

In 2007, increase in prices of energy supplies imported from Russia stimulated interest of Belarusian authorities for grant aid and loans, and made them less reluctant to liberalize business environment and improve investment climate. Related attempts to re-open a dialogue with EC, a major trading partner and important donor of development aid, open certain windows for the UNCT in technical assistance sphere; at the same time, continued political controversies between Belarus and EC strengthened UNCT position of an indispensable implementing partner. Continued dedication of the Belarusian Government to demonstrate its international leadership and commitment in certain areas (such as combating trafficking in humans) helped UNCT to be effectively engaged in these areas. On the other hand, governmental scrutiny over influx of foreign resources to the country, including international development aid, did not decrease, and continued to cause considerable delays in projects development/implementation (in 2007, for instance, it took on average about eight months to get a project registered). Besides, so called complex assessments on the UNCT agencies national implementing partners regularly carried out by ad hoc commissions comprised of control and tax officials, and other reporting obligations under the national legislation, resulted in the deepening reluctance of the current and potential partners to be involved with technical assistance projects. Delivery of the projects often suffer from the striving of the governmental bodies to micro-manage virtually all project aspects, even those which are not supposed to be managed by them. The Government considers continuous international criticism of Belarus record in the area of human rights and democratic governance (including adoption of the UNGA resolution on the situation of human rights in Belarus in December 2007) biased and, as a rule, denies the need for international technical assistance in this sphere. And lastly, manifest divergence between what is stated in some donors' country strategies for Belarus and what is actually supported or intended to be supported, created certain difficulties in resource mobilization.

Summary on progress towards UNDAF outcomes

At a UNCT coordination retreat in January 2007, the UNCT/Belarus Joint Results Matrix (JRM) for 2006-2010 was adjusted based on the results of the UNCT work in 2006. The JRM is comprised of 8 outcomes and 25 sub-outcomes in six areas: SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS AND POVERTY REDUCTION, HEALTH IMPROVEMENT, EFFECTIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE, MIGRATION MANAGEMENT AND COMBATING ORGANIZED CRIME, ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION, CHERNOBYL (CROSS-CUTTING). Though the progress was made in attaining virtually all JRM outcomes, it was most feasible under the outcomes 2.1 and 4.1 (see below).

Work under Outcome 2.1 "HIV/AIDS epidemic halted" (sub-outcomes: "2.1.1: Increased access to HIV prevention services and information", and "2.1.2: Improved access of PLWH to treatment, care and support") was effectively facilitated by the Joint UN Team on AIDS / UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS. Today, HIV infection rate in Belarus is comparable with that of Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium and one-sixth that of Estonia, one-third that of Ukraine and almost one-quarter that in Russia. This is to a great extent the result of the joint UNCT work in the area.

In particular, with the support from the team, the national Universal Access (UA) targets were approved by the CCM in April 2007 and the Road Map towards the UA was finalized by the end of the year. The national specialists were given an orientation session on the methodology of AIDS costing as a preparation to the development of the Action Plan towards the UA 2009-2010. Strategic information for effective planning was ensured through the Assessment of Peer Education Programming on Reproductive and Sexual Health, and HIV/AIDS Prevention among Young People (by UNFPA with UNDP support), Situation analysis of the status of women and children in context of HIV/AIDS, and HIV/AIDS-related indicators were included into the BelarusInfo database on MDGs (by UNICEF). The national monitoring and evaluation system was strengthened to give basis for political decisions in HIV response. One National M&E plan was developed and submitted for approval. A number of surveys were carried out, and capacities of the regional centers for hygiene, epidemiology and public health in the area of HIV/AIDS M&E were strengthened through provision of hardware and training. UNCT agencies carried out a number of activities within WAC "Stop AIDS, Keep the Promise" (such as Youth Festival "Students Against AIDS", "Star Team Giving Promises", joint campaign with the road police (flickers distribution) "My veins are not for drugs" and "AIDS and myself are on different tracks!", a web-site for young people on HIV prevention, etc).

