ANNUAL REPORT
UN Development Programme in Belarus
2009
For 17 years the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been intensifying efforts to encourage and support development plans and innovations in Belarus. In 2008, there were also many successful projects implemented by UNDP at the national and regional levels, which have contributed to a tangible improvement in people’s lives.

We have made a valuable contribution in improvement of administrative procedures and development of innovative entrepreneurship in the country. We have helped elaborate a regulatory and methodological framework for adoption of the Kyoto Protocol mechanism in Belarus, supported and developed new Chernobyl initiatives and, finally, engaged socially responsible businesses in addressing the problems of small towns.

Last year UNDP had 30 projects that were at different stages of implementation, the total programme expenditures exceeded USD 10.5 million thus continuing the recent trend of annual projects delivery being over USD 10 million. This was achieved solely due to effective and coordinated cooperation with our trusted partners – the Government of the Republic of Belarus, civil society, the donor community and other UN organizations – in all areas of UNDP activity. We are proud of our joint achievements in combating illicit drug trafficking, prevention of the spread of TB and HIV-infection, conservation and development of wetlands in Belarus and many other important results. These and other achievements are covered in this publication.

Additionally I trust that I will soon be in a position to report positive results concerning the recently launched UNDP projects, those supporting microfinance development, assisting the country in accession to the World Trade Organization, or facilitating sustainable development at local level. Like in previous years, we now maximize our efforts to implement the commitments we have assumed in addressing the most important challenges to Belarus.

Antonius Broek
UNDP Resident Representative in Belarus
The implementation of the UNDP project on promotion of a wider application of international human rights standards in the administration of justice in Belarus, funded by the European Commission, the UNDP and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), continued in 2008. The UNDP in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, the National Bar Association, the Prosecutor General’s Office, the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court arranged a series of activities aimed at improving the system of justice administration in Belarus.

In particular, five seminars and discussions were held under the project on improving access to legal assistance, realization of the right to remedy, execution of court decisions, alternative types of penalties, and methods to assess the judicial system. During the “hot” discussions, the seminar participants prepared lists of gaps in Belarusian legislation, to be filled with the help of recommendations from national and international experts.

The recommendations on improving Belarusian legislation in terms of fulfilling its international human rights commitments were presented at the final conference, which was held in November 2008 in Minsk. In particular, experts recommended amending legislation on international treaties, regulatory and legal acts, as well as changing a number of codes, which would secure a clear precedence of international human rights law over the national legislation in case of contradictions. In 2008, 12 study trips to Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and other European countries were organized for national experts and public officials. The experience acquired during those trips will be useful for developing recommendations for the Government of Belarus.

Last year, the special focus of the project was on the protection of the rights of children. To support a governmental initiative on reforming the administration of justice on matters in relation to the under-aged, the project organized a study trip to Switzerland for 16 representatives of state organizations dealing with juvenile and rehabilitation justice. Experiences gained from this study visit were later used by members of an interagency commission under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus in drafting a Concept of Juvenile Justice. The project conducted three trainings for judges, prosecutors, and social workers engaged in juvenile justice matters. The trainers were experts from Northern Ireland, Austria and Latvia.

Presentations of the experts’ recommendations on the project themes, and publication of a 4-volume collection of international human rights documents adopted under the aegis of the UN, Council of Europe and OSCE are scheduled for 2009. The project will be completed with the issuance of three social ads on the role of independent judiciary in a democratic rule-of-law state.
Efficient promotion of transparency in the work of Belarusian public agencies has been facilitated by the UNDP project on promoting the administrative procedures reform completed early in 2009.

From now on, any citizen of Belarus with access to the Internet has the opportunity, without leaving home, to find out where to apply for one or other permit or certificate, which documents to submit, and what the expenses are. Presentations of the most vital and asked-for administrative procedures are available on the website http://www.center.gov.by/debur of the National Center of Legislation and Legal Research of Belarus (NCLLR) – the National Project Implementing Agency. Website visitors can request detailed explanations of specific administrative procedures through a special interactive window.

Seven trainings on improving administrative procedures were carried out in 2008 in the context of the project in Minsk and in the regions of Belarus. Over 450 participants of the trainings representing regional, municipal and local authorities as well as NGOs, reviewed the national legislation on administrative procedures, discussed ways to improve it, and shared their experiences concerning information kiosks and distant service methods. The trainings resulted in concrete recommendations which were partially incorporated into the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On the Fundamentals of Administrative Procedures”. The Law was passed in November 2008 and received positive responses from Belarusian and international experts.

Last year, the project carried out three study tours abroad for Belarusian experts and public officials, which resulted in recommendations on improving administrative procedures at the national and local level; these recommendations were prepared and submitted by the study tour participants. Thus, the State Committee on Property of the Republic of Belarus developed recommendations on transition to electronic archives taking into account the Lithuanian experience.

All materials accumulated in the context of the project are placed in the UNDP supported section “De-bureaucratization of administrative procedures” of the NCLLR website. The project has ended but its results will be in demand for many years, as Belarus is just at the beginning of the process of improving administrative procedures.

Another UNDP project implemented in 2008 in partnership with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provided support in the organization of effective collaboration between international technical assistance (ITA) donors and Belarusian state governance bodies regulating ITA receipt and use.

The project experts analyzed the practice of ITA coordination in Belarus and a relevant foreign example. Based on the analysis results, recommendations on improving the national procedures of ITA management and monitoring were developed to improve their efficiency. A series of workshops on ITA were conducted in all regions of Belarus to enhance the potential of ITA recipients, specialists of organizations, national and local authorities, self-governance bodies, NGOs and other legal entities. The workshops’ participants learned procedures of development, approval, implementation and monitoring of ITA projects and programmes, taxation rules, and practice of supervision of targeted use of resources. They also consulted with representatives of donor organizations and stakeholder ministries.

