

Annual session 2000

13-23 June 2000, Geneva

Item 14 of the provisional agenda

Other matters

MISSION REPORT
UNDP/UNFPA EXECUTIVE BOARD

**Field visit to the Republic of Mali and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania
(8-22 April 2000)**

Introduction

1. The UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board delegation to Mali and Mauritania was composed of 12 members representing the following countries: Belarus, Denmark,¹ Ghana, Honduras,² Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Togo, Ukraine, United States and Viet Nam. The mission was accompanied by Ms. Marcela Romero, Executive Board Secretariat.
2. The field visit was very successful, providing the delegation with valuable insights into the role and work of UNDP and UNFPA field offices. Accordingly, the delegation would like to express its sincere appreciation to UNDP resident representatives/United Nations resident coordinators and UNFPA representatives as well as their respective staffs for the enormous efforts they had made preparing the visits. The delegates would also like to thank the Governments of Mali and Mauritania and their civil-society partners for their warm welcome and hospitality.

I. MALI

Background

3. The challenges that UNDP and UNFPA face in Mali, one of the poorest countries in the world, are enormous. Socio-economic indicators, such as gross national product (GNP) per capita (\$280; purchasing power parity: \$740), the adult literacy rate (35 per cent) and the country's human development index (HDI) ranking of 166 (out of 174), indicate the urgent need for development cooperation. The introduction of a democratic process embarked upon in 1991 and the end of the Tuareg insurgency in 1996 provide stable political conditions for UNDP and UNFPA interventions in areas such as the development of local-government structures and civil-society involvement. However, cultural, economic and social differences between the north and south of the country demand thorough understanding of each situation and the continuous adaptation of strategic options.

¹ Ms. Louise Brincker, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nations, was selected the rapporteur.

² H.E. Ms. Noemi Espinoza-Madrid, Permanent Mission of Honduras to the United Nations, was selected team coordinator.

4. Mali is one of the 18 countries selected for the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) pilot project for 1998-2002. Under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) criteria, Mali has been deemed HIPC-II eligible and is currently in the process of elaborating its interim poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). The comprehensive development framework (CDF) of the World Bank is not being undertaken in Mali.

A. UNDP activities in Mali

5. Based on meetings with government officials, representatives of United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, the World Bank and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as on visits to projects representing major UNDP intervention areas, the delegation found that UNDP activities were consistent with the strategy set out in the first country cooperation framework (CCF), 1998-2002, for Mali. In partnership with the Government of Mali and other development partners, including NGOs, UNDP has been focusing on two areas of the CCF: poverty reduction and good governance. Interventions have mostly been in terms of upstream activities, such as policy dialogue and capacity-building, with regard to institutional strengthening, while a few direct interventions on a downstream level have been carried out mainly as pilot projects.

Poverty reduction

6. UNDP has helped the Government to formulate its national poverty-reduction strategy (SNLP) which serves as the guiding strategic framework and foundation for UNDP efforts in the fight against poverty in Mali. Furthermore, elaboration of Mali's PRSP is anchored in the SNLP. By strengthening national capacity through the further refining, monitoring and evaluating of the SNLP, UNDP has been playing a leading role in its implementation.

7. One example of this is seen in the National Observatory for Human Development and Poverty Reduction, which was established and is functioning with UNDP assistance. The Observatory undertakes studies in issues related to sustainable human development, including poverty reduction; follows the implementation of the SNLP; assists the Government in operationalizing the SNLP; and facilitates interaction between the Government, civil society and international development partners. Another example of activities related to poverty eradication is the work of UNDP (together with UNESCO and the World Bank) with the Government to design the country's national 10-year education plan (PRODEC).

8. With limited resource allocations, UNDP direct interventions (downstream activities) have sought to strengthen links between policy and reality and play a catalytic, demonstrative role, thereby opening up the possibility of wider replication should the Government or local authorities so desire. The project sites visited by the delegation appeared to have raised the productivity of the poor, increased income-generation opportunities and improved social conditions. Some projects also helped to promote the status of women, as they greatly improve rural women's working conditions, increase their income and enhance the quality of their daily lives.