Within the UNDP project "Prevention and Treatment of HIV/AIDS in Belarus" funded by the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria complex advocacy and technical assistance activities allowed significantly to scale up access to ARV treatment. As of end of 2007, 884 patients are getting medical treatment (incl. 145 in penitentiary system and 69 children). 444 HIV infected people have been treated against opportunistic infection. 16 types of ARV drugs have been supplied, covering the annual demand. 6 types of pharmaceuticals for treatment of opportunistic infections procured and delivered to regional hospitals. The conference on Modern ARV Principles was held in December, with participation of 68 specialists, including international ones from Denmark, Lithuania and Ukraine. Laboratory monitoring of effectiveness of ARV treatment of HIV infected people was carried out (638 persons, 60 of them are treated in prisons). 83.2% of HIV positive pregnant women were covered by the PMTCT programme receiving ARV prophylaxis. The average cost of the ARVs reduced 6 times. The number of registered ARV medicines increased up to 19 allowing 26 schemes of treatment. WHO provided technical recommendations for laboratory and treatment services prior to ARV treatment.

Work under the Outcome 4.1: "Enhanced migration management, including border management, with safeguards to protect

persons who need international protection" (sub-outcomes: "4.1.1: International standards of protection for migrants/asylum seekers/refugees are adhered to", "4.1.2: Increased capacity of the state to improve migration management and to cooperate within the region", "4.1.3: Increased participation of relevant non-state actors in monitoring, provision of assistance and future planning", "4.1.4: Increased public awareness on migration issues" and "4.1.5: Greater local integration opportunities for refugees") was effectively facilitated by the UN Theme Group on migration management issues. Three UNCT agencies – UNDP, UNHCR and IOM – were implementing a set of complementary and joint projects, covering the whole spectrum of migration management issues which aimed at assisting the Belarusian authorities to establish a humane system for managing irregular migration flows with an emphasis on ensuring that the rights of various categories of migrants are respected in compliance with international norms and standards and that measures for the protection and integration of refugees function effectively. The partnership with the European Commission, providing major bulk of funding for UNCT activities in this area, was further strengthened.

Within EU-funded UNDP project "Enhancing Border Management in Belarus" (BOMBEL-II), staff of the Border Guard Committee and other ministries involved was theoretically and practically trained in the field of the border control automation, information systems and data bases, protection of the "green border". Information exchange was ensured in the framework of cross-border cooperation. Equipment and improved technology was provided for border guards which will lead to enhanced capabilities in executing border controls and the surveillance of the green border, and border guard infrastructure was improved to ensure more effective border management. EC-funded IOM project "Strengthening migration management in Belarus" (MIGRABEL) which aims at improving machine readable travel documents in line with latest internationally agreed standards, record keeping, as well as at enhancing internal controls to curb irregularities in passport and visa issuance process, with a view to: i) facilitate free movement of persons and ii) fight cross-border crime related to travel documents was launched.

EC-funded UNHCR/IOM project "Strengthening the Protection Capacity in Belarus" (AENEAS-I) has started in 2007. Within the overall framework of the EU's pilot "Regional Protection Programme" in the Western NIS, the proposed action aims to ensure that persons seeking protection have access to the territory and asylum procedure in Belarus. The project complements past and ongoing capacity-building and training initiatives carried out by UNHCR, IOM and UNDP in the asylum and migration sector. UNHCR has collaborated with IOM to encourage better understanding of the nexus between asylum and migration, and in order to assist the Belarusian authorities to establish a comprehensive model in working with mixed migration flows at the border, including a possibility of voluntary return to countries of origin for individuals who do not need international protection and choose to return to their countries of origin. The project also included partnership with three non-governmental organisations whose capacity has been strengthened and they performed effective monitoring and advocacy role on behalf of people in need of international protection.

