

Chapter 4

STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF UNDP COUNTRY PROGRAMMES

UNDP's strategic positioning in the NCCs is reviewed in this chapter in terms of 1) the *relevance* and *responsiveness* of its country programmes to national priorities as well as to UNDP's mandate; and 2) the *balance* between UNDP's involvement in the design and implementation of projects and its other activities. Among the latter, special attention is given to: 1) partnerships with different segments of civil society, the private sector or the UN system (which can also be pursued within as well as outside the context of projects in the country programme); 2) resource mobilization and the provision of programming assistance to aid institutions in developing countries; and 3) information programmes related to UNDP's role and services.

4.1 RELEVANCE OF COUNTRY PROGRAMMES

4.1.1 RELEVANCE TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

The goals of the last two programming cycles are closely aligned to the national development challenges summarized in Chapter 1. This is not surprising, since country programmes are developed in conjunction with and funded by the governments concerned.

The relevance of country programmes to a country's priorities is more difficult to assess. This also raises the question of relevance to whom. From the perspective of NCC governments, the projects are relevant since governments themselves approve individual project proposals. Moreover, these projects are largely initiated by government partners and presumably fill a need.

Notwithstanding the strong sense of ownership of UNDP projects by implementing partners and central ministries, the alignment of country programmes to national priorities can be strengthened by:

- Minimizing the inclusion of some questionable projects not obviously related to central national development priorities (a point that was noted by respondents to the NSPRs as well as country offices).
- Covering areas that are central national priorities—for example, poverty reduction in Saudi Arabia (as requested by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and suggested by civil society participants in the NSPR)—while recognizing that there are limits to the number of areas in which UNDP can become involved.

In short: The alignment of UNDP country programmes is strong but can be improved. Given the dynamics of how projects are identified, this must be primarily a government responsibility, working together with civil society partners where appropriate. Strengthening the programming function should facilitate this; it is particularly important in the absence of clear articulation of national priorities, as is the case in most NCCs.

4.1.2 RELEVANCE TO UNDP'S MANDATE

UNDP-supported projects in the Arab region NCCs are relevant to the organization's mandate to varying degrees, but there are some notable exceptions. These projects are small in number but can represent a significant share of the budget and even more in terms of programme expenditures. On the other hand, much of the important work that is promoting human development stems

from engagement with civil society and is financed by a variety of UNDP sources, including trust funds, regional programmes and Resident Coordinator budgets.

It should also be noted that demand is not strong in all of UNDP's practice areas, such as those that directly affect the country's ability to achieve its commitments under the Millennium Declaration and, more specifically, the MDGs. The absence of programme goals relating to gender equality or HIV/AIDS, for example, reflects the fact that these are of moderate significance to the NCC governments rather than weaknesses in alignment per se.

4.2 RESPONSIVENESS TO NATIONAL PRIORITIES

UNDP's responsiveness or non-responsiveness to changes in national priorities is an important issue for NCCs, since the lack of core resources could have an impact on the ability to respond. Responsiveness is also affected by the ability of the country office to identify emerging opportunities and take subsequent action. In all five NCCs, UNDP responded quickly and well to emerging trends. Typically, this response was initiated by the use of UNDP funding. The country offices were able to identify emerging national trends and subsequent activities that were central to UNDP's mandate in virtually all Arab region NCCs.

One particularly illustrative example is from Bahrain. As described below, UNDP responded quickly to the changes in the political situation and progress towards greater democracy that began in 1999. The country cooperation framework (CCF) for 1998-2001, for example, was extended to 2002 specifically to "enable greater and fuller implementation of the CCF and timely preparation of the new CCF, given the new reforms being announced in the country."²³ The new country programme outline (2003-2007) reacted by

engaging on two fronts: women and human rights and, as a consequence, implemented a number of key projects:

- **Strengthening the Institution of the Shura Council & the Council of Representatives in Bahrain** was signed in early 2004 and aimed to support these newly created institutions. The project is financed by government cost-sharing (\$150,000) and the UNDP Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund (\$50,000).
- In mid-2005, representatives of UNDP and the Supreme Council for Women signed the **Action Plan for the Political Empowerment of Women** project, aimed at supporting women candidates in advance of the 2006 parliamentary and municipal elections. Other international organizations tried to support the election process, but were not allowed to interfere. UNDP managed to get approval for its intervention through the fact that Bahrain had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- An ongoing project to **Improve the Institutional Capacity of the Parliament**, which aims to provide newly elected members support to improve their skills and knowledge. In 2005, UNDP raised \$100,000 from its Thematic Trust Fund for Democratic Governance—which represents half the total budget.
- **Supporting Political Reform with the Bahrain Institute for Political Development** was signed in late 2006. The institute had been established by the government two years earlier to support its commitment to promote and accelerate political reform.

Projects financed by governments also showed some responsiveness to national priorities. For example, the inclusion of environment as a new goal in the second country programmes of

23 UNDP-Bahrain country programme outline (2003-2007).

Bahrain and the UAE and the increasing number of environmental projects in the second cycle in Kuwait and the current cycle in Libya reflect the increasing importance of this area among national priorities. In Libya as well, the second country programme became involved in decentralization and local governance in response to the government's comprehensive decentralization process—a trend that is being continued in the country programme document. Finally, in Saudi Arabia, the project to support municipal elections in 2004 is a good example of UNDP's quick response to evolving priorities.

4.3 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The development of strategic partnerships has become a mainstream practice throughout UNDP's work at the corporate, regional and country level. UNDP is committed to promoting partnerships within the UN system and with state, civil society and private sector organizations to support country-led development efforts.

Private sector. Although the economies of the Arab region NCCs are dominated by state oil interests, the role of the private sector in the non-oil sector is extremely important, is growing and should continue to do so as diversification strategies bear results. The private sector has a very large role to play in addressing many of the

challenges identified earlier, including creating jobs and addressing environmental concerns. The private sector is also a channel through which some of the more sensitive challenges to achieving sustainable human development can be addressed, such as promoting the employment of women and their ownership and management of small- and medium-sized enterprises.

In the region, however, private-sector partnerships have been limited in all NCCs except Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and, to a lesser extent, UAE, where efforts have been made to promote corporate social responsibility.²⁴ The Bahrain country office and the UN Country Team convened a June 2007 meeting on the UN's Global Compact with that country's Chamber of Commerce, which hopes to establish a Global Compact chapter in early 2008. UNDP's Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships provided support to the Saudi country office in its efforts to promote corporate social responsibility (see Box 7), but will only respond to demands at the country level. There has been no engagement with the UN Global Compact, even though many of Saudi Arabia's large international companies engaged in the oil sector in the region have already signed the compact.

Civil society. The context in which civil society organizations (CSOs) work varies from country

Box 7. UNDP and Corporate Social Responsibility in Saudi Arabia²⁵

In May 2006, the UNDP country office invited private sector companies in Saudi Arabia to a Corporate Social Responsibility Forum, the first of its kind among members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The forum was opened by the Crown Prince and attracted some 250 participants. Its purpose was to raise awareness of the concept of corporate social responsibility and to showcase UNDP's practical experiences in the region, using the example of Egypt. In addition to promoting development through corporate social responsibility, the country office is also attempting to mobilize resources from the private sector for development activities. As an initial step, the country office introduced the 'Adopt a Project' concept on its website, which encourages potential partners to select and finance projects to which they have a particular affinity. This initiative has attracted two financing partners to date and, according to the country office, many more partners are willing to engage. One restriction on this process is the need for the financing partner to be a Saudi company, as is the case for all investments.

Source: Strategic Evaluation of the Role of UNDP in the NCCs of the Arab Region: Saudi Arabia Working Paper

²⁴ Developing partnerships with the private sector is different from supporting private sector development, for example, through microfinance schemes or supporting the development of a better policy environment for private sector development.

