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Evaluation

**Evaluation of the regional programme for Europe and the
Commonwealth of Independent States**

Executive summary

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I. Introduction

1. The Evaluation Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as part of its annual workplan approved by the Executive Board, conducted the regional programme evaluations for all five UNDP regions and the global programme evaluation in 2012. The present document is the evaluation of the regional programme for the Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States region.

2. The regional programme evaluation is an independent programmatic evaluation with the objectives of providing substantive support to the Administrator's accountability function in reporting to the Executive Board; facilitating learning to inform current and future programming at the regional and corporate levels, particularly in the formulation and implementation of the new regional programme to be approved in 2014; and providing stakeholders in the programme countries and development partners with an objective assessment of the development contributions achieved through UNDP support and in partnerships with other key players through the regional programme.

3. This is the second evaluation of the regional programme for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. It covered the current programme period 2011-2013 and was guided by the regional programme document and its results and resources framework. The evaluation took into account changes made by the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) over time, which has selected three thematic issues of strategic importance to the region, i.e., response to climate change, social inclusion and local development, and the new partnership with emerging donors. The contribution of the programme to the development outcomes was assessed according to a standard set of evaluation criteria used across all regional programme evaluations: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

4. The evaluation used a combination of desk reviews of material, field visits to six selected countries, and interviews with various stakeholders. The country office survey, developed and administered jointly by all regional and global programme evaluations conducted by the Evaluation Office, was used to obtain critical insights into the regional programme operation from the country offices in the region

II. Background

5. Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States is a large and highly diverse region, including countries with different aspirations and development challenges. Countries represented in the region broadly fall into three groups: the European Union member States and those seeking European Union membership in the Western Balkans, and Turkey; countries situated in the Western Commonwealth of Independent States and the Caucasus; and Central Asia, where absolute poverty is still widespread. The Multidimensional Poverty Index varies significantly across the region.

6. Despite its cultural and economic diversity, much of the region shares the legacy of communism followed by 20 years of democratization, as well as of political turmoil and ethnic conflicts. Progress has been made in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) since 2000, including food security, women's employment, and child and maternal mortality. The recent global economic crisis, however, has blocked or reversed the progress, hitting hard the poor and vulnerable people. Recurrent human rights violations, e.g., those against Roma and

people with disabilities and HIV/AIDS, are a concern in some countries where national policies have not yet fully addressed the issues. Women's economic opportunities and empowerment remain constrained in many countries.

7. The development challenges faced by the region in environment and energy include the management of water resources, mitigation of biodiversity loss, climate change, and the need for improvement in energy efficiency and utilization of renewable energy. Governance, particularly local governance, is another critical area for the region. Many countries in the region have gone through significant institutional changes in the last two decades through, for example, extensive administrative reorganization, improvement in institutional framework and capacity development. Strengthening of the rule of law, however, remains a major challenge for many countries.

8. RBEC currently supports 29 countries through its 20 country offices and five project offices. Its long-term mission is to help countries in the region to develop socio-economic structures and governance systems that ensure sustainable, inclusive, equitable, high and growing human development. The Bratislava Regional Centre links country offices with the headquarters and global networks of development expertise as the main knowledge and advisory hub. The Centre provides technical advisory services to country offices upon request, implements a set of regional projects, and seeks to improve the impact of UNDP work in the region through its active communication and advocacy.

9. The current regional programme document, approved by the Executive Board in 2010, defines the framework of UNDP intervention in the region. The regional programme is designed to promote development cooperation across the countries, support the diagnosis of shared challenges, catalyse development solutions, and support investment in knowledge and expertise for the benefit of more than a single country. The programme is articulated in seven programme outcomes. By using the issues of critical importance to the region, results are grouped in the following four topical areas:

- (a) Response to climate change:
Environment and energy (Outcomes 1 and 2);
- (b) Social inclusion:
Poverty, inequality and social inclusion (Outcome 3);
- (c) Local development:
Regional support to subnational governance and development (Outcome 4);
Good and effective governance and social cohesion (Outcomes 5 and 6);
- (d) Promotion of new partnerships in development cooperation (Outcome 7).

III. Key findings

Response to climate change - environment and energy

10. **The portfolio addresses one of the recognized challenges of the region and is aligned with regional and country strategies.** The portfolio has two outcomes, i.e., improved capacity to support the transition to low-emission and climate-resilient economies at the national and subnational levels, and improved capacity for sustainable conservation and management of ecosystems and natural resources by 2013. UNDP has responded to climate change with two flagship projects:

climate risk management in Central Asia and in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Effects of climate change can be particularly significant in Central Asia with its glaciers. With regard to water governance and management of ecosystems and natural resources, UNDP has supported the capacity development of countries to ensure that environment and energy issues are addressed when developing national policies and programmes.

