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THE CONTRIBUTION OF COUNTRY LEVEL EVALUATION IN STRENGTHENING UNDP'S ROLE IN STATE-BUILDING



UNDP as a trusted partner in state - building

State building or interventions that support nations in their own development efforts often occur in unplanned conditions brought about due to conflict or natural disasters. This is a challenging and difficult process as decades of progress can rapidly be decimated due to eruptions of political, social and environmental crises, all of which challenge the concept of vibrant and autonomous nations. These challenges require agile and responsive international agencies that: have the capacity to react to counties' demands; have established trust and shadowed governments over prolonged periods of time; and that have experience working across a broad spectrum of issues.

The success of many of these, often low-key, interventions cannot easily be measured, as they occur in tandem with other partners and in environments that are not easy to operate in or evaluate. It is part of an ethos of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to operate in the most complex environments, over extended periods of time, and through well established relationships, which sets it apart from many other agencies in terms of the value proposition it offers.

UNDP's engagement in state- building is guided by its Strategic Plans. Within UNDP's previous Strategic Plan (2008 to 2013), two focus areas most directly addressed efforts in state-building, namely democratic governance and crisis prevention and recovery. The recently developed UNDP Strategic Plan for 2014 - 2017¹, identifies three areas of work: (1) sustainable development pathways; (2) inclusive and effective democratic governance; and (3) resilience - building. Within the democratic governance area of work UNDP is to assist countries to maintain or secure peaceful and democratic governance, including addressing issues such as constitutional reform, democratic elections, strengthening parliaments, the rule of law and citizen security. In its 'resilience - building' area of work, the Strategic Plan outlines how UNDP is to contribute to peacebuilding and

state-building, particularly in post-conflict and transition settings, emphasizing that state-building should improve capacities, accountability, responsiveness and legitimacy. The efforts should further ensure rapid and effective recovery from conflict-induced crises and increase the ability of countries to prepare for and deal with the consequences of natural disasters, such as those exacerbated by climate change. In all areas of work, UNDP emphasizes the need to address gender equality and women empowerment.

International agencies are obliged to independently evaluate their programs for a multitude of purposes ranging from donor reporting obligations, to responding to the transparency, accountability, and, most importantly, relevance imperatives. As countries and governments are the main beneficiaries of UNDP intervention, it is necessary for independent evaluation to periodically assess progress so that course adjustments can be made and so that new country programs can get prepared. UNDP becomes the evaluator (subject of evaluation) when the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) sets out to evaluate its progress and reports results to the government and stakeholders, for purposes of transparency, accountability, and utility.

The purpose of this paper is to make the argument that evaluative evidence is necessary to align the operational practice to ideal so as to bring about the adjustments necessary to respond to countries' needs in dynamic contexts and with scarce resources. To make its case, this paper will put forward select examples from the IEO's independent Assessments of Development Results (ADRs) - a country level assessment process which uses UNDP country program interventions as the unit of analysis.

The independent assessment of UNDP's work, guided by the IEO which reports to the Executive Board, shows that whilst challenges exist in achieving development results, overall UNDP is a central player in state - building efforts due to its role as manager of the resident coordinator system, its well-established

1 UNDP Strategic Plan 2014 - 2017, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/UNDP_strategic-plan_14-17_v9_web.pdf

and extended country presence and its approach that responds to countries' needs. Moreover, UNDP has institutionalized independent evaluation in all of its country, and other, programmes demonstrating a commitment to quality assurance that has helped to build trust with governments it works with.

Methodological approach to assessing country - level performance

The ADRs are independent country-level evaluations conducted by IEO that assess UNDP's overall performance and contribution to development in that country for a specified multi-year period, and that draw lessons for the future programming cycles. The ADRs ask two key questions: (a) what has been UNDP's contribution to development change (focusing on the change in the country programme outcomes as outlined in the Country Programme Document [CPD]); and (b) what can explain that contribution. The primary purposes of an ADR are to support the development of the next CPD and to strengthen accountability of UNDP to national stakeholders and the Executive Board.

