on any adjustments and adaptations necessary in view of changed circumstances. Enhance capacity during project life to enable effective handover of project products and/or services. Aim for outcomes, not merely outputs.