

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

Disasters have been on the rise over the last decade, and their increasing frequency and scale pose mounting economic and humanitarian challenges. Natural disasters have a disproportionate impact on the poor in developing countries, and the associated risks are strongly connected with poverty. In countries with medium to low levels of income and weaker governance, disasters can further compound existing problems of poverty and inequality and reverse development gains. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals is challenged in many countries by losses from disasters triggered by natural hazards.

Besides short-term effects such as direct economic losses, disasters affect long-term human development and human security. There is considerable evidence to suggest that the impact of disasters on national economies also affects social investments adversely, particularly in the areas of health and education, and curtails investments that lead to employment and income. Disaster risk reduction and sustainable human development therefore are mutually supportive goals. Reducing disaster risk can make a critical difference for highly vulnerable populations, such as those living in disaster-prone regions, small island developing states, and societies weakened by armed conflict. The enormous consequences of disasters for human development and economic growth necessitate effective management of disaster risk as an integral part of development planning. Similarly, in disaster-affected countries, a more integrated approach during recovery and reconstruction is seen as a way forward in reducing future risks.

This evaluation examines the contribution of the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP) to strengthening national capacities in disaster risk management and recovery since 2000. It assesses the relevance of UNDP's work with respect to national priorities and the organization's mandate; the effectiveness of achieving development results; the efficiency of institutional and programming arrangements; and the sustainability of resulting benefits. It provides insights for UNDP in its emerging work in reducing vulnerability to natural disasters as part of its support to environmental management and adaptation to climate change. The evaluation provides an analysis of UNDP policies, strategies and programmes at the global, regional and country levels; implementation of related projects; and cooperation with other United Nations agencies, international organizations and donors in disaster prevention and recovery. The evaluation provides a retrospective and forward-looking assessment of the potential contribution of UNDP.

The evaluation builds on the objectives outlined in the first and second multi-year funding frameworks (2000-2003 and 2004-2007, respectively), and the ongoing Strategic Plan (2008-2013) and Strategy for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (2007-2011). The programme frameworks emphasize three key areas of support in disaster risk management: a) strengthening national capacities in disaster prevention and risk reduction and reducing vulnerability to future events; b) support to response and recovery; and c) addressing programming principles of UNDP, namely gender equality and South-South cooperation. In 2008, UNDP developed an Eight-Point Agenda for women's empowerment and gender equality in crisis prevention and recovery. It requires that 15 percent of the funds for crisis-related activities are allocated for interventions that promote gender equality.

The evaluation includes case studies of nine countries (Colombia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Maldives, Mexico, Mozambique and Myanmar) conducted by national and international consultants. They were supplemented by a meta-analysis of *Assessments of Development Results* and evaluations commissioned by UNDP country offices; telephone interviews with 15 other countries; and extensive interviews at UNDP headquarters, regional service centres and with key partner organizations.

The evaluation considers as part of the strategic framework relevant international conventions and multilateral agreements developed over the past decade. These include the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, and the Bali Action Plan. In the development context, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals has placed further emphasis on disaster reduction and mitigation as a development issue. The Bali Action Plan negotiations have highlighted vulnerability and disaster risk reduction as key elements of climate change adaptation.

The evaluation covers UNDP technical support in disaster prevention and recovery as well as its management roles, such as assisting United Nations Resident Coordinators and responding to government requests for international support in the coordination of the early recovery period after natural disasters.

## FINDINGS

**UNDP has helped countries formulate policies for disaster management, but challenges remain in integrating disaster risk reduction in development planning.**

UNDP combines multisectoral programming in key development areas, extensive country-level presence and the ability to mobilize technical

expertise. It has supported policy formulation and helped to establish an enabling environment for building disaster management institutions in over 30 countries. This has contributed to enhanced participation of governments in international and regional debates and cooperation on disaster risk management and climate change over the past decade, especially among countries at high risk.

In several of the case studies, it was evident that efforts are needed to better harmonize roles, responsibilities and accountability in the institutions responsible for disaster risk management. Most countries have also struggled with the challenge of empowering local governments to play a larger role in disaster risk management.

Disaster risk reduction requires long-term planning and more sustained efforts at the national level. It has been particularly challenging for UNDP to support countries in integrating disaster risk reduction in development planning.

**Closer integration of disaster risk reduction with other UNDP priorities such as poverty reduction, governance and adaptation to climate change is progressing in some country programmes, but has not been given sufficient priority in many others.**

In Mexico, integration of disaster risk reduction in local development programmes significantly contributed to sustaining development investments at the local level. Similar attempts are evident in Bangladesh to strengthen disaster risk management capacities at the local level, and disaster risk reduction is addressed as a governance issue in Honduras. But a large number of other country programmes have not made explicit links between disaster prevention and other development programming.

