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WHAT IS UNDP IN BELARUS AND WHAT IS ITS MISSION?

The publication which is now in your hands gives answers to these and many other questions about the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); it provides the curious reader with figures and snapshots related to our activities in the main thematic areas, such as economic development and the social sector, environmental protection and energy efficiency, healthcare and governance.

This publication presents an overview of the visible results of many successful projects which have been recently implemented by UNDP in collaboration with our partners including the Government of Belarus, the international donor community, UN agencies, private sector, non-governmental organisations and civil society at large. All our projects are aimed at sustainable development and improving living standards for the Belarusian people.

I hope you will find this publication interesting and useful.

Antonius BROEK,
UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative in Belarus

UNDP has been present in Belarus since 1992. The UNDP Resident Representative acts as the UN Resident Coordinator, representing the UN system and leading the UN Country Team. Mr. Antonius Broek has been the UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative in the Republic of Belarus since 2008.

The UNDP Mandate in Belarus, as determined by its Agreement with the Government of Belarus, requires UNDP “to support and supplement national efforts at solving the most important problems of Belarus’ economic development and to promote social progress and better standards of life”. UNDP is currently implementing its fourth Country Programme.

UNDP activities in Belarus are currently guided by the Country Programme Document for 2011-2015, prepared through extensive consultations with key partners in the government, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations system, and the international community. Programme implementation falls into four main thematic areas:

1) Economic Development and Social Security;
2) Energy and Environment;
3) HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis;
4) Effective and Accountable Governance and Human Security.

Throughout its work in any thematic area, UNDP puts a particular emphasis on respect for human rights and promotion of gender equality.
HOW UNDP WORKS IN BELARUS

UNDP is striving to mobilise considerable international assistance to support Belarus in addressing its challenges in the field of development. UNDP’s assistance is administered through thematic projects.

Projects are implemented on the basis of a ‘project document’, a legally binding agreement between UNDP and its partners which delineates a plan for achieving the objectives, the required resources and arrangements for implementation. In Belarus the project document is to be signed by the UNDP Resident Representative and the head of an executing agency which can be either a government entity or a non-governmental organisation. Projects are subject to registration either with the Ministry of the Economy or the Department for Humanitarian Activity of the President’s Affairs Management Office.

As soon as the project document is approved and funding is available, UNDP selects a Project Manager on a competitive basis to lead project implementation. The project manager is expected to coordinate with the National Coordinator, a designated senior representative of an executing agency. Upon completion of the project, UNDP provides the donor with a report summarising the outcomes. The executing agency reports to the national authorities.

All UNDP projects in Belarus are founded on the country’s national interest and commitment. After projects are completed, UNDP also strives to facilitate the sustained efficient performance of individuals, organisations and agencies who have been assisted by UNDP and its partners.

In 2010 the aggregate budget of UNDP projects in Belarus totalled over US$ 18.4 million, the largest amount since the opening of the Office in Minsk.

UNDP DONORS

UNDP projects are co-financed by multiple donors including UN agencies (the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and others), international organisations and funds (the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and others, as well as foreign governments).

Cost-sharing is an arrangement through which donors contribute to UNDP programmes and projects. The standard cost-sharing agreement is a legally binding agreement between a donor and UNDP. The United Nations Development Programme administers the funds contributed by the donor for the project and assumes responsibility for timely financial audits and project reporting.

In recent years the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has been the largest donor for UNDP in Belarus. It has supported a number of healthcare projects. The Global Fund’s grants have contributed to the continuation of efforts in preventing and treating HIV/AIDS in Belarus and making improvements to the system for effective diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis.

Belarus benefits from considerable international technical assistance provided by the European Union. UNDP and EU have recently implemented a number of joint projects focusing on further strengthening of border management, combating human and illegal drug trafficking, supporting the environment and sustainable development at the local level, and also area-based development of the Chernobyl-affected regions.

