

**Management Response to the Evaluation of the Government of Albania - United Nations Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017-2021**  
September 2020

Evaluation Title: **Evaluation of the Government of Albania and United Nations Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017-2021**

Evaluation Year: **2020**

Body responsible for completing management response: **UNCT in Albania and Government of Albania**

United Nations Country Team in Albania welcomes the evaluation of the Government of Albania and United Nations Programme of Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2017-2021 conducted during the period March – mid July 2020 in line with the guidance provided in the Cooperation Framework Companion Guidance (May 2020), incorporating feedback received from consultations with a wide range of stakeholders and the UNCT. UNCT agrees with the evaluation's conclusions and recommendations and has formulated the below responses to the recommendations. The evaluation findings will inform the development of the next Cooperation Framework of the Government of Albania and UN in Albania for the period 2022-2026.

**Evaluation Conclusions:**

**Conclusion 1:** The evaluation concludes that the UNCT collectively prioritizes support and contributes to the country's development. The PoCSD outcomes are relevant in terms of internationally agreed goals and human rights commitments and in line with the national strategic framework as laid out in the NSDI II and sectoral strategies. The PoCSD has made good progress in aligning the Agenda 2030 goals with the national development policies, and in making the SDG framework relevant in the country through its mainstreaming and operationalization of a set of national indicators. The advancement of the SDG agenda was fostered by the strong, high-level partnership of the RCO and UNCT with the Prime Minister's Office and Parliament. To ensure the continued commitment, at sectoral level, of the executive and other institutions, the UN agencies need to continue pursuing an explicit SDG-related agenda to overcome technical difficulties.

**Conclusion 2:** The PoCSD is coherent with government policies and it has built-in flexibilities that allow for timely adjustments of the interventions to accommodate any changes in the course of national policies. Contributions of the PoCSD are also coherent with other international development partner policies, with consistent inter-linkages and complementarities identified with other partners, most frequently with the EU. The financing of PoCSD is heavily dependent on donor contributions, which makes donor coordination a key prerequisite.

**Conclusion 3:** The PoCSD provides a reference framework for the cooperation and coordination of work. UN agency internal cooperation is strongest at the programming phase, when interventions strategies are discussed, and information exchanged with a view to avoid duplication as well as communication overlaps with beneficiaries. The cooperation approach and modalities of programming and implementation have been tested by the UN family in Albania over more than a decade and much of the cooperation has now become inherent to the organisational culture. Cooperation is more intense in the framework of joint programmes funded by the SDG Acceleration Fund. Cross-fertilisation of approaches is more evident with joint programmes, although agencies tend to persist in employing a "division of labour" approach in terms of delivery of activities and responsibility for project components.

**Conclusion 4:** The PoCSD Results framework is highly consolidated at outcome level, which undermines the clarity of the intervention logic and theory of change. Typically, there are no direct links between results defined at outcome level and output level indicators, which may undermine the coherence of the results chain as well as accountability for implementation. In other cases, single outputs are directly linked with one entire national strategy and high level national institutions that are responsible for their implementation are not represented in the PoCSD management structures.

**Conclusion 5:** The interventions of the PoCSD are quite donor-driven, as core and regular resources finance less than 15% of its resource envelope. The viability of intervention strategies and prioritisation of actions within Outcomes is interdependent with the degree to which objectives converge with donor strategies in terms of content and time. The joint resource mobilisation strategy provides a useful framework for the joint UNCT efforts in a contracting donor environment. Individual agency resource mobilisation efforts remain particularly intense, with frequent overlaps in terms of donors and scope, which may undermine the credibility of the One Voice message.

**Conclusion 6:** The UN Resident Coordinator has played an effective role in leveraging the leadership and diverse expertise of the UN family to improve the relevance and impact of the PoCSD. The RC office plays a central role in the fostering of strategic partnerships with Government, and advocacy for key principles and strategic priorities, including for the setting of national objectives and financing of Agenda 2030.