Good governance

9. The role of UNDP is particularly noteworthy with regard to its proactive involvement in policy formulation, institution strengthening and human-resource development. Close dialogue between UNDP and the Government on policy development has contributed substantially to the Government's high degree of participation and ownership in enhancing good governance. One striking example is seen in the process of decentralization which, thanks to the early initiative and consistent support of UNDP, is the centerpiece of governance reform in Mali. The role of UNDP is further described in the evaluation report "UNDP's role in decentralization and local government: A joint UNDP/Government of Germany evaluation." Parallelling strategic support at the central level, UNDP is currently helping authorities in about 30 per cent of the country's local communities to assume their new responsibilities by strengthening local planning and management capacities, following the communal elections of 1998.

10. Subsequent to its support in the resolution of the conflict in northern Mali between 1991-1995, UNDP, in line with the new focus of UNDP activities, has been engaged in post-conflict activities by helping to reintegrate ex-rebels into mainstream society and to promote dialogue and consensus-building in the north region. At the subregional level, UNDP assistance was specifically called on to set up a programme supporting the implementation of the Moratorium on Illicit Small Arms Proliferation agreement signed by the heads of state of the 16 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries.

Partnerships

11. In accordance with its ongoing reform, UNDP has developed strategic partnerships with a number of actors. The Government is clearly satisfied with its relations with UNDP, which has established fairly good relationships with national NGOs, which, together with international NGOs, have been involved in UNDP activities in various ways. The resident coordinator system (RCS) operates effectively in Mali. Quite a number of organizations participate, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The World Bank, also a participant, considers the system useful for the exchange of information.
12. Although imperfect, the elaboration of the UNDAF has been a valuable learning exercise for stakeholders while, at the same time, putting a heavy burden on them. The process continues with the current preparation of UNDAF II. On the financial side, UNDP has cost-sharing arrangements or manages the trust funds of a number of partners, such as Norway and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF).
13. In relation to project execution, difficulties stemming mainly from the complexity of accounting procedures of different funds/programmes and donors were reported in connection with the national execution modality. A complicating element, which has resulted in gaps and overlaps, is the lack of a single coordinating unit within Mali's ministries responsible for the management of foreign development assistance. To strengthen the impact of aid, UNDP, in particular, and others have supported the Government/OECD/DAC aid reform process, which is expected to produce improvements in the impact of the bi- and multilateral activities of aid partners.

Conclusions and recommendations

14. In conclusion, the delegation is of the view that UNDP activities in Mali conform to the needs of the country and are in accordance with the future orientation of UNDP as expressed in the Administrator's Business Plans, 2000-2003. Activities in poverty and governance are based on government ownership, are well targeted and include various partners. UNDP experience in Mali has proven that, when combined, policy dialogue, institutional strengthening (upstream) and pilot/demonstrative intervention (downstream) can sustain one another if carried out in an effective and cohesive manner.
15. The delegation believes that the future success of the UNDP programme in Mali will continue to depend on UNDP capacity to build on past experience while accommodating new developments. The mission recommends that the experience gained from the peace settlement in the north of the country serve as an example for current efforts to define the role and comparative advantage of UNDP in countries in special development situations and as a contribution to UNDP reform.
16. Good coordination occurred in the RCS despite limited financial resources and little support from headquarters. The delegation recommends the United Nations Development Group Office (UNDGO) pay closer attention to strengthening communication between resident coordinators and headquarters. Furthermore, the delegation suggests that UNDP, in cooperation with the Government, should seek to define a single ministerial coordinating body that will allow for an overview of total aid flow to Mali, among other things.
17. In general, UNDP should devote greater effort to seeking ways to harmonize administrative and financial processes in the field in order to facilitate such things as co-financing and rapid response in crisis/post-conflict situations. Finally, the delegation was struck by the practice of labelling salaries for local staff as "administrative overhead". It is recommended that this practice be reviewed so as to reflect the importance of such staff to the achievement of UNDP work.

