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Independent Evaluation Section



INDEPENDENT IN-DEPTH EVALUATION OF UNODC PROGRAMMING IN WEST AND CENTRAL ASIA



REGIONAL PROGRAMME FOR AFGHANISTAN AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

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INTRODUCTION

According to its programme document, the **Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries** (Regional Programme or RP) is UNODC's framework to support the countries of West and Central Asia to develop regional and international joint responses to counter the harmful impact of illicit narcotics trafficking and transnational organized crime on security, governance and social and economic development. The overall aim of the Regional Programme is to facilitate regional cooperation and to improve and streamline coordination between the eight RP member countries in addressing illicit drug trafficking, illicit drug use and crime. The RP is currently implementing its second phase, which runs from 2016 to 2020 (first phase: 2011-2015). The Regional Programme was designed in consultation with Member States to provide a platform for better coordination and facilitation of counter-narcotics efforts across the West and Central Asian Region, bringing coherence to activities conducted by UNODC. Since its launch, the Regional Programme has become the core mechanism for UNODC to promote regional responses in West and Central Asia to achieve concrete regional cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking and trans-national organised crime. During its first phase the Regional Programme was successful in supporting several initiatives that strengthened law enforcement and legal cooperation and bringing together countries in the region to share experiences and best practice in drug demand reduction. Across all design documents for programmes in the region, the Regional Programme is strongly linked to all the other programmes operating in West and Central Asia.¹

PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK

SUB-PROGRAMMES

SP 1: REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION (RERV07)

OBJECTIVE: Law Enforcement authorities increasingly communicate, cooperate and coordinate to identify, and investigate illicit trafficking of drugs as well as precursor chemicals.

SP 2: PHASE II INTERNATIONAL/ REGIONAL COOPERATION IN LEGAL MATTERS (RERV08)

OBJECTIVE: Regional cooperation and coordination in fighting drugs and crime is enhanced among Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries through assisting them in building their capacity as well as bringing their domestic and institutional frameworks in closer compliance with the UN drugs and crime conventions (in the areas related to drugs and international cooperation in Criminal Matters) and international standards and norms.

SP 3: DRUG USE PREVENTION, DRUG DEPENDENCE TREATMENT AND CARE, HIV AND AIDS PREVENTION AND CARE IN THE COMMUNITY AND IN PRISON SETTINGS (RERV09)

OBJECTIVE: Reduction in drug dependence, injecting drug use and HIV prevalence among drug dependent individuals.

SP 4: TRENDS AND IMPACT (RERV10)

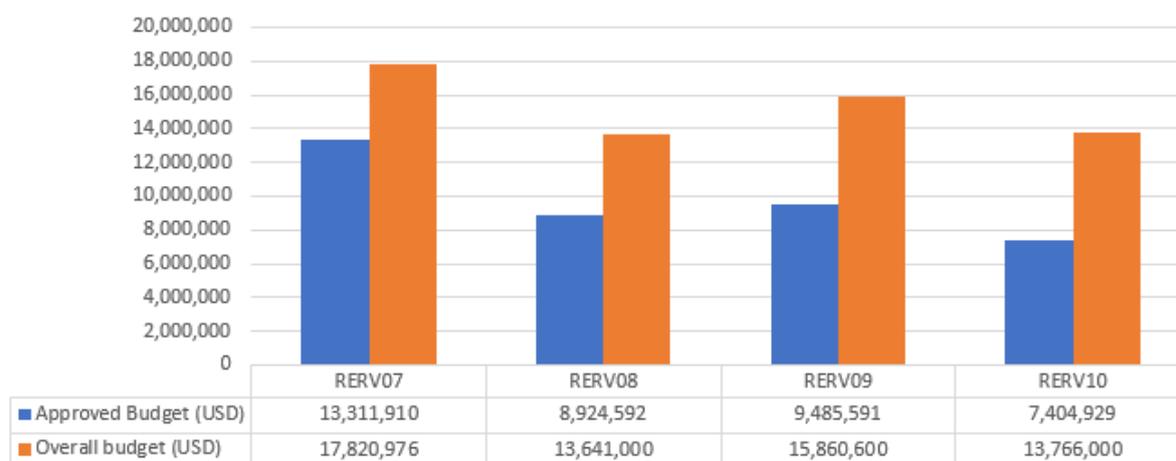
OBJECTIVE: Informed evidence-based policies and strategies through trends analysis and impact monitoring at the regional level.

