



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

# Empowering Lives, Building Resilience

## Development Stories from Europe and Central Asia

**volume two**

United Nations  
Development Programme

This publication was produced by the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) in August 2012. It is the second volume in a series devoted to documenting transformational success stories in the Europe and Central Asia region.

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*COVER PHOTO: Arlinda Hajdari has gained valuable skills as a machine operator for a company in Kosovo (UN Security Council Resolution 1244, 1999). With UNDP support, thousands of young people have found jobs in the private sector. See the story on page 17.*

Photo credit: Alexia Skok

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

# Letter from the Administrator



I am pleased to introduce volume two of *Empowering Lives, Building Resilience*, a compendium of human development stories from Europe and Central Asia. Each story shows how development assistance—sustained over time—leads to tangible improvements in people’s lives and builds more resilient nations.

Each story you are about to read demonstrates the transformational change that occurs when development interventions strengthen local institutions, and create opportunities for people to fulfill their potential.

When such positive change takes place, the impact continues far beyond the life of our projects.

There are common qualities to transformational change, regardless of the context or country in which it takes place. Some critical characteristics of successful transformational change include: measurable results; strong partnerships with governments and civil society; and improved national capacity to manage development projects autonomously.

UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations which can withstand crisis, and drive the kind of sustainable growth which is the foundation of strong and resilient nations. On the ground in 177 countries and territories, we offer a global perspective and local insight, and have succeeded in improving the lives of people all around the world—as the remarkable stories in this publication show.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Helen Clark  
*UNDP Administrator*

# Foreword



The second volume of *Empowering Lives, Building Resilience* features stories of development success achieved by countries in Europe and Central Asia, the outcome of joint collaborations between UNDP and national governments. It is the second volume of a series that seeks to demonstrate transformational changes that only sustained, long-term efforts can bring about.

Supporting employment creation, meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, managing the environment responsibly, crisis prevention and disaster recovery are the main thematic areas covered in this volume. All are important drivers of sustainable, inclusive and poverty-alleviating development.

Each story documents how UNDP responds to the demands of governments in Europe and Central Asia, delivering sophisticated policy support that mitigates the impact of economic and environmental shocks that have the potential to push populations back into poverty.

Building effective, transparent and accountable government institutions, strengthening civil society organizations, and supporting the development of the private sector—while keeping the focus on people and their needs—is at the core of what UNDP and its partners do every day. These stories provide vivid examples of ‘triple-win’ strategies that aim to advance at once social, economic and environmental objectives.

I am very pleased to share these stories with our partners and the broader public, and trust that the examples and good practices that they provide will help motivate others in the region and beyond to strengthen their support and commitment to development cooperation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cihan Sultanoglu". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Cihan Sultanoglu  
*UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director,  
Regional Bureau for Europe and the  
Commonwealth of Independent States*

# Introduction

This publication highlights successful projects of UNDP and our partners that promote inclusive, resilient and sustainable development in Europe and Central Asia. From Romania, to Tajikistan, to Turkey, to Moldova, each story offers examples of how development cooperation can make lasting changes in people's lives, and highlights solutions that can be replicated or scaled up in this region, as well as outside it.

Despite the relatively high average income in the region's middle-income countries, large numbers of people are poor or at risk of falling into poverty. Growing inequalities, due to social, economic and political exclusion, remain a challenge. And environmental degradation, in a region where some countries are among the world's highest emitters of greenhouse gases per unit of gross domestic product (GDP), poses additional threats.

Analysed together, these stories showcase UNDP's role and value added in middle-income countries. They demonstrate how UNDP has contributed to building the capabilities of government institutions, civil society and the private sector by providing seed funding and expertise, and by bringing different parties together.

UNDP responds to the demands of governments in Europe and Central Asia for sophisticated policy support that mitigates the impact of economic and environmental shocks, which have the potential to reverse development gains and push populations back into poverty. Countries have demonstrated that they value our contributions, and in most instances, they share the costs of UNDP-implemented projects.

The stories in this publication illustrate how our work achieves transformational change, which occurs when development interventions demonstrate measurable results and national governments take ownership of the process. Such work is often innovative, drawing on good practices from other countries and regions. It also benefits from national, regional and international partnerships, which convert organizational synergies into results on the ground. Put another way, transformational change comprises:

**NATIONAL OWNERSHIP:** This occurs when national, regional or local governments, civil society and the private sector see the benefit of a development intervention, and take the work forward. Long-term transformational change depends on the will and ability of national counterparts to own the work and scale it up.

**CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT:** Establishing new government functions or strengthening existing ones is a prerequisite for transformational change. Development cooperation must be anchored in an institutional development objective. Without the organizational abilities of government, civil society and the private sector; enabling policies and legislation; and people to carry on the work, development interventions will likely cease when the donor funding ends—however valuable the immediate results.

**KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION:** UNDP's ability to draw on a global knowledge network, and to bring in experience and good practices, especially from other parts of Europe and Central Asia, may be one of its most valuable contributions. There is a high demand for sharing innovative approaches, to which UNDP responds effectively through its network of country, regional and global offices.

**PARTNERSHIPS:** Partnerships are critical for transformational change. Bilateral donors, multilateral funds, other UN agencies, international and regional organizations including financial institutions, and civil society groups enable the mobilization of expertise, capacities and financial resources necessary for transformational change.

This publication reflects the four focus areas of UNDP's work: poverty, inequality and social inclusion; good and effective governance; energy and environment; and crisis prevention and post-conflict recovery. Three out of its four sections are devoted specifically to these areas, while the focus on good and effective governance is reflected in all the stories. (For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNDP support helped public employment offices more effectively provide services to youth.) Ensuring gender equality is also an objective in most of the stories. Since we often implement projects *across* countries, as many development challenges go beyond borders, we have included a section on regional initiatives.

While serving country needs, UNDP has also taken the lead in advocating for the global development agenda. We help national counterparts understand the significance of sustainable development, and the emerging post-2015 development agenda. This responsibility is all the more urgent in view of the conclusions of the June 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

As the global community is pursuing a sustainable development agenda, the process will involve a two-way dialogue, as many countries of the region have become donors in their own right, contributing to global knowledge and sharing expertise with less developed nations. In this process, UNDP will play a critical role. We will not only help governments fulfil their development agendas, but also provide high-level policy advice that they can employ to help other nations.

# Overview of Stories

UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. On the ground in 177 countries and territories, we offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations.

The stories featured in this publication are grouped according to three priority themes: poverty, inequality and social inclusion; energy and environment; and, crisis response and post-conflict recovery. Regional initiatives are presented in a separate section.

## POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

**Lack of job opportunities, growing inequalities, discrimination and marginalization of vulnerable groups—including people with disabilities and minorities such as the Roma—call for targeted support to meet specific needs.**

### Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Job and a Future for Youth

Nearly 60 percent of young people cannot find the jobs they need to start adult lives. But employment services had never targeted their specific needs until a joint UN programme, with UNDP as one of five partners, helped set up 16 youth-focused Centres for Information, Counselling and Education. In their first 14 months of operation, the centres provided career counselling and skills training to more than 6,800 young people, while almost 1,800 youth gained their first work experience.

### Turkmenistan: People with Disabilities Move Forward

Turkmenistan has been working to ensure that people with disabilities have equal chances to live and work. From 2005 to 2009, UNDP has supported the country's Deaf and Blind Society to help more than 220 people with visual and hearing impairments gain productive employment. The work coincided with Turkmenistan's accession in 2008 to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. A 2011 conference in Turkmenistan provided a landmark platform to speak openly about the issue.

### Kosovo: Finding a Job, Gaining a Foothold

Kosovo has struggled with crippling unemployment in the aftermath of conflict during 1998-1999. A joint programme with UNDP as one of the partners has helped Kosovo give 10,000 young people professional vocational training tailored to the needs of the private sector. Some 5,000 young people have found jobs with private companies. Moreover, the Government has adopted many elements of the programme in its employment strategy, validating its contributions.



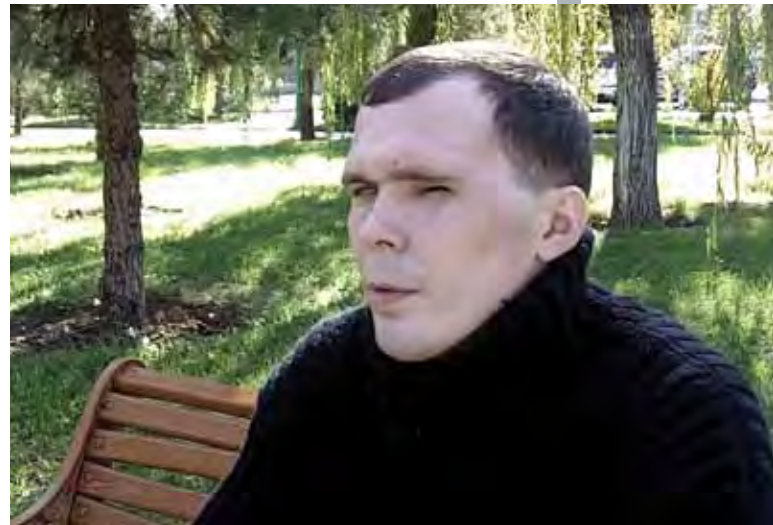
*With new skills from specialized job centres, youth find employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

© UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina



### Romania: Incubating Businesses, Supporting Entrepreneurship

As part of its bid to join the European Union in 2007, the Government of Romania was seeking to foster entrepreneurship as an alternative to reliance on state-owned enterprises for employment. UNDP helped create a network of 10 incubators that gave life to over 200 starts-ups from 2006 to 2012. The programme gave people the tools to become owners of their future, rather than relying on state-owned firms. In 2002, according to the latest government statistics, small and medium-sized enterprises employed about half the workforce in the industrial and services sector. By 2008, this proportion had increased to almost two-thirds.



*Yuriy Kulik of Turkmenistan lost his sight during adolescence, but has since found his calling as a masseur.*

© UNDP Turkmenistan

## ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

**Countries in parts of Europe and Central Asia have some of the world's highest levels of greenhouse gas emissions, as estimated per unit of GDP. There is considerable potential for reducing carbon emissions and mitigating climate change, along with restoring and maintaining rich natural habitats and biodiversity.**

### Tajikistan: Putting Environmental Resources in Local Hands

In Tajikistan, the poorest of the Central Asian countries, national resources remain limited, including to stem environmental losses in the Vakhsh river valley. Facing accelerating degradation, UNDP partnered with the Global Environment Facility to put the management of natural resources in the hands of the people who use them. In one area with endangered tugai forests, a Community Forestry Management Committee has overseen a 90 percent decline in tree-cutting since 2008, which has allowed the forest to regenerate and provide fuel for localities.

### Kazakhstan: Preserving the Wetlands, Protecting the Economy

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the wetlands of Kazakhstan fell into steep decline. Many local inhabitants were left with little work other than illegal poaching. Bird and fish populations began to decrease, and the ecological balance faced serious disruption. UNDP assisted in securing Ramsar-protected status for more than 1.6 million hectares of wetlands. Illegal fishing has fallen by up to 62 percent in three project sites. Residents from 500 villages have developed eco-friendly business ventures, and more than \$3.2 million was raised for sustainable biodiversity projects.

### Moldova: Big Plans for Biomass

For years, Moldovans struggled under a heavy burden of expensive imported fuel. Now the Government has committed to increasing the share of renewable energy to up to 20 percent of national consumption by 2020. UNDP is helping 60 villages in 12 districts convert heating systems in public institutions and residences to use biomass, made from readily available agricultural wastes. This has been good for local businesses too: The number of biomass fuel makers increased four times in the first year of the project.



*Biomass fuel means cheaper heating for children in a Moldovan kindergarten.*

© UNDP Moldova

### Turkey: Lighting the Way to Sustainability

Changes in Turkey's natural resources management are taking place amid growing concern about environmental threats and a shift to greater local democracy. UNDP has worked with the Government to establish and manage the Kure Mountains National Park, considered one of Europe's top 100 forest hotspots. Now it is a growing centre for ecotourism and a model for park management in Turkey. Both forestry officials and local NGOs sit on bodies that oversee the park, while communities in the buffer zone around it engage in decisions to protect the landscape and wildlife.

## CRISIS RESPONSE AND POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY

**Conflict has swept through a number of states, and disasters have struck unexpectedly. Recovery efforts have focused on removing the remnants of war, and fostering a return to peace, security and development.**

### Azerbaijan: A National Capacity for Mine Action

With mine clearance expected to take up to 40 years, UNDP has helped Azerbaijan set up its own fully functioning mine action agency. Nearly 186 square kilometres of land have been cleared and certified as safe, with the annual rate increasing from under a square kilometre a decade ago to around 30 square kilometres today. Azerbaijan is now sharing its successful strategies with other countries, including Afghanistan, Georgia and Turkey.

