



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
11 January 2017

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships

Eleventh session

Geneva, 20-22 March 2017

Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda

Implementation of the Programme of Work since the tenth session:

Team of Specialists on Public-Private Partnerships (TOS-PPP)

Independent evaluation of the project “Capacity Development to Support the Implementation of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Belarus”

Note by the Secretariat

Background

This document is submitted by the Secretariat for information purposes and as received from the independent evaluator, Mr. Marius Birsan, who conducted an evaluation of the project “Capacity Development to Support the Implementation of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Belarus” during the period 1 October to 28 November 2016.

The evaluation was carried out pursuant to the UNECE Evaluation Policy¹ designed to improve programme performance, promote organisational learning, and support accountability.

¹ More information on the UNECE Evaluation Policy is available at: <https://www.unece.org/info/open-unece/evaluation.html>

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Executive Summary

1. This evaluation analyses the design, management, results and the potential impacts of the United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE) project, “Capacity Development to Support the Implementation of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Belarus”, implemented between August 2013 and November 2015 in cooperation with the Government of Belarus and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Belarus, and funded by the European Union.

2. The main objective of the project was to strengthen the capacity of Belarus to deliver infrastructure projects and public services using the Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) mechanism. The project aimed at increasing the capacity of the public and private sectors, and society at large in Belarus, in the PPP process with a view to promoting, developing, delivering, operating and managing PPP projects for infrastructure and public services delivery.

3. The project has been properly designed and implemented at the request of the Government of Belarus. The UNECE National PPP Readiness Assessment report for Belarus² is a high quality analysis and made clear, straightforward recommendations on the necessary steps. Considering the proven need and request from the host country, the alignment of the objectives with the mandates of the organizations involved, and the appropriateness of the project design based on a sound readiness assessment, the project relevance is rated as “excellent”.

4. The project achieved all planned results. The UNECE delivered critical support to create awareness and offered legal technical assistance, facilitating the drafting, debating, approval and enactment of the PPP law. The Inter-Ministerial Infrastructure Board (IIB) in Belarus³ is functional and endowed with sufficient technical knowledge to take strategic decisions regarding the PPP investments in the country. If the Ministry of Economy’s (MoE) intentions for 2017 materialize, the PPP Unit has a good chance to be revived, building on the technical knowledge that has been left after the end of the project. As a result of the project, the Government embraced the idea of using the M10 toll-road as a showcase, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is involved in providing hands-on support to create the tendering documentation. All the stated elements contribute to the general positive impact of the UNECE’s contribution, making the project “highly satisfactory” both at the impact and sustainability level.

5. With all these considerations taken into account, the main conclusion is that the UNECE brought a high-added value to this project, based on the fact that it mobilized world-class resources related to PPPs, it created an effective policy dialogue in the country and ensured the credibility of the project results.

6. Being a generally, “highly satisfactory” project, recommendations that build on the lessons learned and are for replication in other, similar projects are:

(a) Identify at an early stage a senior idea-champion, to advocate for the new intervention or approach;

² The UNECE National PPP Readiness Assessment report is available at:
http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/ceci/documents/UNDA_project/PPP_Readiness_Assessment_Belarus.pdf

³ The UNECE National PPP Readiness Assessment report recommended that an inter-ministerial infrastructure board be set-up in Belarus to share knowledge, promote good practice and to develop approaches to cross-cutting themes such as how to effectively attract private capital to Belarus.

(b) Employ a thorough needs assessment (Readiness Assessment), with facts-based clear recommendations and alternative proposals;

(c) Continue the involvement of the UNECE PPP Business Advisory Board (BAB), as it greatly complements, at the technical level, the policymaking role of the UNECE;

(d) Assist governments to create better employment environments for people benefitting from highly-skilled trainings and knowledge transfers, or to create mechanisms to retain them for a set period of time, in order to avoid similar cases to the PPP Unit which lost most of its staff to other employment opportunities (a situation foreseen in the UNECE PPP Readiness Assessment report); and

(e) On the gender dimension, the future project documents should foresee provisions on collecting gender disaggregated data for the relevant indicators.

