



**Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works
United Nations Development Programme
Global Environment Facility**

***Integrating Global Environmental Issues into Bulgaria's
Regional Development Process Project***

(Working Title: Rio Conventions Project)

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**Final Project Report
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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|------------|--|
| AB(M) | Advisory Board (Meeting) |
| BCC | Bulgarian Climate Coalition |
| BE | Bulgarian Entity |
| BRC | Bratislava Regional Center |
| CD | Capacity Development |
| CEU | Central European University |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| DA | District Administration |
| DDS | District Development Strategies |
| DG | Directorate General |
| DG SRDPATO | Directorate General "Strategic Regional Development Planning and Administrative and Territorial Organization" (at MRDPW) |
| EA | Ecological Assessment (Bulgarian legal term for SEA) |
| EIA | Environmental Impact Assessment |
| EU | European Union |
| EEA | Executive Environmental Agency |
| FE | Final Evaluation |
| GE | Global Environment |
| GEI | Global Environmental Issues |
| GEF | Global Environmental Facility |
| GIS | Geographic Information System |
| GOB | Government of Bulgaria |
| GPI | Green Policy Institute |
| GRDP | Greening Regional Development Programmes |
| IE | International Entity |
| IPA | Institute for Public Administration |
| LPAC | Local Project Appraisal Committee |
| MEA | Ministry of External Affairs |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MDPs | Municipal Development Plans |
| MOEW | Ministry of Environment and Water |
| MRDPW | Ministry for Regional Development and Public Works |
| MTE | Midterm Evaluation |
| NCSA | National Capacity Self Assessment |
| NGO | Non-Government Organization |
| NPD | National Project Director |
| NSFRD | National Strategy for Regional Development |

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|--------|---|
| NSI | National Statistic Institute |
| OPs | Operational Programs |
| OPRD | Operational Program for Regional Development |
| PA | Program Analyst |
| PIR | Project Implementation Review |
| PMU | Project Management Unit |
| PSC | Project Steering Committee |
| RCP | Rio Conventions Project |
| RD | Regional Development |
| RDA | Regional Development Act |
| RDPs | Regional Development Plans |
| RFP | Request for Proposals |
| RTA | Regional Technical Advisor of UNDP/GEF |
| SC | Steering Committee |
| SEA | Strategic Environmental Assessment |
| SP | Spatial planning |
| SU | Sofia University |
| TDA | Territorial Development Act |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| TP | Training Program |
| TPP | Training Program Package |
| UNCBD | United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity |
| UNCCD | United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |

1. The Rio Conventions Project and the Context to its Development

1.1 Introduction – Regional Development and Spatial Planning in Bulgaria

The accession of Bulgaria into the European Union (EU) on 1st January, 2007 offered important opportunities for explicitly incorporating the mandates of the UN CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD¹ into the regional development and spatial planning processes, which, prior to that, were typically focused on socio-economic issues. On one hand, Bulgaria adopted a different, systematic regional development planning approach following EU practices and legislature which was also reflected in the new Regional Development Act (RDA) and the Statute for its implementation adopted on 31 August, 2008.

The status of an EU member poses several challenges and opportunities for integrated development policies that are in line with EU requirements. One of the biggest challenges is the need to develop sound and effective coordination between line Ministries (that represent the vertical axis of decision-making), and regional entities (the horizontal level of decision-making). This is an important objective of the current EU assistance to the country (2007-2013 planning period) and is motivated by the need to achieve coherent policy formulation and efficient absorption of current and future funding under the EU Structural Funds.

One of the special areas of emphasis that has emerged as part of the EU accession process is the sustainable regional development of Bulgaria's six regions at the NUTS 2 level. Within Bulgaria there exists critical regional differentiation. As a result of the inherited social and economic structures and the dynamics of the country's development, the existing differences in the economy, infrastructure, employment, income and quality of life in the different parts of the country have intensified. This fact has been taken into account in the preparation and implementation of the national policy of regional development, which is aimed at overcoming the differences in the standard of living in the different regions of the country by assisting them in their structural adjustment, development of parts of their territory that are in decline, and general economic and social recovery.

The responsibility for determining the regional development path lies with the Ministry for Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW), and this development path is articulated through a series of documents - National Regional Development Strategy, the Operational Programme for Regional Development (OPRD), six Regional Development Plans (RDPs), 28 District Development Strategies (DDSs) and 264 Municipal Development Plans (MDPs). All those strategic planning documents are subject to ex-ante, midterm and ex-post evaluations in accordance with methodological guidelines provided by MRDPW. MRDPW's administrative units at the district level were also established – e.g. the Directorates for Technical Assistance, Coordination and Management of Regional Programmes – in order to facilitate and advise the implementation of the new regional development policies at the district and municipal level. Finally, the Regional Development Act (RDA) also established six Regional Development Councils² and 28 District Development Councils³ which provided a wider stakeholder platform for coordinating the delivery, monitoring and evaluation of regional development policies and planning at the regional and local level and to ensure a cross-sector cooperation with other operational programs. MRDPW organizes the development and implementation of the National Regional

¹ UN Convention on Biodiversity, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

² This is a consultative body to MRDPW on regional development planning, consisting of representatives from 6 national-level ministries, district governors and mayors of the districts and municipalities which are included in the particular region at NUTS 2 level, representative from NGOs, business associations, labor unions from the region. It approves the development, update, monitoring and evaluation of RDPs.

³ A consultative body to the 28 district governors, consisting of representatives from mayors of the municipalities which are included in the particular district, representative from NGOs, business associations, labor unions from the district. It approves the development, updating, monitoring and evaluation of DDSs.

Development Strategy and the Operational Program Regional Development (OPRD), as well as renders methodological guidance for the development and implementation of the six Regional Development Plans, District Development Strategies and Municipal Development Plans. It was that evolving regional development planning process that the project sought to link into, at an early stage, so as to ensure that global environmental concerns can be mainstreamed.

Spatial planning and territorial development goes hand in hand with regional planning and development, since land area must be prepared to accommodate regional development vision and absorb the allocated funds⁴ and vice versa. The 2002 Territorial Development Act (TDA) regulates spatial planning in Bulgaria. Spatial planning is carried out in compliance with the actual and intended socio-economic development, the actual and intended land use, and attempts at guaranteeing environmental protection. The Minister for Regional Development and Public Works manages the state policy for territorial development and spatial planning. District Governors carry out the state policy in their respective districts. Even though the legislation (RDA and TDA) does link with each other, there is a weak practical link between regional development planning and spatial planning. The key bottleneck is the lack of practical experience that can demonstrate how this can work in practice and how the “Regional planning–spatial planning” loop can be closed. The lack of understanding of the importance of linking regional development planning (which provides the sustainable development vision) and spatial land-use planning (on-the-ground implementation of that vision) is inhibiting allocation of adequate government resources to linking spatial and regional planning.

MOEW implements the legislation related to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Impact Assessments (SEA)⁵. An Ordinance on the conditions, procedure and methods for environmental assessment of plans and programs⁶ was prepared by MOEW and adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2004. It stipulates that the OPRD and the RDPs are bound to obligatory Ecological Assessment (EA), while MDPs are subjected to discretionary EA. The National Comprehensive Spatial Planning Scheme, District Spatial Planning Schemes and General Spatial Plans are subjected to obligatory EA, while Detailed Spatial Plans and Specialist Detailed Spatial Plans are subject to discretionary EA.

EAs are carried out in parallel with the preparation of the respective plan / program and a formal opinion on it should be issued prior to the adoption of the plan / program. Competent authorities with respect to the EA are the Minister for Environment and Waters (for documents which are to be adopted by central ministries or Parliament) and the Director of the respective Regional Inspectorate for Environment & Waters or the Minister for Environment & Waters (for plans and programs which are to be adopted by decentralized bodies of central government or Municipal Councils).

Prior to the project intervention national and regional development policies treated global environmental issues as a stand-alone agenda of limited concern to national or local development priorities. The Ministry of Environment and Water (MOEW) in Bulgaria is assigned the prime responsibility for implementing the Conventions. However, prior to the project start, it has not been able to develop effective cross-sectoral dialogue at a government-wide level to mainstream global environmental issues into sectoral policies.

1.2 Problems that the Project Sought to Address

The Rio Conventions Project was identified as a priority for Bulgaria as a result of the Bulgarian National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) for Improved Global Environmental Management Project, conducted from 2002-2004, designed to further Bulgaria’s commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),

⁴ Land use, estate acquisition, auxiliary infrastructure, environmental impact assessment of spatial planning schemes must be in place prior to the actual implementation of regional plans and programs.

⁵ MoEWt is also responsible for the implementation of the Rio Conventions and all Convention focal points are staff members of the Ministry.

⁶ Environmental Assessment (EA) is the Bulgarian legal term for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) collectively referred to as the Rio Conventions.

The NCSA identified the need to develop national capacity for mainstreaming global environmental objectives into the regional development process, at national, regional, district and municipal levels.

The assessment was that, without intervention, the evolving framework for regional development and spatial planning in Bulgaria was unlikely to mainstream biodiversity, land degradation and climate change.

In addition, a need for better coordination among the key ministries, tiers of governments and agencies at the national/ central and local/ regional levels has been stated as a key objective for the implementation of the conventions. As stated in the NCSA report, “stakeholder coordination is insufficient to mainstream the obligations under the Conventions and to achieve effectiveness and efficiency in implementation”. Two main interconnected areas of support have been identified in this regard: i) support to institutions in the area of cross-sectoral planning, decision-making and information systems; and ii) support for decentralized integrated environmental planning and action-oriented approaches.

The NCSA process also assigned importance to strengthening the capacity of state institutions responsible for the management of financial resources. The objective is to improve the efficiency of their disbursement for the purpose of meeting the objectives of national development and those of the Rio Conventions. The final NCSA document of Bulgaria states: “...the strategy aims at a more efficient use of Bulgaria’s limited institutional, human and financial resources based on the following principles: ... the objectives and measures for implementation of the Conventions are mainstreamed into Bulgaria’s regulatory and economic framework in the context of its EU accession priorities.

The fact that regional development objectives do not directly coincide with global environmental objectives was not unexpected. Initially, those objectives were determined on the basis of EU requirements, which were primarily about competitiveness, jobs, economic development, and the like.

The Union has reconsidered its approach to development policy as a result of the adoption in 1992 of the Treaty on European Union (the Maastricht Treaty), which for the first time introduced a specific chapter on development into the Union’s basic texts. The Treaty specified that Community policy was to be complementary to the policies pursued by Member States and was to foster; the sustainable economic and social development. The European Commission adopted its major Communication Agenda 2000 in July 1997, which proposed a broad framework for the budget of the Community for the years 2000 to 2006. The proposal acknowledges that not all the Community’s funds have been used in an environmentally optimal way, therefore mechanism such as impact assessments (EIA and SEA) shall be widely used to verify that community funding does not harm the environment. In the more recent years, that process was further strengthened by the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty (2009) and the 2020 Strategy on Sustainable, Innovative and Inclusive Growth (also known as EU Strategy 2020).

The issue of importance from the point of view of the global environmental Conventions is how a particular region, district or municipality chooses to achieve those development objectives. In the baseline situation, it is unlikely that objectives of the biodiversity, climate change and land degradation conventions will be appropriately factored into regional development planning. Since relevant region-specific global environmental objectives are rarely identified in regional development documents, the related indicator system that is used to monitor and report on implementation of regional development policies does not explicitly address the achievement of Bulgaria’s commitments under the global environmental conventions. Thus, Convention objectives again get marginalized relative to development objectives. For instance, urban development indicators for eco-transport, street lighting, energy efficiency and the like (associated with climate change) are rarely used; costs for biological losses (related to biodiversity) are not used in cost-benefit analyses; formal links between biodiversity conservation, sustainable use, and sustainable land management, and the planning processes in economic sectors directly involved in using and/or managing natural resources, such as mining, construction, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism, and control of invasive species are missing. These sectors are subject to sector-specific strategies and operational programs and, therefore, indicators for their

activities, outputs and impacts could well be missed in regional development and spatial planning documents. Similarly, the selection criteria for regional development projects programmed under the OPRD do not explicitly include specific global environmental objectives-related indicators.