### Armenia: Increasing Resilience by Reducing the Risk of Disaster

As one of the 60 most disaster-prone countries in the world, Armenia faces a heightened risk of earthquakes, floods and other catastrophes. Eight out of every 10 Armenians are at risk of suffering a disaster. Ten years ago UNDP brought in international expertise to help the country develop a national disaster risk reduction system. It also bolstered preparedness at the community level by cleaning 5,000 metres of drainage systems and 500 metres of mudflow channels, as well as building 1,500 metres of soil dams.



*Azerbaijan has built an internationally recognized agency to remove landmines and explosive remnants of war.*

© UNDP Azerbaijan

## Cyprus: Bringing Down Barriers to Peace

Cyprus has been divided since 1974. A line stretching across the island, from west to east, separates the Turkish Cypriot community in the north, from the Greek Cypriot community in the south. The road between the villages of Limnitis/Yeşilirmak in the north and Kato Pyrgos in the south had been closed—until UNDP helped to reconnect it in 2010. Making a tangible difference in the everyday lives of people, the initiative has supported the peace process.

## REGIONAL INITIATIVES

**Countries in the Europe and Central Asia region share a legacy of socialism and environmental challenges that go beyond borders. Such common challenges demand programmes that are implemented in multiple countries.**

### Empowering the Roma to Overcome Adversity

In Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, many Roma lack legal documents, which prevents them from getting a job, and deprives them of access to health care and other social services. Many have limited opportunities to improve their lives, and they don't get support from national authorities. Benefitting over 34,000 people, a UNDP-implemented programme gave hundreds of Roma legal status, strengthened policies by embedding Roma coordinators in local government institutions, and helped the Roma organize projects to improve their livelihoods. The work continues as national authorities have assumed responsibilities previously carried out by the programme.

### Lake Prespa: Promoting Conservation, Protecting Livelihoods

A globally significant ecosystem shared by Albania, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Lake Prespa is home to over 2,000 species of plants and animals. But for over 40 years, local farming had exposed the area to harmful chemicals, over-exploited water resources and mismanaged the disposal of solid waste. Sustainable farming techniques have been introduced with the support of UNDP. Some 6,000 hectares of forests have been returned to their original splendor. Approximately 2,000 hectares of habitats for birds, fish and rare plants now thrive. More than 600 square metres of riverbed have been restored.

*Lake Prespa  
now has a  
brighter future.*

© UNDP The  
former Yugoslav  
Republic of Macedonia



# Poverty, Inequality and Social Inclusion

Bosnia and  
Herzegovina



*To get a job at  
Moj Market,  
Aleksandar Vrhovac  
first had to learn how  
to market himself.*

© UNDP Bosnia  
and Herzegovina

## Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Job and a Future for Youth

Bosnia and Herzegovina's contracting economy, smaller than it was in 1990, has posed problems for many people, but especially youth. Nearly 60 percent cannot find the jobs they need to start adult lives. Many consider leaving the country, dreaming of better prospects abroad.

Aleksandar Vrhovac is one. "I did not want to leave Bosnia," he says firmly. "But I was constantly searching for a job, going from interview to interview, with no success. Many young people become so discouraged. It feels useless to make an effort."

At 25, Aleksandar had no previous work experience. He knew nothing about how to prepare a resume, look for a job or present himself in an interview—until he went to one

of the new Centres for Information, Counselling and Education, known as CISO centres, opening across the country.

There, he finally learned the basics of how to market himself to prospective employers. One of his next interviews landed him a job at Moj Market, a national retail chain. “CISO staff really encouraged me and gave me confidence, and that has paid off,” he says, adding, “I’m so happy to be able to work.”

Aleksandar has found a footing to start his adult life. Bosnia and Herzegovina has kept a young person who can contribute to its future, instead of its brain drain.

## Services just for young people

The CISO centres emerged from a collaborative UN initiative involving UNDP, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In 2009, in partnership with the Government and with the assistance of the Government of Spain, the five organizations came together under the umbrella Youth Employability and Retention Programme. Its aims include assisting the country’s network of Public Employment Institutes to do a better job in supporting young people.

The programme introduced a novel approach in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Instead of assuming that all unemployed people need the same kinds of support, it launched the CISO centres with services specifically tailored to young people new to the job market.

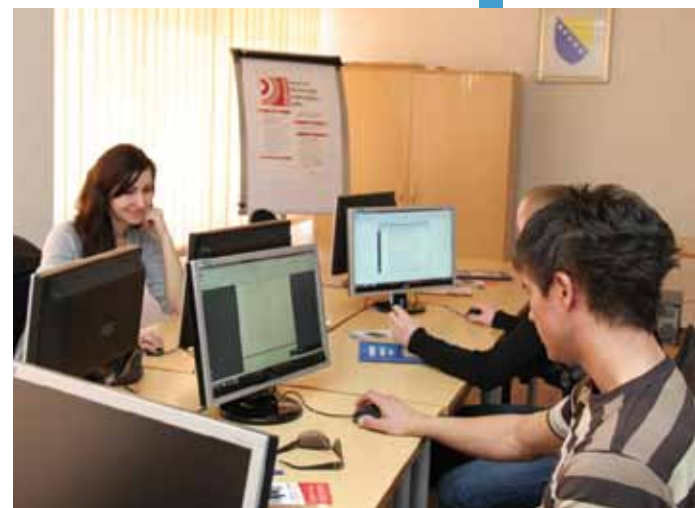
In the past, the Public Employment Institutes mainly performed basic functions such as registering the newly jobless and validating official documents. The CISO centres, while sponsored by the institutes, are proactive in reaching out to youth. They teach them how to write resumes, succeed in job interviews, develop job searches, bolster computer skills, and find work placements and internships.

Across the country, 16 centres now provide standardized, quality services to unemployed youth, an important step towards reducing inequalities in opportunities especially for rural youth, who typically have fewer resources. In their first 14 months of operation, the centres provided career counselling and skills training to more than 6,800 young people, while almost 1,800 youth gained their first work experience.

A scheme for sharing job ads on the CISO Facebook page has made the former discouraging trek to the Public Employment Institute to search for ads on a worn-out bulletin board a distant memory. Wherever they are located, young people can tap into the online system for information, as well as connections to CISO advisors and other jobseekers. The page had 11 million hits in its first year.

*Unemployed  
youth gain  
job skills at a  
CISO centre.*

© UNDP Bosnia  
and Herzegovina



## Overcoming scepticism

A number of factors helped the CISO centres take root. One of the most important was the UN programme's willingness to acknowledge and address widespread scepticism about the value of this new kind of service. People in the Public Employment Institutes had become used to thinking of their responsibilities in a certain way. The public was used to services that did not meet all their demands.

A starting point was to foster interest and ownership among existing Public Employment Institutes staff. The programme began by building relationships with high-level officials as well as mid-level managers and service directors charged with daily administration. Concerted advocacy convinced decision-makers to invest in the programme's success by financing some of the training and recruitment of CISO staff.

The programme team held meetings and workshops explaining the potential benefits of the youth-focused centres; once they began operating, additional sessions shared early successes and lessons. Favourable media coverage helped send home the message that change was necessary for the future of the country. Officials of the Public Employment Institutes were particularly receptive to this, because it helped mitigate public perceptions that they had not done enough in a time of widespread unemployment.

Another early priority was to ensure that the new services would be high quality, relevant to young people, and would stimulate demand. Towards that end, UNDP worked with the Public Employment Institutes on in-depth training of CISO staff, including youth-focused techniques for one-on-one job counselling. While specific to the centres, the training built on a larger platform already in place for institute staff, minimizing extra administrative burdens.

Different UN agencies contributed diverse sources of expertise as the new services were planned and delivered. UNDP offered inputs on assessing labour markets to tailor counselling services, while UNICEF assisted in establishing life skills education to help youth manage personal and professional affairs. UNV has helped young people explore volunteering as a source of job-related experience.

Different UN agencies contributed diverse sources of expertise as the new services were planned and delivered. UNDP offered inputs on assessing labour markets to tailor counselling services, while UNICEF assisted in establishing life skills education to help youth manage personal and professional affairs. UNV has helped young people explore volunteering as a source of job-related experience.

## Sustaining a good practice

Bosnia and Herzegovina, like many countries, operates in a time of austerity, with a freeze on hiring additional public employees. Nonetheless, support for sustaining the CISO centres has been strong. The Government helped find space for several of them, and the Public Employment Institutes have begun modifying regulations to incorporate CISO operating expenses in their own budgets—nine of the centres are on track for integration by the end of 2012, with the remaining six to follow.

### CISO centres extend across the country



Plans call for opening an additional 14 centres, in part by building on links with an existing network of job clubs financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. In the interim, some individual institute directors have begun allowing CISO staff to travel and provide services in areas that do not yet have their own centres.

For its part, the UN system remains active on other critical dimensions of youth employment. One initiative is tracking school dropouts through municipal databases so that authorities can understand what causes dropouts and develop effective strategies to encourage young people to return to school.

In areas with high rates of migration, primary and high schools have used IOM assistance to make youth more aware of potential dangers of going abroad, such as false job advertisements and risks of exploitation. UNFPA is helping to develop the first national system to monitor youth migration trends, a critical input for devising accurate laws and policies in response.

While over the longer term, Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy will need to grow to provide more young people with jobs, for now, some are at least better equipped to navigate through difficult times.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- First employment services specifically for young people.
- 16 centres across the country, including in marginalized areas
- Career counselling and skills training provided to more than **6,800 young people** in the first 14 months of operation; almost 1,800 youth gained their first work experience.
- **11 million** hits on Facebook in one year.
- Public Employment Institutes are **integrating the centres** in their own operations.

*Visually impaired women learn massage techniques that will help them make a new start in life.*

© UNDP Turkmenistan



## Turkmenistan: People With Disabilities Move Forward

Yuriy Kulik might have remained unemployed, relegated to the fringes of society in Turkmenistan. After losing his sight as a teenager, he could not find a job that would accommodate his disability.

But in 2005 Kulik took part in an intensive course that taught him how to adapt and function without his sight. It taught him how to read and write in Braille, and gave him the skills to become a professional masseur.

“I am happy that I can help people,” says Kulik, adding that the course helped him regain his confidence.

The course he took is offered by the Deaf and Blind Society of Turkmenistan (DBS), with the support of UNDP. It teaches people with disabilities not only basic literacy, but also how to function outdoors and learn a skill, such as carpentry and sewing (for the hearing impaired) in addition to massage (for the visually impaired).

From 2005 to 2009, the programme helped more than 220 visually and hearing-impaired individuals gain a new start in life. About 80 percent of graduates got jobs: some people from the provinces set up their own private businesses at home, while others work for DBS.

For its part, UNDP has helped DBS train sign language interpreters to support DBS’ efforts in training the hearing impaired, including children. It bought minibuses, as well as



computer equipment to produce audio books. UNDP trained DBS employees in financial and economic management to run a business effectively.

The Society has a number of enterprises—a sewing workshop, a publishing house, as well as facilities producing locks, cartons and other items. Many graduates of the programme work in these enterprises.

Currently, its garment enterprise in the city of Turkmenbashi is working at full capacity, thanks to orders for mattresses, bed linen and work uniforms from local oil refineries. The garment workshop's quarterly profits have increased to 90,000 mantas (\$32,000), resulting in salary increases for its visually and hearing-impaired workers (from \$60 to \$180 per month).

The Society relies in part on profits from its enterprises to support its operations. But because the profits don't cover its operating expenses, the initiative has received \$685,000 in funding from the European Union, UNDP and the Asian Blind Union.

## Providing special attention for the hearing and sight impaired

People who become visually or hearing impaired after birth require special attention. They must learn basic reading, writing and orientation skills. They often don't have access to higher education and specialized medical facilities. Laws don't yet consistently protect their rights. Basic vocational training often doesn't exist. Those without a job must rely on minimal state support.

With 2,800 members, DBS pioneered an experimental two-month basic rehabilitation course for the visually or hearing impaired. From 2005 to 2009, 63 people from different parts of the country completed the elementary rehabilitation course in Ashgabat, the capital. At the same time, DBS organized a similar course in the provinces, where former students became teachers, inspiring and leading through example.

