
Third regular session 1997
15-19 September 1997
Item 10 of the provisional agenda
UNDP/UNFPA

OTHER MATTERS

FIELD VISITS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Part one

KYRGYZSTAN

(23 August-30 August 1997)

I. BACKGROUND

1. The UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board visited Kyrgyzstan from 23 to 30 August 1997. The mission consisted of representatives from the following Board members: Antigua and Barbuda¹, China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Finland², Japan, Romania, and Slovakia².
2. In close cooperation with the national authorities, the programme for the mission was prepared under the leadership of Ms. Anna Stjærnerklint, Resident Coordinator/Resident Representative of UNDP, and Dr. Turgiz Gokgol, UNFPA Country Representative for Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (resident in Tashkent, Uzbekistan).
3. The mission was accompanied by Ms. Evelyn Wilkens of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board Secretariat.
4. The mission visited government and local authorities, project managers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan; Osh, the provincial capital of one of the southern provinces; in the village of Tamchy in the Lake Issyk-Kul area; and in a village in the Kant district near Bishkek. The complete programme for the visit is available on request from the Executive Board Secretariat.

¹ Ambassador Patrick Lewis, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations, was selected as Team Coordinator.

² Ms. Heli Sirve of Finland and Mr. Peter Hulenyi of Slovakia were nominated as rapporteurs.

5. The aim of the Executive Board mission was to assess how compatible UNDP and UNFPA cooperation is with the national development priorities as well as with the approved policies of UNDP and UNFPA.

II. OBSERVATIONS BY THE MISSION AND SITUATION ANALYSIS

6. Kyrgyzstan became an independent republic in 1991, after the breakup of the former Soviet Union. As a country with its economy in transition, Kyrgyzstan is facing similar problems as the other Central Asian republics. Currently, the gross national product is not calculated by the Krygyz authorities or by the World Bank. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 1996 was \$570 per capita, according to the World Bank. In the 1997 National Human Development Report of the Krygyz Republic, the GDP per capita figure is given at \$680 per capita for 1995.

7. Unlike economic indicators, which to a large extent are comparable to those of least developed countries (LDCs), some of Kyrgyzstan's social indicators, notably the literacy rate of almost 100 per cent, are better than those in LDCs.

A. International and regional relations

8. During the discussions, in particular with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the State Secretary of Kyrgyzstan, it was highlighted that the effort to integrate Kyrgyzstan into the world economy constituted a primary goal. A constructive step towards that end is the application by Kyrgyzstan to become a member of the World Trade Organization. To increase awareness about Kyrgyzstan and its development-related issues as well as to alleviate its relative isolation, the country welcomes intensified international and regional exchanges of information and with regard to development activities. It was underlined in discussions that Kyrgyzstan wishes to achieve stability and to increase cooperation among the Central Asian countries, e.g., through trade and regional development programmes, national security (including such components as economic and ecological issues), as well as human rights, were considered to be essential for accelerating development. Based on visits in the country and discussions held, the mission considers that UNDP has rendered valuable assistance in that field and notes that it has plans to continue and expand its support for Kyrgyzstan. Examples of useful activities are: (a) Building national capacity at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs; (b) The establishment and improvement of communication and information networks; (c) Promotion of the participation of Kyrgyz nationals in various international and regional training workshops and seminars.

9. The Fergana Valley Development Programme is an example of a planned new regional activity to support multisectoral integrated development activities in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In that regard, the UNFPA contribution seems useful, particularly through support to Kyrgyz nationals participating in both regional and international training.

Recommendations

10. The mission encourages UNDP:

(a) To support the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in establishing the multisectoral centre for the retraining of professionals in foreign relations and in its attempts to seek other donor support for continuation of those training activities;

(b) To support the expansion of communications and information networks to the provincial levels in accordance with national priorities;

(c) To consider the possibility of supporting the elaboration and expansion of general information about Kyrgyzstan;

(d) To complete the preparatory work for the Fergana Valley Development Programme and to involve the participating countries actively in that work. Efforts to involve other potential donors in the preparatory phase also seems to be called for.