The funds of the Global Environment Facility are used by UNDP for execution of several large-scale projects on improving energy efficiency in public sector enterprises and creating a conducive environment for the sustainable performance of the wetland protection system in Belarus. The Small Grants Programme initiated by UNDP in Belarus some years ago has provided funding to non-governmental and community-based environmental organisations towards implementation of their projects.

DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In September 2000 at the Millennium Development Summit at UN Headquarters in New York, representatives of 189 countries including 147 heads of state and government adopted the Millennium Declaration. The Declaration formulated a concise set of goals, numerical targets, and quantifiable indicators known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which are to be achieved over a 15-year period from 2000 to 2015, taking 1990 as a baseline for measuring progress.

The Millennium Development Goals consist of:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
2. Achieve universal primary education;
3. Promote gender equality and empower women;
4. Reduce child mortality;
5. Improve maternal health;
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases;
7. Ensure environmental sustainability;
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

Acting as the UN global development network, UNDP consolidates and coordinates global and national efforts toward the achievement of the MDGs. UNDP utilises the capacities of other UN agencies to help countries integrate the MDGs into their national development programmes. For example, with support from UNDP, Belarus adopted the National Sustainable Socio-Economic Development Strategy for the period until 2020, which contains references to the MDGs. Belarus published National Reports on the Achievement of the MDGs in 2005 and 2010.

The latest report concluded that Belarus has achieved almost all of the MDGs: the country has ensured universal primary education and has considerably reduced poverty, maternal and child mortality. A strong emphasis has been placed on enhancing gender equality and strengthening efforts against HIV/AIDS, ensuring environmental sustainability and establishing a global partnership for development.
In 2003–2006 UNDP and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus implemented the first poverty reduction project which involved assessing and analysing the profiles of low-income households and key drivers of poverty in Belarus as well as identifying population categories in need of support. The project gave a definition of poverty as a complex phenomenon driven by both low incomes and human capital deficiencies including such pillars as health and education. The project helped identify the key focuses of the National Poverty Prevention and Reduction Strategy and its provisions were then reflected in the National Socio-Economic Development Programme for 2006–2010.

Another project in this field (2008–2010) was directed at improving social policy in the regions, mostly in small towns and rural areas, and included piloting of social innovations at the district level.

UNDP has been supporting the development of small and medium enterprises in Belarus since the late 1990s. UNDP efforts have succeeded in creating the first business incubators and credit unions, as well as introducing microfinance as a new mechanism for small business support. UNDP sees facilitating public-private dialogue and fostering partnerships to promote an enabling environment for private business development as its core mission.

Joint work with the Council for Enterprise Development under the President of the Republic of Belarus and leading business associations has allowed UNDP to identify gaps in private sector development, strengthened the expertise capacity of the country’s business community, and expanded the business community’s abilities to influence the formation of an administrative, legal and economic environment conducive for business. These efforts have considerably improved the regulatory environment for opening and running a business and have facilitated the rapid increase of the number of private enterprises.

UNDP involvement in improving the national innovation system in Belarus has contributed to the establishment of a broad network of technology transfer centres which can support innovative business and the creation of an enabling environment for conducting technological forecasting surveys.

To facilitate private business in small towns and rural areas, UNDP has focused efforts on improving the existing infrastructure for business support. With UNDP support, Centres for Rural Business Development have been established in Stolin, a district centre in Brest Region, and the village of Komarovo in Miazdzel District, Minsk Region. The centres provide legal support in the preparation of documents required for registering small enterprises, monitor market developments and facilitate the creation of new jobs. UNDP assistance to the Centres has also included elaboration of practical guidelines on how to set up small businesses, using examples such as agro- and eco-tourism, retail, catering, the printing business and car repairs. Investor’s guides to the Mahiliou and Minsk regions were published in order to attract investment in these areas, in collaboration with experts from the Kunialsky Business Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers.