11. At the midpoint of the programme cycle, a number of targets are making solid progress. Gender mainstreaming has not yet taken root at the programme level. On both the climate change and ecosystem and natural resources components, the planned targets in establishing relevant legal and regulatory frameworks have already reached or are reaching the expected goals. The Regional Centre has mobilized \$97 million from the Global Environment Fund (GEF) and other funds in 2011 for climate change, against the initial target of \$50 million, and the full target of \$45 million for ecosystem and natural resources has also been met. Thirty-five against the total target of 30 initiatives to integrate sustainable management of ecosystems and natural resources into national socio-economic development were established by the end of 2011, particularly in biodiversity, trans-boundary waters and Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) projects, and in international waters learning. Regarding the portfolio's target that 50 per cent (later reduced to 30 per cent) of interventions show gender mainstreaming under the climate change component, the indicator lacked the baseline and in its specificity, and no progress has been reported at the regional level. At the project level, countries are making their own effort through, for example, climate risk management. Tajikistan reported having spent 27 per cent of its budget on gender issues, and Kyrgyzstan introduced an indicator measuring the gender ratio in training.

12. Various practice areas collaborated with the Environment and Energy team in programme implementation. Lack of funds at the start of a project was often an issue, forcing the programme team to revisit the project design. Cross-practices were commonly used to improve programme synergy with various practice teams, e.g., with the Crisis Prevention and Reduction and Poverty Reduction teams for climate risk management, with governance in addressing climate change and environmental justice at the local level, and with poverty reduction to highlight their critical linkages. Efficiency was not optimal, however, owing to a significant deviation between the amount of total resources required and the actual resources available at the beginning of projects. Climate risk management for Central Asia, the largest project under the climate change component, had secured only 50 per cent of the budget required (\$12 million) at the start of the project. For IWRM, only \$3.5 million of the required \$5.4 million was available when the project launched. The effort for acquiring required funds was often left to programme managers during the actual project implementation. Staff addressed the situation by revisiting the project designs (e.g., a shift from having a pilot activity to selecting a low-cost alternative practice for making the communities more resilient to climate change under climate risk management), and ensuring synergies with other projects through cost-sharing activities (IWRM). The provision of advisory services by the Regional Centre advisers was highly appreciated by country offices, particularly those of a high-level policy nature as demonstrated in the preparation for the Rio+20 Summit, support through the community of practice, and support in the development of project proposals for GEF and the European Union. Project Every Drop Matters has established an efficient partnership with the private sector, which has now grown into a

global programme that engages countries in the Arab and Asia and the Pacific regions.

13. Robust project designs with practical approaches and the focus on capacity- building and knowledge-sharing are likely to contribute to programme sustainability. The institutional platforms, however, have yet to be fully established. The portfolio has shown elements likely to foster its sustainability, e.g., regional projects that focus on country-level actions; allocation of funds to national activities and assignment of dedicated managers; national stakeholder engagements when defining priorities and fine-tuning the projects; and focus on institutional capacity as climate change-related issues may be new to some countries. One example of UNDP support to integrate climate risk management into a government policy was the capacity development at the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Urbanization on monitoring its climate change action plan. However, the institutional platforms vary and are not yet well established among countries. For example, data are often scattered between different ministries, e.g., the Ministry of Environment with data on climate change adaptation and the Ministry of Emergency Situations with disaster risk management data. Institutional set-ups for climate risk management are focused either on water resources or disaster response and risk reduction. Institutionalization of climate risk management fully into existing national platforms remains a challenge in the region.

Social inclusion

14. The programme is consistent with the priorities outlined by UNDP. It is relevant to the development needs of the region, owing to its focus on subregional challenges and the development of knowledge products. More inclusive consultation processes could enhance its relevance. Social inclusion is addressed in the regional focus area of poverty reduction, inequality and social inclusion, which aims at increasing the capacity of public, private and civil society actors to address human development challenges through evidence-based, inclusive and sustainable policies and through private-sector-based pro-poor development. The UNDP Strategic Plan 2008-2011 and the RBEC Rolling Strategy 2011-2013 articulate UNDP work in the area. In the Western Balkans and European Union member States, the programme has been guided by the European Union social inclusion and European integration agenda among others. The Regional Centre, in partnership with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the World Bank and the Open Society Institute, carried out a survey in 2011 to address the need for Roma data through a regional project Tools and Methods for Evaluation and Data Collection. In the Western Commonwealth of Independent States and the Caucasus, projects such as Aid for Trade and the Black Sea Trade and Investment Promotion programme, and advisory services on agriculture and rural development are implemented, guided by the principles of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Regional HIV/AIDS Project 2010-2011 and HIV, Human Rights and Universal Access in Eastern Europe addressed the HIV epidemic. In Central Asia, a significant number of advisory services and the Support for MDG-oriented Policies project have supported countries to develop, monitor and evaluate national/local strategies and development plans. Important knowledge products, such as the new social exclusion measurement methodology, presented in the Regional Human Development Report 2011, were produced. Interviews indicate that the programme relevance could be further enhanced with

more inclusive consultation processes, particularly with Governments and other national stakeholders.