B. Aid coordination

11. During the mission's discussions, in particular with the representatives of the State Commission on Foreign Investment and Economic Assistance, the Vice Chairman of the Commission underlined the good working relationship with UNDP and expressed appreciation for its assistance in organizing the round table meetings as well as regular donor meetings at the country level. The monthly country level donor meetings are chaired by the United Nations Resident Coordinator. In every second meeting, the national authorities, representatives of NGOs, or other nationals, are invited. The mission took part in one donor coordination meeting and observed that the donors share their experiences, plans and problems openly and frankly. UNDP is making constructive contributions in that area. In addition, regular humanitarian donor meetings are held on a rotating-chairmanship basis.

12. The cooperation between United Nations organizations and the Bretton Woods institutions seems to function well. The World Bank and UNDP have signed a memorandum of understanding.

13. The Government has so far not requested the United Nations to help prepare a country strategy note (CSN). The United Nations organizations working in the country feel that the total number and level of activities are still so limited that a CSN is not needed.

14. The programming cycles of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF are not yet harmonized. Nevertheless, there is a need and willingness to initiate discussion towards that end.

C. Common premises and services: United Nations House

15. Two United Nations operative development organizations, UNDP and UNFPA, are currently sharing offices as well as utilizing common services, e.g., in communications. The United Nations Children's Fund has established its own office in Bishkek. All United Nations development organizations active in operational activities have worked for only a few years in Kyrgyzstan and all have small staffs. The current premises used by UNDP and UNFPA do not allow for increases in staffing.

16. The idea of establishing common premises for the United Nations organizations operating in Kyrgyzstan, except for the World Bank which already has its own office, was raised about three years ago. The "United Nations House" initiative is supported by national authorities as well as all United Nations development organizations. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations have also expressed interest in moving to the "United Nations House". The Government is currently making efforts to find a suitable building which will be made available to the United Nations free of charge. The concerned United Nations organizations are interested in discussing ways to share services and thereby create savings.

D. Mobilization of funds and government cost-sharing

17. UNDP is currently using approximately \$ 7 million per year for different development activities in Kyrgyzstan. An indication of the close and confidential working relations between the Government and UNDP is that the Government normally contributes to development activities supported by UNDP. The Government appreciates and encourages the efforts of UNDP to mobilize additional resources.

E. Capacity-building and national execution

18. Although the general level of education of Kyrgyzstan is relatively high, there is a lack of knowledge and skills in many specific areas, including in modern technologies. The UNDP and UNFPA offices provide good examples of utilizing and strengthening national staff. Both organizations are continuously supporting the utilization and strengthening of national capacity. The Kyrgyz authorities seek to recruit and utilize national specialists whenever possible, for example, they strongly promote utilization of national consultants in planning, implementation and evaluation. Very recently, the utilization of national execution in programme and project implementation increased considerably. A factor for the increase is the limited number of international experts working in Kyrgyzstan.

19. UNDP has elaborated a manual (in Kyrgyz and in Russian) that is seen as a prerequisite for the successful national execution of projects. UNFPA does not have such a manual and a shortage of qualified national staff is an additional obstacle. However, both the national authorities and the United

Nations staff admitted that there are still a lot of problems relating to national execution.

F. United Nations Resident Coordinator

20. In Kyrgyzstan, the UNDP Resident Representative is also the United Nations Resident Coordinator. Even though there are only a few United Nations organizations represented in Kyrgyzstan, the role of the United Nations Resident Coordinator is highly visible, in particular in such areas as aid coordination, the "United Nations House" initiative, and security, as well as through regular contacts with bilateral donors.

G. Programme approach

21. The programme approach is not yet systematically used by the donors in Kyrgyzstan owing to the fact that they have been operating for only a few years in the country. The national authorities and UNDP are emphasizing the advantages of the programme approach. In their opinion, that would mean savings in the planning and support of development efforts and more cohesive approaches.