The underlying cause of this is not weaknesses in the regulatory framework. In the case of Bulgaria, the legislation already states that environment should be taken into consideration in regional development planning so as to achieve sustainable development. It is in putting the laws into practice where the challenges lie. The critical barriers are the lack of methodologies, knowledge, skills and practical experience on how the laws can be put into practice and how Convention mandates can practically be mainstreamed. Those who are responsible for preparing the planning documents in MRDPW do not have the level of familiarization with biodiversity, land degradation, and climate change issues that is needed to ensure that regional development strategies, programs and plans explicitly further national-level commitments made under the UNCBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD where appropriate. This is especially true of staff at levels below the central one, namely NUTS 2, NUTS 3 and LAU 1 (districts) and LAU 2 (municipalities) levels. In addition, at the institutional level, the incentives for taking into account global environmental issues are lacking. There are no functions and adequately tasked posts to ensure global environmental mainstreaming into the regional development planning process.

One could argue that full implementation of the country's SEA policy, which falls within the remit of the MOEW, should to a large extent address the integration of local and global environmental objectives with regional development planning. However, such an approach would still be seen as a parallel exercise led by MOEW, and the consideration of global environmental issues would not be effectively internalized into the operations of the principle Ministry in charge of sustainable development planning (i.e., MRDPW). The ability of those who manage the development process to integrate global environmental issues would still be lacking.

2. Main objectives of the Rio Conventions Project

The long-term goal of the project is to embed global environmental concerns into the processes of regional and local development, as well as spatial planning in Bulgaria.

The project objective is to build capacities for mainstreaming global environmental issues into the formulation and implementation of regional and local development, as well as spatial planning policies. This objective will be realized through the following 3 outcomes.

- Outcome 1: The methodologies, skills, knowledge, and information management system for mainstreaming global environmental considerations into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of regional development and spatial planning policies are in place
- Outcome 2: Institutional changes that support mainstreaming of global environment into regional development and spatial planning are in place.
- Outcome 3: Regional development plans and municipal-level spatial development plans are revised to integrate global environmental objectives in a pilot region or group of municipalities through application of capacities developed in Outcomes 1 and 2.

3. Project Development and Implementation Arrangements⁷

Local Project Appraisal Committee (LPAC) held:

GEF approved a grant of USD 499,000 on 22 March, 2006. After approval by the GEF council, the project LPAC met on 19 May, 2006. Participants in the meeting included representatives of the UNDP, Ministry of Environment and Water (Ms. Dimitrinka Marinova), Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (Mr. Valery Naidenov) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Mr. Branomir Zaimov). LPAC members reviewed and accepted final adaptations to the project. The Project Document was officially

⁷ An organizational chart is inserted in Annex 3.

endorsed by all parties, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 28 June, 2006. A National Project Director was assigned by MRDPW.

Project manager has been hired and a fully functioning PMU established:

Because the position of project manager was declined by the top candidate the first time the post was offered, the UNDP had to hold a second selection round (September – October, 2006). This resulted in a project manager being hired, and implementation of the project started on 13 November, 2006. A project administrator was hired on 14 December, 2006. Thus a full functioning PMU was established and it started by working out of temporary premises at UNDP Bulgaria. At the beginning of May 2007 a permanent office and meeting room at the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works were established and PMU became fully integrated with key staff and directorates at the Ministry. The project document was reviewed, and the overall work-plan and budget, along with the 2007 work-plan and budget were revised (a shift in timing) to reflect the stage that implementation of the project had reached.

Steering Committee formed:

In early February, 2007 the MRDPW and MoEW officially nominated the Steering Committee members. The first Steering Committee meeting was held on 19 February, 2007 at MRDPW. PSC members approved the proposed changes (shift in timing) to the budget and the overall work-plan, as well as the proposed Work Plan for 2007 developed by the PMU. PSC meetings were held bi-annually. A total of 8 (eight) PSC meetings were held during project duration.

Project Inception Workshop held:

On February 21 2007, the project's Inception Workshop was held in Sofia, bringing together more than 50 stakeholders, including representatives of ministries, municipal associations, NGOs, academic institutions, parliamentary committees and media. Those who took part in that workshop formed the initial cohort of members for the project's Advisory Board (AB), which subsequently met once a year. The membership of the AB was continuously expanded over the project time period as it continuously identified and interacted with new and relevant stakeholders who were consulted regarding the implementation of the project's strategy, achieved results and planned activities. PSC members were always invited to AB meetings. Minutes from the AB meetings were also sent to the PSC and if they pointed to any strategic issues regarding the project implementation, the latter were discussed during the next PSC (e.g. holding a meeting with representatives from the Institute of Public Administration to include the project developed short-term training courses in their portfolio of training courses for public employees). Suggestions and recommendations from AB members related to improvements of the day-to-day management of the project were implemented directly by PMU (e.g. improvements in the project web site, suggestions for improved promotion of the developed training programs, etc.).

Project extension:

Although the initial planned end date was on 27 June, 2010 a three month no-cost extension for operations was approved during a PSC meeting on 3 Nov, 2010 until 27 September, 2010, and final closure by the end of 2010.

4. Summary of Achievement of Project Outcomes

Note: further details on the project, including both key project documents (Main Project Document, reports from the midterm and final evaluation, project implementation reviews, etc.) and deliverables (publications, reports, analyses, etc.) can be found on the project website (www.rioconventions.org), respectively in the Project Information and Publications sections.

Project Outcome 1: The methodologies, skills, knowledge, and information management system for mainstreaming global environmental considerations into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of regional development and spatial planning policies are in place

Output 1.1 *Accredited training programme on the integration of UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD objectives into regional development and spatial planning processes is established*

In January, 2007 one of the first strategic decisions made by the project was with respect to the Training Program (TP) development, where the Project Team together with Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW) assessed that, instead of international consultants, an international academic institution (partnering with a Bulgarian institution) shall be sought for the training program development in order to assure longer term commitment and delivery of the program by building a lasting cooperation between an international and a domestic training institution.

Based on this new approach, at the end of January, 2007 the Project produced a roster of 25 potential International Training Institutions through an internet-based research and through contact details provided by the International Association for Impact Assessment, European Association of Environmental and Resource Economics and the Greening Regional Development Project.

In order to identify an appropriate Bulgarian Entity (BE), in February 2007, the Rio Conventions Project initiated an assignment which was aimed at evaluating Bulgarian higher education institutions, NGOs and private companies providing trainings in the cross-cutting area of Global Environment and Regional Development. In this connection, a ranked short-listing of 23 higher education institutions and 5 private training centers were subsequently sent a questionnaire dwelling further into these entities institutional capacity.

The selection of the International Entity (IE) was finalized in early July, 2007. Six proposals submitted by renowned international educational institutions and consortia were reviewed and the proposal of the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary (CEU) was selected as the most responsive to the conditions laid down in the ToR for IE search. A contract was signed with the selected IE on 27th July, 2007.

Based on the new approach, CEU team was involved in the development of a ToR for the identification of an appropriate Bulgarian educational partner. As a result of the targeted search, five proposals were received within the announced deadline (10 Sept, 2007). Subsequently, the proposal of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridsky was selected and a contract was signed on 5th of October, 2007.

Also in support of the Training Program development, a parallel assignment was launched to identify and evaluate existing skills and gaps in knowledge regarding the integration of the three Rio Conventions in regional development and spatial planning policies and programs in Bulgaria. In consultation with UNDP, MRDPW and MoEW a list with 70 potential respondents was developed – public officials from MRDPW, MoEW, their regional structures and municipalities – and surveyed. In conjunction with the survey a specialized questionnaire was developed and sent to the targeted respondents. By the end of Sept, 2007 60 responses were received and 14 face-to-face interviews were conducted. A final descriptive and graphic analysis of the received responses was developed on the basis of the feedback from RCP, CEU and the SU and “fed” into the Training Program Package (TPP).

The pilot testing of the CEU and SU developed training program started on 3rd April and finished on 23 May, 2008. 15 trainees (5 from MRDPW, 4 from MoEW, 5 from Rhodope mountain municipalities and 1 from Smolian DA) went through the ten-day course and received certificates issued by SU. The main topics of the training included:

Session 1 – Introduction to Sustainable Development and the Rio Conventions

Session 2 – Practical mechanisms and tools for integration of environmental issues into the planning and management policy for regional and local development.

Session 3 – Best practices for integration of issues concerning biodiversity loss, climate changes and land degradation into the regional development and management.

Session 4 – Environmental assessments in the context of regional development

Session 5 – Information technology for preservation of the environment and regional development.

The final versions of the CEU-SU produced training program package, consisting of: curriculum, manuals and training materials in the English language, was finalized in August, 2008. The core training course Manual and annexes were translated into Bulgarian by 15 September, 2008.

Finally, a MoU between UNDP, MRDPW and MoEW was agreed and signed on 30 August, 2008. The MoU assigned responsibilities and obligations of each party for the recruitment of participants, covering their training-related expenses and the delivery of the training program.

The official start of the ten-day course delivery was on 18 September, 2008. The official start of the one-day training course delivery was 8 January, 2009.

A new master course entitled *Management and Planning of Territorial System*, with an optional concentration on integration of environmental issues into RD and SP (<http://suggfrpg.blogspot.com/>), was approved by Sofia University Academic Board and the 1st cohort of 15 MSc students began its training in November, 2009. By 27 Sept 2010, 30 prospective MSc students expressed their interest in the new maser course, as approximately 1/3 of them were municipal experts and employees from national ministries and agencies. The course was also jointly developed by SU and CEU.

By the end of the project, the three types of courses developed under the project – Introductory (one-day), Core (ten-day) and a Master course (three-semester) are already well integrated and accredited within the Sofia university training and academic curriculum. In addition, Sofia University has “built” a teaching staff that is well prepared to offer the courses even beyond the project end.

Finally, a meeting was organized in September 2010 with representatives from project PSC and SU with the director of the Institute for Public Administration (IPA) to discuss the opportunity to include the developed training course in the Institute’s 2011 Catalogue. A preliminary agreement was reached that in order to include it in the catalogue, the training experts from IPA shall work with SU representatives to design a three-day training option in the cross cutting area of RD, SP and environmental protection to best suit the training preferences of public officials from the institutions to which IPA provides training.

Output 1.2 *Key staff from MRDPW and MOEW is trained to integrate biodiversity, climate change and land degradation objectives into their regular work activities related to regional development planning, implementation and evaluation.*

In order to facilitate the delivery of the “core” training course to the core group of 130 public officials from MRDPW and MOEW, as written in the ProDoc, in July 2008, the PMU, in consultation with UNDP, initiated a process of signing a MoU with the two targeted ministries. In parallel to that, negotiations with Sofia University were started in order to extend their current contract and secure training facilities and instructors for the TPP delivery. SU contract was successfully extended at the beginning of Sept. 2008 and the first group of 13 trainees started their training on 18 September, 2008.

In addition, to “put into use” the one-day Introductory course on GEI integration into strategic planning documents developed by CEU and SU teams and to assist MRDPW into the delivery of “green” trainings at the DA and municipal level, in December, 2008 and in assistance with MRDPW, the project developed a schedule for the delivery of those trainings in the 28 DA centers and hired two qualified consultants from Sofia University to deliver the trainings between Jan and June, 2009.

The last training session of the ten-day core training course took place between 18 Feb and 26 March, 2010. 22 representatives from MRDPW, MoEW, municipalities and district administrations attended the course and received their certificates from Sofia University.

Eight ten-day courses with a total number of 141 participants were organized and held at SU during the period Sept, 2008 – March, 2010.

