Evaluation of the UNDP-implemented project

**“Support to the Civil Service Training in the Republic of Azerbaijan”**

Final Report, 12 June 2017

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# List of Abbreviations

AA Association Agreement

APA Academy of Public Administration

CSC Civil Service Commission

CO Country Office

DAC Development Assistance Committee

ENA École nationale d'administration (France)

ENI European Neighbourhood Instrument

EU European Union

INAP Instituto Nacional de Administracion Publica (Spain)

IRP Institutional Reform Plan

OECD Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation

PAR Public Administration Reform

TMP Talent Management Programme

ToT Training of Trainers

UNAPF United Nations Azerbaijan Partnership Framework

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

USD US Dollar

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# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an independent end-of-project evaluation of the project “Support to the Civil Service Training in the Republic of Azerbaijan”. The evaluation serves both accountability and learning purposes. In particular UNDP as the lead implementer expects to draw lesson for its future engagement on public administration reform in Azerbaijan.

The project has been implemented by the UNDP Country Office (CO) in Azerbaijan between 2014 and 2017. The total project budget was 1.250.000 Euro, funded, with 1.000.000 Euro by the European Union through its European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), and with the remaining 250.000 Euro being contributed by UNDP, as the originally agreed in-kind contribution by the initial project partner, the Civil Service Commission (CSC), did not materialise.

The project has been bifurcated by the abolishment, in spring 2016, of the project’s counterpart institution, the CSC. From July 2016 onwards, the main partner of the project was the Academy of Public Administration (APA) under the President of Azerbaijan, which is one of the providers of training for civil servants in the country.

The initial objectives of the project were:

* To support the CSC in establishment and capacity building of its Strategy and Training Unit and Training Centre;
* To strengthen the institutional capacities of the CSC to lead and coordinate the civil servants training and to provide methodological assistance to state bodies and other training centres.

The objectives of the project remained broadly the same as in the initial project design, with CSC being replaced by the APA as the main partner institution. The change in project counterparts resulted in a period of inactivity during the transition, resulting in considerable time pressure to deliver project outputs within a period of just about 12 months (until the end of June 2017).

The evaluator adopted a standard approach of desk study of project and relevant external documents; stakeholder interviews (16 interviews in-country, as well as over Skype with international experts involved in the project activities in 2016/2017); and analysis and triangulation of the information derived from this. Given the dissolution of the CSC and the lack of access to key stakeholders from that period, the scope of the evaluation is the second phase of the project, from July 2016 to June 2017.

A number of limitations affected the assignment, including the fact that a considerable amount of project documentation and deliverables is on file in Azerbaijani, only (justified in terms of project management, but limiting a non-language speaker’s insight); and cultural specificities related to aspects of the evaluation in particular where they relate to more critical reflection on performance. A key limitation is the fact that at the time of the evaluation (May 2017), some deliverables were still being finalised; where deliverables have been used by APA outside of the framework of the project, the project design did not allow for provisions to monitor to what extent the deliverables suited the context of APA.

The evaluation report is organised around the standard OECD/DAC criteria of relevance; effectiveness; and sustainability. A discussion with UNDP during the field phase suggested that financial data—a precondition to assess the DAC criterion of “efficiency”—would not be available to the evaluator (a function of the contractual agreement between the main donor and UNDP). A discussion is therefore not included in the report.

The evaluation has the following findings:

#### Relevance

The project is aligned with the UNDAF as well as the UNDP Strategic Plan. In its initial design, the project was a direct contribution to the Institutional Reform Plan 3 of the government of Azerbaijan, and which was, until its abandonment in 2016, closely aligned with the process of negotiation of an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU. With the dissolution, in 2016, of the project’s main partner, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) this alignment has seized. As of early May 2017 (the time of the evaluator’s field work), there were no clear indications as to the overall future direction of the public administration reform (PAR) in Azerbaijan, and what emphasis there might be on civil service training within such a future PAR.

Despite this absence of a broader institutional reform agenda, training for civil servants across the institutions to address emerging issues to make the administration more responsive to the demands and needs of the modern world are in itself highly relevant for the context of Azerbaijan. While the project has worked, *inter alia*, on the development of modules that reflect new areas of importance for modern public administrations, a question is whether the project should have focused not so much on the delivery of specific modules, but on the building of the capacity of the APA to develop curricula and appropriate training methods to develop these curricula themselves.

In terms of the relevance of counterparts, until its unexpected abolishment in spring 2016, the CSC’s mandate was that of a training provider in Azerbaijan, and in that respect, it was a highly relevant partner to work with. As for the second phase of the project, the APA, too, was a highly relevant partner, as training of civil servants falls into the mandate of the institution. On the implementation side, UNDP has **added value** on several vectors, including the organisation’s long-standing presence in the country and which provides it with good access to senior government decision-makers (which proved to be particularly pertinent when the project lost its original partner, the CSC, in spring 2016, when the project was threatened with discontinuation). UNDP’s country presence also means the organisation has solid knowledge and a good network of local experts it can draw on, as well as the reputation and gravitas—as well as suitable procedures—to procure the services of international experts in the areas relevant to the project objectives.

#### Effectiveness

Despite significant changes caused by factors and developments completely outside the control of the project itself, UNDP has been able to deliver a considerable number of outputs in accordance with the initial project workplan for 2016 and 2017. In particular, it is to the credit of the UNDP project implementation team that it was able to safeguard most of the deliverables (designed, effectively, with and for a different beneficiary) from the first phase of the project, and to anchor the project within a new beneficiary institution, and with considerable ownership by this new partner.

At the time of the evaluation, the following main deliverables of the project against the project’s workplan can be ascertained:

**Output 1 – Training Centre under the Academy of Public Administration is established and operational**

* The project has assisted the Training Centre of the APA to build its capacities through the delivery of training modules on 33 topics horizontally relevant for the public administration of Azerbaijan; the training of 45-50 trainers from among APA staff on these topics; the development of a training strategy and internal procedures adapted to the specific needs of the Training Centre.
* Infrastructure: as part of the project, IT equipment, initially foreseen for the CSC, has been purchased for the Training Centre of the APA and is functional. A training management software, developed initially for the CSC, is, as of early May 2017, being adapted to the needs of the APA. The management of the equipment and, in the future, of the software, is/will be carried out by staff of the APA. The equipment has been used to successfully pilot distance training of civil servants in the regions.
* UNDP project management was able to successfully carry forward to the APA deliverables that were produced for the CSC in the framework of a GIZ project (and which came to a planned end in March 2016), namely, the draft training strategy; the Strategic Leadership Programme; as well as 9 training modules and 2 e-learning modules. These deliverables were adapted to the context of the APA.

In a potential future cooperation—if such an opportunity should arise—on civil service training, it is advisable that a look be taken at some of the more uneven outputs.

Specifically, with regards to the trainers trained in the APA as part of a Training-of-Trainers (ToT) approach, the evaluator finds that there is a very notable asymmetry between the trainees’ and the trainers’ perception of the effectiveness of the trainings. Trainers were consistently sceptical that based on what were very short trainings (between 2 and 4 days), trainers-to-be would indeed be in a position to deliver the trainings themselves. There was shared concern, among the trainers, that key concepts the trainings dealt with were not, by the end of the trainings, fully understood by trainers-to-be. As the ToTs did not involve an element of trainers-to-be having to deliver a training during the lifetime of the project, there is simply no way of knowing whether those trained in the project are able to train others or not. Follow-up cooperation on ToT could potentially involve longer trainings; a clearer process of selecting trainers-to-be; repeat trainings; and trainings to be delivered by future trainers as part of the process. There has also been evidence that trainings could have benefitted from even closer preparatory work with the international trainers.

Related to the above, a more systemic concern, and which goes beyond this project and beyond the APA, is the fact that many of the trainers-to-be lack sufficient practical experience in the civil service and that would provide them with the hands-on experience and authority to provide training to civil servants, including medium- and senior level civil servants.

Other project outputs, too, are too early to conclusively assess for their effectiveness. This also includes a Talent Management Programme—a scheme that would aim at high-achieving young civil servants, through specific coaching, training, and mentoring opportunities, and which was in the pilot phase at the time of the evaluation; and a Strategic Leadership Programme-a set of training modules specifically targeting senior civil servants.

**Output 2 – Institutional capacity of APA to lead and coordinate civil servants training and to provide methodological assistance to state bodies and other training centers are strengthened**

* A library and resource centre in the APA has been established.

While this result corresponds to the Project Document, it is notable that there is a disconnect between the ambitions worded under the output heading and the deliverable pursued. The establishment of a library cannot stringently be connected to leading and coordinating of civil servants training etc. The evaluation has not found specific evidence of project activities specifically concerned with the broader aims of this output heading.

The level of ownership of the project by the APA has overall been good, which is commendable, given that the institution had not been part of the original design. There are opportunities for a further strengthening of the relationship between UNDP project management and the APA, should there be a future cooperation. Specifically, this concerns the process of selecting trainers-to-be, and where both APA and UNDP, including trainers, should be involved in order to ensure that the right people are trained; and that their pre-existing knowledge and skills are realistically assessed prior to the training, so as to tailor the training more appropriately.

A clear area of concern exists with regards to the complete absence, in the project, of any gender perspective built into the design, planning and monitoring of individual activities. While this might not have been required by the main donor, this cannot serve as an excuse for UNDP as an implementer, and where gender considerations have, for many years, been one of the key mainstreaming requirements to all projects.

#### Efficiency

As highlighted above, a specific discussion on efficiency was not possible, given the fact that there is a limitation on UNDP, in accordance with its contract with the EU, to share project financial data. The evaluation has therefore not included an assessment of this criterion.

#### Sustainability

At the time of the evaluation, some deliverables in accordance with the project document’s workplan were in the process of being finalised; a number of deliverables were taken forward by the APA, but as there has been no built-in monitoring of the content or quality of these trainings, it is not possible to draw wider conclusions at this point. Overall, both project management and the beneficiary institution have assured the evaluator that they will, after the project closes, be making use of the deliverables produced by the project—training modules and trainers to deliver training to civil servants; use of the library (which is established but still needs to be completed); distance learning training with the regions of Azerbaijan.

## Recommendations

To UNDP

1. Operational level

* Further strengthen cooperation between project management and the beneficiary, by providing clearer guidelines on aspects of the project that have an impact on effectiveness. This includes a more thorough, collaborative process on selecting trainers.
* Reconsider resources and sequencing needed to ensure effectiveness, in particular with respect of ToTs. This includes moving away from trainings of short duration to more protracted trainings stretching over a longer period of time; involvement in the selection of trainers to be part of the training pool; more systematic preparation of trainers in the ToTs (including their clear knowledge of who the trainees are; what the level of preparation on specific subjects is; etc.); inclusion of a trial training to be conducted by trainers-to-be; inclusion of examination/testing to ensure that trainees-to-be have mastered the specific subjects; allocation of responsibility for training and training modules to more than one trainer at the time.
* Consider offering assistance on curriculum development and development of training methods as opposed to delivering curricula on specific topics.
* Strengthen project design and aspects of implementation in future interventions. Even though the project in its implemented form has been approved and financed by the EU, there is still considerable scope for improvement relating to a stringent theory of change, underpinned by meaningful objectives tied to relevant outputs and supported by baseline indicators as well as consistent monitoring and data collection. Documenting project activities and deliverables so as to ensure that the trail of documents can be meaningfully assessed by stakeholders outside the direct project implementation team is also an area with scope for improvement.
* Introduce gender as a standard perspective during project implementation.

1. Strategic/advocacy level

* At the level of policy dialogue with the government of Azerbaijan, advocate for the need to better connect teaching with work experience/practice.

# Background

## Key project parameters

This report presents the findings of an independent end-of-project evaluation of the project “Support to the Civil Service Training in the Republic of Azerbaijan”. Implementation of the project started in July 2014, and will end in June 2017, after a no-cost extension by twelve months.

The total project budget was 1.250.000 Euro, funded, with 1.000.000 Euro by the European Union through its European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI), and with the remaining 250.000 Euro being contributed by UNDP. An originally agreed in-kind contribution by the initial project partner, the Civil Service Commission (CSC), did not materialise.

When designed, the project was one in a portfolio of various EU-funded projects in support of public administration reform in Azerbaijan as part of its Comprehensive Institution Building Programme. In parallel to this UNDP-implemented project, GIZ also carried out a project with the CSC, and for all of the time that both projects ran in parallel, GIZ and UNDP shared project premises at the CSC.

The project’s initial title was “Support to the Civil Service Commission under the president of the Republic of Azerbaijan in implementation of the Institution Reform Plan within the Comprehensive Institutional Building Programme.”

The initial **overall objective** of the project was “to strengthen the capacities of the Civil Service Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan with regard to management and coordination of civil servants training and professional development function across state bodies and leading to the development and implementation of training strategy and training policies.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The following **specific objectives** were set for the project:

* “To support the CSC in establishment and capacity building of its Strategy and Training Unit and Training Centre;
* To strengthen the institutional capacities of CSC to lead and coordinate the civil servants training and to provide methodological assistance to state bodies and other training centres.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The CSC was chosen as the project’s counterpart considering its mandate as the leading training provider for the civil service on horizontal issues, a mandate that it, in part, shared with the Academy for Public Administration (APA)[[3]](#footnote-3) under the President of Azerbaijan. In spring 2016, the CSC was abolished without any clear prior warning. Stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation have posited that this move has been part of a general wave of consolidation of functions in the public administration. A key part of the mandate of the CSC—the implementation of examinations for candidates to the civil service—was transferred to a newly created organisation. The CSC was partly reconfigured into a new public entity with recruitment functions; at the time of the dissolution of the CSC, the new partner, APA, was the only institution with a mandate for civil service training on horizontal issues.

For the project, this meant that it had, effectively overnight, lost its main partner. After a period of uncertainty as to whether it would make sense and be feasible to continue the project, the UNDP CO, using its access to senior-level decision makers in government, managed to “rescue” the project by transferring it to the APA—the only obvious other counterpart institution for the objectives pursued through the project. The project was renamed to “Support to the Civil Service Training in the Republic of Azerbaijan”, revised in 2016, and the overall objective was framed as follows: “Training Centre under the Academy of Public Administration is established and operational”; the **specific objectives** were:

* “to support the APA in the establishment of a Training Centre and the capacity building of its staff; and
* to strengthen the institutional capacities of the APA to lead and coordinate the civil servants trainings and to provide the methodological assistance to state bodies and other training centres”.[[4]](#footnote-4)

These two specific objectives were further broken down in “output targets”, which, in turn where accompanied by activities as part of an “Annual Workplan” (these will be discussed in detail in the Findings section below). This workplan contains but one baseline (“There is no training centre for civil servants established and operational”) and one indicator (“A training centre for civil servants is established and operational – yes/no”).

Project activities, which had effectively been on hold from April 2016 onwards resumed in September 2016. In terms of continuity between the two “phases” of the project (i.e. phase 1, with the CSC as the main counterpart and phase 2, with APA as the main counterpart), the physical infrastructure that had been procured through the project (see below), this was successfully moved to the APA, which made available premises within its building. The intellectual outputs (training modules) produced by the project in collaboration with the CSC were also transferred, but had to be adjusted to the context of the APA. UNDP also managed to transfer the intellectual outputs from the GIZ-led project (which had come to its close in March 2016), such as the draft training strategy that was developed for CSC; this, too, had subsequently to be adjusted by the project to suit the APA context.

In terms of project management, the first phase of the project operated with a UNDP Project Manager; and a UNDP Project Officer. For the second phase of the project, and given that the funding initially pledged by CSC had not materialised, project management was consolidated and the overall, day-to-day management and running of the project was taken over by the, to date, UNDP Project Officer. Overall substantive and administrative oversight is provided by a UNDP Project Advisor. The project has also had a series of interns (at the time of the evaluation – 2).

## The evaluation

### Purpose

The evaluation, which is part of the CO’s evaluation plan for 2017, was commissioned by UNDP CO Azerbaijan in April 2017 and will conclude by end May 2017.

The purpose of the evaluation is two-fold: one the one hand, it serves accountability purposes; on the other hand, there is an element of learning that underpins the rationale. As having mainly been funded by the European Union (EU), it has successfully passed a regular verification of its financial procedures by an EU contractor; the EU Delegation in Azerbaijan is not, at the moment, considering a continuation of this or similar projects (given the absence of public administration reform among the national reform priorities by the government). Against this background, the EUD is somewhat less concerned by the findings of the evaluation. However, the evaluator understands that the assignment is important to the UNDP CO for organisational learning, as well as its dialogue and advocacy work with the government of Azerbaijan.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation (see Annex A) stipulate the objective as follows:

It “will assess progress towards the achievement of the project objectives and outcomes as specified in the Project Document, and assess the relevance and sustainability of outputs as contributions to mid-term and longer-term outcomes. The evaluation will also review the project’s strategy, its risks to sustainability.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

The ToR focus on the assessment of the second phase of the project, i.e. the phase that has cooperated with the APA from mid-2016 onwards.

### Methodology

The evaluation has adopted a standard methodology of a) desk study of project and relevant non-project documents (see Annex B for a full list), submitted by the UNDP Project Officer in charge of the project and/or collected independently by the evaluator through internet research; b) a series of stakeholder interviews (a total of 16 interviews), including UNDP project management; the donor; senior management of the APA; participants in specific training and other project activities; international experts involved in the development of training modules and the delivery of training of trainers in the framework of the project (these interviews continue at the time of writing of the first draft report); d) direct observation of one of the project activities; d) a triangulation of the findings of a, b and c.

Stakeholder interviews (b) had a standard, semi-structured format. The evaluator introduced the purpose of the evaluation to interview partners; ascertained the respective interviewee’s role and involvement in the project; and then moved to probe assumptions on outcomes and results achieved at the level of the individual and the institution. Given the shortage of time for the assignment (10 days in total including travel days), there was no scope to apply non-conventional data collection techniques. Also, all interviews were arranged for by UNDP, also a function of the shortage of time.

The evaluation is organised around the standard OECD/DAC criteria of relevance (including value-added of UNDP in the implementation); effectiveness; and sustainability. As mentioned above, with regards to efficiency criterion, the project has undergone an EU verification (a standard procedure looking into financial implementation aspects), and with view to the agreement between the EU and its implementing partners on divulging financial data related to projects, financial data was not available to the evaluator. As the project has not yet been concluded, impact, too, is too early to assess at this point in the project.

### Scope

In accordance with the ToR, the evaluation focuses on the second phase of the project, i.e. during which UNDP cooperated with the APA as its partner institution. The ToR are rather detailed in the way in which an assessment of results is expected to be presented. However, as will be discussed in the following section on “Limitations”, it appears difficult to follow this approach for the task at hand.

### Limitations

A number of limitations affected the assignment and the way it was able to deliver on the specific requirements of the ToR. First, a considerable amount of project data and documentation is held on file in Azerbaijani. This is understandable, given that to translate material on individual activities into English is resource-intensive, and not required by the donor; it does, however, make an outside assessment of individual activities and outputs difficult for a non-Azerbaijani speaker. The regular reports provided by the project to the donor are summary in character – this corresponds to the agreement between UNDP and the EU and is also not in and of itself a problem other than reducing data search to stakeholder interviews to make up for the scarcity of written evidence available.

With regards to the interviews with APA stakeholders, the evaluator found there to be a specific challenge posed by the cultural context in which the assignment took place, and where criticism—even if constructive and in the spirit of improving future cooperation—is considered impolite.

Another limitation is the format of the project document and its workplan itself. This is the result of a need to reframe the project for the purposes of its work with the APA as the main counterpart. However, as discussed above, there is but one single (Yes/No) indicator for the entire workplan, and there are then five “output targets”, which in turn have “activities” assigned to them, but where the link between these is not always obvious or stringent. Also a function of the immense time pressure under which the project is currently being implemented, there is no formal internal monitoring process in place, and which would collect project data in a structured way over time. To then assess the project using the framework provided for by the ToR appears to be disproportionate, as the way it is framed does not lend itself to this.

It has been challenging to understand the available project documentation. Documents often do not have a discernible structure nor a clear outline of their purpose, follow-up steps, etc. In terms of accountability, it would have been useful had the project kept its files organised using the work plan outputs.

The most important limitation, however, is the fact that while the 33 training modules that were developed as part of the project had been handed over and a pool of trainers had been developed, the project has no in-built mechanism to monitor how these modules and trainers perform outside the project parameters. Trainers and the APA’s management have assured the evaluator that they will be taking the trainings forward in the future; however, there was also evidence to suggest that in order to do so, the ToT part of the project would need to be deepened (see below). In terms of the evaluation, this makes it impossible to discuss effectiveness or sustainability issues in a rigorous way, as the evidence is too weak to come to any conclusion at this point in the lifetime of the project.

# Findings

## Relevance

The project is aligned with the 2011-2015 and the current 2016-2020 United Nations-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework as well as the UNDP Strategic Plan and specifically Strategic Priority Area 2, “Strengthening Institutional Capacities and Effective Public and Social Services”[[6]](#footnote-6). However, the evaluator has found no evidence on how the project measures performance against these strategic frameworks and/or its indicators.

In its initial (2013) design, the project was a direct contribution to the then Institutional Reform Plan 3 (IPR 3) of the government of Azerbaijan, and which was closely aligned with the process of negotiation of an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU; the AA process was, however, abandoned in 2016, and the government of Azerbaijan is currently working on a different agreement with the EU. With the dissolution, in 2016, of the project’s main partner, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) this alignment with the IPR 3 has seized; at present, there are no clear indications as to the overall direction of the public administration reform (PAR) in Azerbaijan, and what emphasis there will be on civil service training within a future PAR.

Despite this absence of a broader institutional reform agenda, training for civil servants across the institutions addressing emerging issues such as sustainable development; strategic and change management etc., to make the administration more responsive to the demands and needs of the modern world and citizens are in itself highly relevant for the context of Azerbaijan.

In terms of the relevance of the project design, it has worked on the development of 33 modules that all reflect new areas of importance for modern public administrations worldwide; these have been made available to the APA for the institution’s use for future trainings to be delivered by APA trainers themselves, and a pool of which has also been trained as part of the project. It did so bringing to bear expertise, experience, and best practices to bear from outside Azerbaijan. Stakeholders (trainees and trainers) have confirmed that this has been a relevant approach to the country context, in that systematic, structured exposure to international best practices – both in terms of the content of the training modules as well as in the didactic/pedagogic methods of teaching them—is not readily available for the APA.

However, stakeholders have also posited that there could have been an argument for working more on the APA’s capacities to develop curricula and to work with modern training methods on their own in the future, given that the modules delivered as part of the project carry the risk of becoming outdated in the medium term.

The procurement of IT infrastructure and resources for a library within the APA has been assessed highly useful from the point of view of the APA. The evaluator has insufficient information to come to any diverging conclusion—its stands to assume that no institution will reject the donation of a not insignificant amount of IT and other equipment.

In terms of the relevance of counterparts, until its unexpected abolishment in spring 2016, the CSC’s was a highly relevant partner to work with. As for the second phase of the project, the APA, too, was a highly relevant—and in fact the *only* partner that could have taken over from the CSC--, as training of civil servants falls into the mandate of the institution, as mentioned above, it is, at the time of the evaluation, the *only* institution in Azerbaijan mandated with civil service training on horizontal, cross-cutting aspects. However, a larger concern exists with regards to the heavily academic profile of the education sector in general, and where APA is no exception. While thematically, the modules and trainings delivered were relevant to the APA, the overarching question is as to how teaching will be conducted given that most of the APA pool of trainers are career academics and teachers, and there is a distinct lack of practical experience (be it in the public administration or elsewhere). However, in the context of Azerbaijan, there is no credible alternative stakeholder who could have been more relevant for the context of the project.

On the implementation side, UNDP has added value on several vectors, including the organisation’s long-standing presence in the country and which provides it with good access to senior government decision-makers (which proved to be particularly pertinent when the project lost its original partner, the CSC, in spring 2016 and when the project was threatened with discontinuation). UNDP’s country presence also means the organisation has solid knowledge and a good network of local experts it can draw on, as well as the reputation and gravitas—and suitable, trusted procedures—to procure the services of international experts in the areas relevant to the project objectives.

## Effectiveness

Despite significant changes caused by factors and developments completely outside the control of the project itself, UNDP has been able to deliver a considerable number of outputs in accordance with the project objectives. In particular, it is to the credit of the UNDP project implementation team that it was able to safeguard most of the deliverables (designed, effectively, with and for a different beneficiary) from the first phase of the project, and to house the project within a new beneficiary institution, and with considerable ownership of this new partner.

As discussed in the section on “Limitations” above, the assessment of effectiveness is made difficult by what has to be judged to be a weak results framework for the second phase of the project, and which lacks any sort of meaningful quantitative or qualitative indicators, and also lacks a discussion of risks associated with the implementation. The evaluator understands that the document has been put together at a time of considerable pressure to “rescue” the project from closure, and might represent what UNDP and APA could agree on at the time, given the circumstances. In terms of project planning standards and best practices, it might, however, fall somewhat short in any other context.

The following section assesses results against the Annual work plan output targets for 2016 and 2017 in order.

### Specific objective 1: To support the Academy of Public Administration in the establishment of a Training Centre and capacity building of its staff

#### Output Target 1.2**[[7]](#footnote-7)** – Training Strategy and Action Plan is finalised and submitted for approval

* The draft Training Strategy and Action Plan for the Training Centre in the APA has been adjusted to fit the context of the APA. The draft Strategy has been a deliverable under the GIZ project with the CSC, and UNDP has ensured that this deliverable is not lost, by carrying it over to the APA and spending resources on adapting it.

#### Output Target 1.3—The necessary equipment, software and furniture are installed in the Training Centre

* The APA has made a number of rooms available inside its building for the Training Centre. This is not a wing of connected rooms. However, it is a proof of the considerable ownership on the side of APA to do created a dedicated Training Centre in their premises. The project has equipped these rooms with furniture (tables and chairs etc.).
* IT equipment, initially foreseen for the CSC, has been purchased for the Training Centre of the APA and is functional. A training management software, developed initially for the CSC, is currently being adapted to the needs of the APA. The management of the equipment and, in the future, of the software, is/will be carried out by staff of the APA – another piece of evidence of the ownership of APA for the project. The equipment has been used to successfully pilot distance training of civil servants in the regions.

#### Output Target 1.4—Training Centre is established

This output target refers not so much to the physical aspects of the Training Centre (and which is covered in the previous target) as to the intellectual outputs related to the operation of the centre. The workplan contains a set of activities, which will be discussed here.

1. *Establishment of Training Centre*. See discussion under 1.3
2. *Finalising internal procedures of the center*. –Guidelines for the development of work plans and training plans for the APA Training Centre have been developed (these were adopted from the procedures initially adopted for the CSC to reflect the realities of APA), and a training was developed for staff to work on the development of work plans and training plans in the future.

*Development of new modules and adoptation of the developed modules*. In total, in phase 1 and 2 of the project, 33 training modules were developed (11 modules had been developed as part of the GIZ project with the CSC and which ran in parallel and in cooperation with the UNDP project; these were carried over by the UNDP project to APA, where they underwent adjustment to better suit the requirements of APA). For three of the 22 modules developed by the UNDP project in 2016 and 2017, international experts were engaged. Both national and international experts developed draft modules; these modules were then used in 2-days and 4-days Training of Trainers (ToT) of APA staff. In future, the trained APA staff is expected to provide training, using these modules and the methods and knowledge gained from the trainings, to civil servants. The nomination of the trainers-to-be was done by the APA itself; however, information on the participants-to-be was forwarded to the trainers in preparation of the trainings.

From a project design point of view, the ToT approach seems to be a sensible one, as it aims at institutionalising the deliverables. However, the evaluator has observed a very clear discrepancy between how trainers (international and national) on the one hand, and APA trainees on the other hand, assess the effectiveness of the trainings, specifically, their ability, in the future, to indeed conduct trainings on the given topics themselves. Trainers were mainly sceptical as to whether a 2 or 4-day one-off trainings were enough to really lead to trainees being able to conduct similar trainings themselves; in part, this scepticism was informed by the fact that participants were not, at the end of the training, in a position to successfully resolve the tasks trainers provided them with. There has also been evidence that the trainings could have been more effective with deeper and more detailed preparation and guidance to experts. However, given the considerable time pressure the project has been under to deliver, it is clear that these aspects might have been under-resourced.

Another concern with respect to effectiveness has been the overwhelmingly academic profile of the trainees. While the trainers who conducted the ToTs have a strong, multi-annual track record of providing trainings, their target audiences in the main are civil servants, with hands-on knowledge and experience being part of a civil service organisation. Trainers felt that the content of the training might possibly have benefitted trainers from civil service organisations somewhat more.

However, trainees themselves (with a few exceptions), were confident that they would be able to conduct trainings. The project design does not foresee that trainees have to demonstrate their new skills. The APA has started to deliver trainings using the modules, but assessment of the trainings does take place outside the project. Therefore, no further information is available at this point to be able to confirm or refute trainees’ self-assessment.

From an evaluation point of view, this leaves a dilemma, in that no clear assessment is possible.

*Localisation of Strategic Leadership Programme*. This Programme, originally part of the GIZ project that ran in parallel to phase 1 of the evaluated project, was adapted, in June 2017 for the purposes of the APA. It proposes a training programme specifically targeted at senior civil servants, comprising of a total of 8 individual modules, and which would be taught, over the course of 10 days, back-to-back. The focus of the Programme would be to develop skills in areas now internationally recognised as necessary for a modern civil service. Proposed topics include: leadership skills and strategic leadership; change management; team building; conflict management, negotiation and mediation; public relations and others. A first pilot of the training was held within the project, and the results were assessed as positive based on participants’ post-training evaluation forms; however, these were administered in Azerbaijani and were therefore not accessible to the evaluator for further analysis.

*Launch of Talent Management Programme*. The Talent Management Programme (TMP), too, is a deliverable that originates from the first phase of the project, and where the idea had been generated as a result of a study visit of CSC staff to Ireland. At the core of the TMP is the creation of a specific, highly prestigious career development track for high-achieving junior civil servants, by recognising and nurturing (through targeted opportunities such as mentoring and coaching) their talents, and by giving visibility to participants. APA has been welcoming the idea, and at the time of the evaluation, a first set of activities had been conducted to pilot the scheme.

As with other deliverables, it is not possible, at the time of the evaluation, to conclude whether this initiative will have lasting results beyond the pilot phase, i.e. whether it will be taken up by the APA, including whether resources will be made available for such a scheme. It would appear that the decision to run the TPM does not solely depend on the APA – rather, it would seem to require a decision at government level, and with the training role assigned to APA within this scheme.

#### Output Target 1.5 – Awareness on best practise in civil service training management is raised

Under this target, the project organised two study tours to EU countries – Spain (INAP) and France (ENA). APA participants (4 and 5) appreciated the high quality of the programme that was put together by UNDP project management and the hosting institutions. However, it is difficult to conclude what the more longer- term benefits of these tours have been for APA. The evaluator consulted the post-tour reports by participants, and while these contain “lessons learned”, there is, at least from these documents, no specific sense of whether any of the practices in Spain or France will be applied to APA, or what steps would need to be undertaken to do so.

### Specific Objective 2 – Institutional capacity of APA to lead and coordinate civil servants training and to provide methodological assistance to state bodies and other training centers are strengthened

#### Output target 2.1 Library and Resource Centre of Training Centre is established.

A library and resource centre in the APA has been established in one of the rooms that form part of the Training Centre, and procurement of books (all of which seem highly relevant for the profile of the APA) for the library is almost concluded. Neither the project nor the APA collect any information on the use of the resource centre; it is therefore not possible to offer any additional assessment of this output target.

Overall, while this result corresponds to the Project Document, it is notable that there is a disconnect between the ambitions worded under the Objective heading and the results pursued. The establishment of a library cannot stringently be connected to leading and coordinating of civil servants training etc. The evaluation has not found specific evidence of project activities concerned with the broader aims of this objective heading.

### Ownership

The level of **ownership** of the project by the APA has overall been good – all the more that the institution had not been part of the original project design. APA has not been the recipient of many technical assistance projects in the past, and is also a new cooperation partner for UNDP. As discussed above, APA has made 4 rooms available that now make up the new Training Centre, consisting of the Resource Centre, Computer and Database Rooms, and a training auditorium; they also made available premises for the project team.

### Effectiveness of project implementation arrangements

In terms of the effectiveness of the project implementation, some questions arose in relation to the cooperation vector between APA and UNDP on the one hand, and in relation to some internal processes on the other hand. These can be explained by the intense time pressure to deliver the project before its closure in June 2017.

With regards to the cooperation between APA and UNDP, some aspects could be strengthened in the future, should there be a continued cooperation. Specifically, this concerns the process of selecting trainers-to-be – a process that now lies entirely with the APA, and where UNDP—while stipulating the broad criteria for future trainers—does not participate in the process of selection of who is to become part of the pool of trainers and for which module. The process of selection of trainers is, in similar projects, an important part of the implementation process, and where considerable resources are being invested to ensure that the right people are trained into the pool of trainers. This process would typically involve the international experts who would then work with trainers-to-be over a protracted period of time along all stages of the ToT (see above discussion under Output Target 1.4, point c).

Further, there might be arguments to leverage better follow-up from the APA on some of the deliverables. For example, the quality of the post study tour reports does not convince – which in part leads to the rather modest assessment of this output above. As also highlighted elsewhere in the report, it is uncertain whether the APA is actually in a position to deliver on some of the more ambitious objectives in the aftermath of the abolishment of the CSC; a future effort should, then, frame these objectives more realistically to reflect what is in the institutional mandate of the APA and what is not.

With regards to UNDP internal project management, and with the strong caveat that this project has had very little time to deliver the project, a few issues deserve highlighting. First, it is clear that training could have been more effective had there been a longer lead time for project management to work with the trainers in preparation of the training, as well as ensuring that the APA-nominated trainers matched the stipulated criteria and had a realistic assessment of their own knowledge on specific topics, as well as on the level of their language skills. Effectiveness could have been further enhanced by stretching the trainings out over a longer period of time, as well as by making a training to be delivered by trainees a compulsory part of the process, so as to make absolutely sure that training can indeed be delivered.

Second, the evaluator has struggled with many of the project’s internal documents and deliverables. Many of these (see list in the Annex C) do not contain dates nor authors; it is not clear what the status is of these documents, who the audience is, nor what the follow-up steps are to implement the issues highlighted in the notes. For some of the deliverables, questions arise with regards to quality control, as the reader is left to guess, for example, what the structure is of the paper - papers do not contain tables of content; executive summaries.

From an evaluation point of view, this makes it rather very difficult to do the overall project justice. While bureaucracy should be kept to a minimum, the evaluator feels that there is scope to further improve file keeping and thinking about it from the point of view of accountability and how clear it is for an outsider to appreciate the project’s achievements.

### Crosscutting issues – Gender

A clear area of concern exists with regards to the complete absence, in the project, of any gender perspective built into the design, planning and monitoring of individual activities. As with other more problematic parts of the project, while this might not have been required by the main donor, this cannot serve as an excuse for UNDP as an implementer, and where gender considerations have, for many years, been one of the key mainstreaming requirements to all projects. There has been evidence that there is scope to include gender considerations more proactively into project deliverables. For example, some trainers have remarked on the voluntary split, during trainings, in seating arrangements between male and female training participants. Also, there appears to have been a different work dynamic along gender lines that might have been addressed in a more structured way by trainers had they been alerted to and prepared for it.

## Efficiency

As highlighted above, a specific discussion on efficiency has been abandoned, given the limitations posed on UNDP, to divulge financial data as part of the organisation’s contractual agreement with the main donor, the EU. The evaluation has therefore not included an assessment of this criterion.

## Sustainability

At the time of the evaluation, some deliverables in accordance with the project document’s workplan were in the process of being finalised.

Both project management and the beneficiary institution have assured the evaluator that they will be making use of the deliverables of the project—training modules and trainers to deliver training to civil servants (a workplan for the delivery of trainings after the end of the project was prepared by an expert for APA); use of the library (which is established and is nearing completion). Distance learning training with the regions of Azerbaijan has been piloted by APA. This effectively means that beyond stating that trainings are taking place, a more specific discussion is not possible as no data or evidence is available on whether the trainers have the skills to train on these modules (see discussion above – there have been significant discrepancies in assessment between the trainers and the trainees), and to what extent the modules have to be further adjusted as they are being applied to Azerbaijani civil servants. In less time pressured circumstances, the project should have specifically built an element of “testing the new trainers” into the design.

Similarly, there is, at the time of the evaluation, insufficient evidence about concrete steps on the Strategic Leadership Programme and the Talent Management Programme (see discussion above). APA management is supportive of the two schemes, but there is too little information on what the specific next steps are beyond the pilot phases for both.

As discussed above under “Effectiveness”, there are some doubts associated with the actual skills created for trainers to deliver trainings independently.

# Conclusions

The evaluated project has been implemented under challenging circumstances, most notably, the unexpected abolishment of its initial partner institution, the Civil Service Commission. UNDP has succeeded in a commendable effort to safeguard the deliverables from the first phase of implementation, and to anchor it with a new partner institution in a short period of time. Equally, UNDP has managed to deliver a considerable amount of outputs. Strong aspects of the project design and approach include the Training-of-Trainers approach; as well as the considerable ownership of the new host institution, the Academy for Public Administration under the President of Azerbaijan.

In part as a function of the time pressure to the deliver, the project has had insufficient mechanisms built into its design to make the work on the ToT and the training modules a more protracted process, with multiple layers of engagement with trainers-to-be, and crucially, with mechanisms in place to ensure sustainability of results.

# Lessons Learned

**A sound training-of-trainers approach has many iterations.** On each step in the process, considerable resources have to be invested. These range from the need for a dialogue with the partner institution on the requirements on trainers-to-be; an engagement/participation in the selection of trainers; thorough preparatory work with the experts involved in the ToR and the development of the modules; close follow-up with the experts on the outcomes of the training and on how these need to translate into follow-up activities; a compulsory element of testing the newly trained trainers “on the job” by shadowing a training delivered by them; a repeat training over time. At the minimum, there should be a built-in mechanism to observe and monitor the use of project deliverables.

**Even if the donor does not explicitly require so, projects need to follow best project design and implementation standards**. This includes the clear conceptualisation of a theory of change; the setting of realistic outcomes; outputs to achieve these outcomes; meaningful baseline and performance indicators; and the systematic collection of data to demonstrate progress. Even if the donor is content with a modest amount of reporting, UNDP should follow examples from its own operations on file keeping, not least to allow for clear accountability.

# Recommendations

To UNDP

Operational level

* Further strengthen cooperation between project management and the beneficiary, by providing clearer guidelines on aspects of the project that have an impact on effectiveness. This includes a more thorough, collaborative process on selecting trainers.
* Reconsider resources and sequencing needed to ensure effectiveness, in particular with respect of ToTs. This includes moving away from trainings of short duration to more protracted trainings stretching over a longer period of time; involvement in the selection of trainers to be part of the training pool; more systematic preparation of trainers in the ToTs (including their clear knowledge of who the trainees are; what the level of preparation on specific subjects is; etc.); inclusion of a trial training to be conducted by trainers-to-be; inclusion of examination/testing to ensure that trainees-to-be have mastered the specific subjects; allocation of responsibility for training and training modules to more than one trainer at the time.
* Consider offering assistance on curriculum development and development of training methods as opposed to delivering curricula on specific topics.
* Introduce gender as a standard perspective during project implementation.

1. Strategic/advocacy level

* At the level of policy dialogue with the government of Azerbaijan, advocate for the need to better connect teaching with work experience/practice.

Annex A: List of People interviewed

Mrs Lala Rzayeva, UNDP Officer

Prof Urkhan Alakbarov, President of the Academy of Public Administration

Prof Alikram Adbullayev, Vice-President of the Academy of Public Administration

Dr Ziyafat Habibova, Project Expert on Development of Training Strategy

Mr Valid Madhoun, Project Expert

Mrs Gulnara Gurbanova, Head of Institute for Professional Development of Senior Public Administration Cadres

Mrs Ziver Zeynalova, Expert on Strategic Leadership Programme

Mrs Sabira Shihaliyeba, former Project Manager, Expert on Talent Management Programme

Mr Rza Zulfugarzade, EU Delegation to Azerbaijan

Mr Shamil Rzayev, UNDP Programme Advisor

Mr Anar Hasanov, Expert/Trainer

Mr Shahin Hasanov, Expert/Trainer

Mr Farid Quluzade, Training Participant

Mrs Ulker Mehdiyeva, Training Participants

Mrs Edita Kalnina, Expert

Mrs Irina Serebryakova, Expert

Mrs Eric Roty, Expert

# Annex B: List of Documents reviewed

2013 Project Grant Application to the European Union, including Annexes

2016 Substantive Project and Budget Revision

Final Project Progress Report 2014-2015

Training Strategy and Training Schedule

Concept on Talent Management Programme (no date)

Concept of the Resource Center of the Training Center established at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan within the UNDP Project “Support to the civil service training in the Republic of Azerbaijan” financed by the European Union (no date)

Justification of amendments to the Concept of Resource Center (note to EUD in Azerbaijan, no date, no author)

Concept Note on the International Conference on “Capacity Development during Public Administration Reforms”, 9-10 July, 2015 – Baku, Azerbaijan (no author)

Conference Report of the International Conference on “Capacity Development during Public Administration Reforms”, 9-10 July, 2015 – Baku, Azerbaijan (no author)

Minutes of Joint Working Group meetings (phase 1 of the project), 2014-2015

Minutes of the First Steering Committee, 29 December 2014

Minutes of the Third Steering Committee, 1 July 2016 (Lala Rzayeva)

Report on the Results of the study tour to Hungary during December 15-17 2014 prepared by the employees of the CSC, 29 December 2017

Suggestions on the implementation of knowledge and innovations gained during the study tour of the delegation of the Academy of Public Administration under the President of Republic of Azerbaijan to National Public Administration Institute of Spain during the period of 12-15 December 2016 (no date, no author)

Suggestions on the implementation of knowledge and innovations gained during the study tour of the delegation of the Academy of Public Administration under the President of Republic of Azerbaijan to Paris, France, during the period 28 February – 5 March 2017

Report on the study tour of the delegation of the Academy of Public Administration under the President of republic of Azerbaijan to Paris, France (no date, no author)

Strategic Leadership Programme – Concept; April 2017 (no author)

Guideline for work/training plans development for the Academy for Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. November 2016 (no author)

Final Evaluation Report of GIZ project “Support to Civil Service Training Capacities with a Focus on EU Affairs” in Azerbaijan ENPI/2013/324-462, author: Nodar Jibladze, March 2016

Final report on expert opinion of civil service development in draft of Civil Service Code of Azerbaijan; Arno Almann, 2015

List of publications for the Training Center

List of training modules prepared under both phases of the project, incl. with initial GIZ support

“Sustainable development goals: planning and management” e-training; List of participants; 06-07 April 2017

“Change management” e-training; List of Participants, 4-5 April 2017

“Reforms in public administration and key directions in personnel policy” e-training; List of Participants, 30-31 March 2017

1. See p. 5 of the Grant Application Form (January 2013) by UNDP Azerbaijan to the EUD to the Republic of Azerbaijan. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. APA is providing education at university level leading to M.A. degrees; the academy is also in charge of provision of training for civil servants at all levels, but has traditionally focused on middle- and senior level civil servants. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See “Substantive Project and Budget Revision”, 30 June 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See ToR, in Annex I, p. 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/Executive%20Board/2015/Second-regular/English/DPDCPAZE3\_UNAPF%20(2016-2020)\_FINAL%20(for%20signing)\_ENG.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. There is no 1.1 in the document. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)