The UN initiative “Global Compact” has been evolving in Belarus since 2006. The initiative has now been joined by more than 70 Belarusian companies willing to adopt the principles of corporate social responsibility and to implement plans on sustainable development in the country. These include well-known multistakeholder partnership projects with socially responsible businesses, focusing on improving children’s diets (initiated by OJSC Savushkin Product), making small towns attractive for tourists (Coca-Cola Beverages Belarus), developing youth entrepreneurship (the Minok Transit Bank) and promoting telemedicine to improve access to high-quality healthcare services for people living in remote regions (MTS Mobile Operator). These projects are intended to consolidate the economic and social interests of business development.
IMPROVING ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Despite the progress that has been achieved in recent years, the energy intensity of the Belarusian economy is still high compared with industrialised countries. In this context, the priorities for government policy for 2011-2015 include reducing Belarus’ dependency on energy imports and diversifying energy supply by means of alternative sources of energy.

In 2003-2008 UNDP implemented a GEF-funded pilot project aimed at using waste wood for heating and supplying hot water to residential buildings, industrial sites and public buildings such as schools, hospitals and sanatoriums. The project established five demonstration sites: a boiler house, three waste wood fire mini-CHPs, and an enterprise for harvesting, processing and delivering wood chips. In addition, a bio-energy revolving fund with an initial capitalisation of over US$3 million was set up in order to finance energy efficiency projects.

UNDP and GEF are now implementing another project which aims to improve energy efficiency in the state sector in Belarus. The project aims to establish energy efficiency measures in three areas: improving the energy efficiency of heat and power generation, upgrading pumping and compressor equipment, and enhancing heat recovery. By the end of 2011 the project is expected to have initiated activities with investments totalling about US$ 120 million. The International Energy Centre, which was opened in Minsk within the framework of the project, actively contributes to the fulfilment of the above tasks.

Knowledge-sharing about energy efficiency is an essential part of the project. The nationwide “Ecomarathon” contest for school students and teachers is organised every year in collaboration with national partners. After the contest, additional teaching materials on energy efficiency including visual aids are prepared and distributed for extra-curricular activities.

SUSTAINABLE ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Efficient use of energy resources and environmental protection are essential drivers of sustainable development. Climate change and depletion of biodiversity are issues of global concern because they cannot be addressed through the efforts of individual countries alone. UNDP supports national efforts to find solutions to these problems, providing innovative policy advice, sharing best practices and connecting partners through pilot projects.

The UNDP office in Belarus has implemented a number of successful projects aimed at improving energy efficiency, encouraging more extensive use of renewable energy, combatting land degradation, improving protection and efficient use of natural resources, conserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable development at the local level.

UNDP has assisted Belarus in undertaking a national capacity assessment to enable the country to meet its obligations under the environmental conventions. UNDP has also assisted Belarus in assessing the financial and technical cooperation benefits of joining the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. As a result of the resulting recommendations, the Republic of Belarus officially joined the Kyoto Protocol in 2005.

RIVERS AND LAKES

Rivers and lakes are among the most important natural resources in Belarus but are often affected by pollution. For example, about 40% of the water in the Dnieper River flowing across Belarus, Russia and Ukraine fails to meet quality requirements. As a result, many species of flora and fauna are endangered. A GEF regional project implemented by UNDP in 2006-2009 assisted the three above-mentioned countries in elaborating uniform approaches to managing and monitoring the condition of the natural resources of the Dnieper basin. The project elaborated a Strategic Action Programme which became the key instrument for the crossborder management of natural resources in the river basin.

A similar project is being developed for the Neman River flowing across Belarus, Lithuania and Russia.
Over 6% of Belarus’ territory is covered by peatlands, one of the most valuable and most threatened types of natural habitat worldwide. Large-scale drainage in the 1960s and 1970s reduced the number of natural peatlands in Belarus by more than half. The degradation of peatlands contributes to a progressive loss of productivity and declining harvests, disruption to the carbon cycle and shrinkage of habitats of important animal species.