In parallel, 27 one-day training courses on the same topic were organized and held in 27 district administrations between 8 Jan and 26 June, 2009. A total of 201 experts from municipalities and DAs attended those short courses.

Output 1.3 *Set of uniform indicators and guidance for application are established for measuring the contribution of regional development policy and spatial planning to meeting global environmental objectives*

The initial work for developing of a set of indicators for measuring the contribution of RD and SP policies towards meeting Rio Conventions objectives involved identification of national data sources relevant to the implementation of the Rio Conventions in Bulgaria and a proposed format for classifying the collected data. The database was finalized and produced both in Bulgarian and English in accordance with the RCP approved format in Sept 2007 and subsequently printed and distributed on a CD.

A further planned activity under this output - and in accordance with the Project Document – was the integration of the identified global environmental indicators into GIS on regional development. In order to facilitate its implementation, the project felt the need to initiate a prior research on already existing domestic (best) practices in GIS application relevant to regional, spatial and environmental planning. In Oct and Nov, 2007 a comprehensive analysis of the domestic experience in successful application of GIS for planning purposes was conducted. 41 cases of GIS usage in different setting were explored (i.e. public, private, project-based, etc.). A short list of 6 domestic best practices was produced and subsequently printed and distributed on a brochure in 2008.

An inter-institutional expert group on indicators was formed in May 2008 and its 1st working meeting took place on 20th June, 2008 in Sofia University. The main goal of the meeting was to initiate project work on the identification of a set of indicators and the development of guidelines for measuring the contribution of regional development and spatial planning policy towards meeting global environmental objectives. The following main topics were discussed during the meeting:

- Past experience in Bulgaria in the development of indicators for the objectives of regional planning and sustainable development
- Criteria for assessment of an indicator system for integration of global environmental objectives into the process of regional and spatial planning.
- Required resources for development of an effective system of indicators for integration of environmental issues into the process of regional development and spatial planning.

Participants in the work group were experts from the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, Ministry of Environment and Water, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, National Statistics Institute, Executive Environment Agency, Cadastre Agency, Energy Efficiency Agency, State Forestry Agency, Bulgarian Academy of Science, National Territorial Development Centre, etc.

As a result of the meeting, PMU initiated a short-term assignment in August, 2008 which aimed to produce a motivated proposal with up to 10 indicators relevant to the monitoring of the 3 Rio Conventions and applicable to the Bulgarian context. As a result of the assignment, a “long” list of 47 indicators, followed by a “short” list of 6 indicators, were produced in January 2009. Both lists were sent to the expert group, SC members and Rio Conventions focal points at MRDPW for input and comments. Those proposals were discussed and finalized over the 2nd working meeting of the expert group which took place on 31 Jan, 2009 and a total of 7 indicators was agreed and subsequently included in MRDPW’s Ordinance for the update of strategic planning documents in May, 2009.

This project component also involved the development of a prototype GIS for facilitating GEI integration, monitoring and evaluation at MRDPW. Two major preparatory assignments for developing the prototype GIS for global environmental issues integration into RD&SP were conducted between July and November, 2009: namely, an assignment for the development of technical passports for the 7 strategic indicators and development of GIS passports for 5 of the 7 strategic indicators. The final outputs of the two assignments served as basis for finalizing the ToR for the structure of the pilot GIS.

In addition, a short term assignment on producing a model Excel database for collecting and processing the necessary information regarding the indicators by MRDPW staff was conducted in Dec, 2009.

In January 2010, the technical “passports” of the 7 strategic indicators, were submitted to Deputy Minister Liliana Pavlova and to the Managing Authority of OP Regional Development to be considered

during the forthcoming Midterm Evaluation of OPRD in mid 2010, with a view that some of those indicators could be used for assessing the impact on the global environment of projects to be funded by OPRD and implemented beyond its Midterm during 2010-2013 period, as well as during the next programming period (2014-2020).

A RFP procedure was conducted in February 2010 for the selection of a developer for the prototype GIS for the needs of Directorate General “Strategic Regional Development Planning and Administrative-Territorial Organization” (DG SRDPATO) at MRDPW and to support the monitoring and evaluation of the actual integration of the project-developed 7 strategic indicators in relevant strategic planning documents produced and/or supervised by the Directorate. As a result of the tender procedure and the following evaluation GAP Consult Ltd based in Sofia, Bulgaria was hired as a Subcontractor to implement the assignment in March 2010.

Two demo meetings took place at MRDPW on 23 April and 14 June, 2010 to showcase the progress on the development of the prototype and to obtain feedback and proposals for adjustments on the part of the ministerial experts. All the recommendations were carefully reviewed and taken into consideration into the finalization of the prototype GIS. In addition, one-day training course, demonstrating the use of the developed GIS, took place in Sofia on 29 June, 2010. It was attended by 12 designated MRDPW employees from Directorate General “Strategic Regional Development Planning and Administrative-Territorial Organization” at MRDPW. In parallel, an appropriate software (ArcView 9.3.1), compatible to work with the newly developed GIS, was also purchased and installed at MRDPW. The prototype was officially installed at all computers at DG SRDPATO at MRDPW on 7 July, 2010. A hand-over protocol was co-signed by DG SRDPATO and Directorate “Informational Systems and Security” (ISS) at MRDPW which would be jointly maintaining the prototype GIS since a back up of all technical and license documentation and databases were provided to both directorates. Currently, the prototype shall be used for monitoring and evaluation purposes of RDPs only. However, the assignment also produced a concept for expansion of the GIS to include the lower planning levels (districts and municipalities) and to have a publicly accessible, internet-based component, for which DG SRDPATO shall look for additional funding within the ministry and from appropriate EU funding sources beyond the project scope.

Output 1.4 *A portal website dedicated to integration of biodiversity, climate change and land degradation issues into development planning is operational for all stakeholders (government, NGOs, businesses, academic and research institutions, public)*

The project web site was successfully developed and launched on 27 June, 2007. The web page proved to be a very successful tool in the process of IE and BE search and subsequent assignments since it secured visibility and transparency in the process of communication with interested entities and consultants.

In response to a recommendation made during the 2nd SC meeting in October, 2007, PMU initiated an assignment about the establishment of electronic distribution list and a newsletter template that would be distributed to stakeholders from Bulgaria at the national, regional and local level who are potentially interested in project activities and results. The produced database initially contained more than 600 relevant recipients and till the project end it grew to over 850 recipients. 10 issues of the electronic newsletter in total were produced and distributed to the list of the targeted stakeholders by 30 September, 2010.

In addition, an assignment was initiated in Sept, 2008 and a long-term consultant was hired to support the PMU in the identification and uploading of news and other documents relevant to the implementation of the 3 Rio Conventions in Bulgaria and EU, as well as facilitates the contacts with the Conventions’ focal points. The news are uploaded on specially designated section at the project web site: <http://www.rioconventions.org/bg/The-Rio-Conventions/sybitia-i-publikacii.html>.

More than 200 such news were produced and uploaded both in English and Bulgarian on the specially designated subsection at the project web site entitled “Events and Publications” during a two year period - Sept, 2008 – Sept, 2010. In addition, more than 40 project related news in English and Bulgarian were prepared and uploaded by PMU staff on the project web site.

Output 1.5 *Develop knowledge materials from extensive information on good practices from Bulgaria, neighboring countries, EU and other regions for dissemination through the portal website.*

As a result of the re-established connections with the EU funded Greening Regional Development Project (GRDP) in the beginning of 2007 and attending the final GRDP conference in Budapest, Hungary in May 2007, the PMU was able to obtain a permission to adapt and translate in Bulgarian selected publications produced within the duration of the GRDP project. In order to facilitate the selection and adaptation of appropriate to the project goals GRDP publication a short-term assignment was implemented. 8 relevant GDRP publications were initially short listed for a review in mid August, 2007. Finally, two publications were adapted and recommended for translation and dissemination in Bulgaria, namely:

- *Partnership as a tool to green regional development programmes. Experience and recommendations.* This report aims to summarize good practice in managing current EU Structural Funds assistance through partnership, focusing on the involvement of environmental partners in the programmes, and

- *Creating networks to promote environmental integration.* The document presents an overview of the establishment of networks of environmental and regional development planners and authorities on national, regional and international level for Structural Funds acquisition in selected EU Member States.

The translation of the two publications in Bulgarian was completed in December 2007 and they were published and uploaded on the project web site in March, 2008.

The second publication produced by the project in 2008 was a summary with the identified domestic best practices in GIS use for planning purposes. The publication is accompanied with a CD containing the database of nationally accessible data sources.

A third publication entitled “*Stimulating Public Participation for Integrating Global Environmental Issues into Strategies and Plans for Regional Development and Spatial Planning in Bulgaria*” was finalized in March 2009.

In September 2009 the project also produced a specifically designed promotional leaflet and a web site for the new Master Course at Sofia University.

Copies of all publications were distributed at relevant public national and international events attended by PMU staff and provided to participants in the core course trainings delivered at SU.

Project Outcome 2: Institutional changes that support mainstreaming of global environment into regional development and spatial planning are in place

Output 2.1 *Institutional improvements introduced at MRDPW and MOEW (SEA) to sustain the capacities developed through the training programme for the integration of global environmental objectives into regional development and spatial planning*

A Study Visit entitled *Good Practices for Protection of the Environment in Utilization of Structural Funds*” took place between 5 and 9 Nov, 2007 for 11 officials from MRDPW and MoEW in Cornwall, UK. The following themes were covered during the five-day study tour: *Major Infrastructure Developments and Preservation of Natural and Cultural Heritage; Renewables and Urban Regeneration; Partnerships for Integrating Environmental Issues in Business Planning.* The Bulgarian delegates were also officially welcomed by the Leader of Cornwall County Council Mr. David Whalley and Mr. Alexey Andreev, First Secretary at the Bulgarian Embassy in London. The Bulgarian delegation conducted a number of site visits to academic, business, public and non-for-profit organizations to share experience and learn about successful public-private partnerships established for the sustainable use of Structural Funds in Cornwall during the 2000-2006 planning period under the Objective One Program, which helps in reducing differences in social and economic conditions within the European Union.

As a result of the UK Study Trip a return visit and a seminar for two representatives of the region of Southwest England and Cornwall was conducted on 2 and 3 June, 2008. The main goal of the event was to introduce representatives of Bulgarian district and municipal administrations to some opportunities for cooperation with the South-west England Region on joint projects, co-financed by the EU funds. The seminar speakers were Mr. Phil McVey - Director of European Programmes in the South West of England Regional Development Agency and Mr. Brian Shipman - European Policy & Development Officer responsible for transnational co-operation across Europe and internationally for Cornwall County Council. During the seminar, the municipal and district administrations representatives who attended the event were given the opportunity for individual consultations with the official visitors from the South-west England region for discussions on specific opportunities for cooperation in the related areas: *sustainable tourism; development of rural areas; agriculture; renewable energy sources and education.*

In addition, the UK study visit resulted in institutional improvements at MRDPW since the good working contacts established with the government of Cornwall supported the ministry to participate in three project proposal partnerships under the EU Interreg IVC program with partners from Cornwall region. Those partnerships further enhanced the capacity of DG SRDPATO to integrate global environmental issues into the daily work of its employees and into the development and update of strategic planning documents.

The first one entitled Regions for Sustainable Change (RSC) got funded in Nov, 2008 and a kick-off meeting took place in Szentendre, Hungary on 15-16 Dec, 2008. The main objective of the project is to produce a methodology to measure the carbon footprint of EU regions as for a pilot region in Bulgaria was selected the South West Region at the NUTS 2 level. The project runs in the period December, 2008 – December, 2011 and has total budget of 2,153,526.63 EUR. The approved budget for project activities in Bulgaria is 120,347.71 EUR.