The ADRs are conducted in the penultimate year of the ongoing UNDP country programme and usually cover a period of seven to nine years. Importantly, the IEO times these evaluations so as to ensure that their findings effectively feed into UNDP's subsequent country programme strategies. The scope of the ADRs include the entirety of UNDP's activities in the country covering interventions funded by all sources of finance. Initiatives from the regional and global programmes are also included in the scope.

Since UNDP first introduced this methodology in 2002, the IEO conducted over 80 ADRs. In Africa, several of the recently carried out ADRs demonstrate well how evaluation can strengthen UNDP's efforts in state-building, namely ADRs in the Republic of Liberia (Liberia), Sierra Leone and in the Republic of the Congo.

Insights from country – level evaluations on UNDP's contribution to state-building in Africa

The ADR in Liberia covered the period from 2004 to 2011², during which Liberia commenced its transition from a post-conflict, emergency - assistance phase to a more stable phase focusing on state-building and sustainable development. The ADR found that UNDP's contribution in aiding this transition was significant, with UNDP Country Office in Liberia (UNDP Liberia) implementing a wide range of activities that were urgently needed in the post-conflict period. The ADR identified that, in addition to engaging in its traditional areas of work, UNDP also supported diverse activities including infrastructural works (e.g., rehabilitation of roads, and of government buildings), procurement of essential equipment and reintegrating war-affected populations. Most of these activities were implemented through short-term projects using the direct implementation modality.

UNDP's response, as noted in the ADR, was appropriate given that Liberia urgently needed both immediate reconstruction and peacebuilding and given that these activities were identified as required by the national government, the United Nations Mission in Liberia and other donors in the country. However, the evaluation also noted that UNDP's approach was heavily focused on visible, physical outputs, e.g., infrastructural works, relying largely on UNDP to implement the activities. While this was justified during the earlier years, the ADR emphasized that UNDP should not continue with this approach going forward. The evaluation noted that the effect of this tendency to use UNDP as substitute for the capacity of national institutions has come at the expense of longer-term capacity building. It further stated that national institutions were not given greater responsibility or ownership of projects resulting in the delay in the development of national capacities to take full charge of their own development. Rather than to continue with this approach, the ADR recommended that

2 UNDP IEO, Assessment of Development Results: Evaluation of UNDP Contribution –Liberia (2012), <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/liberia.shtml>

corrective actions be taken in future UNDP programming to ensure that UNDP slowly moves away from the project-based, infrastructural and procurement services, to providing more technical and advisory services. The evaluation strongly emphasized the need for continued strengthening of the internal capacities of various national institutions, in particular those in the rule of law, justice and security sector, such as the Liberian Anti-corruption Commission, in order to build national capacity to acceptable levels.

The ADR particularly highlighted the UNDP Liberia's notable achievements in the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1325, which was the first Resolution to address the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women. This resolution emphasizes that women should be active agents, fully participating in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace-building and peacekeeping and it called on member states to incorporate gender perspective in all areas of peace building. As elaborated in the ADR, UNDP support in Liberia, especially through the Ministry of Gender and Development, effectively initiated processes that will lead to realization of many action areas of the Resolution 1325. Crucially, while noting substantial achievements in this area, the ADR recommended that the new UNDP programme in Liberia should include a key dimension of advancing government efforts to address gender equality, including addressing gender-based violence and women's access to economic resources.

In response to the ADR's findings and recommendations, UNDP Liberia agreed to re-focus its work on three main pillars of work to address some of the key structural causes of the conflict and to shift from a project-based approach to a more strategic, programmatic approach. Thus, UNDP Liberia prepared a new CPD for 2013-2017 which incorporated both the lessons highlighted in the ADR and outlined concrete actions to address the ADR's recommendations. In the new CPD, UNDP Liberia committed to supporting a gradual transition to the

national implementation modality and proposed a new programme of work that is deeply focused on building and strengthening inclusive governance and public institutions. For instance it committed to strengthening the capacities of the investigators and prosecutors within the recently established Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission. UNDP will moreover re-focus its support on providing technical advice and provide targeted strengthening of national capacities to successfully implement the needed reform processes in the justice and security services to make these sectors more accessible and responsive.