I. Introduction and Evaluation Methodology

7. This evaluation analyses the design, management, results and potential impacts of the UNECE's involvement in the project "Capacity development to support the implementation of PPPs in Belarus", implemented between August 2013 and November 2015 in cooperation with the Government of Belarus, and the UNDP in Belarus, and funded by the European Union.

8. The main objective of the project was to strengthen the capacity of Belarus to deliver infrastructure projects and public services using the PPP mechanism. The project aimed at increasing the capacity of the public and private sectors, and society at large, in Belarus, in the PPP process with a view to promoting, developing, delivering, operating and managing PPP projects for infrastructure and public services delivery.

9. The methodology for this evaluation is based on the Terms of Reference provided by the UNECE and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Standards for Evaluation in the UN System including the relevant Code of Conduct and the Ethical Guidelines. Gender and Human Rights aspects were also covered by the evaluation, taking into account guidance provided by the UNEG on the matter.⁴

10. The evaluation consisted of a desk review of relevant documents (project document, the UNECE National PPP Readiness Assessment Report, list of activities, recommendations and reports created by the UNECE BAB, narrative report, official correspondence) and of an online-questionnaire⁵ filled in by beneficiaries of the PPP training. Online/telephone discussions were conducted with people involved in the project management at the UNECE and the UNDP, and a field visit was carried out in Minsk for in-depth discussions (meetings and interviews) based on the participatory evaluation principles and considering a gender-balanced involvement in the evaluation.

11. After collecting the data, the evaluator synthesized the results of all the component inputs and supplementary materials in a policy-oriented synthesis report, systematically covering the evaluation purpose, the agreed questions, and the specified criteria (relevance, impact and sustainability), to produce conclusions and recommendations. The recommendations should be used by the Cooperation and Partnerships Section, within the

⁴ Available at <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/980> and <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1452>

⁵ Available at: <https://kwiksurveys.com/s/5YCtjntP>

Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of the UNECE, to improve its planning and implementation of projects.

12. The objective of the evaluation was to undertake an in-depth analysis of the project in order to generate comprehensive and specific evaluation feedback on the project, by analyzing its relevance of the project as well as the sustainability and the potential impact of the results.

13. The duration of the evaluation was 25 working days during the period from 1 October to 28 November 2016. The evaluation activity was performed by an independent evaluator⁶ with a background in socioeconomics, expertise in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of international development projects and experience with policy design and capacity-building-related projects in the Eastern Europe and CIS countries.

14. In the evaluation process, the evaluation criteria to be assessed (Relevance, Sustainability and Impact) according to the Terms of Reference, received one of the following ratings: “*Excellent – Fully Satisfactory – Partly Unsatisfactory – or Unsatisfactory*”.

II. Background information

15. Following the 2008 international crisis, the rising public debts of governments and the contraction of international financial markets exerted additional pressure on state budgets. According to data from the National Bank of Belarus, the government’s external debt ratio to GDP is significant, increasing from below 5% before 2008 to above 20% in 2012 and 25% in 2016. The International Monetary Fund notes in the Country Report No. 13/18 – January 2014 that “the current account is worsening, coinciding with peak debt service, limited market access, and low reserves.”

16. At the time of project’s inception, Belarus viewed infrastructure as the basis for sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The infrastructure sectors were facing acute shortages of investments in the most needed modernization and upgrading projects, and were affected by acute gaps in management capacity and market-oriented operational approaches. Some industries, such as the energy system, needed to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, and make better use of natural resources.

17. According to the UNECE National PPP Readiness Assessment Report⁷ Belarus needed “a world-class infrastructure benchmark against globally competitive economies”. In order to cover the gaps between increasing public expenditure needs and lower budgetary revenues, the Government of Belarus envisaged exploring new ways to finance public services.

18. Members of the Government of Belarus started to consider PPPs as viable financing alternatives after 2009, and the Government Action Plan for 2011–2015 (adopted by the Council of Ministers’ Resolution No. 216 of 18 February 2011) contains provisions on enterprise promotion and PPPs, calling for legal and organizational support to PPPs, including the preparation of a draft law defining the principles and mechanisms for PPPs.

⁶ The independent evaluation was conducted by Mr. Marius Birsan, and was carried out in close cooperation with the UNECE Programme Management Unit.

⁷ See Page 6 of the UNECE National PPP Readiness Assessment report for Belarus.