The second proposal entitled *University Collaboration in Regional Development Spaces* (UNICREDS) got funded in Nov, 2009 and a kick-off meeting took place in February 2010 in Brussels, Belgium. The main theme of the project is the support of higher education for regional development in order to increase growth and employment in less developed regions in EU, including Bulgaria. The project runs in the period December 2009 – December 2012 and has a total budget of 2,291,854 EUR. The approved budget for project activities in Bulgaria is 78,900 EUR.

The third proposal entitled Geopower was submitted and March 2010 and obtained a provisional approval in August 2010. As the project title indicates the major project focus would be to improve the use of geothermal energy in the housing, industrial and agricultural sectors with a specific focus on producing guidelines to be used by OPRD for funding such projects in Bulgaria within the available budgets under the OP during this and next planning periods. As an official partner to the project proposal in Bulgaria was attracted the Energy Efficiency Agency. The project runs in the period December 2009 – December 2012 and has a total budget of 2,041,530 EUR. The approved budget for project activities in Bulgaria is 140,300 EUR.

To support the institutional improvements to be conducted at MRDPW, in Sept 2008 the project initiated an assignment, which focused on the review of relevant job descriptions in 11 Directorates and 1 territorial structure of the Ministry. Over 150 job descriptions were reviewed by Nov, 2008 and a list of recommendations was produced as to how those descriptions should be updated in the future in order to reflect the Rio Conventions objectives into the work of the respective ministerial experts.

During the period March – September, 2009 an assignment for developing a model for producing *Monitoring and Control Reports* for 2008 (as required by RDA) evaluating the implementation of the prescribed ecological measures during the initial Ecological Assessments of the 6 RDPs, was finalized and the model report was adopted by DG SRDPATO at MRDPW. In December 2009, the finalized drafts of the 6 *Monitoring and Control Reports for 2008* were submitted to MoEW for a review. In essence, they contain a proposal to add to the initial set of indicators for monitoring the impact of RDPs on the environment adopted as part of the EA process the project developed seven strategic indicators. The structure of the reports was officially approved by the EA (SEA) Directorate at MoEW in March, 2010.

Due to the fact that at the end of Nov 2009 a new structure of the MRDPW was accepted by the Council of Ministers – it involved the merge or closure of some existing directorates – PMU, in consultation with MRDPW, at the beginning of 2010 PMU implemented a short assignment to produce

update of the recommendations for GEI integration in job descriptions at the ministry, in accordance with its new administrative structure.

Output 2.2 *Stakeholders have the capacity to monitor, evaluate, adapt, replicate and learn from project strategy (PMU functioning)*

Steering Committee members were appointed by MoEW and MRDPW in February 2007 and the 1st Steering Committee Meeting was held on 19 February 2007 at MRDPW. SC members approved of the proposed changes in the budget and the overall work-plan. Eight meetings of the PSC in total were held through the project duration.

Furthermore, on 21 February, 2007 the Rio Conventions Project held its Inception Workshop in Sofia, Bulgaria bringing together more than 80 stakeholders, including representatives from ministries, municipal associations, NGOs, academic institutions, parliamentary commissions and 10 national media. The primary objective of the Inception Workshop was to acquaint the invitees with:

- i) GEF and GEF issues;
- ii) The project management structure, the overall time frame and budget;
- iii) Project objectives and outcomes;
- iv) Planned activities for 2007.

PMU officially moved to its re-furnished premises at MRDPW on 7 May, 2007 since prior to that it was temporary operating from UNDP head office in Sofia.

On 30 June, 2007, PMU successfully compiled and sent for approval to GEF the 1st Project Implementation Review (PIR). Subsequently, 3 more PIRs were produced and approved by UNDP/GEF throughout the project implementation.

The 1st project Advisory Board meeting (ABM) took place on 29 February, 2008 in hotel Arena di Serdica, Sofia, Sofia and attracted over 50 participants from different organizations from all over the country who were acquainted with the first-year project progress and achievements. A total of 3 AB meetings were organized and held throughout the project implementation. The 2nd project ABM took place on 11 November, 2009 at Best Western City Hotel in Sofia, Bulgaria. The major goal of the meeting was to provide publicity to major project results achieved during 2009: e.g. the development of a Master Course at Sofia University and the inclusion of the seven strategic indicators for GEI integration into the Methodological Guidelines of MRDPW to municipalities and district administrations. The 3rd ABM took place on 27 September, 2010 in hotel Sv.Sofia in Sofia, Bulgaria and presented key projects achievements during its entire implementation and key recommendations from the project FE.

A major effort from PMU staff during the last quarter of 2008 was directed towards the organization of the field visit and successful completion of the project Midterm Evaluation (MTE). The field visit of the selected independent team of consultants took place between 3 and 7 Nov, 2008 and included over 20 face-to-face interviews with selected project stakeholders. The Midterm review was successfully finalized by 10 December, 2008 and the final report was published on the project web site and sent to project SC and AB members, key consultants and project partners. A project management response document with an action plan as to how to tackle the recommendations of the MTE report was prepared and approved by PSC in January 2009.

During the 1st quarter of 2010 PMU started work on the development and approval of the ToR for the project final evaluation. The call for expressions of interest from appropriate international and national consultants to conduct the project Final Evaluation (FE) was launched in May 2010. A team of 1 international and 1 national consultant was selected at the end of June 2010. The field mission of FE team took place between 12 and 21 July, 2010 and included interviews with 25 stakeholders at a national and regional level who were involved in the project implementation and decision-making during the second half from its implementation period. The final report was widely discussed with UNDP CO, BRC and PSC members and was finalized in September, 2010.

Project Outcome 3: The Regional Development Plan (RDP) for the pilot planning region adequately integrates biodiversity, climate change and land degradation issues

The preparatory activities for the project pilot component were initiated in the last quarter of 2009. First, it was decided that the pilot integration of the 7 strategic indicators shall be tested within the framework of one District Development Strategy (DDS) instead in one RDP since the update of all six RDPs is almost finalized due to a legislative requirement adopted in August 2008. It was decided that the testing should specifically focus on conducting a genuine public hearing and diverse working meetings to reflect the opinions of different stakeholders in the process of DDS update, which are often “overlooked” in the development of strategic planning documents in Bulgaria. For that purpose a set of criteria for selecting a pilot District Administration (DA) were developed by PMU with the support of project expert group on indicators and subsequently sent for an approval to project SC members in February 2010. As a result of the two step evaluation – based on the agreed technical and operational criteria – Plovdiv DA was selected for the development of a pilot update of its DDS.

To assign the exact roles and responsibilities of UNDP, Plovdiv DA and MRDPW during the process of DDS update and subsequent dissemination of results a detailed MoU was developed in parallel and signed between MRDPW and Plovdiv DA on 31 March, 2010. A team of three consultants – a team leader and an expert in regional development, an expert in spatial planning and sustainable development and an expert on information processing and GIS - was hired to implement the assignment.

Overall, the project pilot component included two assignments both of which were implemented during the last two project quarters in 2010.

As already mentioned above, the first assignment dealt with the update of the District Development Strategy (DDS) of Plovdiv District and producing Procedural Guidelines for the update of DDS to serve as model to the remaining district administrations in the country in the forthcoming updates of their district strategies. During May and June, 2010 the consultants team conducted a series of meetings with key stakeholders from Plovdiv DA, the 18 municipalities in the district, NGOs and business associations to identify strategic changes that have occurred in the district since the start of the DDS implementation in 2007 and to propose changes and revisions for the remaining period of its implementation: 2010-2013. In addition, the updated document was discussed over three public hearings and meetings of the District Development Council of Plovdiv DA held respectively on 11 June, 23 July and 16 September, 2010. The updated DDS was officially approved by Plovdiv district administration at the end of Sept, 2010.

The second assignment dealt with the development of Methodological Guidelines and a model ToR for the conducting of a Midterm Evaluation (MTE) of DDS which should take place by the end of 2010 according to the changes in the Regional Development Act from August, 2008. It was initiated as result of a request by 5 district governors from North Bulgaria sent to the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works in April 2010. As result of that request and in discussion with MRDPW and UNDP, the project assisted all 28 district administrations in developing such Methodological Guidelines and a model ToR. Those documents were developed with the active participation of designated experts from the DAs. The first round of working meetings with those experts were conducted in the period 17-23 June, 2010 in Sofia, Veliko Turnovo, Varna, Burgas and Plovdiv and as a result, contents for the two type of documents were produced and a second round of working meetings took place in Veliko Turnovo and Plovdiv during the period 6-8 July, 2010. The Methodological Guidelines for DDS update were finalized and officially approved by MRDPW on 18 August, 2010

5. Summary of Key Project Successes as Identified by the Project Final Evaluation

The key project successes as identified by the **project final evaluation team** include:

- The project has had, and will continue to have, a positive impact on the Regional Development Planning process in Bulgaria. The Methodological Guidelines, adopted by the MRDPW in 2009 introduces new requirements for the elaboration of the planning documents with extended environmental analysis and monitoring of the environmental performance. It is likely that some

additional impact will be seen in the regional development strategies and plans in the next planning period 2014 – 2020.

- The development of standardized Terms of Reference for conducting interim evaluations of DDS and updates through piloting in the Plovdiv District Development Strategy seem to be highly valuable, as it will create a model of good practice, which is expected to be replicated to the other district and regional administrations in both formal and informal channels.
- The project has improved both formal and informal links between people in different Ministries and Institutions, which should have positive benefits in future integrated planning.
- The project has deliberately engaged with EU planning processes as these should ensure that the focus on inclusion of Environmental Issues in development planning is maintained in Bulgaria.
- The inclusion of environmental tasks and the need for environmental skills as a pre-requisite in Ministerial Job Descriptions was innovative in the way it not only focused on the need for environmental thinking in the tasks, but in the way it built in incentives for on-going consideration of environmental capacity building by individuals after the project.
- There is a certain positive capacity building impact – the number of the trained public employees through the Training courses and the mainstreaming the GEI into the higher education related to the regional development through the Master Course.
- The project team has done an excellent job in delivering the project as it was designed – activities were carried out to a high standard, these led to the achievement of the objectives, which will deliver the outcomes.
- The project has also been significant in establishing the precedent of development plans including environmental indicators; although there were some issues with the development process, and the current format, of these they represent an excellent foundation.
- Because the specific environmental issues addressed in the development plans are directly generated through analysis of the local situation the project is directly relevant to the local environmental issues, as reported to the evaluators, such as access to clean water, sewage treatment, and solid waste management.
- Besides its direct outputs the project has also contributed to the design and implementation of other linked projects at MRDPW as several INTERREG IVC projects.
- Financial management within, and of, the project has been carried out accurately, in a timely manner, and in full compliance with financial systems. This has been shown by the project receiving a “full compliance” report from the external auditors from its external audit and a full compliance rating from the UNDP financial manager.
- The project has delivered an impressive set of outputs, especially over the training and development and piloting of model planning methodologies, for a relatively modest GEF budget, and would therefore appear to have been highly cost effective.
- For a relatively small GEF project the Rio Conventions Project has brought about a number of significant results that should ensure its sustainability.
- As indicated by the successful management and delivery of the project its co-ordination mechanisms (PSC, AB, expert groups) were well designed and effectively operated.
- The Monitoring and Evaluation components of the project have been conducted to a high standard following UNDP requirements and as laid out in the Project Document. Reports prepared by the PMU have been thorough and on time, and have been prepared against the log-frame indicators, and fully complied with the required format.
- The project has demonstrated good practice in Adaptive Management, utilizing information from the monitoring and evaluation process to identify issues that required change, such as the need to change the piloting process or to create another consultative body (the indicators expert group) instead of an inter-ministerial task force.

- The institutional links between the UNDP CO, the PMU and MRDPW have been excellent, with the project being well integrated into the Ministry, bringing benefits for both management and institutional support and learning, and in increasing the chances of long term impact. The MOEW were an active part of the Steering and Expert Groups.
- The MRDPW structures, District and Municipal Administrations were well represented in the project implementation.
- The Project has established an excellent website which not only disseminates the information from the project but also gathers and allows access to relevant Rio Conventions information and documents.