The project was completed in 2009. It has helped to enhance the competitiveness of Belarusian project proposals for international technical assistance programmes as well as identify ways to improve the process of attracting foreign donors and the efficient use of ITA by Belarus.

“International organizations have a lot of technical assistance instruments”, believes Ivan Belchik, Head of the Department of Technical Assistance Coordination and Cooperation with International Organizations of the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus. “Therefore it is possible and necessary to search for resources needed for programme implementation. Nevertheless, initiatives from regions experiencing concrete problems are of high importance. And the Ministry of Economy is ready to support this initiative”.

A Worthy Contribution to Administrative Reform

According to head of the students’ science and research laboratory of the S&R Institute of Public Administration Theory and Practice of the Academy of Public Administration, Aleksandra Nevmerzhitskaya, converting normative acts provisions into presentations makes administrative procedure easier to understand for citizens with no legal education, thus saving time, energy and resources spent by public officials on consultations.
WTO Accession Support

A two-year UNDP project to assist the Government of Belarus in accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) was launched in spring 2008. Among the expected achievements of the project are analytical studies leading to action-oriented recommendations on issues related to WTO accession, enhanced national expert and institutional potential through trainings, workshops and “round table” discussions, and an awareness raising campaign on the potential costs and benefits of WTO membership for Belarus.

In 2008, the project supported the pioneering publication and presentation in all regional centers, of the first handbook integrated in Belarus, entitled “World Trade Organization: Activity Basics, Procedures, Accession Experience” targeted at national and regional authorities. Two manuals for media and business will be released in 2009.

An analytical document “Trade Policy Options for Belarus: What to Make of the European Dimension?” was drafted by an international expert of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. Moreover, the training of six Belarusian consultants at the UNCTAD was a significant contribution towards enhancing the potential of national experts.

The project supported the first international forum held in Belarus, which considered WTO membership issues in terms of the interrelation of economic and environmental aspects. Experts from Switzerland, the Netherlands, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and other states participated in the forum. A “round table” business discussion was arranged jointly with Kuniavsky Business Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers, which focused on the practical aspects of economic activity under WTO membership.

Late 2008 – early 2009, all regional centers of Belarus hosted seminars and discussions “WTO: principles of activity, benefits and costs of accession for economic entities of Belarus”. The forums were attended by representatives of local authorities and key regional enterprises, including small and medium-sized businesses.

The scheduled 2009 visit of WTO Deputy Director General and WTO Secretariat experts to Belarus to arrange training, and the upcoming sitting of the Working Group on Belarus, could be considered as important outcomes of the project.

Union of Science and Business

Innovation in economic development means both raising the efficiency of scientific R&D and expanding the application of its results, through the commercialization and the adoption of advanced solutions. Accordingly, the development of market mechanisms and support infrastructure for innovation activity is needed, promoting entrepreneurship in the sphere of the development and adoption of innovations. These are the objectives of the project on strengthening the national system for technology transfer.

The project united the efforts of the State Committee for Science and Technology (SCST), the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the UNDP and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in the development of innovation entrepreneurship. This was achieved by improving the regulatory and legal framework of technology transfer, facilitating technological forecast research, developing technology transfer institutions, and promoting youth innovation entrepreneurship.

In 2008, two branches of the National Center of Technology Transfer (NCTT) were opened under the project on the premises of the Belarusian State Economic University and the Theory and Practice Center for Materials Technology of the National Academy of Sciences. Thus, the number of NCTT branches reached 21. The NCTT signed agreements with technology transfer centers of Russia, Ukraine, and China. A programme of cooperation between the NCTT and the National Library of Belarus aimed at developing instruments of innovation activity information support, was drafted and approved by the SCST.

A special section with a primary database on 36 innovation projects of young scientists and entrepreneurs was created on the NCTT website. A catalogue of innovation projects issued by the SCST, “Expertise of technology commercialization projects”, “Technological Forecast Research: why Belarus needs them”, “Technology transfer: union of science and business” manuals, and other materials prepared under the project are available in the website library.

More than 300 heads and specialists of industrial enterprises, NAS organizations, young scientists and entrepreneurs participated in trainings on technology transfer within 26 national and international conferences, exhibitions and workshops. The project forums and “round table” discussions produced recommendations on improving the efficiency of technology transfer to make the scientists’ projects profitable.
Belarus like many other countries in the region faces the problem of supporting the development of entrepreneurial initiatives and self-employment, particularly in small towns. Focusing on this problem, the UNDP and the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus launched a joint project on microfinance in 2008, which will help to develop a comprehensive state policy in the sphere of financial services for low-income members of the population.

A Board on Microfinance comprising representatives of the National Bank, Ministries of Economy, Finance, Justice, unions of banks and business structures, European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, International Finance Corporation, and UNDP was established under the project. A special working group was created within the Board to draft a state concept of microfinance development under the chairmanship of the Russian Center for Microfinance.

In view of the fact that Belarus lags behind other CIS countries in development of microfinance institutions, the project provided active support to integrate the country into the global system of microfinance. Stable contacts were established and knowledge exchange was arranged between the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus and the Center for Microfinance for Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS, the Russian Center for Microfinance, and other foreign institutions. As a result, Belarus jointly with Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan founded an International Coordination Committee of Microfinance Organizations of CIS countries. The founding treaty was signed in St. Petersburg in November 2008. This successfully developing cooperation opened the way for the inflow of advanced microfinance technologies to Belarus. Workshops with the participation of foreign trainers to support Belarusian banking experts, foundations and financial support institutions, and consumer cooperatives of mutual financial aid of citizens, are conducted on the premises of the training center of the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus.