B. UNFPA activities in Mali

18. Within the framework of Mali's country programme (1998-2002), UNFPA has, in collaboration with the Government, been working successfully to integrate population-related issues into sector approaches, national-policy planning and advocacy. Mali's country programme is based on the national population policy for the year 1991-2022, focusing on reproductive health, population and development strategies and advocacy. UNFPA is actively participating in policy planning and plays an important role in fostering the implementation of both the Programme of Action of the International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) and the 20/20 principle.

/...

19. Government health policies are anchored in the 5-year health sector programme (PRODESS) for 1998-2002 which, together with the 10-year PRODEC programme, constitute important parts of the SNLP. Both programmes use a sectorial approach to health problems, paying special attention to girls and adolescents. Less priority seems to be given to efforts to enhance equity between people in the different regions of the country.

20. Through policy dialogue with the Government, UNFPA has, with great appreciation from the government, contributed to the implementation of PRODESS. The policy dialogue has been supplemented by direct interventions aimed at decreasing maternal and infant mortality and developing reproductive health/family-planning services, such as the establishment of health centres through the provision of equipment and contraceptives, as well as capacity-building in terms of training of personnel. Similarly, through the special training of teachers, UNFPA is contributing to the introduction of family-life education in school curricula.

21. In terms of partnerships, UNFPA is collaborating with other United Nations agencies, such as UNESCO, in the context of policy planning and operations in PRODEC, and with WHO in PRODESS. The World Bank as well as bilateral donors, such as Luxembourg, are also important stakeholders of programme resources from the current programme.

Conclusions and recommendations

22. UNFPA activities are in great demand, given Mali's substantial difficulties resulting from the very limited number of health centres, notably in the north of the country, the absence of trained personnel, cultural preferences and overall persistent poverty. These constitute major hindrances to women's access to reproductive health care. In this context, UNFPA is encouraged to continue and strengthen its activities, especially by giving high priority to its advocacy role for education in family-life planning.

23. In general, UNFPA is encouraged to increase the sustainability of its projects by building capacity for local health-care services rather than by providing short-term supply of materials. It follows that UNFPA should strengthen Government involvement to ensure the future financial sustainability of health centres, while it focuses more on advocacy. As a general rule, UNFPA should work to a larger extent on including NGOs and youth groups as stakeholders.

24. In view of cultural and economic differences between regions and disparities in access to basic health services and information, the delegation recommends that UNFPA work to convince the Government to further direct its allocations and interventions to the northern part of Mali and more towards the very poor. At the same time, UNFPA is encouraged to strengthen its own activities in the north of the country, in ways that do not supplant the responsibilities of the Government.

II. MAURITANIA

Background

25. Influenced by both Arab and African cultures while belonging to neither, Mauritania presents rather particular terms of reference for the work of UNDP and UNFPA. Harsh environmental conditions, particularly desertification and sand-dune migration, constitute a major obstacle to development in Mauritania and result in increasing pressure on already limited resources, accelerated rural depopulation and economic inequities between urban and rural populations.

26. Economic trends in Mauritania have been favourable for the last few years. High population growth (2.7) and a HDI ranking of 148 (out of 174), however, indicate that in the coming years Mauritania will be characterized by an increasing incidence of poverty, particularly if the fertility rate (6.3) does not decrease.

27. On the political side, democratic reform was initiated in 1991, with a new constitution legalizing political parties and leading to the growth of democratic institutions and the rise of a political will for development. Mauritania is HIPC II-eligible and a process of the elaboration of the PRSP has started. Mauritania is currently undertaking a common country assessment (CCA) and will finalize its UNDAF by 2001. A World Bank CDF has not yet been initiated.

A. UNDP activities in Mauritania

28. The first CCF for Mauritania (1997-2001) establishes three focus areas for UNDP activities: poverty reduction (including private-sector development), environment and governance. National capacity-building/human-resource development and the advancement of women are cross-cutting themes. Based on meetings with government officials, representatives of United Nations funds and programmes, United Nations specialized agencies, the World Bank and local NGOs, as well as visits to projects representing the main UNDP intervention areas, the delegation found that UNDP activities are generally in accordance with the CCF and that the process of moving from a focus on downstream to upstream activities as required in the ongoing UNDP reform are in progress.