6. Summary and Evaluation of the Rio Conventions Project Activities

The Rio Conventions Project played a key role in integrating global environmental concerns into national, regional and local development planning.

In particular, under **Outcome 1**, capacities for integration of Global Environmental Issues (GEI) into strategic planning are built via MRDPW, MoEW, DA and municipal employees' participation in one-day and ten-day training courses developed by the project and delivered by a qualified professors from Sofia University. 141 and 201 employees from those institutions attended, respectively, the ten-day and the one-day training courses. As indicated by the electronic survey conducted in the period August – September, 2010 among the participants who attended the trainings, approximately 25% of the one who attended the ten-day training course, as opposed to only 5% of the one who attended the one-day option indicated that they use and apply different aspects of the training in their daily work. Those results also indicated that a deeper immersion into the training, secured through the ten-day course, was much more adequate and practically oriented than the one-day option which just provided a general notion of the topic of GEI integration into RD&SP. In addition, a new Master Course on the same topic was officially included in Sofia University curricula and launched in November, 2009. Outcome 1 also focused on the development and official endorsement by MRDPW of the 7 strategic indicators for GE integration. In May 2009 the indicators were officially included in MRDPW endorsed Guidelines for update of strategic planning documents. Their technical and GIS passports were finalized in November 2009 and served as the basis for the successful development and pilot testing of a prototype GIS on GE integration at the ministry in the first half of 2010.

With respect to the implementation of **Outcome 2**, PMU actively worked towards improving the practical skills and knowledge available at MRDPW and MoEW for GE integration and the cooperation between the two ministries on issues such as ecological assessment (SEA) of strategic planning documents. First, the project assisted MRDPW in the update of relevant job descriptions at the ministry so that they reflect the need for horizontal integration of GEI into the work of MRDPW's experts. Second, the project produced templates for the required annual reports from MRDPW on the implementation of the environmental measures prescribed in the Ecological Assessments of the 6 RDPs, which were subsequently approved by MoEW. Furthermore, with the active support of the project MRDPW currently participates in the implementation of three projects funded by the EU INTERREG IV program which shall sustain the capacities in the area of GE integration beyond the project closure.

With respect to the fulfilment of the targets and objectives under **Outcome 3**, the project implemented 2 pilot assignments directed towards improving the capacity of district administrations in Bulgaria to apply the newly adopted by MRDPW GE sensitive guidelines and the 7 strategic indicators in the forthcoming update and MTE of DDS. The change in the focus of the project pilot component on DDS update (instead of on RDPs and MDPs update) and the reported own contribution by DAs (instead of municipalities) occurred due to a number of reasons. On one hand, due to changes in the Regional Development Act on 31 August, 2008, 5 out of 6 regions at the NUTS 2 level (the former planning regions) changed their territorial scope. According to the Bulgarian EA legislature the already adopted RDPs and their subsequent updates needed to pass through an assessment of the need for conducting a new Ecological Assessment which started in November 2009 and ended in June 2010. On the other hand, MRDPW is not a direct principal of municipalities – in fact, they are governed by the Law on Local Self Governance – and it was not certain whether and how it will be able to cooperate with municipal mayors and councils and to influence the process of update of their MDPs and on the use of the 7 strategic indicators within the project timeframe. Due to uncertainties in the

outcomes of EO procedure of RDPs and in the ability to influence local governments to start the update of MDPs, at the end of 2009 the project NPD and Program Analyst (PA) PA from UNDP proposed to PMU to focus its pilot component to the intermediate planning level – the district administrations (DAs), over which MRDPW can exercise much more control in the process of DDS update and midterm evaluation.

LESSONS LEARNED⁸

Lessons Related to Project Design

- Environmental Improvement can often be effectively achieved by projects, such as the Rio Conventions Project, that are driven, and hosted, by line agencies (e.g. MRDPW) that can impact the environment, rather than being hosted in environmental agencies (MoEW) trying to influence other, often more influential agencies.
- Projects, which aim to improve regional development planning and spatial planning have to provide information on the financial mechanisms in place to support the implementation of the development strategies and plans. In Bulgaria those were in particular OP Regional Development, OP Administrative Capacity, OP Development of Human Resources and OP Technical Support. All of them finance the development of the capacity of the Bulgarian state administration for integrated planning, including in the area of RD&SP. Furthermore, most of those OPs also could potentially finance research, data collection and methodology development to further the process of integrated RD&SP. At the EU level, there are a number of other funding programs (INTERREG, ESPOON, etc.), which also fund the development of the capacity and tools for regional development planning. However, those financial sources were not included in the initial project review and there was no attempt to establish linkages with them later in the project implementation. Based on this, intervention on the funding mechanisms should also take place in order to ensure wide-spread, cross-sector results. Projects backed either with strong (financial or other) incentives or enforcement based on governmental regulations, have a higher chance of leaving a lasting cross-sectoral impact.
- Such projects should also include an analysis of the decision-making processes within the system(s) in addition to the “main stakeholders analysis”. The “decision makers” analysis needs also to be supported by an engagement strategy for the key decision makers. If this analysis of decision making is conducted prior to the project start, and key decision makers at the different planning levels are also identified and included, then it would be easier to target fundamental change in regional and spatial development planning processes.
- MoEW based focal points for the Rio Conventions were included in the Advisory Board after the project start and attended training events, however despite this there was not a clear link between the process of development and implementation of national strategies and plans under each of the conventions and the detailed activities of the project. For instance, during the project design phase the national Rio Conventions Project Focal Points could have been asked to prepare a paper specifically outlining the key priorities for implementation of their conventions in the country and a strategy for how refinement of the development planning process could help implement their priorities. Also, mechanisms to link the project to national processes under the Rio Conventions should be strengthened in the project design in order to ensure that these processes, which establish national priorities, have had a clearer role in identifying priorities for “change” in the development planning process and the concrete strategic planning documents, as well as in projects financed by OPs.
- Attract a broader involvement of MRDPW’s relevant departments (e.g. Financial Office, OPRD Directorate, Territorial Cooperation, Spatial Planning, Executive Agency Phare, etc.) in all major stages of project design and subsequent implementation in order to facilitate the overall project success (e.g. in terms of reporting own-contribution, adopting relevant institutional changes,

⁸ Some of the lessons learnt in the Project Design and Project Implementation sections also incorporate findings from the project Final Evaluation which was conducted in the period 5 July – 10 September, 2010 since PMU fully agrees with them and deems it important to share them with forthcoming GEF projects in the cross-capacity building focal area.

financing projects that support Rio Conventions implementation in Bulgaria, achieving real link between regional development and spatial planning, etc.)

- Increase quantity of financial resources available in the project budget for evaluation and monitoring purposes (e.g. initially MTE was not envisaged to involve an international evaluator and a budget revision was needed to accommodate a later decision by BRC to involve one, no resources were allocated for monitoring and measuring the impact of the training program after the end of the training; no resources were allocated to ensure the actual contribution to meeting Rio Conventions objectives of projects reported as co-financing, etc.).
- SMART” indicators and good log frame (with a few and measurable objectives and indicators) are a critical component in project formulation. One of the key problems that the management of the Rio Conventions Project has been faced with in its initial year of operation is its very loosely defined project indicators. It should also be noted that development of indicators in a more participatory fashion with the key stakeholders and those who are to measure them would probably have lead to the choice of more efficient indicators during their subsequent revision.
- Stronger linkages to other projects focusing on similar issues of how to mainstream GEIs into development, and development planning should be considered during project design to provide additional benefits. In order for regional level replication of project results to be effective it should be enhanced by establishing closer links with the other projects in the region that are also addressing cross-capacity building issues.
- If it is envisaged that the project should directly influence donor and EU funded development (e.g. through projects funded by OPs, World Bank, etc.), direct links between the project and EU mechanisms should be established at its beginning and representatives at a decision-making level from those financial/donor agencies should be included in the PSC or AB. I.e. although it was anticipated that funding programs such as the OPRD would sustain activities started under the project, the specific mechanisms to promote, transfer know-how, or support environmental mainstreaming, were not fully designed in and specific mechanisms to promote that replication could have been better addressed in project design.
- There was broad participation in the project preparation from government (MRDPW, MOEW, Agriculture, Forestry), and from Civil Society, though there was limited input from the Finance sector or Business since they were not identified during project development as main stakeholders, and so had a more limited role during implementation. If these had have been more closely involved then the project might have had a broader perspective on the gaps between environmental and development issues, and might have taken a broader view of how to mainstream Global Environmental Issues into development planning.

Lessons Related to Project Implementation, Management and Adaptive Management

- Public participation in projects needs to be based on a Stakeholder Analysis and needs to be secured from the start. Securing real commitment, and ownership, from key stakeholders is easier at the start (e.g. municipal associations, district governments, business associations) than asking them to join an already up-and-running project.
- Regarding the training program delivery it was essential to make explicit agreements with MRDPW and MoEW, through the signing of a MoU, as to how to co-share financing the delivery of the project developed training program and have more equal division of participants from both ministries.
- Exchange of Good Practices with International Expert Networks in the Crosscutting Area of Global Environment and Regional Development was essential to the successful project delivery. During the project formulation phase communication was initiated with the Greening Regional Development Program⁹ and the project management re-established the contacts with the GRDP network in late 2006. This contact and resulting cooperation represents a good example on how communication and exchange of experience with international expert networks (in the cross

⁹ The Greening Regional Development Programmes (GRDP), www.gdrp.org, is an EU-wide network co-funded by the Interreg IIIC programme. The GRDP project brings together local, regional and national authorities, environmental authorities, development agencies and research institutes from 8 EU Member States.

cutting area of global environment and regional development) can “boost” the implementation of similar projects with less experience, like the “Rio Conventions” project. During the course of the project GRDP had supported the Rio Conventions project in: the search of high quality international training organizations (for the training program development); producing of initial set of good practice materials and the organization of a study visit for key officials from the two target ministries in the UK; involvement of the primary implementing partner (MRDPW and other key stakeholders (DAs)) in new projects (e.g. three new projects financed by the EU INTERREG IVC program for inter-regional cooperation) in the cross-cutting area of regional development and environmental protection and increasing spin-off effects and capacity building.

- The international study visit to Cornwall region, UK is an example of a good practice because it was a result of a careful study of the needs of participating organizations and its program was specially tailored to their needs. In particular, the timing and the host organization were very well chosen: i.e. it was conducted right after Bulgaria’s joining the EU when the country and its public employees lacked the necessary skills as to how to integrate global environmental objectives when applying for EU funds. Furthermore, the host organization of the visit was also well selected: i.e. on one hand, Cornwall is an Objective 1 region as most regions in Bulgaria (and are eligible for EU funding); on the other hand, Cornwall County Council was a very adequate partner and tier and type of government for MRDPW to become counterparts in joint projects development and implementation (as compared to the UK Environmental Agency for instance). Thus the opportunity to “institutionalize” and sustain those partnership beyond the scope of the particular study visit was “built in” in the process of its preparation.
- For cross-capacity building projects is very essential to be hosted by the respective implementing Agency. The fact that RCP PMU was established at the premises of MRDPW allowed it to become very well integrated with all key departments targeted by the project and to establish close contacts and cooperation those departments, as well as with regional structures of the ministry and relevant territorial units that were under its direct supervision (e.g. DAs).
- Adaptive management is very important to be implemented well in advance with respect to the project pilot components. For instance, in the middle of 2009 it became clear that the RCP pilot component could not be focused on the regional and municipal level (as envisaged by the Project Document) due to legislative and budgetary constraints. Therefore, PMU decided to focus the activities of the pilot component on the next tier of regional development planning, i.e. the District Administrations (DAs) and their strategic planning documents (the District Development Strategies).
- It is also essential to select the pilot location in a broad consultation, and based on objective criteria, with the targeted stakeholders and to select their commitment via signing a MoU. In the case of Plovdiv DA it was selected as a pilot in a broad consultation with the members of the project expert working group on indicators and PSC, who also developed the criteria for choosing the pilot.
- Regarding the production of methodologies and guidelines, it is also essential to broadly consult their primary beneficiaries from the onset of their development. The updated version of Plovdiv DDS was presented and discussed with local stakeholders during three public hearings. Similarly the Methodology for conducting MTE of DDS was developed in consultation with experts from all DAs through a series of work meetings, most of them hosted by the DAs themselves.