**Conclusion 7:** The PoCSD intervention logic is based on the combination of a mix of approaches ranging from assistance to design policies and legal frameworks, to building capacities and awareness of national stakeholders, and building systems and institutions. Although heavy emphasis on drafting legal and regulatory framework persists, the UN is gradually increasing focus on building national capacities for implementation, especially at the local level. In many instances, the government calls upon UN to deliver on their behalf in cases when it fails to provide adequate human and financial capacities to comply with their commitments.

**Conclusion 8:** Building national institutions and capacities should be at the heart of the next programme cycle, during the course of which Albania is expected to have started EU accession negotiations. Stakeholders highlight the need for reinforcing interventions at the local level, as well as continued focus on integrated regional approaches, in cooperation with other country offices, which can help put Albania on the map and create synergies or provide more effective and efficient solutions in areas with evident spill overs such as environment or economic growth.

## UNCT Albania Responses to Evaluation Recommendations

<b>Recommendation 1:</b> The Government of Albania and public counterparts should be engaged in co-creating and co-developing the next UNSDCF. Key representatives and technical staff should actively participate in the design teams/working groups. This will help to have a common understanding of issues to be addressed, and how to address them, from the beginning/design stage, which will be useful for the work plan developments and the implementation of the UNSDCF.		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		
<b>Actions to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible Entities</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resource implication</b>	<b>Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress</b> (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
In line with the CF 2022-2026 Roadmap, engage GoA and relevant stakeholders in all the phases of the CF 2022-2026 development through active involvement in consultative processes and requesting their review and/or feedback on documents prepared.	RC/UNCT RCO Stakeholders	2020-2021		N/A
Ensure Result Groups organize at least 4 meetings (online or face to face) to prepare for key processes (JWPs, MYR, APR, Joint implementation) with Government counterparts and not relying solely on conducting work via email.	RCO Result Groups	2020-2021		N/A
Engage GoA in the UNCT configuration exercise	RC/UNCT	Q4@020		N/A
<b>Recommendation 2:</b> Clearer management arrangements should be established to ensure accountability for implementation at both output and outcome level, in particular in cases where stakeholders are not represented at outcome level. The responsibility for implementing outputs could be increased further. Some kind of representation/ participation in the UNCT meetings, even on a rotation basis, would make the future UNSDCF mechanism more participatory. Some Outcome Groups comprise different Ministries, which have created an awkward situation of hierarchy among ministries, with one Ministry being the head of the outcome and main signatory of documents for another Ministry that is just as big and important. This could be addressed by clarifying the accountability of each institution and by an enhanced strategic coordination, not only at sector/line ministry level, but also at the inter-ministerial level.		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		
<b>Actions to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible Entities</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resource implication</b>	<b>Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress</b> (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
OWG Chairs to participate in those UNCT meetings where UNDAF implementation and UNSDCF development is to be discussed	RC/UNCT RCO OWG	2020-2021		N/A
Outcome Chairs to continue to inform line ministries under their specific outcome on their role and accountability in the UNDAF implementation under the outcome areas to avoid creation of an awkward situation of hierarchy among ministries.	Outcome Chairs RCO	2020-2021		N/A
Outcome Chairs to play an increased role vis-à-vis the Government and the role of related Ministries in JWPs and other UNDAF implementation matters	Outcome Chairs RCO	2020-2021		N/A
<b>Recommendation 3:</b> As a follow up to the resource mobilization strategy, the UNCT should enhance joint resource mobilization efforts and opportunities for collaboration. The large proportion of the non-core resources of the PoCSD highlights the importance of local resource mobilization for being less donor driven. The UNCT should tap new resource potentials, including from the private sector and international financial institutions, aside from efforts to increase government cost-sharing, which became a reality for the first time in		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		