DBS also succeeded in creating more jobs for hearing-impaired women at a modernized garment workshop in Ashgabat, which had been upgraded with UNDP support and a grant from the European Union. Hearing-impaired workers were retrained to operate the modern equipment.

Funds were also utilized to educate the public about how disabled people can be full-fledged members of the workforce. Following a large-scale awareness-raising campaign on the local and national level, the project engaged local administrations in a dialogue on the needs and concerns of people with disabilities. UNDP was part of this process and made a significant contribution by publicizing the issue of disability in Turkmenistan.

UNDP project staff, together with DBS senior management, visited every province of Turkmenistan to meet with representatives of regional administrations, social and labour departments, and other stakeholders to advocate for more employment opportunities for the visually and hearing impaired. Together they gathered statistics on those living in the provinces in order to better recruit people for the rehabilitation programme in Ashgabat.

UNDP also supported the visit to Turkmenistan of Diana Gurtskaya, a visually impaired pop singer. She gave charity concerts in Ashgabat. Visually impaired singers, including children, from Turkmenistan, also sang at the concerts. Her visit helped to raise awareness about the capacities of disabled people.



*A training course teaches participants how to read and write in Braille.*

© UNDP Turkmenistan

## Promoting societal change

Now that the programme has transformed many people's lives, it is ready to be scaled up to the national level. Already, DBS is part of a larger story of change in Turkmenistan, a traditional society where even talking about people with disabilities has been taboo.

In 2008, the country reached a critical milestone, acceding to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which urges states to remove barriers and facilitate their full participation in society on an equal basis. It was the first Central Asian country to sign the Convention.

In June 2011, an international conference was held in Turkmenistan on the challenges faced by people with disabilities, giving them a platform to speak with national partners about their problems. National television spotlighted the conference.

In December 2011, for the first time ever, members of the Mejlis (parliament) received Mohammed Al-Tarawneh, who uses a wheelchair and is a member of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They discussed making public spaces accessible for people with disabilities.

Then representatives of government ministries met with Al-Tarawneh to learn what they need to do to make their facilities accessible to people with disabilities.



*Yuriy Kulik (standing), who lost his sight during adolescence, now works as a masseur for the Deaf and Blind Society.*

© UNDP Turkmenistan

## Advancing the social inclusion of people with disabilities

The work continues by strengthening the trainers' capabilities and increasing the number of persons benefiting from the programme. Between 2009 and 2012, 10 graduates of the rehabilitation programme have helped retrain approximately 50 visually impaired individuals in all five provinces of Turkmenistan.

In the next two years, UNDP and the Deaf and Blind Society will work together to sustain the successful rehabilitation of people with disabilities as part of a new project co-funded by the Finnish Fund for Local Cooperation.

As part of this project, UNDP and DBS will promote employment opportunities for the visually and hearing impaired through forums and consultations with state employment centres. Efforts will be made to revise labour legislation and policies regarding employment of the visually and hearing impaired.

Most important, the project will support the Government's efforts to revise national legislation in order to comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and to develop a National Action Plan targeting persons with all forms of disabilities.

Turkmenistan aims to build a state that abides by the inclusive motto, "A State for the People." By fostering a culture that is open to people with disabilities, the country is slowly edging towards this goal.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 220 people with visual and hearing impairments gain productive employment through an innovative programme.
- Turkmenistan acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in 2008.
- A 2011 conference hosted by Turkmenistan provided a landmark platform to speak openly about the issue of disability.



*Florentina Hajdari is training to become a machine operator, one of thousands who have found opportunities with private companies.*

© Alexia Skok

## Kosovo: Finding a Job, Gaining a Foothold

Kosovo is still struggling to improve its economy after the conflict in 1998-1999. Almost one out of every two persons is without employment. For people 25 or younger, the share rises to eight out of ten. Women and minorities are especially affected. Such rampant joblessness has been seen as a principal threat to social stability.

Since 1999, UNDP has been working with Kosovo to help increase employment by strengthening the offices that help people find jobs. Results include: better information about the job market; enhanced vocational training; more effective job counselling; and improved employment prospects for youth and people with disabilities.

Avni Gallopeni, 25, had everything going for him—except a job and an income. A smart, ambitious graphic designer with a university degree, he searched for employment for three years, only to see doors slam in his face.

“After several failures one after another, I made my way to an employment office,” recalled Gallopeni, who was born in the village of Doberdolan, in rural Kosovo.

With assistance from the office, Gallopeni got an internship at SOLID, a shoe manufacturer in nearby Suhareka. There he put his graphical skills to work designing footwear. After finishing the internship in 2011, the company gave him a job.

## A longstanding commitment to employment support

Work on boosting employment started with a €9 million project funded by the Government of Italy and the European Agency for Reconstruction, overseen by the European Union and UNDP. The initiative helped 25,000 people from 1999 to 2001. Beneficiaries were engaged in public works projects to help rebuild Kosovo after the conflict. Local communities were involved in the selection of projects. People targeted included minorities, people with disabilities and the unskilled.

In 2004, short-term employment programmes were scaled up. They aimed to create short-term public sector jobs and provide vocational training to people with no professional skills. Working closely with 29 municipalities across Kosovo, UNDP initiated 73 public works projects. They included: de-silting irrigation channels, improving school yards, clearing space for long-distance power lines, cleaning river beds, and draining solid waste from lakes and commercial channels.

The programme provided jobs for 3,200 unemployed, 15 percent were minorities—mainly Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians and Serbs. The project received financial support from the Governments of Denmark and Norway, and from the Kosovo Government.



*Astrit Ceraku, enrolled in a vocational education programme, is preparing to become a car mechanic.*

© Alexia Skok

## From short-term relief to sustainable job creation

A private sector employment initiative soon followed the public works programme. UNDP joined forces with Kosovo's Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Together they helped young people gain job skills and seek opportunities with private employers.

Vocational training centres across Kosovo launched courses in the 16 most sought-after professions in manufacturing, trade and construction. To attract interest from private companies, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare signed agreements with 3,500 firms over a five-year period to enrol young jobseekers in training and apprenticeship programmes. Companies willing to employ graduates of the vocational courses were offered half of the monthly minimum wage for each worker employed for a period of six months.

One beneficiary was Lirie Gerbavci, 27, who had been unemployed for two years before the programme helped her find an internship at Xhejsa, a paper manufacturing company in Ferizaj. She was trained as a machine operator and has been working for the company ever since.

"Life is much better now," she said. "I can now support my family, cover my own expenses, and I am not a burden to others."

UNDP's assistance also extended to seven key regional employment centres across Kosovo. In cooperation with the ILO, UNDP organized coaching sessions for 50 employment counsellors and eight vocational trainers to teach them how to provide individual assistance to jobseekers, prepare training plans for youth and advise on self-employment opportunities.

Since 2005, some 10,000 young people have gained qualifications and skills adapted to the needs of the private sector. Forty-six percent of graduates from the vocational

programmes have found jobs in the private sector. Young women comprise 45 percent of the beneficiaries. UNDP also closely worked with community groups and associations to encourage the engagement of national minorities and people with disabilities.

One such person with disabilities is Halim Xhelili, visually impaired from birth. He lives in Kamenica, a remote town in southeast Kosovo. Because of his disability, he never had job opportunities. “People like me were not even considered for a job. I tried several times to find employment in the private sector, but all my efforts failed,” Xhelili said.

When Xhelili heard about the employment programme, he applied to the Regional Employment Centre in Gjilan, a city close to his village. Counsellors at the centre studied Xhelili’s credentials and offered him on-the-job training as a librarian at the Centre for Visually Impaired People.

“I never thought I could do it, but I pushed myself to go ahead with the training,” Xhelili says. “I wanted to prove that people with disabilities are not a burden to society. We can learn new skills and use them to make a living.”



*Qendresa Bujupi is getting on-the-job training at a meat processing company.*

© Alexia Skok

## Scaling up

In 2009, the Government of Kosovo endorsed a three-year Employment Strategy, outlining priorities and policies aimed at helping young people access the labour market. Specific actions noted in the strategy, such as public works programmes, on-the-job and pre-employment training, internships and apprenticeships with private companies, were piloted and proved effective by the UNDP-supported employment programme.

UNDP has continued its assistance to Kosovo employment offices and vocational training centres, as well as private companies in developing employment policies and setting up services for jobseekers. Together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, UNDP is working to establish a Labour Market Information System—a web-based platform that will provide information on labour supply and demand imbalances, job vacancies and training opportunities to employers, jobseekers and the Government.

“I wanted to prove that people with disabilities are not a burden to society.”

– Halim Xhelili, who is visually impaired, got a job as a librarian

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 10,000 young people in Kosovo received vocational training tailored to the needs of the private sector.
- 3,500 private companies enrolled young jobseekers in training and apprenticeship programmes.
- The Government has incorporated key elements of the employment programme into its three-year Strategy.
- 5,000 young people found jobs with private companies.

Jorj Pavel Dimitriu  
of the Brasov  
Business Incubator  
has gained the  
opportunity to  
interact with other  
entrepreneurs.

© UNDP Romania



## Romania: Incubating Businesses, Supporting Entrepreneurship

In 2006, Csaba Kiss was thinking of launching his box manufacturing company in a new business incubator in Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania. Given the country's unpredictable business climate, he had legitimate concerns: Would he really benefit from the business advice that it offered? Wouldn't it later demand a share of his company? Furthermore, would the incubator *itself* be in business in a few years' time?

Such questions were common in Romania then. Business incubators were new, and many people viewed joining one as a high-risk endeavour. They had grown used to the security of employment in state-owned enterprises, but were now looking for new livelihoods, as many of them had lost work due to economic restructuring.

The government was promoting incubators as a vehicle to stimulate new investment and encourage entrepreneurship. Supporting small business as an alternative to failing state enterprises became a key priority as the country prepared to join the European Union in 2007.

Despite his reservations, Csaba took the risk. He launched his box-manufacturing company, TriBox, in the incubator with two employees and \$10,000 in capital. He spent three years in the facility, where he received a \$7,000 grant, subsidized rent, free access to business development advice, and the opportunity to collaborate with 19 other start-ups.

In 2009, TriBox became a self-sufficient business and left the incubator. It employed 11 workers and had robust annual revenues of \$732,000, despite the global financial crisis of 2008, which had sent many businesses into bankruptcy.

“I wouldn’t turn any order down no matter how large or atypical,” he said, adding that he even has a contract with BMW, the German automaker, to supply a nearby factory with boxes for auto parts.

### A coordinated enterprise

TriBox is one of 200 businesses that have received assistance from a network of incubators established between 2006 and 2012 with support from UNDP, the Romanian National Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), and local municipalities.

The last provided the land and often the space for the business incubators. UNDP coordinated the programme, including hiring administrators for each incubator, overseeing the recruitment of companies, providing training, reporting on results, and assisting administrators with financial and operational management.

By the first quarter of 2012, the network consisted of 10 incubators. Most had been placed in disadvantaged counties in central and northeast Romania. To date, the incubators have created 450 new jobs, 47 percent of which have been filled by women.

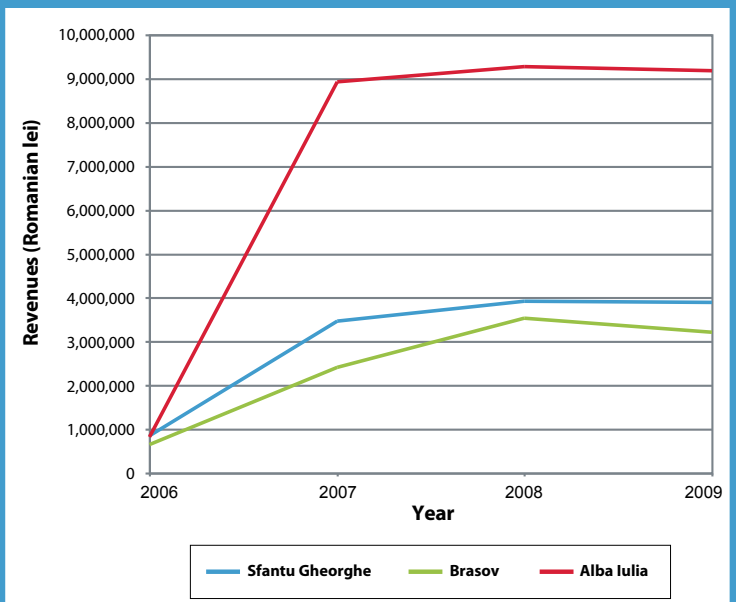
Each incubator hosts between 16 and 24 businesses for a period of three years. Industries represented include textile, food product, consulting, radio broadcasting, IT, security, construction and heating companies. Businesses are expected to leave the incubator after the three-year cycle.