Lessons Related to Mainstreaming

- As already indicated above, the project developed a set of indicators and a training program that will aide Bulgarian policy makers at the national, regional and local level in being better equipped with the necessary tools and skills to integrate GEI into strategic planning documents. Furthermore, the project-developed indicators were pilot tested and adjusted to fit the local circumstances through the pilot update of one DDS. Finally, through the establishment of a prototype GIS at MRDPW relevant to the implementation of the 3 Rio Conventions in Bulgaria the project assisted first, the ministry, and later on - DAs and municipalities, in their efforts to create national, GIS based information system that shall be used by in the preparation and update of their planning documents.

- It is expected that, in the long run, the project-developed indicators will lead to substantial decrease in biodiversity loss, greenhouse gasses emissions, soil degradation, etc., which in term shall strengthen the capacity of regional and local governments to prevent and manage causes of natural disasters.
- For this to happen the project has successfully supported the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW) and other relevant stakeholders (DAs and municipalities) to build and strengthen their capacity by supporting the development and piloting of required instruments (such as ‘global environment’ sensitive guidelines and indicators), instituting changes in the organization of work (updated job descriptions reflecting the requirement to address global environmental considerations in planning), developing and organizing necessary training (both on-the-job and at a university), and piloting the use of guidelines and indicators of ‘global environment’ in development planning at different levels.
- Close cooperation of the project team with a range of relevant actors (from MRDPW to universities to district authorities) and flexible and adaptive approach (yet strictly adhering to project goal, objectives and outcomes) were important contributing factors to achieving GEI mainstreaming in strategic planning processes and ministerial ordinances.
- The piloting of the use of the guidelines for incorporation of global environment considerations and GEI adopted by MRDPW in May 2009, in district planning (in the pilot update of Plovdiv DDS) was of key importance to ensure the sustainability of project results.
- The success of the project in supporting the MRDPW in adjusting the job descriptions of relevant ministry staff to explicitly recognize the need for consideration of global environmental issues in their work on strategic planning and implementation including the monitoring of municipal and district plans was of crucial importance.
- The inclusion of environmental tasks and the need for environmental skills as a pre-requisite in Ministerial Job Descriptions to build in incentives for on-going consideration of environmental capacity building by individuals after the project.
- The project was designed to build the foundations for environmental mainstreaming in development and implementation of regional development plans by raising the awareness and capacity of planners. However with the identified gap between development and environmental objectives there was clearly a risk that local decision makers, especially the broad-based, Regional and District Development Councils, would not fully support the stronger environmental thinking coming through in draft development plans since adoption of the plans is the responsibility of the Councils, not the Planning staff within DAs and municipalities. Therefore, members from those councils were included in the project training courses and participated in a number of working group meetings regarding the indicators and methodologies development.

Lessons Related to Democratic Governance, Risk Prevention and Gender Relevance

- The project implementation shall most clearly contribute to enhancing democratic governance in Bulgaria since the pilot created an example of how other interested stakeholders (apart from the national implementing agency) should be involved and can contribute into the process of update and development of regional and local strategic planning documents (i.e. three public hearings were held during the update of Plovdiv DDS). In addition, the project produce a publication entitled “Including civil society organizations and other interested stakeholders into the process of update and development of regional and local strategic planning documents”. The publication provides examples of good practices from Bulgaria and the EU regarding the responsibilities of public institutions to organize public hearings and to solicit feedback from interested parties in the update of strategic planning documents. At the same, they offer “directions” to citizens, NGOs and other stakeholders to participate in such hearings in the most “educated” and practical manner.
- The project-developed indicators will also have an indirect effect on improving crises prevention related to natural disasters, as it will provide DAs and municipalities with guiding principles and tools how local economic development can be combined with the care for the environment.

- The project provided equal opportunities to men and women when hiring consultants for assignments to be implemented under the project. Most of the project consultative and strategic decision-making bodies - e.g. PSC, Advisory board, expert working group on indicators - are predominantly composed by women, which indicates that women had a strong voice both in the implementation and decision-making process of the project.

Lessons Related to Working with Partners, Stakeholders and Beneficiaries

- From the very onset of the preparatory stage, the project developers ensured a broad scale involvement of key stakeholders, particularly from central and regional governmental structures. This close collaboration helped the project identify where the project could be most suitably placed, with respect to the targeted interventions of the project. As Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works exercises a central part in the policy making, implementation and steering of regional development, it was a very suitable implementing partner for the project. A main reason for this was that the Ministry is responsible for the national, regional and local planning which translates the national strategies into national regional and local development plans. At the same time, it was very important that a clear link and cooperation was established from the onset of the project with the Ministry of Environment and Water, as it has the monitoring and regulatory responsibilities for the environment.
- The early, and detailed, negotiations with project stakeholders assisted the project in finding the right partners. By subsequently involving these partners in the project implementation process an “ownership”, by the responsible institutions was created, which, over time, resulted in a greater governmental, and stakeholder “buy-in” of its results.
- Throughout its implementation the project worked very successfully with NGOs, despite the fact that they were not the primary beneficiaries of its results by design. For instance, foundation Green Policy Institute was selected in 2009 through a competitive procedure to produce a publication text and to conduct two trainings on the topic "Stimulating Public Participation for Integrating Global Environmental Issues into Strategies and Plans for Regional Development and Spatial Planning in Bulgaria" because it demonstrated diverse experience in organizing public hearings and referenda on important infrastructure projects with big potential environmental impacts. GPI brought the "missing" civil society perspective and experience in stimulating public participation in local strategic planning in general and in GEI integration in such planning, in particular. Through its research and findings indicated in the assignment final report the foundation also stressed upon the major difficulties experienced by CSOs and informal groups in Bulgaria in the process of conducting public hearings and referenda regarding regional and local strategic planning documents. In addition, in 2010 and as part of its Exit Strategy the project actively worked with the Bulgarian Climate Coalition (BCC) (www.climatebg.org), which is an umbrella organization of national NGOs active in the area climate change adaptation and mitigation. An agreement was reached between BCC and the project that after its official closure in September 2010 news from BCC web site shall be automatically published in the News and Events Section of the Rio Conventions Project web site using RSS feed, so that it is kept up-to-date with relevant news on the UNFCCC implementation in Bulgaria and abroad, along with news from other relevant international sites.
- Close cooperation of the project team with a range of relevant actors (from ministries, to universities and NGOs and to district authorities and district development councils) and flexible and adaptive approach were important contributing factors for achieving project results.
- The selection of one pilot district to demonstrate and pilot test the developed set of indicators and methodology for DDS update was the working model for such a small project, instead of “chasing” the big numbers and working with many DAs and municipalities.

Lessons Related to Engagement of the Corporate Sector

- Private sector companies have ensured valuable contribution towards project implementation and especially towards ensuring visibility and transparency in project implementation via producing high quality project web site, publications and PR materials.

- Representatives of national business associations and trade unions were part of the project Advisory Board and provided useful input and feedback regarding the implementation of key project assignments and results.
- Since experts from the national business associations and trade unions are also members of the Regional and District Development Councils, representatives from those sectors were also included in the ten-day training courses offered at SU in order to increase their awareness about the importance of GEI integration into regional development planning and the project developed methodologies and guidelines for update and midterm evaluation of strategic planning documents, with a focus on the practical use of the seven strategic indicators.
- The partnership between MRDPW and GAP Consult on the development of the GIS prototype for GE integration into strategic planning process was particularly valuable to the ministry since it built its capacity to use innovative and internet-based tools in order to improve monitoring, evaluation and decision-making regarding strategic issues in regional development planning in Bulgaria.

Lessons Related to Training, Learning, Awareness-Raising and Information Dissemination

- Although NGOs were not officially included as beneficiaries of the project activities, the cooperation with NGOs active in the target areas of the 3 Rio Conventions was very beneficial to the overall efforts for awareness raising and dissemination of results. NGOs were involved in the project implementation both through implementation of assignments, participation in project advisory board meetings and co-organization of workshops on topics relevant to the 3 Rio conventions. CSOs have also provided valuable background information as to what are the problems and their potential solutions with the actual implementation of the 3 conventions "on the ground": i.e. in conducting EIA, EA and Natura 2000 assessments of projects and plans, organizing public hearings to discuss strategic investment projects or strategic planning documents and strategies, etc.. That information was, in turn, "brought back" to the decision makers at MRDPW, MoEW and DAs on the national and regional level and reflected in the final variants of relevant Ordinances and Methodologies institutionalized by MRDPW throughout the project implementation.
- It is important to understand how people learn best, and time needs to be invested early on to design effective approaches. Project designers should not assume that the usual methods employed in environmental education projects - leaflets, posters, workshops, etc - are the most appropriate and effective. To this respect the project conducted an extensive training needs analysis prior to the development of the TPP to reflect the vision of the potential trainees.
- Providing relevant training is important but not enough – training is more effective if offered on a more regular basis (e.g. one training day a month after initial workshop to check on what has been learned, bolster information retention and ensure training is being used). This was revealed by the post-training evaluation conducted prior to the project end which allowed to assess the quality of the trainings and what further adaptation and topics should be included. The survey results indicated that the ten-day training course which spanned over 5 to 6 weeks was much more successful in mastering new skills and applying new knowledge compared to the one-day, on-the-job trainings conducted in municipalities and DAs.
- A well-designed website with lots of information for download is a powerful learning tool. The distribution of an electronic newsletter also contributes to awareness raising and capacity building efforts.
- It is normally anticipated that a project that builds awareness and capacity will bring sustainable benefits, however this can be weakened when there is no process to use the new skills, nor recognition of the enhanced capacity of individuals. RCP has addressed both of these through the formal adoption of a ministerial ordinance for update of strategic planning documents, and by the inclusion of environmental skills as a required component in the job descriptions for staff in MRDPW.

ANNEX 1. Achievements of the Rio Conventions Project

Project Activities, Outputs and Successes

The key project outputs include (per reporting periods):

2006-2007 (The reporting on key project outputs reflects cumulative results since project start – i.e. outputs from the **reported period 1 July 2006 – 30 June 2007**)

| Project Outcomes | Key Outputs |
|--|--|
| <p>Outcome 1:</p> <p>The methodologies, skills, knowledge, and information management system for mainstreaming global environmental considerations into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of regional development and spatial planning policies are in place</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Background studies for collecting information on available training programs in Bulgaria in the area of GE and RD and existing training manuals on EIA, SEA and N2000 assessments. 2. Agreeing training program content (background, toolbox and practical skills sections) and structure (training package consisting of introductory, “core” and academic course) with UNDP and MRDPW. 3. Conducting a successful RFP procedure which resulted in a sufficient number of high-quality international applicants, and selection of a reliable and experienced international training institution, which shall play a leading role in the training program development. 4. Developed and inaugurated project web site both in Bulgarian and English at www.riconventions.org, which shall provide visibility and transparency in project results and operations. |
| <p>Outcome 2:</p> <p>Institutional changes that support mainstreaming of global environmental into regional development and spatial planning are in place.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Project office and a meeting room established at MRDPW to facilitate day-to-day contacts with the implementing partner¹⁰. The meeting room shall provide a convenient venue for SC and other project related meetings. 2. Partnership with Greening Regional Development Programs Project (GRDP) re-established. The partnership provided an initial set of good practices in the cross-cutting area of RD and GE, which shall be adapted and translated for the needs of MRDPW employees and other stakeholders. 3. A potential pool of host regional level organizations that exemplify a successful example for integration of GE indicators into regional development policies identified and contacted to partner with RCP in the organization of a study visit for high-level officials from the two target ministries. 4. Successfully conducted 1st Steering Committee Meeting and Project Inception workshop. |
| <p>Outcome 3:</p> <p>Regional development plans and municipal-level spatial development plans are revised to integrate global environmental objectives in a pilot region through application of capacities developed in Outcomes 1 and 2.</p> | <p>There are no outputs produced under this outcome during the rating period.</p> |

¹⁰ Project management activities are included under Outcome 2 in the Main Project Document.

