EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Independent Evaluation Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted in 2015 an Assessment of Development Results (ADR) of UNDP's country programme in Albania. The ADR aims at capturing and demonstrating evaluative evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results at the country level, as well as the effectiveness of UNDP's strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts for achieving development results. The objectives of this ADR are to:

- Support the development of the next UNDP Country Programme Document
- Strengthen accountability of UNDP to national stakeholders
- Strengthen accountability of UNDP to its Executive Board

The ADR covers the period 2007–2015, which includes two programme cycles: the current one (2012–2016) and the one that immediately preceded it (2007–2011). This period is particularly important for Albania; during this time, the UNDP programme responded to a development context defined by the efforts towards European Union (EU) accession and government measures to further democratic institutions, systems, mechanisms and capacities. The election of a new government in June 2013 presented opportunities for development partners to engage in Albania on various reforms. It is significant that Albania's middle-income status and EU candidature in 2014 led to changes in the aid architecture as donors began to downsize their programmes. The United Nations (UN) system and UNDP responded to Albania's national development priorities as a One UN programme. UN and UNDP programmes evolved to respond to the changing priorities of Albania.

UNDP'S PROGRAMME

Key UNDP programme areas over the two cycles are as follows:

- Democratic governance and local development: UNDP's democratic governance and local development portfolio covered a wide range of areas related to public administration reform. Key results were achieved in supporting the territorial and administrative reform, where UNDP offered its project management and implementation experience and coordinated donor contributions through the pooled funding mechanism. Other areas of UNDP's governance programme included policy planning, public service delivery, anti-corruption, information and communication technology, electoral assistance and statistics. In addition, UNDP supported regional and local development (including mine actions). UNDP's substantive engagement in economic governance was relatively minor.
- Economic and social inclusion: Gender equality mainstreaming and gender-based violence were among the key areas of work in the economic and social inclusion portfolio. UNDP also worked on human rights and social inclusion enabling frameworks and supported specific vulnerable groups, such as Roma and Egyptian minorities and persons with disabilities. Employment promotion emerged as a key area in the current programme cycle in the wake of the economic slowdown and increasing unemployment rates, which increased the interest of national authorities in labour market interventions. Another key area was the work with civil society.
- Environment: One of the key areas of interventions was biodiversity, where UNDP worked on improving the coverage and man-

agement effectiveness of marine and coastal protected areas, and supported integrated ecosystem management in the Prespa Lakes Basin. Climate change was a key area, with the support for the preparation of national communications to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and climate change adaptation in the Drini Mati River Delta. UNDP also worked on renewable energy (solar water heating), disaster management and environmental hotspots, and supported Albania's environmental administration in its efforts to comply with EU accession requirements.

METHODOLOGY

The ADR assessed UNDP's contribution to development results in three key programme areas: democratic governance and local development, economic and social inclusion, and environment. It also assessed the strategic positioning of UNDP in the EU accession and the Delivering as One (DaO) context. The evaluation included assessments of:

- The effectiveness of UNDP's contribution to development results in Albania in the three key areas of its support. Specific attention was paid to assessing the contribution related to UNDP's global vision of supporting countries in eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities and exclusion, and its contribution to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.
- The quality of UNDP's contribution based on three criteria:
  - Relevance of UNDP's interventions to the needs of the country, the national priorities and UNDP's mandate
  - Efficiency of UNDP's interventions in terms of the use of human and financial resources (managerial efficiency and programmatic efficiency)
  - Sustainability of the results to which UNDP contributed

The ADR was both retrospective and prospective. Retrospectively, the ADR assessed UNDP's contribution to national efforts to address development challenges in the three thematic areas noted above. Prospectively, the evaluation looked ahead to examine how UNDP can support Albania's development in the next programming cycle (2017–2021), taking into account the DaO modality and the EU accession context.