Over the last three years, increased support has been provided to address climate change as a development issue, largely through the environment portfolio of UNDP. Although a correlation can be found between many disaster risk reduction and climate change objectives, the

evaluation indicates limited integrated programming to date in these two areas. A notable exception is the Maldives, where the nexus of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation has been well established. A recent series of agreements among UNDP policy and practice bureaux to explore and define the nature of cooperation on climate change adaptation may provide opportunities for closer integration in the future.

**Community preparedness initiatives can strengthen local capacities, yet they are typically constrained by poor institutionalization of programme processes and outcomes.**

Disaster preparedness and risk reduction initiatives at the local level comprise about 54 percent of UNDP's disaster risk reduction interventions, and have been implemented in 27 countries. Some programmes have produced important achievements. In India and Mexico, for example, the programmes were successful in demonstrating the importance and benefits of local-level preparedness. In most cases, however, community-level programmes have not influenced government programmes and policies, and UNDP has had difficulty establishing coordination among local, state and national governments.

**UNDP has spurred the participation of women in community-level initiatives in recovery and prevention, yet the application of gender policies has been uneven, and work is needed to achieve leadership and funding targets.**

UNDP has adopted significant policy measures to further gender equality in crisis-related programming, and specific attention has been paid to the needs of women. But gender policies have not been systematically implemented. The Eight-Point Agenda, which includes a mandatory requirement to allocate 15 percent of the budget for crisis-related programming to interventions that promote gender equality, is an important and unique step taken by UNDP to address issues related to gender and women. While there are indications that these measures

are gaining acceptability, only modest efforts have so far been made to integrate gender issues into the design and implementation of disaster prevention and recovery programmes. UNDP has ensured the participation of women, particularly those from indigenous and vulnerable groups, in community projects and programmes. However, success has been limited when it comes to contributing to a more coherent approach to integrating gender-related concerns in policy and government programming.

UNDP programmes often narrowly construe the presence of women in community-level interventions as addressing gender concerns. This fails to take into account the extent to which women have the opportunity to participate in leadership positions and the extent to which their perspectives and aspirations have been considered.

**UNDP support to disaster recovery lacks a strategic focus and has not been used effectively to strengthen national ownership and capacity.**

UNDP plays multiple roles in post-disaster situations. These include support for short-term micro-level livelihood activities and shelter construction, United Nations coordination, and providing longer-term recovery support for strengthening administrative systems and improving government capacities. Evidence from the case studies suggests that these various roles are not clear to disaster recovery partners, and in some cases partners doubt that UNDP has the capacity to carry out assigned tasks.

Micro-level livelihood activities and shelter construction have, in many cases, achieved intended outcomes. However the merits of UNDP involvement need to be considered in the context of the many other actors providing this type of support, including non-governmental and community-based organizations.

It has been challenging for UNDP to address long-term recovery needs such as strengthening administrative procedures and systems and coordination capacities of government. Limited attention

has gone to support for coordination, technical issues (such as land planning, coastal regulations, housing policy), and tackling the causes of vulnerability among specific high-risk groups.

**Though UNDP has made progress in supporting early recovery cluster coordination, issues remain with respect to communicating the need for such an approach, facilitating wider coordination and enhancing national ownership.**

UNDP has placed considerable emphasis on support to early recovery cluster coordination. While UNDP has the advantage of bringing a development perspective into the early recovery process, shortcomings were found in its efforts to leverage its partnership with governments at different levels and to enhance national ownership in early recovery cluster coordination.

In some situations, national governments have been reluctant to operationalize the cluster approach. In others, as in Latin America and other regions, the cluster approach was not acceptable to all governments or to other humanitarian stakeholders. Consequently, a nuanced approach has been necessary.

The evaluation showed that national and local non-governmental organizations have not always been well integrated into early recovery cluster coordination. It also indicated that engagement with development stakeholders was limited. Better communication between UNDP and the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has been shown to be critical to early recovery cluster coordination.

**Complex programme management and administrative procedures constrain effective programming.**

Complex and inflexible procedures hinder programme performance and effectiveness. Furthermore, programme management is constrained by overambitious goals, programmes with short time-frames, unrealistic deadlines for accomplishing complex tasks, weak synergies

among different programme areas, and poor reporting and monitoring.

While quality, transparency and accountability in procurement and project approvals should never be compromised, more efforts are needed to simplify UNDP's administrative procedures to better suit implementation requirements during crises. The recently introduced fast-track policy is a step in this direction. Though still in the pilot phase, there is concern among some managers in country offices that the fast-track measures have not gone far enough to facilitate speedier implementation in crises.

## CONCLUSIONS

**Conclusion 1. While UNDP strategic priorities acknowledge the links between poverty reduction, sustainable development and disaster risk reduction, these strategies are not systematically implemented.**

The Strategic Plan identifies disaster risk reduction as an important factor in reducing poverty and vulnerability and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It further points out that disasters affect the poorest people disproportionately. Explicit links are also made between disaster risk reduction and sustainable environment and climate change adaptation. Yet there are no operational frameworks for integrating cross-cutting issues into UNDP programme areas, both in terms of planning and implementation.