15. Strong results have been reported in a number of areas, with some areas under limited progress. Key results were achieved in the following areas: (a) the development of reliable and robust data (e.g., ethnically disaggregated data, vulnerability databases, social exclusion data); (b) support to human development literacy through reflection of MDGs in national development reports and strategies; (c) increased awareness of the relationship between trade policy, human development and poverty; (d) improved civil society engagement in social services and human rights advocacy; and (e) improved capacity in monitoring the violation of the rights of people with HIV/AIDS. Limited progress was reported in the private sector engagement to address poverty and inequality and in the reduction of gender-based segregation in the labour market. The technical knowledge and expertise of advisers, the partnerships with relevant and influential development partners, multi-practice work in the portfolio development, focus on capacity-building and pilot activities, and intensive dissemination campaigns on social inclusion have contributed to results. At the same time, staff turnover, lack of commitment by some countries to take on pro-poor approaches, and delays in project funding slowed down programme implementation. Weaknesses in the results framework, in particular the selection of indicators, also affected the manner in which results can be measured.

16. Activities have progressed as planned in most cases and resources have been used in an efficient manner. The Regional Centre has taken prompt action to address any implementation issues. Regional projects were efficiently implemented when: (a) they were complemented by advisory services and knowledge products, e.g., the Regional Human Development Report; (b) the country programmes have been well integrated into the regional efforts (e.g., Aid for Trade in Georgia); and (c) when the economies of scale were achieved within a subregion (e.g., the Decreasing Roma Vulnerability project in the Western Balkans). Advisory services were most appreciated when they helped the national partners to use resources more efficiently, were complementary to local actions, thus increasing the efficiency of both operations; and supported resource mobilization. Funding gaps, staff turnover and communication issues between the Centre, national implementation teams and donors have affected efficiency.

17. Efforts in capacity development and partnerships with relevant development partners suggest favourable sustainability prospects. Inclusive consultations, decentralized implementation and integration of local approaches are important in ensuring sustainability. Results have favourable sustainability prospects, owing to embedding capacity development in all regional efforts, engagement of country offices and partnerships with relevant development partners. Regional projects that have a decentralized implementation approach, with locally available funding and responsibilities, and those integrated in the country programmes or activities of national counterparts are reported as having enhanced national ownership. The partnerships with United Nations and other partners have been important in increasing synergy and efficiency of interventions and in promoting methodologies and approaches among partners. Networks and alliances with civil society organizations, private sector and academia to increase knowledge transfer, replication of good practices and advocacy have been promoted.

Local development (1) – subnational governance and development

18. **The programme reflects local development challenges in its design and has made progress towards results.** The programme aims at improved capacity of national and subnational institutions to deliver sustainable and integrated activities reflecting good governance and climate change considerations. It includes projects such as Human Security for Individuals and Communities in Chernobyl-Affected Areas through Local Information Provision, which has established the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network (ICRIN), Advocacy and Outreach in Central Asia, which provides a framework for undertaking the Central Asian Regional Risk Assessment, and Think Globally, Develop Locally, which focuses on administrative reforms and local development and attempts to link good governance and climate change. Notable initial results in Think Globally include, for example, the enhanced capacity of several municipalities in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia through a pilot initiative of inter-municipal cooperation for energy management. Advisory support provided by the capacity development team with the ICRIN project, through a concrete capacity development plan, has now been adopted in Turkey and Moldova.

19. **Efficiency is maintained by synergies between regional projects and advisory services, tailored approaches to country needs, and partnerships. Funding-related issues affected timeliness in implementation.** The contribution of strong and flexible advisory services provided upon request from country offices, complemented by the conduct of regional projects, has been significant in local governance. Partnerships with United Nations agencies have contributed programme efficiency, as in the case of the ICRIN project with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), where agency-specific tasks have been clearly defined, as well as in Think Globally where collaboration with the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe has helped reach more potential beneficiaries. The lack of funds at the start of a project has caused delays in some projects (e.g., Think Globally, Develop Locally) and postponement of initially envisaged activities.

20. **The programme enjoys a relatively high level of ownership among counterparts. The scaling-up of the portfolio may be difficult owing to funding and other issues.** All projects under the portfolio share, to some extent, good sustainability prospects, e.g., strong end-user orientation in the interventions and focus on fostering project ownership among national/subnational partners and on capacity-building. For example, Think Globally interacts with the Network of Associations of Local Authorities, through which a number of local authorities are engaged in finding the solutions related to inter-municipal service delivery. Synergies between Think Globally activities and national projects, e.g., Moldova's Integrated Local Development project and Ukraine's Community-Based Approach to Local Development, will enhance programme sustainability. The scaling-up of the project to the Central Asia level, however, may not be feasible given funding gaps and lack of a supporting environment.

Local development (2) – Governance and social cohesion

21. **The programme, which seeks to strengthen governance and institutional capacities to ensure a more equitable delivery of public**

services, and contribute to peaceful and tolerant societies, is of particular relevance to the region, where despite much progress, the subjects remain a priority in many countries. The programme is highly relevant to the region as many countries still require strengthening of governance in their institutional structure and implementation of international conventions, e.g., the United Nations Convention against Corruption, to which all Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States countries are parties. Many of the country offices in the region are undertaking activities on public administration reforms and anticorruption. The regional interventions such as Promoting Human Rights and Access to Justice for Social Inclusion and Legal Empowerment (PHASE) have supported selected institutions to build peaceful and tolerant societies and assisted countries engage in international principles, e.g., the follow-up to the Universal Periodic Review. The importance of these issues are articulated in the regional strategy documents and country programmes.