Along with the elaboration of the state policy and preparation of potential suppliers of microfinance services, the project is launching a mini-project “Plan your Future” to raise the financial literacy of low-income citizens of small towns and villages of Belarus. The mini-project was successfully tested in Poland and Russia. In the near future, instructors selected from economic universities, small business support centers and incubators, and non-banking financial organizations will undergo special training by experts from Eastern Europe and the CIS.

**Improved Access to Finances and Loans for Population and Small Businesses**
Improving the conditions for entrepreneurial activity through the development of dialogue between the state and business is the main objective of this UNDP project in Belarus. The initiative on the formation of an auspicious administrative, legal and economic environment for business development has been implemented in Belarus since 2007 by the Board on Entrepreneurship Development, in partnership with business associations and unions as well as interested state governance bodies.

In 2008, important results were achieved. In particular, recommendations on promotion of small business development in the sphere of production of goods and services submitted to the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus were absorbed in the Ordinance of the President of the Republic of Belarus on improving the system of leasing as well as the Plan of priority activities on liberalization of economic activity in 2009. As a result, additional guarantees were created for lessees, equal terms were provided for economic activity of entities of different forms of ownership, and the number of administrative procedures needed for the launching and operation of business were reduced.

By order of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, draft Regulations were prepared on the procedure of providing state financial aid within the programmes of state budgetary support of small and medium-sized businesses, which absorbed recommendations contained in an analytical note submitted by the project.

Owing to the performance of an interagency working group, which included representatives of the business community, the harsh restrictions on price formation and setting of commercial increments were removed. By the Resolution of the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus, revised Regulations on formation and application of prices and tariffs were adopted, which considerably narrowed state regulation of prices. Moreover, the project contributed to simplification of the tax system of Belarus: the amendments adopted by the Presidential Decree ease the tax burden and regulate accounting.

The recommendations on expansion of participation of small and medium-sized businesses in the delivery of goods and services for state needs developed under the project, were included into the activities on development of production cooperation (subcontracting) among large, small and medium-sized enterprises of different property forms approved by the First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus. The development of subcontracting promotes private initiatives in the real sector of the economy, integration of small business into new spheres of activity and private funding of promising projects.

Another UNDP project on promotion of entrepreneurship in small towns and rural areas was launched in 2008 with the direct participation of Kuniavsky Business Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (BUEE). The project focuses on strengthening the role of private business in the socio-economic development of the regions by improving the efficiency of the current business support infrastructure, improving the technology and methods of work of its entities as well as the creation of demonstration sites in villages to multiply the opportunities of experiencing private initiative in action.

Basic problems of operation and development of regional entrepreneurship, including the issues of improving the national legislation, were analyzed under the project, and ways to resolve them were identified. The project has given a new impetus to the cooperation between small business support infrastructure institutions and local authorities, on promotion of business and self-employment in small towns and rural areas. Groups of experts conducted research and development in the project pilot regions, which resulted in the development of an investor’s guide for Mogilev and Minsk Regions. The project also played the role of a catalyst for attracting international technical assistance from other international donors (Eurasia Foundation, governments of Germany and Norway) in regional business development programmes.

During the year, the project arranged a number of “round table” discussions and workshops. The workshop “Crisis management: experience of successful managers and economists” drew a wide response. The workshop participants focused on the impact of the global financial crisis on commercial organizations of Belarus, changes of the strategy of organization of production and marketing policy, financial management, pricing, labor incentives, and peculiarities of consumers’ behavior under the crisis.
Summer 2008 saw the launch of a joint campaign of the participants of the UN Global Compact initiative in Belarus and the Ministry of Economy “Socially responsible business for sustainable development of small towns”. The campaign will contribute towards expanding the participation of business in resolving small town problems, including by attraction of investments, creation of new jobs, and boosting local business activity.

Belarus is a country of small towns, and potential investors often know very little about their competitive advantages, including beneficial geographical location, modern telecommunication, transport and banking infrastructure, and well-educated, industrious people capable of working efficiently. Investors can find information about comparative advantages of small towns in a special booklet published in English and Russian under the campaign. Among future activities are a series of workshops “Small town through investors’ eyes” and “round table” discussions with participation of all stakeholders aimed at promoting small towns and attracting investment.

Last year, a new project on the development of telemedicine in small towns and rural areas was launched under the Global Compact. Telemedicine (“distant medicine”) is a method of providing medical services in areas where distance is a critical factor. The Minsk District has become the first pilot region of Belarus, where mobile communication technologies were introduced in telemedicine.

The Global Compact was launched in Belarus under the UNDP aegis in 2006. As of early 2009, 46 Belarusian companies were participants of the Global Compact, thus expressing their willingness to be guided by the principles of corporate social responsibility and to partnership with society in implementing the national sustainable development plans.

A Cardian-PM mobile telemedicine complex, which was procured by the mobile operator MTS, and installed in the Ratomka local hospital, which has no staff cardiologist, allows the transmission of electrocardiograms for expert analysis to the main medical institution - the Minsk Central District Hospital. MTS also provided free network traffic and a telephone. Thus, specialists’ high quality assistance is now available in remote areas owing to the socially responsible initiative of a private company, support of state governance bodies, and the active position of the UNDP, which has done great work on consolidation of the efforts of all stakeholders under the Global Compact.
Climate Market and Belarus Environment Projects

More than 180 countries, including the former USSR republics, joined the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. For 15 years, this document has provided the basis for coordination of activities of states on climate change issues. Its main objective is to stabilize the concentration of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere at a level low enough to prevent dangerous anthropogenic effects on the climate.