EC-funded UNHCR project "Strengthening the National Asylum System in Belarus" (TACIS-I) was fully completed and helped to address the gaps in the development of the Belarus' asylum system that became more pronounced with the organizational restructuring of the State migration service. The project has been instrumental in further refining the refugee related legislation and in development of administrative capacities for its implementation: in particular, by improving the reception conditions for refugees and asylum seekers and capacity of the state to conduct a refugee status determination procedure. UNHCR has also assisted the Belarus government in its increased cross-border and sub-regional cooperation in refugee and migration related areas with its neighboring countries as a part of the Soderkoping and post-CIS Conference Processes such as the European-Asian Programme on Forced Displacement and Migration. UNHCR's annual programme has been vital for these asylum seekers and recognized refugees, who require basic protection and assistance. As a result of UNHCR's activities with its Implementing Partners, some 500 asylum seekers and refugees received various kinds of legal aid, as well as social or medical assistance in some 2,500 instances. Implemented projects in a cost-effective manner have responded to the identified needs of vulnerable individuals that are not sufficiently addressed by the state. Assistance was provided to facilitate durable solutions for refugees, including voluntary repatriation, integration and resettlement. Local integration in Belarus remained the most practical durable solution.

Summary on progress in UN Reform

i) Effort to align with the national development processes

The UNCT agencies with multi-year programme cycles (UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA), have already harmonized them with the main national development plan, Programme of Social and Economic Development of Belarus for 2006-2010.

ii) Support to the national government in the preparation, implementation, and/or revision of comprehensive MDG-based national development strategies

All UNCT agencies' projects implemented in 2007 are aimed to support different sectoral development strategies – partially due to the fact that the Government has adopted such strategies for virtually all spheres of social and economic development. A typical case is UNCT's coherent efforts to support Belarus in attaining MDG 6 (Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases), target 8 (Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases). In Belarus, the main tuberculosis epidemiological indicators since 1991 have been deteriorating. Over the period of ten years (1991-2000), the total tuberculosis incidence rate in the country increased by 62.0%, and since then has not decreased much. In 2006, the number of newly identified TB cases was 5142, which made 52.8 cases per 100,000 population. To address this problem, the national programme "Tuberculosis" for 2006-2010 was adopted. In line with MDG 6, and national priorities in the sphere of public health, an outcome 2.3 "TB spread halted and reversed" was included into UNCT Joint Result Matrix for 2006-2010. In 2006, Belarus was successful in obtaining a grant from the Global Fund to

combat HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria of \$ 14.2 million for significant improvement of TB control in Belarus, setting up of laboratory network, provision of care and treatment to more than 7,500 TB patients (many of them belong to such vulnerable groups as prisoners and HIV infected). To implement the grant, a UNDP project "Support to the National Programme 'Tuberculosis'" (with WHO input in the form of expertise) was registered and started to be implemented in 2007. The project activities are to be complemented by a WHO project funded by USAID which would build national capacities in policy areas, medicines procurement, etc. It is expected, that implementation of two these projects will result in reduction of general incidence rate from 54 to 49 cases per 100,000 population by 2012, enhancement of successful TB treatment from 74% to 85% by 2012, and will considerably strengthen national capacities in the area of TB.

On the other hand, two sectoral development programmes approved in 2007, the State Programme of Demographic Security for 2007-2010, and the State Programme on Countering Human Trafficking, Illegal Migration and Unlawful Deeds Related Therewith for 2008-2010, were developed without extensive consultations with UNCT agencies concerned, though still provide sufficient space for the activities in their support (for instance, UNFPA is indicated as an international partner under the former programme, and IOM and UNICEF – under the latter).

iii) Progress UNCT is making collectively in support of the national partners' endeavors towards capacity development and aid effectiveness. Though general capacity of Belarusian governmental and non-governmental organizations can be assessed as very high, capacity development elements are present in most of UNCT agencies' projects – trainings, study visits, etc. UNRC advocacy in favor of liberalizing national regulations governing receipt and use of international technical assistance produced mixed results: on the one hand, Ministry of Economy, a focal point for coordination of foreign development aid in the Government, admitted existence of problems in this area, and ready to address them within a joint UNDP/UNICEF/UNHCR project on improving technical assistance regulations (see below); on the other hand, general reluctance of the authorities to ease the controls over the foreign technical assistance and humanitarian aid continued to affect aid effectiveness.