UNDP has developed a project for the rationalisation and sustainable management of degraded peatlands in Belarus in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, combat land degradation and ensure conservation of globally valuable biodiversity. Fifteen exhausted peatlands and disturbed bogs with a total area of 28,207.7 hectares were restored in 2006-2010 under the GEF-funded project.

The successful rehabilitation of vegetation and wildlife habitats after the restoration of the wetlands has been confirmed by the findings of biodiversity monitoring conducted in project areas by the Institute of Experimental Botany of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences. In particular, scientists noted the presence of some globally endangered species such as the spotted eagle, marsh cock, common heron, egret and others.

The large-scale drainage of Polesie, a unique area in the south of Belarus accommodating expansive natural wetlands with unique biological and landscape diversity, has led to a significant lowering of the groundwater table, erosion of soil and decline in biodiversity. However some wetlands areas, namely Sporovskoe, Dikoe and Zvanets reserves, remain virtually intact. UNDP is working towards the conservation and sustainable management of the region’s biodiversity. For example, a UNDP/GEF thematic project has contributed to the elaboration of a National Strategy and Action Plan on the Conservation of Belarus’ Wetlands for 2008-2013.

An important project achievement has been the establishment of the Transboundary Ramsar Area “Prostyr – Pripyat – Stokhid” (Belarus-Ukraine), the first in the post-Soviet countries. To create a conducive environment for tourism in the region, the project has supported seven initiatives for eco-tourism development in Polesie. Four ecological and education centres have been reconstructed and equipped and five ecological routes have been established in the reserves.

The United Nations Development Programme and the European Union have assisted Belarus in building capacity for nature conservation through a Strategic Environmental Assessment, making it possible to analyse the environmental impacts of government policies, plans and programmes. Project experts have developed a National Strategy for Conservation and Sustainable Management of Biodiversity, approved by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, as well as a new National Programme to Combat Land Degradation.

HIV/AIDS PROGRAMMES

In 2004-2009 UNDP and the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Belarus implemented a project “Prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS in the Republic of Belarus” financed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Under this project, the needs of the healthcare sector for antiretroviral drugs for treating HIV/AIDS were fully met. The project provided support to national efforts in fighting HIV/AIDS by procuring laboratory equipment for HIV/AIDS and STI diagnostics, pharmaceuticals for treatment of opportunistic infections, and means of protection against HIV for medical staff. Large scale prevention activities among at-risk groups and awareness raising campaigns made a significant contribution to HIV prevention activities in Belarus.

The successful implementation of the Global Fund’s grant, amounting to a total of around US$17 million, has created a solid foundation for funding further HIV/AIDS programmes implemented by UNDP in Belarus up to 2016. Financial resources currently designated for HIV programmes implemented by UNDP in Belarus by the Global Fund amount to over US$47 million. These HIV programmes are targeted at HIV prevention among the most at-risk populations, as well as providing treatment, care and support for people living with HIV. The work is structured in such a way that, by the time the Global Fund’s grants in Belarus are completed, the government in partnership with civil society will be able to take over the majority of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment activities.

Under the multisectoral information strategy supported by the Global Fund, Belarus is adopting uniform information and communication standards for HIV/AIDS that would improve the quality of information on HIV prevention. Production work is underway on a TV series about HIV/AIDS for young audiences; it will reflect the most acute concerns of today’s society including stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV. The series is expected to reach at least 2 million people.
A modern system for diagnosing, registering and recording TB was created under the auspices of this project. National laboratories were equipped with modern equipment for TB diagnostics in accordance with WHO standards. Medical specialists in the TB services, Red Cross nurses, laboratory personnel and medical staff of penitentiary institutions will be trained in modern methods of diagnosis, care and treatment of TB patients, especially those with multi-drug-resistant TB.