22. Through advisory services and regional projects, targeted support to national counterparts was provided on anti-corruption and legal empowerment issues. Some indicators are not suitable for measuring results. While the programme has just begun, a number of concrete activities to bring about changes are implemented in various countries, e.g., capacity-building of beneficiaries through training, assistance in conducting United Nations Convention against Corruption self-assessments, raising awareness on corruption measurement and risk assessments, and the development of national anti-corruption strategies. Country offices found support from Regional Centre advisers valuable, e.g., in the conceptualization of national projects and resource mobilization. In Ukraine, support from the Centre has helped the country office better position itself among the experts and practitioners, facilitating its engagement with the Ministry of Justice in legal empowerment of the poor and access to justice. In Serbia, the Centre support helped the country office finance the development of a web-portal by a local non-governmental organization that collects citizens' opinions and data as part of the Universal Periodic Review process. A donor's request to reflect the human rights-based approach in the local development project in Moldova was achieved with technical support from Bratislava. However, the assessment of programme results was hampered by weak indicators. For example, two of the four indicators used for the anti-corruption portfolio are not appropriate for measuring intended results within the regional programme.

23. Collaboration with country offices and United Nations agencies was critical in ensuring programme efficiency. Constraints included the timeliness in the availability of funding. Strong partnerships at the country level and with relevant partners were instrumental to the success of many activities implemented. On anti-corruption, the diverse but targeted support was provided to country offices by filling the capacity gap and focusing on the United Nations Convention against Corruption review process and on public services. Regional projects are complemented by specific advisory services to maximize the effects. Collaboration with with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in anti-corruption and with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in bringing technical expertise and United Nations mandates in human rights monitoring and protection, for example, has promoted programmatic synergies among the partners working in common areas. While most of the projects have been delivered in a timely manner, only about 60 per cent of resources required for the anti-corruption component and 40 per cent for social cohesion were available at the time of

evaluation. The withdrawal by a key donor from the Public Administration Reform project, for example, has delayed its implementation.

24. National ownership, efforts in capacity-building and partnerships are embedded in the anti-corruption and PHASE projects to facilitate sustainability. The anti-corruption portfolio contains elements that will facilitate its sustainability: strong interest by national counterparts and country offices; tailored project design to address the needs of varying stakeholders; and focus on enhancing the skills of direct beneficiaries to use the appropriate tools to fulfil national and international obligations. Initiatives such as the support to the Anti-Corruption Practitioners Network and the community of practice have facilitated the transfer of know-how and East-East exchanges of experiences. Filling the technical gaps among country office staff to better work with local institutions has been an important component. Similarly in PHASE, country offices, selected public human rights protection institutions, and other national partners such as civil society organizations are defined as the programme's critical beneficiaries. The Regional Centre Democratic Governance team has promoted partnerships with OSI and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Promotion of new partnerships

25. The programme for promoting new partnerships in development cooperation is of high relevance to the region, but the intervention logic is not conducive to realizing its objectives and its intended results have not yet been fully measured. The programme aims at supporting Governments in the region, particularly those graduating from the support of UNDP, to effectively manage and coordinate their development activities. The subject is relevant to the region, where a number of countries are recognized as emerging donors. Through regional projects such as the Emerging Donor Initiative, capacity-building support was provided to countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, and a high profile lecture series has been implemented to share lessons and experiences. The portfolio has begun slowly mobilizing resources through partnerships. However, challenges in the underlying design, e.g., weaknesses in the selection of indicators and lack of clearly defined targets, limited focus on policy-level decision-makers in its outreach strategies, and modest resources available for the programme team, have prevented the programme from fully exploiting its potential.

26. The overall breath of provision of services for emerging donor support remains limited, and more attention should be paid to intensifying the provision of policy services. The programme team is composed of two international staff, one of whom joined the team only in late 2011, and two national staff. Efforts made by the staff have been appreciated by country offices, e.g., on the seminars on how to work with the Russian Federation as a donor, advisory services related to the emerging donor initiative with Turkey, and capacity-building through staff exchanges. However, the amount of time spent on advisory services by the programme advisers has been relatively limited, compared to what has been spent by advisers in other practices. The overall provision of policy advice needs to be intensified to strengthen its support.