The evaluation used a mixed-method approach that included desk reviews of reference material, interviews and field visits. The interviews and site visits were conducted at the national and municipal levels in the capital Tirana and eight municipalities (Durres, Elbasan, Kamez, Korca, Lezha, Pogradec, Shkodar and Vlora). Data and information collected from various sources and methods were triangulated to strengthen the validity of the findings.

KEY FINDINGS

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The UNDP programme, to varied degrees, contributed to the Government's reform agenda in a number of governance areas, including the territorial and administrative reform, service delivery reform, public policy planning, and others. UNDP's ability to respond quickly to the emerging needs and priorities of the Government was a key advantage in its support. Its capacity to mobilize funding and expertise in a short time enabled the Government to anticipate the first key actions and advance the reform agenda. UNDP's contribution has been effective in cases where it has closely followed government priorities and where there has been clear ownership of the reform agenda by government institutions.

UNDP's contribution has been most significant in furthering the territorial and administrative reform. UNDP contributed to the development of the law on territorial reform and the operational tools for the actual transfer and amalgamation process for new local government units after

the local elections in June 2015. The reform was politically highly sensitive, and UNDP, regarded as a neutral and reliable partner, has played an important role in supporting the development and implementation of the reform sequence. UNDP's effective coordination role and its work with various agencies in supporting the Government on a key governance reform have been central to its contribution.

In other programme areas, such as service delivery, ICT, policy planning and coordination, electoral assistance and anti-corruption, UNDP's scope of activities has been modest compared to the support of other agencies, but it was responsive to the needs of the Government. UNDP has used the immediate capacity needs of the Government as entry points to strengthen institutional capacities. Nevertheless, actual capacity development within the Government has not materialized to the desired extent. Key results in these areas include UNDP's contributions to the development of a long-term public service delivery strategy and a national anti-corruption strategy for the period 2015–2020, as well as the support with regard to Roma registration in the framework of the 2011 census.

UNDP has been consistent in its support to regional and local development in Albania over the past decade and is recognized as a key actor. While regional and local development support produced good project-level outputs, given the significant contextual changes, the sum of these outputs did not contribute to creating a regional and local development model in Albania. Almost two years of work in supporting the central government at the policy level in regional development was invalidated by the changing framework for EU's pre-accession assistance when the new financial framework 2014–2020 of the EU introduced a new funding and implementation approach. The scale and scope of UNDP's activities pertaining to economic governance was limited for any meaningful contribution to national development results in this area.

UNDP's work in mine action has contributed to the removal of life threats for the affected communities and enabled the restitution of land for the resumption of economic activities. Joint efforts by the Government of Albania, UNDP and other development partners led to the declaration of 'mine-free Albania' in 2009.

UNDP's support to governance reforms and local development is anchored in national polices and government priorities. The approaches taken by UNDP, particularly the emphasis on government institutions' leadership, were appropriate in improving programme relevance. UNDP has been able to respond to opportunities to contribute to the Government's reform agenda. The objectives in some cases (such as work on economic governance) are, however, over ambitious compared to the resources available.

Complementarity of UNDP operations with activities of other development actors was generally ensured. UNDP's positive cooperation with other donors and its ability to leverage resources through co-financing schemes and pooled funding were factors in its programme efficiency. More synergies could have been explored among interventions in some programme areas, for example, between territorial and administrative reform and service delivery, economic governance and regional and local development, or regional and local development and mine actions.

UNDP's policy support as part of its contribution to governance reforms has been sustainable as the results have been institutionalized and integrated within the public policy framework. The various laws, legislation and strategies that UNDP contributed to have been approved and are now in the implementation phase. UNDP's efforts to engage the staff of government institutions in the process contributed to ensuring their ownership of the outputs produced. UNDP has managed to build partnerships around a number of its initiatives to carry forward the outcomes and outputs achieved. Regional development is an area where the sustainability of UNDP's contribution at the central and regional policy level is weak, although

UNDP's interventions at the local level brought sustainable results.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The UNDP programme has focused extensively on social issues and UNDP has developed a niche in the area. UNDP has contributed to the development and enhancement of the Government's vision and strategy, including the gender equality strategy and the social inclusion strategy. UNDP has also supported the adoption of important laws and action plans, such as the gender-based violence laws and by-laws and the Roma action plan.