Also as part of this project, an electronic TB register was successfully introduced in 25 TB institutions across the country. By the end of 2015 more than 7000 patients (both in the civilian sector and in penitentiary institutions) will receive treatment with first-line TB drugs. It is expected that as a result of the implementation this project the mortality rate among TB patients in Belarus will be reduced and the treatment success rate will increase.

Currently the issue of tuberculosis is one of the most socially important challenges for the public healthcare system in Belarus. Today tuberculosis is not a disease only affecting people with a poor quality of life, but poses a threat to the population at large. With assistance from UNDP, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has provided funding amounting to USS 34 million to support the diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis in Belarus.

Traffic in human beings has reached epidemic proportions and no country is immune. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are among those with the fastest-growing spread of human trafficking in the world. UNDP efforts in Belarus focus on raising public awareness and other preventive interventions, strengthening capacity of a number of the Belarusian ministries and non-governmental organisations in the area of preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and curtailing illegal migration both into Belarus and into EU countries.

The project of UNDP and the EU on Combating Trafficking in Women (2003-2005) established an electronic database of specialised agencies and organisations providing assistance to the victims of trafficking, funded a telephone hotline for persons who are leaving to go abroad, and opened a rehabilitation shelter for female victims of trafficking. The findings of a comparative analysis of the legislation of the Republic of Belarus and EU countries related to combating trafficking in women, conducted as part of the project, were reflected in proposals for amending the existing Belarusian legislation.

A joint project of the EU, UNDP and UNICEF (2009-2010) has adopted a more comprehensive approach to addressing human trafficking. Men and children have also been included in the target groups and efforts have focused on the mitigation of social impacts. The project has helped improve the knowledge and skills of the staff of education establishments in the area of prevention of trafficking in human beings and enhanced the capacities of law enforcement agencies to prosecute traffickers.

As part of its preventive interventions, the project has established a multi-service centre to promote youth employment and participation of youths in private sector development, helping nearly 1500 young people to find jobs, as well as a youth business incubator where 21 enterprises were registered during project implementation. The project has supported a hotline giving people consultation on safe travel abroad, as well as a rehabilitation shelter which has provided assistance to over 30 women and men victimised by trafficking. Study tours to EU and CIS countries have allowed more than one hundred representatives from government authorities and non-governmental organisations to learn from international best practices, which were taken into account in the process of elaborating a draft national law “On combating trafficking in human beings.”

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The key challenge in the process of building democratic governance is to develop institutions and processes that are more responsive to the needs of people, including the poor. UNDP brings people together both within nations and around the world, sharing ways to promote participation, accountability and effectiveness at all levels.

In recent years UNDP has successfully cooperated with Belarus on issues related to effective and accountable governance. UNDP targeted projects have contributed to a better understanding of international human rights standards amongst officials of the country’s judicial authorities, a simplification of administrative procedures and broader adoption of the “one window” approach, and have strengthened the capacity of the legislative authorities for analysing law enforcement practices. The Government of Belarus has been assisted in improving the legal mechanisms for coordinating and managing international technical assistance.

Together with international organisations and UN agencies, UNDP has implemented several projects and programmes aimed at strengthening Belarus’ capacity in the field of border control and prevention of trafficking in human beings. In collaboration with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, UNDP has been helping Belarus to improve the secure storage of small arms, thus reducing the risk of illegal proliferation.

UNDP pays close attention to contributing to the public’s understanding of the significance of human rights and informing government authorities about their obligation to promote and protect the rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens. Under the EU-funded joint project of UNDP, UNICEF and the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus, a team of national and international experts drafted recommendations for improving the national legislation in such areas as “The Judiciary and Status of Judges,” “Competition in the Penal Process,” “Guarantees for the Realisation of the Constitutional Right to Juridical Protection,” etc.

The project has elaborated and published a four-volume compendium of International human rights standards, containing 3200 pages with a circulation of 8000 copies. It has been distributed among judges, lawyers, prosecutors, officials of legislative and executive authorities, universities of jurisprudence and non-governmental organisations.
PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Inclusive and sustainable development builds on equal rights enjoyed by men and women and their equal opportunities to participate in social, political, economic, legislative and other areas as well as on practical realisation of these rights.