Strategic positioning and cross-cutting issues

27. **In each of the three topical areas of strategic importance, the regional programme has found its strategic relevance and responded to critical challenges at hand.** In its response to climate change, the Regional Centre has played a critical role of facilitating funds that are externally available, e.g., GEF and EC Climate East Fund. In social inclusion, the Centre has moved strategically to become one of the key actors supporting countries in the Western Balkans to advance the European Union integration agenda. The MDG-related activities were particularly relevant in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The programme focused on intensive human development training, production of a range of knowledge products (e.g., the Regional Human Development Report and the Development and Transition Newsletter) and extensive use of social media and interactive platforms. In local development, the regional programme has built on results achieved by country offices through the inter-municipal development project and has expanded its focus by introducing climate considerations. The anti-corruption portfolio has been particularly critical in supporting country offices in the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Central Asia. Support in the implementation of human rights recommendations has emanated from the Universal Periodic Review and other mechanisms. The UNDP comparative strength of impartiality has been crucial in the programme.

28. **The definition of a regional project is not clear. The current guidelines do not seem to encourage the formulation of projects between the countries under the different Regional Bureaux.** In reviewing existing regional projects, some projects were found to have been implemented only in one country, and others were implemented in multiple countries but without carrying concrete objectives and changes defined at the regional level. The focus on activities, rather than on effects to be achieved at the regional level, compromises the value of implementing a regional project. It was also found that based on the current UNDP Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures, the formulation of a regional project is for countries belonging to the same Regional Bureau, making it difficult for countries to link with those who could provide support regardless of their affiliation with a UNDP Regional Bureau.

29. **Efforts should be strengthened in the assessment of the quality of advisory services, and the utility of knowledge products.** The internal service tracker system is designed to collect feedback from country offices on the quality of the Regional Centre advisory services. Data recorded in the system, as well as survey results indicate general satisfaction among them on the services provided. In some individual cases, however, country offices expressed dissatisfaction with the content of the advisory services which lacked the international standards or did not meet their expectations. In 2011, a limited amount of feedback was captured in the system. Numerous knowledge products varying in their size, profile and complexity were released during the review period. Innovative tools, e.g., teamworks, twitter, and online media platforms, were used to facilitate the information sharing. When asked about the familiarity with those products, however, country offices were likely to refer to those that had been highly publicized (e.g., the Regional Human Development Report) or those that had directly involved them during the production phase. The level of utility and impact of those knowledge products is not fully known.

30. **The regional programme document has only partially reflected gender and human rights aspects.** The Regional Centre has taken

strategic action to advance gender equality at the country and regional levels within the framework of the RBEC Gender Equality Strategy 2008-2011 project. The analytical work on regional gender issues, provision of gender disaggregated data to policymakers and practitioners, and highlighting of gender dimensions in economy, poverty, health and education have contributed to informed legal reforms and policy development. Gender mainstreaming capacity-building for practitioners in the region has also been provided. The regional programme as defined in its programme document, however, has not fully reflected gender perspectives. The programme outcomes in the results and resources framework are often gender-blind and most of the indicators are not gender disaggregated. Regional projects have scored low in the gender marker exercise. On equity and human rights, while a range of vulnerable groups and duty-bearers are identified as stakeholders, they are not engaged in the programme document consultation processes, and the efforts are often left to individuals. The full engagement of the stakeholders may take time, but can be done by, for example, effectively partnering with regional organizations or with country offices when they conduct their own internal consultation exercises of developing the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and country programmes.

31. **Much effort has been made in the promotion of other United Nations values. Further attention should be paid to the measurement of their results.** As poverty is not always openly discussed in official policies in some countries, the promotion of human development and MDGs as part of the regional programming strategy has not been easy. The Regional Centre has taken innovative approaches to actively promote this important value by, e.g., the production of analytical reports, development of new measurement methodologies, and linking of the subject with trade, economic planning, human rights, social inclusion, HIV/AIDS, and sustainable development. National capacity development is incorporated in the formulation of all seven outcomes, and is addressed well in project designs. However, the extent of results produced by the efforts is often unclear, as the actual contribution is not systematically measured or reported. Bratislava has also promoted East-East cooperation through, e.g., capacity development support to emerging donors, inter-municipal cooperation in local development, and innovative triangular partnership projects through the project office in Poland that has engaged not only the countries in the region but those in other regions (e.g., Iraq, Afghanistan and India). Efforts have often been made, however, without having been fully articulated in the programme document and its results framework (e.g., the scope of cooperation and the rationale for selecting related projects).

32. **Resource mobilization efforts should be strengthened.** Results suggest that country offices require more support in mobilizing their resources through the Regional Centre. Rigidity with UNDP administrative/contractual procedures and requirements was often raised as a bottleneck to materializing potential partnerships with donors. Within the Centre, some practice areas, e.g., Environment and Energy and HIV/AIDS, Health and Development, have been more successful than others in raising funds. The partnership and resource mobilization strategy should be strengthened at the regional level by analysing the recent donor landscape and their requirements for engaging with UNDP and defining clear targets and approaches.

IV. Conclusions

33. **Conclusion 1: While the programme is at its midpoint and full results are yet to be seen, the regional programme is making important progress within its framework. The selection of the three themes – response to climate change, social inclusion and local development - as emerging priorities for the programme has been appropriate for the region, given the needs and challenges faced by the countries in the region. Tangible results have been observed in each of the areas.**

34. With regard to the response to climate change, UNDP has positioned itself as a broker of environmental finance in the region, helping countries to access funds available in global and regional trust funds. It has also successfully set the standards in climate risk management. Using cross-practices as the foundation of the programme implementation, e.g., collaboration among the Energy and Environment, Crisis Prevention and Recovery, Poverty Reduction, and Governance teams, the programme has provided high-level advisory services and engaged in capacity-building efforts to achieve the objectives under the environment and energy.