According to research conducted by UNDP, a business that starts in an incubator has a higher chance of survival in the first five years of its life. Global studies carried out in the early 2000s reveal that 50 to 80 percent of newly established enterprises go bankrupt in the first five years—in contrast with only 13 percent of firms in incubators.

By 2009, the survival rate among small and medium-sized enterprises in incubators in Brasov, Sfantu Gheorghe and Alba Iulia was 82 percent. Out of 56 start-ups that were in the incubators at the time, all but one completed the three-year cycle despite the severe economic slump.

The three business incubators grew in size during the first three years, seeing a six-fold increase in revenues of hosted firms (see figure).

Total revenues of firms in each of three incubators, 2006-2009



### Establishing incubators in depressed regions

The Romanian Government turned to UNDP for help after passing a 2004 law on SMEs. Until then, small and medium-sized business development had tended to concentrate

in a limited number of more developed regions. The incubators that had gotten support lacked the capacity and resources to continue when donor funding ended. The new law aimed to establish incubators in economically depressed regions, where state-owned enterprises had been shut down and unemployment was high.

The Business Incubator Programme began in 2006 with a budget of \$800,000, funded by the Governments of Romania and Japan, UNDP and local municipalities. Due to the success of the programme, in 2010 the government increased annual funding to \$2 million, a strong sign of commitment amid a shrinking state budget. The programme also helped develop the capacity of the National Agency for SMEs, which is presently preparing to take over the management of the business incubators network from UNDP.

The support provided to this programme and related ones has contributed to the sizeable growth of the SME sector over the past 10 years. In 2002, according to the latest government statistics, SMEs employed about half the workforce in the industrial and services sector. By 2008, this share had increased to almost two-thirds.

Local municipalities, the key owners of the incubators, say that they can recoup their initial investment after about nine years. They recognize that incubators have helped to revitalize local communities. The programme has stimulated new income opportunities and helped foster a new entrepreneurial attitude.



*Ioana Ghila of the Mures Business Incubator crafts hand-made jewelry.*

© UNDP Romania

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Over 200 business start-ups received support.
- 450 jobs created.
- 82 percent survival rate in the first three business incubators.
- A network of 10 incubators located mostly in economically disadvantaged counties established.



# Energy and Environment



*Land degradation led to the collapse of this road.*

© UNDP Tajikistan.

Tajikistan

## Tajikistan: Putting Environmental Resources in Local Hands

Tajikistan's Vakhsh River valley is crucial to the livelihoods and food security of millions of people. But the degradation of natural resources has been persistent and extensive. Under the former Soviet system, the land was centrally managed, with decisions about agricultural and irrigation practices that took little account of impacts on local environments.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, poverty, civil war and population pressures exacted further tolls. An extensive network of irrigation systems fell into disrepair, leaving the earth waterlogged and choked with salt. Sand began to blow across the denuded landscape; landslides and floods occurred more frequently.

The consequences are starkly apparent in areas like the sub-district of Jura Nazarov. Almost all of its over 14,000 inhabitants depend on farming. But more than 70 percent of the land is no longer arable.

## Leaving a legacy behind

Tajikistan, with international support, has moved to leave behind the Soviet legacy of centralized state control, and adopt more sustainable policies and systems to manage its economy and environment. Still, it is the poorest of the Central Asian countries. National resources for stemming environmental losses in the Vakhsh River valley remain limited.

Given the urgency of the situation, UNDP, in partnership with the Global Environment Facility (GEF), has introduced a novel solution, considering the country's history. Starting in 2007, it has helped put the management of natural resources in the hands of local people who use them—and have some of the most immediate incentives for being judicious stewards.

In four districts of the valley, UNDP organized an initiative that has reached out to local officials and community members. Community meetings, awareness campaigns, theatre productions and school events have encouraged people to look up from daily subsistence struggles and consider the environmental threats they face. They then come together to work on plans to improve land use, turning to new and traditional know-how to both restore the environment and boost local economies.

The process gives people new confidence that they can manage difficult local issues, rather than expecting distant authorities to act, as was the case in the past. As one local leader, Gulshan Kulolova, says simply, “The project comes with the input of the people. They learned that they themselves can do something.”



*The project has brought local people into the management of natural resources.*

© UNDP Tajikistan

## Welcoming restrictions

One particular project focus has been the tugai forests, a priceless and highly endangered natural resource. Reservoirs of biodiversity, they are also a source of life essentials for people who live in and around them, giving wood for fuel and land for grazing animals, and supplying food through hunting and beekeeping.

Over the past 100 years, the forests have suffered massive losses. At first, they were largely cleared for agriculture. After the Soviet Union dissolved and public services declined, widespread felling of trees took place as rural people had no other sources of energy for cooking and heating their homes. A lack of regulation allowed timber dealers to move in from larger towns, stripping the forests of trees at an ever-escalating rate.

In the sub-district of Nuri Vakhsh, an area of 126 hectares of forest survives. UNDP in 2008 began working with community members to develop a system for protecting and regulating it. The Community Forestry Management Committee was formed, drawing members from five villages adjacent to the forest.

Since the forests technically belong to the state, an agreement was reached with local authorities to allow villagers to lease land at nominal rates for grazing. At the same time, they became responsible for regulating the number of livestock along with the cutting of trees. Dead wood was cleared and distributed for firewood.

After four years, an evaluation of the project found that grazing is being carefully managed. Tree-cutting has declined by 90 percent since 2008, allowing the forest to regenerate and provide fuel for localities in the medium term. Populations of birds and animals have increased by 50 percent. Community members say they feel a sense of pride and ownership in what they have been able to accomplish.

“Protecting the forests is a noble cause that should always be supported,” says Bekmurodov Kurbonmahmad, a member of the Community Forestry Management Committee.

Salima Bekmurodova, his wife, adds, “Restrictions are never welcomed by people, but now those involved in the protection of the forests can see the results.”

## The seeds of new thinking

Elsewhere in the Vakhsh valley, UNDP has assisted communities with other aspects of sustainable rural development. It has helped them establish user associations to manage water resources, for example, and carry out repairs of irrigation systems. Since most farmers once worked on large collective farms where they followed instructions and developed little technical knowledge, farmer field schools—one in each of the four districts covered by the project—have helped introduce appropriate agricultural techniques. Micro-credit facilities linked to the schools and managed locally have assisted farmers in securing low-cost loans to invest in new practices.

The combination of new knowledge and funding has achieved some dramatic results. A survey of participants in the schools found that two-thirds had introduced new crops and growing methods that have proven more productive and better suited to local conditions. The wasteful use of fertilizers has dropped—farmers who once dumped as much as 1,800 kilogrammes of nitrogen on a hectare now use only around 200 kilogrammes. Seventy-five percent of the respondents reported that they were able to sell additional crops, for a 25 percent increase in income, on average. The extra funds have gone into renovating family homes, hiring farm labour to expand production, de-silting drainage networks, repairing irrigation facilities and sending children to school.

Once farmers demonstrate new practices that work, they tend to spread. At one school, farmers reported pest control as a major problem, since chemical pesticides have become too expensive. The school helped identify traditional non-chemical methods that had been long forgotten. A few farmers agreed to try them, and soon they were being picked up across the district.

Achievements like these have scope for wider influence. Different aspects of UNDP’s Vakhsh valley initiatives have already been replicated in nine districts of Tajikistan, some under the GEF Small Grants Programme. Lessons will feed into the Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management.

“The project comes with the input of the people. They learned that they themselves can do something.”

– Gulshan Kulolova, a local leader



*Farmer field schools have introduced new, more productive crops and methods of cultivation.*

© UNDP Tajikistan

It has been formed to collect practical experiences in order to shape ongoing reforms of the agriculture sector across the region in ways consistent with sustainable land use and socioeconomic development.

The accomplishments in the Vakhsh valley are small steps. But in them lie the seeds of new thinking and new partnerships between people and the state, and between local communities and the natural resources they depend on.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Four districts** have put the management of natural resources in the hands of local people who use them—a novel step given Tajikistan's history of central control.
- Through new **community forestry committees** and water user associations, local people have learned they can take their own initiatives.
- In one area with an endangered tugai forest, tree-cutting has declined by **90 percent** since 2008, allowing the forest to regenerate and provide fuel for localities in the medium term.
- A survey of participants in farmer field schools found that two-thirds had introduced productive new crops and growing methods; income increased by an average of **25 percent**.
- **Project activities** have been replicated in nine other districts across Tajikistan.



*Valentina Zhakupbekova (second from the right) and other women display their handicrafts, which are made from materials found near the wetlands.*

© UNDP Kazakhstan

## Kazakhstan: Preserving the Wetlands, Protecting the Economy

Valentina Zhakupbekova had depended upon the exploitation of Kazakhstan's vast wetlands—a patchwork of thousands of square kilometres of rich soil and abundant lakes, with caviar-bearing fish, unique birds and aquatic flora. Her husband was an illegal poacher, supporting their four children with the fish he caught—until he drowned in a nearby lake.

With no employment and a family to feed, Zhakupbekova participated in a UNDP-supported workshop that taught her how to create felt products made from wool, a commodity in abundant supply.

Today, she sells her popular handmade slippers, boots and jewellery in a local retail shop that she opened. She supports herself and her children, and has trained seven other mothers in her trade, including people with disabilities. Her eldest son now attends college in Astana, the capital.

A successful entrepreneur, Zhakupbekova embodies the changes that are taking place around the wetlands: Slowly, people are switching from exploitative livelihoods to environmentally friendly occupations. Spearheading the move is the Government of Kazakhstan together with UNDP and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

## From decline to revitalization

The story of the wetlands is one of economic shock turning into environmental degradation. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economy around the wetlands fell into steep decline. Many villagers lost their jobs and were left with little work other than illegal poaching. Due to such activity, migrating birds and fish began to decrease in number, and the area's ecological balance faced serious disruption.

Even more damaging to the wetlands than poaching was unsustainable water extraction, particularly on the part of the agricultural industry. With no effective management plan in place, there was an excessive withdrawal of water for land irrigation, which decreased the region's water level.

A joint initiative by UNDP/GEF and the Government was created to salvage and protect the wetlands. The project focused on building an effective and sustainable management model in three areas: Alakol in the east, Tengiz-Korgalzhyn in the centre and the Ural River Delta in the west. It addressed the environmental and economic challenges related to poaching, water extraction and tourism.

As a result of the initiative, the vibrant, bio-diverse wetlands of Kazakhstan have begun to return to their previous splendour, and residents are finding a balance between economic and environmental sustainability.

## Environmental management

The first step in the joint initiative was for UNDP to facilitate Kazakhstan's ratification of the Ramsar Convention, a global environmental treaty for wetlands preservation. As a result, seven sites covering more than 1,626,700 hectares have now obtained Ramsar-protected status, and reserves in Tengiz-Korgalzhyn and Naursum have become the first sites in Central Asia to appear on the UNESCO Natural Heritage list. By signing the Ramsar Convention, the Government has made an internationally binding commitment to incorporate environmental concerns when developing water management policies.

UNDP helped initiate the revision of the country's water code, which introduced strict restrictions on the use of water in the wetlands and mandatory regulation for agricultural use. Another new law established restrictions on amateur fishing and hunting, and includes fines and penalties.

The project has achieved visible results: illegal fishing fell by 45 percent in 2010 in the Ural River Delta, by 62 percent in Tengiz-Korgalzhyn and by 40 percent in Alakol-Sasykkol, as compared with 2004. Wildfires consumed only 300 hectares in Tengiz-Korgalzhyn in 2010, down from 15,000 hectares in 2004.

The initiative also resulted in improved employment prospects. Key staff and decision makers, including government officials and workers in the wetlands, underwent extensive training programmes in wetland conservation and monitoring practices, learning how to sustain and manage wetlands. The project equipped protected areas with surveillance and patrolling units, creating jobs while simultaneously reducing illegal fishing, logging and poaching.

*Kazakhstan supports the largest population of waterfowl in Central Asia.*

© UNDP Kazakhstan





*Exhibits about the wetlands help communities become advocates for environmental protection.*

© UNDP Kazakhstan

## Promoting environmental awareness

In addition to promoting institutional change, the project centred on educating the public through media outreach campaigns, educational materials and training offered throughout Kazakhstan. Three visitor centres were established, including the Korgalzhyn Visitor Centre, opened in 2009, which is equipped with modern technology and is considered to be the most innovative centre of its type in Central Asia.

The project has also developed environmental and biodiversity courses and supplementary multimedia tools for schools across Kazakhstan. So far, 22 pilot schools near the three project sites have introduced wetland conservation into their curricula. Six of the schools have created classrooms for wetlands education.