2019. Joint programme resources channeled through the SDG Acceleration Fund should continue to provide a useful platform for the consolidation of a sound programme strategy in the respective areas.				
<b>Actions to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible Entities</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resource implication</b>	<b>Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress</b> (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
Strengthen RCO capacities with the recruitment of the Resource and Partnership Mobilization Officer to support UNCT's joint RM efforts	RC/RCO	2020Q3		N/A
UN agencies to share information on Agency specific RM efforts through the pipeline RM table to be updated monthly.	RC/UNCT/RCO	2020-2021		N/A
Prepare CF funding framework and SDG financing strategy	RC/RCO UNCT	2021Q1		N/A
Apply/prepare at least 2 joint programmes to be financed either through global funds (SDG-F, COVID, other), Albania SDG Acceleration Fund resources, private sector, or IFIs.	RC/RCO UNCT	2020Q3-2021Q4		N/A
Support implementation of SERP- Covid recovery, through at least 1 joint programme funded through SDG Acceleration Fund	RC/UNCT	2021		N/A
<b>Recommendation 4:</b> Governmental authorities at central and local level should be brought on board to make financial contributions for planned interventions through cost sharing modalities to ensure long-term commitment and sustainability. This is all the more needed that partnership building and consultations with governmental authorities at central and local level and CSOs is an essential ingredient of success to ensure country ownership and commitment to achieve and sustain results.		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		
<b>Actions to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible Entities</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resource implication</b>	<b>Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress</b> (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
Ensure disbursement of second/third tranche GoA committed annual contribution of USD 2M to the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund to fund priorities agreed by the JEC.	RC/UNCT JEC RCO	2020Q3-2021Q4		N/A
Prepare JWPs in close collaboration with GoA to ensure gov. authorities are on board with the planned activities and/or explore potential cost-sharing/fund matching initiatives.	RC/UNCT GoA RCO	2020Q3-2021Q4		N/A
UN agencies to ensure engagement/partnership at local level in implementation of JPs on Gender, LNB, integration of services	RC/ UN Agencies	2020Q3-2021Q4		N/A
<b>Recommendation 5:</b> Synergies between UN Agencies should be actively sought out over the course of the design and implementation of the next UNSDCF, alongside a careful consideration of a clear division of labour between the different agencies, to avoid inherent competition over the PoCSD (and donor) resources and scope of activities. The UNCT should also continue to be inclusive of Non-Resident Agencies and explore synergies. To avoid the appearance of competing and/or bundling of priorities (solely) to make intervention proposals more lucrative for potential donors, the UNCT could consider establishing an internal preliminary review process for the harmonization of resource mobilization initiatives, under the leadership of the RC.		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		
<b>Actions to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible Entities</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resource implication</b>	<b>Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress</b>

				(to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
Use the RM task Force and UNCT fora to share information on Agency specific RM efforts, and explore opportunities to prepare JPs as per the main thematic identified as priority by the UNCT	RC/UNCT RCO	2020Q3-2021Q4		N/A
Incentivize donors to use the SDG Acceleration Fund to allocate resources to the UN agencies in Albania for implementation of UNDAF and implementation of SERP.	RC/UNCT RCO	2020Q3-2021Q4		N/A
NRAs to be engaged via Outcome Groups in UNDAF monitoring/reporting as well as participate regularly in UNCT meetings, and kept abreast with relevant information	RC/UNCT RCO	2020Q3-2021Q4		N/A
<b>Recommendation 6:</b> There is a need to further strengthen the strategic partnership between the UN and the EU, which would replace a donor-contractor type of approach. The UN, the EU and other development partners should not only coordinate their work but also strengthen their collaboration, reinforcing each-other's messages and relying on each-other's resources. Some form of strategic partnership document might be developed between the two entities, prior to the new PoCSD, indicating potential areas of collaboration and positioning the UN in a more "preferential" dealing status by the EU.		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		
<b>Actions to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible Entities</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resource implication</b>	<b>Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress</b> (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
Active involvement in DTS, as well as actively participate in IPMG groups as lead/or implementing partner	RC/UNCT RCO	2020Q3-2021Q4		N/A
Implement meticulously the EU funding provided bilaterally to UN agencies in several outputs, especially related to earthquake response in Albania	RC/UNCT RCO	2020Q3-2021Q4		N/A
Organize a joint UN-EUD meeting to explore synergies for the next UNSDCF	RC/UNCT/RM Task Force	2021		N/A
<b>Recommendation 7:</b> The UN is called to continue advancing the human rights agenda, supporting the improvement of the regulatory framework and the integration of human rights into the policies and strategies by the government, and accompanying the implementation of programmes and Treaty Bodies' recommendations. UN Agencies should continue to generate stronger political engagement by Parliament and Human Rights institutions to strengthen public accountability mechanisms and increase outreach to vulnerable people. The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) and the equity focus should continue to be strengthened, with an intentional effort to bring the most vulnerable at the centre of attention, in particular the Roma, People with Disabilities, returnees, migrants, and refugees.		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		
<b>Actions to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible Entities</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resource implication</b>	<b>Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress</b> (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
Continue to support the government to monitor progress on implementation of recommendations from international Human Rights Conventions, Treaties and regular National Reports, improve evidence for actions taken in line with observations and recommendations and establish tracking mechanisms.	RC/UNCT RCO GoA	2020-2021		N/A
Continue to support Parliament and NHRIs to strengthen public accountability mechanisms, increase outreach to vulnerable people.	RC/UNCT RCO IHRI	2020-2021		N/A