35. Placing social inclusion and equity-related interventions at the heart of the regional programme has been a big step forward in the work of the Regional Centre. Regional projects were particularly relevant when they focused on specific subregions with shared concerns and common development challenges, and when they had a flexible design at the country level. The programme has helped strengthen national partners' capacity to address social exclusion, and human development challenges generally, through evidence-based policies and measures. Progress has been made in the provision of reliable and contextualized data (e.g., on Roma, social exclusion, vulnerability, and gender), facilitation of pro-poor trade initiatives, engagement of civil society in social economy and in the monitoring and advocacy platforms for the promotion of the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. The expertise of the Regional Centre advisers, partnerships with reputed and influential partners and the creative use of social media have facilitated the achievement of results in the social inclusion programme.

36. Similarly in the local development and governance portfolio, the combination of regional projects, advisory services and knowledge products have contributed to programme effectiveness. Most notable achievements were made in the areas related to public administration reforms and human rights and justice. The initiatives supporting national and subnational institutions in local development are in their early stage of implementation and the progress to date is limited. Factors instrumental for the success achieved to date include the tailored, high-level expertise provided and high level of local ownership. The main factor hampering further progress in this programmatic area has been the lack of or delays in funding.

37. **Conclusion 2: Regional projects have often lacked explicit regional dimensions and objectives which could contribute to results at the regional level.**

38. Many of the current regional projects provide support to multiple countries (i.e., so-called multi-country and cross-border projects) but often without the clear goals set as regional effects. The projects have produced results at the individual participating country level, but have not necessarily brought about the development changes at the regional or subregional level. The regional efforts as defined in the UNDP guidelines

seem to discourage the formulation of joint projects across various Regional Bureaux, limiting the opportunities for countries to seek support from any geographical region.

39. Conclusion 3: While the three subregions vary in their development challenges, a specific strategy for each of them is not clear. There is subregional variation in the degree to which regional support has been valued among the country offices.

40. The Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States region is represented by three distinct subregions with varying challenges and needs. In the Western Balkans and Turkey, the main challenges relate to meeting the European Union accession criteria. In the Western Commonwealth of Independent States and Caucasus, the challenges derive from the European Neighbourhood Policy requiring adoption of policies conducive to sustainable growth, regional development, and strengthening of the small and medium-sized enterprises. In Central Asia, countries are faced by challenges related to climate change, poverty, human rights and weak civil society. While efforts to tailor the subregional needs are made at the individual portfolio level, a specific strategy for tackling each of the three distinct subregions is not clearly defined in the current regional programme.

41. Responses from country offices revealed that services provided by Bratislava advisers have been generally more appreciated in Central Asia than in other subregions. The Western Balkan countries had the lowest level of demand for such services. One reason may be that the Regional Centre does not have a strong focus on and sufficient expertise with European Union accession-related topics, particularly in the negotiation chapters and related *acquis communautaire*, i.e., the cumulative body of European Commission laws, comprising the Commission's objectives, substantive rules, policies and, in particular, the primary and secondary legislation and case law.

42. Conclusion 4: The consultation process in shaping the overall regional programme and regional projects was not always sufficiently inclusive. Regional projects and knowledge products that are designed and implemented by close engagement with country offices are likely to be successful in enhancing the relevance and ownership at the country level.

43. The regional programme as defined in its programme document was developed based on a large consultation process of country offices. However, there was a general lack of ownership of the programme among the country offices, possibly due to perceived insufficient subregional programmatic focus and incentives for formal endorsement by the countries. Engagement of national and regional partners (governments, civil society, and major donors) in the design and appraisal of the programme document was limited. The lack of national ownership has serious drawbacks as it weakens the sustainability of the policy advice generated within the regional programme.

44. The inclusiveness of the consultation process to ensure country offices and government ownership in regional projects varied across the practice areas and project portfolios. When properly done (e.g., Climate Risk Management, Roma, social inclusion, HIV/AIDS), the end results were rewarding i.e. up-scaling of pilot projects, complementary funding, embedding of results (methodologies, tools, data) in policies and practices. The national ownership and efficiency increased when the

management of regional projects was decentralized to the country level and flexible implementation arrangements were put in place according to local circumstances. Knowledge products that had engaged the country offices in their development and were contextualized for country use were reported to be particularly useful (e.g., Regional Human Development Report and RBEC Development Stories).

45. Conclusion 5: The regional programme has promoted human rights and gender equality in the region. The integration of a more thorough human rights-based approach and gender mainstreaming in the design of the regional programme document and its results and resources framework would further strengthen UNDP efforts, by particularly facilitating the monitoring and evaluation of results and better accountability for their achievement.