Since no quantitative obligations are laid out in the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol was elaborated upon, setting binding targets for the State Parties of the Convention to reduce or stabilize GHG emissions over a five-year period from 2008 to 2012, against 1990 levels. The Kyoto Protocol was the first global agreement on protection of the environment containing market based regulating mechanisms. They are called “flexible mechanisms”, for they are based on the understanding that climate impact is not tied to any specific location of GHG emissions. The Kyoto Protocol lays out the following flexible mechanisms: emissions trading, joint implementation and clean development projects.

After joining the Kyoto Protocol in 2005, Belarus has received access to emissions trading and joint implementation projects. The difference between Belarus’ real GHG emissions and allowances in favor of the latter, provides it with the opportunity to attract investment in environmental and energy efficient projects. Despite the intensive and committed work on creation of an institutional basis for implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, Belarus still lacks necessary conditions for full-fledged participation in its mechanisms. That was the reason behind the launching in 2006 of the UNDP project on capacity building for implementation of flexible mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol in Belarus.

Energy Efficient Investments

In 2008, working under the auspices of the UNDP project funded by the Global Environment Facility on enhancing energy efficiency of state enterprises in Belarus, a group of Belarusian experts developed recommendations on opening special energy efficient accounts as a source of co-financing and providing incentives in the state sector. Stakeholders were advised to open target accounts in banks to accumulate financial savings for funding new projects on improving energy efficiency and providing personal financial incentives for the most active employees. These recommendations were approved by the Department of Energy Efficiency of the State Standardization Committee of the Republic of Belarus and submitted to the Mogilev and Vitebsk Regional Executive Committees – the project partners.

Last year, about USD 14 mln. was allocated for energy efficiency in accordance with the project investment programme, including USD 7.7 mln. in loans and over USD 6 mln. in-kind contributions of the following project participants: Krasnoselstroimaterialy JSC, Keramika JSC (Vitebsk), Beriozstroimaterialy JSC, and Ivatsevichi housing and utilities. In 2008, these sites almost completed the development of their own energy efficiency projects with the assistance of the UNDP/GEF project experts.

2008 saw significant achievements in the project implementation. For example, the necessary regulatory and methodological framework for application of the Kyoto Protocol mechanisms in Belarus was established (draft strategy of participation in flexible mechanisms and draft infrastructure for implementation of carbon financing mechanisms were elaborated and approved by the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Belarus). 22 environmental project investors were identified, five of whom have started marketing and negotiations. Draft emission reduction purchase agreements have also been developed.

The project elaborated on a detailed description of methodologies applicable to typical Belarusian projects on voluntary emission reduction (VER). Guidance containing instructions and recommendations on project cycle procedure was published and disseminated in CD format. In 2008, 187 projects were identified, of which 58 projects would be applicable to the VER market. In total, 32 projects were prepared in PIN format, five of which were highly appreciated by the UNDP Regional Office in Bratislava.

A course of lectures entitled “Kyoto Protocol and utilization of its mechanisms in implementation of state environmental protection policy” was drafted to provide incentives for citizens to participate in initiating and implementing projects. Workshops involving representatives of the Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the Republic of Belarus, Bellesbumprom Concern, and regional inspectorates were conducted. Moreover, an information campaign on the Kyoto Protocol implementation was launched under the project for national and international experts, project designers, and potential investors.
Wetlands are recognized as a vital source of oxygen on the planet. They contribute to climate formation and secure preservation of biodiversity. Belarus’ wetlands are home to more than 20 rare species of birds included in the Red Book, and about 50 species of valuable medicinal herbs. However, improper environmental policy resulted in the reduction of the Belarusian wetlands area by more than twofold over the past 50 years: from 3 mln. to 1.4 mln. hectares. Today, preservation and, if possible, rehabilitation of this unique treasure is a vital task for Belarus. In 2008, the implementation of the two joint UNDP/GEF projects worth over USD 3 mln. on preservation of biodiversity of the Belarusian Polesie and renaturalization and sustainable development of the national wetlands, continued.

The first project has been implemented since 2006 in the territories of four national reserves in the Belarusian Polesie. The objective of the project is to provide assistance in the protection of especially valuable eco-systems and to develop a strategy to increase the number of successful project outcomes throughout the country. A priority objective of the project in 2008 was to improve the efficiency of management of Polesie wetland reserves. Management plans for Mid-Pripyat and Prostyr national reserves (Pinsk and Luninets Districts) were drafted, approved by the local authorities and submitted to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus. Management plans for Zvansets and Sporovsky wetlands (Drogichin and Berioza Districts) were improved. A complex management plan was drafted for the Pinsk District with account taken of biodiversity preservation in agricultural and forestry activities. A forestry training center was established on the premises of Luninet forestry.

A number of the project activities were aimed at improving the national regulatory and legal framework. For example, in 2008, the Government and the President of the Republic of Belarus approved the National Strategy for Development and Management of the System of Especially Protected Natural Territories and the respective State Programme, which were developed under the project. The project also contributed to drafting a National Strategy and a Plan of Action for Preservation of Wetlands of Belarus for 2008-2013. Another important outcome of the project last year was the pioneering establishment in the CIS area of the transboundary Ramsar Site “Prostyr-Pripyat-Stokhod” (Belarus-Ukraine).

The second project on renaturalization and sustainable management of peatlands was launched in 2005. The objectives of this project are to restore over 40,000 ha of degraded peatlands, reduce peatland fire incidents, and create conditions for rehabilitation of populations of rare species of flora and fauna.