Recommendations

22. The mission encourages United Nations development organizations:

(a) To strengthen further the role of national authorities in aid coordination, e.g., by systematic involvement in donor coordination and by gradually transferring the full responsibility for aid coordination to national authorities;

(b) To follow-up without delay the "United Nations House" initiative, in close cooperation with the Government and all interested United Nations organizations;

(c) To initiate negotiations about the utilization of common services as soon as possible;

(d) To continue systematic support to utilization and strengthening of national capacity, in particular with regard to UNFPA activities;

(e) To elaborate manuals for national execution, utilizing the experiences that UNDP already has in providing such manuals;

(f) To analyse comprehensively, together with the national authorities, the remaining problems and difficulties in national execution in order to remedy them;

(g) To increasingly use the programme approach in the planning and implementation of multilateral support to national development efforts.

III. SUPPORT BY UNDP AND UNFPA TO DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN KYRGYZSTAN

23. The mission is of the opinion that UNDP support to Kyrgyz development activities is in harmony with national development priorities and with the approved priorities of the organization, i.e., focusing on poverty alleviation, environment, sustainable human development and women in development. UNFPA is playing a crucial role in promoting increased awareness about population issues and reproductive health, and family planning in Kyrgyzstan. In that regard, UNFPA is practically the sole provider of contraceptives in Kyrgyzstan at present.

A. Poverty alleviation

24. During the visit to Kyrgyzstan, the mission participated in the signing of an agreement on UNDP support for the implementation of the national sustainable human development strategy. Since Kyrgyzstan is not only a country with its economy in transition, but also a country undergoing a change in its inherited practices and thinking, the national authorities, at the highest levels, attach great importance to the concept of sustainable human development and the continued improvement of national capacities.

25. The launching of the third National Human Development Report of the Kyrgyz Republic (1997) took place during the mission's visit. It is another example of involving national expertise in the general discussion on development priorities and overall planning. A positive feature in the preparation of the report is that different teams of national experts are involved in the work each year.

26. To achieve sustainable results in poverty alleviation, one of the central tools used is credits, including micro-credits. While the commercial banking system is only weakly developed in Kyrgyzstan, micro-credit schemes supported by UNDP offer a more immediate opportunity to assist small entrepreneurs, women's groups and individuals. Micro-credits are used, for example, for improved agricultural production, and for small-scale enterprise, for example in food and handicraft businesses. To channel micro-credits, it was continuously highlighted that the potential users need to be trained in such areas as business management and planning, as well as in accounting techniques. That kind of training is provided not only in the capital area but also in the regions, e.g., by the Osh State University Business Centre "South", visited by the mission.

27. The mission visited two NGOs that provide support to women, one in Kant district and another in the area of Lake Issyk-Kul. It is obvious that women play a key role in the family and in the communities, not only in taking care of their family duties, but also in becoming increasingly involved in productive activities. It seems, however, that Kyrgyz women are still struggling to have their opinions heard in the society. UNDP and UNFPA are actively supporting women's groups in Kyrgyzstan.

28. Women's groups are an important component of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan. However, the creation of NGOs is just beginning in the country and their quality and capabilities vary a lot. The government authorities, therefore, have varying attitudes towards and expectations from NGOs: some authorities strongly support NGOs and some expect NGOs to become stronger before being willing to support them or use them as implementing organizations.

29. UNDP and the World Bank have been requested to support the creation of a unified fund, the Kyrgyz Peoples' Initiative Fund, to assist the low income population and disadvantaged groups in all parts of the country.

30. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is providing appreciated assistance in poverty alleviation, support to NGOs, and capacity-building. There are currently 17 UNV specialists working in Kyrgyzstan.

B. Environmental issues

31. The mission had the impression that there is an increasing awareness of environmental issues in Kyrgyzstan and there are a few environmentally focused NGOs in the country. A positive example of UNDP cooperation for the practical improvement of the environment is the Local Initiative Facility for Urban Environment (LIFE) programme active in the capital area, as well as in Osh. The mission observed the very practical implementation of garbage management through cleaning the banks of the Ak Bura River and planting trees. The project is also contributing to poverty alleviation through engaging locally employed persons to do the work.