	Parliament			
Organize meetings of the joint UN-People Advocate Group at least twice a year to discuss priorities of joint collaboration and address needs.	UN-PA Group RCO	2020-2021		
Refresh programme staff and GoA programme partners on the HRBA to programming in the context of the CF formulation.	RCO UN Agencies GoA	2020-2021		
<b>Recommendation 8:</b> The UNCT should continue to implement the recommendations of the UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard, to ensure that gender continues to be well mainstreamed in the PoCSD and most programmatic areas. UN Agencies can also use the Gender Marker system that has proven to be a very useful tool to ensure gender is mainstreamed in the UNSDCF programmatic work, and implement the recommendations issued from this system. All UN staff is encouraged to increase their capacities in making good use of these two tools at every step of design, planning, implementation and evaluation and monitoring work as per the Outputs interventions. The Gender Thematic Results Group should play a key role to support the key phases of the new UNSDCF, including through the CCA and other key steps in the new joint planning exercise. It should also continue to be active in supporting a joint approach and collaboration, not only in the area of implementation of international normative standards and commitments, but also in the area of public advocacy campaigns, and in supporting gender mainstreaming across all Joint Programmes and agency programmes. The GTRG can also serve more as a 'policy advice platform' for the UNCT on issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women in the context of SDG localization efforts in Albania.		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		
<b>Actions to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible Entities</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resource implication</b>	<b>Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress</b> (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
Prepare a <u>gender position paper</u> to ensure that the pursuit of gender equality is reflected throughout the substantive content as well as the process of the CCA in order to inform the forthcoming UNSDCF 2022-2026.	GRTG UNCT RCO	2020Q3 – 2021Q4		N/A
Implement actions identified by the Gender Thematic Results Group from the Gender Equality SWAP recommendations to address shortcomings in the CF 2022-2026	GRTG UNCT RCO	2020Q3 – 2021Q4		N/A
The GTRG to support (i) all phases of the CF 2022-2026 and (ii) UNCT application to calls for proposals to ensure gender mainstreaming in line with guidelines.	GRTG UNCT RCO	2020Q3 – 2021Q4		N/A
The GTRG to serve more as a 'policy advice platform' for the UNCT on issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women in the context of SDG localization efforts in Albania, including through close collaboration with the Parliamentary SDG Sub-committee.	GRTG UNCT RCO	2020Q3 – 2021Q4		
<b>Recommendation 9:</b> While CSOs are increasingly partnering with the UN as service providers rather than legitimate representatives of rights holders, the next UNSDCF should step up its efforts in building real, strategic partnerships with CSOs. UN Agencies are called to intensify efforts to build and sustain the CSO sector, which is relatively weak in Albania, building on positive examples of how the PoCSD engages with CSOs, including on the support for shadow reports under the UPR and the strengthening of the CSO sector in the gender budgeting and LGBTI rights areas. The next UNSDCF should underscore the principles of transparency, partnership, and accountability, and the commitment to work together with – among other – civil society partners in a coordinated and coherent manner, as well as the private sector, with which current partnerships are encouraging.		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		