III. Project Design vs. Relevance

19. The first steps towards considering the PPP mechanism as a viable approach for involving the private capital in the provision of public services and infrastructure investment were made in 2008, when the UNDP Belarus drafted, for the Council of Ministers of Belarus, a Policy Note on PPPs and best international practices, leading to a Council decision to establish a working group on PPPs under the Ministry of Economy.

20. The evaluated project has its roots in a project proposal document drafted by the UNECE in September 2009, outlining the situation at that time in the region. Following a growing interest from the Ministry of Economy, the UNECE (represented by the Economic Cooperation and Integration Division) commissioned a PPP Readiness Team (composed of Mr. Tony Bonnici from the UNECE secretariat and Mr. Leo McKenna, Strategic Adviser to the UK Government) to prepare a national PPP readiness assessment report, aiming to provide the Ministry of Economy with advanced knowledge, recommendations and proposed areas of action in order to ensure the development of PPPs in Belarus (May 2012). Following several rounds of consultations between the experts from the UNECE International PPP Centre of Excellence and national stakeholders (including lead and line ministries, financial institutions, private businesses and representatives of intergovernmental organizations), a comprehensive study, “National PPP Readiness Assessment Report – Belarus” was released in February 2013.

21. With the clear recommendations and next steps detailed in the assessment report (developing institutions and procedures, elaborating a national infrastructure plan, and driving the PPP implementation), the UNECE and the UNDP Belarus approached the EU Delegation in Belarus, who accepted to finance such a project with EUR 1 million under the Eastern Neighborhood Partnership Initiative (ENPI) Programme.

22. According to EU regulations and given that the UNECE does not have a physical presence in the country, the UNDP in Belarus has been selected to implement the project, under the National Implementation (NI) modality, in partnership with the Ministry of Economy in Belarus – as the national executing entity, with the UNECE providing the subject-matter expertise and support.

23. Following the Project Assurance Committee (PAC) meeting on 1 October 2012, the project was officially signed in May 2013, with an implementation period of April 2013 – April 2015,⁸ and having a total budget of EUR 1,080,528 (including Agencies’ and administration costs).

24. The project document provides a thorough justification of the need for the project and its alignment with the strategic objectives of participating institutions, as reflected in the following key documents:

(a) United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for Belarus – contributing to Outcome 1.1: “Innovation for development, investment and business climate are improved”;

(b) Objectives and priorities of the Country Strategy Paper, the National Indicative Programme;

(c) UNECE Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships’ Terms of Reference;

⁸ With the agreement of all parties involved, the implementation period of the project was extended till November 2015.

(d) UNDP Country Programme output 1.2 “Enabling policy framework promoted for the growth of inclusive markets and incentives for investments and entrepreneurship”;

(e) Terms of Reference for the Team of Specialists on PPPs, designed to assist governments in developing their PPP potential through training, capacity-building and policy advice;

(f) ENPI Annual Action Plans for Belarus – CRIS n° ENPI/2008/20652; and

(g) UNDP corporate gender strategy (2008-2013) - focusing on employment and self-employment for men and women by contributing to the prevention of female unemployment and creating equal opportunities for decent work.

25. The project design, as it was agreed and signed by all parties, had a three-level structure of planned components: (I) Disseminating knowledge on different aspects of PPPs; (II) Support to the establishment of the National PPP Unit; and (III) Developing instructional guidelines for the identification and appraisal of pilot PPP projects in two selected infrastructure sectors.

26. By implementing the above-mentioned activities, the project envisaged the achievement of the following objectives:

(a) Build capacity and train different stakeholders involved in the PPP process to develop and implement PPP projects as a tool for attracting private investments;

(b) Strengthen institutional capacity through the proposed National PPP Unit as an engine of PPP development in Belarus; and

(c) Promote the potential of public infrastructure development in order to attract private capital through the identification and appraisal of selected pilot PPP projects.

27. The stated objectives had relevant indicators in the project document, which were monitored throughout the project.

28. The project design also provided a stakeholder analysis, describing the way public administration (at central and regional level), the business community, and the general public would be involved and benefit from the results.