²⁵ It should be noted that, subsequent to the forum, the government has discouraged UNDP's partnership with the private sector.

to country. Bahrain, for example, has an active civil society and the number of CSOs is growing rapidly. Senior officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested they would like to see “a healthy, vibrant civil society involved in UNDP projects.” In Libya, NGOs work under a small number of umbrella organizations close to the state. UNDP’s engagement with civil society is often through events aimed at advocacy and networking. Efforts have been made to strengthen CSOs through capacity-building and networking, most notably in Bahrain. There are also examples of implementation partnerships, such as the MicroStart project in Bahrain, support to early childhood learning in Kuwait, and engagement with the General Women’s Union in the UAE. Civil society participants in all three NSPRs suggested that UNDP needs to play a larger role in supporting civil society development. This view is shared by the evaluation team for all the Arab region NCCs and is also widely held among country office staff.

UNDP counterparts in the central ministries in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia²⁶ have called for more involvement of civil society in UNDP projects in principle. However, there appears to be some ambivalence about UNDP’s direct engagement with CSOs; there is less ambivalence about selected non-political CSOs working with UNDP as implementing partners. Direct partnership with CSOs also brings up the problem of financing. Since UNDP has no core resources for these countries, it has to rely on other sources of funding to undertake such activities. Governments may be willing to finance initiatives to strengthen CSOs, as in Bahrain, but competing priorities and interests often prevent this from happening. Renewed efforts to overcome these constraints are therefore warranted.

The media. The media has been an important partner for a number of the country offices, both in promoting the activities of UNDP and the UN

in general and in carrying out joint advocacy efforts. While it is clear that partnerships are being built, a clear message from the three NSPRs is that UNDP’s visibility is still quite limited (see section 4.5).

UN system. As noted earlier, features of Arab region NCCs are small UN Country Teams and few resident offices dedicated to the country (without regional responsibilities). None of the countries are working within a UN Development Assistance Framework. Nevertheless, there have been efforts to prepare common country assessments and UN Development Assistance Frameworks in the past and, in the case of Bahrain, the process is ongoing. Some country offices have hosting relationships, such as Libya, where UNICEF is ‘hosted’ by the UNDP county office. In many countries, the use of UN agency execution was the main way that UNDP worked with other agencies, though this modality is being replaced by national execution. Within this context, UN partnerships are likely to be limited. Nonetheless they do occur, in addressing HIV/AIDS, for example, and, more generally, in UN advocacy (UNDP partnered with the ILO for a proposed Kuwait Interregional Forum for Expatriate Labour, for example). It should be noted that a key issue related to partnerships with civil society and the private sector is the need to move towards broader partnerships with the UN system as a whole and not just UNDP.

Notwithstanding the relatively limited activities of the UN system in NCCs, a role remains for UNDP to work in partnership with UN agencies to ensure that the government has access to the best the UN can offer. The new UNDP Strategic Plan suggests strengthening existing partnership arrangements, reflected in Memoranda of Understanding with UN partners to ensure a practical division of labour and to create synergies. Different models of joint programming have yet to be tried. The UN Country Team in

²⁶ For example, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in Saudi Arabia called for UNDP to bring in elements of society other than government and form a committee with business, women, university professors, NGOs and government to interact with regularity.

Bahrain, for example, is actively examining possibilities for joint programmes among themselves and examining opportunities to increase the role of non-resident agencies.

NCC cluster. A final type of partnership is among country offices themselves. At present, such partnerships are either informal or limited to occasional meetings of Resident Representatives. Some cooperation does occur at the operational level (for example, staff exchanges between offices), but it is limited. This issue is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

4.4 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN AID

Country office involvement in raising resources for the UN system has been *ad hoc* and purely administrative, limited primarily to setting up meetings for visiting representatives of UN agencies when requested. The country office has also been used at the request of UNDP headquarters as a conduit for raising voluntary contributions to UNDP by the host governments. Voluntary contributions have totalled almost \$3 million a year in recent years, with contributions from Saudi Arabia (\$2 million), Kuwait (\$600,000), the UAE (\$324,000), and Bahrain (\$56,000).²⁷ The total voluntary contributions from Arab region NCCs exceed the cost of the five Resident Coordinators/Resident Representatives, who are estimated to cost the organization around \$200,000 a year each. The resource mobilization role of the country office for voluntary contributions is appropriate and has absorbed a minimal amount of time of the country office; there is no need to revisit this aspect in future.