UNDP's work on gender and domestic-based violence has been highly effective, with positive results especially in building capacity for policy monitoring and systems at the local level. In the second programme cycle, UNDP extended its contributions to capacity development for key independent oversight bodies for human rights, such as the Ombudsman and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, who played a progressive role in removing discriminatory practices against women. Political participation of women was another important area of UNDP contribution following the institution of the gender quota in electoral legislation in 2008.

UNDP's contribution has been important in defining the social inclusion policy framework, but tangible results are difficult to measure in a context where the Government has not made significant advancement in the internalization of mechanisms and policies to mainstream social inclusion principles. Support to people with disabilities has been important at the policy, legislation and institutional levels and has been quite effective, especially at the local level. In this area, UNDP has prepared the Government for bigger institutional and legal changes advanced with the support of the World Bank.

UNDP's work with Roma and Egyptian minorities included capacity support for legislation and policy development; interventions in the regulatory framework for access to basic services (most prominently civil registration); and direct work for the empowerment of community-based organizations and employment opportunities for Roma women and youth. UNDP is recognized as a key government partner on Roma issues. However, the implementation of the national action plan for the Roma Decade is slow due to inadequate resources and insufficient coordination at the local and central level.

UNDP has been advocating and supporting civic participation and empowerment at all levels of governance, facilitating civil society actors to take active part in policy formulation and decision-making. Civic actors have led a number of initiatives, including the fight against domestic violence and the fight for women's rights. Initial results were encouraging, but civil society development issues have somewhat declined in the national agenda. While engagement with civil society actors persisted in the current programme cycle, initiatives aiming at direct capacity support for civil society organizations (CSOs) diminish in scope and budgetary weight. The nature of UNDP engagement with CSOs in the current programme cycle became skewed towards CSOs acting as service providers to help UNDP achieve specific results in awareness campaigns and similar activities.

UNDP's support in the employment and skill development area contributed to changes in the governance of Active Labour Market programmes. UNDP has made a significant contribution towards informing policymakers in key areas related to the labour market inclusion of disadvantaged groups, which have provided a meaningful basis for future intervention by the Government. UNDP's knowledge of Albanian governance systems, and its flexibility in responding to challenges in the alignment of economic development and social inclusion policies, has increased the significance of its contributions.

The objectives and key target groups addressed through interventions in the social inclusion port-

folio have not changed drastically over the two programme cycles, but their relevance to national strategic priorities has strengthened thanks to the relative importance that social inclusion and employment acquired in the national agenda. The sequencing and rationale for interventions has followed sound logic. UNDP's interventions in this area have moved gradually from capacity for government and non-government stakeholders to increasing awareness and understanding of social inclusion issues and visibility of vulnerable target groups in the early years, to supporting important legal initiatives, such as the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and related legislation. These efforts have been accompanied by measures to strengthen national and local-level domestic institutions and mechanisms in charge of implementation and monitoring.

The DaO modality has allowed for increased efficiency in the division of work among the UN agencies and reduced transaction costs for the Government. With the DaO, UNDP has been able to focus its programme in fewer areas but provide more systematic contributions. The evolution of UNDP's role in the gender area illustrates this division of work. Within UNDP's overall programme portfolio, there are good synergies among projects but they could be exploited more proactively.

UNDP has paid careful consideration to sustainability concerns in its programme, with enhanced emphasis on building national systems. However, the sustainability of results achieved is variable. It is higher in areas where there is clear ownership and government commitment, such as gender-based violence and employment. The pressure for UNDP to deliver outputs quickly and to show results, as well as inadequate human resources in some government institutions, have sometimes incentivized direct programme delivery by UNDP staff rather than through government institutions. This approach hampers capacity development and the prospects for sustainability.