C. Population and health issues

32. During the discussions at the Ministry of Health, the following health problems were emphasized: tuberculosis; sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), notably syphilis; problems in the area of maternal and child health, including family planning; and heavy consumption of alcohol and tobacco.

33. The health problems in Kyrgyzstan are intimately interlinked with the general socio-economic situation, including poverty, poor sanitary conditions and water supply, housing, and prevailing attitudes.

34. The mission visited maternal and child health (MCH) centres in Osh, a family planning clinic, and STD and HIV/AIDS prevention programmes in Bishkek. UNFPA is supporting maternal and child health care activities through the further training of personnel, the provision of training materials specifically in reproductive health, and the provision of contraceptives.

35. The variety of contraceptive methods offered is sufficiently wide, but the provision of services is unreliable and the coverage, particularly in rural areas, is insufficient. The rate of abortions (as a "method of family planning") has been traditionally very high, but is now generally decreasing. Kyrgyzstan currently faces great difficulties in meeting adolescent

reproductive health needs, in particular with regard to preventing pregnancies and STDs.

36. UNFPA is supporting the planning and implementation of censuses in Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, a census is scheduled for 1999 and planning work is at an early stage.

Recommendations

37. The mission encourages UNDP and UNFPA:

(a) To focus increasingly in their future work on the issues of cost coverage as a necessity for achieving sustainable results, e.g., in covering the running cost of women in development support organizations and discontinuing the provision of contraceptives free of charge;

(b) To expand their assistance to micro-credit arrangements, including through attracting new donors in that field;

(c) To continue to collaborate with the World Bank with regard to the Kyrgyz People's Initiative Fund;

(d) To render assistance to women's organizations and groups in expanding their networking with other regional and international women's organizations;

(e) To increase the use of potential NGOs in the execution of project and programme activities, thus contributing to more capacity-building;

(f) To utilize more United Nations Volunteers specialists and Junior Professional Officers in project implementation;

(g) To involve other local authorities, in addition to those in Bishkek and Osh, in the implementation of practically oriented environmental activities;

(h) To decrease the Government's dependency on only one donor in the field of contraceptive provision. Other donors should therefore become involved in those activities;

(i) To consider providing assistance, especially for youth and adolescents, in the field of reproductive health and family planning;

(j) To support the attaining and local production of health, reproductive health and family planning literature and information materials;

(k) For UNDP and UNFPA to consider providing greater assistance to the collection of socio-economic data in Kyrgyzstan, including mobilizing donor support for the preparations and implementation of the census of the Kyrgyz population scheduled for 1999;

(l) To assess the need for assistance to remedy the health hazards caused by alcohol and tobacco use;

(m) To assist in the establishment of a nation-wide mechanism to monitor the HIV/AIDS situation.

38. The mission wishes to express heartfelt thanks to all who contributed to the successful arrangements for the visit to Kyrgyzstan. The mission appreciates the frank and fruitful discussion with Kyrgyz nationals and the international staff working in Kyrgyzstan.

Rahmat.

Part two

LATVIA

(31 August-5 September 1997)

I. BACKGROUND

1. The UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board visited Latvia from 31 August to 5 September 1997 to acquaint themselves with ongoing and planned UNDP- and UNFPA-supported development activities. The aim of the mission was also to assess the compatibility of UNDP and UNFPA cooperation with national development plans and priorities, as well as with the approved policies of those organizations.

2. The mission consisted of representatives from the following Executive Board members: Antigua and Barbuda¹, China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Finland², Romania and Slovakia². In consultation with the national authorities, the programme for the mission was prepared under the leadership of Mr. John Hendra, Resident Coordinator/Resident Representative of UNDP in Latvia, as well as with the national UNFPA staff in Latvia. Furthermore, the mission had discussions with the representatives of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Bank. A meeting with major donor representatives was also held.

3. The mission was accompanied by Ms. Evelyn Wilkens of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board Secretariat.

¹ Ambassador Patrick Lewis, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations, was appointed Team Coordinator

² Ms. Heli Sirve of Finland and Mr. Peter Hulenyi of Slovakia were nominated as rapporteurs.