¹ Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries (2016-2019) (Programme document).

PROGRAMME SUMMARY

Project/ Programme number	RERV07, RERV08, RERV09, RERV10
Project/ Programme title and duration	Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries (2016-2021) ²

Approved vs overall budget per project



DISBURSEMENT HISTORY (THROUGH 13 NOVEMBER 2020)

	Total Approved Budget	Expenditure	Exp. in %
RP Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries (RERV07, RERV08, RERV09, RERV10)	\$39,127,021.29	\$37,336,336.12	95%

FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

While the programme document for the RP³ does not describe a programme theory of change, there is an implied *regional theory of change* and result logic of the programme. This theory of change is visible in the programme (and sub-programme) design documentation. This implied theory of change can be said to begin with the design of the RP, wherein the RP is described as ‘UNODC’s framework to support the countries of West and Central Asia to develop regional and international joint responses to counter the harmful impact of illicit narcotics trafficking and transnational organized crime on security, governance and social and economic development.’⁴ The Regional Programme’s design document describes a harmonised approach to programming in West and Central Asia, including ‘the comparative advantages of each UNODC office in West and Central Asia (i.e. COAFG, COIRA, COPAK and ROCA)

² The programme was recently extended to the end of 2021.

³ Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries (2016-2019) (Programme document).

⁴ Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries (2016-2019) (Programme document).

together in an integrated programming effort.⁵ The Regional Programme's design document also notes the Programme's overall goal of *increasing the impact of efforts to counter narcotics and crime across the region, in partnership with governments and other stakeholders*, through four Sub-Programmes, all grounded in a gender responsive, human rights- based approach:

Design alignment is confirmed in documentation for each of the four other programmes in the region, both in the specific statements of alignment and in the stated programme objectives. The Programme for Central Asia Programme Document states that it 'is closely linked to the Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries (2011-15 and its second phase is aligned to 2016-2019), which allows UNODC to assist governments to tackle drugs and crime related challenges in a broader regional context.'⁶ The structure of the Programme for Central Asia is closely aligned with the Regional Programme and other programmes in the region. The programme document for the Country Programme for Afghanistan notes that 'it is proposed that UNODC's support in Afghanistan is focused on four (interdependent) areas of work including a cross cutting element, *mirroring the structure and focus of the Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries*. The Country Programme for Iran (I.R. of) 'seek maximum synergy with existing programmes in the region, primarily the Country Programmes for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Programme for Central Asia, and the Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries (RP), in order to enable an integrated and concerted one UNODC response in West and Central Asia.'⁷ The structure of the programme in Iran correlates relatively closely with the Regional Programme's structure, with a clear relationship in the focus areas of the defined sub-programmes. The programme document for Pakistan notes the Regional Programme as the UNODC 'framework to support the countries of West and Central Asia to develop the joint regional and international responses to counter the harmful impact of narcotics trafficking and transnational organised crime (TOC) on security, governance, social and economic development.'⁸ The structure of the programme in Pakistan also has a correlation with the Regional Programme's structure.

As with the other programmes, a further issue with the *structure* of the RP is that its result framework does not necessarily link to actual funded programming. This impacts negatively on intervention logic as the undertaking of a number of activities, to deliver a set of outputs and therefore contribute to achieving intended outcomes, is fundamentally based on undertaking the activities. Higher level logic – achieving intended outcomes – cannot be guaranteed if the design is not actually implemented.

What is also not clear in the design document is the longer-term context of UNODC programming in West and Central Asia. While the RP is a clear extension of previous programming, no clear presentation of *change* is visible: there is no detailed discussion and representation of the impact vision for the programme, i.e. the ongoing nature of UNODC engagement over time, how the proposed inputs and outputs contribute to change over time and how this longer-term change is monitored and reported on. This later aspect is particularly important, as there is currently no reporting framework that addresses the accumulation of results/ change across programme cycles. With the RP entering a third 5-year framework, a need for this longer-term view becomes more important.