ENVIRONMENT

UNDP has made important contributions to the Government's efforts in meeting its obligations under multilateral environment agreements through its support to the preparation of the national communications to the UNFCCC. UNDP activities complemented those of other agencies in facilitating government efforts to meet the EU accession requirements in different areas of environmental management, including protected areas, climate change adaptation, carbon finance, integrated ecosystem management, environmental hotspots and renewable energy.

UNDP is a key player on marine protected areas and contributed to the establishment of the first marine protected areas in Albania, as well as the finalization of the national strategic plan for marine and coastal protected areas. UNDP contributed to the preparation of a policy paper on carbon finance, providing a useful framework for further development in this area. UNDP supported the preparation of a number of other legal documents and strategic plans, for example, the national law for strategic environment assessment, by-laws for environmental impact assessment procedures and the law on renewable energy sources. UNDP's support has been critical for providing Albania an environmental legal and policy framework.

Through its support to the integration of climate change across sectors, UNDP contributed to the inclusion of climate change mitigation and adaptation in the Cross Sectorial Strategy for Environment and the Strategy of Rural and Agriculture Development in Albania within the framework of the National Strategy for Development and Integration. Climate change indicators were included in the integrated environmental monitoring system. Climate change adaptation was also included in the standard structure for management plans of protected areas in Albania.

Strengthening institutional capacity for better environmental administration has been a key component of UNDP's support. UNDP's support to the Ministry of Environment in the imple-

mentation of the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol, as well as in fulfilling its responsibility as the Designated National Authority to approve Clean Development Mechanism projects, was considered important. In 2014, the National Protected Area Agency was also established—an important step for moving work forward in this area.

At the local level, UNDP contributed to enhancing capacity through targeted seminars and special expertise workshops, for example on the preparation of local environmental action plans. There is increased awareness and understanding of environmental issues and better collaboration among stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations and local administrations. UNDP has contributed to a shift in the approach of the local administration in environment management towards more sustainable protection, preservation and use of natural resources. The Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool has been introduced in marine protected areas. As a result of the integrated ecosystem management intervention in Prespa, forest area under improved management has increased, as has lake surface under biodiversity-oriented management.

A participatory approach is systematically followed in all areas of environment, energy and climate change programmes, leading to strong local stakeholder engagement and ownership. Efforts were made to ensure that women participated in local-level environment activities.

Short-term interventions are a challenge for sustaining programme outcomes, and further efforts are needed to sustain the momentum generated. The strategies, plans and proposals prepared need to be implemented. UNDP has supported small pilot demonstration activities at the local level that have been beneficial, but more efforts are needed for wider application and institutionalization of some of the practices. Environment results depend on further reforms in the area and more sustained government initiatives. To produce climate change adaptation outcomes, further efforts are needed from the Government and other development partners to finance the project proposals developed and implement the adaptation measures identified. UNDP's solar water heating intervention reached the individual and the service sectors, but in order to further promote the use of this renewable energy source, UNDP's interventions must penetrate the industrial sector, as the industrial facilities are the intensive end-users of hot water; the availability of an attractive financing mechanism (including subsidies) is critical for this to happen.

UNDP interventions have been aligned with national strategies and have responded to key priorities and needs, both of the central government and the local administration and communities. The interventions were designed taking into account good practices and lessons learnt in the respective areas. However, it is important to note that environment is an area where most of the resources come from external funding rather than core funds and this has significant influence over real priority setting. The availability of external funding has been the most important driving force determining where, how and when UNDP work has been undertaken.

Various measures have been taken to ensure the efficiency of the programme, but there is scope for improvement. UNDP has been able to leverage resources from others for the projects it supports. There are a few examples of synergies among UNDP-supported projects and this should be further developed.

National and local ownership of UNDP's interventions provides a strong basis for sustainability of outcomes. The enhanced capacities empowered the individuals in small communities to take actions. The activities provide avenues for further government action. Funding for environment management is a key challenge for sustainability.

UNDP'S STRATEGIC POSITIONING

UNDP has positioned itself well to play a meaningful role in Albania's development process. While aligning with the Government's EU accession priorities, the UNDP programme also

brought to attention other priorities. UNDP supported not only the EU-acquis priorities areas, but also other areas that are critical for inclusive development, such as youth employment and social inclusion.

A key challenge for UNDP is the limited core resources and its dependence on external funding. UNDP maintained a pragmatic and flexible approach to resource mobilization from different sources. An issue related to external funding is that key areas of UN support, such as governance, are also accession priority areas where the EU is directly involved. For the forthcoming programme, this would mean that UNDP's engagement on some of these issues depends largely on dialogue with both the Government and the EU for strategic and financial partnership and increasing government co-financing of programmes.

UNDP's comparative strengths in Albania include its strong relationship with the Government at the central and local level, its understanding of the socio-economic and cultural context and national institutions, and its technical and managerial capacities to effectively implement projects and provide policy advice. UNDP's strong working relationship with government institutions has inspired confidence in donors. Leveraging of partnerships with other development actors has played an important role in strengthening UNDP programmes. There have been successful examples of not just resource mobilization, but collaboration, such as the support to the territorial reform, which enhanced contribution to national development results. Collaboration with civil society partners in programme delivery resulted in tangible contributions in a number of areas, such as the work with the Roma community and work related to marine protected areas and climate change adaptation in the environment portfolio. While UNDP worked with CSOs mostly in implementing its activities at the local level, there is considerable scope for a more concerted effort to strengthen civil society capacities in areas where there are fewer CSOs or where capacities are weak.

UNDP has been consistent in its support in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment and human rights. It plays an important role in communicating and working with the Government to promote the implementation of international gender and human rights agreements, and has contributed to the formulation and adoption of gender equality legislation and secondary legislation that represents a significant step forward in achieving human rights for all in the country. Despite a strong gender portfolio and a growing effort to mainstream gender in other areas of UNDP work, mainstreaming gender in different UNDP programmes faced limitations. Many results in other areas of UNDP work (such as governance, local development and environment) are focused on equity in the number of women and men targeted (for example, to ensure the participation of women in training activities). More analysis of gender dimensions is required in planning and implementing other areas of the UNDP programme.

With its global network, UNDP has a strong advantage in supporting and facilitating knowledge exchange and collaboration among countries. It has made some important contributions in this area in its programmes in Albania.

Partnership between UNDP and other UN agencies takes place within the DaO modality, which raised the visibility of UN programming in Albania. UNDP played a key role in the formulation and implementation of the One UN programme. Within the DaO framework, UNDP demonstrated synergy with other UN agencies' programmes to enhance programme strategizing and contribution. The multidimensional characteristics of some areas, such as governance and social inclusion, offered a good entry point for joint programming among UN agencies. Overall, strong synergies with the UN agencies in DaO enhanced UNDP's contribution in Albania, as well as the contribution of the broader UN system.

The DaO modality increased UNDP's programme resources, though not as much as it did for the smaller UN agencies. The DaO modality

also provided more opportunities for UNDP's engagement in some areas little known during its previous experience in the country, such as youth employment. UNDP's involvement in some areas expanded (such as governance) and some other lines of work blossomed (such as social inclusion).

Despite funding coherence, the DaO in Albania has a degree of fragmentation in implementation and spreads thinly across a range of issues. Too many outcomes, outputs and related management processes led to fragmentation and overlap. Recognizing this problem, UN agencies underwent a mid-term review exercise in 2014 that resulted in a drastic reduction in areas of work down to only four outcomes. Nevertheless, challenges remain.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 1. In the two periods under review, the UNDP programme was strongly anchored in Albania's development priorities. While aligning with the national priorities of EU accession, UNDP also leveraged its strong relationship with the Government to bring attention to other priorities, such as social inclusion, aiming to support the country's development process based on the human development perspective. UNDP is well positioned to support the Government and there is certainly an important role it can play in supporting Albania in attaining EU accessing goals and sustainable development.

Conclusion 2. UNDP has a wide range of activities in its Albania programme, and has, to varied degrees, contributed to development results in Albania. UNDP's contribution has been relevant and important in developing key policies and in filling key institutional gaps in areas such as governance, social inclusion and environment. The implementation of the various legislation and action plans is ongoing and yet to be accomplished.

Conclusion 3. Within the DaO framework, UNDP demonstrated synergy with other UN agencies' programmes to enhance programme strategizing and contribution. In addition to the strong partnership with the Government, leveraging partnerships with other development actors has played an important role in strengthening UNDP's programme. The participatory approach of the UNDP programme contributed to enhancing ownership of the programmes and outcomes.

Conclusion 4. UNDP's flexibility has given it a real comparative advantage in mobilizing resources from partners. The pooled funding mechanism used to support territorial and administrative reform not only enabled coherent support to policymaking, but also enhanced national ownership and results. Dependence on external funding is likely to have a significant influence over priority setting of UNDP programmes.

Conclusion 5. UNDP support complemented government staff needs and capacities, and this was important in the context of inadequate human resources in some government institutions. While UNDP support has enabled these institutions to function, UNDP's programme implementation approach in some cases did not facilitate capacity development to the desired effect, which may hamper the eventual sustainability of outcomes. Challenges exist in sustaining the programme's benefits, and continuous follow up was required to ensure lasting impact.

Conclusion 6. Despite a strong gender portfolio, systematic integration of gender issues in the design and implementation of UNDP's governance and environment programmes remains a challenge. There is not yet a multidisciplinary approach to cross-cutting issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: UNDP's relevance in an EU accession context remains being responsive to emerging development needs and priorities of the Government. Moving forward, UNDP should provide an adequate balance of policy and demonstration of viable development models. UNDP should focus more on service delivery at the local level.

Management Response: *In Albania, UNDP enjoys strong alignment to the country's EU accession context. On the policy dialogue level, UNDP actively participates in joint fora with national and international development partners, e.g. Donor's Technical Secretariat and Development and Integration Partners, for coordination of assistance. Further UNDP engages actively in the Government's Integrated Policy Management Group (IPMG) architecture, which is a sector coordination mechanism. In some areas, e.g. in social policy and employment, UNDP together with UNWOMEN plays lead roles in support of EU-supported sector programs. In the water sector UNDP supports governance mechanisms to manage river basins in transboundary context to deliver better water quality and a more balanced use of natural resources.*

The regional development policy, distinguished from area-based development, is a critical EU policy tool for cohesion of European regions. In Albania, policy for regional development has also been evolving. In the past programme period, UNDP supported the implementation of EU's 'Integrated Support to Decentralization' project, which aimed to establish Albania's regional development strategy and to support Albania's regions approximate the planning and institutional set up needed to engage with EU's regional development policy. The ADR provides valuable insight on the relevance and effectiveness of this work, noting also that the national policy and institutional framework objectives have been ambiguous. Going forward, UNDP will engage with national partners to support local governance mechanisms with a view to strengthen their capacities to participate in the further policy and institutional framework for regional development. Important partners are also among the international community, notably Austrian Development Agency and Swiss Development Cooperation. The Regional Development Fund is a critical asset of the Government, which can support such policy and institutional frameworks. UNDP will seek partnerships and identify strategies to support the country's newly amalgamated local government units so that the people of Albania derive measurable development gains from the evolving regional development policy of the Government. Supporting transparency and effectiveness of Fund operations as well as promoting innovative funding, including co-mingling of funds with the Regional Development Fund, towards clear, measurable performance targets at municipal levels will be explored with partners.

While most social policy is not explicitly regulated by EU Acquis, there are complex and sophisticated EU instruments to promote European standards and norms in social rights. In Albania UNDP enjoys strong partnership with national and international development partners, to support Albania's institutions in aligning to these standards and norms. Going forward, the new Country Programme of UNDP for 2017–2021, identifies social inclusion as one of its key pillars. Specific target vulnerable groups are persons with disabilities, survivors of gender-based violence, and vulnerable Roma and Egyptian populations. In this context, UNDP's gender equality agenda, both through gender mainstreaming of key national policy frameworks and legislation and through developing capacities of independent institutions to remedy discrimination against women, are key programme components going forward. UNDP's comparative advantage will be on work at local levels at the level of the newly consolidated government units.

UNDP has supported the development of the vision and strategies for social inclusion and protecting the rights of vulnerable populations. Going forward, and leveraging once again the economies of scale and capacities established by Albania's territorial administrative reform, the new Country Programme of UNDP is designed so that results are delivered at the level of local government units. The strategy of implementation of the country programme is through local government units, with indicators and targets adopted for 61 municipalities, representing also a bringing to national scale, the pilots to policy work (e.g. in community response mechanism to gender-based violence) to national coverage through the 61 municipalities.

Recommendation 2: UNDP should continue to strengthen its efforts for resource mobilization. It should also explore cost-sharing options or technical service modalities fully financed by the Government.

Management Response: *The Country Office acknowledges that a critical mass of programme funding is essential for achievement of development results supported by UNDP. The experience of the Country Office has been that UNDP's support, when linked to a nationally driven reform agenda, and delivered in coherence, partnership and collaboration with other development partners, has been effective in attracting also financial resources. National ownership and drive of results are critical. UNDP will concentrate resource mobilization efforts, not as a fund-raising effort towards UNDP projects, but rather as ensuring that national reform programmes are adequately resourced. To date, as underlined in the ADR, Government Cost Sharing towards UNDP-supported programmes and projects has not been substantial. However, the more UNDP focuses on delivering national reform programmes, the more national resources can be attached to programme results. During the past programming cycle the Country Office progressively dispelled the notion that UNDP is a donor. The Country Office will continue to offer a problem solving approach towards delivering of national reform agendas to government partners at central and local levels. This in turn will encourage pooling and comingling of national and international resources towards mutually agreed targets, some of which are most effectively delivered by UNDP. Comparative advantages lie not only in substantive command of areas such as rights of vulnerable communities, gender-based violence, local governance, but also in operational and managerial capacities for co-management with government and other national partners different sources of funding towards reform objectives. Local government partners will play an increasing role in such partnerships going forward, as they themselves will become more financially stronger actors. Further UNDP's project delivery strategies, through good governance mechanisms, participation, due process, transparency and effective utilization of funds (procurement, recruitment, contract management etc.) are instruments applicable in a variety of substantive areas.*

The Government's reform agendas all require additional and innovative funding sources, some of which can be built through UNDP partnerships. Notable possibilities are energy-efficiency or innovative municipal financing mechanisms, or financing mechanisms for protected areas. Co-mingling with Government funds through such instruments will increase scale and impact of programmes.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should strengthen partnership and knowledge cooperation with other development actors and should focus on scaling up impact.

Management Response: *UNDP notes that development knowledge and replicable experience often sits with partners outside UNDP. This is also true in Albania. Some of the most important best practices in municipal services delivery, for example, have been accomplished through programmes supported by our partners across the country (SDC e.g. in Functional Areas; One Stop Shops; USAID on municipal finances; fiscal decentralization). UNDP support to the Government's reform programmes will need to be based on bigger investments on the side of the Country Office in learning from and leveraging the knowledge of other development partners, government units, civil society and academia. UNDP's programme design and management tools, such as Local Project Appraisal and Steering Committees, are formal and collaborative mechanisms (involving leadership of development partners, national institutions) for ensuring that such knowledge and experience is reflected upon, assessed, and brought to scale, as relevant in UNDP-supported reform programmes. Going forward UNDP will deploy more intent to knowledge management through these formal mechanisms as well as through other mechanisms such as project visits, experience exchange and more structured dialogue.*

The recommendation to focus on scaling impact is at the heart of the strategy for delivering the Country Programme 2017-2021. It is also the Country Office's key strategy for UNDP Strategic Plan alignment parameter of scale. UNDP has been part of successful experiences of scaling pilots to policy levels. One such example has been the experience of the coordinated community responses to gender-based violence (CCR). Going forward, a virtuous cycle of pilot to policy will be closed with bringing this response mechanism to scale through the agency of

the 61 newly amalgamated municipalities (Evaluation of the CCR in the Context of Territorial Reform refers). Further the Country Office notes that scaling of UNDP-supported pilots or strategies may also be achieved through programmes supported by other development partners. For example UNDP pilots and models for financing for protected areas (2016 onward) provide inputs to broader policy and wider replication impact through EU-Italian Cooperation programme for Natura2000; or EU Climate Change Programs.

Recommendation 4: UNDP should apply a multidisciplinary approach to cross-cutting issues, including human rights, gender equality, social inclusion and environmental management.

Management Response: *UNDP's work in Albania with UNWOMEN and other UN agency partners was recently recognized by the UNDG as a case study of strengthening normative and operational linkages as called for in GA resolution 67/226 translating normative framework (CEDAW) into results in Albania in the legal framework as well as at civil society and popular levels for increasing voice and participation in demand of rights. https://undg.org/main/undg_document/eight-case-studies-on-integrating-the-united-nations-normative-and-operational-work/ The Country Office notes however that such successes need to be made more horizontal across all outcome areas of the UNDP Country Programme going forward. Therefore, the Country Office has volunteered to apply the Gender Seal to its programme and operations in 2016. Further, effective use of programme design tools such as pre-appraisals, appraisals and monitoring and evaluation are already yielding results in stronger mainstreaming of gender across the portfolios, with most recent examples being STAR2 and STAR-PAR pooled funding programmes in support of local governance. Stronger follow up Special Procedures of Treaty bodies 'recommendations for Albania as well as the Universal Periodic Review findings will also be integrated into the Country Programme, going forward.*

Environment – UNDP Country Office is regularly integrating Social and Environmental Standards in its programs as per applicable policy. Going forward, it will be important not only formalistically meeting the Standards, but using the SES as basis for advocacy and further project design, e.g. integrating longer term disaster and climate change scenarios into floods rehabilitation works under ongoing program. More significantly, supporting the national mechanisms for mainstreaming of environmental and climate-related concerns in development and sectoral policy is a development challenge UNDP seeks to address through its upcoming Country Programme (2017-21) for which specific output targets to this regard have been agreed to and specified. The interministerial committee on climate change is a relatively young coordination mechanism for climate change mainstreaming. UNDP will support the governance and capacities of this committee to lead on policy direction that must be complied by line ministries.

Quality Assurance system for Country Office programming will be used throughout the new programme period. The Country Office has already mobilized other mechanisms for pursuing an issues-based approach that cuts across outcome areas They include the establishment of solution teams to support Tirana Municipality in follow up to the Smart City conference and multisectoral work plan of the Municipality. Further the Country Office's systematic use of Open Government and Open Data Partnerships including the Trust in Institutions Surveys help feed multidisciplinary assessments, performance monitoring into programme work across portfolios.

Recommendation 5: UNDP should prepare a long-term strategy for its development support to Albania during the course of the EU accession process. The strategy should outline UNDP's key areas of support to Albania in moving forward with EU membership.

Management Response: *The UNDP Country Programme 2017-2021 presents greater focus and credibility to our work going forward. Its alignment to the NSDI and the overarching goal of promoting rule of law and good governance with the ultimate objective of Albania's European integration outlines UNDP's strategy of support to Albania in moving forward with EU accession. In this context, the Country*

Office will explore in 2016 further entry points to support especially the anti-corruption and rule of law actors by expanding its current work. This can be further broadened in the frame of public administration reform including transparent business processes and effective public services delivery, to see how anti-corruption and rule of law support contributes to broader EU accession priorities. Each programme outcome area will be provided with the European integration relevance rationale in the Country Programme.