## Benefits to the economy

The project took into consideration high unemployment levels in rural wetlands areas. A survey found that while there was a steady influx of birdwatchers and other tourists, there were no guest houses or accommodations available. There was clearly a need for developing businesses that boost the economy and promote ecology-friendly tourism.

UNDP introduced an alternative livelihoods and entrepreneurship programme to develop businesses in these rural communities. Within three pilot territories, UNDP allocated more than \$1 million for microcredit programmes to aid community business start-ups. Supported by the Government's country-wide microcredit programme, the initiative eventually expanded into 25 protected areas across the country, resulting in more than 34 projects and 150 new jobs.

Residents from 500 villages have developed business ventures such as building greenhouses, manufacturing souvenirs and clothing, bottling *kumys* (a national drink made from horse milk), and creating fishing ponds, among other ecotourism projects.

The funding model has proven to be quite successful: Despite the end of the project, enterprises continue to operate profitably, and more than 500 villagers now have their own source of income.

The project has also provided equipment, trucks and motorboats that allow tourists to reach wetlands sites without causing damage to the ecosystem. Over the course of a year and a half, more than 6,000 tourists have visited the Korgalzhyn reserve, yielding \$40,000 in income for the national wetland reserve, and helping residents finance their operations and further develop infrastructure.

*Over 50 million birds migrate through the wetlands semi-annually, and approximately 20 percent are estimated to nest in Kazakhstan.*

© UNDP Kazakhstan



## Continued conservation

Despite the project's successes, further resources will be needed for comprehensive management of the wetlands. UNDP has established a Biodiversity Trust Fund, raising more than \$3.2 million. Early donations totalling \$450,000 were offered by Kazakhstani businesses—Air Astana, and Kazakhmys, the natural resource company.

The cooperation fostered during this project is a promising sign that the wetlands will be protected in the future. The UNDP/GEF-led initiative has proven that the environmental and economic health of the wetlands can be interrelated, achievable goals.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- More than 1,626,700 hectares of wetlands have obtained Ramsar-protected status.
- Illegal fishing fell by between 45 percent and 62 percent between 2004 and 2010 in the three project sites.
- Residents from 500 villages have developed eco-friendly business ventures.
- More than \$3.2 million was raised for sustainable biodiversity projects.





*In its search for energy independence, Moldova is turning to locally available biomass fuels.*

© UNDP Moldova

## Moldova: Big Plans for Biomass

The kindergarten in the village of Ermoclia has declared its independence. Energy independence, that is. Instead of struggling to keep students warm with expensive imported gas, the kindergarten now heats up with locally produced biomass fuels made from readily available agricultural wastes such as straw, corn stalks and sawdust.

It's good for the children and the environment too. And the cost of heating the school has fallen by half. It is the first public institution in Moldova heated with biomass energy through a UNDP project to increase its use. Moldova has big plans for biomass.

“(We are at) the beginning of the large-scale use of biomass fuels,” affirms Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy Valeriu Lazar. “Besides reducing the consumption of imported energy sources, we are introducing agricultural residues into the economic cycle. These will no longer be perceived as wastes, but as a new business opportunity and source of income.”

### Reducing energy dependency

For years, Moldova has struggled with the burden of importing 95 percent of its fuel. When gas was cheaper, national policies promoted its use, including by connecting almost all rural communities to gas lines. Then prices began to soar, skyrocketing six times over the past six years. Rural Moldovans' dreams of economically heating their homes by pushing the button of a gas boiler disappeared; many found they could no longer pay their gas bills.

“Children are the best advocates for alternative energy in Moldova.”

– Natalia Halaim,  
a biology teacher

By 2010, a National Human Development Report sponsored by UNDP warned that energy prices would weigh down development. It called for introducing renewable energy to relieve the pressure, contribute to rural incomes and help mitigate climate change—altogether, a set of triple ‘wins’.

The Government subsequently committed to increasing the share of renewable energy to up to 20 percent of national consumption by 2020. Much of this can come from biomass fuel. To start moving towards its objective, the Government enlisted UNDP’s help. With support from the European Union, and in partnership with national authorities, UNDP launched the Moldova Energy and Biomass Project, the country’s most ambitious attempt to promote renewable energy. Started in 2011, the initiative is designed to help 130 public institutions, including schools and health centres, heat themselves with biomass fuels, all in compliance with European Union emissions standards. Already, nearly 60 villages in 12 districts have begun the conversion, with benefits for over 23,000 people—such as the children of Ermoclia.

Much of the work of the project involves direct engagement with localities to define conversion priorities. This builds on a community mobilization model that UNDP developed in 2007 under an initiative to foster more effective local governance. Diverse constituencies in 150 municipalities—18 percent of the total in Moldova—came together in focus groups and public hearings to plan and carry out projects to improve social services and basic infrastructure for water, sanitation and waste collection. In meeting after meeting, people cited shortfalls in heating and the cost of energy as top local concerns, providing further impetus for the introduction of biomass.

## New ways, new businesses

Besides encouraging cleaner, more accessible and more secure supplies of energy, the biomass project has another aim: new businesses and jobs. Initially, small subsidies are assisting the installation of imported biomass heating systems, but as people see the benefits and demand increases, there will be growing incentives for local production. Once installed, the systems require the regular production of biomass briquettes and pellets—here small-scale manufacturing is already growing.

In Carbalia, a small village with 500 inhabitants, the local community centre went unheated in the winter until a biomass system arrived. A local entrepreneur saw an investment opportunity to produce briquettes.

At first, Igor Chirilenco was not sure that such a business would be viable, since biomass heating is so new to Moldova. But once the systems were in place, both at the community centre and at a local kindergarten, he approached the UNDP project for support. It helped him develop a business plan, calculate when investments might be recouped, and acquire the technical skills for transforming plant wastes into usable fuel.

Nationally, the number of biomass fuel makers increased four times in the first year of the project. To foster this momentum, a new mechanism allows manufacturers to lease part of their equipment and pay back the cost over time, without any interest charges or taxes.

Other incentives to invest in change come from public recognition. The Ministry of Economy and the Energy Efficiency Agency, assisted by UNDP, have begun providing annual awards to private companies, public institutions, non-governmental groups and others making significant contributions to green energy and energy efficiency in Moldova.



*The manufacturing of biomass briquettes has been a boon for local businesses.*

© UNDP Moldova

## Greater public demand

Biomass use will take off in Moldova once the supply of new equipment and fuels is matched by public demand. As a start towards encouraging private consumption, the UNDP project has set up a preferential pricing scheme to help 500 households install biomass heating systems. Once word gets out that the systems are cheaper and equally effective in heating homes, friends, neighbours and broader communities are more likely to adopt them as well.

To reach the next generation, an educational initiative in schools teaches children about new technologies and the importance of renewable energy, with the colorful Energel mascot making learning fun. “Children are the best advocates for alternative energy in Moldova,” says Natalia Halaim, a biology teacher and coordinator of the initiative. “They see what it is, and how it works in their school or community centre, and promote it to the people they know.”

So far, over 2,500 students from 39 schools have engaged in discussion clubs, debates, field trips, exhibitions and other activities. Students in the 7th and 8th grade can even attend a Bioenergy Summer Camp.

A public awareness campaign has reached over a million people. It has included activities such as an event at the 2012 Europe Day in Moldova where ordinary citizens shared views about the social, economic and environmental benefits of renewable energy. Other forms of engagement involve municipal leaders—over 1,100 have attended technical training courses and hands-on demonstration projects on the advantages of switching to biomass fuel. The Ministry of Economy recently recommended that a renewable energy and energy efficiency module be incorporated in mandatory training for all mayors. They can look towards a day when energy savings can be channeled to other local development priorities, such as expanded public services and greater environmental protection.

In 2012, the Government established the Energy Efficiency Fund to finance community projects on energy efficiency and renewable energy. Project proposals from authorities in towns and rural villages will be vetted for feasibility by technical evaluations and energy audits. As projects are implemented and more people come on board, momentum will build of its own accord.



*At the 2012 Europe Day, people shared perspectives on the benefits of renewable energy.*

© UNDP Moldova

## HIGHLIGHTS

- People in 150 municipalities—**18 percent** of the total in Moldova—came together to debate local development priorities, identifying energy costs as a top concern.
- Nearly **60 villages** in 12 districts have begun converting heating systems in public institutions to biomass, in compliance with European Union emissions standards, to the benefit of 23,000 people.
- The number of biomass fuel makers **increased four times** in the first year of the project; new government incentives encourage biomass manufacturing.
- Over **1,100 municipal leaders** have attended technical training courses and hands-on demonstration projects on the advantages of switching to biomass fuel.
- **500 households** are demonstrating the merits of biomass heating for personal use.

*Galip Arslan, a local activist near the Kure Mountains National Park, has been part of the Government's efforts to engage communities in protecting the environment.*

© Yildiray Lise



## Turkey: Lighting the Way to Sustainability

Turkey is well known as one of the cradles of human civilization, bridging Europe and Asia. But it is also home to a rich array of plant, animal and other species, with three globally recognized biodiversity hotspots. Caring for its natural resources, in the face of a worldwide decline in species, is a national and global priority.

Turkey has had a system of protected natural areas in place, but their management has not always been adequate. Half its forests are considered degraded as a result of encroachment, overgrazing and illegal logging. Some destruction occurs when local communities turn to forests for basic necessities, such as wood for fuel.

With UNDP support, Turkey has begun to turn the decline around. The Government has not only extended the coverage of protected natural areas, but also engaged local communities in developing comprehensive plans for long-term, sustainable management.

“This national park is a torch in our hands, lighting our way forward!” exults 76-year-old Galip Arslan, a community activist in Asagicerci village near the Kure Mountains National Park. He runs an NGO dedicated to teaching local people about nature conservation.

Over a decade ago, he and his neighbours played key roles in defining the boundaries of the park. Today, they have an integral role in its management. The process marked the first

time that ordinary citizens and the central Government worked together to protect their common environment.

Says Arslan, broad participation “increased the number of people who care about local people’s livelihoods as well as the unique nature here.”

## A park is formed

Changes in the management of Turkey’s natural resources are taking place amid growing concern about environmental threats, and the country’s shift towards decentralized governance and greater local democracy. Momentum began to gather in 1998, when the Ministry of Forestry started working with UNDP and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on a programme to both protect biological diversity and encourage rural development. One immediate focus of attention was the Kure Mountains. At the time, they were not under protection, but a growing body of evidence suggested they should be.

Considered one of the 100 forest hotspots in Europe, the mountains contain some of the best remaining examples of the type of forests that once ringed the Black Sea. The area features spectacular rocky cliffs and waterfalls, canyons and caves, and hundreds of species of plants and animals.

Recognizing that long-term protection would need to engage local communities, UNDP and FAO made a proposal to the ministry: conduct a participatory process to delineate the boundaries of a new national park in the Kure Mountains, including a buffer zone where people could continue to live and use resources, albeit in a way that would sustain the forest.

The ministry agreed on this approach, and a two-year process of consultation began, involving local NGOs, villagers and government staff. They eventually agreed that a new park would cover nearly 38,000 hectares, surrounded by a buffer zone of over 134,000 hectares. Local communities consented to restricting activities such as grazing and wood-cutting to the buffer zone, where they would continue to live and manage their farms and orchards.

In 2000, the Kure Mountains National Park was officially created. In 2012, the park became the first in Turkey and the 13th in Europe to be granted an elite PAN Parks certificate, recognizing its high value as a protected natural area and destination for ecotourism.

## Under new management

As the park was being created, UNDP also helped the Ministry of Forestry develop an initial plan to manage it. But within a few years, implementation of the plan stalled, having run into a lack of coordination, staff and capacities.

Some progress was made. Local and national park authorities worked with NGOs to develop projects on ecotourism and sustainable natural resource usage, including through a series of small grants from the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Gradually, the park began to attract attention as a tourist destination. With the support of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-Turkey, one project set up Turkey’s first ecotourism centre, including a bed and breakfast inn. This attracted visitors and sparked the interest of entrepreneurs in the nearby town of Pınarbaşı. Today, the town can accommodate 200 guests in small inns and hotels. Ten years ago, it had no such facilities.

By 2008, a more orchestrated approach to managing the park was needed. With assistance from the GEF, UNDP and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry began working

Broad participation  
“increased the  
number of people  
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unique nature here.”