46. The regional programme has promoted the human rights in the ECIS region, providing opportunities for Regional Centre advisers to work with national partners to develop the relevant legal and institutional framework and to increase citizen access to justice, information, basic services and public decision-making. At the same time, there is insufficient reflection of the use of a human rights-based approach to programming, the critical gaps being the lack of engagement of rights-holders in the consultation, analysis and review processes of the programme document and the lack of disaggregated data in its results framework. The programme document has thus been partially instrumental for assessing its contribution to the realization of human rights in the region and for accountability purposes.

47. The work carried out within the framework of the regional programme has contributed to the strengthening of the gender mainstreaming capacity of gender practitioners in the region. It also informed legal reforms, policy developments and measures through the provision of gender-disaggregated data to policymakers and practitioners. The programme document has, however, only partially mainstreamed gender equality in its results framework. It has thus not fully served as a guiding framework for the monitoring, evaluation and accountability for gender equality results.

48. Conclusion 6: There is ample room for improvement in orienting technical services towards meeting the needs of regional development and the recipients of such services.

49. The Regional Centre provides country offices with its technical expertise through the use of three operational modalities of support, i.e., the implementation of regional projects, development of knowledge products and the provision of advisory services. Each of those modalities can be further strengthened by taking a standpoint of meeting regional development challenges as well as of the direct recipients of such expertise and services. In many regional projects, for example, successful results through cross-practices have been reported in some areas, e.g., climate change, HIV/AIDS, and human rights. Not all project designs, however, necessarily articulate the rationale or means of how cross-fertilization of efforts will be created, other than organizing a set of ad hoc joint activities, involving all relevant practice areas.

50. Advisory services provided by the Regional Centre staff were viewed, in several instances, as not having met the expected international standards. In particular, in the middle-income countries of the region, the availability of qualified local expertise has allowed some country offices and partners to benchmark the quality of advisory services prior to committing for Regional Centre expertise. While the feedback on the

quality of services is sought from country offices, only limited comments have actually been collected. The mechanism of systematically soliciting unbiased country office feedback on the quality of services provided has not yet been fully established. Knowledge products have not always reflected the needs of countries in the region as demonstrated by limited reference made by the country offices except for large publications. A follow-up assessment of the utility of these products has not been systematically done.

51. Conclusion 7: Insufficient funding and often reduced size of funds have posed a threat to successful implementation of regional projects.

52. Funding gaps in regional projects can be observed in the majority of portfolio areas. There are either gaps between the requested funds and available funds as stated in the project document or, in some cases, gaps between the available funds still to be confirmed and their actual availability at project start. Under the current circumstances, project managers need to acquire funds during the project implementation. If the funding gaps are not sufficiently addressed, the projects are unlikely to be implemented as anticipated in the project documents.

V. Recommendations

53. Recommendation 1: The regional programme should focus on a limited number of targeted thematic areas and on holistic sustainable human development. A clear strategy for each of the three subregions should also be developed.

54. Sustainable human development should be clearly elaborated in the new regional programme as the goal of UNDP work in the region, which would be in line with the post- Rio +20 agenda, Europe 2020, and the Busan Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation and with the UNDP Agenda for Organizational Change. The concept would facilitate the streamlining of the project portfolio and more focused use of resources, as well as cross-practice programming and delivery. The regional programme should also acknowledge the diversity within the region of Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States by providing targeted subregional responses.

55. Partnerships with major international financing institutions (e.g., the European Union the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank) and Funds (e.g., GEF and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria) would be instrumental in supporting UNDP to advocate for macro-economic policies in the region, which set employment objectives, promote sustainable growth, control inflation and expand the fiscal space for social protection policies. Advisory services on social security, fiscal issues and budget allocations to reduce inequality would be of highest priority.

56. Recommendation 2: The regional programme and the regional projects within, reflecting the outcome and the output levels, should be developed to ensure that they address the regional dimension of development challenges.

57. Currently, the primary characteristic of many of the regional projects is that they are implemented among several countries, rather than being focused on generating results at the regional level. Results may have been achieved at the country level, but mutual collaboration is required by all participating countries to bring about the results at the

regional level. The critical opportunity is missed unless a common strategy or thread of efforts exists. In future, guidelines on the classification and typology of regional projects should be established. In the process of designing a project, the desired effects at the regional and country levels should be clearly defined.

58. The current geographical focus of the regional projects may be substituted or supplemented by a more issue-focused approach, so as to allow regional projects to involve countries from other regions, as appropriate. This has also been recommended by the previous RBEC regional programme (2006-2010) evaluation. Regionality criteria for regional programming should also be established to determine when a regional approach is appropriate, as recommended in the evaluation of the UNDP Contribution at the Regional Level to Development and Corporate Results (2010).

59. Recommendation 3: A cross-practice approach should be firmly embedded in the regional programme practice architecture to foster greater cross-fertilization of programme results and to support the sustainable development goal of the regional programme.

