UNDP enjoys high profile in Guatemala and is highly appreciated as a neutral broker, a facilitator of dialogue and discussion on the most sensitive issues. UNDP has a considerable reputational capital inherited from its past involvement in the negotiation of the Peace Agreement and its collaboration with Verification Mission of the United Nations in Guatemala (MINUGUA, 1994-2004). At the same time UNDP strategic focus has weakened, in the past years, affecting the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of its contribution to development in the country.

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES
A multi-ethnic country, Guatemala occupies an area that was once the heart of the Mayan civilization. Historically, the indigenous population has been marginalized from the country’s political process. From the 1960s until the mid-1990s, guerrilla forces and military governments were locked in an armed conflict whose main victims were the indigenous people. An “Agreement for a Firm and Lasting Peace” was signed in 1996 between the Government of Guatemala and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union. Early successes were the rapid demobilization of the guerrilla forces, political openness and an end to political persecution. However, much remains to be done to achieve the peace agenda’s goals and various commitments are behind schedule. One important example is violence and insecurity: the total number of homicides has been rising since 1999.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS
In Guatemala, UNDP effectively contributed to combine the UN peace building mandate of the General Assembly with post conflict development interventions.

UNDP’s past involvement with peace agreements and its cooperation with MINUGUA marked UNDP’s strategy and portfolio. Today UNDP in Guatemala is recognised as a neutral agency, a facilitator and promoter of dialogue on sensitive issues and between opposite groups.

UNDP generated value added in the areas of governance and crisis prevention and recovery. UNDP’s record is less strong in poverty reduction, energy and environment, two areas that may gain importance with the current global economic crisis, challenging past UNDP approaches.

In the case of governance, UNDP supported the technical capacities of public institutions at the central, municipal and community levels. It also contributed to the creation of strategic plans and relevant institutions to address the agrarian conflict in the country. It played an important role in supporting civil society associations.

In the case of crisis prevention and recovery, it played a fundamental role in the dignifying of victims of armed conflict by promoting a holistic approach including anthropological forensic research psychosocial assistance for the families of victims and support to a national compensation programme.

UNDP was also active in disaster risk-reduction and mitigation: in this case, it developed new methods and instruments to improve public responses to disasters such as tropical storm Stan. Inter alia they include a new approach to post-disaster reconstruction, matching risk management with economic initiatives for income generation. These approaches are being increasingly “owned” by public authorities in Guatemala.

The record is less strong in the areas of poverty and environment, with the notable exception of the National Human Development Report. Yet poverty and environment are likely to acquire more prominence in the near future: the first symptoms of the global crisis have become visible in early 2009.

UNDP has been relatively successful in supporting the implementation of social programmes but less so in helping to shape the related policies. Its environmental agenda has been driven by external funding (GEF) and has limited visibility in the country.
Guatemala socio-economic and political contexts is challenging and volatile. Against this background, UNDP has made efforts to introduce strategic planning but the effects have been relatively weak in terms of orienting and improving its programmes.

The context in Guatemala has been characterized by deep divisions in the population, reflected in a shifting political party spectrum as a consequence of weak coalitions since the Peace Accords. Overall tax collection has traditionally been very low, and the legal framework for public administration complicated.

UNDP Guatemala’s strong dependence on external resources provided incentives to respond to shifting external demands for its services, not always in accordance with its substantive mandate. Resources and tools have been limited for substantive support from the headquarters to the country office. Senior management of the UNDP country office changed frequently in the evaluated period, with consequent changes in priorities. Against this scenario, the strategy defined by UNDP and its partners retained little power to orient its activities. At the country level no strong mechanisms (such as an Advisory Council with high-level members from major sectors in the country) were in place to introduce greater continuity beyond government cycles.

UNDP was active in the management of public programmes for the Government. There are incentives for UNDP and for the Government to entrust the administration of public programmes to UNDP. However this substitutes for strengthening the efficiency of the State and inflates UNDP’s resources in less substantive administrative activities. Its effects on long-term institutional strengthening are ambiguous at least.

Twelve years after signing the Peace agreements, a sobering recognition of limited advances in attaining its objectives prevails, pointing also to the need for a more effective use of international cooperation resources.

Crucial socio-economic structures such as access to and ownership of production factors, inclusion into political decision centres, and enforcement of human and civil rights changed little. International cooperation and UNDP, while providing support in many public areas, have produced limited results for a more equal development in favour of disadvantaged groups, and of indigenous peoples in particular.

In the field of security, due to the configuration of the political forces in the country and limited public and international commitment, the spread-out support could not reverse a continuously worsening situation of violence and insecurity and this during a time of economic stability and growth.

For both the development and the security agenda, there is an urgent need to better align and harmonize international development cooperation with government policies and local efforts, calling for national coordination capacities to be strengthened, a role UNDP could support, at the request of the government, to a greater extent.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clarify UNDP’s intended role and value added in the areas of poverty reduction, energy and the environment.
- Rebalance UNDP support to the Government in favour of increased high-level advisory services. In particular, strengthen high-level advisory mechanisms in the country representing its major sectors to support UNDP senior management in shaping and maintaining long-term strategies.
- Support the Government when and where it requests help to better comply with harmonization of international cooperation and quality control mechanisms.
- Within the UN System, support a process of greater harmonization among the agendas of each agency, eliminating duplication and acting with one voice where pertinent from the perspective of the national authorities.
- Enhance the strategic and programmatic support of the Regional Bureau towards the country office, from its central office in New York and/or from its sub-regional office in Panama.
- Increase opportunities for collaboration with the private sector in the issue of corporate social responsibility, including its private, national and overseas foundations.
- Reinforce the function of monitoring and evaluation at the UNDP project and programme level and help establish monitoring and evaluation capacities of the Government.