Poverty eradication

29. UNDP activities in the area of poverty eradication are anchored in Mauritania's national poverty eradication programme (NPEP), 1998-2001. UNDP helped the Government to formulate the programme, which, in turn, provides the basis for the elaboration of the PRSP. UNDP participates in 6 of 8 subprogrammes with a significant part of its support falling in the areas of upstream capacity-building and policy-advice activities. For example, to strengthen government capacity for the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the NPEP, UNDP is supporting three institutions: the High Commission for Poverty Eradication, Human Rights and Integration, the National Office of Statistics and the Observatory for Sustainable Human Development.

30. Furthermore, UNDP is assisting the Government in the formulation of a private-sector development programme, in which a critical element is the alleviation of poverty through self-generating income-promotion projects. On the community level, and in some cases as part of the Africa 2000 initiative, UNDP is involved in a number of different areas, among which are several very successful micro-finance projects for women. UNDP supports regional development through programmes such as the Assaba integrated project. Advocacy for information technology and the provision of access to the internet by financing equipment is another important area of UNDP support. Such interventions are among several directed towards strengthening the capacity of NGOs and civil society and are, to a large extent, examples of co-financing.

Environment

31. In addressing environmental problems, previous UNDP activities have focused on slowing rural depopulation through sand-dune stabilization, desertification control, reforestation, preservation of arable land, and electrification through renewable energy. UNDP interventions have been mostly through downstream activities and have had large technical-assistance components. A great number of them have been implemented in cooperation with other United Nations agencies and partners, such as the Office to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNSO), FAO and bilateral donors and financed through modalities, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Currently, UNDP is shifting its focus to capacity-building in order to, among other things, help the Government to develop a national plan of action for the environment. UNDP encourages the more active involvement of civil society in the environmental area by strengthening the capacity of national NGOs.

Governance

32. UNDP is supporting the Government in several areas covered by the national governance programme, primarily through capacity-building activities. In 1999, the Government adopted a policy declaration on good governance, and a National Programme for Good Governance in which UNDP plays a catalytic role is currently being developed. However, in the decentralization process, problems were observed. The central Government appears to have delegated authority to communes that do not have the capacity to manage themselves and the decentralization has not been accompanied by the allocation of adequate necessary resources from the central Government.

Partnerships

33. A high level of coordination among United Nations agencies has taken place. The Resident Coordinator System (RCS) involves UNDP, UNFPA, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNICEF, FAO, WFP, WHO, UNHCR and the World Bank. The agencies operate under a coordination charter which seeks to ensure joint programming, the formulation of a CCA in 2000, the completion of an UNDAF in 2001, and the harmonization of the planning of the various agencies by 2003, to coincide with the programming cycle of the Government. The World Bank

expressed strong support for the RCS, and was involved in joint projects with a number of United Nations agencies. UNDP maintains partnership relations with missions of donor countries and in some cases has implemented common projects with them. Furthermore, UNDP works in partnerships with NGOs and civil society, including the mass media. A number of UNDP-supported projects involved NGOs as executing partners or as full implementers.

Conclusions and recommendations

34. In conclusion, the Mission found that UNDP involvement in Mauritania's national development was pivotal and should be continued, particularly to ensure equity, effective participation in decision-making and the sustainability of the development process. UNDP should continue to focus on its priority areas using a combination of policy advice and pilot/community projects. However, the delegation found that the approach of UNDP in intervention areas needs adjusting to ensure that activities are focused and have more of a mainstream orientation, with greater emphasis on equity and sustainability. Regarding sustainability, the Assaba programme is an example that, despite positive results, showed a lack of ownership and thus sustainability, on the part of the Government. Furthermore, equity should be integrated into the strategy for poverty reduction and governance.