In 2008, the “Renaturalization, Sustainable Management and Protection of Degraded Peatlands” section of the National Framework Programme of Prevention of Land Degradation in Belarus was developed under the project and approved by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection. Design documentation for construction work aiming at restoring the hydrological regimes on 8 pilot sites – depleted peatlands were developed. Engineering and construction works were completed on the Galoye, Ladovo and Morochno project sites. The total rehabilitated area reached 7,913 ha by early 2009. Renaturalization of Osveskoye peatland also began.

Scientific feasibility studies were carried out for 6 other project sites. The Institute of Experimental Botany of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Belarus arranged regular monitoring of flora and fauna on 9 project territories. A proposal to include 10 new sites into the National System of Environmental Monitoring was developed.
Efforts to industrialize traditionally agrarian regions of the Dnieper River basin, which were undertaken in the 20th century, resulted in gross and often irreversible changes. Threats to the Dnieper ecosystem were apparent already in the 1990s.

The consequences of the worsening environmental state of the river are important not only to Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, but also globally, for they affect the Black Sea ecosystem and the pan-European biospheric and climatic processes. Realization of the situation compelled the states of the Transdnieper region to take drastic measures for ecological rehabilitation of the river. A Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the Dnieper River basin and implementation mechanisms were developed by experts of the three countries under GEF financial support and UNDP coordination. SAP turned out to be a political document agreed through negotiations between the three states and submitted to the highest level.

The long-term objective of SAP was to improve the ecology of the Dnieper River by neutralizing the consequences of pollution, the rational use of the resources, and rehabilitating regional biodiversity. In 2008, under the project PDF B stage “Implementation of SAP Priority Activities for the Dnieper River Basin”, experts presented projects on improving sewage treatment at a number of small enterprises; they also developed documents analysing international best practices of creation and operation of clean production centers. At an international meeting in Kiev, experts finally approved the Programme of transboundary monitoring of waters and the environment of the Dnieper basin, and scrutinized the harmonization of national nature protection legislations.

Based on the previously developed documents on introduction of clean production, transborder monitoring, and harmonization of national nature protection legislations, a single document was drafted for Belarus and Ukraine containing analysis of the current condition of the river basin eco-system, and a strategy and work plan detailing the future full-scale project implementation.

How to Save the DNIEPER

Wild Nature Course for Schoolchildren

Raising environmental awareness of the Belarusian population through ecological education of future generations, and developing their capacity in making decisions contributing to preservation of the environment, is the objective of the UNDP project focusing on the development and introduction of an educational course in secondary schools.

Three hundred and fifty Belarusian schools will include a new course “Wild Nature of Belarus” into the curriculum of 7th and 8th grades. In future, this course could be offered to all secondary schools in Belarus. The project’s focus on children, including those living in rural areas, will help them to develop an interest and caring attitude towards the local environment as well as understand the methods of sustainable use of natural resources.
2008 saw the continuation of the successful implementation by the UNDP and the Ministry of Health of the project “Prevention and Treatment of HIV/AIDS in the Republic of Belarus” funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The main objective of the project is to provide support for Belarus in halting the spread of HIV.

Special focus is still on population groups who are most vulnerable to HIV. During the year, the project supported the work of 50 anonymous counseling centers (ACCs) for drug users in 36 cities of Belarus. The ACCs provide the following prevention and medical services for drug addicts: access to information about prevention methods and means of protection from HIV/STIs, consultations on medical, psychological and social issues, including “hot line” counseling, referrals to detoxification and rehabilitation centres. 25,000 people requested the ACCs’ assistance during the project implementation period.

Last year, under the pilot project on adoption of methadone substitution therapy at the Gomel drug abuse clinic, about 50 patients were involved in the substitution therapy programme for drug addicts (more than 70 patients in total since the project launch). Methadone substitution therapy is applied to patients who have suffered from drug addiction for more than two years and who have failed in other methods of treatment. The programme allowed the patients to change their life by finding a job, improving their family relations, and devoting themselves to their children. The second stage of the pilot project on methadone substitution therapy will be launched on the premises of the Minsk municipal drug abuse clinic, where 100 people will receive treatment in 2009. Moreover, new methadone substitution centers are to be opened in Svetlogorsk and Soligorsk.

Year after year, the cases of sexual transmission of HIV is growing in Belarus, thus making work with population groups practicing risky sexual behavior even more important. During the year, more than 470 men having sex with other men (MSM) and about 370 female sex workers (FSWs) were tested for STIs. 170 MSM and over 220 FSWs received necessary treatment under the project. The work on HIV prevention among these groups has continued. Since grant allocation, 15,197 MSM and 6,298 FSWs have been covered by the prevention programme in Belarus. The launch of the programme of re-socialization of FSWs was one of the novelties of the project in 2008. The Project staff have been helping women to renounce their hazardous occupation and find new employment. As a result, five FSWs have been trained on socially important professions at the Minsk educational center.

One of the project components is implemented in 33 national penitentiary institutions, where activities are arranged to prevent HIV and adopt the programme of antiretroviral therapy of all HIV-positive convicts. In 2008, a specialized therapy section for HIV-infected and a HIV training center were opened at Gomel correctional institution No.4, where convicted women serve their sentences. This facility provides patients with treatment, pre- and endtest counseling, develops commitments, trains volunteers, arranges discussion and reviews of printed materials and visuals on HIV prevention.