Regarding UNDP's activities with aid institutions in NCCs, there are *ad hoc* instances where the country office was instrumental in raising resources that were channelled to developing countries. In

the UAE, resource mobilization from NGOs for other countries totalled \$16 million. The UAE country office has been successful in mobilizing resources for supporting tsunami recovery in Indonesia. In Kuwait, requests to national institutions to contribute to UN development and humanitarian efforts led the Kuwait Red Crescent to donate \$3 million to the UN resource mobilization campaign. And in Saudi Arabia, UNDP has been active and successful in raising resources for development assistance to other countries through national agencies. Approximately \$10 million was raised in 2006 with limited effort in terms of time spent (the majority directed to the Occupied Palestinian Territories). The Bahrain country office raised \$3 million for a UNDP/government project in the Philippines. UNDP Bahrain was also successful in raising more than 150 metric tons of in-kind contributions for Lebanon during the crisis of the summer of 2006. All these activities were undertaken on an *ad hoc* and reactive basis, since such activities are not viewed to be a central aspect of country office responsibilities.

The above efforts were limited to raising funds rather than supporting programming interventions in which UNDP services could be used to improve aid administration to other countries and foster cost-sharing with UNDP projects in other countries. There are potential institution-building possibilities for UNDP in this respect that need to be defined and explored. For example, since countries lend money for political reasons (to foster friendships and promote security), UNDP could help them channel aid towards achievement of the MDGs. Subsequently, UNDP could help them measure and advertise the results. This was the basis of the Memorandum of Understanding that UNDP signed with the African Development Bank in 2003. To exploit this potential, institutional relationships need to be built. So far, this has occurred in only one case in an Arab region NCC—namely the signing of a Memorandum of

²⁷ Libya has contributed about \$90,000 per year to UNICEF in the last ten years.

Understanding between UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank in 2006 to “facilitate cooperation between the two parties in matters of common interest and to establish the arrangement for implementing the same.”²⁸

The potential for developing mutually beneficial relationships with a variety of regional, bilateral and private institutions in all the NCCs that are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) may be significant, given the increases in various forms of assistance from these countries that are likely to result from rising oil prices. These countries have been involved with aid for a long time and, for the most part, have institutions with established policies and experience in that area. UNDP needs to explore the role it can play on a case-by-case basis. If there is sufficient interest from the parties concerned, UNDP involvement could result in considerable development value for both GCC and developing countries.

The situation in Libya is different from that of the Gulf State NCCs. Libya is an emerging donor whose government is keen to have the assistance of the international community, especially the UN system, to help streamline and rationalize its development aid. In this respect, Libya’s situation resembles more the ‘Korean model’ in which the Republic of Korea sought to obtain UNDP assistance to channel its aid to Africa. Four Memoranda of Understanding were recently signed in Libya between the Community of Sahel-Saharan States and FAO, UNESCO, the African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development and WHO to obtain their assistance in special areas of expertise.²⁹ UNDP has not explored a potential role for itself to assist relevant institutions in their

efforts to streamline their aid to Africa, even though the UNDP country office has been fully aware of the possibilities. This is a major lost opportunity for UNDP that was recognized by the country office that sought headquarters support in this area; unfortunately, the requested assistance was not forthcoming.

4.5 AWARENESS OF UNDP AND KNOWLEDGE OF ITS ROLE AND SERVICES

The NSPRs in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as well as in Bahrain found that awareness of UNDP outside a circle of government officials was surprisingly limited. Beyond awareness, knowledge of UNDP’s specific role is also important. The country offices make an attempt to distinguish between the political and developmental roles of the UN. But NSPR respondents (other than government officials) indicated that there is little understanding of that distinction and that UNDP is often confused with the political arm of the UN. In Libya, the Ministry of Planning noted the same confusion with respect to the imposition of sanctions. NSPR respondents (other than government officials) as well as the Ministry of Planning in Libya noted that there is a limited understanding (even among government officials and UNDP partners) about UNDP’s role and the role of its sister UN agencies as well as the specific services these organizations can offer. The majority of those who were aware of UNDP lacked a thorough knowledge of its mandate, mission, actual or potential activities or what kind of services it is best suited to provide. These consistent, pervasive and strong findings were corroborated by the evaluation team’s field work in the NCCs.