Over the last ten years UNDP efforts have contributed to an expansion of the public influence of women in Belarus. Large-scale advocacy work has outreach government officials, representatives of non-governmental organisations, the mass media and students. Assistance has been provided for the elaboration of a National Action Plan on Ensuring Gender Equality in Belarus; the concept of a Law on Gender Equality has been drafted; gender-mainstreamed Masters’ courses on business administration for women have been opened.

Today UNDP facilitates promotion of gender equality in Belarus within the framework of the UN information campaign against domestic violence and through the integration of gender dimensions into its current activities. UNDP works to secure real access to the sphere of decision-making for Belarusian women by influencing public opinion to foster a more conducive social environment for active women. Particular attention is paid to collecting and analysing data disaggregated by gender and to gender-sensitive communication.

SAFE LIVELIHOODS IN THE CHERNOBYL-AFFECTED AREAS

The Chernobyl catastrophe of 26 April 1986 remains one of the biggest man-made disasters in world history. 23% of Belarus’ territory was contaminated with radioactive fallout. Nearly 1.5 million people (about 15% of the country’s population) still reside in the contaminated areas.

UNDP support is built upon a holistic approach, as articulated in the UN Report “The Human Consequences of the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident. A Strategy for Recovery”. In Belarus the Strategy is intended to improve the living environment of the population in the affected areas and envisages support for local community initiatives aiming to create better social and economic conditions in towns and villages.

In 2004-2008 UNDP administered a Support Project for the Programme “Cooperation for Rehabilitation” (CORE Programme) in the Chernobyl-affected areas, which was implemented in four pilot districts (Chachersk, Brahin, Stolin and Slausnarad districts). UNDP has made an important contribution to the successful implementation of 73 development initiatives at the district level which have been financed in whole or in part by national, foreign, and international donors.

A joint project of UNDP and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) “Family Health” was implemented in the Stolin District of the Brest Region from 2007 to 2009. The project organised a series of training seminars and events for residents of the district (including health professionals and teachers), covering such issues as healthy motherhood, fatherhood and childhood in radioactively contaminated areas, reproductive health, paediatrics, psychology and the basics of radiation medicine. The “Dialogue” Counselling and Information Centre was opened in the Stolin district hospital as part of the project.

Under the joint initiative of EU and UNDP “Combat the negative effects of the Chernobyl disaster in Belarus”, two projects were implemented in 2009-2010: the establishment of an International Research Treatment Centre for thyroid diseases and the Area-Based Development (ABD) of the affected areas. The aggregate project budget totalled Euro 2.6 million. The ABD project has implemented 61 project initiatives in local communities, focusing on health services, energy saving, sport and promotion of safe livelihoods in the contaminated areas. Over 9500 people benefited from improved life standards in these districts.

MARIA SHARAPOVA – UNDP GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

The world tennis star became a UNDP Goodwill Ambassador in 2007. In summer 2010, Maria Sharapova visited the Gomel Region, Belarus, where she has family roots and where her charitable foundation has supported a number of UNDP youth projects. In addition, the Maria Sharapova Foundation finances a scholarship programme for students from radioactively contaminated areas.

“It has always been my dream to contribute to the recovery of a region where I have a personal connection,” said Maria Sharapova. “Giving young people the tools they need to reach for their dreams is a good way to overcome the Chernobyl legacy. Helping people help themselves is at the heart of UNDP’s mission.”

During her visit to Gomel Region Maria Sharapova announced that she would make an additional contribution of US$ 250,000 to expand UNDP-supported programmes in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine involving sports and physical activities for youth in areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster.

ABBREVIATIONS:

EU European Union
GEF Global Environment Facility
OSCE Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UNCTAD UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID United States Agency for International Development
WHO World Health Organisation
WTO World Trade Organisation