29. Specifically, for the UNECE Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnership, the project objectives are aligned with the guiding activities c) and d) of its terms of reference (Annex of the ECE/EX/2015/L.8):

(a) “Facilitating effective regulatory policies and corporate governance, including those in the financial sector”, and

(b) Promoting public-private partnerships for domestic and foreign investment.

30. The important role of PPPs in supporting development has been officially recognized during the tenth session of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships (CICPPP),⁹ when the meeting highlighted the important role that the CICPPP should play in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which calls for the elaboration of guidelines on PPPs.

⁹ ECE/CECI/2016/2

Facts and Key Outputs:

- (a) The situation in the country at the time of the project inception required innovative approaches to financing infrastructure and public services;
- (b) The UNECE expertise was requested by the Government of Belarus;
- (c) The “National PPP Readiness Assessment” justified the approach taken, and was an excellent enabler of the project;
- (d) The project design properly addressed the gaps in the country and built on the capacities readily available within the UNECE International PPP Centre of Excellence; and
- (e) The project objectives respond fully to the UNECE’s mandate to support member States in building their capacity to deliver infrastructure projects and public services through the PPP model.

31. Considering all the above facts (the proven need and request from the host country, the alignment of the objectives with the mandates of the involved organizations, the appropriateness of project design based on the sound readiness assessment), the project relevance is rated as *excellent*.

IV. Project Impact

32. The project had all activities successfully implemented and the related outputs achieved by the end of November 2015 (the new PPP Law was approved by the Parliament in December 2015). The analysis of the short-term impact reveals the following:

Legal framework

33. The support provided by the UNECE helped in creating awareness of PPPs, created the opportunity to discuss the PPP law at the legislative level, and through legal technical assistance, facilitated the process of drafting the law, the debate and – ultimately – the adoption and promulgation of the law. Representatives of line ministries unanimously praised the work done by the UNECE, and stated that, without this support, the law would not have existed.

34. Once the legal framework had been put in place, PPP projects started to be prepared (e.g. the M10 toll road) and then, eventually, tendered: this process will take time, but once the first PPP projects are completed, the public services offered to the Belarussian population should be improved and the general acceptance of PPPs will increase.

35. By enabling a new way to develop, finance and procure public infrastructure, the project will contribute to improving the delivery of infrastructure and related public services in Belarus. Such improvement will ramp up progressively with the development of the PPP practice within the Belarus Administration and the implementation of PPP projects.

Inter-ministerial Infrastructure Board (IIB)

36. The IIB has been established with a clear mandate and a broad representation within the stakeholders having the power of decision (14 Ministries, representatives of the central and regional administration, banks, and other stakeholders). The IIB approved the National Infrastructure Plan, and is empowered to take decisions at the strategic level on the appropriateness of proposed PPP projects

37. The evaluator had the opportunity to attend the second IIB-BAB meeting held on 28 October 2016 and observed a high level of understanding and involvement from the

stakeholders. Representatives from the Ministry of Transport and from the Regional Administration presented PPP project proposals, while UNECE international experts provided constructive technical inputs. It is expected that the IIB will play a continuing and critical role in shaping the PPP environment in Belarus.

PPP Unit

38. The Unit has been endowed with a clear mandate to provide the technical support both to the authorities proposing projects and to the IIB. At the time of the evaluation, the Unit was not able to fully provide the expected services, as it is under-staffed. Provided that the Unit is restructured as recommended in the PPP Readiness Assessment report and it is properly staffed, it will contribute to the general mid- and long-term impact of the project.

39. The materials produced by the BAB and its recommendations are of high quality, clearly presented and – although not adopted in their entirety – positively appreciated by the Belarussian counterparts. The studies and recommendations are of a nature that they can be used over a long timespan in order to support the strategic and technical decision-making.

40. The expertise, hands-on technical cooperation and policy advisory activities delivered by the UNECE through the project were instrumental in getting the EBRD committed to supporting the M10 toll-road project. The project results provided the EBRD with the comfort required to enter into detailed discussions with the Belarussian authorities about supporting the M10 project and, ultimately, agreeing to mobilize EBRD's Infrastructure Project Preparation Facility (IPPF) for an amount of up to EUR 1.7 million and to prepare the documentation for the tendering process. A similar support is envisaged by International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, in case the Grodno hospital proposal provided that some changes in scope and scale are agreed to.