2007-2008 (The reporting on key project outputs reflects cumulative results from the **reported period 1 July 2007 – 30 June 2008**)

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Outcome 1:</p> <p>The methodologies, skills, knowledge, and information management system for mainstreaming global environmental considerations into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of RD and SP policies are in place</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training Needs Analysis conducted among 70 public officials from relevant governmental institutions at the national, regional and local level to identify existing skills and knowledge, as well as major gaps, in terms of global environmental issues integration into strategic planning documents. 2. Survey on the nationally accessible data sources relevant to the implementation of the Rio Conventions and development of a CD in English and Bulgarian for dissemination among relevant stakeholders. 3. Analysis of GIS applications used for strategic planning purposes in Bulgaria and development of a brochure with six best practices was prepared. 4. Pilot testing of the CEU and SU developed “core” training course and delivered for 15 public officials from MRDPW, MoEW, municipalities and DAs from Rhodope region and incorporating participants’ feedback into the final TPP. |
| <p>Outcome 2:</p> <p>Institutional changes that support mainstreaming of global environmental into regional development and spatial planning are in place.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Study visit to Cornwall, UK to review Good Practices for Protection of the Environment in Utilization of Structural Funds was provided for 11 public officials and experts from MRDPW, MoEW, Varna DA and National Association of Municipalities in Bulgaria. 6. Return working visit of two Cornwall high level public officials was conducted focusing on identifying opportunities for Green Regional Cooperation between Bulgaria, Cornwall and South-west England and on establishing partnerships between Cornwall County Council and Bulgarian municipalities and DAs. 7. As a result of the Cornwall study visit MRDPW became an official partner in 2 Interreg IVC project consortia on the following topics: <i>Regions for Sustainable Change</i> and <i>University Collaboration in Regional Development Spaces</i>. Funding decisions of the submitted proposals are expected by the end of 2008. 8. Successfully conducted two Steering Committee Meetings and 1st Project Advisory Board Meeting. |
| <p>Outcome 3:</p> <p>Regional development plans and municipal-level spatial development plans are revised to integrate global environmental objectives in a pilot region through application of capacities developed in Outcomes 1 and 2.</p> | <p>There are no outputs produced under this outcome during the reporting period.</p> |

2008-2009 (The reporting on key project outputs reflects cumulative results from the **reported period 1 July 2008 – 30 June 2009**)

| Project Outcomes | Key Outputs |
|--|--|
| <p>Outcome 1:</p> <p>The methodologies, skills, knowledge, and information management system for mainstreaming global environmental considerations into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of regional development and spatial planning policies are in place</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Five ten-day advanced training courses on GEI integration organized and successfully conducted at Sofia University for 77 employees from MRDPW and MoEW and their regional structures, as well as for employees from municipalities and district administrations. 2. Twenty seven one-day introductory training courses on GEI integration organized and successfully conducted in 27 DAs. More than 200 participants attended this option, nominated by district administrations and MRDPW's regional territorial units. 3. More than 70 relevant news regarding the Rio Conventions implementation researched, translated and uploaded on project web site and 4 electronic newsletters sent to a database of over 800 relevant participants. 4. Publication regarding stimulation of public participation in GEI integration in strategic planning developed and two trainings for municipal and DA employees and NGO experts held in North and South Bulgaria. |
| <p>Outcome 2:</p> <p>Institutional changes that support mainstreaming of global environmental into regional development and spatial planning are in place.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Job descriptions review implemented in 11 directorates at MRDPW and approximately 130 ministerial employees included in the review. List of specific recommendations to each set of positions at the 11 surveyed directorates developed and officially submitted to MRDPW. 2. Development of a short list of 7 strategic indicators relevant to the Rio Conventions implementation in Bulgaria and agreed with MRDPW and a Task Force of experts from other key state and scientific organizations. 3. An assignment implemented regarding the identification of relevant projects funded by relevant MRDPW operated funding schemes, which contribute to the Rio Conventions. 4. Developed a detailed ToR for the development of a specialized GIS component to the uniform information system for regional planning of MRDPW, focusing on GEI integration into strategic planning processes, as well as a roster of relevant domestic companies to be invited to develop the GIS component through a competitive RFP procedure during the second half of 2009. |
| <p>Outcome 3:</p> <p>Regional development plans and municipal-level spatial development plans are revised to integrate global environmental objectives in a pilot region through application of capacities developed in Outcomes 1 and 2.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developed a model ToR for conducting ecological assessments (EA) of RDPs and/or their periodic updates. 2. Developed model contents for the MoEW required annual reports on the implementation of the ecological measures prescribed in the EA of the respective RDP. 3. Produced six model annual reports for 2008 on the implementation of the ecological measures prescribed in the respective EA of the six RDPs. 4. Submitted list of PMU proposed recommendations to MRDPW with respect to the ministry developed Updated Document on the National Strategy for Regional Development. The recommendations focus on how GEI integration should be better emphasized in the proposed Updated Document and the relevant sections in it that tackle the ensuing update of RDPs, DA Strategies and MDPs. |

2009-2010 (The reporting on key project outputs reflects cumulative results from the **reported period 1 July 2009 till the project extended official closing date 27 September, 2010**)

| Project Outcomes | Key Outputs |
|--|---|
| <p>Outcome 1:</p> <p>The methodologies, skills, knowledge, and information management system for mainstreaming global environmental considerations into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of regional development and spatial planning policies are in place</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Three ten-day advanced training courses on GEI integration organized and successfully conducted at Sofia University for 69 employees from MRDPW and MoEW and their regional structures, as well as for employees from municipalities, district administrations and member organizations of the Regional Development Councils. 2. Technical and GIS "passports" developed for the 7 strategic indicators and reference values for 2007 produced for all planning levels: regions, districts and municipalities. 3. Prototype GIS based on the strategic indicators successfully developed, pilot tested and installed at MRDPW. One-day training on the use of the developed prototype for 12 experts from MRDPW conducted and a GIS Manual on the use of the prototype produced. 4. More than 120 relevant news regarding the Rio Conventions implementation researched, translated and uploaded on project web site and 4 electronic newsletters sent to a database of over 850 relevant recipients. |
| <p>Outcome 2:</p> <p>Institutional changes that support mainstreaming of global environmental into regional development and spatial planning are in place.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The recommendations as to the necessary update in relevant job descriptions at MRDPW were reviewed and updated, following a new administrative structure at the ministry. 2. PMU staff actively assisted their colleagues from DG SRDPATO employees managing the two INTERREG IVC projects - Regions for Sustainable Changes (RSC) and University Cooperation for Regional Development (UNICREDS) - in the preparation of presentations, surveys and studies, as well as reporting under the two projects. Four news were developed and published on the project web site focusing on the outcomes and progress achieved under the two INTERREG IVC projects. A third INTERREG IVC was prepared and submitted in March 2010 with the support of RCP PMU and shall start implementation in Nov, 2010. It focuses on promoting the use of geothermal power in administrative and residential buildings and shall improve the capacity of MRDPW to fund and manage such projects in Bulgaria under OPRD. 3. Six draft updates of RDPs developed by MRDPW with the active support of the project and a proposal submitted to MoEW to assess the need to conduct a second EO of the updated RDPs as a result of the territorial changes that have occurred in the six NUTS 2 regions. In June 2010 MoEW issued a decision that a second EO of the updated RDPs was not needed. In addition, MoEW also officially approved that the 7 strategic indicators were included in the monitoring and evaluation scheme, evaluating the impact from the implementation of the RDPs on the environment, besides the indicators and measures prescribed in the initial EO decision by MoEW experts. 4. One advisory board meeting conducted in November 2009 to publicize intermediate project results to over 50 participants from key national, regional and local institutions and organizations. |
| <p>Outcome 3:</p> <p>Regional development plans and municipal-level spatial development plans are revised to integrate global environmental objectives in a pilot region through application of capacities developed in Outcomes 1 and 2.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The District Development Strategy (DDS) of Plovdiv DA updated to include the project developed and MRDPW endorsed strategic indicators on GE integration. 2. Three public hearings organized in Plovdiv in order to discuss the proposed changes in the DDS. 3. Seven working seminars with DA experts conducted in the first half of 2010 to discuss the practical integration of the 7 GE sensitive indicators in the forthcoming DDS updates and midterm evaluations (MTE). 4. Methodology and a model ToR for conducting MTE of DDS produced and are in advanced stage of institutionalization by MRDPW. The 7 strategic indicators for GE integration are also included in the MTE Methodology as part of the indicator system to be used by external evaluators to determine the impact from the implementation of DDS. |

Annex 2. Achievement of Project Objectives

A review of Project achievements versus expected targets was lastly done in the PIR 2010 which indicates that the Project has met – and sometimes exceeded – most its set of expected project targets (underlined figures in Table below). Consequently, the progress made by the project to achieve its Objectives was rated “*Highly Satisfactory*” by the final evaluation team.

Table: Objectives evaluation matrix (taken from last PIR, 2009-2010)

| Objective/ Outcomes | Description of Indicator ¹¹ | Baseline Level ¹² | Target Level | Level at project end (Sept 2010) |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Project Objective:</p> <p>To build capacities for mainstreaming global environment into the formulation and implementation of regional and local development, as well as spatial planning policies.</p> | <p>Indicator 1: New GE sensitive guidelines, for national, regional and municipality planning are adopted by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works.</p> <p>(Mid term target: N/A)</p> | GE sensitive guidelines are not in place | GE sensitive guidelines are in place till mid 2009 | Achieved. The GE sensitive guidelines are in place since May 2009 and no changes in this indicator have occurred during the reporting period. |
| | <p>Indicator 2: Percentage of projects under the OPRD funded after 2008, which contain GE indicators relevant to the individual projects, as well as report on them.</p> <p>(Mid term target¹³: N/A)</p> | 0 | 80% of projects under the OPRD funded after 2008 contain GE indicators relevant to the individual projects, as well as report on them | Partially Achieved. All projects funded by OPRD report on one GE indicator, namely, emissions of CO2 equivalent emitted as a result of the project implementation. The indicator was officially approved by DG "Regional Development" at the European Commission at the launch of OPRD in 2007 as it specifically requested MRDPW to adopt only one "environmental" indicator as part of the monitoring and evaluation schemes of OPRD. The introduction of new indicators under OPRD is a lengthy and cumbersome procedure: first, the proposed change is subject to approval by a National Monitoring Committee and then by DG "Regio" and therefore major changes in OPRD indicator system are not implemented during the program period. However, the project developed 7 strategic indicators for GE integration and their |

¹¹ This should describe the quantitative indicator

¹² This should be a quantitative numerical value

¹³ The indicators to be used by the projects under the OPRD is expected to be ready by mid 2008 as part of activities related to Indicator 4.