The project has also supported a large-scale programme of providing HIV/AIDS treatment throughout Belarus, thus saving the lives of about 1,250 people living with HIV who receive complex antiretroviral treatment (ARV-therapy). 2008 saw the involvement of the Belarusian Red Cross Society in intensive implementation of the programme of palliative assistance for people living with HIV. 10 multi-service centers providing medical, psychological, social and moral assistance are open in six cities, which have suffered most from the epidemic (Svetlogorsk, Gomel, Zhlobin, Minsk, So-

Comics – a popular genre for kids and teenagers were used by the project to create information materials on HIV/AIDS. The comic heroes were members of the Star Team which was created under the project in 2007 featuring famous musicians, sportsmen and actors. A presentation of the comics and a photo session were held on 1 December, World AIDS Day, in one of the Minsk schools.
ligorsk, Pinsk). As a result of this dedicated work, 40 patients in the terminal stage of AIDS were provided assistance in 2008.

Self-support groups of people living with HIV (PLHIV) is one of the most effective and necessary initiatives supported by the project. In 2008, 12 self-support groups were operational in nine cities across Belarus. A Positive Movement NGO providing assistance for PLHIV and their families is the major partner organization of the UNDP on this initiative. For many people, these groups have become the only source of information about life with HIV and ways to resolve difficult situations. During the grant implementation, more than 600 HIV-positive people were provided with assistance from self-support groups.

The modernization of laboratory service for HIV clinical and lab monitoring continued. During the project implementation period, diagnostic equipment and test-systems worth USD 978,500 were procured for national health institutions.

Creation of the network of rooms of information and educational activities on HIV prevention among young people is one of the main achievements of the project. These rooms have become resource centers for all in need of information and materials on HIV/AIDS prevention activity. These resource centers host various events, such as meetings, seminars, press conferences, and are available for teachers, physicians, social workers, and media. They also host volunteer clubs. Today, 13 such resource centers are operating in Belarus.

The information campaign “Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise” continued under the project support in 2008. Representatives of 20 Belarusian agencies and enterprises took part in a cross-country race under the slogan “Sports against AIDS”. Another new initiative was an action under the slogan “Sports against AIDS” arranged within the Student Games, which gathered over 50 Belarusian universities together. A balloon with the slogan “Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise” was lifted during the Slavyansky Bazar festival in July 2008. A 2008 All-Russian action “AIDS-STOP!” was awarded international status and encompassed cities in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. A charity concert of the motor rally “AIDS-STOP!” was arranged in October at the center of the Belarusian capital with financial and information support of the project.

In 2008, the social advertising component of the project was represented by TV commercials, billboards, and city lights. An image of the red ribbon and the slogan “1 December is World AIDS Day” were seen on the National Library – the highest building in Minsk.

The UNDP in partnership with the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) continued to support the Christian Churches by expanding their participation in activities against HIV. This opportunity was provided after the signing of the Declaration on Social Partnership of the Christian Churches against HIV/AIDS and the development of the Strategy of Christian Churches Response to HIV/AIDS in Belarus.

Despite the insufficient experience of the Churches for large-scale and comprehensive participation in addressing HIV, each Christian Church has communities willing to fight against AIDS. In 2008, several pilot projects received funding. A contest for Christian Churches of Belarus resulted in the selection and implementation of four mini-projects. For instance, a memorial “Remember. Live. Stay Beside” was opened near the St. Transfiguration Church in Svetlogorsk at the initiative of the Gomel Eparchy of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. According to the founders of the concept, those staying close to the memorial could honour the memory of people who died from AIDS, and pray for the health of the HIV-positive sufferers.

The Internet-library “Religious Organizations and HIV/AIDS” (http://www.library.imcss.org/) is an important contribution in raising the awareness of the population about the activities of the Churches in the sphere of HIV prevention. Library visitors can find a catalogue of the Churches’ websites with updated news about HIV, and a monthly news posting “Religion and HIV/AIDS”.

For the first time in Belarus and in the whole CIS area, the UNDP and UNAIDS supported the publication of a multimedia guide for priests and parishioners “AIDS in Belarus: Response of Christian Churches”. The guide explains in an easy and modern form, medical and social issues of HIV, and reflects the position and activities of Christian Churches on this problem. The urgency of the problem and impossibility to give a single answer, and the polemic character of the opinions will help users of the guide to develop their position and explain, how the Church deals with HIV, and how each of us could help solve this problem.
According to the World Health Organization, each year about 9 million people in the world become infected with tuberculosis, and more than 1.5 million die. Even though the Government of Belarus has managed to improve significantly the epidemiological situation, the need to reduce the TB prevalence rate is still on the agenda. The situation is to be improved with the assistance of the UNDP project “Support of the National Programme “Tuberculosis” in the Republic of Belarus” funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The first year of the project implementation was fruitful. For example, a training center for medical staff in prevention, diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis equipped under the project was opened on the premises of the Scientific-Research Institute of Pulmonology and Phtysiology (SRIPP) of the Ministry of Health. DOTS (directly observed treatment strategy) training programmes were developed for medical personnel of all specialties, and more than 20 workshops were conducted on introduction of DOTS into the work of TB institutions. 7,460 tuberculosis patients of the first, second and third categories were provided with first line TB drugs procured under the project, and the regional TB dispensaries and the SRIPP received medicines to treat 3,730 patients. In 2008, nine passenger cars were procured for monitoring departments of the SRIPP, regional TB healthcare institutions, and the Department of Execution of Punishments of the Ministry of the Interior to enhance the epidemiological control.