42. Last but not least, with the success of the current project in Belarus, the UNECE has an example of an excellent initiative in enabling private capital to be involved in delivering infrastructure and public services. This model could be presented as “best practice” for other countries in the region and beyond.

43. It is worth noting that, ultimately, the decisions on approving the PPP projects rest with the Presidential Administration. The decision-taking mechanism is not clear enough and may be arbitrary, hampering the predictability and increasing risks in the case of projects financed by private and/or foreign entities. This, coupled with the pricing regulation (set at the same decision level), might hamper an investor's appetite to be active on the Belarussian market.

Facts and Key Outputs:

(a) The UNECE delivered critical support to create awareness and offered legal technical assistance, facilitating the drafting, debating, approval and enactment of the PPP law;

(b) The IIB is endowed with the technical and strategic knowledge needed in order to take decisions on PPP projects in Belarus;

(c) The PPP Unit needs a clearer positioning within the MoE (or under the Prime Minister's cabinet, as suggested in the PPP Readiness Assessment), and an improved budget to be able to attract qualified personnel;

(d) The project results proved to be critical in convincing the EBRD to support the Ministry of Transport in creating the tendering documentation for the “flagship” M10 toll road modernization; and

(e) In the case of the successful M10 project, the MoE expressed the determination to continue with prudent “showcasing” of PPP projects, in order not to strain the State budget.

43. All the stated elements contribute to the generally positive impact of the UNECE’s contribution, making the project “*highly satisfactory*”.

V. Sustainability

44. The project document embedded sustainability elements at several levels. Firstly, it correctly identified, during the planning stage, the need for a PPP-idea “Champion” within the Ministry of Economy. The project document stated that the project sustainability “is based on the keen interest of the Ministry of Economy in the adoption and pursuit of innovative approaches to managing the economy and public administration”.

Legal framework

45. It was envisaged that activities related to the adoption of the PPP concept and methodology be performed by the Institute of Economic Research under the MoE, in cooperation with the National Centre for Law Drafting Activity. The discussion with the Institute’s management revealed that they felt empowered to perform better and with more self-reliance in future, similar endeavors, a first indicator showing sustainability.

46. The PPP Law, adopted in December 2015 by the Belarussian Parliament and promulgated by the Presidential Administration in June 2016 is the primary basis and a “sine qua non” condition for PPP development. The general opinion of the specialists is that the law is good, incorporating some 60 per cent of the UNECE BAB recommendations, while the secondary legislation are more flexible, but still under improvement.

Organizational set-up

47. The organizational structure resulting from the project was also considered to be appropriate and contributing to sustainability. The IIB is a fully functional political decision maker, endowed with technical support delivered by the project to take decisions at the strategic level. The composition is broad and representative (14 Ministries, representatives of the central and regional administration, banks, and others), the level of discussion is appropriate and creates an excellent basis for taking the right decisions.

48. The PPP Unit, on the other hand, did not live up to expectations. Enhanced technical support invested in the Unit, together with clear recommendations on the mandate, structure, and role, were created. Still, after the end of the project, some of the team members left and, at the time of this evaluation, the PPP Unit only employed a Deputy Head and two other staff members. This situation was caused by the low salaries available for staff, in accordance with the salary scale for public servants in Belarus.

49. Recommendation number four of the PPP Readiness Assessment was to locate the national PPP Unit at the appropriate level of authority, including considering locating the Unit in the President’s Office or the Prime Minister’s Office. This recommendation was made in order to provide the PPP Unit with the required authority and so that it would have the necessary strategic view and oversight, above that of line ministries, and also in order to allow the level of the salaries to be adjusted accordingly.

50. The decision to create the PPP Unit within the “Economy Research Institute” of the MoE lowered the profile of the PPP Unit and, after the end of the project, the Unit was moved within the National Agency of Investment and Privatization, a second line structure within the Ministry.

51. The discussion with the representative of MoE revealed that for the 2017 Budget there is a proposal to increase the Unit's annual budget thus, potentially, allowing the possibility of making an attractive financial offer for qualified personnel. Another successful approach in the region to staffing such a unit is in Kyrgyzstan, where qualified consultants are employed and paid by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), ensuring the quality and stability of the employees (although not necessarily the sustainability of the project since it depends upon ADB funding).