– Galip Arslan, a local activist



*Kure Mountains National Park is steadily improving the infrastructure needed to accommodate visitors to attractions such as Valla Canyon.*

© Aykut Ince

together with WWF-Turkey. It not only has extensive expertise on local environmental issues, but is linked to WWF Global, a founder of the PAN Parks certificate.

The initial aims of the project were to develop comprehensive plans to manage and conserve the park, and ensure a balanced use of natural resources in the buffer zone. Building on earlier experience with creating the park, the project established participatory working groups involving government staff, NGOs, community members and academic experts. Initial training equipped national authorities with a new understanding of conservation management and ecotourism.

The consultations fed into the development of both a park management plan and a plan for sustainable tourism, the first of its kind in Turkey. Based on these, the ministry has initiated measures to demarcate the boundaries of the park and strengthen systems for patrolling it. New infrastructure includes two visitor centres, an information centre, entrance gates, trails and signs. A monitoring tool gauges effectiveness in administration, such as overseeing equipment and managing visitors. It uses a scale that has shown a 132 percent improvement since the project began.

In the buffer zone, which is mostly covered with forests, the project encouraged 17 different local forestry units to involve local people in planning forest management to better protect the landscape and wildlife. Intensive tree-cutting practices have stopped and over 15,000 trees have been planted to rehabilitate degraded areas. To begin reducing demand for wood, the project highlighted the zone to a national programme for installing solar panels for water heating. It prioritized installations there, and 300 families now have the panels on their homes.

## Change takes root

One of the objectives in the Kure Mountains National Park project was to establish a management model that could be adopted by other parks and natural areas in Turkey. The Government has already begun applying the monitoring tool to 41 national parks. The Yenice Forest is developing plans for sustainable tourism. A PAN Parks group has been formed, bringing together government staff, local NGOs and tourism businesses to develop ecotourism training courses.

Another important outcome has been the new working relationship between the government and non-governmental interests, coming against a historical backdrop where public participation was generally marginal. Local NGOs continue to hold formal positions on bodies overseeing the Kure Mountains National Park. They have been part of consultations identifying three new forestry functions—landscape conservation, wildlife conservation and wildlife development—that have been added to the responsibilities of forestry officials across the country. Their successful and sustained involvement sets an important precedent for Turkey's eventual decentralization of governance structures, where functions now performed by the central Government will shift to local authorities.

As Galip Arslan says, "An organized society is a powerful society. We will have a better vision and hope for the future."

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Creation of the Kure Mountains National Park, covering nearly **38,000 hectares** and surrounded by a buffer zone of over 134,000 hectares.
- In 2012, the park became the first in Turkey and the 13th in Europe to be granted an elite **PAN Parks certificate**.
- Turkey's first ecotourism centre has spurred **business growth**, including flourishing inns and hotels, in the town of Pınarbaşı.
- New infrastructure for the park includes visitor centres, entrance gates, trails and signs. A monitoring tool gauging effectiveness in administration rated a **132 percent** improvement since the project began.
- Intensive tree-cutting practices have stopped in the buffer zone, and over **15,000 trees** have been planted to rehabilitate degraded areas.

# Crisis Response and Post-Conflict Recovery

Azerbaijan

*Mine clearance priorities—such as this water system—are directly linked to returning people to normal, productive lives.*



## Azerbaijan: A National Capacity for Mine Action

Landmines are easy to lay, but far harder to clear. Once in the ground, they threaten human lives and livelihoods when people cannot use contaminated land.

The Republic of Azerbaijan is one of dozens of countries struggling to clean up landmines in the wake of conflict. While one model for mine action is to have the international community manage it, UNDP has stood by Azerbaijan's efforts to build its own national institution, recognizing that mine action may continue for decades.

As a result, the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action, known as ANAMA, has grown from a fledgling organization to one fully equipped to clear mines, provide risk education and assist survivors of accidents. Since 1999, ANAMA has cleared and certified as



safe nearly 186 square kilometres of land—about the size of 27,000 football pitches—in the process destroying over 665,000 mines and other explosive weapons. More than 160,000 people displaced by conflict have been resettled as a result.

Fakhraddin Maharramov, a resident of Zobcug village, lived in a camp for displaced people until clearance meant he could safely return to his land. He says, “We are happy to be back and work on our fields without fear.”

## The growth of an agency

Azerbaijan’s mine problem goes back nearly a quarter of a century to the 1988 clash with Armenia over the autonomous region of Nagorno Karabakh. Land changed hands multiple times and mines were randomly laid, often by scattered groups of partisan forces. By the end, there was little record of where threats remained.

A cease-fire was brokered in 1994. As the Government began preparing to resettle a million people displaced by the conflict, indications of a massive landmine problem emerged. In 1998, the President of Azerbaijan decreed the formation of ANAMA as a non-military agency mandated to conduct humanitarian demining, meaning it would focus first on areas posing the greatest threats to human safety and livelihoods. The Government called on UNDP for assistance in establishing it.

UNDP brought in international experts to train ANAMA staff on all aspects of mine action—such as carrying out surveys to identify mine locations, removing explosives and supporting survivors of accidents. Initially, it also helped mobilize resources and broker international partnerships to support the agency; by 2003, the agency was ready to assume this role itself. By 2004, it was operating primarily using the expertise of its own staff.

Today, Elnur Gasimov leads ANAMA’s Training, Survey and Quality Assurance Team. In 1993, when he was 15 years old, he spotted a shiny metal object along a road. Curious, he picked it up. In a flash, the discarded fuse of a hand grenade exploded in his hand, destroying three fingers.

After recovering, he went on to complete his education, deciding along the way to dedicate his career to mine action. At ANAMA, he learned to provide mine risk education to schoolchildren—sharing vital safety information that had not been available to him as a young man. “I want to prevent accidents such as the one that happened to me,” he says. As he rose to become the head of training, he emerged as a symbol of hope and compassion, teaching by example that recovery from tragedy is well within reach.

*In some cases, explosive remnants of war are removed from people’s homes.*



## Surveying the problem

One early activity at ANAMA was to comprehensively survey the extent of the mine problem. While a local non-governmental organization in 2001-2002 had conducted a general survey confirming mine hazards on 60 square kilometres of land, Azerbaijan needed a landmine impact survey. This would more precisely map where the mines were, along with their socio-economic impacts, and suggest actions for mitigation.

Carried out in 2002-2003, the second survey found 736 square kilometres of land contaminated by mines. This provided an initial basis for ANAMA to develop its programme, but it was also clear that surveying required the ongoing collecting, updating and cross-checking of data. A third survey in 2006 reduced the estimate of suspected hazardous areas by 60 percent, to 306 square kilometres. With its growing experience, and by continuing to draw on UNDP training and expertise, ANAMA was able to conclude that full-scale mine clearance would need to take place on only 10 percent of this area.

To further develop the accuracy of its survey capabilities, ANAMA set up survey teams including people from affected localities. They go from village to village to meet with community members and collect updated information. This is fed into a national mine action database that helps steer clearance efforts towards areas most in need.

ANAMA is now releasing land identified as contaminated by mines or unexploded ordnance at a rate of around 30 square kilometres a year—meaning either the land is cleared or confirmed as safe. Only 10 years ago, the release rate was less than a square kilometre per year. To expedite its efforts, the agency has moved away from manual demining, where individuals sweep the ground with metal detectors. It now uses an approach that combines mine clearing machines, mine-detection dogs and visual observation.

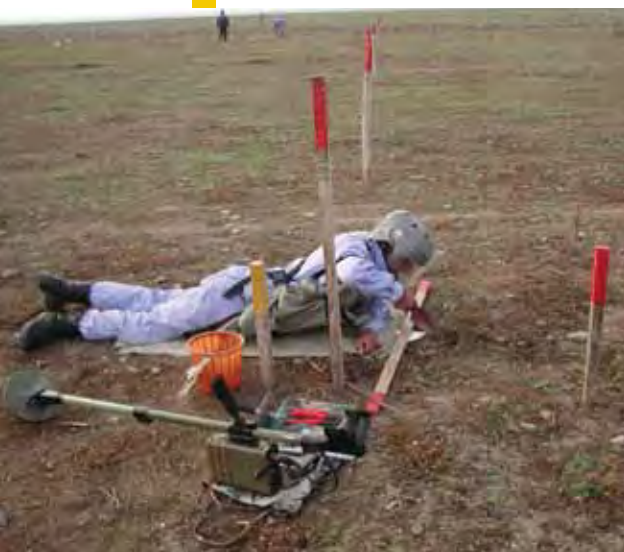
Still, the process is painstaking and slow. While ANAMA aims for a mine-free Azerbaijan by 2013, this does not include disputed territories still under Armenian control. By ANAMA estimates, clearance there may take up to another 40 years.

## Making connections to development

UNDP's support of ANAMA has consistently emphasized the socio-economic impacts of demining—an approach that the Government has taken seriously by integrating ANAMA's activities in the State Socio-Economic

Development Plan, one of Azerbaijan's primary development planning documents. Mine risk education programmes reach over 50,000 children in schools. The ministries of health and labour assist survivors of mine accidents with medical care and physical rehabilitation programmes. ANAMA manages a microcredit initiative to improve the livelihoods of victims and their families, and oversees efforts such as carpet-weaving workshops that develop new skills.

Clearance priorities are directly linked to people's ability to reuse land or find employment. In the Alkhanli region, for instance, decontaminating the banks of a local river has



*Mine detection dogs (top) and manual demining (bottom) are among the methods contributing to Azerbaijan's success in mine action.*

allowed farmers to once more draw its water for their crops. Irrigation has been extended to 250 hectares of cultivated lands that produce 500 tons of grain each year.

An important achievement for the entire nation was clearance that permitted continued construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. Two months of effort were required along a stretch that was 22 kilometres long and 60 metres wide—121 pieces of unexploded ordnance were found and destroyed. The pipeline is considered key to jumpstarting renewed economic growth for all of Azerbaijan.

## Sharing new knowledge

Today, Azerbaijan interacts with a variety of international institutions involved in mine action, facilitating a two-way exchange of knowledge on successful practices. UNDP has helped it make connections to organizations including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross and The World Bank. Collaboration with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining has focused on developing a new generation of information management systems for mine action and testing new mine action technology.

ANAMA has also begun supporting other countries with their national mine action programmes. It has provided training to the Georgia National Army unit charged with mine action, and to a Turkish consortium clearing a border crossing with Syria. A partnership with the national mine action agency in Afghanistan is helping it prepare to take over tasks presently done by international partners. Given that dozens of countries still need to rid themselves of mines, Azerbaijan's success within its own borders should be widely shared.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Nearly **186 square kilometres** of land cleared of mines and certified as safe.
- Destruction of over **665,000 mines** and other explosive weapons.
- More than **160,000 people** displaced by conflict have been resettled.
- Around **30 kilometres** of land per year cleared and certified as safe, up from less than a square kilometre annually a decade ago.
- Clearance permitted continued construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, considered key to jumpstarting renewed economic growth.
- Azerbaijan has a fully equipped national mine action agency, with clearance expected to continue for decades.

*These walls were shaken by an earthquake, underscoring the impact that disasters can have on human development.*

© UNDP Armenia



## Armenia: Increasing Resilience by Reducing the Risk of Disaster

For years, the people of Sipanik expanded the area of land under cultivation in an attempt to grow more food. But each time the Hrazdan River thwarted the efforts of this small, remote community, situated in one of the most disaster-prone areas of Armenia. It swelled and flooded their crops, and the people had to start over once more.

“Over the past 72 years I have witnessed hundreds of natural disasters that have not only smashed roads, houses, and crops, but also gradually diminished our hope for a better life,” said Hovhannes Arakelyan, a resident of Sipanik. “I always thought that we must be prepared for the next time, rather than act after disaster knocks at our door.”

Together with five other communities, Sipanik was selected by UNDP in 2008 to pilot an approach to harnessing the skills of communities to reduce the impact of disasters, as part of a 10-year effort to establish a national disaster risk reduction system. After 20 days of work, a 1,000 metre-long soil dam was built in Sipanik, protecting 80 houses from flooding.

“With this soil dam, our settlement is no longer damaged by rises in water levels,” said Anahit Hambardzumyan, a Sipanik resident. “We are even able to use productively our backyard plots for agricultural purposes. And most importantly, our children are safe from diseases caused by humidity.” Local residents contributed labour, machinery and 20 percent of the project costs.

These communities embody some of the local-level challenges that Armenia faces in preparing for disasters and reducing their impact. One of the 60 most disaster-prone countries in the world, Armenia faces a heightened risk of such catastrophes as earthquakes, droughts and flooding.