Particular attention was paid to improving the quality of TB assistance for convicts of penitentiary institutions. The fact is that the TB incidence rate in confinement facilities (prisons) is 7-8 times higher than that of the rest of population of Belarus. TB drugs for the treatment of 200 patients and advanced laboratory equipment were procured for the National Tuberculosis Hospital of Correctional Institution No 12. The project experts developed a mechanism of providing social support to TB patients on the premises of TB healthcare institutions. At present, 13 such institutions are targeted by the project.

Social support also includes remuneration for TB patients, which provides additional incentives for their continuing treatment, and secures continued and regular therapy. This observation is based on the results of work in many countries. In Belarus, remuneration is provided in the form of a monthly food basket and season tickets for public transport. In 2008, 1,342 TB patients were provided with social support.

In addition, the project in partnership with the Belarusian Red Cross Society implements informational and educational activities among the population. The information campaign “I’m stopping TB” was launched in spring 2008. The main objectives of the campaign are to raise the hygienic literacy level of the population and to form a cautious attitude towards the disease along with the reduction of prejudices towards TB patients. Campaign activities were carried out all over the country. Judging by some estimates, it covered over 2 million residents of Belarus.

**PROJECT EXPECTED OUTCOMES:**

- Reduced TB incidence and recurrence rate from 54 to 49 per 100 000 population by 2012;
- Increased index of successful treatment from 74% to 85% by 2012;
- Increased percentage of TB patients tested for HIV from 90% in 2005 to 98% in 2009;
- 7,460 TB patients provided with high quality TB drugs within the first two years of the project implementation;
- Medical care and social support provided for 2,000 TB patients within the first two years of the project implementation;
- 200 patients with multi-resistant forms of tuberculosis provided with necessary drugs by the end of 2009;
- The National Reference Laboratory enhanced, and medical institutions equipped with advanced diagnostic devices;
- **The National Register “Tuberculosis” – an automated system of data collection and analysis adopted.**
From 2003 through 2008, the UNDP implemented the regional Programme for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and the Fight against Drug Trafficking in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova (BUMAD) with financial support from the European Commission. The year of 2008 was rich in events and achievements, like the following:

The first national guide of rehabilitation centers for drug addicts in Belarus was developed under the initiative of non-governmental organizations. It is worth noting that programmes of rehabilitation of drug addicts are quite new for Belarus. Previously, there was no systematized information about rehabilitation centers available for drug abuse experts and drug addicts looking for ways to escape their addiction. 1,500 copies of the guide were distributed among teachers, medical staff, officers of law enforcement agencies, personnel of NGOs, and syringe exchange centers engaged in drug prevention and dealing directly with drug users. BUMAD supported the production of a documentary on the national rehabilitation centers, which facilitated an open discussion of the issue in Belarusian society.

In 2008, the UNDP provided support for equipping the Brest and the Gomel regional forensic laboratories with chromato-mass-spectrometry systems allowing regional experts to raise the quality level of narcotics research – from colour charts and thin layer chromatography to chromato-mass-spectrometry analysis. In October 2008, on the premises of the Swedish Forensic Laboratory, BUMAD arranged a workshop on amphetamine profiling for experts of the central laboratory for drug research of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Belarus. The workshop participants learned the methods of comparative analysis of seized samples of amphetamine line drugs and acquired software allowing them to launch amphetamine profiling in Belarus right away.

Last year, BUMAD supported the Ministry of the Interior in the development of a sniffer dog training service. 22 German shepherds, cars for transportation of sniffer dogs to search locations, office equipment and literature for a training class were procured for the Mogilev dog training center. Belarusian dog experts underwent training at the advanced training center for sniffer dogs of the Northern Rhine-Westphalia police (Germany). In 2008, sniffer dogs helped German law enforcement bodies to detect more than 10 kg of drugs.

In 2008, a series of introductory workshops for social trainers on prevention of drug addiction were conducted in all regional centers of Belarus. Over 450 participants were extensively informed of the consequences and factors of drug consumption, and improved their skills in using interactive methods of practical work with students. That was the first step towards changing the approaches to prevention of bad habits in school: a transition from lecturing on consequences of drug consumption to interactive methods of development of children’s life skills.

The participants of the final BUMAD conference conducted in March 2009 in Minsk expressed hope that the initiatives implemented under the project will be further supported by state governance bodies and NGOs, and will contribute towards the reduction of supply and demand for drugs in Belarus.
A Healthy Family
is the Foundation of a Healthy Society

A joint project of the UNDP, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Ministry for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus “Family Health” is implemented in the Stolin District (Brest Region), which suffered from the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The objective of the project is to improve the health of the population of the district.

Workshops were organized for medical workers on several topics: healthy maternity, parenting and developing a healthy child in the territories contaminated with radio nuclides, reproductive health, pediatrics, psychology, and radiation medicine issues. 20 medical workers were trained in the skills of organizing peer-to-peer education to pass the knowledge and skills gained within the project to those not involved in the project activities. Trainings were also arranged for local school instructors teaching children and young people healthy lifestyles.

The Information and Advisory Center “Dialogue” was opened on the premises of the Stolin Central District Hospital with the support of the project at the beginning of 2008. During the year, more than 150 people made individual appointments with doctors through this center. Over half of them were children and teenagers under 18. Most of the “Dialogue” visitors requested the advice of the obstetrician-gynecologist and the psychologist. Along with individual appointments, meetings, group counseling, and lectures were arranged by the center specialists for Stolin secondary school children to promote a responsible attitude towards their health from a young age.