Training

52. Among other results, the project trained more than 50 senior government officials from regional administrations on selecting and drafting project proposals for consideration as potential PPP projects by the IIB. Assessing the quality of the project proposals from the regions, the trainees have acquired a basic awareness and understanding of the PPP process, yet they still need in-depth support on socioeconomic analysis and drafting skills. The MoE mentioned the possibility to involve the World Bank in a follow-up project designed to tackle this gap.

PPP Project proposals

53. As a result of the project, sixty-seven projects were proposed and underwent analysis. After a first screening, a list of seven "short-listed" projects were under formal consideration at the time of the evaluation. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) plans the allocation of around BYN 260,000 for the fiscal year 2016/2017 for their pre-feasibility studies, whereas the M10-toll-road project plays a central role. On the other hand, the MoE stated they would take a careful approach, starting with the M10 project and then, subsequently and subject to successful progress, they plan to roll out the next proposals.

54. The "flagship" PPP project proposal – the M10 toll road rehabilitation – has been chosen by the Government of Belarus, on the advice of the UNECE BAB, to be a "study case", to create momentum on PPPs. Due to its strategic importance at the national level, its size and awareness potential, the M10-PPP project could play a critical role through its demonstration effect. The MoF allocated budgetary funds for 2016-2017, in order to enable the first, necessary, preparatory steps.

55. International institutions such as the EBRD and the IFC showed the first signs of interest on providing the Belarussian authorities with technical assistance in preparing the pre-feasibility study and preparing the tendering documentation. Given the slightly different approach and better specialization of the EBRD, in August 2016, the IFC decided to focus on supporting a different project, so the EBRD took the lead in supporting the Ministry of Transport in the preparatory stage.

56. The EBRD agreed to mobilizing the EBRD's Infrastructure Project Preparation Facility (IPPF) for an amount of up to EUR 1.7 million to support the preparation of the M10 project. With this prospect, the Ministry of Transport and the EBRD are confident that in 2017 the tendering documentation will be ready, and the first PPP project will be launched for negotiations and financing.

57. The other key project proposal – the Grodno oncological hospital – was well accepted initially. However, as the IFC pointed out, the appropriateness of the project is questionable. The IFC has a thorough understanding of, and experience with, the medical sector in Belarus, and is of the opinion that the oncological sector already suffers overcapacity in the country. The scale of the hospital modernization (up to 400 beds) is also too big. In exchange, they propose to lower the scale (up to 200 beds), change the specialization from oncology to radiology or early-stage diagnosis, making the project more appropriate and appealing for investors – a situation in which the IFC showed interest and

availability to perform similar support activities as the EBRD is already performing for the M10 project.

Facts and Key Outputs:

- (a) The legal framework is the basis for future developments in the PPP area;
- (b) The IIB is functional, endowed with the technical skills and empowered to take strategic decisions; the PPP Unit has an ambiguous status and lacks employees to perform its functions, in spite of the clear recommendations made by the PPP Readiness assessment;
- (c) Some technical skills on generating regional PPP projects have been transferred at the regional administration level, but they need upscaling to generate quality proposals (eventually through a follow-up project);
- (d) A first batch of PPP projects is under appraisal, and the MoF allocated funds for the next budgetary year for pre-feasibility studies; the MoE expressed the intention to roll out more projects subject to the success of the M10 project;
- (e) The EBRD involved the IPPF mechanism to support the preparation of the M10 project tendering documentation; and
- (f) The Grodno hospital proposal could be supported by the IFC, provided some changes in scope and scale are accepted by the Government of Belarus.

58. Considering the above facts, the evaluation considers the project sustainability as “*highly satisfactory*”.

VI. Gender and Human Rights

59. In order to assess a country’s equal treatment of both genders, the UN’s Human Development Report analyses several criteria, including:

- (a) The gender inequality index: with an indicator value of 0,151, Belarus is ranked 31st in the world, a very good position; and
- (b) Share of seats in parliament: 30.1% in 2014 – higher than the world’s average of 21.8%, and significantly higher than the average value for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (19%), making Belarus one of the global frontrunners in involving women in politics and decision making.