iv) Experiences with joint programmes and HACT, as well as other highlights in coordination

In 2007, four new joint programmes were developed: UNDP/UNCTAD: "Assistance in accession of Belarus to the WTO"; UNDP/UNCTAD: "Investment policy review of Belarus", UNDP/UNICEF/UNHCR: "Assistance in enhancing effectiveness of the international technical cooperation of Belarus on the basis of harmonization of national regulations with donor regulations", and UNDP/UNICEF/UNFPA: "Enhancing Human Security in the Chernobyl Affected Areas of Belarus".

In as much as the HACT macro-assessment is meant to be a desk review of the existing PFM reviews by the World Bank (in the case of Belarus, the latest PFM review goes back to 2003), it was decided to postpone carrying out of macro-assessment until PEFA, Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability programme is implemented by the World Bank (will be completed by the end of 2008). In June 2007, a review of ExCom agencies' implementing partners, receiving cash transfers, has been carried out. It revealed that of all ExCom agencies' implementing partners receiving cash advances only three partners (NGOs) are over the threshold of US\$ 100,000 cash advances a year. Two of these NGOs are sub-recipients within the project "Prevention and Treatment of HIV/AIDS in Belarus" funded by the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, implemented by UNDP, and are regularly subjected to strict controls (audits and spot-checks). In the first half of 2007, these organizations successfully underwent "sub-recipient technical and financial assessment survey", whose content is very close to HACT micro-assessment. The third implementing partner to overcome US\$ 100,000 ceiling is "Belarusian Red Cross" NGO, which is to receive cash advances of US\$ 1.4 million in 2007-2009 within the project "Prevention and Treatment of TB in Belarus" also funded by the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and implemented by UNDP. This NGO successfully underwent a full-fledged micro-assessment in August 2007. The appropriateness of lowering the ceiling of cash transfers a year to have additional full-fledged micro-assessments carried out was discussed by the ExCom agencies operations staff in August 2007 and they recommended the UNCT to adhere to the recommended ceiling of \$ 100,000 for full-fledged micro-assessments. As regards to 'light' micro-assessments, they are to be carried out with all future recipients of cash advances.

Joint campaigns and advocacy events continued to be an effective form of joint UNCT efforts to promote important themes. A joint information campaign "Violence Kills Family", which rallied efforts of the members of the UN Theme Group on Gender, national governmental bodies and businesses was held on in November–December. The campaign was cosponsored by UNFPA, UNICEF, UN DPI, UNHCR, IOM, OSCE and supported from SRC budget. The goal of the campaign was to draw Belarusian public's attention to the domestic violence issue, to inform the general public on the forms of domestic violence, as well as to strengthen the campaign audiences' capacity to identify domestic violence situations. All in all, as monitored, 23 press and online materials and 19 broadcasted original reports on radio and TV channels came out from 23 November till 31 December. Published materials and broadcasted TV and radio feature stories draw the attention of different media's audiences to statistical data on domestic violence issue in Belarus, to the actual scale of the problem. The lack of specific legislation dealing with domestic violence problem in Belarus was highlighted by analytical materials which saw light in national press as one of the tightest bottlenecks in resolving the very issue and/or bringing down its acuteness. Another example of joint campaigning was a film festival and poster exhibition "Human Dignity, Equality, Justice", organized jointly with OSCE Office in Minsk, which was held on 3-10 December with the audience of over 5,000 persons.

Key aspects of the proposed 2008 workplan

RESULTS AREA: COORDINATION FOR RESULTS

UN support to formulation/implementation of relevant national strategies or plans e.g. JAS/NDP/PRS; UN plan to support the implementation of the UNDG Action Plan on the Development Outcome of the World Summit (MDG Action Plan)

Activities in this area will be within a joint UNDP/UNICEF project to promote MDG monitoring (BelarusInfo), inclusion of MDG-related indicators into the national development programmes, and enhanced MDG reporting (preparation of the Second National MDG Report).