This lack will become increasingly evident as the severity of recent disasters pushes the issue of climate change adaptation into centre stage, with direct implications for UNDP programming. Through its support to national governments both before and after disasters, coupled with the extensive country support mechanisms already in place for the environmental protection aspects of climate change, UNDP is in a pivotal position to help countries develop effective adaptation strategies.

Responding to slow-onset disasters such as drought is treated as an aspect of poverty



reduction and sustainable environment support and is therefore not under the purview of disaster risk management. The impact of climate change is likely to blur the boundaries between slow- and rapid-onset disasters in the future, making measures to improve coordination among programme areas even more critical.

**Conclusion 2. National ownership of disaster risk reduction strategies is key to achieving UNDP objectives in poverty reduction and sustainable development.**

UNDP can play a stronger role in national and international partnerships because of its extensive country-level presence, well-established relationships with governments, neutrality and strong programme support in key areas of development. However, these advantages have not been used effectively enough for UNDP to play a leadership role in areas related to recovery, early recovery and disaster risk reduction. UNDP has not always been successful in building on its strengths at the national level, particularly in terms of development-related support.

While strong partnerships are found with local governments and at the community level, UNDP has not leveraged them to inform national-level processes and strategies. More reactive engagement and the lack of a clearly thought-out strategy for seeking partnerships have limited UNDP's contribution.

While UNDP has made progress in supporting early recovery cluster coordination, its potential role at the national level has been challenged by a number of issues, including communicating the need for such an approach and facilitating wider coordination and national ownership. The links between humanitarian interventions and the development process have often gone unexploited due to the narrowly perceived role of the lead agency in the cluster approach and by inter-agency dynamics. Early recovery, both as a cluster and as a concept, requires more deliberation among stakeholders at the country level and with other UN agencies. It is evident that the availability

of human and financial resources and technical support have determined the extent to which early recovery cluster coordination has succeeded.

**Conclusion 3. UNDP has achieved a measure of success in many micro-level, short-term recovery activities, but at the cost of its longer-term risk reduction and development focus.**

Enabling countries to take more effective and sustainable actions towards recovery has not often been given adequate priority. This gap exists in most disaster-response efforts, since governments and donors become focused on short-term, direct-impact solutions addressing immediate problems of affected populations, such as livelihoods, housing and public infrastructure. UNDP has the flexibility to design longer-term recovery programmes to suit country-specific needs and priorities within the disaster context. This includes transparent systems of management, since disaster response and recovery often involve huge outlays of public resources.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Recommendation 1. UNDP should make clear that its principal area of focus in disaster prevention and recovery is to assist countries in the development dimensions of the issue, especially risk reduction and vulnerability.**

Addressing social and economic vulnerability requires a comprehensive programming approach, involving joint programmes in areas such as poverty reduction, sustainable development and governance. UNDP should provide an operational framework for addressing disaster risk reduction as a cross-cutting issue in development programming.

Support to prevent or mitigate slow-onset disasters entails a different approach and alternative strategies, which will require closer coordination with poverty reduction and environment programmes and new partnerships with different government agencies and other stakeholders.

**Recommendation 2. A stronger commitment is needed to implement UNDP's corporate gender policies and advance gender equality in crisis-related programming.**

UNDP should continue the mandatory allocation of funds and improve capacities for systematic application of gender policies in programme planning and implementation. UNDP's regional bureaux should play a more active role in implementation of the Eight-Point Agenda and the allocation of funds.

UNDP should also enhance its contribution to policy discussions and debates on gender and public-resource allocations at the national level. More systematic support is required for gender-sensitive risk and vulnerability assessments, and for the inclusion of the gender dimension in national poverty reduction and disaster risk reduction policies.

**Recommendation 3. The UNDP disaster risk reduction strategy should be revised to more directly address adaptation to climate change.**

A unified strategy at the country level is required to support government efforts in integrating climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. UNDP should leverage its strengths in both areas to increase access to available funds.

**Recommendation 4. UNDP should minimize micro-level, short-term recovery activities that do not contribute to strengthening national capacities, policies or practice.**

UNDP support should be oriented towards building national capacity for disaster risk reduction and, consequently, for sustainable long-term recovery.

During the early recovery phase, UNDP should facilitate coordination of recovery activities and support longer-term capacity-building, in particular strengthening governance mechanisms for integrating risk reduction in development planning. More efforts are needed during early recovery cluster coordination to go beyond short-term interventions, to better engage development stakeholders and to enhance national ownership.

**Recommendation 5. UNDP administrative procedures should be improved so that they no longer constrain effective programming in natural disasters.**

Administrative and programming procedures should not only ensure accountability; they should also enable country offices to respond quickly with well-planned interventions. UNDP should continue to refine its administrative procedures to enable faster procurement, staff recruitment and flexibility in funding during crises.