60. The current project, offering technical assistance in a highly specialized area, does not have a direct impact on the final beneficiaries from the gender perspective: ultimately, all society at large would benefit from the long-term impact of the project. Also, being a totally new area in Belarus with a limited number of individuals with the needed skill and expertise, it would not have been appropriate to include in the project design (creation of the institutional framework) provisions on gender equality. This could be, however, considered for the future developments of related institutions.

61. Although the project document mentions “the principles of gender equality will be incorporated in the national training programme on PPPs, including the selection and recruitment of national experts to perform assessment and evaluation of the PPP projects”, the project indicators do not mention any gender disaggregated data, and they have not been monitored as such.

62. Analyzing the project components, implementation, results and immediate impact, we can observe a generally unbalanced involvement of both genders in the IIB structure (five women versus 34 men, similar for the regional IIB sessions), while the project management and the PPP Unit had an equilibrated structure. The disaggregated collected data on the training event that the evaluator participated in show that the gender proportion was almost even (23 men vs. 20 women).

63. On the human rights dimension, again, the technical characteristic of the project made the involvement of right holders irrelevant at this stage. Later, in support of human rights, it will be important to have mechanisms to involve the civil society and have proper consultation mechanisms at the environmental and social impact assessment stage of due-diligence efforts.

VII. Conclusions and Recommendations

64. The project has been properly designed and implemented at the request of the Government of Belarus. The PPP Readiness Assessment is a high-quality analysis and has clear, straightforward recommendations on the necessary steps.

65. The project achieved all planned results. Thanks to the involvement of the UNECE PPP BAB which generated quality, high-level expert support – the general view of the beneficiaries is that the project achieved results beyond expectations.

66. The PPP Law is enacted, although it still needs some “fine tuning”, complemented by secondary legislation.

67. The IIB is functional and endowed with sufficient technical knowledge to take strategic decisions regarding PPP investments in the country. If the MoE’s intentions for 2017 materialize, the PPP Unit also has a good chance to be revived, building on the technical knowledge that was left after the end of the project (in the form of policies and procedures, manual for PPPs, etc.).

68. As a result of the project, the government embraced the idea of using the M10 toll-road as a showcase, and the EBRD became involved in providing hands-on support to create the tendering documentation.

69. With all of these considerations taken into account, the main conclusion is that the UNECE brought a high added value throughout this project, based on its ability to mobilize world class resources related to PPPs, it created an effective policy dialogue in the country and ensured credibility for the project results.

Lessons Learned

70. In a highly rigid and hierarchical public administration environment, it is always critical to identify a senior idea-champion, to advocate and be the main driver in adopting a new approach. In the current situation, the MoE played the crucial role to mobilize the interest and energies of the national government, where the UNECE found fertile ground for its work.

71. The PPP Readiness Assessment is a case of “best practice” needs assessment, to be duly performed before major initiatives are to be implemented in other countries. The clear structure and the fact-based recommendations made it a key document, which proved its effectiveness even after the end of the project.

72. The role of the PPP BAB is also highly relevant, given the technical nature of the project. While the UNECE is working at the policy-making level and needs to build on the ties with the national government, the BAB can focus on critically assessing the proposals

from the standpoint of financial and technical feasibility. These complementary roles make a great combination to effectively conveying the needed messages.

Recommendations

73. Having an overall “highly satisfactory” project, the recommendations build on the lessons learned for replication in other, similar projects:

- (a) Identify at an early stage a senior idea-champion, to advocate for the new intervention or approach;
 - (b) Develop a thorough needs assessment (Readiness Assessment), with facts-based clear recommendations and alternative proposals;
 - (c) Continue the involvement of the PPP BAB, as it greatly complements, at the technical level, the policy-making role of the UNECE;
 - (d) Assist governments to create better employment environments for people benefitting from highly skilled training and knowledge transfers, or to create mechanisms to retain them for a set period of time, in order to avoid similar cases like the PPP Unit which lost most of its staff to other employment opportunities (a situation foreseen in the PPP Readiness Assessment); and
 - (e) On the gender dimension, future project documents should foresee provisions on collecting gender disaggregated data for the relevant indicators.
-