4. The mission visited government and local authorities, project managers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Riga, the capital of Latvia, and in Kraslava, in the south-eastern part of Latvia. The mission also paid a visit to a Latvian language-training camp for military recruits in Licupe. A detailed programme for the visit is available on request from the Executive Board Secretariat.

II. OBSERVATIONS BY THE MISSION AND SITUATION ANALYSIS

5. Latvia regained its independence in 1991 after the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Although its gross national product per capita - \$2,420, the 1995 World Bank figure - is relatively high, Latvia faces specific problems as a consequence of being a country with its economy in transition as well as its institutional structures, democracy and governance in the process of being restructured and reformed. Among the specific issues requiring particular attention are: coexistence and furthering the harmonization between the majority of the population, i.e., Latvians (56 per cent) and the minority groups, which includes a Russian minority group of 30 per cent. Another problem requiring action is the imbalance in development between the capital region and the rest of the country. Latvia has taken initial steps to improve democratic rule, human rights, participatory processes and governance, as well as numerous reforms in the social sector, which, however, need longer-term, continuous attention.

III. SUPPORT BY UNDP AND UNFPA TO DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN LATVIA

6. The mission observed that the relations between UNDP and the Government and public authorities as well as with the donor community are built on mutual understanding and respect, frank exchange of views, and willingness to achieve shared goals. In its cooperation with Latvia, UNDP has been able to utilize its own and those comparative advantages of the United Nations, i.e., neutrality and impartiality, in an excellent way. UNDP has focused its cooperation in Latvia on carefully selected sensitive and crucial issues such as the protection of human rights, increased integration among different ethnic groups, and social welfare reform (e.g., on refugee issues). Thus, UNDP has gained the full confidence of the Government and the donor community. Consequently, UNDP has been successful in mobilizing additional funds for those and other development activities. The level of UNDP core contributions in Latvia has been relatively small.

7. UNDP core support activities in Latvia. The promotion of human rights and social integration in Latvia are currently major ongoing longer-term activities supported by UNDP. There are several donors who participate in those activities on a cost-sharing basis. The mission visited the Latvian National Human Rights Office and the National Programme for Latvian Language Training. Both are nationally implemented activities that maximize use of national staff.

8. In spite of promising recent overall economic developments in Latvia, there are still considerable socio-economic regional imbalances, pockets of poverty, and severe social problems in the country. The Ministry of Welfare informed the mission about several ongoing and planned activities in this area that have been jointly supported by UNDP, the World Bank and other donors. The mission visited the Child Social Rehabilitation Centre in Kraslava district. The role of the Centre is to provide temporary care for children coming from families with severe social problems. There is fruitful cooperation between the World Bank and UNDP in the field of social welfare reform as well as in many other areas requiring reform, a point that was underlined by the World Bank representative for the Baltic countries.

9. UNDP support to other development activities in Latvia. The mission visited the UNDP-supported NGO Service Centre in Riga and had the opportunity to hold discussions with representatives of various NGOs in Riga and in Kraslava. During the mission's visit, a comprehensive directory of NGOs in Latvia was launched. The NGO Service Centre provides necessary and useful assistance to improve further the possibility for NGOs to influence opinion and decision-makers in Latvia as well as to develop their participation in various development activities. Latvian NGOs operate primarily in the Riga region. Elsewhere in the country, those activities are not yet well developed.

10. UNDP, in close cooperation with UNHCR, is currently involved in providing assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers. Their efforts in that respect, have contributed to the establishment of legal frameworks and some improvements in living conditions for refugees and asylum-seekers.

11. The mission visited a proposed site for a new reception centre for refugees located about 20 kilometres from Riga. Contributions from several bilateral donors for that project are already forthcoming (e.g., the Nordic countries and the United States).

12. The Latvian authorities also highlighted the desirability of focusing on the external image of the country as a means to approach the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the European Union. UNDP is assisting the Ministry of Economy in improving the Latvian public administration's capacity to achieve those goals. UNDP also supports the compilation of information and the national elaboration of development strategies in some key areas of development such as a national poverty alleviation strategy and a survey on reasons for the slow naturalization process in Latvia. UNDP is promoting women's equal rights in Latvian society through its development cooperation programmes.