| Objective/ Outcomes | Description of Indicator ¹¹ | Baseline Level ¹² | Target Level | Level at project end (Sept 2010) |
|---|--|------------------------------|--------------|---|
| | | | | <p>technical "passports" and technical characteristics (min, max and mean values for a given indicator and planning region in Bulgaria; how is the data calculated and analyzed, with what frequency, how is it interpreted, how does a certain value of a given indicator affect policy making, etc.) of the 7 short listed indicators were finalized and were officially submitted to OPRD in Feb 2010 to be considered during the forthcoming MTE of OPRD. MRDPW is in a process of selecting a subcontractor for the MTE, which shall begin after project official closure. As evidenced by the above information, the final decision lies within OPRD and is beyond project's ability. However, OPRD welcome the idea to consider the indicators during the planning process for the next planning period (2014-2020) which has been already initiated by an assignment entitled "Needs Analysis and Assessment of the Variants for Preparation and Implementation of the Process of Regional Development Programming and the Associated Programming Documents during the Period 2014 – 2020."</p> |
| <p>OUTCOME 1: The methodologies, skills, knowledge, and information management system for mainstreaming global environmental considerations into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of regional development and spatial planning policies are in place</p> | <p>Indicator 3: At least 130 staff, are applying their training (developed by the project) in their review of plans, projects and programmes. (Mid-term target: Training programme fully developed and 20 people trained)</p> | 0 | 130 | <p>Partially Achieved. A total number of 141 civil servants were trained during the project implementation period in the 10-day training course. Another 201 civil servants from district and municipal administrations attended the one-day introductory course on integration of GEI into RD&SP policies. As part of the final evaluation, the international team leader has recommended to perform an electronic survey among the participants in the trainings to assess the extent to which they actually apply the skills and knowledge taught during the course. PMU is in a process of finalizing the survey questions together with the evaluators team and the survey shall be performed and results processed in September 2010.</p> |

| Objective/ Outcomes | Description of Indicator ¹ | Baseline Level ² | Target Level | Level at project end (Sept 2010) |
|---------------------|---|---|--|---|
| | <p>Indicator 4: GE indicators identified and used in evaluating the implementation of RDPs (regional development plans) and MDPs (municipal development plans) and projects</p> <p>(Mid-term target: Information on GE indicators accessible, reporting process and reporting format pilot tested.)</p> | <p>GE indicators have not been identified</p> | <p>Identified GE indicators are used to verify “zero negative impact on the environment” of RDPs and MDPs and projects</p> | <p>Partially Achieved, the indicators are identified but their practical use is still forthcoming. In November, 2010 the project finalized the technical and GIS "passports" for the 7 GE sensitive indicators. Base year calculations and reference targets for each of the indicators on the EU-27 level were produced and distributed to district and municipal administrations. The GE sensitive indicators shall be gradually adopted in the forthcoming updates in 2010 and 2011 of Regional Development Plans (RDPs), District Development Strategies (DDS) and Municipal Development Plans (MDPs). In addition, a prototype GIS was developed and pilot tested at MRDPW in the first half of 2010 to assist the GE indicators monitoring and evaluation at the level of the 6 planning regions and in the implementation of the 6 RDPs.</p> |
| | <p>Indicator 5: The established web-site for “GE integration into local and regional planning” is viewed and used as a useful information source in work related matters by municipal and regional planners, interested stakeholders and Government staff (MRDPW etc.)</p> <p>(Mid-term target: The established website is fully operational and its existence is recognized by municipal and regional planners, interested stakeholders and Government staff (MRDPW etc.)</p> | <p>Web-site for “GE integration into local and regional planning” not established</p> | <p>Web-site for “GE integration into local and regional planning” used as an information source</p> | <p>Achieved. The project web site continued to be used by local stakeholders as relevant information source on the implementation of the three Rio Conventions in Bulgaria and abroad. More than 200 such news in English and Bulgarian were uploaded on the project web site since its establishment. In addition, more than 40 project related news in English and Bulgarian were uploaded on the project web site since its establishment. 10 issues of the project electronic newsletter were produced and sent to the project electronic database of more than 850 recipients. Since its launch in June 2007 till June 2010 the project web site had more than 21,000 visits, out of which 14,858 are unique visits. 85% of the users come from Bulgaria and 15% are international, which indicates that the web site is also used as a trusted information source on an international level, as well. After the project official end the project will be "fed" with relevant news on the Rio Conventions Implementation via RSS feed from appropriate domestic and international web sites: e.g. Bulgarian Climate Coalition, UNCBD, UNFCCC, GEF Climate Evaluation</p> |

| Objective/ Outcomes | Description of Indicator ¹ | Baseline Level ² | Target Level | Level at project end (Sept 2010) |
|--|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|--|
| | | | | <p>Portal, etc. PMU conducted a couple of meetings with the Secretariat of the Bulgarian Climate Coalition and it was agreed that they will support the update of news of the Rio Conventions Project web site after its official end. Both MoEW and MRDPW have added a link to the project web site on their official sites, as well.</p> |
| <p>OUTCOME 2: Institutional changes that support mainstreaming of global environmental into regional development and spatial planning are in place.</p> | <p>Indicator 6: Staff participation (MRDPW, district administrations and municipalities) in (xx hours of) trainings, seminars and workshops related to “green” development planning and implementation through Ministry support (as well as from other funding sources). (Mid term target: Staff participation in (1000 hours) of trainings, seminars and workshops related to “green” development planning and implementation)</p> | <p>0</p> | <p>6240 hours</p> | <p>Partially Achieved. 96 hours of participation in workshops and seminars related to "green" development planning by experts from DG "Strategic Regional Development Planning" at MRDPW in the framework of the two Interreg IVC projects implemented by the directorate in 2010. A total of 2082 hours of training related to "green" development planning was financed by MRDPW, municipalities and DAs from other sources. The project budget also financed 27 training workshops with one-day duration, in each of the 27 district centers. In addition, the project budget supported the delivery of training workshops with ten-day duration at Sofia University with a total equivalent of 8460 academic hours (141 participants x 60 academic hours). Both type of courses (one-day and ten-day) were delivered by qualified instructors from Sofia university. The lower number of "green" trainings attended by MRDPW, municipal and DA employees, based on other funding sources, is due to the outbreak of the financial crises which severely diminished the available training budgets at all public institutions in Bulgaria in 2009 and 2010. The developed 10-day training course and the MSc will continue to be offered by SU beyond the project scope which shall ensure the sustainability of the developed training programs even after the project official end.</p> |

| Objective/ Outcomes | Description of Indicator ¹¹ | Baseline Level ¹² | Target Level | Level at project end (Sept 2010) |
|---|--|------------------------------|---|--|
| | <p>Indicator 7: 100% of job descriptions and performance evaluation forms within the <u>relevant</u> departments and structures of Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (app. 50) have been updated in accordance with the Methodological Guidance, so as to outline the specific task required, by the individual positions, to ensure overall integration of GE into the Ministry's activities.</p> <p>(Mid term target: 25% of the relevant staff's job descriptions and performance evaluation forms have been updated.)</p> | 0 | 100% of the relevant staff's job descriptions have been updated (app. 50) | Partially Achieved. At the time the initial survey among relevant MRDPW directorates was conducted (Jan 2009) the ministry was structured in three Directorates General, 16 Directorates, an Inspectorate and an Internal Audit Unit. The total number of staff on the payroll in the organizational structures and administrative units of the Ministry was 655 people. The scope of the study comprised 12 Directorates, 130 job descriptions for a total of 332 people on payroll (app. 50% of the total employees at MRDPW). Following the approval of a new administrative structure at MRDPW after the parliamentary elections in July 2009 an update of the job descriptions was produced in February 2010 and re-submitted with an official letter to the Chief Secretary of MRDPW to be considered in forthcoming job descriptions update. 34 job descriptions were updated at DG "Strategic Regional Development Planning" in February 2010. |
| | <p>Indicator 8: Number of meetings held by an inter-ministerial expert Task Force aimed at exchanging experience and best practices and developing a proposal for integrating GE concerns into the work of other ministries.</p> <p>(Mid term target: 1 meetings held by the Task Force)</p> | 0 | At least 4 meetings held by the Task Force | Partially Achieved. The inter-ministerial Task Force was not established since it requires a proposal by the Council of Ministers which was beyond project mandate to achieve. Instead, in 2008 the project established an expert working group on indicators with representatives from different ministries, agencies and academic organizations which was actively consulted first, with respect to the finalization of the technical and GIS "passports" of the 7 strategic indicators for GE integration and second, with respect to the selection of a pilot district administration for an update of its District Development Strategy (DDS). |
| OUTCOME 3: Regional development plans | Indicator 9: The new GE sensitive guidelines adopted by MRDPW, for regional ¹⁴ and municipality planning are introduced to a set | N/A | Adopted guidelines introduced to | Partially Achieved. The GE sensitive guidelines were adopted by MRDPW in 2009 and they guide the update of all levels of strategic planning documents in Bulgaria: |

¹⁴ National planning follows the cycle. National Strategy -> Regional Plan -> District Strategy -> municipality planning according to the District Strategy -> regional planning combining the district and municipality planning wishes -> national planning following the planning wishes outlined in the regional plans.

| Objective/ Outcomes | Description of Indicator ¹¹ | Baseline Level ¹² | Target Level | Level at project end (Sept 2010) |
|--|---|------------------------------|---|---|
| <p>and municipal-level spatial development plans are revised to integrate global environmental objectives in a pilot region through application of capacities developed in Outcomes 1 and 2.</p> | <p>of municipalities and the 28 district administrations. (Mid-term target: Review of regional and municipal planning documentation underway.)</p> | | <p>municipalities and regional administrations</p> | <p>RDPs, DDS and MDPs. As a special annex to the Guidelines were included the project developed 7 strategic indicators for GE. The GE sensitive guidelines were "put into practice" during the project pilot component (Outcome 3) since all the assignments under this component focus on the practical use of the indicators at the district level. Furthermore, the indicators were introduced in RDPs in the process of their update (directly supervised by DG "Strategic Regional Development Planning at MRDPW) and shall be monitored at the level of the 6 planning regions (NUTS 2 regions) through the prototype GIS that was successfully developed and pilot tested at MRDPW. During the project duration a total of 6 RDPs and 2 DDS were updated in accordance with the new Ordinance and project developed indicators, as the update of one of the DDS (of Plovdiv district) was part of the project pilot component.</p> |
| | <p>Indicator 10: Number of public hearings that is held for each of the development plan reviewed and an equal number of seminars on civil participation in plan development and plan monitoring held. (Mid term target: Materials for seminars on civil participation in plan development and plan monitoring produced)</p> | <p>0</p> | <p>At least 1 public hearing and 1 seminar per reviewed plan/strategy</p> | <p>Achieved. 3 public hearings were organized with respect to the update of Plovdiv DDS. In addition, 7 working seminars were organized with experts from 26 District Administrations (DAs) in order to reflect their comments and recommendations into the developed Methodology and a model ToR for DDS midterm evaluation (MTE). According to the Regional Development Act the MTE of RDPs, DDS and MDPs should be performed in 2010. However, no Methodology existed as to how this MTE should be conducted. Therefore in April 2010 a letter was received at MRDPW from 5 regional governors requesting the support of the Ministry in developing such a Methodology and model ToR for conducting MTE. In consultation with UNDP an assignment was initiated under the Rio Conventions project to support the development of such a Methodology and a model ToR in broad consultation with all DAs in Bulgaria. This assignment was also viewed as a natural "entry point"</p> |

| Objective/ Outcomes | Description of Indicator¹ | Baseline Level² | Target Level | Level at project end (Sept 2010) |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| | | | | <p>for promoting the 7 GE strategic indicators at the district level. The project pilot component did not focus on RDPs and MDPs because throughout the first half of 2010 the RDPs were in a procedure of assessment of the need to conduct a second SEA by MoEW due to changes in the territorial scope of the 6 NUTS 2 regions. With respect to NSRD, MRDPW took a decision to perform its midterm review and subsequent update internally and the project intervention was not requested. As far as MDPs are concerned, they are developed by the municipal mayor and approved by the municipal council and MRDPW does not have direct tools to "influence" the update and MTE of MDPs, as opposed to DDS in which case MRDPW can act as a principal and can exercise a direct role in the process of their update and MTE. Therefore, a strategic decision was taken at the end of 2009 to focus the activities of the project pilot component at the DA level and to cover all 28 DAsl. The decision was also confirmed at a PSC meeting.</p> |

Annex 3. Chart of the Implementation Arrangements for the Rio Conventions Project

Rio Conventions Project Organizational Chart