In 1988 a huge earthquake struck, killing 25,000 people, injuring 15,000, and leaving 517,000 homeless. Today, according to The World Bank, eight out of every 10 Armenians are at risk of experiencing a disaster.

Until recently, many communities didn't have working drainage systems, mudflow channels and soil dams. Neither was there a nationwide government-operated system to monitor incoming disasters before they strike, nor a national system to coordinate the response, such as many more developed countries have.

UNDP assisted the Government of Armenia in establishing a national disaster risk reduction system. It helped the country make critical progress in developing local-level capacity to prepare for, and respond to, catastrophes. The goal has been to create a strong centre with resilient communities, to provide a critical safety net ensuring that progress can continue even when disaster strikes.

Support for this effort has come from the World Bank, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Swiss Development Cooperation, Germany's Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the World Food Programme, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNICEF and OXFAM. UNDP provided international expertise in establishing a disaster risk reduction system, as well as assistance to communities in improving their preparedness.

## Building a national system

About 10 years ago, assisted by UNDP and other organizations, the authorities revised national legislation to establish a strong legal and regulatory framework for disaster risk reduction. Armenia committed to achieving the strategic goals of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2002-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, an international strategy to which Armenia and 167 other countries are signatory.

By 2011, the Ministry of Emergency Situations had implemented a plan to decentralize the disaster risk reduction system, appointing the Ministry's regional representatives as regional focal points. It helped to improve the Ministry's management capacities through the



*A crisis management centre is capable of dealing with disaster when it hits.*

© UNDP Armenia

establishment of the Crisis Management Centre and National Disaster Observatory, which is connected to 18 ministries.

The purpose of the National Disaster Observatory is to systemically collect, analyse and interpret data, as well as share the information. For example, using more than 30,000 units of data, hazard maps were created to pinpoint the potential for landslides, mudflows, floods and earthquakes.

The Observatory strengthens national disaster risk reduction systems, supports and facilitates national risk assessments, and periodically updates the country's disaster risk profile, utilizing data in national disaster risk reduction policies. Moreover, as the Observatory is housed in the Ministry's Crisis Management Centre, it supports rapid analysis for early warning.

“The establishment of an effective system of disaster risk reduction is of vital importance for our country, not only in terms of risk management, but also in terms of poverty reduction and addressing socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities,” says Armen Yeritsyan, Minister of Emergency Situations. “The partnership with UNDP has been essential and very productive—an exemplary cooperation between a government and an international organization that can be replicated in other corners of the world.”

## Raising awareness

Working closely with the local authorities, including the Crisis Management State Academy—a state educational institution—UNDP helped to coordinate public awareness campaigns in 40 communities. An advocacy event dedicated to International Disaster Risk

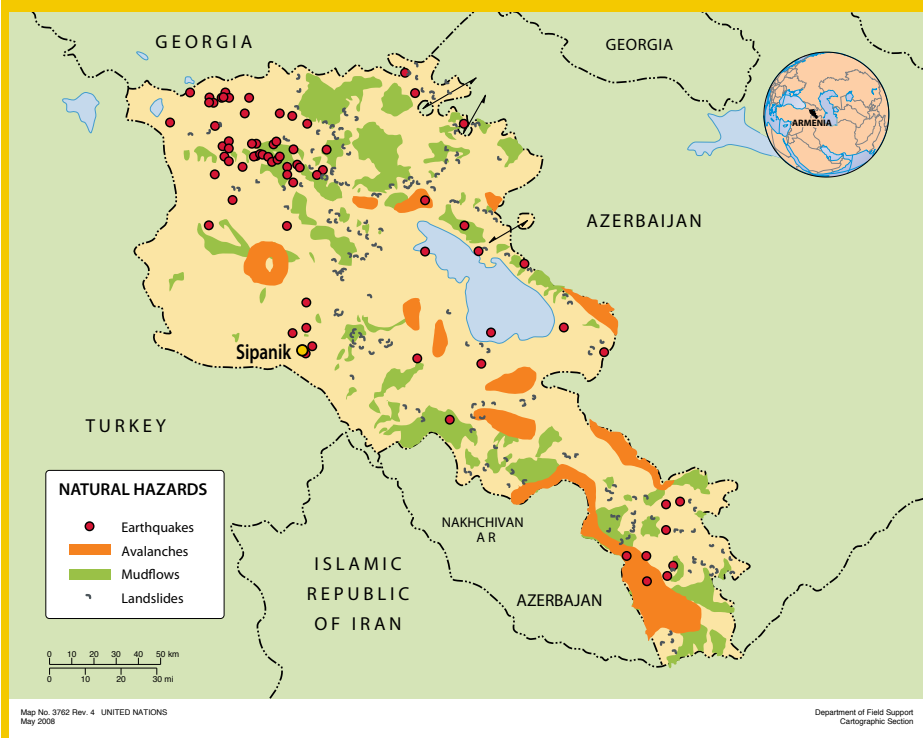
Reduction Day was organized with the participation of 11 organizations, widely engaging the mass media.

Local citizens in four regions of Armenia presented their vulnerability to disaster in the form of photo essays, to raise awareness of the importance of protecting community interests, and to encourage their participation in decision-making, planning and implementation.

## Better preparedness at the local level

Community-level efforts have been a critical element of the national disaster risk reduction work. In total 5,000 metres of drainage systems and 500 metres of mudflow channels were cleaned at the local level, and about 1,500 metres of soil dams were built.

### Armenia confronts numerous hazards



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



*This road could not withstand a landslide and collapsed.*

© UNDP Tatevik Ghazaryan

and experts,” said Arakelyan, the Sipanik resident. “The impact is obvious: I cultivate my land and reap the yield, even if the Hrazdan River floods again.”

In addition to dam construction, projects focused on cleaning drainage systems to prevent flooding and manage water tables on agricultural land that otherwise might be choked by salt. The measures helped to protect hundreds of hectares of land and households.

What is more, disaster risk reduction measures have been integrated into the local budgets of 95 communities. While Armenians cannot stop catastrophes from occurring, they can reduce the risk that disaster will derail development.

“We appreciate very much the fact that UNDP brought together those who wanted to help and defend us, and ensured that our voices were heard as much as those of decision-makers

“We appreciate very much the fact that UNDP brought together those who wanted to help and defend us, and ensured that our voices were heard...”

– Hovhannes Arakelyan,  
a resident of Sipanik

## HIGHLIGHTS

- A national disaster risk reduction system established in Armenia.
- 95 communities have integrated disaster risk reduction into local community budgets.
- 5,000 metres of drainage systems and 500 metres of mudflow channels were cleaned, and about 1,500 metres of soil dam were built.
- 12,000 pieces of public information materials were distributed, raising people’s awareness of how to reduce their risk of disaster.

*Cyprus leaders release doves at the opening of the road connecting Limnitis/Yeşilirmak with Kato Pyrgos in 2010.*

© United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)



## Cyprus: Bringing Down Barriers to Peace

Cyprus has been divided since 1974. The buffer zone (or green line) stretches 180 kilometres across the island from west to east, separating the Turkish Cypriot community in the north from the Greek Cypriot community in the south.

The road from the village of Limnitis/Yeşilirmak leading to Kato Pyrgos runs through some of Cyprus's most beautiful areas. Sprawling fields and green mountains rise above the turquoise water of the Mediterranean. The two villages are just seven kilometres away from each other, one in the northern part of the island, the other in the southern. The green grass of the UN-controlled buffer zone lies in between.

The road connecting the two villages was closed in 1974. The presence of landmines and the poor condition of the alternative roads forced residents and ambulances to undertake long and difficult journeys to reach workplaces or hospitals in Nicosia.

Local economies suffered from the division. While many strong relationships existed between the two communities, they gradually grew apart over time. Civilian movements or activities in the buffer zone required specific authorization from the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

In 2010, following the agreement of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders to open the new crossing—enabled through the support of the Good Offices Mission in



Cyprus and UNFICYP—the European Union, the United States Agency for International Development and the Government of Cyprus agreed to fund the upgrade of the two sections of the road, reuniting the two communities.

Since the road runs approximately 1.6 kilometres through the buffer zone and 4.4 kilometres in the northern part of the island, getting agreement on whom should be entrusted with the construction proved challenging.

UNDP was called on by all parties to oversee implementation of the project. UNDP designed the project; served as the liaison between the two communities, their authorities and technical departments; and secured an agreement on the design of the road and who would carry out the construction.

A feasibility study and the construction were performed through joint ventures between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot engineering and construction companies—evidence that business partnerships between the two communities are possible and valuable in terms of the benefits they can bring to the reunification process.

Specifically, the project entailed the improvement of the road alignment and the carrying capacity, the enlargement of the width for two lanes, as well as provisions for traffic management and safety. These measures led to the opening, on 14 October 2010, of the seventh crossing on the island.

## Tangible progress

Recently, the people of Kato Pyrgos described the benefits they have gained from the opening of the crossing point. Most farmers of the village produce fruit. Before the crossing was opened it took them almost six hours to reach Nicosia to sell their produce. Going through small mountain roads, especially during the summer heat, most of their products would rot during the trip. Today, because of the new crossing, it takes them only about one hour to reach Nicosia.

The most significant advantage from a health standpoint is that ambulances now reach Nicosia General Hospital in 75 minutes, as opposed to the six hours it took before. In addition, they can cross without significant formalities, an indication of better relations on both sides.

Before, entire families would move to Nicosia, abandoning Kato Pyrgos until the children completed school. Now they can continue living in the village and go to school in Nicosia. Some 90 percent of local youth travel on the new road to attend college or university.

The crossing has also strengthened families. Previously, men would leave their wives and children in the village, rent a house in Nicosia and come back during the weekends. Now they can commute.

Costas Michaelides, representative of Kato Pyrgos, said the relationship between his village and Limnitis/Yeşilirmak has improved.

“Before the crossing was opened people looked at each other with fear, considering ‘the other’ an enemy. But since the opening, we have started to mix.” On a recent day, women from Limnitis/Yeşilirmak came to Kato Pyrgos for a manicure; men drank coffee together in the local coffee shop.



*The people of Limnitis/ Yeşilirmak and Kato Pyrgos are the beneficiaries of the new crossing point bridging the two communities.*

© UNFICYP

Ersoy Köycü, representative of Limnitis/Yeşilirmak, said business has also started to flourish. “Before the opening, my village was a dead area. Now the road is busy, and this has brought new businesses: a restaurant, two grocery shops and a market.”

### Crossing points restore community relationships



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Yeşilirmak and Ledra/Lokmacı, as well as the five others since 2003, have created momentum behind inter-communal confidence-building. Making a tangible difference in the everyday lives of many Cypriots, the crossings have helped support the ongoing peace talks.

### Part of a larger initiative

This crossing is the third that UNDP has helped to open in Cyprus. (The other two are Zodeia/Bostancı and Ledra/Lokmacı, projects that have been fully funded by the European Union). UNDP has facilitated decision-making and confidence-building for each. It has strongly promoted and supported the implementation of joint ventures between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Furthermore, UNDP has closely supervised the implementation work outside and within the UN-controlled buffer zone.

By 2011 more than 80,000 crossings had taken place on the newly improved road. For the first time in 37 years, a strawberry festival took place in Limnitis/Yeşilirmak in June 2011, and villagers from both sides were able to attend and meet old friends thanks to the newly refurbished road.

The most recent crossings at Limnitis/Yeşilirmak and Ledra/Lokmacı, as well as the five others since 2003, have created momentum behind inter-communal confidence-building. Making a tangible difference in the everyday lives of many Cypriots, the crossings have helped support the ongoing peace talks.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 80,000 crossings have taken place along the newly improved road.
- Travel time for ambulances has been cut by over 75 percent.
- 90 percent of youth travel to college or university along the road.

# Regional Initiatives



*Roma women take part in adult literacy courses.*

© UNDP Kosovo

## Empowering the Roma to Overcome Adversity

In Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, life can be precarious—especially for the Roma, one of Europe’s poorest minorities. Many lack legal documents, which prevents them from getting jobs, and deprives them of access to health care and other social services. They have few opportunities to improve their lives, and don’t often get support from national authorities.

A regional programme started in 2007 by UNDP addressed the very complex challenges facing Roma<sup>1</sup> communities in Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, where extreme poverty is often accompanied by displacement following the conflicts of the 1990s. Funded by the

<sup>1</sup> In Kosovo and Montenegro, three minority groups are in focus: the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians.

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the programme concluded in 2011—but the work goes on.

Many Roma live in extreme poverty, with incomes of just a few dollars a day. They lack basic school education, and are deprived of employment opportunities. They suffer from inconsistent efforts to promote their interests. Integrating them into society has become a key priority for the European Union, and a key rationale for the programme.