35. The delegation is of the view that UNDP should continue its active involvement in the area of governance. The absence of links between decentralized competences and resources gives UNDP the opportunity to urge greater political and economic participation on the part of the central Government and thereby create a larger degree of ownership. The delegation encourages UNDP to enhance its efforts toward fostering the active engagement of civil society and the private sector.

36. In the area of environment, UNDP should focus its future activities on policy advice to the Government and capacity-building for NGOs. Projects should be conceived within the framework of government development programmes and should be jointly financed to ensure the direct and full stake of the Government in the development process and to avoid the dependency of communities on external partners. Similarly, UNDP interventions regarding the Internet, if continued, will need refocusing in the future. While UNDP should limit its role in advocating the importance of information technology and the Internet, the private sector, bilateral donors, the World Bank or others should be encouraged to finance the equipment.

37. The delegation found that coordination and the RCS worked well but imposed pressures on time and resources. With the exception of UNDP and UNFPA, no other agency budgets reflected the costs of coordination. It is recommended that the issue be brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). The team also found that support for the coordination process from headquarters needed to be improved to increase the effectiveness of the RCS.

B. UNFPA activities in Mauritania

38. The ongoing fourth country programme (1998-2001) has two subprogrammes: reproductive health and population, and development strategies that build on the attainment of objectives within the framework of the programme of action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD+5). Advocacy is supposed to be incorporated into both subprogrammes. UNFPA has contributed significantly to initiating national policies and programmes on population and development. As UNFPA was the sole partner of the Government in the formulation of the 1995 Declaration on National Population Policy, the 1997 National Health Plan and the 1998 National Strategy for the Promotion of Women, it contributed greatly to the Government's preparation of the 1998-2002 National Reproductive Health Plan. UNFPA continues to help strengthen the National Commission on Population (NCP) under the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development, to assist the statistics office and to support civil-registration activities. A number of areas critical to Mauritania's capacity to design and implement policies/programmes on population and development have also benefited from UNFPA assistance.

39. UNFPA has also extended its support for advocacy work to raise awareness at the grassroots level and sensitize pupils, students, youth and local communities to issues related to population, family life and the environment. On a direct intervention basis, UNFPA improves the situation of reproductive health by supporting the construction of new health/maternity stations or the rehabilitation of older facilities.

40. UNFPA focus on the development of Partnerships has had a number of positive effects: the involvement of the World Bank in the area of reproductive health, which has permitted an extension of the number of regions covered; cost-sharing with the World Bank, as is the case for the population census of 2000; and World Bank financing of

UNFPA contraceptive procurement for the Government. NGOs have also been involved in different aspects of UNFPA activities.

41. UNFPA contributed effectively to coordination efforts both in policy dialogue and resource mobilization. UNFPA has worked considerably to promote population issues in the health theme group led by WHO and helped to establish a working group on reproductive health with the participation of various government agencies and development partners. Due to these coordination mechanisms and the adoption of the National Reproductive Health Programme, more development partners have entered the area of population and development.

Conclusions and recommendations

42. In spite of achievements in encouraging communities to use reproductive health services, a considerable number of targeted groups still do not make use of these services. Since in Mauritania raising awareness on issues, such as sexually transmitted diseases and female genital mutilation, is sensitive, the delegation recommends that advocacy and communications activities be strengthened. One way of dealing with this could be to designate advocacy and communications to a separate subprogramme, which may begin by formulating a strategy to identify the difficulties and to devise means and channels of communications to overcome them.

43. UNFPA should also consider working closer with the Government to establish appropriate institutional arrangements dealing with population and development. At present, the NCP seems to be weak while the area of population and development continues to be only part of the Department of Public Health in the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. In this and other respects, the programme in Mauritania can benefit from other countries' experiences under the interregional programme.

44. It is recommended that UNFPA assist Mauritania to ensure the continuous retraining of reproductive health service personnel. UNFPA should explore a more predictable arrangement with the Government in order to maintain pilot projects for possible application on a wider scale using a more sustainable approach. UNFPA should make particular efforts to ensure that the funds obtained from HIPC II debt relief are allocated to UNFPA priority areas in the country.

