

Empowering Lives, Building Resilience-
Stories from Eastern Europe and Central Asia
Launch event

Kori Udovicki, summary of remarks:

What is it that makes UNDP special as a go-to development partner for governments?

Bear with me—what I will now say will sound a bit abstract:

UNDP's **value added** stems above all from its particular, special position as a

- **Universal membership** organization, created and governed by both donor and program countries.
- Above all, UNDP acts as, and—equally importantly is perceived to act-- an **impartial development player**, universally recognized as committed to undisputable, universal, development goals.
- Being the **child of the two constituencies**—the donor and developing country one, it speaks both languages. Also, being a UN organization makes it a government organization, without being THE government of the country at issue-- makes it an **“official”**, representative, yet still independent from politics. This lends UNDP a unique kind of **authority**.

As I said, this sounds abstract, but on the ground it translates into very practical considerations.

A needle exchange program, for example, is incomprehensible and unacceptable to many ethical systems in the World. Convincing of its merits, rather than imposing it as a foreign solution, requires the exploitation of the advantages brought by every bit of these unique characteristics on the ground:

- (a) The individuals engaged to promote it need to understand the advantages and ethos underlying the program, but also to deeply empathize with the ethos that resists it. It is not enough to be informed about both worlds, it is necessary to be able to, as I call it-- **translate between the languages of the two worlds**.
- (b) The ability to translate is not necessarily enough--the **authority** lent by its official UN status is necessary to lend access, open doors.
- (c) The **trust** created by UNDP's impartiality is necessary to open hearts, minds.

The use of **Translation** is most obvious, but it does not stop at bridging between two value systems. Before I elaborate on this, while we are still in the realm of value systems, let me say that there is no substitute for bridging value systems—that is, there is a need for true, gradual persuasion. **Imposing solutions** through conditionality may seem faster, but are likely to be ineffective or backfire in the longer run.

Now, in my view, much of **development transformation is actually about “Translation”**: the **adoption** of tried and tested solutions, with the **“innovation”** necessary to adapt them to the always unique circumstances of the specific country and case. The choice of adequate policy models to follow, and their effective application, require the understanding of both the worlds in which the policies have been developed and tested, and the specifics of the world in which they are to be applied. Transition Europe full of examples of regulation adopted but has not come to life.

The fact that UNDP is an official organization, yet not one that is part of the official system of any particular country also lends very important advantages. UNDP can act as an impartial, yet official, **facilitator and learning conduit, in the interaction between different parts of the national socio-economic system**. Development of effective democratic systems is about finding institutional solutions that help different parts of a society interact

with one another to advance their particular interests, while advancing, not contravening, the interests of the whole. It is a very, very delicate **game of repeated trial and error, learning by doing** that sometimes seems impossible to help and accelerate. Yet, UNDP does it—this is actually the staple in its trademark activity of community mobilization, helping communities prioritize their development needs and interact with their governments...that is exactly what UNDP is able to do.

We are cheap – relatively speaking. We can, and do, spend literally months consulting with local communities and local authorities to make sure we really get at the gist of the problems they are facing. We are a global organization which reaches into small, remote corners of the world with the support needed not to provide short term emergency aid, but sustained development support.

We are often told that our mandate is too spread out, that we need to choose between different sectors of work – do we want to focus on environment? Poverty? But these are areas of expertise, and it is not our expertise that makes us an interesting partner. We are needed for our global reach, and our flexibility. Looking ahead, from today's viewpoint, the trajectory for a development organization like ours is not clear or straightforward. What we see very clearly is that there is a role for UNDP in the Middle income countries. Our role as the flexible and impartial convener is needed in the MICs, and in an increasingly globalized world. It is important that we do not lose this role.