Benefitting over 34,000 people, the programme gave hundreds of Roma legal status, strengthened policies by embedding Roma coordinators at the local level, and helped the Roma organize local projects to improve their livelihoods. The work continues to this day as national authorities have assumed responsibilities previously carried out by international organizations.



*Roma municipal coordinators take part in a training course.*  
© UNDP Serbia

## Montenegro: helping the Roma become citizens in their own country

For many Roma in Montenegro, having valid personal documents is often a distant dream, so the programme began by helping them obtain legal documents. Take Barisa Span. He was on the right track by some measures. Married and the father of five, he held a stable job in Montenegro as a manual labourer. But his papers told a different story.

Born in Yugoslavia, he didn't have Montenegrin citizenship. By 2008, Montenegro required him to get national citizenship or risk losing his job. He didn't know where to turn.

Span was not alone. In 2008, in three municipalities of Montenegro—Berane, Niksic and Bar—approximately 75 percent of the population lacked personal documents.

Working with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UNDP helped 626 Roma gain proper documents in three municipalities of Montenegro. The percentage of people registered with employment bureaus rose by 67 percent in these municipalities.

## Bridging two worlds

In order to support the Roma, two challenges needed to be addressed. First, they needed help in understanding administrative processes. Many didn't know how to communicate with state agencies in their jargon. And state agencies were often poorly equipped to serve the Roma—to understand their different living conditions, habits and culture. Two worlds existed apart.

UNDP built the capacity of local NGOs to help the Roma put their papers together and understand the procedures involved. Sweden's SIDA funded all the administrative fees and travel needed for processing of the documents.

For Span, NGO staff travelled to Serbia several times to cancel his Serbian citizenship, which he had automatically received after the break-up of Yugoslavia. The trips would have cost him 500 euros, far more than his monthly salary.

UNDP also conducted training courses for social welfare centres and employment bureaus so they could better serve the Roma. For the first time, state employees visited

Roma homes to collect information for a database that enabled them to better understand their clients. NGOs helped foster communication between municipal authorities and minorities.

Today, these processes have helped Span gain not only Montenegrin citizenship, but also access to the full range of state services and benefits that citizenship grants. In total, over 400 Roma were assisted in obtaining Montenegrin citizenship. They have become eligible for all public social security, health and employment services. What is more, social service agencies now know how to assist them.

## Serbia: Roma coordinators integrated into the government

In Serbia, the programme aimed to remedy the lack of coordination among government structures in addressing Roma vulnerability. The programme supported the Government by building a network of local Roma coordinators whose work could inform and influence policies at the national level.

Before 2007, 19 municipalities had utilized local Roma coordinators, often funded by international donors. When the programme ended in 2011, this number had grown to 55, with 45 being funded by the Ministry of Labour—a sign of national take-up. To this day, most local Roma coordinators continue to work for their municipalities.

The tasks of the coordinators consist of, for example, conducting local level needs-assessments, devising local action plans for the Roma, and mobilizing local inhabitants to carry out public works projects. Roma coordinators have helped catalyse a variety of community projects, including street clean-ups, computer literacy training and even knitting clothes for soldiers.

As a result, there has been a visible growth in the ability of local administrations in the 55 municipalities to implement national action plans at the local level. Before the project started in 2007, only eight of 55 municipalities had developed local action plans for Roma inclusion, but by 2011 this number had grown to 31.

## Kosovo: Small grants bring communities together

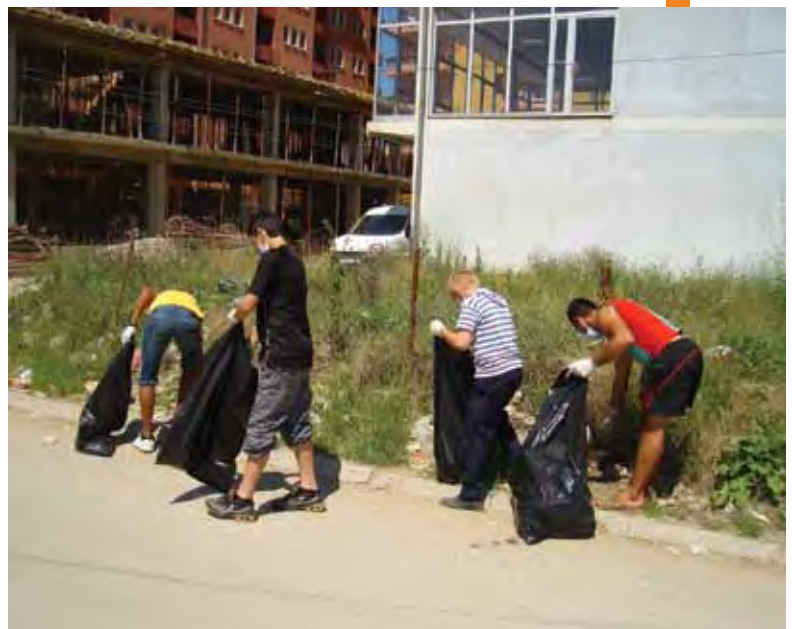
In Kosovo, the programme aimed to address local needs by distributing small sums of money in the form of grants. To decide on how the funds should be used, 34 community meetings and workshops were organized, which demonstrated to people the usefulness of coming together to discuss common concerns.

The grants were used to pave roads, reconstruct sewage systems, provide children with school bags and other supplies for school, and build playgrounds. Grants were also dispersed for medical equipment, such as ultrasound machines for hospitals.

All told, some 43 small projects were implemented. Some 7,736 people benefitted directly; one-third of them were children below the age of 14.

*Roma youth  
clean up their  
neighbourhood.*

© UNDP Kosovo



The project also helped promote understanding among the Roma, the Ashkali and Egyptians, minority groups that had strong differences of opinion on how to approach common concerns. The programme helped bring members of these groups together by requiring them to submit joint proposals for projects.

## A more resilient Roma community

Ultimately, the programme has helped the Roma understand that they can be empowered to solve local challenges and make tangible improvements in their lives. Many have come to realize that they can overcome adversity to become forces for local change.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- In Montenegro, 626 Roma gained legal personal documents.
- 67 percent increase in Roma registered with employment agencies.
- In Serbia, 55 municipalities utilize Roma coordinators.
- 31 municipalities have developed local action plans for Roma inclusion.
- In Kosovo, 43 projects implemented at the community level, benefitting 7,736 people.



*The Lake Prespa basin is shared by Albania, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.*

© Anila Bitraku

## Lake Prespa: Promoting Conservation, Protecting Livelihoods

The Lake Prespa region has borne fruit for as long as Frosina Georgievska can remember. Shared by Albania, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the region produced abundant harvests of apples for generations of farmers like Georgievska. But the fruit came at a cost.

“My grandparents and my parents and neighbours always used to tell me that the more pesticides we use, the more we’d produce—and the more money we’d make,” said Georgievska, who lives in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Hoping to increase production, and unaware of the effects they were having on the environment, farmers frequently applied excessive quantities of pesticides.

The chemicals contributed to the contamination of one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. Home to over two thousand species of plants and animals, the Prespa region boasts the world’s largest breeding colony of Dalmatian Pelicans and nine species of fish that are unique to the area.

About 30,000 people live in the Prespa region, and 60 percent of them are involved in agriculture, largely apple production. In addition to using too many chemicals for over

40 years, people had over-irrigated crops, mismanaged waste products and land, and encroached upon the ecosystems of rare and endangered species.

Today the region has made a dramatic turnaround. Sustainable farming techniques have been introduced, reducing farmers' costs. Approximately 30 percent of solid wastes were reduced through improved treatment systems. More than 600 square metres of riverbed have been recovered. Some 6,000 hectares of forests have been restored to their original splendour, and 2,000 hectares of habitats for birds, fish and rare plants now thrive.



*Apples now meet international standards for pesticide use.*

© UNDP The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

## An international effort to save Lake Prespa

Work to protect the Lake Prespa region started more than 10 years ago. In 2000, the Prime Ministers of Albania, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia signed a landmark declaration, creating the Prespa Park and vowing to make the area a model for conservation and habitat protection.

An international programme followed. Launched in 2004 with \$10 million from the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP and the three governments, the Lake Prespa Assistance Programme aimed to restore and protect the lake while preserving livelihoods. Stakeholders included the municipality of Resen (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), the communities of Ligenas and Proger (Albania), and the municipality of Prespa (Greece).

## Reducing agricultural waste

The programme began by teaching farmers about good agricultural practices, which have helped them introduce techniques that are less pesticide and water intensive. Thanks to these efforts, they have reduced their costs by 30 percent.

Over 2,000 farmers have been trained in 40 villages of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and five agro-meteorological stations were established to monitor pesticide use and the health of apple, onion and potato crops. Three stations were set up on the Albanian side to reduce the environmental impact of agricultural production.

The stations operate a pest and disease monitoring system, which notifies farmers via text messaging about the best time to use pesticides. The system also provides weather forecasts and guidelines for irrigation.

Farmers like Georgievska have learned that modern agriculture can also open new markets. "My apples are environmentally certified and I can now sell them everywhere," she says. She sells her products in the European Union, as they meet international standards for pesticide use.



*An agro-meteorological station helps farmers reduce pesticide use.*

© UNDP Albania.



In Albania, initiatives have included establishing four associations of farmers to improve the harvesting, storage and marketing of fruit products, such as honey. Employing new technologies such as greenhouses, farmers grow vegetables more efficiently.

## Reducing outflows of solid waste

Once it tackled agriculture practices, the programme addressed waste management strategies. The town of Resen, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, would discard approximately 10,000 tons of apples—about 10 percent of its total annual crop—in years when demand was low. Since farmers had no system for collecting and disposing biodegradable waste, they would sometimes release it into Lake Prespa and its tributaries.

Through the programme, people learned how to seal solid waste and turn biodegradable refuse into organic fertilizers. In Albania, an improved treatment system, involving recycling and composting in the villages of Liqenas and Proger, reduced solid wastes by 30 percent.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where compost is less expensive than fertilizer, farmers have reduced costs and reaped other benefits. “It means that our river, Golema Reka, will be cleaner,” said Georgievka.

## Reducing flood dangers

The Golema Reka river is the largest in the Lake Prespa watershed. It provides jobs to residents, but also had jeopardized their existence through frequent flooding and growing pollution.

According to Sali Zylal, a 54-year-old fisherman, the river bed filled with solid waste, and was damaged by erosion, human activity and poor maintenance.

“The pollution was so high it affected our fish population. And we also were flooded quite often as the river banks were so damaged,” Zylal said.

More than 600 metres of riverbed have been restored, beginning in Resen, and sewage networks have been constructed, with the support of \$3 million in aid from the Swiss Government.

To ensure comprehensive water management, UNDP, with the support of the GEF, helped the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia create the first-ever Watershed Management Council. The council includes representatives from more than 20 economic sectors and provides a conflict resolution platform.

“We were the first to adopt a watershed management plan in line with EU directives,” says Mihail Volkanovski, Mayor of Resen.

## Better forest protection

In addition to wide expanses of water, the Lake Prespa region includes forests spanning 465 square kilometres, covering one-third of the basin. They are home to the *Celtis Teuneforti*, an endangered tree species in Albania, in addition to the *Quercus Trojana* and Grecian Juniper woodlands in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Reliance on these forests for fuel, wood, timber and fodder caused gradual degradation and fragmentation.

Thus natural resource management also became an area of cooperation between Lake Prespa’s three countries, leading to the development of a management plan for the region



*Frosina Georgievka conducts soil analysis in an agro-chemical laboratory in Resen.*

© UNDP The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

and the first-ever joint action for the conservation of habitats, fisheries and endangered species. In Albania, for example, fish traps made out of tree branches that had been harmful to many fish species were removed.

To stimulate reforestation in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNDP provided modern tractors and irrigation pumps to the nursery of the Public Forest Enterprise—which has since doubled its annual production of native tree seedlings.

More than 6,000 hectares of forests and over 2,000 hectares of priority habitats for birds, fish and rare plants now thrive as a result of the programme's collaboration with Albania, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.



*Fishermen from the Albanian side of Lake Prespa exchange experiences with peers from another protected area of the country.*

© UNDP Albania

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Sustainable farming techniques introduced, decreasing farmers' costs by **30 percent**.
- **30 percent** of solid wastes were reduced through improved treatment systems.
- More than **600 square metres** of riverbed have been restored.
- **6,000 hectares** of forests returned to their original splendour.
- **2,000 hectares** of habitats for birds, fish and rare plants now thrive.

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*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

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