60. There is evidence of “multi”-practice work in the form of ad hoc joint activities, but often without the formulation of a well-conceived programme/project framework, from the conceptualization and design stage, developed by the direct participation of all relevant practice teams. The integration of the human rights-based approach and gender mainstreaming in the design and implementation of the regional programme document and its results framework should be ensured. A new Regional Centre cross-cutting practice may be created by merging the existing Gender team with the team of human rights advisers in the Democratic Governance practice, which would be mandated to support all Regional Centre practices.

61. The Regional Centre management should further promote a cross-practice culture in the organization and in region at large. The provision of appropriate advice and monitoring the cross-practice activities for the ultimate goal of sustainable development would be important to this function. Cross-practice work should be formally brought into the programme document. The promotion of communities of cross-practices may also be considered. Regional projects should start with the joint conceptualization and planning of activities by all relevant practices, which should be clearly reflected in the project documents and their joint accountability firmly agreed to for results. The same applies to advisory services and knowledge products.

62. Recommendation 4: Given the fact that the fully required funds for regional projects are not often available at the critical start of the projects, the Regional Centre should continue to explore an efficient resource mobilization strategy.

63. The Regional Centre should explore options to strengthen its resource mobilization and partnership strategy, including, for example the establishment of a dedicated business development function within the Centre. In all three thematic areas, i.e. response to climate change, social inclusion and local development, the challenges of not having full funding already available at the start of the regional projects were raised. Programme managers have often been forced to acquire funds in the middle of their project implementation. While some practices (e.g., Energy and Environment and HIV/AIDS, Health and Development) have been more successful than others in fund raising, all projects should be able to begin their intended activities from their start without concerns

for insufficient funds. Projects and their outputs, at the same time, should be realistically designed based on available resources. A concerted effort at the Regional Centre should be made in order to comprehensively plan its funding requirements for all of its activities envisaged for the programme defined in its programme document, in close consultation with other offices within UNDP, including the Partnership Bureau, the Bureau for Development Policy/Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, and the Regional Bureau.

64. Recommendation 5: Staff development should be a strategic priority for the Regional Centre, given the significant role its staff members are expected to play in providing technical expertise and knowledge to country offices.

65. The Regional Centre should encourage staff learning, providing access of its staff to top-level, up-to-date learning opportunities for personal and professional development. Monitoring of learning outcomes and continuous improvement of knowledge and skills should be a priority. The Regional Centre should carry out a regular skills profiling to check gaps between the existing expertise and demand from country offices and to inform the staff development policy of the Centre. A clear distinction between advisers, project managers and business development staff' should be introduced as they need different knowledge and skill sets. For the Energy and Environment practice, the GEF portfolio managers could also contribute to advisory services. It is also recommended that the Regional Centre introduce an institutional memory system to address high staff turnover issues, in order to ensure that knowledge and expertise is capitalized and not lost with the leaving of staff from the Regional Centre.

66. Recommendation 6: The regional programme should be developed on the basis of more inclusive consultations with relevant partners to ensure its full alignment with regional and subregional needs and challenges. Incentives for the ownership and formal endorsement of the regional programme by the country offices, national partners and relevant regional institutions should be introduced to enhance joint accountability for results.

67. The regional programme should be considered as a programme for the region and of the region. Currently, it is considered more like a programme of the Regional Centre, which has solely been kept accountable for its implementation and results. Such perception should be reversed by more systematic and more inclusive consultations, at very early stages, with the country offices and regional institutions, with the participation of Governments and civil society organizations to the extent possible. As strongly requested by the country offices, inclusive consultations should also apply, as a rule, to all regional projects, pipeline projects, and to the selection of themes for knowledge products. Advisory services should be based on terms of reference developed by the country offices, as is now the case. In addition to ensuring more inclusive consultations, subregional focus and decentralized management at the country level should be increasingly used as crucial incentives for accountability and ownership.

68. Recommendation 7: The regional programme should be designed in such a way that the three thematic issues of importance to UNDP in the region are effectively translated into the outcomes of the regional programme. Indicators and outputs should be clearly linked to the envisaged outcomes.

69. The current outcomes 1 and 2 of the environment and energy portfolio should be integrated as one outcome, incorporating all climate and energy and environment-related aspects. This would end an ongoing distinction between support required in climate change and in biodiversity and ecosystems and would further foster the Energy and Environment cross-practice work. Under poverty and social inclusion, an outcome on inclusive growth should be formulated, focusing on private sector development, pro-poor trade, rural development and employment creation. The introduction of an outcome on equity and social inclusion should also be considered, addressing social equity, fiscal issues and social inclusion. In democratic governance, two outcomes should be considered, i.e., one outcome on local development and subnational governance (current outcome 4) and the other on integrating governance interventions at the national level, anti-corruption and rule of law initiatives (merger of current outcomes 5 and 6). The new structure will facilitate the combination of different advisory services with regional projects and measurement of the results achieved. Human rights and Gender should be mainstreamed in all outcomes. In the new regional programme document and its resources and results framework, the formulation of indicators should clearly support the outcomes. Each outcome should have clearly assigned outputs to be measured against a set of output indicators. Reporting on regional projects and advisory services should be done against those indicators.