UN support to aid coordination/management

UNCT support to enhanced national capacity in aid coordination/management will be mainly provided through a one-year joint UNDP/UNICEF/UNHCR project "Assistance in enhancing effectiveness of the international technical assistance to Belarus on the basis of harmonization of national procedures of approval and usage of foreign assistance with procedures of donors" (its implementation shifted from 2007 to 2008 because of delayed registration). Within the project, recommendations to improve national regulations of international technical cooperation, and to enhance its effectiveness will be developed; opportunities for Belarus' accession to Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, as well as for implementation of Declaration's indicators by Belarus will be assessed; skills and knowledge of representatives of governmental bodies, local executive committees, NGOs and other entities involved in development and implementation of international technical assistance projects and programmes will be enhanced; and a system to compile and process data related to international technical cooperation of Belarus, which is open to external users (web-based) will be developed and installed at the Ministry of Economy, the national focal point for aid coordination.

The UNCT support to aid coordination will be also provided through two new coordination tools – "Donor news" monthly electronic bulletin, and donor web-site www.foreignaid.by, which will be launched in the second quarter of 2008. Also, quarterly donor meetings will be called to provide the platform for interaction for the local donor community.

Preparation/implementation of new Joint Programmes

The SRC funds will be used as seed money to support development and implementation of at least three joint projects/programmes.

Plan for the roll-out/implementation of HACT in the country

The HACT will be implemented through the FACE form usage and completion of macro-assessment, which was postponed to 2008 to base it on the results of PEFA, Public Expenditure Finance Assessment by the World Bank, which is to be completed in 2008 with support from UNDP and IMF. Joint assurance activities will be carried out in cases of joint implementing partners.

Gender equality

The work of UNTG group on gender will continue with primary focus on exchange of information and identification of opportunities for joint programming. The UNTG will also facilitate the implementation of the joint UNCT campaign to combat domestic violence.

Establishment of Joint UN Team on AIDS and implementation of joint programme of support on AIDS; UN support to the national response to AIDS through strengthening the Three Ones; HIV/AIDS in the Workplace

A detailed Annual Work Plan of the Joint UN Team on AIDS (AIDS Team) in Belarus for 2008 will be implemented.

Human rights

The main emphasis in human rights promotion will be made on commemorative activities related to the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which will target general public.

RESULTS AREA: UN ADVOCACY AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Development/implementation of the UNCT communications/advocacy strategy & plan

The UNCT will implement a joint communication/advocacy strategy facilitated by the Communication Group (led by UN DPI though the effective usage of the joint UNCT communication tools (such as UN Bulletin, UNCT web-site, and joint advocacy campaigns).

Development/implementation of RM strategy

Based on the UNCT joint resource mobilization strategy for 2007-2010 developed in 2007, a set of resource mobilization activities will be carried out to facilitate an increase in resource mobilization both for joint UNCT projects and for projects of individual UNCT agencies within their specific mandates, and to strengthen "One UN" image in Belarus.

RESULTS AREA: COORDINATION CAPACITY OF THE UNCT

RCO Staffing

UNDP will continue funding of RC Adviser (Coordination Analyst) position. SRC funds will be allocated to fund a position of Human Rights Consultant (part time).

Training of UN staff

Substantial part of the UNCT coordination retreat to be held in mid 2008 (upon arrival of the new RC) will be dedicated to team building exercises thus contributing to stronger UNCT team work.

Recommendations

Though the UNCT/Belarus has already had about 30 common services in place, virtually all of them cover quite peripheral business activities, and do not bring feasible cost benefits. At the same time, introduction of common services, which cover the central business processes (such as HR and finance), and bring real added value is hindered by separate administrative and finance procedures and systems of the ExCom agencies, let alone other UN specialized agencies, funds and programmes. This problem needs to be addressed at HQ level.