Management note on the evaluation of UNDP support to poverty reduction in the least developed countries

1. This management note presents an initial response to the evaluation of UNDP support to poverty reduction in the least developed countries (LDCs) in the period 2014-2017, carried out by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) in 2018. The evaluation focused on: (a) support to national efforts aimed at poverty reduction in LDCs; and (b) the extent to which UNDP leveraged its overall portfolio to promote sustainable poverty reduction approaches.
2. Given the importance of this issue, and in recognition of the key conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation and the opportunities it presents to learn lessons and improve our support for countries in the future, the note represents the start of an open dialogue on the implications of the evaluation for UNDP work to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. This is especially critical given the significance of this topic for the UNDP vision in its Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, to help countries achieve sustainable development by eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, accelerating structural transformations for sustainable development and building resilience to crises and shocks. Accordingly, this note presents an opening set of reflections on the evaluation, which will be shared with the Executive Board for information at the first regular session of 2019. Further consultations will be held with IEO in order to respond fully to the evaluation and elaborate a plan of action. A comprehensive management response will be presented for formal consideration at the annual session 2019.
3. Around the world, more than 650 million people live below the international poverty line ($1.90 per day) and 800 million people sit close to this threshold.[[1]](#footnote-1) When considering overlapping and multiple deprivations, the figures are even more staggering: a total of 1.45 billion people[[2]](#footnote-2) are multidimensionally poor, with women, people younger than age 18 years[[3]](#footnote-3) and those in urban settings increasingly disproportionately affected.[[4]](#footnote-4) Nearly 1.6 billion people (including about half of the world’s poor) live in settings of fragility and cycles of violence and conflict. Therefore, the contexts in which poverty is concentrated become important.
4. The 2030 Agenda aims to end poverty and promote prosperity and people’s well-being while protecting the environment. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will therefore be an especially acute challenge for LDCs, where the levels and types of deprivation are acute, infrastructure is inadequate, economies are vulnerable and capital is in short supply[[5]](#footnote-5). Further, rising inequalities across the world speak to the imperative of the 2030 Agenda to *leave no one behind*.
5. UNDP remains strongly committed to supporting LDCs in implementing the Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020[[6]](#footnote-6) in alignment with the 2030 Agenda. As the development arm of the United Nations, UNDP has a key role to play in supporting countries to make this vision a reality, putting societies on a sustainable development pathway, managing risk and enhancing resilience, advancing prosperity and well-being and eradicating poverty. The organization’s budget safeguards resource allocations to LDCs. The bulk of UNDP regular resources (a minimum of 60 per cent) were allocated to LDCs in the period 2014-2017 (of which about half was allocated to poverty reduction) and similarly for the period 2018-2021. This means that despite the decline in regular resources faced by the organization, the primacy of UNDP support to LDCs is protected in the budget.
6. The role of UNDP in supporting countries to reduce poverty has been recognized since the end of the 1980s. Previous evaluations have recognized the success of UNDP in embedding a multidimensional perspective of poverty across national and global debates, creating enabling environments to help Governments to develop pro-poor policies and expanding local capacities for pro-poor policymaking and social protection (e.g., the evaluation of the Strategic Plan, global programme and regional programmes, 2014-2017).[[7]](#footnote-7)
7. UNDP management is pleased to note that the present evaluation concludes that UNDP poverty reduction programme approaches and areas are highly relevant for the LDCs, and that UNDP remains the agency of choice in some LDCs, both in policy and implementation support. (The evaluation of the Strategic Plan, global and regional programmes, 2014-2017 also recognized that the increasingly integrated, multifaceted approach of UNDP to development challenges is well suited to, and consistent with, United Nations priorities and the needs of national partners.) The present evaluation provides an opportunity to further deepen and strengthen its poverty eradication efforts and its findings and recommendations will be useful to inform the UNDP poverty eradication offer to LDCs. UNDP notes that its programmes on sustainable development pathways, inclusive markets, aid for trade, extractive industries and building institutional and national capacities are critical in this respect. So is the significant tailored support that UNDP has provided in mainstreaming the Istanbul Programme of Action and Sustainable Development Goals into national development plans, United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and UNDP country programmes.
8. The evaluation recognizes that UNDP has made significant contributions to poverty reduction in LDCs, including by:
9. exercising critical leadership role in the conceptualization and measurement of multidimensional poverty at the global and country levels;
10. continuously supporting countries in implementing the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals, particularly through the inter-agency mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support (MAPS) approach[[8]](#footnote-8), which helped keep the momentum on integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into national plans;
11. facilitating transformative partnerships with the private sector to better harness its potential for inclusive and sustainable growth initiatives;
12. Contributing to economic revitalization in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries and played a vital role in enabling temporary benefits to affected populations through community-level income-generation initiatives.