28 In late 2004, a senior mission from UNDP visited Saudi Arabia to hold talks with the Islamic Development Bank and the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) aimed at further strengthening collaboration. The mission included the Director of UNDP’s Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Deputy Director of the Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships and the Deputy Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States.

29 For example, with technical assistance from FAO, a broad range of projects are being developed in Africa in agribusiness and agro-pastoral domains under three programmes involving cotton; cereals, fruits and vegetables; and the promotion of agricultural exports.

This lack of knowledge about UNDP prevails despite efforts by several country offices to promote UNDP's image and advertise its services. It also has a bearing on UNDP's strategic positioning and the composition and effectiveness of its programmes. Saudi Arabia is the only country office that has specialized media staff; it also sponsored the most activities to raise awareness of UNDP. In addition to recruiting media specialists, the Saudi country office has also recruited two popular, high-profile Saudi personalities to serve as UNDP Goodwill Ambassadors and participate in UNDP events to create UN(DP) awareness. An example of the latter is an MDG Painting Competition (November 2006) among students in which girls were invited to create a painting

reflecting each Millennium Development Goal. Certificates and UNDP gift items were given to the winners. A soccer game in November 2006 aimed to raise young boys' awareness of the MDGs. While Bahrain has no dedicated communications staff, it has recently managed to develop good relations with local media and has had extensive coverage of its activities. In Libya, a football match between senior officials of the Libyan Olympic Committee and a team headed by the UN Resident Coordinator was organized in June 2004 to promote the MDGs.

Box 8 provides a summary of the evaluation team's finding regarding the strategic positioning of UNDP country programmes.

Box 8. Strategic Positioning of UNDP Country Programmes: Summary Of Key Findings

RELEVANCE AND RESPONSIVENESS

- **Relevance to national priorities:** Country programmes were largely relevant to beneficiaries' needs; with few exceptions, they were also closely aligned with national priorities.
- **Relevance to UNDP's mandate:** Country programmes were generally relevant to UNDP's mandate with the exception of a few large projects that could only be tangentially related to the practice areas under the multi-year funding framework for 2004-2007.
- Much of the important work of promoting human development in Arab region NCCs comes from projects financed by UNDP, especially those that involve civil society.
- **Responsiveness to national priorities:** UNDP responded quickly and well to emerging trends.

PARTNERSHIPS

- **Partnerships with civil society and the private sector** have not been broadly developed, though there are some good examples of success in both areas. These successes do not extend across all five countries, however.
- Governments have an ambivalent view about UNDP's direct engagement with civil society and the private sector.
- **UN system partnerships** are limited by the small UN presence in the Arab region NCCs; in the past they have been limited mostly to UN agency execution. Important UN partnerships have been developed to combat HIV/AIDS and for advocacy. Opportunities exist for greater joint efforts both with resident and non-resident agencies.
- **Partnerships with national and regional aid agencies and private groups** have not been pursued, and occur on an exceptional and *ad hoc* basis. In Libya, UNDP has not exploited a potential major role for assisting the Libyan authorities, especially through the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, to streamline aid to other developing countries, especially in Africa.

AWARENESS OF UNDP AND KNOWLEDGE OF ITS ROLE AND SERVICES

- Awareness and knowledge of UNDP's role as a development agency is limited outside of direct counterparts.
- Knowledge and understanding of the services UNDP and other UN agencies can provide is limited in the Arab region NCCs.
- Partnerships with the media have not been effective in promoting awareness of UNDP or the services it can offer.

DEVELOPMENT VALUE AND BALANCE OF UNDP'S ACTIVITIES

- Delivery levels are not a good measure of development value because 1) the relationship between project budgets and development value is tenuous; and 2) UNDP's role is not limited to delivery, but involves other important activities, such as advocacy, knowledge-sharing and partnership-building.
- UNDP spends relatively too much time on implementation and too little time on the activities not related to delivery.