Actions to be taken	Responsible Entities	Timeframe	Resource implication	Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
Continue to support CSOs to strengthen their role as service providers and representatives of rights holders.- for preparing shadow reports under the UPR, strengthening of the CSO sector in the areas of gender budgeting, GBV, LGBTI rights, etc.- in line with planned current and future CF implementation activities.	RC/UNCT RCO	2020-2021		N/A
Collaborate with the National Council of Civil Society to achieve SDGs in Albania	RC/UNCT RCO	2020-2021		N/A
<b>Recommendation 10:</b> In order to effectively respond to the Covid19 pandemic, the UN Agencies, with the support of development partners, will need to adapt to the challenges, and focus on key priorities. The UN will need to identify needs in a proper way, and continue to listen to the right interlocutors – duty bearers, rights holders and other partners, by further intensifying policy dialogue and stakeholder inclusion, especially at local level. The pandemic showed the fragility of the more vulnerable, and the UN will need to identify a new way of looking at vulnerabilities and the social inclusion agenda.		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		
Actions to be taken	Responsible Entities	Timeframe	Resource implication	Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
CCA to reflect at best Covid- related impact and serve for preparation of future steps	RC/UNCT RCO Central/local GoA Stakeholders Beneficiaries	Sept.2020-Dec. 2021		N/A
Shape CF strategic direction (outcomes, outputs) by properly identifying needs and priority areas through policy dialogue and inclusion of stakeholders/ beneficiaries, especially at local level.	RC/UNCT RCO Central/local GoA Stakeholders Beneficiaries	Sept.2020-Dec. 2021		
Implement the SERP and include SERP activities into the JWPs – signed by GoA.	RC/UNCT RCO Central/local GoA Stakeholders Beneficiaries	Sept.2020-Dec. 2021		N/A
<b>Recommendation 11:</b> The UNCT is called to ensure sustained support to guarantee that PoCSD advancements are solid and irreversible, and to make sure that the transition into nation- and society-wide programmes happens, even after UN's interventions stop, all of which requires a clear vision for sustainability and ownership by duty-bearers. The capacities that were built in the past (for example work with the Roma), should not be lost due to the lack of continuity of some projects, and the lack of ownership and buy-in from the Government. The Government should sustain capacity development of its institutions, NGOs and CSOs, at both local and central levels, in all areas of cooperation with the UN.		<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>		
Actions to be taken	Responsible Entities	Timeframe	Resource implication	Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)

Continue the partnership building and consultations with governmental authorities at central and local level and CSOs as an essential ingredient of success to ensure country ownership and commitment to achieve and sustain results - analyze, discuss with the national partners and adopt approaches to ensure sustainability of results as an integral part of the new CF 2022-2026 preparations.	RC/UNCT RCO JEC Result Groups Stakeholders	2020-2021		N/A
Implement capacity development activities (individual, institutional and policy) in different areas of focus of the current UNDAF and also plan in the JWPs of CF 2022-2026, focusing the interventions on the achievements of SDGs.	RC/UNCT RCO JEC Result Groups Stakeholders	2020-2021		N/A
Continue the reporting practice with focus on results-reporting, both mid-year and annual, capturing bottlenecks and lessons learned for future improvements.	RC/UNCT RCO JEC Result Groups Stakeholders	September 2020 and May/September 2021		N/A
<b>Recommendation 12:</b> A more systematic and better structured integration of communication would be needed in all programme phases: design, planning, implementation, review and monitoring, as well as output/outcome annual workplans, and into partnership building and resource mobilization. This also requires a strengthened Communication for Development element throughout the programme areas. It is also important to dedicate well thought and planned resources.	<b>Accepted/Partially accepted/Rejected</b>			
<b>Actions to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible Entities</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Resource implication</b>	<b>Achieved/ Good Progress/Some Progress/Little Progress</b> (to be evaluated in 2021Q4 with the PoCSD annual review exercise)
Include communication activities into joint workplans and organize joint Comms and RM Task Force meetings	CTG UNCT RCO	2020-2021		N/A