As part of the effort to support inclusive governance, a key area of its planned work is to specifically expand the role of women in each area of engagement, particularly supporting their participation in decision-making bodies at all levels of government and in the positions of authority. As stated in the CPD, UNDP plans to achieve this through activities related to increasing female participation in all stages of the electoral cycle, ensuring gender-balanced staffing in government offices, ensuring that the planned Constitutional review incorporates and fully addresses gender equality, and that gender-responsive budgeting is used in the formulation and implementation of sectoral strategies. All these actions should further serve to improve the implementation of the Resolution 1325 as well as the other six resolutions that collectively fall under the UN's 'Women, Peace and Security Agenda'.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) the ADR evaluated UNDP's support between 2003 and 2012³. Akin to Liberia, during this period, the DRC emerged from a series of conflicts and, consequently, most of the UNDP interventions prioritized humanitarian aid and stabilization efforts. As noted in the ADR violence and instability are a continued threat in several regions of the country and the national capacities remain weak. While acknowledging the significant challenges facing the DRC, the ADR asserted that future UNDP programming should progress beyond the emergency mode of operations

3 UNDP IEO, Assessment of Development Results: the Democratic Republic of Congo (2012), <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/congo-drc.shtml>

and towards more ‘traditional’ development and capacity building efforts.

The ADR made nine recommendations, three of which illustrate well how this evaluation can be seen as having contributed to state – building efforts in the DRC. The first of these noted that the ensuing UNDP planning cycle should reduce the number of sectors for interventions building upon the strongest elements of its former programmes. Within its good governance sector the ADR suggested that UNDP DRC should continue supporting state institutions, particularly the Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and the Court of Auditors. The second ADR recommendation emphasized the need for UNDP to redefine its approach to capacity building of national institutions noting that UNDP should focus on a small number of key institutions to amplify its impact. The third recommendation stressed that the new UNDP programming should specify concrete measures and projects to mainstream gender and to address gender – equality issues. The ADR suggested that some possible areas may include: the role of women in conflict resolution and mitigation; the role of women in elections and politics; and interventions to promote access to justice by victims of sexual violence.

UNDP DRC accepted the recommendations and through its newly adopted CPD (2013-2017) proposed a programme of work that has reflected the evaluation’s recommendations. A key area of cooperation that UNDP is to support in the future includes strengthening democracy in the DRC by investing in capacity building of several key institutions, including CENI and the Court of Auditors. UNDP plans to continue strengthening the electoral cycle through such initiatives as enhancing the financial and administrative capacities of CENI and establishing a permanent electoral register. It further plans to invest in structures and competencies of the Court of Auditors to strengthen oversight of public finances. Ultimately, these interventions should lead to: state institutions that have greater capacities to perform their duties; more transparent electoral process; and

greater state accountability through stronger oversight of the public finance accounts.

Lastly, gender- issues have been integrated throughout the new CPD especially by promoting the role of women: in conflict resolution mitigation; in participation in the electoral cycle; by supporting efforts to enable easier access to justice through for instance combating impunity in cases of sexual violence; and through planning to integrate gender-specific needs into the future pro-poor strategies. These are critical initiatives in a country where gender inequality and sexual violence remain high and will be of pivotal importance for the successful UNDP’s involvement in the implementation of Resolution 1325 in the DRC.

In the Republic of Sierra Leone (Sierra Leone) the ADR evaluated the support provided by UNDP from 2008 to 2012⁴, noting that during this period UNDP’s support was vital, particularly when it comes to supporting government systems and governance. Critically, UNDP strengthened the entire electoral cycle to improve Sierra Leone’s capacity to administer and hold free, fair, inclusive, and transparent elections. Another notable achievement, in collaboration with the African Development Bank, was UNDP support to the regional initiative known as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The ADR noted that the APRM process has provided a comprehensive benchmark for further development of governance in Sierra Leone.