Twice a month, thematic classes in the form of study groups for pregnant women, their family members, and mothers of newborns are conducted on the premises of rural medical laboratories and health posts located in 9 villages. 8 settlements hosted Health Fairs, where information and education materials were distributed on safe living in the radiation contaminated areas, healthy maternity, parenthood, upbringing and developing healthy children. Experts spoke to the local population, and thematic videos produced under the project were shown. All comers had an opportunity to test their foodstuffs for cesium-137 content, had their body checked for radio nuclides content by Whole Body Counter (WBC), and had all their questions answered by experts dealing with Chernobyl issues, and doctors and scientists invited to the event.

The project contributed to the organization of a Stolin district group of volunteers “Youth for a Healthy Lifestyle” comprising students of several secondary schools and using interactive forms and methods of peer-to-peer education. Activities were aimed at developing teenagers’ need for responsible behavior in interacting as equals and expressing their opinions freely, in taking the initiative, drawing conclusions, and making them aware of their acts and deeds.

Each Health Fair was accompanied by a sport competition “Father, Mother and Myself are a Sporty Family” to promote healthy lifestyles.
Support Project for CORE Programme: Worthy Completion

The support project for the “Cooperation for Rehabilitation” (CORE) Programme, which was initiated in 2003 to establish sustainable living conditions for the population of the four districts affected by the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant accident, has been completed.

The support project has made a considerable contribution to the successful implementation of 73 local development initiatives fully or partially funded by national, foreign and international donors. In total, 146 projects worth about Euro 9 million were developed in the target districts under the CORE Programme.

In 2008, the UNDP project assisted with implementation of 7 new local, national and international initiatives, including the “Fresh Bread” bakery project in the Chechersk District supported by Italian partners of the CORE Programme, the project on prevention of violence in families in the Bragin District supported by the Christian Children Fund, the “Berry of Health in School Garden” initiative on creation of a berry orchard in a Bragin district school supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and OSCE.

The project also coordinated the creation of a people’s museum named after Vasily Ignatenko, a Hero of Ukraine, who was born in the Bragin District and was among the first fire-fighters on the flame-engulfed roof of the fourth reactor of the Chernobyl NPP on 26 April 1986. The Bragin district history museum hosted the display, which was supported by the Belarusian Orthodox Church and funded by the Department for Mitigation of the Consequences of the Accident at the Chernobyl NPP of the Ministry for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus.

In 2008, the project also focused on working with local organizations and population on consolidation of the outcomes and achievements after the CORE Programme completion. The continuing implementation of 15 local initiatives proves the success of the efforts undertaken within the support project.

Chernobyl Impacts Remain in the Focus of Attention

UNDP activities focusing on post-Chernobyl recovery have been given a new impetus. Last year the Government of Japan approved a USD 1.5 million allocation from the UN Trust Fund for Human Security to finance a new project on ensuring safe livelihoods in the Chernobyl affected areas of Belarus.

A three-year project will be implemented by the UNDP jointly with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The project will help to improve income generating opportunities for subsidiary land plot owners in the affected areas, raise public awareness about a healthy lifestyle (for example, the project education efforts are intended to reduce consumption by local households of food, mainly forest products, which have not been tested for radio nuclides) and will contribute to prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

Another two projects of the European Commission and the UNDP funded Action “Combat the negative effects of the Chernobyl disaster in Belarus” –
“Establishment of International Scientific and Practical Center of Thyroid Diseases” and “Area-Based Development of the Chernobyl Affected Regions” with a total budget of Euro 2.6 million – are in the process of endorsement and registration in accordance with the national legislation. Their implementation will start in 2009 together with a USD 2.5 million new regional programme on the development of the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network (ICRIN) designed to meet the information needs of Chernobyl-affected communities in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. This three-year initiative aims to translate the latest scientific information on the consequences of the accident into sound practical advice for residents of the affected territories. The programme activities include dissemination of information through the education system, trainings for journalists, teachers and medical professionals as well as the creation of Internet-equipped information centers in the affected rural areas.

Three projects targeting children and youth were implemented in 2008 in two affected districts of the Gomel Region. The initiatives with a total budget of USD 35 thousand were financed by the Maria Sharapova Foundation and implemented by the UNDP in partnership with local and regional authorities and district-level cultural, health care and educational institutions. Maria Sharapova is a world tennis star and UNDP Goodwill Ambassador whose parents moved from Belarusian Gomel to Siberia in 1986 to escape the impact of the accident in the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The Foundation financed procurement of musical instruments (composer, piano, button accordions and etc.), furniture, methodological and music literature for four branches of rural music school in the Bragin District of the Gomel Region (photo 1). In Chechersk an ecological hobby group of the local Children’s Arts Centre received office equipment; a nature room with birds, hamsters, rabbits and an aquarium with fish was also arranged (photo 3). Thanks to Maria Sharapova’s help, the Chechersk Central District Hospital opened a relaxation and psychological rehabilitation room called “Fairytale” offering therapy to children in the form of interactive plays with the use of developmental toys and devices for tactile stimulation which had been procured for the room (photo 2).

Another joint initiative of Maria Sharapova Foundation and the UNDP was announced in autumn 2008; the launch of a USD 210 thousand scholarship fund for Belarusian students from the area affected by the accident in the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Scholarships will allow 12 talented young people to study arts in the Belarusian State Academy of Arts or the Belarusian State University. For the first time ever an international non-governmental organization will provide such support in the educational sector in Belarus. The first scholarship recipients will start education already in the 2009-2010 academic year.
Our partners:

Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs

BirdLife Belarus

COWI, Denmark

European Commission

Global Environment Facility

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Interchurch Mission “Christian Social Service”

Kunlavsky Business Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers

National Center of Technology Transfer

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, UK

UN agencies in Belarus

UN Conference on Trade and Development

UN Industrial Development Organization

US Agency for International Development

UN Development Programme in Belarus

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