13. At the same time, it must be noted that the UNDP focus on *multidimensional poverty* emphasizes other areas of work that are not within the scope of the current evaluation. There is a significant contribution, for instance, from the UNDP work on governance in LDCs to adopt legislation and policies to eliminate discrimination and ensure inclusion of marginal or excluded groups. Similarly, critical contributions to multidimensional poverty reduction come through UNDP programmes in health and climate change. Such an approach is in line with the recommendations from the previous evaluation of the overall UNDP contributions to poverty reduction (2000-2013), which highlighted that UNDP should maximize its poverty impact through its governance, environment, crisis prevention and recovery efforts and ensure a pro-poor bias across UNDP.
14. In particular, UNDP takes careful note of the areas where more work is needed to further strengthen its poverty work in LDCs, including: sufficient capacities to address the multidimensionality and complexity of poverty interventions; ensuring that poverty interventions generate scalable and transformative solutions, with better linkages between community-level sustainable livelihood programmes and rural poverty alleviation policies; strengthened efforts to partner with the private sector to expand productive capacities and reduce poverty, and expanding other partnerships for targeted and strategic poverty programming; more systematically pursuing the humanitarian-development divide; and paying special attention to youth- and gender-responsive policies and programmes.
15. The breadth of the Sustainable Development Goals requires that UNDP take an integrated approach to poverty eradication. The ongoing United Nations reforms also emphasize the UNDP ‘integrator role’, “giving due consideration to the role of a responsive United Nations Development Programme as the support platform of the United Nations development system providing an integrator function in support of countries in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Accordingly, to meet the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda and a repositioned and vastly strengthened United Nations development system, UNDP is transforming itself for a new era of development.
16. As the evaluation notes, the new UNDP Strategic Plan has a strong focus on an integrated approach to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals that is highly relevant for the commitment of the 2030 Agenda to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions. The Strategic Plan’s package of six interlinked signature solutions ensures an integrated, multidisciplinary focus to *keeping people out of poverty,* strengthening governance, enhancing crisis prevention and recovery, promoting nature-based solutions for development, closing the energy gap and advancing gender equality. These solution pathways are further tailored to three specific contexts: eradicating poverty in all its forms; accelerating structural transformation for sustainable development; and building resilience to crisis and shocks.
17. UNDP is also realigning its structures, capacities and expertise to be better aligned with the Strategic Plan. The existing Bureau for Policy and Programme Support and an expanded Crisis Bureau will form part of one Global Policy Network, to serve as the engine for UNDP thought leadership and programmatic work in delivering the integrator function.
18. Building on more than 50 years of development experience, UNDP is firmly grounded in practice, performance and relationships of trust. The UNDP poverty reduction offer focuses on areas where the organization has proven expertise, but it also positions the organization to be flexible and meet the demands of countries. The findings from the evaluation will be used to strengthen that offer, particularly for LDCs.
19. UNDP management looks forward to discussing the findings of the evaluation with Member States and the IEO at the upcoming Executive Board session and throughout the upcoming months.
1. UNDP*,* ‘UNDP Support to the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal 1: Poverty Reduction’ (New York, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sabina Alkire and Gisela Robles, ‘Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2017’, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) briefing 47. <http://ophi.org.uk/global-multidimensional-poverty-insdex-2017/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Estimates from the 2018 global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) released on 20 September 2018 by UNDP and OPHI. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite, ‘Urban Poetry in the Global South: Scale and Nature’, (London and New York, Routledge, 2013). The World Bank estimates that by 2035, most of the world’s extreme poor will be found in urban areas. <http://blogs.worldbank.org/governance/governance/more-voices-mean-smarter-cities> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. There are currently 47 countries in the LDC category (31 in Africa, 12 in Asia and the Pacific, 3 in the Arab States and 1 in the Latin America and Caribbean region). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Istanbul Programme of Action aims to help LDCs overcome structural challenges to eradicate poverty, achieve internationally agreed development goals and enable these countries to graduate out of this category. The comprehensive high-level midterm review of the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the LDCs for the decade 2011-2020, Antalya, Turkey, 27-29 May 2016, emphasized the “concerted and revitalized efforts … required to enable half of the least developed countries to meet the criteria for graduation by 2020” (A/CONF.228/L.1, paragraph 12). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. UNDP IEO, Evaluation of the UNDP Strategic Plan and global and regional programmes, pp. xii, August 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ‘MAPS – A Common Approach to the UNDG’s policy support to the SDGs’, March 2016, https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/doco-summary-brief-on-maps-march2016.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A/RES/72/279, Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, http://undocs.org/a/res/72/279 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)