In addition to fulfilling an essential function of independently validating UNDP’s contribution to state-building efforts, the ADR also presented several pertinent recommendations. Most importantly, the ADR called on UNDP to take on the lead role in the governance, constitutional and security sector reform areas working collaboratively with other UN agencies. Another ADR recommendation suggested that UNDP Sierra Leone should broaden its efforts in the area of access to justice and the third relevant recommendation highlighted the need to further strengthen local governance in order to consolidate peace and stability in the country.

4 UNDP IEO, Assessment of Development Results: Sierra Leone (2014), http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/adr/sierra_leone.shtml

UNDP Sierra Leone noted that the ADR provided useful guidance on efficacy and relevance of the Country Office's support to the Sierra Leone Government and that it informed the design of its new CPD. UNDP Sierra Leone will continue its work on governance and security sector reform noting that these initiatives have been incorporated in the new CPD. As part of this effort UNDP will continue supporting electoral management bodies, Parliament and the Parliament Assistance Coordination Office, originally established by UNDP. For security sector reform the CPD notes that the focus will be on modernizing the Sierra Leone police to improve border management and strengthen the capacity of institutions for threat monitoring and conflict prevention. In response to the need to broaden its access to justice efforts UNDP noted that, while the office will continue its work on gender justice, the new CPD will prioritize those interventions focusing on systemic issues within the justice sector including pre-trial detention, corruption and capacity building of the Law Officers Department. Finally, with regards to the ADR's third recommendation, UNDP management stated that it will support the formulation of a strategy for Local Governance and Economic Development along with continuing its advocacy efforts to clarify the roles of different functionaries.

Conclusion - The link between evaluation, UNDP intervention and state building

Evaluations, especially country – level ones, can provide a valuable contribution to state - building efforts, especially in post-conflict countries. They offer an independent validation of UNDP's achievements and support to national governments. As shown in the examples of the three ADR's that had been carried out by the IEO an important function of these evaluations is to take account of and highlight UNDP's notable achievements in these countries. Through an objective process, these evaluations independently validate the organization's efforts and results in a given country thus helping inform the key national stakeholders of the extent of the organizational support and achievement over a given time period. Country-level evaluations therefore perform a vital accountability and quality assurance function to both the Executive

Board and the national governments, which might help strengthen the strategic partnerships between the national governments and UNDP.

Country - level evaluations serve another crucial function. They can decisively pinpoint the critical shortcomings of an approach previously adopted in a country, which in some cases might have adversely affected the effectiveness of national capacity and state - building efforts. When prepared in a timely manner evaluations can help provide the evaluative evidence needed to re-focus and design new CPDs in a way that ensures better strategic alignment of UNDP with the key state-building initiatives and by ensuring that UNDP's projects and programmes target the most critical areas of work.

Combined, these two important aspects of evaluation can strongly shape and influence future efforts in a country, directly contributing towards state-building efforts, and laying stronger foundations for that country's transition to a more sustainable development.

PROFILE OF THE AUTHOR

Indran Naidoo was appointed Director of UNDP's Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) in February 2012. The IEO is responsible for the evaluation of UNDP's global, thematic and country level programmes worldwide.

Prior to joining UNDP, Mr. Naidoo held several oversight positions in South Africa: Director of Monitoring and Evaluation in the National Department of Land Affairs, Chief Director of the Independent Constitutional Oversight Body, Deputy Director-General for both Leadership and Management Practices and Monitoring and Evaluation. Mr. Naidoo has also held elected positions in several Evaluation Associations.

He holds a graduate degree in English and Education and post-graduate qualifications in Geography from the University of KwaZulu Natal and a post-graduate degree in Education from the University of South Africa. He also holds a Master's degree in Geography from West Virginia University (USA), and a PhD in Evaluation from the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa.