



# INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION BELARUS



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# Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the Independent Country Programme Evaluation for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Republic of Belarus, the first country-level assessment conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office in the country. The evaluation covered the programme period 2016 to 2019.

Despite a fluctuating economic growth, Belarus has resumed its economic recovery since 2017 and created a more enabling environment for business opportunities. The share of the population living below the poverty line has remained around 5 percent, with important attainment in terms of increased life expectancy and improved health conditions since the prevalence of tuberculosis was significantly reduced. As the Government spearheaded important efforts in the area of natural resources conservation and restoration, carbon dioxide emissions remain high and incentives to promote sustainable energy remain limited.

The evaluation found that UNDP has supported the Government of Belarus in achieving important national objectives, particularly in environmental management. UNDP has accompanied the Government in the path towards accession to the World Trade Organization and promoted measures at the local level to promote small-medium enterprises and introduce different options for socially responsible entrepreneurship. With the approval of the Sustainable Development Goals, UNDP effectively supported the creation of a national machinery for the integration of the Goals into national policies and laws, promoting the involvement of civil society and the private sector. For all the results achieved, UNDP's efforts have been constrained by limited resources and challenges with the projects' registration, partly linked to an incomplete understanding of UNDP's value proposition in the country.

The evaluation concluded that UNDP could still play an important role in supporting the Government in realizing a greener growth and promoting the well-being and inclusion of vulnerable groups in the most economically disadvantaged areas of the country. A clearer value proposition, a closer involvement of national authorities in planning, and better communication of results will all be essential inputs of a renewed partnership between UNDP and the Government of Belarus.

I would like to thank the Government of the Republic of Belarus, the various national stakeholders, and colleagues at the UNDP Belarus Office for their support throughout the evaluation. I trust this report will be of use to readers seeking to achieve a better understanding of the broad support that UNDP has provided, including what has worked and what has not, and in prompting discussions on how UNDP may be best positioned to contribute to sustainable development in the Republic of Belarus in the years to come.



**Oscar A. Garcia,**  
**Director,**  
**Independent Evaluation Office**





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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>ABD</b>     | Areas-based development   |
| <b>AIDS</b>    | Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome                                    |
| <b>CCM</b>     | Country Coordination Mechanism  |
| <b>CO</b>      | Country office  |
| <b>CPD</b>     | Country programme document  |
| <b>CSO</b>     | Civil society organization  |
| <b>DPC</b>     | Direct project cost   |
| <b>EU</b>      | European Union  |
| <b>GDP</b>     | Gross domestic product  |
| <b>GEF</b>     | Global Environment Facility   |
| <b>GHG</b>     | Greenhouse gas  |
| <b>GRES</b>    | Gender Results Effectiveness Scale                                    |
| <b>HCFC</b>    | Hydrochlorofluorocarbons  |
| <b>HDI</b>     | Human Development Index   |
| <b>HIV</b>     | Human immunodeficiency virus  |
| <b>ICPE</b>    | Independent Country Programme Evaluation                              |
| <b>IEO</b>     | Independent Evaluation Office   |
| <b>IOM</b>     | International Organization for Migration                              |
| <b>IT</b>      | Information technology  |
| <b>LAG</b>     | Local Action Group  |
| <b>M&amp;E</b> | Monitoring and evaluation   |
| <b>MAPS</b>    | Mainstreaming Acceleration and Policy Support                         |
| <b>MCT</b>     | Management Consulting Team  |
| <b>MNREP</b>   | Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection            |
| <b>NCD</b>     | Non-communicable disease  |
| <b>NGO</b>     | Non-governmental organization   |
| <b>NHRAP</b>   | National Human Rights Action Plan                                     |
| <b>NSDS</b>    | National Sustainable Socio-Economic Development Strategy              |
| <b>PPP</b>     | Public-private partnership  |
| <b>RBEC</b>    | Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States |
| <b>RR</b>      | Resident Representative   |
| <b>SALW</b>    | Small arms and light weapons  |
| <b>SDG</b>     | Sustainable Development Goal  |
| <b>SME</b>     | Small and medium enterprise   |
| <b>SOP</b>     | Standard operating procedure  |
| <b>TB</b>      | Tuberculosis  |
| <b>UMIC</b>    | Upper-middle-income country   |
| <b>UN</b>      | United Nations  |
| <b>UNAIDS</b>  | Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS                            |
| <b>UNCRPD</b>  | United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  |
| <b>UNCT</b>    | United Nations Country Team   |

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>UNDAF</b>  | United Nations Development Assistance Framework              |
| <b>UNDP</b>   | United Nations Development Programme                         |
| <b>UNHCR</b>  | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees                |
| <b>UNICEF</b> | United Nations Children’s Fund                               |
| <b>UNSDCF</b> | United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework |
| <b>UPR</b>    | Universal Periodic Review                                    |
| <b>WHO</b>    | World Health Organization                                    |
| <b>WTO</b>    | World Trade Organization                                     |

# Evaluation Brief: Belarus

The Republic of Belarus is an upper-middle-income country, whose economy mostly depends on the service and industrial sectors. The socio-economic conditions of the country have improved since the late 1990s, with 5.6 percent of the population living below the poverty line and the country ranking 50<sup>th</sup> in the Human Development Index. Belarus is considered a country with relatively high levels of gender equality, although a gap remains in women's participation in the workforce as well as their involvement in unpaid labour. For all the progress made in preserving biodiversity and expanding specially protected areas, environmental issues are still considered a low priority, resulting in limited funding to the sector.

The UNDP country programme document (CPD) 2016-2020 was premised on the priority development areas identified by the National Sustainable Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2030 and related national development programmes. To support the Government of Belarus in achieving its priorities, UNDP set three goals: i) strengthening effective governance systems that are inclusive, responsible and accountable; ii) pursuing a green growth trajectory based on the principles of inclusion; and iii) ensuring universal access to basic services for vulnerable groups.

## Findings and conclusions

In the area of inclusive and responsive governance, UNDP's work to promote the progressive realization of human rights and strengthen public service delivery at local level has not achieved the expected results, as the majority of UNDP's planned interventions have not been approved by the Government or interrupted. In partnership with other United Nations organizations, UNDP successfully enhanced the capacity of State institutions to address irregular migration and human trafficking, although UNDP's role in this area significantly diminished after 2017. Some progress was attained on the promotion of citizens' feedback for State-delivered services.

UNDP worked to enhance Belarus' economic competitiveness by supporting its accession to the World Trade Organization and encouraging the development of the private sector's productive capacities. Operating in economically distressed industrial towns, including in Chernobyl-affected areas, UNDP enhanced awareness on socially responsible approaches to entrepreneurship. UNDP also supported local development initiatives that promoted social contracts and appeared to have improved the livelihoods of vulnerable populations. The capacity of local authorities in the field of area-based-development was strengthened, although outputs have not been systematically integrated into local planning.

In the area of environment and energy, UNDP has played a crucial role in supporting the Government in establishing the institutional infrastructure and strengthening policies and practices for the management of wetlands and peatlands, resulting in the restoration of more than 55,000 hectares of degraded land. UNDP has promoted renewable energy and energy efficiency, introducing new methods and standards for the design of residential buildings. However, economical electricity prices have hampered progress in this area. UNDP has intensified its support for the country's transition to a green economy and urban development. The sustainability of the interventions will depend on the continuation of efforts and the institutionalization of practices by the Government and private sector.

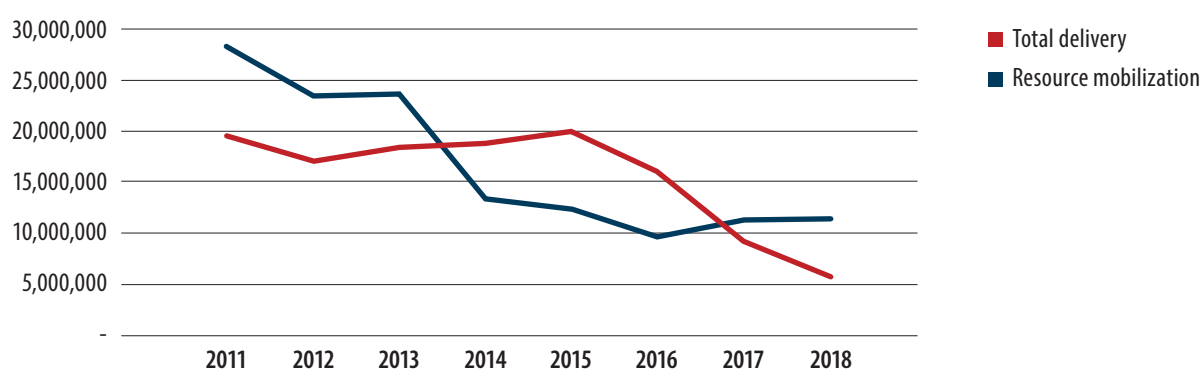
UNDP successfully transferred the management of resources for the prevention, treatment, and care of HIV/AIDS to national institutions. With Global Fund resources directed to national authorities, UNDP's work in this area focused on preventing non-communicable diseases and enhancing awareness of issues faced by people with disabilities. UNDP's work, while relevant for its focus on social vulnerabilities, remained of limited scale.

Overall, UNDP has been an important partner for the Government and contributed to progress in

achieving national priorities. UNDP was considered to add the most value when it focused on inequality reduction, exposed Belarus to international experience and expertise, and promoted cooperation and concerted efforts among national institutions. In particular, UNDP played a catalytic role in supporting the development of the national architecture for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and promoted dialogue with civil society and the private sector.

UNDP's work, however, has been challenged by lengthy project registration processes, specifically in the area of inclusive and responsive governance, fragmentation around individual initiatives, and challenging financial conditions owing to reduced core resources, limited donor interest and minimal cost-sharing. UNDP remains at a critical juncture, with financial sustainability closely tied to a commitment by the Government to invest resources in UNDP for the value it adds to the country's development.

### UNDP's delivery and resource mobilization, 2011-2018 (US\$ million)



## Recommendations

To strengthen UNDP's work in Belarus in support of national development priorities, the Independent Country Programme Evaluation has made six recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** Ahead of the formulation of the CPD 2021-2025, UNDP should discuss with all stakeholders how best to support the Government in implementing initiatives around the four accelerators identified in the Mainstreaming Acceleration and Policy Support report.
- **Recommendation 2:** UNDP should reinforce its support to leaving no one behind, focusing on marginalized areas and vulnerable communities.
- **Recommendation 3:** UNDP should continue engaging with the Government in the area of inclusive and responsive governance to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public administration system.
- **Recommendation 4:** UNDP should assess the effectiveness of the proposed approaches in the area of small and medium enterprise development and use the evaluation findings to advise the Government on policy options.
- **Recommendation 5:** UNDP should develop a long-term resource mobilization strategy to ensure the financial sustainability of the country office, including through cost-sharing.
- **Recommendation 6:** UNDP should reinforce the monitoring and evaluation of its programmes and projects, focusing on an assessment of their contribution to outcomes and behavioural change.



# CHAPTER 1

## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to capture and demonstrate 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. ICPEs are independent evaluations carried out within the overall provisions contained in the UNDP Evaluation Policy.

The ICPE is the first IEO evaluation of UNDP's work in the Republic of Belarus. It covers the period from 2016 to 2018,<sup>1</sup> in accordance with the evaluation's terms of reference (see Annex 1 available online). The ICPE assessed the entirety of UNDP's activities in the country, whether funded by core UNDP resources, donors or the Government. It also considered UNDP's contribution to the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and assessed UNDP's role as a catalyst and convener working with other development partners, civil society, and the private sector.

The ICPE was timed to feed into the preparation of the next country programme document (CPD), which will be implemented from 2021. The primary audiences for the evaluation are the UNDP Belarus Country Office (CO), the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC), the UNDP Executive Board, and the Government of the Republic of Belarus.

## 1.2 Evaluation methodology

The ICPE followed the approved IEO process. During the initial phase, an analysis was conducted to identify all relevant stakeholders, including those

that may not have worked with UNDP but had played a key role in the outcomes to which UNDP has contributed.

The ICPE addressed three key evaluation questions:<sup>2</sup>

1. What did the UNDP country programme intend to achieve during the period under review?
2. To what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives?
3. What factors contributed to, or hindered, UNDP's performance and eventually the sustainability of results?

The effectiveness of the UNDP country programme was analysed through an assessment of progress made towards the achievement of the expected outputs, and the extent to which these outputs contributed to the intended CPD outcomes. In this process, both positive and negative, direct and indirect results were considered. To better understand UNDP's performance and the sustainability of results in the country, the ICPE examined the specific factors that have influenced – both positively and negatively – the country programme. UNDP's capacity to adapt to the changing context and respond to national development needs and priorities was examined.

The evaluation methodology adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.<sup>3</sup> In line with UNDP's gender mainstreaming strategy, the evaluation examined the level of gender mainstreaming across the country programme and operations. Gender disaggregated data were collected, where available, and assessed against programme outcomes. To assess gender across the portfolio, the evaluation considered the UNDP gender marker assigned to the different project outputs,<sup>4</sup> and IEO's gender results effectiveness scale (GRES).

<sup>1</sup> The report also considered projects that had started in the first six months of 2019, without being able to assess their effectiveness.

<sup>2</sup> The ICPEs adopt a streamlined methodology, which differs from the previous Assessments of Development Results that were structured according to the four standard Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee criteria.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>

<sup>4</sup> A corporate monitoring tool used to assign a rating score to project outputs during their design phase and track planned expenditure towards outputs that may include advances or contributions to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. As the gender marker is assigned by project output and not project ID, a project might have several outputs with different gender markers.



The evaluation relied on information collected from different sources and then triangulated:

- A review of UNDP strategic and programme documents, project documents and monitoring reports, evaluations,<sup>5</sup> research papers, and other available country-related publications. The main documents consulted by the evaluation team are listed in Annex 6, available online.
- An analysis of the programme portfolio, and the development of theories of change by programme area to map the projects implemented against the goals set in the CPD.
- Response by the CO to a pre-mission evaluation questionnaire, which was further discussed and validated during the country mission.
- In-person and phone interviews with 81 stakeholders, including UNDP staff, Government representatives, UNCT member representatives, development partners, civil society organizations (CSOs), academia, and beneficiaries.

The interviews were used to collect data and stakeholders' perceptions of the scope and effectiveness of programme interventions, determine factors affecting performance, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the UNDP programme as a whole. A full list of interviewees is available in Annex 5 online.

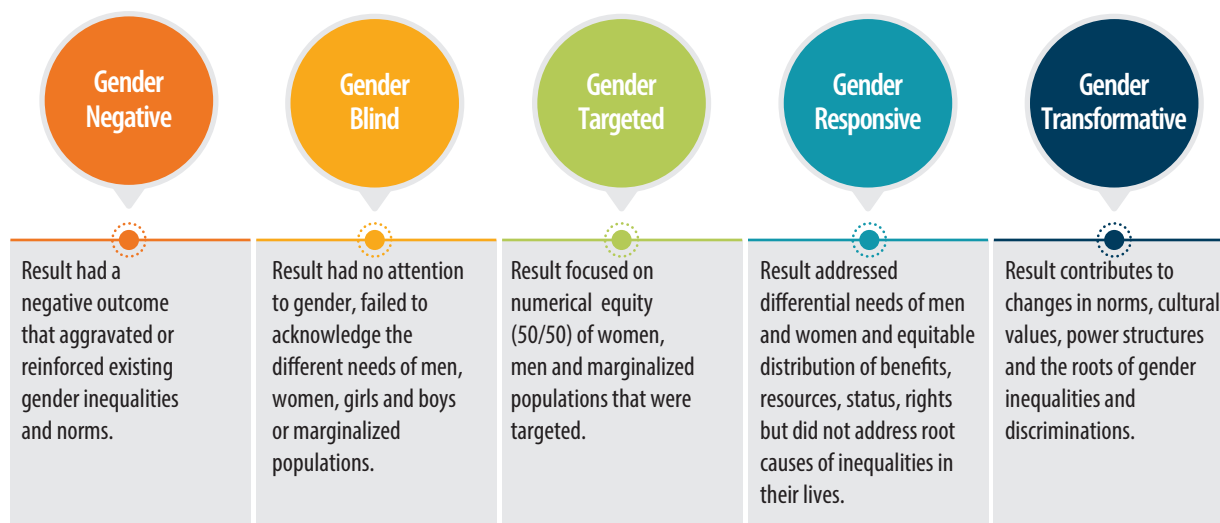
- Two one-day field visits (Vileika, Nalibokski Reserve, and Dzerzhinsk) to assess the results of selected initiatives and conduct semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and beneficiaries.

The draft ICPE report was quality assured by two IEO internal reviewers, then submitted to the CO and the RBEC for factual corrections and comments, and finally shared with the Government and other national partners.

### Evaluation limitations

The limited time and resources available to conduct the evaluation affected the team's capacity to collect primary data and consult data sources that had

**Figure 1: Gender Results Effectiveness Scale**



Source: The IEO's evaluation of UNDP's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment

<sup>5</sup> Six decentralized evaluations were conducted in the period under consideration.

not already been systematized. Most of the research for the evaluation was conducted remotely, with only five days spent in the country (from 3 to 7 June 2019). This influenced the level of consultation with national stakeholders, as well as the number and depth of field visits to interview beneficiaries and directly assess the projects' results.

To address these challenges, the ICPE planned and extensively used the pre-mission evaluation questionnaire in which the CO was asked to provide evidence that responded to the evaluation questions. In addition, the team put considerable efforts in planning its visit to Belarus in coordination with the CO, to ensure that key stakeholders (Government, CSOs, donors, and – to a lesser extent – citizens) were consulted, and their views heard.

### 1.3 Country context

According to the World Bank (2019), the Republic of Belarus is an upper-middle-income country (UMIC) with a population of 9.45 million.<sup>6</sup> The national economy mostly depends on the services sector (49 percent of the gross domestic product, or GDP) and industries (26 percent). Agriculture plays a minor role (7 percent) and it is still largely dependent on the Government's subsidies. As part of the former Soviet Union, Belarus had a relatively well-developed industrial base, which, however, presents inefficiencies. The country is dependent on subsidized Russian energy and preferential access to Russian markets.

After a period of stagnation and macroeconomic downturn that led to a 39 percent decline in GDP in 2014–2016,<sup>7</sup> starting from 2017 Belarus has resumed its economic recovery with a 15 percent GDP growth

rate in 2017 and 26 percent in 2018, thanks to tighter macroeconomic policies, a more flexible exchange rate, and reduced subsidized public lending to public enterprises. Progress has also been achieved in terms of reduced administrative and licensing procedures for businesses, tax administration and ownership registration procedures, raising Belarus' rank in the World Bank's Doing Business Index from 57 in 2015 to 37 in 2019. The share of the population below the national poverty line has drastically declined from 41.9 percent in 2000 to 4.8 percent in 2014 but has since risen to 5.6 percent in 2018.<sup>8</sup>

Belarus ranks 50<sup>th</sup> out of 189 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI), with a steady increase of its values since 1995. The mean years of schooling are stable at 12.3, while life expectancy increased from 67 years in 2000 to 73 in 2017.<sup>9</sup> The country has significantly reduced the prevalence of tuberculosis (TB), and 95 percent of persons living with HIV who are included in care are receiving antiretroviral treatment. When adjusted for inequality, the HDI encounters a loss of 6.5 percent, which is, however, far less significant than that experienced by other countries in Europe and Central Asia (11.6 percent), and/or countries with a very high HDI (10.4 percent).<sup>10</sup> Belarus is considered a country with relatively high levels of gender equality, ranking 27 (out of 162 countries) in the 2018 UNDP Gender Inequality Index. While 87 percent of women aged 15 and more have at least some secondary education, there is still a significant gap in women's participation in the workforce (58.1 percent vs. 70.3 percent of men).<sup>11</sup> The pay difference between men and women has increased by a third from 2001 to 2017, and women's involvement in unpaid labour remains high.

<sup>6</sup> Based on a review conducted by the UNDP Bureau of Management Services, Belarus will, however, not graduate to the UMIC category in January 2020, as its average per capita gross national income in the past four years has dropped below the required threshold.

<sup>7</sup> In nominal 2014 US\$ terms or 6.2 percent reduction in national currency terms.

<sup>8</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Human Development Report, Statistical Update, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Inequalities are mostly perceived in income, while health and education show fewer differences. Free education and health care are guaranteed by the Belarusian Constitution. In practice, however, supplementary financial payments are required in these sectors in order to ensure high-quality service.

<sup>11</sup> Source: 'Inequalities in human development in the 21st century', Briefing note Belarus, UNDP, 2019. National stakeholders commented that the gap in participation in the workforce is also due to the earlier retirement age for women.

Belarus' Presidential system was created following a Constitutional referendum in 1994. The President of the Republic is the Head of the State and guarantor of the Constitution. The Administration supports the activities of the President and monitors implementation of his decisions.<sup>12</sup> The President appoints regional and local authorities. The human rights situation in Belarus appears stable, but with significant restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and assembly.<sup>13</sup> The country has yet to ratify a number of international human rights treaties<sup>14</sup> and remains the only European country to have the death penalty.

Belarus has been among the first countries to sign the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol, undertaking to reduce and phase out the consumption of ozone-depleting substances. It is reportedly on track to meet its goal to completely phase out hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFC) by 2020. For all the progress made in this sector, environmental issues are still considered by national stakeholders as a low priority, resulting in limited attention and funding to the sector. The price of electricity – from which 21 percent of the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are derived<sup>15</sup> – is still low and heavily subsidized, which created limited incentives for energy efficiency investments. Furthermore, the upcoming commissioning of the Belarusian nuclear power plant and the expected surplus of electricity affect the prospects of renewable energy in the country.

Belarus continues to preserve its biodiversity and expand its specially protected areas, which account for 9 percent of its territory (as of January 2020). As a result of peat extraction and intensive agricultural development, large areas of peatlands have lost their productive capacity and can no longer be used effectively. Thanks to many years of sustained efforts in cooperation with the United Nations,

Belarus has now emerged as one of the regional leaders in the restoration of peatlands, with about 50,000 hectares of inefficiently drained peatlands restored. Twenty-six sites are currently designated as wetlands of international importance (Ramsar sites) with a surface of almost 800,000 hectares. As of December 2019, more than 150 sites have been included in the Council of Europe's Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest.

## 1.4 UNDP programme in the Republic of Belarus

UNDP's CPD 2016-2020 is premised on the priority development areas identified by the National Sustainable Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2030 (NSDS 2030) and related national development programmes such as the Programme of Social and Economic Development 2016-20 and the 2016 Social Protection and Employment Strategy. National priorities were reflected in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the same period, to which the CPD was fully aligned. The CPD contributed to outcomes 1, 2 and 3 of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2014-2017.

UNDP set three goals for the CPD 2016-2020: strengthening effective governance systems that are inclusive, responsible and accountable; pursuing a green growth trajectory based on the principles of inclusion; and ensuring universal access to basic services for vulnerable groups.

In the area of inclusive and responsive governance, UNDP's work aimed to support the progressive realization of human rights and the efficient implementation of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations, with a focus on the rights of vulnerable migrants, women's political and economic

<sup>12</sup> Regulation on the Administration of the President of the Republic and Article 84 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus.

<sup>13</sup> 'Situation of human rights in Belarus', A/74/196, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> The Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture, the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

<sup>15</sup> National authorities report that the energy sector accounts for 61.4 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. Electric power accounts for 35 percent of the energy sector, the remaining 65 percent coming from thermal sources. Source: National Statistics Office.

empowerment, and personal data. UNDP also intended to build the capacity of legal professionals and investigators on the respect of human rights and the detection of human trafficking. Beyond the area of human rights, UNDP planned to improve service delivery by establishing integrated customer service centres for administrative procedures, develop infrastructure for the safe management of small arms and light weapons (SALW), and support the Government in mitigating corruption risks and improving its functions. UNDP implemented eight projects for a total budget of US\$3.3 million.

In the area of inclusive growth, UNDP's goal to contribute to Belarusian economic competitiveness was planned to be realized through interventions at the international, national, and local level. UNDP provided multipronged assistance to the negotiation process for Belarus' accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and aimed to promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) to stimulate employment in high-tech, agriculture, tourism, and green economy sectors. At the local level, UNDP supported income-generating activities by working both on individuals' capacity development as well as the promotion of small businesses. UNDP implemented eight projects, worth a total of \$18.1 million.<sup>16</sup>

To contribute to "the preservation of the natural potential for future generations and combat climate change" (NSDS 2030), UNDP supported the development of policies and regulatory frameworks in line with international environmental conventions and introduced new approaches for Belarus to adapt to climate change and safeguard biodiversity, particularly in degraded wetlands. In the area of energy, UNDP encouraged the use of energy-efficient measures and renewable energy, promoting the idea that investments into green energy could also bring significant economic benefits. In this area, UNDP implemented 17 projects for a total budget of \$15.1 million.

Finally, in the area of basic services and human capital development, UNDP supported the strengthening of partnership arrangements among local authorities, communities, and CSOs to reduce the abuse of alcohol and tobacco and promote healthier lifestyles. The CO continued strengthening national institutions in implementing HIV and TB programmes and promoted the participation of civil society in decision-making through a dedicated coordination platform. UNDP also supported the rights of people with disabilities through awareness programmes and the improvement of standards for the provision of services. In this area, UNDP implemented five projects for a total budget of \$4.3 million.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Eighty-seven percent of the resources was concentrated in two projects in support of local economic development.

<sup>17</sup> Projects on HIV and TB, which ended in 2017, constituted 54 percent of the budget.

A decorative graphic consisting of a white dotted line that starts at the top left, goes down, then right, then down again, and finally right. Six colored circles are placed at various points along this line: an orange circle at the top left, a teal circle on the first vertical segment, a white circle at the first horizontal segment, a light green circle on the second horizontal segment, an orange circle on the third horizontal segment, and a yellow circle at the end of the line.

# CHAPTER 2

## FINDINGS

DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP  
sustainability MANAGING FOR RESULTS responsiveness COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT responsiveness  
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## 2.1 Inclusive and responsive governance

**CPD outcome:** By 2020, State institutions ensure responsive, accountable, and transparent governance to enable citizens to benefit from all human rights in line with international principles and standards.

**Finding 1: UNDP’s work to promote the progressive realization of human rights and the implementation of UPR recommendations has not achieved the expected results. The majority of UNDP’s planned interventions in this area have been rejected by the Government (see also Finding 16). UNDP positioned itself as a convening platform to discuss human rights and project funding was partially redirected towards activities aimed at enhancing awareness of civil servants, but in a fragmented way with limited effectiveness.**

The expectations set in the CPD to ensure the progressive realization of human rights were not met, as the space to work in this area has over time contracted, particularly around civil and political rights. Positive results included the elaboration of the National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP) 2016-2020, the first in the country based on the recommendation of the 2015 UPR, as well as the implementation of the NHRAP components on health, education, and rights of people with disabilities. The planned study to assess the added value of a national human rights institution – one of the NHRAP priorities and which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had initially approved – was ultimately rejected. Stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation commented on the overall limited progress in the plan’s implementation and the challenge

of monitoring advancements with a highly vague formulation of results and no indicators. With the arrival of the senior adviser for human rights in the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in July 2018, UNDP withdrew from active participation in this area.

Except for two national capacity development projects to fight human trafficking and the continuous support to CSOs’ involvement in HIV/AIDS and TB (see Findings 2 and 13, respectively), UNDP could not implement planned projects in the area of human rights. Neither the project on supporting the national human rights institution nor the one on establishing the group on rule of law and access to justice was registered. The CPD outputs related to “legislative acts adopted to ensure protection of personal data”<sup>18</sup> and “legislative acts that incorporate the provisions of international agreements” were not completed. Work in the area of “policies to advance participation of women in decision-making and supporting women’s economic empowerment” was limited to a study, albeit important, to promote the participation of women in the workforce (see Finding 7).

In this context, UNDP positioned itself more as a convening platform for national and international stakeholders to discuss human rights (including the rights of people with disabilities, see Findings 6 and 14), rule of law, and access to justice issues. In cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNDP promoted the involvement of CSOs in the discussion around the plan’s progress through bi-annual events. The project’s resources were also used to facilitate the participation of representatives of national stakeholders (e.g. Ministry of Justice, Prosecutor’s Office, Supreme Court, Bar Association) in workshops and conferences on legal aid, open governance, and mediation as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism. The Ministry of Justice was reported to have used the knowledge acquired through the training to adjust the national legislation on mediation, which will enter into force in July 2020. UNDP

<sup>18</sup> A draft law on personal data is being discussed by the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. The ICPE did not have any evidence of UNDP support to it.

also promoted the involvement of youth in research about human rights and organized a round table to discuss opportunities to mainstream human rights into educational processes. Overall, these initiatives will require further work by the United Nations as well as CSOs to achieve their intended effectiveness.

**Finding 2: In partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNDP enhanced the capacity of State institutions to address irregular migration and human trafficking. By working through national institutions, the CO promoted institutionalization and sustainability. UNDP's role in this area diminished significantly after 2017.**

In the period 2013-2017, UNDP supported the development of the State Border Committee's capacity by reinforcing its training and guidance system in line with European Union (EU) standards. In partnership with the IOM and UNHCR, infrastructure was upgraded, curricula developed, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the management of human trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence cases were successfully integrated into the work of the Committee and the training of mid-ranking recruits by the Border Service Institute. During the project's implementation, more than 700 victims of trafficking were identified and referred by both law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organization (NGOs) to the IOM, which then worked on the provision of reintegration services.<sup>19</sup> Stakeholders interviewed for the ICPE praised the project's approach to sustainability, reporting continued use of both the training materials and the SOPs.

Through a parallel project, UNDP enhanced the capacity of professionals from Belarus and other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States in combating human trafficking. UNDP reported that workshops organized to discuss inter-agency coordination and cross-border cooperation to address the root causes of trafficking functioned more as "ad hoc fora for discussion".<sup>20</sup> The project's terminal report recommended the development of an institutional framework to put multi-agency coordination in practice and ensure more equitable participation of representatives of national social sectors and NGOs. According to national stakeholders, coordination mechanisms to identify victims and support services are functioning effectively.

As confirmed by interviews, the collaboration between UNDP and other United Nations partners was valuable to bridge human rights and governance work. Since 2017, the CO has continued collaborating with the IOM to support annual youth summer camps, exposing young activists to knowledge and solutions to fight human trafficking.<sup>21</sup> UNDP's planned projects (as reflected in the CO's pipeline) in combating human trafficking, migration, and supporting displaced populations, however, did not materialize. As these remain issues of concern in Belarus,<sup>22</sup> the CO has an important role in supporting the country's engagement in this area – and in partnership with other United Nations agencies – to promote concerted efforts that address the root causes of trafficking.

**Finding 3: UNDP did not achieve the expected results to strengthen efficient, transparent, and accountable public service delivery at the local level. Some progress was attained on the promotion of citizens' feedback for State-delivered services.**

<sup>19</sup> Based on a review of monitoring reports and interviews.

<sup>20</sup> UNDP final narrative report.

<sup>21</sup> UNDP used the occasion of the camp to enhance youth awareness on the SDGs. The 2018 camp alumni reportedly implemented several awareness-raising activities in cities and towns, speaking about human trafficking problems and security measures to more than 2,300 peers.

<sup>22</sup> According to the US State Department 'Trafficking in Persons Report' (2019), Belarus remained in the group of tier 3 countries for human trafficking.

UNDP has made very limited progress against the targets set in the CPD for an “efficient, transparent, and accountable public service delivery”. One small (\$33,000) project on improved feedback mechanisms for service delivery was fully implemented, but no proposal was adopted to mitigate sector-specific corruption. Nor were integrated customer service centres for administrative procedures opened.

UNDP’s work in this area has been notably affected by political sensitivities around planned interventions. The EU-funded programme on good governance has not yet been approved by the Government. A \$2.2 million project funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) to strengthen inclusive local governance was first delayed by a lengthy registration process and the change of the national coordinator,<sup>23</sup> and was then terminated and de-registered because of ‘political complexity’ and sensitivities particularly around civil service reform. UNDP was able to complete an assessment of the system of selection, training, and performance evaluation of civil servants and organize a number of training and workshops on public administration management. They were, however, interrupted by the project’s closure. Also, training on public service delivery and multifunctional centres were organized, but the development of a methodology for integrated customer services stopped. Attempts to re-programme the remaining funds proved unsuccessful. In 2018-2019, UNDP provided international expertise to support the Ministry of Justice with the creation of one-stop shops.

Some progress was made in the area of e-governance and citizens’ contribution to decision-making, where UNDP supported the implementation of the 2011 Law on Appeals by Citizens and Legal Entities, providing individuals with the possibility to submit electronic appeals to State agencies. The e-module, including a special application for people with visual impairment, was piloted on the website on the National Centre of Legislation and Legal Research

and recommendations to inform the national law were submitted to the Ministry of Justice. Since 2017, the legislation of the Republic of Belarus stipulates the obligation for public authorities to ensure their websites have a version for persons with visual disabilities.<sup>24</sup> A search of Belarusian websites revealed examples of available electronic appeals, including for the visually impaired, by companies and State authorities alike. Through the DANIDA project, UNDP partnered again with the National Centre of Legislation and Legal Research to survey the most requested public services and available feedback mechanisms. The research results were expected to be used to inform a draft legal framework on public engagement in planning, implementation, and monitoring of public services at the regional and district levels. The project’s closure interrupted work.

Stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation concurred on the importance of, and the Government’s interest in, projects that support e-governance and one-stop-shop services, where UNDP can add value by favouring exchanges with countries in the region. The space to support the Government in the area of civil service and public administration reform was instead considered more limited.

**Finding 4: Through sustained engagement, UNDP has enhanced national capacities for the safe management of SALW, enabling Belarus to reach a higher level of compliance with both national requirements and international best practices.**

Starting in 2007, UNDP has supported Belarus in the safe disposal of a significant stock of SALW remaining after the Soviet period. Working in close cooperation with the Ministry of Defence, the CO has supported the improvement of infrastructure for the safe management of SALW, by fully upgrading eight stockpiles, and performing maintenance work in three additional locations. The project also developed software for electronic inventory management, which reportedly attracted the interest

<sup>23</sup> The new national coordinator brought a new vision to the project, which created friction with the national implementing agency.

<sup>24</sup> Regulation of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of 23 October 2017, No. 797.



of several other countries once shared with the Centre for Conflict Prevention of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.<sup>25</sup>

Out of 13 military units originally planned to be upgraded, five still require support to ensure full security of SALW storages. According to the project's terminal report, the project's delay and less-than-expected results were due to a lack of project funding as the cost estimate provided in 2006 had become outdated. The project's extension has been hampered by the lack of donor resources since 2017.

## 2.2 Inclusive growth and sustainable development



**CPD outcome:** By 2020, the economy's competitiveness is improved through structural reforms, accelerated development of the private sector and integration in the world economy.

**Finding 5: UNDP worked to enhance Belarus' economic competitiveness by supporting its accession to the WTO and encouraging the development of the private sector's productive capacities through the support to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), PPPs, and tax advisory services. While Belarus is expected to enter the WTO in 2020,<sup>26</sup> the other interventions would require more sustained efforts to produce significant results.**

Starting from 2008, UNDP has supported the different phases that led Belarus to the final stage of its accession process to the WTO.<sup>27</sup> During the current CPD cycle, the CO developed analyses of the potential impact of WTO accession on individual sectors of the economy, built the negotiation capacity of the members of the Inter-Agency Commission on Belarus' Accession and promoted exchanges with Russia and Kazakhstan for the development of the National Centre on WTO.<sup>28</sup> The CO's capacity-building and awareness-raising activities focused both on the Government's line Ministries and business representatives, including in the regions. The participation of international experts, supported by UNDP, was considered very important, for it facilitated first-hand experience-sharing and addressed the concerns raised, particularly by the business community at the local level, on the implications of WTO accession.

In line with post-2015 national priorities, UNDP worked to promote employment and self-employment in SMEs located in small and medium-sized towns. In this area, the CO has implemented two projects, which are ongoing and yet to produce the expected results.<sup>29</sup> Operating in a number of economically distressed industrial towns, including in Chernobyl-affected areas, UNDP invested most of its resources in enhancing awareness on "a socially responsible approach" to entrepreneurship through training and study tours, guidelines on different forms of cooperation (such as regional clusters and franchising), and information sessions on credit lines for SMEs. Following the model adopted in the Russian Federation and other countries of the Eurasian Economic Union, the National Subcontracting Centre – established

<sup>25</sup> Most of the project activities have been completed by 2015, with some infrastructure improvements implemented in 2016. The project was extended to April 2017, in anticipation of possible additional funding.

<sup>26</sup> At the last meeting of the working party (July 2019), Belarus reaffirmed its intent to complete the process by the next Ministerial Conference, although concerns were raised about the feasibility of the plan. Some stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation indicated that it could require up to five more years.

<sup>27</sup> Belarus applied to join the WTO in 1995. In 2007, the negotiation process was made inactive due to the decision to create a Customs Union between Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan and the reluctance of WTO members to negotiate the accession of the three countries to the WTO as a single customs territory. After Russia and Kazakhstan joined the WTO in 2012 and 2015 respectively, negotiations with Belarus intensified from 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Based on interviews and monitoring reports.

<sup>29</sup> The Employment in Small Towns project, funded by the Russian Federation and the National Development Bank of Belarus, started in 2016 and will be completed by February 2020. The Local Economic Development project, funded by the EU, started in May 2018 and is expected to be completed by January 2022.

by UNDP – organized three business matching sessions for SMEs and large enterprises in 2018. Monitoring reports indicated that 10 agreements were concluded as a result of the business rounds. Further, the CO supported the drafting of development plans for six business incubators, which have been created/strengthened through the provision of equipment within public enterprises but are yet to be fully functional. While the offer of financing options is likely to enhance the effectiveness perspective of the interventions, some stakeholders interviewed for the ICPE expressed concern about business sustainability and requested an evaluation to be conducted also to understand the effectiveness of the incubators for the promotion of small businesses. The ICPE's document analysis revealed significant potential for synergies and possible duplications between the projects funded by the Russian Federation and the EU, as both aim to conduct studies on factors influencing SMEs' development, promote a more enabling environment for SMEs, and establish business incubators.

To promote private businesses, UNDP facilitated the development of tax advisory services, which were institutionalized through a Presidential edict in 2017.<sup>30</sup> The CO provided guidance and capacity-building for the certification of tax advisers, including through the organization of study tours and round tables on the shadow economy. Although delays in the legislation's approval put sustainability at risk (for activities could only be piloted during project implementation), the Tax Advisory Institute has been operational as part of the Ministry of Taxes and Duties.<sup>31</sup> As of April 2019, a unified register of tax advisers exists, with almost 400 professionals having received the required qualification. In an April 2019 survey, the majority (52 percent) of respondents expressed 'negative feelings' about the introduction of the institution of tax consultants. National

stakeholders reported that an edict of the President signed in October 2019 allowed to resolve the issues raised by representatives of businesses in the survey.

UNDP also assisted with the formulation of the law on PPP, which aimed to give private-sector partners more financial guarantees.<sup>32</sup> The CO helped to enhance awareness of PPP and building capacity within the Government, but with limited success. According to stakeholders, the decision to include the PPP unit under the Ministry of Economy (against the recommendation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe to put it within the Office of the Prime Minister) limited its visibility and resources. Since the adoption, only one PPP infrastructure project (out of 100 proposed) was approved.<sup>33</sup> However, performance impact investments are an area of increased interest in the country, where UNDP can provide important support in partnership with the private sector and international financial institutions (IFIs).

**Finding 6: UNDP supported a number of local development initiatives that promoted social contracts and, based on the limited evidence available, appeared to have improved the livelihoods of vulnerable populations, including the elderly and people with disabilities. The capacity of local authorities in the field of area-based-development (ABD) was strengthened, although ABD passports have not been systematically integrated into local planning.**

UNDP has been long invested in the promotion of local development in Belarus, in partnership with the Ministry of Economy. In the current CPD cycle, the CO extended its interventions to 30 districts in two regions, where it developed the capacity of local action groups (LAGs) to define priorities based both on a need assessment and a sociological survey that assessed the potential for district development.

<sup>30</sup> Presidential edict 338 "On tax advisory services", 19 September 2017. The edict defines the terms of access to the profession, the modalities of the professional activities, and the liability insurance requirements.

<sup>31</sup> Interviews indicated that a second phase of the project, which was expected to make the Institute independent from the Ministry, was not approved.

<sup>32</sup> UNDP had started supporting the strengthening of national capacity in the field of PPP in the previous CPD, with funding from the EU.

<sup>33</sup> The M10 highway project has a planned duration of 20 years. The implementation started in January 2019, with the support of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

ABD passports – approved by local authorities and endorsed by the Ministry of Economy through the project board – represented an important first step in the exploration of social contracting, exposing local authorities to a new model of participatory planning with significant inclusion of women. All stakeholders highlighted the presence of regional coordinators in the *rayons* (districts) as an important factor for the efficient implementation of projects and the involvement of the community, particularly as LAGs experienced challenges in harmonizing different priorities.<sup>34</sup>

Through small grants (partly co-funded by local authorities, non-profit institutions and small businesses),<sup>35</sup> UNDP supported the implementation of a total of 243 local activities for the socio-economic development of the target zones. They included different facilities for youth with special needs, arts and crafts centre, resource centres for financial as well as ecological education, and a nursing home for the elderly.<sup>36</sup> Most of the proposed initiatives came from NGOs (49 percent) and public associations (28 percent), with a strong focus on community development but with limited capacity for implementation attached. The strong financial interdependence between local and State governance and the lack of a PPP implementation mechanism were said to have significantly affected the involvement of local authorities and their collaboration with NGOs and business representatives.<sup>37</sup>

The sustainability of the project activities is uncertain. As the CO is not tracking the success of the initiatives it has supported, the ICPE could not find any evidence of continued use of ABD passports in targeted communities, nor of the number of continuously operating LAGs. Overall, the impact and sustainability of the activities implemented through grants will depend on the continuous availability of

financial resources to maintain the established infrastructures and facilities. Institutional sustainability will depend on the capacity of the communities to continue organizing themselves around agreed priorities. As the field visit conducted by the ICPE showed, LAGs could be sustainable when anchored to an existing community-based organization, although their capacity to influence decision-making may still be limited in the absence of an institutionalized mechanism. Contrary to the donor's expectation, ABD passports have not been integrated into the draft law on indicative planning.

**Finding 7: Working through new and reinforced partnerships, UNDP has expanded its portfolio to cover tourism to boost Belarus economic development in a sector that is rapidly expanding.<sup>38</sup> The CO also started a small but innovative project addressing the barriers to women's full participation in the workforce.**

From 2018, UNDP started projects in two areas previously unexplored (tourism development and women's economic empowerment), promoting new partnerships with the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, with funding from new donors (Poland and the United Kingdom) and enhanced collaboration with the private sector.

While the work on tourism development has just started, that on women's economic empowerment showed some results already and attracted the attention of Government and IFIs. In partnership with the Behavioural Insights Team, UNDP analysed the structural and sociological barriers to women entrepreneurship at the local level in Belarus. The research results were used to inform the second phase of the project, in which UNDP will run a randomized control trial in one of the leading information technology (IT) companies to encourage more women

<sup>34</sup> Interim narrative report for fiscal year 2017, shared with the donor in 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Co-funding amounted to Euro 1,052,246 or 23 percent of the total.

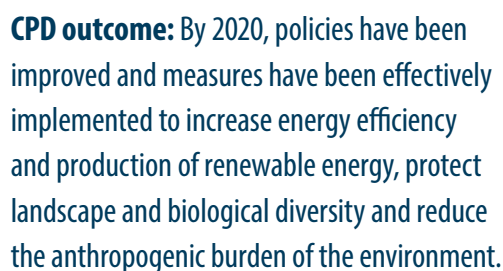
<sup>36</sup> Applications for grants focused on the following priority areas: promotion of healthy lifestyle, tourism development, provision of social services and social inclusion (26 percent each); economic development and boosting employment (16 percent); and education (6 percent). Source: project monitoring reports.

<sup>37</sup> As indicated in the 2017 monitoring report, despite a series of training and workshops, the organizational and human capacity of local authorities to continue holding local contests, including through outreach to participants, remains limited.

<sup>38</sup> Applications for grants focused on the following priority areas: promotion of healthy lifestyle, tourism development, provision of social services and social inclusion (26 percent each); economic development and boosting employment (16 percent); and education (6 percent). Source: project monitoring reports.

to apply for jobs, while piloting family-smart options for men to take a more active role in caring activities. This project represents an important example of valuable partnership between UN agencies (if the collaboration with the UN Population Fund [UNFPA] is confirmed) and IFIs<sup>39</sup> coming together from different angles to promote a solution to a specific issue.

## 2.3 Energy and environment



**CPD outcome:** By 2020, policies have been improved and measures have been effectively implemented to increase energy efficiency and production of renewable energy, protect landscape and biological diversity and reduce the anthropogenic burden of the environment.

**Finding 8: UNDP was well positioned in the area of environment and energy with a focused programme. Where UNDP has engaged for a long time, its interventions have been transformative. However, there is potential to further strengthen synergies between projects and make the programme funding more sustainable.**

The environment and energy portfolio has been for many years the cornerstone of the UNDP country programme. The CO has been strategically well-positioned, and its long-standing and sustained engagement with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection (MNREP), the Department for Energy Efficiency of the State Committee for Standardization, and other relevant partners has created trust, depth, and expertise. The main areas of work revolved around the management of natural resources – particularly in protected areas, wetlands, and peatlands – and

climate change mitigation through the promotion of energy efficiency and renewable energy. Other areas of engagement included the sustainable use and management of waste and hazardous chemicals as well as sustainable urban development, which is a new area of significant potential for the CO with a high level of interest from the central Government and local authorities.

In areas where UNDP has engaged for a long time, thanks to the financial support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the EU, the CO's interventions have been transformative. UNDP has played a crucial role in supporting the MNREP establish the necessary institutional infrastructure and strengthen policies and practices for the management of wetlands and peatlands, thus helping Belarus become a regional leader in the management of protected areas and the recovery of damaged ecosystems. Further, in the area of energy efficiency, long-running UNDP projects have helped to institutionalize a number of practices and structures, including building codes and energy audits.<sup>40</sup> Through sustained engagement in these areas, the CO has also been able to retain key project staff, especially project managers, promoting institutional memory and continuity as well as strong partnerships with national institutions.

For all the temporal integration of these activities, there is room for closer cooperation between the different projects and portfolios, particularly in ecotourism and sustainable use of natural resources where there are natural synergies with local economic development activities. Also, the monitoring capacities of the programme in the environmental area – consisting of only two staff – seem quite limited, given the significant size of the programme and the complexity and technicality of the issues involved. Another challenge that requires the CO's attention is the limited diversification of the funding base for environmental activities, which relied mostly on the traditional sources of the GEF and the EU.

<sup>39</sup> The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development will also be involved, as it provides consultancy services for women to access financial products.

<sup>40</sup> See case study, 'Belarus: efficient technology for a greener transition' (p.18) in the UNDP publication 'Empowering Lives, Building Resilience'.

**Finding 9: UNDP has addressed important priorities in the area of management of natural resources and biodiversity, contributing to the prevention of soil degradation and the conservation of globally threatened species. UNDP helped to strengthen environmental legislation, building institutional capacity, and sharing international knowledge and practices with national counterparts.**

The conservation-oriented management of forests and wetlands has been one of the main areas of work in the current cycle, through the implementation of three projects.<sup>41</sup> In this area, UNDP has supported improvements of the legislative and policy framework,<sup>42</sup> and introduced monetization of economic and social benefits for the management of forests and wetlands that harbour internationally important biodiversity. UNDP introduced innovative methods – including a scheme for the sustainable use of drained peatlands, a methodology for the practical restoration of peatlands, and the piloting of a financially self-sustainable wetland biomass harvesting and processing system in partnership with the private sector – while developing livelihoods and ecotourism opportunities.<sup>43</sup> UNDP also supported the building of infrastructure for peatlands' biomass usage in energy, construction, and agriculture. Overall, work in this area has resulted in the restoration of inefficiently drained peatlands, thus stabilizing the groundwater table, preventing soil mineralization and drying out of peat soil, and eventually reducing carbon emissions. As of June 2019, over 55,000 ha of degraded peatland area has

been restored,<sup>44</sup> which represents about 10 percent of total degraded peatlands in the country.<sup>45</sup> The terminal evaluation of the Peatlands II project estimated a 238.8-tonne (CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent) reduction of GHG emissions over a 20-year period.

UNDP also supported the maintenance of a favourable habitat for globally endangered species by restoring wetlands,<sup>46</sup> training forestry organizations on the identification and sustainable use of rare and typical biotopes, and developing a system for the registration and inventory of key habitats of globally threatened species.<sup>47</sup> The national DNA Bank was enriched with samples of 24 endangered species, further supporting the country's efforts on the sustainable use of genetic resources, and a special protection regime for 42 habitats was introduced.

In 2018-2019, UNDP supported the development of a set of proposals to establish a legal mechanism for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity's Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization. According to national stakeholders, the proposals were taken into consideration during the preparation of draft laws, but the search for international resources to support further work in this area has not been successful. The close involvement of national specialists was considered an important factor for the successful implementation of the project.

<sup>41</sup> UNDP implemented the following projects: Clima-East: conservation and sustainable management of peatlands in Belarus to minimize carbon emissions and help ecosystems to adapt to climate change; Landscape approach to management of peatlands aiming at multiple ecological benefits; and Conservation-oriented management of forests and wetlands to achieve multiple benefits. According to Atlas, the projects' budget for the period 2016-2018 was \$2.8 million, and reached \$5.1 million in 2020.

<sup>42</sup> The Republic of Belarus adopted a strategy for the preservation and sustainable management of peatlands in 2015. In 2019, the law on protection and management of peatlands entered into force.

<sup>43</sup> This was piloted in the Sporaŭski and Zvaniec reserves. Cranberry processing was demonstrated as an example of responsible use of resources in bog ecosystems. Support was also provided on the formulation of a strategy for the development of ecotourism and a pilot project for tourism related to the European bison and other wild animals in targeted protected areas was developed.

<sup>44</sup> Based on information provided by Belarus to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: <https://www.unccd.int/news-events/belarus-shares-success-peatland-restoration>.

<sup>45</sup> Based on information by the National Academy of Science, as reported in: <http://www.aukstumala.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/14.-Grummo-D.-Wetland-restoration-experience-in-Belarus.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> The restoration of wetlands was said to have increased by 1.5 times the density of Aquatic Warbler compared to 2015. Source: UNDP project monitoring report.

<sup>47</sup> The National Academy of Science of Belarus has reported that a third of Red Book (threatened) species in the territory of Belarus reside in wetlands territory, thus benefiting from the recovery resulting from project interventions: <http://www.aukstumala.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/14.-Grummo-D.-Wetland-restoration-experience-in-Belarus.pdf>.

**Finding 10: UNDP has promoted renewable energy and energy efficiency, introducing new methods and standards for the design of residential buildings that reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions. The CO contributed to establishing the proper enabling environment and enhancing national expert capacity, along with awareness-raising and demonstrations of the economic and environmental viability of new technologies. Progress in this area, however, has been hampered by economical electricity prices and institutional arrangements for effective coordination.**

Through two extended projects on energy,<sup>48</sup> UNDP has strengthened the legal and regulatory framework to improve energy efficiency in buildings by supporting the enforcement of the Technical Code for Energy Performance of Buildings and enhancing the capacity of specialists to implement and monitor energy efficiency building standards and construction norms.<sup>49</sup> Other reported contributions to the policy debate included the support to a draft Presidential Decree on Carbon Market and related amendments to the tax code; a draft resolution of the Council of Ministers on the procedures for the establishment of prices of electricity produced using renewable sources; and a concept of a national strategy defining the main directions of development of renewable energy sources in Belarus until 2030.<sup>50</sup> UNDP also promoted awareness of the general public on energy efficiency in the residential sector and included the subject in university curricula. However, there has been no attempt at assessing increased awareness and effectiveness of the advocacy campaigns. Importantly, the CO also supported the implementation of energy efficiency measures in schools and the construction of three pilot residential buildings based on energy-saving technologies, which was a first in Belarus. According to the terminal evaluation of the project, lifetime GHG emissions from the demonstration buildings were estimated to be 24,100 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>

equivalent, although the project did not include adequate time to properly monitor the energy savings during its implementation. Also, the long-term sustainability of the projects remains difficult to assess, giving the very low heating tariff which affect the feasibility of the investments in this sector. The State Standardization Committee reported that, as of June 2018, 87 buildings had been designed to reduce energy consumption.

UNDP has also supported the MNREP in promoting the removal of barriers to the adoption of wind energy, by working with the Belarusian State Institute for Standardization and Certification to develop several legal acts and training experts and officials on planning, financing and implementation of wind projects. A study on derisking renewable energy, with a focus on wind energy, has been completed.<sup>51</sup> However, progress on implementing the pilots – which is crucial for demonstrating the viability of wind energy in the country – has been limited, for the economical electricity prices resulting from the construction of the nuclear power plant provide a powerful disincentive. The ICPE also noted a lack of clear leadership among national institutions, with several ministries responsible for various aspects of renewable energy but no single entity taking ownership of the effort.

**Finding 11: UNDP has intensified its support for the country's transition to a green economy and sustainable urban development in small and medium-sized cities, with an important focus on awareness-raising and demonstration projects. The sustainability of the interventions in this area will depend on the continuation of efforts and the institutionalization of practices by the Government and the private sector, both at the central and local level.**

<sup>48</sup> The 'Improving energy efficiency in residential buildings in the Republic of Belarus' and the 'Developing an integrated approach to a stepped-up energy saving' programmes started in 2012 and were completed in 2018 and 2017, respectively. According to Atlas, the total budget of these interventions for 2016-2018 was \$2.8 million.

<sup>49</sup> 'Terminal Evaluation of UNDP/GEF Project: Belarus: Improving Energy Efficiency in Residential Buildings', UNDP Belarus, June 2018.

<sup>50</sup> UNDP ROAR 2019.

<sup>51</sup> 'Derisking Renewable Energy Investment: Selecting Public Instruments to Promote Wind Energy Investment in Belarus', UNDP, April 2017.

UNDP has promoted the green economy and sustainable urban development through policy development, planning processes, and the implementation of pilot initiatives. The CO facilitated the development of the National Green Economy Action Plan till 2020<sup>52</sup> – whose implementation is coordinated by the Government – and supported the formulation of green urban development plans at the local level.

An intensive information campaign to promote green economy and urban development was conducted and their principles demonstrated in various sectors. In partnerships with NGOs, local administration and businesses, UNDP has supported the implementation of various pilot initiatives in the field of green production, energy efficiency, and sustainable transport. These included the production of office paper from recyclable materials, the processing of wood waste into biofuel, the production of highly efficient organic fertilizers through advanced sapropel processing, the installation of LED street lighting, and the establishment of a system for the measurement, verification and reporting of the GHG emissions from green urban development measures.<sup>53</sup> UNDP also supported the establishment of ‘green schools’, where students have been trained on environmental matters, and the creation of ‘environmental monitoring clubs’ to promote accountability for the violations of environmental laws by the local population.

Overall, the sustainability of results in this area is yet to be proved. Both the Eco-monitoring and the Green Cities project are still ongoing, with the latter having been delayed by a long registration process and a change in project management.<sup>54</sup> In the case of the Green Economy project, the development by the CO of a strategy for ensuring the sustainability of projects results is a good practice, although much will depend on the continuous efforts by the MNREP and other ministries to create a favourable legislation and develop incentives for green production by the private sector.

**Finding 12. UNDP’s support has been crucial to allow Belarus to be on track to meeting its 2020 target of complete HCFC phase-out.**

UNDP has also supported Belarus in the phase-out of HCFCs in response to its obligations under the Montreal Protocol and Vienna Convention.<sup>55</sup> The CO supported the development and adoption of the HCFC phase-out strategy, training of refrigeration technicians<sup>56</sup> and customs officers, and a range of awareness-raising activities.<sup>57</sup> UNDP has also supplied analytical and servicing equipment for Government bodies, including customs authorities, and has piloted small-scale destruction of ozone-depleting substances. Thanks to this support, Belarus is reported to be on track to meeting its 2020 target of complete HCFC phase-out.

<sup>52</sup> Approved by the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of 1 December 2016, No. 1061.

<sup>53</sup> The ongoing Green Cities project is expected to generate direct GHG emission reductions of 100,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent through improved urban transport efficiencies and energy efficiency pilots in three municipalities.

<sup>54</sup> The project had an official start date of October 2015, but the inception workshop was not held until July 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Hydrochlorofluorocarbons, a group of ozone-depleting chemicals, are used in the countries with economies in transition in a variety of applications including refrigerants, foam-blowing agents, solvents, fire extinguishers and aerosols. The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer provides mechanisms for protecting the ozone layer against the negative impact of HCFCs at the global level.

<sup>56</sup> A classroom was established in the Belorussian State Technological University to train refrigeration technicians in installation and maintenance of air conditioning equipment using hydrocarbons (propane) as a refrigerant.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.by.undp.org/content/belarus/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/12/21/belarus-is-moving-towards-the-use-of-ozone-friendly-refrigerant-chemicals-in-the-industrial-sector.html>

## 2.4 Basic services

**CPD outcome:** By 2020, vulnerable groups and the population at large have equal access to quality health, education, and social protection services that effectively address their needs, including comprehensive post-Chernobyl development.

**Finding 13: UNDP successfully transferred the management of resources for the prevention, treatment, and care of HIV/AIDS to national institutions, therefore ensuring sustainability. The CO's role in this area is now limited to the coordination of the country mechanism to oversee the provision of grants to NGOs. Together with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNDP promoted important legal changes to decriminalize people living with HIV/AIDS and developed a tool to monitor the respect of their rights.**

UNDP has long been the principal recipient of resources by the Global Fund to Fight Against HIV and TB, which have contributed to prevent, diagnose, and treat the diseases' symptoms. In the current CPD cycle, UNDP implemented three projects in this area worth \$2.3 million, of which the largest aimed to develop the capacity of the Republican Scientific and Practical Centre for Medical Technologies, Informatization, Administration and Management of Health. Through its projects, UNDP procured antiretroviral products (until the first half of 2016), then focusing on training, mentoring, and developing the IT infrastructure to procure the drugs. Interviewees described the transfer of capacity to national authorities as an "extraordinarily

good example" of sustainability. According to the Global Fund, Belarus now finances 95 percent of its antiretroviral drugs and 100 percent of drugs to treat multidrug-resistant TB. Between 2008 and 2018, the TB incidence has decreased by half, and it has continued decreasing after the transfer of competencies to national authorities.<sup>58</sup> While the number of people living with HIV has been constantly increasing among certain groups (people who inject drugs, female sex workers, and men who have sex with men), the number of AIDS-related deaths remained lower than 500 cases per year.<sup>59</sup> As national stakeholders assumed charge of the management of HIV and TB resources, UNDP's role has focused on supporting the Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM), which oversees the grant management. The CCM also provided an important opportunity for CSOs and vulnerable groups to participate in the design and implementation of HIV and TB programmes.

Joint UNAIDS-UNDP advocacy efforts reduced the legal discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS. Article 57 of the criminal code about HIV/AIDS transmission was changed, while the law on social services to include social contracting for NGOs working on HIV/AIDS is at the final stage of adoption by the Parliament.<sup>60</sup> A monitoring tool was developed to track the provision of services for and any rights violation of people living with HIV/AIDS.<sup>61</sup>

**Finding 14: Beyond its sustained engagement on HIV/AIDS, UNDP facilitated the promotion of local activities to prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and enhanced awareness of issues faced by people with disabilities. UNDP's work was relevant for it focused on social vulnerabilities but remained of limited scale.**

Together with other United Nations agencies, UNDP has contributed to the implementation of an EU-funded Euro 4.1 million programme to prevent NCDs and promote healthier lifestyles, in support of

<sup>58</sup> The number of TB cases in 2018 was 31 per 100,000 inhabitants.

<sup>59</sup> Source: UNAIDS.

<sup>60</sup> In Belarus, local governments award social contracts to NGOs, but a high number of difficult requirements need to be met for NGOs to enter into the social contract.

<sup>61</sup> <http://hiv-prava.by/pravo-na-zdorove/>



the national programme on health.<sup>62</sup> In addition to overall project coordination, UNDP supported the implementation of 25 initiatives across Belarus. It provided local NGOs and State institutions with business training and grants to upgrade infrastructure, provide classes on nutrition and physical well-being, and organize self-help groups for addicted people, among others.<sup>63</sup> By organizing local contests for grants, the project helped to enhance awareness on NCDs. The large number of applications received (ten times higher than expected) was considered a sign of the relevance of the intervention in meeting local public health needs. Overall, interviewees appreciated UNDP's ability to manage grants and provide capacity-building for grassroots organizations and NGOs at the local level. However, concerns were raised about the sustainability of the supported interventions, which the project should have considered before its end.

Following the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), UNDP supported the Government in developing the action plan and undertook a study on basic services to inform the law on the rights and social integration of people with disabilities, which is scheduled for the first reading at the Parliament in June 2020.<sup>64</sup> The CO also supported the drafting of an information strategy to address issues of persons with disabilities in mass media, which was adopted by the Government, and conducted a large-scale advocacy campaign across six oblasts. Stakeholders acknowledged the role played by UNDP in enhancing the visibility of people with disabilities and changing perceptions using its core resources.

Overall, UNDP's contribution to the improvement of health, education, and social protection services for vulnerable populations has been important but too limited to produce a significant impact in terms of vulnerability reduction. Since 2016, UNDP conceived

several project ideas aimed at reducing risks and increasing the resilience of vulnerable populations – by, for example, addressing the youth's drug use, enhancing access to healthcare in the penitentiary system, and assisting displaced populations and victims of trafficking – which have not materialized. In the area of support to people with disabilities, UNDP had envisaged playing a more strategic and coordinating role, working both at policy and service provision level, in partnership with line Ministries (Education, Labour and Social Protection, and Health) to promote the development of the people with disabilities' human capital through vocational education and work opportunities. Projects on social integration and empowerment of people with mental disabilities, as well as a joint programme with UNICEF and UNFPA to implement the CRPD, have not materialized.

## 2.5 Overall country programme implementation

**Finding 15: Through relatively limited financial investment of core resources, UNDP played a catalytic role in supporting the development of the national architecture for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promoted dialogue around the goals, including civil society and private sector. The level of awareness and commitment among the population at the local level, as well as the definition of the SDGs' financial implications, require further work.**

Starting from 2017, and with a core resources budget of \$0.3 million,<sup>65</sup> UNDP has supported Belarus in its efforts towards a fuller implementation of SDGs. It has done so by enhancing the awareness of the local population, informing policy dialogue, establishing a solid institutional architecture for decision-making, and supporting the availability of data to monitor

<sup>62</sup> The BELMED project on healthy lifestyle promotion saw the participation of the World Health Organization (WHO, for capacity building for surveillance on NCDs), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF, on the prevention of child trauma), and UNFPA (pregnant women and newborns).

<sup>63</sup> Besides the management of grants, UNDP supported WHO with the procurement of software for breast cancer screening and advocacy to promote interventions in reduction of NCDs, which are considered to cost Belarus 5 percent of its GDP.

<sup>64</sup> The draft law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Integration" was submitted by the Council of Ministers to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly in September 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Phase 2 of the project was extended until February 2019, with funding from UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA.

progress. Many interviewees indicated that UNDP's contribution, while relatively modest from a financial standpoint, had played a decisive role in the creation of dialogue around the Agenda 2030, which is a high priority for the Government, and in ensuring the transfer of knowledge and international good practices through study visits, forums and workshops.

UNDP supported the establishment of an institutional architecture for SDG implementation, with the dual advantage of being both anchored to high position of powers<sup>66</sup> and participatory, through the creation of a partnership group involving civil society and private sector representatives. The established structure includes the Council for Sustainable Development,<sup>67</sup> the Parliamentary Group on the SDGs, and the Public Council for the Sustainable Development Strategies Drafting and Evaluation. National stakeholders interviewed for the ICPE valued the structure as an enabler of concerted efforts by stakeholders, particularly through regular Parliamentary hearings and high-level events.<sup>68</sup> The work with the Parliament led to the development of recommendations to the Government, and the introduction of legal amendments requesting every regulatory legal act to take into account its compliance with the SDGs.<sup>69</sup>

The CO supported the Government in the preparation of the 2017 Voluntary National Review and the Mainstreaming Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) report. The latter defined four accelerators around issues of green transition (see also Finding 11), future generation orientation, digital transformation, and gender equality (see Finding 18). The MAPS document has reportedly been used to inform the National Strategy for Sustainable

Development 2035, although the results are yet to be seen. State budgetary resources have not been yet linked to the agreed commitments.

In partnership with UNICEF, UNDP supported the National Statistical Committee in the development of a national platform for reporting on the indicators of the SDGs.<sup>70</sup> The platform includes updated information for 75 percent of the indicators included in the national list, going back in some cases to 2000. The National Statistical Committee is reported to have been working on addressing existing data gaps. A gender portal – complementary to the SDG database – is under development. Activities for building statistical capacity for SDGs monitoring have been included in the Strategy for the Development of Government Statistics of the Republic of Belarus till 2022.

Importantly, the SDGs represented a window to promote a closer involvement of the private sector in socially relevant issues. Interviewees reported a high interest of the private sector in being associated with SDGs work, and a model for further engagement was tested during the Bike4SDGs advocacy campaign. In addition to the Parliamentary hearings mentioned above, where UNDP took advantage of the existing Global Compact platform,<sup>71</sup> the CO also presented a package worth \$31 million in investment proposals to private companies, national banks and funds, and IFIs at the 2019 SDG Impact Investment Forum. The first two agreements with Coca-Cola and Visa (in the context of the Eco-monitoring project and to support women entrepreneurs, respectively) were signed in late 2019.

<sup>66</sup> The Deputy Chairperson of the Council of the National Assembly was appointed SDGs National Coordinator.

<sup>67</sup> The Council for Sustainable Development has 38 members, including representatives of governmental bodies and organizations at the Deputy Head level. The Council has an internal division by area: economy, social affairs, environment and monitoring. The structure also includes a Parliamentary Group on the SDGs.

<sup>68</sup> Including the 2017 International Conference on Women's Entrepreneurship, the 2018 Regional SDG Coordination Forum, the 2019 National SDG Forum and the 2019 SDG Impact Investment Forum.

<sup>69</sup> Law "On regulatory legal acts", February 2019.

<sup>70</sup> <http://sdgplatform.belstat.gov.by/en/sites/belstatfront/home.html>. Data for 25 indicators included in the national list are calculated by international organizations, while information for 15 indicators is available in the global database of the United Nations Statistical Department.

<sup>71</sup> The Global Compact Belarus was launched in 2006. It includes 25 participants (companies, SMEs, foundations and NGOs) from different sectors (e.g. industrial transportation, software and computer science, beverages).

At the local level, UNDP helped with the creation of regional working groups in all oblasts and Minsk, including State representatives and NGOs. In the absence of an approved procedure and a defined role for the working groups, their role was not fully operationalized, and participation differed greatly from region to region. Significant efforts have also been put into raising awareness on the SDGs through round tables, workshops and public lectures for youth, as well as advocacy campaigns, covering different topics including environment and climate action, health, and inclusion.<sup>72</sup> While SDGs billboards are widely present in the streets and dedicated workshops for the media have been organized, according to interviewees, more efforts are needed to strengthen the public understanding of what the SDGs mean in everyday life.<sup>73</sup>

**Finding 16: UNDP's work has been significantly affected by lengthy registration processes. While appreciating the recent stronger collaboration with the CO, some national stakeholders reported the perception of having been inadequately involved in the preparation of planning documents and commented on the need to improve the quality of proposals. A limited understanding of UNDP's role and added value in some areas also permeated the relationship with the Government, requiring the CO to reconsider its value proposition.**

UNDP's efficiency has been affected significantly by lengthy registration processes spanning several months, with considerable risks to the CO in terms of operational capacity to deliver service. According to the 2017 internal audit report, registrations took between four and seven months. Interviews for the ICPE provided an estimate of eight to nine months, with some projects' registration going up to two years. The process for environmental projects was faster, because of their technical nature and the designation of a dedicated focal point in the Government. The establishment in 2015 of the Coordination Council on International Technical

Assistance to enhance efficiency has not helped to reduce the registration time, since the Council meets once a year and the power of project review and approval continues to rest with the Ministry of Economy.

Lengthy and/or unsuccessful registration processes have significantly affected UNDP's effectiveness on inclusive governance (as discussed in Findings 1 and 3). While indicative of a limited endorsement of the work proposed in some areas, the issues experienced with the registration process have also been symptomatic of a limited government understanding of UNDP's value proposition and a perception of inadequate transparency and consultation during project preparation. Noting that projects had been registered within five days of approval, national stakeholders reported the issue laid instead in the quality and promptness of the documents required for approval. Some stakeholders interviewed for the ICPE attributed the delays to the 'convoluted structure' and poor clarity of the project design and expected results. Interviewees also indicated that poor reporting on accomplishments made them 'increasingly sceptical' about the value of work by the UNDP. More recent efforts by UNDP Senior Management to enhance the quality of cooperation were appreciated and interpreted as an acknowledgement of UNDP operating in full support of ministries and national priorities.

Bringing a very small percentage of all international assistance, UNDP was by some considered more as an administrator of donor resources and too costly for the size of the programme. While the CO's support to international processes, expertise, and good practices – including through the WTO programme, the SDGs project, and energy efficiency and protected areas interventions – was very much appreciated, UNDP's added value in other areas was less understood. Stakeholders suggested that the CO developed a new model of cooperation for Belarus, focused on poverty reduction in selected areas of the country and innovative work across sectors in

<sup>72</sup> SDGs communication took about half of the time of the UNDP Communications Officer in 2017-2019

<sup>73</sup> A survey on how the SDGs link to personal priorities is planned through the UNCT Communications Group.

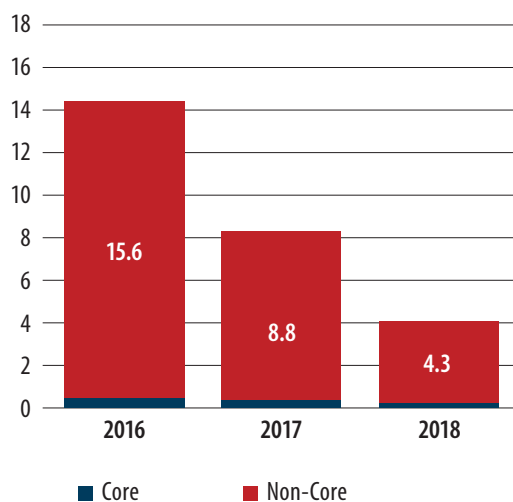
the context of Agenda 2030. Furthermore, national stakeholders advocated for a stronger involvement of UNDP in Chernobyl-affected areas, through the promotion of programmes in the areas of basic services, economic development, and environmental restoration.

**Finding 17: UNDP’s financial situation has been challenged by multiple factors, including reduced core resources, limited donor interest, and minimal cost-sharing. Budget and delivery have plummeted over the years, affecting the ability of the CO to achieve what had been planned. The CO was able to reduce its costs by consolidating and downsizing the office, but it remains at a critical juncture, with financial sustainability closely tied to a commitment by the Government to invest resources in UNDP, for its value added to the country’s development.**

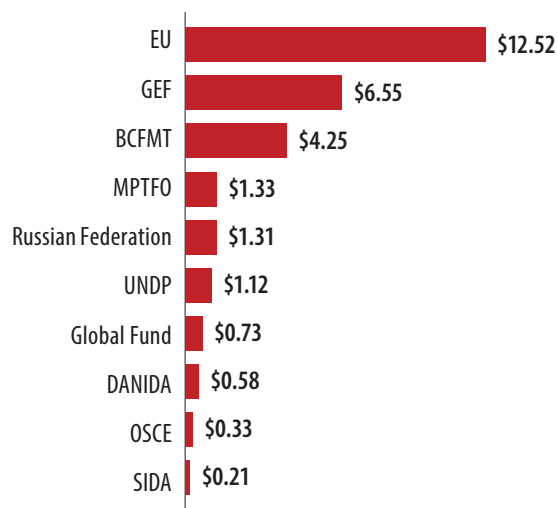
UNDP’s office in Belarus relies mostly on external donors for its functioning, with core resources representing 2 percent to 4 percent of the budget since 2011. In the current CPD, UNDP’s financial situation has been challenged by the disengagement of traditional donors (such as Sweden) and the decision of the Global Fund to switch to a national principal recipient in 2016. Despite some effective outreach to new donors (such as the United Kingdom and Poland)<sup>74</sup> and the growing importance of the Russian Federation as a partner, UNDP has continued to rely on the EU and the GEF as its main source of funding. In 2016-2018, the EU’s contribution to the UNDP’s budget oscillated between 44 percent and 53 percent, with a peak of 64 percent in 2017.

Local cost-sharing was minimal (between 0.1 percent and 0.6 percent).<sup>75</sup> As receiving funding from the private sector registered in Belarus is precluded by national legislation, UNDP has intensified its outreach to few international private companies, concluding agreements with two in the context of SDG impact investments (see Finding 15).

**Figure 2: Programme expenditure (US\$ million)**



**Figure 3: Top 10 donors (US\$ million)**



<sup>74</sup> For a total of \$1.4 million.

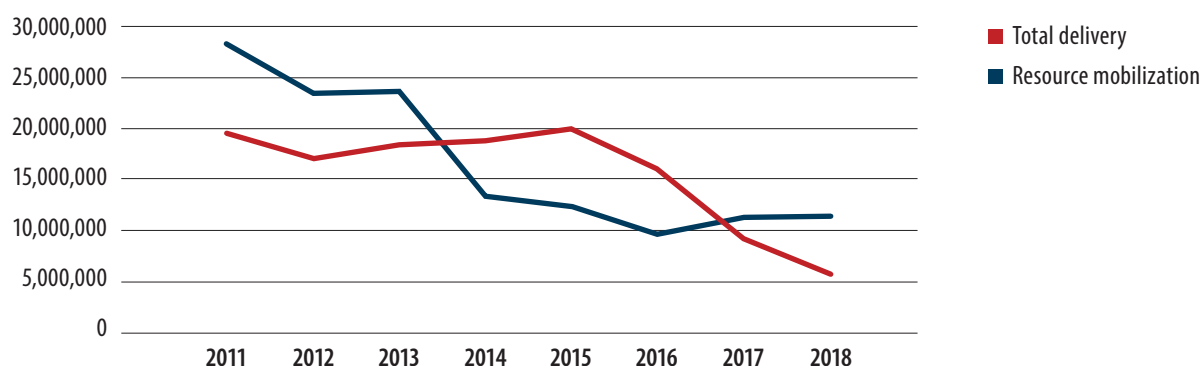
<sup>75</sup> The Government and UNDP met in 2020 to discuss prospects of co-financing for projects.

Both resource mobilization and delivery have significantly diminished compared to the previous cycle (2011-2015). In 2016-2018, mobilized resources reached a total of \$32.4 million against a target of \$82 million for the entire CPD and with a reduction of 35 percent compared to the three previous years. Total delivery also continually diminished from \$20 million in 2015 to \$16 million in 2016, \$9.2 million in 2017 and \$5.8 million in 2018. As the average delivery/budget ratio was 89 percent (with a high of 95 percent in 2018), the reduced delivery was mostly attributed to delays in the projects' start due to lengthy registrations.

Both in absolute and relative terms, inclusive and responsive governance was the area most affected by the reduced resource mobilization and delivery. Expenditures reached \$2 million in 2016-2018 against a target of \$15 million set in the CPD. At the time of the ICPE, the areas of environment and inclusive growth were both at a 36-37 percent delivery against the CPD target, with environment expenditures being the highest at \$13 million in 2016-2018. In the area of basic services, UNDP mobilized 46 percent of the planned resources, but only up to 2016.

In the last two years, UNDP has gone through an important consolidation and downsizing exercise, following the recommendations of the 2017 Management Consulting Team (MCT), to align the CO's capacity to the new Strategic Plan and ensure a financially sound model that reduced fixed management and operating costs.<sup>76</sup> In addition, in observance of UNDP Direct Project Costs (DPC) policy and after a long negotiation with the EU and the Government,<sup>77</sup> UNDP was able to increase the contribution of DPC from 6.4 percent in 2016 to 13.6 percent in 2019. Some interviewees indicated that the financial situation of the CO could be sustainable if resources from new donors (such as the Russian Federation and Poland) doubled in addition to the continuous support by the EU and the GEF. Others questioned the current paradigm of dependence on external donors and urged the CO and the Government to start a serious discussion around the value-added proposition of UNDP in Belarus and enhanced co-financing in support.

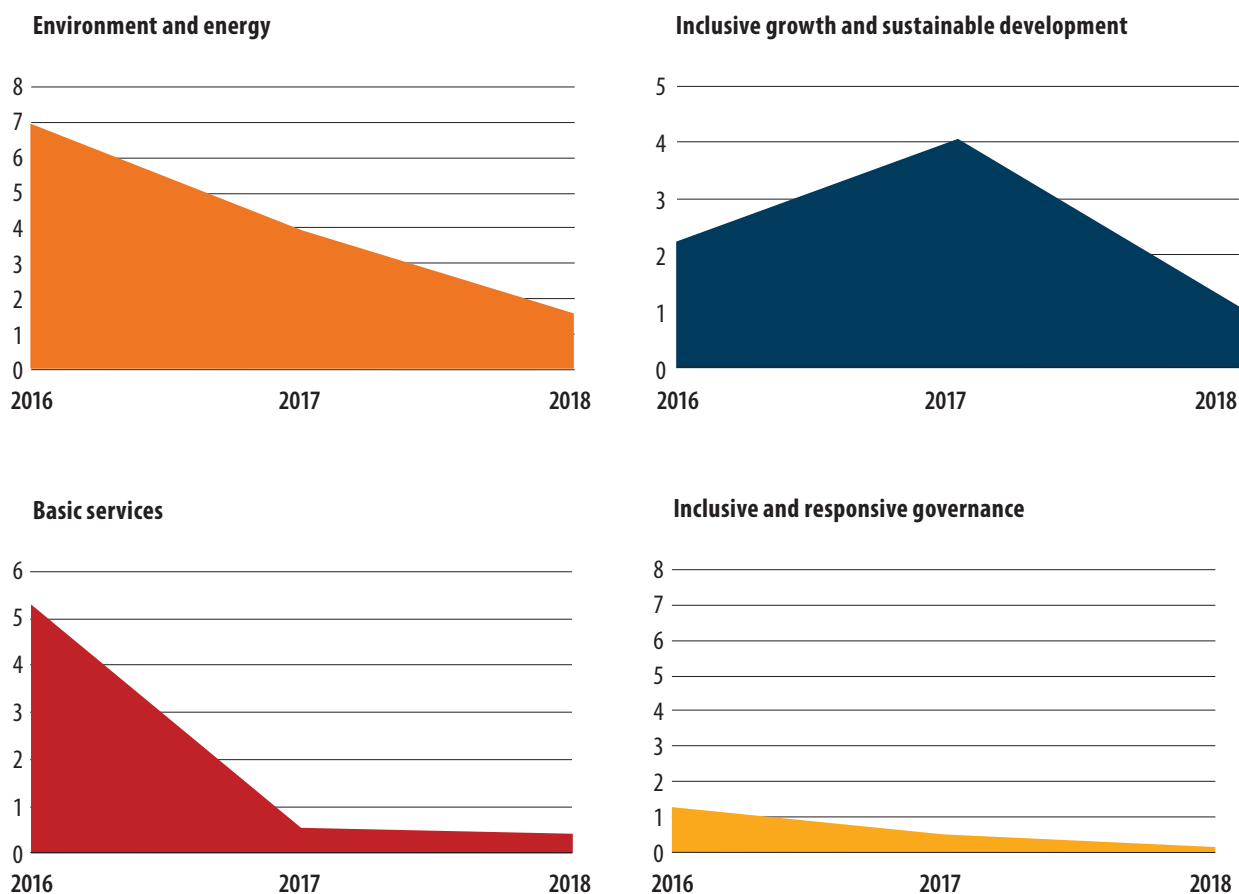
**Figure 4: UNDP total delivery and resource mobilization, 2011-2018 (US\$ million)**



<sup>76</sup> In 2016, the ratio of extrabudgetary cost/staff was 60 percent. The MCT proposed a new functional structure with a Programme Implementation Unit, the abolition of 11 positions and the nationalization of the post of Deputy Resident Representative. The MCT recommendations were all implemented, with the exception of the DRR post which will not be nationalized but lowered in grade.

<sup>77</sup> DPC are organizational costs incurred in the implementation of a development activity or service that can be directly traced and attributed to that activity (projects and programmes) or service. The EU disagreed with the inclusion of development effectiveness under DPC. While the Government advocated for a transfer of DPC to its budget, as the majority of the projects are implemented according to the national implementation modality (NIM), both the CO and the MCT report agreed that DPC would still be needed for UNDP to cover project implementation, M&E, and procurement, given the limited ability of governmental agencies to implement full NIM-projects.

**Figure 5: Expenditure by area, 2016-2018 (US\$ million)**



**Finding 18: UNDP does not have a clear and realistic gender strategy informing its work. Yet, the CO implemented a number of gender-responsive projects in the area of migration and human trafficking and targeted women through its work on inclusive growth. Planned outputs to advance women’s participation in decision-making were not achieved. The work to improve the position of women in the labour market and the preparatory analysis for the implementation of the SDGs represent an important avenue to be further pursued.**

UNDP formulated a gender strategy for 2016-2020, which aimed to ensure gender mainstreaming through checklists and training, create partnerships with international and national development actors, and promote an inclusive and zero-tolerance environment for sexual harassment.<sup>78</sup> However, the strategy, which includes a detailed action plan with transformation initiatives in the area of women’s economic empowerment, appears too ambitious and not fully integrated with UNDP’s actual programme of work. The strategy also foresees a role for the gender focal point to review all project concept notes before approval, although the ICPE did not find any evidence.

<sup>78</sup> UNDP Belarus reports it also follows the inter-office Policy on Sustainable Management that contains guidelines on ensuring gender balance in events and communications. The interview selection panels and internal committees are gender-balanced.

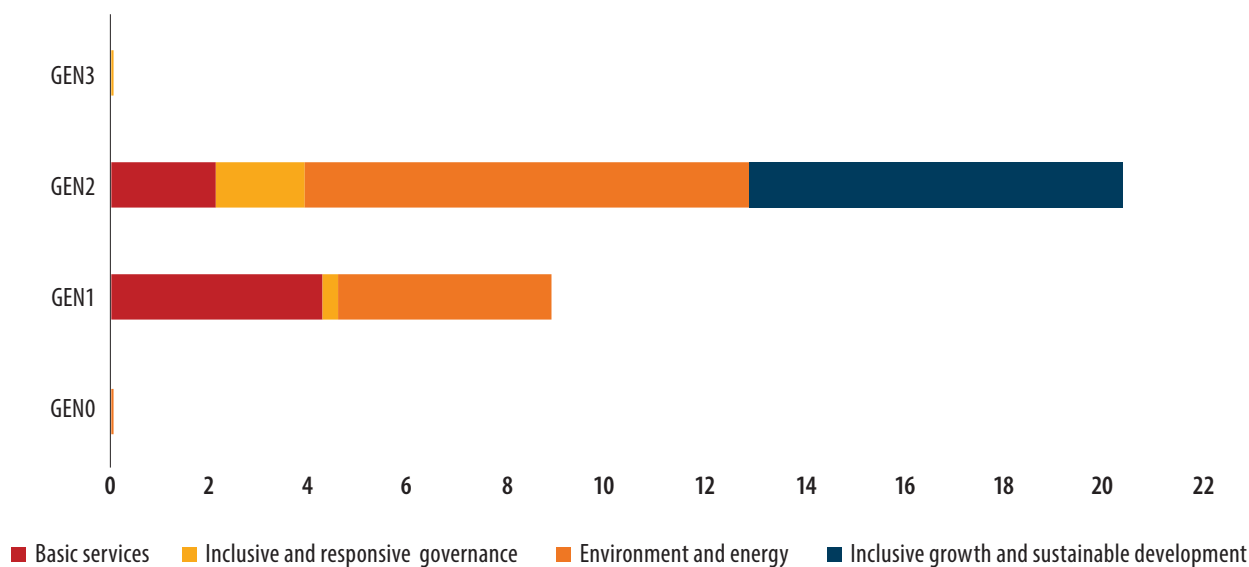
Overall, the CO reported that all of its project outputs in the area of inclusive growth and most project expenditures in governance and environment (84 percent and 67.5 percent, respectively) significantly contributed to gender equality. In the area of basic services, the share went down to 33 percent.<sup>79</sup>

The IEO’s GRES analysis, however, revealed a less positive picture. UNDP’s work included gender-responsive projects in migration and human trafficking, where the CO addressed issues of sexual and gender-based violence for vulnerable women, and isolated initiatives aimed at mainstreaming gender in local and urban planning, in cooperation with the Belarusian Union of Women. Interventions in the area of inclusive growth, and to a lesser extent the environment, were mostly gender-targeted by providing women with on-the-job training for SME and green economy development. Other initiatives in the area of environment and governance were mostly gender blind.

**Finding 19: UNDP’s monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system mostly focused on the completion of activities and achievement of outputs at the project level, with little attention paid to expected outcomes. The CO has very limited M&E capacity, and no evaluation was conducted outside the area of energy and environment. The introduction of monthly delivery meetings and mandatory lessons learned reviews incentivized adaptive management.**

The two building blocks of UNDP’s monitoring system in Belarus – project monitoring reports and the Results Oriented Annual Reports – were not designed to provide a comprehensive assessment of the results achieved by the CO at outcome level. At the project level, the Results and Resources Framework template stopped at the definition of outputs and included mostly a list of activities implemented, with a poor definition of targets. Its use in monitoring reports has been inconsistently applied too. At the programmatic level, UNDAF indicators

**Figure 6: Expenditure by gender marker and thematic area (US\$ million)**



<sup>79</sup> GEN2 marker. Source: Atlas.

have been vague or defined at a level too high to assess UNDP's effectiveness. Some of UNDP's CPD output indicators (e.g. the share of UPR recommendations implemented or the level of public satisfaction with public service delivery) actually aimed to measure effectiveness at the outcome level, although – for the most part – corresponding data have not been collected.

Since 2016, UNDP has commissioned six evaluations but only in the area of energy and environment, for projects funded by the GEF and the EU, which have compulsory evaluation requirements. Their quality was rated as moderately satisfactory.<sup>80</sup> No evaluation was conducted in the areas of governance, basic services, and inclusive growth, exception for the mid-term review of the BELMED programme,<sup>81</sup> which was commissioned by the donor and included in the larger programme review of the EU's support to Belarus in the area of health.<sup>82</sup>

UNDP lacks an adequate M&E system, where key data and information about project performance are stored and used to inform decision-making. As a good management practice, the CO has introduced monthly meetings to discuss delivery rates and issues of protracted registration, as well as mandatory quarterly lessons learned for projects. Information, however, remained on individual files and has not been analysed for trends in factors affecting performance for replication and/or corrective actions, as appropriate.

The lack of evaluations and assessments of contribution to higher-level achievements was said to have resulted from both limited resources and capacities. At the time of the ICPE, programme associates mostly monitored project, while corporate M&E was one of the tasks assigned to a temporary programme integration specialist together with planning, project pipeline management and forecast analysis. Interviews revealed a lack of appreciation for M&E, which continued to be perceived as an additional task rather than an integral tool for project and programme management. Contrary to indications by the 2017 transformation plan,<sup>83</sup> the ICPE uncovered a high demand by national and international stakeholders for more frequent outcome M&E. Enhanced communication of results achieved, it was noted, would contribute to increasing trust and reinforcing the image of UNDP in the country.

<sup>80</sup> Quality assurance system by UNDP IEO: <http://erc.undp.org>.

<sup>81</sup> Preventing Non-communicable Diseases, Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle and Support to Modernization of the Health System in Belarus

<sup>82</sup> Mid-Term Evaluation of the EU-funded programme 'International accreditation of testing laboratories for medical products and support to healthcare in Belarus' (2018). The EU had also commissioned a mid-term evaluation (MTE) of the programme 'Support to regional and local development in Belarus' in 2015; the terminal evaluation will be conducted in 2020 as part of the MTE of the support to local economic development project.

<sup>83</sup> UNDP Transformation Plan, Belarus, 2017.



A decorative graphic consisting of a white dotted line that starts at the top left, goes down, then right, then down again, and finally right. Along this line are several colored circles: an orange circle at the top left, a teal circle below it, a white circle at the bottom left, a green circle, an orange circle, and a yellow circle at the bottom right.

# CHAPTER 3

## CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

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## 3.1 Conclusions

- **Conclusion 1: UNDP has been an important partner for the Government of the Republic of Belarus and contributed to progress in the realization of national priorities. UNDP was considered to add the most value when it focused on the reduction of inequality, exposed Belarus to international experience and expertise, and promoted cooperation and concerted efforts among national institutions.**

National partners overall appreciated UNDP's support to the sustainable development of Belarus, particularly when it focused on the reduction of poverty and vulnerabilities which still mainly affect the northern regions and pockets of population, including women, youth and people with disabilities. Across its areas of work, UNDP was seen to add the most value when it promoted Belarus on the international scene (as in the case of the WTO accession process and the SDGs forums) and exposed national institutions to other countries' good practices, particularly from states with a similar socio-economic background. In a context like Belarus, UNDP's efficacy appears to reside also in its capacity to promote cross-sectoral interventions that address complex issues and bring together public entities, private companies, and CSOs. That was the case, albeit with different degrees of effectiveness, in the areas of the SDGs, energy efficiency and sustainable urban development, human trafficking, and addressing barriers to women's economic empowerment.

- **Conclusion 2: Belarus' national income level, advanced capacities and political sensitivities have narrowed the space for international assistance to fewer areas. Inclusive growth and the environment constituted the core of UNDP's work, with potential for expansion. The SDGs represent an important window of opportunity for UNDP to continue supporting Belarus' international development, including in Chernobyl-affected areas.**

As a high human development country with available resources, it is considered that Belarus' development needs can be met through its national programmes and strategies, with limited international assistance. With Global Fund resources redirected to national authorities and restricted ability to work in the area of inclusive and responsive governance, UNDP has thus concentrated its support in the area of economic competitiveness. It has been promoting the development of SMEs and private economic initiatives, and environmental management, with a focus on the promotion of sustainable urban development and green production, as well as the preservation of natural resources.

Given some of the challenges Belarus faces in its path towards the full realization of the SDGs, the country would still benefit from international assistance to ensure that the gains of a more efficient economic production system bring socio-economic benefits to the population at large and do not affect the quality of the environment. The areas identified by the MAPS report for future work all represent important opportunities for UNDP to further promote its integrator role and work with other United Nations agencies (including non-resident ones) to address national priorities. The need – which has been identified in the CPD 2016-2020 – of a more inclusive and responsive governance system, particularly for service delivery at the local level, remains valid.

- **Conclusion 3: With some notable exceptions of sustained work, UNDP's programme has been mostly fragmented around individual projects and limited in scale. UNDP's efficient administration of grants and demonstration projects promoted valuable work that met the needs of the community and helped to raise awareness on sustainable development issues. These activities need to be further scaled up and/or integrated into broader institutional frameworks for stronger impact and sustainability.**

Partly as a function of UNDP's reliance on external resources, UNDP's programme has been fragmented around individual projects and activities that were seldom scaled up and continued as part of a broader programmatic framework. Few areas of work – such as HIV/AIDS, peatlands management, and energy – benefited from sustained engagement over time. Others (e.g. the e-feedback mechanism or the tax advisory services project) have been more ad hoc interventions, formulated around project opportunities. In the area of inclusive growth, where UNDP has invested significant resources, the CO's involvement in policy development has been limited, and the support to SMEs – while closely coordinated with national stakeholders – has yet to produce results that can be upscaled.

UNDP's support to local development has been significant and led to the implementation of important initiatives that promoted public participation and, through individual grants, met the needs of vulnerable populations. However, without a clear linkage to local strategies and finances, most of the supported interventions remained small in scope, and with uncertain sustainability. In the area of green economy too, UNDP's interventions still require sustained engagement by the Government, particularly from parties other than the MNREP, to enhance the economic and institutional incentives that help to promote green technologies and renewable energies.

- **Conclusion 4: The CO's current business model is no longer suitable to the country's development needs, nor is it sustainable. To further align its programme to the Government's 2020-2035 priorities, UNDP needs a stronger value proposition, better communication of results, and a more solid financial base with increased cost-sharing.**

UNDP's current business model in Belarus is based on donor-funded individual projects, with resources mostly coming from the GEF and the EU, challenging the ability of the CO to plan in the medium-long term. Although attempts at diversification of resources led to new partnerships with some donors, the financial sustainability of the CO remains uncertain, in the absence of Government's co-financing. For Belarus to progress on the achievement of its SDG targets, and UNDP to be able to support the country's efforts, national resources will be necessary.

As UNDP enters into discussion with the Government about the CO's contribution to Belarus' sustainable development in the next four years, more attention is to be paid to the communication of results planned and achieved, with evidence coming from a stronger M&E system. In the past years, the CO's management has enhanced its focus on accountability and monitoring of delivery, with still very limited focus on outcomes and higher-level results. A stronger value proposition, closer involvement in planning, and better communication of results will all be essential inputs for a renewed partnership between UNDP and the Government of Belarus. That may, in turn, result in increased cost-sharing agreements for UNDP to support the implementation of national priorities based on its mandate and added value.

## 3.2 Recommendations and management response

### Recommendation 1:



Ahead of the formulation of the CPD 2021-2025, UNDP should discuss with all stakeholders how best to support the Government in implementing initiatives around the four accelerators identified in the MAPS report. In partnership with other United Nations agencies, UNDP should focus its support on digitalization and innovation, preparing youth for the job market, green transition, and women's economic empowerment. In addition, UNDP should strengthen its work at the local level on sustainable development of cities and urban villages, which has met significant interest by the central Government and local authorities. Tapping on the high-level technological capacity in the country, UNDP should consider creating a national Accelerator Lab that, through research and innovation, supports the Government towards the full realization of its targets.

### Management response:

Agreed



The office agrees with the recommendation and finds it relevant to be implemented in the run-up to the next CPD formulation.

| Key action(s)  | Time-frame     | Responsible unit(s)   | Tracking*   |           |
|--|----------------|---|---|-----------|
|  |                |   | Comments  | Status    |
| 1.1 Hold open and transparent national consultations with all stakeholders from the Government, Parliamentarians, civil society, private sector, academia and the UN to jointly develop ideas for UNDP's next country programme around the four SDG accelerators and Belarus' national development priorities. | September 2019 | Resident Representative (RR)/Deputy Resident Representative (DRR)/key units and project experts | Conducted in local language and well attended   | Completed |
| 1.2 Take an active part in national consultations with all the stakeholders in the formulation of the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) to support the Government in implementation of the accelerators.   | October 2019   | RR/Programme officers/project personnel   | UNDP took the lead on the first accelerator green and inclusive growth and is active in the other three | Completed |

Recommendation 1 (cont'd)

|  |               |                 |  |           |
|--|---------------|-----------------|--|-----------|
| 1.3 In close collaboration with the RC/UNCT join consultations with international development partners to build partnerships for the new UNSDCF. | December 2019 | RR/POs/M&E team | UNDP presented the first UNDAF outcome | Completed |
|--|---------------|-----------------|--|-----------|

**Recommendation 2:**



**UNDP should reinforce its support to leaving no one behind, focusing on marginalized areas and vulnerable communities.** In cooperation with other United Nations partners, UNDP should strengthen its engagement in the area of gender and social protection, focusing particularly on socio-economic opportunities for women, victims of trafficking, and people with disabilities. In all these areas, UNDP could play an important role in coordinating the support to different line ministries to address the root causes of marginalization and the obstacles hampering a full enjoyment of human rights, including through policy and legislative reforms. UNDP should also engage with the Government on how to best support the sustainable development of Chernobyl-affected areas through an integrated approach that focuses both on socio-economic and environmental issues.

**Management response:**

Agreed



The office agrees with the recommendation underlying that the vulnerable groups and 'leaving no one behind' principle are already integrated into project and programme activities, as well as the strategic documents. Nevertheless, they will be further strengthened in our future work and the next country programme.

| Key action(s)   | Time-frame    | Responsible unit(s)               | Tracking |           |
|---|---------------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------|
|   |               |                                   | Comments | Status    |
| 2.1 The principle of leaving no one behind and definition of vulnerable groups clearly embedded in the UNSDCF and the CPD including low-income population, people living in rural areas, especially affected by Chernobyl, families with many children, | February 2020 | RR/POs/M&E team/project personnel |          | Completed |

◀ Recommendation 2 (cont'd)

|   |                       |  |  |  |
|---|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| <p>families at social risk, persons and children with disabilities, people affected by communicable diseases such as HIV and TB, vulnerable adolescents and youth, people of retirement age, vulnerable migrants and stateless persons, victims of violence and trafficking. Particular attention is due to people affected by multiple vulnerabilities at the same time.</p>   |                       |  |  |  |
| <p>2.2 Propose an integrated programme to support Chernobyl-recovering regions and vulnerable communities in close engagement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Emergencies, local authorities, elected representatives, communities and entrepreneurs reflecting local priorities, opportunities and needs. Programme to be operationalized through an investment platform for Chernobyl and other vulnerable regions.</p> | <p>September 2019</p> | <p>RR/DRR/<br/>Partnerships<br/>and SDG<br/>Financing Unit</p> | <p>One of the first RR visits was to Chernobyl regions in Gomel and Mogilev oblasts, as well as the Poleskiy Radioecological Reserve</p> | <p>Completed; platform by end 2020</p> |
| <p>2.3 The UNDP/EU SPRING project and UNDP/Russia small towns project with the Ministry of Economy and regional governments develop and sustain SMEs and business development services (with special support to women, youth, people with disabilities) in the vulnerable regions and districts of Belarus.</p>   |                       | <p>Socio-economic<br/>Development<br/>Unit</p>                 |  | <p>Initiated; due by end 2020</p>      |

◀ Recommendation 2 (cont'd)

|  |  |   |  |                                   |
|--|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| <p>2.4 Develop a range of innovative interventions for targeted groups focused on (1) the economic empowerment of women; (2) social entrepreneurship; (3) behavioural insight for women in IT sector; and (4) social contracting in partnerships with other UN agencies.</p> |  | <p>Socio-economic Development Unit, Partnerships and SDG Financing Unit</p> |  | <p>Initiated; due by end 2020</p> |
|--|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|

**Recommendation 3:**



**UNDP should continue engaging with the Government in the area of inclusive and responsive governance to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public administration system.** UNDP should continue supporting the modernization efforts by the Belarusian Administration, promoting e-governance and one-stop-shops for service delivery. Future efforts should build on the work started in the current CPD and take advantage of the lessons learned and positive experience of other countries in the region.

**Management response:**

Agreed



The office agrees with the recommendation and will hold discussions with the national partners to identify potential areas of joining efforts in improving the effectiveness of public administration.

| Key action(s)   | Time-frame            | Responsible unit(s)                                    | Tracking |                  |
|---|-----------------------|--|----------|------------------|
|   |                       |  | Comments | Status           |
| <p>3.1 Hold a meeting with the Academy of Public Administration, under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Belarus, to identify areas of cooperation in the field of public administration.</p> | <p>September 2019</p> | <p>RR/Socio-economic Development Unit/ SDG project</p> |          | <p>Completed</p> |

Recommendation 3 (cont'd)

|   |  |   |  |                                   |
|---|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| <p>3.2 Play an integrator's role through a joint SDG project to assist the Government in translating SDG strategy and targets to national programmes and strategies at national and regional levels. Small SDG project set the stage for a larger one for the next three years.</p> |  | <p>Socio-economic Development Unit/ SDG project</p> |  | <p>Initiated; due by end 2020</p> |
| <p>3.3 Promote the development of alternative means of dispute resolution in Belarus among the state bodies, private sector and business entities.</p>  |  | <p>Socio-economic Development Unit</p>              |  | <p>Initiated; due by end 2020</p> |

**Recommendation 4:**



**UNDP should assess the effectiveness of the proposed approaches in the area of SME development and use the evaluation findings to advise the Government on policy options.** As the CO is piloting different approaches aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs and private sector initiatives, project results and lessons learned should be used to inform policy discussions with the Ministry of Economy, the Council for SME Development, the Ministry of Labour, and others to promote more impactful change. In this area, UNDP should also take full advantage of the experience of non-resident agencies (such as the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) to advise the Government on the best course of action.

**Management response:**

**Partially agreed**



The office partially agrees with the recommendation since the Ministry of Economy, being the national implementing partner, is informed regularly of project activities and approaches on SME development and various policy papers and briefs on this topic are developed in coordination with the Ministry.



◀ Recommendation 4 (cont'd)

| Key action(s)  | Time-frame | Responsible unit(s)                 | Tracking  |                 |
|--|------------|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------|
|  |            |                                     | Comments  | Status          |
| 4.1 Commission evaluation of coming-to-closure projects aimed at SME support and cooperate with the evaluators commissioned by the EU in the process of mid-term and final evaluations of the SPRING and local development projects. The findings will be discussed with the Ministry of Economy and the EU and inform further UNDP programming in Belarus in the area of SME support. |            | Socio-economic Development Unit     | The small towns project will be evaluated by the end of April 2020. The EU-funded projects are the subject for EU evaluation. | Due by end 2020 |
| 4.2 Hold discussions with the national counterparts (Ministry of Sports and Tourism, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Economy) on developing a programme-based approach to tourism development to cluster fragmented projects and initiatives in this area to ensure synergies and systemic development results.   |            | Socio-economic Development Unit     | The CO has two distinct tourism projects plus a number of tourism initiatives under SPRING project                            | Due by end 2020 |
| 4.3 Create and operationalize plan for investment platform for Chernobyl and other vulnerable regions that will support SME development through market-based mechanisms, financing options, investment promotion and bankable projects.  |            | Partnerships and SDG Financing Unit |   | Due by end 2020 |

### Recommendation 5:



**UNDP should develop a long-term resource mobilization strategy to ensure the financial sustainability of the CO, including through cost-sharing.** Based on a well-defined value proposition linked to the SDGs, UNDP should explore with the Government any opportunity for cost-sharing, which will be essential for the continuation of activities in the country. UNDP should also continue exploring financial opportunities, other than the GEF and the EU, to further diversify its portfolio, including from foreign private sector companies interested in SDGs' impact investments.

### Management response:

Agreed



The office agrees with the recommendation. The current resource mobilization strategy will be revised, and a long-term partnership and communications strategy will be developed for the new CPD.

| Key action(s)   | Time-frame   | Responsible unit(s)  | Tracking  |                              |
|---|--------------|--|---|------------------------------|
|   |              |  | Comments  | Status                       |
| 5.1 High-level outreach to the Government by UNDP Administrator, Regional Director, the RR to secure Government Contribution to Local Office Costs and position government financing.   | October 2019 | RBEC/RR/management team  | Belarus position in UNDP classification for GLOC has gone down from UMIC to MIC | Continued                    |
| 5.2 Undertake cost-recovery analysis by project.  |              | Operations/Programme   |   | Due by March 2020            |
| 5.3 Develop a CO strategy and plan on government financing and other new financing options.   |              | RR/management team   | Detail assignment from UNDP Serbia  | Initiated; due by April 2020 |
| 5.4 Sign MOU or long-term cooperation agreement with IFIs (European Investment Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, etc.) and/or public and private financial institutions (private and state-owned banks, venture funds, etc.). |              | Partnerships and SDG Financing Unit/ Energy & Environment Unit/Socio-economic Development Unit |   | Initiated; due by end 2020   |

### Recommendation 6:



UNDP should reinforce the M&E of its programmes and projects, focusing on an assessment of their contribution to outcomes and behavioural change. Both at project and programme levels, UNDP should elevate its analysis of results achieved beyond the completion of activities and outputs. Based on issue-based theories of change, the CO should identify selected programme-level outcome indicators, to which different projects will contribute to, and monitor them. The project’s log-frame template should be revised to include higher-than-output level results and indicators. Project-level results and lessons learned should be included in a shared database and dashboard to inform decision-making and communication to stakeholders. In order to accomplish this, the CO should seek means to enhance its staff capacity in this area.

### Management response:

Agreed



The office agrees with the recommendation and the M&E capacity of programme and project staff will be further strengthened.

| Key action(s)  | Time-frame | Responsible unit(s)           | Tracking |                                  |
|--|------------|-------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------|
|  |            |                               | Comments | Status                           |
| 6.1 Develop a detailed CO M&E plan for the next country programme with a focus on strengthened processes for RBM, outcome and impact evaluations.  |            | M&E and Programme Integration |          | Initiated; due by September 2020 |
| 6.2 Hold a training for programme and project staff on M&E with a focus on tracking the outcome-level changes (with an external expert; leveraging UNDP regional experience and best practices). |            | M&E and Programme Integration |          | Due by end 2020                  |
| 6.3 Discuss with national partners the idea of holding annual meetings on an exchange of results achieved and M&E of current programmes and projects.  |            | M&E and Programme Integration |          | Due by end 2020                  |

\* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database.

# Annexes



Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the Independent Evaluation Office at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12266>

**Annex 1.** Terms of reference

**Annex 2.** Country at a glance

**Annex 3.** Country office at a glance

**Annex 4.** Project list

**Annex 5.** People consulted

**Annex 6.** Documents consulted

**Annex 7.** Summary of CPD indicators and status as reported by country office









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