13. UNFPA support to development activities in Latvia. UNFPA provides relatively limited assistance to Latvia. It focuses mainly on reproductive health and rights and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS. The mission observed an ongoing workshop on reproductive health and rights, fertility and family planning, held in Riga, as a positive example of UNFPA support to training and exchange of information in that field.

14. The alarming growth rate of STDs in Latvia, particularly syphilis, and the fact that there are registered cases of HIV/AIDS, underline the necessity to take immediate action to prevent the further spread of those diseases. The mission witnessed the signing of the UNAIDS project "Integrated Cooperation for Information, Education and Advocacy on HIV/AIDS". UNFPA is also supporting the compilation of information and surveys on the reproductive health situation in Latvia in order to develop a national strategy in that field. UNFPA is actively cooperating with NGOs in that field.

IV. UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AND AID COORDINATION

15. UNDP and UNDCP share common premises and services in Latvia. In addition, UNHCR and UNFPA operate in the same United Nations premises with liaison and national officers. UNICEF is represented by and works through a National Committee.

16. During the mission's discussion with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Finance, the idea to consolidate further and develop the idea of the "United Nations House" was stressed. The Government favours the existence of a well-functioning "United Nations House" as a means to enhance regional cooperation and exchange of experiences and contribute to the generally positive image of the United Nations.

17. There are only a few United Nations organizations represented in Latvia and the role of the United Nations Resident Coordinator is prominent and appreciated and based on well-functioning practical cooperation among the United Nations organizations working in the country.

18. UNDP is supporting the programme approach through assistance to the national elaboration of consolidated sectoral programmes. UNDP has been very successful in mobilizing cost-sharing financing for those activities, often from such donors who otherwise would not have contributed to development activities in Latvia.

19. The systematic utilization of the national execution modality in the programme and project implementation and national staff clearly contribute to the future sustainability of development activities. Although the Government is demonstrating its willingness to support and sustain UNDP- and UNFPA-assisted activities, the Government's financial situation does not yet allow full cost-coverage. To safeguard future sustainability, the Government and NGOs have to shoulder an increased responsibility for financing of national development efforts.

20. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for aid coordination in Latvia and the European Union coordinates development aid issues among the donor community.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

21. The mission encourages UNDP and UNFPA:

(a) To expand their future support activities to areas outside Riga, in particular to the less well-developed ones;

(b) To consider the possibility of including credit and micro-credit programmes for small-and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas;

(c) To continue assisting Latvian authorities to organize such events as subregional and regional seminars and workshops in the field of human rights, utilizing and building on its wide experiences in that field;

(d) To build on previous experience in supporting human rights work in Latvia and to consider expanding work with the Government with regard to social welfare reform and social integration;

(e) To consider expanding Latvian language-training activities to include training programmes broadcast by radio. The mission is of the view that this type of activity could support the sustainability of language skills as well as contribute constructively to social integration;

(f) To sustain support to NGOs, particularly outside Riga, and work to encourage gradual national financing of NGO activities;

(g) To continue financial support to Latvia in the sectors chosen, particularly in alleviating poverty and reforming social welfare sectors, including, in light of the relatively low core allocation, through additional cost-sharing funding from other interested donors;

(h) To continue discussions about the proposed "United Nations House" with Latvian authorities and interested United Nations organizations;

(i) To consider focusing support to health-care services in Latvia more consciously on preventive and primary health care through support to the participation of the Latvian health personnel in seminars, study visits, etc. in that area;

(j) To focus on more in depth sectoral aid coordination, complementary to the ongoing overall aid coordination.

22. The mission wishes to express its warm thanks to both UNDP and UNFPA as well as to the national authorities, representatives of municipalities and NGOs for a most interesting and balanced programme in Latvia. The mission enjoyed open and constructive discussions with everyone, often on sensitive topics.

Paldies.