Across the region, Government Counterparts (GCs) were overwhelmingly supportive of the alignment of the RP with their needs and of its flexibility in the face of changing circumstances. Support was particularly appreciated in areas of fast-moving change, such as methods of complex financial crime, where national-level expertise is often low or even absent, given the mandate of the RP to provide a particular focus on regional and cross-border issues and in the area of synthetic drugs. The RP is aligned with the Tajik National Border Management Strategy for 2010-2025, and the Families and Schools

⁵ Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries (2016-2019) (Programme document).

⁶ Programme for Central Asia (2016-2019) – programme design document.

⁷ Country Programme for Iran (2016-2019) – programme design document.

⁸ Country Programme for Pakistan (2016-2019) programme design document.

Together (FAST) and Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) are aligned with the Tajikistan Education Policy of Tajikistan. In consultative meetings and discussions, the countries explained training needs, equipment, and other technical aspects. These elements were designed after an initial assessment was completed by a consultant, starting with site visits to understand establish baselines of implementation. The RP is constantly updated, via needs assessments and correspondence with counterparts, to help direct future activities. This was deemed by the RP as key for success. Some noted that these needs are not just linked to concrete operations, infrastructure and training, but also to prevention work, gains in science and research, and coordination in terms of policy and legislation change proposals. Counterparts felt the RP played a strong role in the establishment of new contacts through participation in regional events, increased cross-border cooperation, and the sharing of ideas and best practices. GCs feel the biggest success of the RP is the dramatic increase in the overall capacity of states and institutions to engage in counter narcotics strategies, and the regional cooperation that has followed. This success is attributed to the expert advice of UNODC, the technical design and content they bring to programming. Innovative legislative and policy change is noted. While there is little clarity on the nature and extent of available research and data on drug prevalence and drug use in general across the region, which suffers from a lack of information on drug use, drug dependence and HIV/AIDS, this gap has been partially filled by the organisation of regional consultations. The use of expertise and documented policy options within these regional meetings was considered a key element to their relevance for GCs, and GC stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the level of alignment between the RP and their national strategies, understanding the RP provided a relevant platform to build on regional knowledge and experience to inform their national solutions.

While the UN 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs are implemented at country level, the RP contributes to international/regional dimensions and addresses specific goals, such as around good governance and reducing corruption. National counterparts reported sensitisation impacts from RP training events that brought SDG priorities to their attention and raised their awareness of how regional work directly supports national progress on SDG indicators. The programme document states that the RP is in full alignment with UNDAFs, and driven by the SDGs, particularly SDG 16 with a focus on security matters, peace, and protection of human rights in the region, including security matters. Reporting also notes RP contributions the UN Regional Development Groups in respective countries and the contributions of RP staff in each country to UNODC membership in UNDAF results-groups (based on the strategic area of focus) and UNDAF monitoring, evaluation and coordination groups. Stakeholders confirm this alignment in field interviews. In relation to the SDGs, reporting specifically notes the establishment of the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network (ARIN) as a contribution to SDG 16.4 and 16.5. The SFP is also pointed to as a direct contributor to SDG 3.5, as well as SDGs 16, 5 and 10.⁹

The RP was responsive and flexible in responding to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. A specific example was the workplan review and development of a contingency plan drafted to assess the pandemic impact on drug users and on service provision and provide where necessary and appropriate antiseptics and prevention material to all service centres, including methadone dispensaries.

COHERENCE

WITH NATIONAL PRIORITIES

Comment from Regional Programme stakeholders note that cooperation among national entities is a driving force of the RP. Coherence in linking the region was significantly advanced by the creation within the latest programme cycle of the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network for West and Central Asia (ARIN-WCA) which was widely noted and highly valued by national counterparts. Bringing coherence to national counterpart regional relationships was also moved forward through facilitation of MoUs and a

⁹ 2018. Annual Programme Progress Report – Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries.

networking approach to speeding and solving cross-border queries. Efforts were observed to reach out more broadly, such as in developing linkages with the Heart of Asia initiative. The Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) is a particular example of increased coordination and cooperation among law enforcement bodies, providing learning opportunities and the sharing of good practices, and is evidence of a good collaboration between the Programme for Central Asia and the RP.

From an external perspective, the regional rationale brings coherence and encourages stakeholders to a pro-active engagement of this policy idea. The evaluation found that the RP provided a bridge between countries and a dialogue platform for exchanging and learning from each other's concerns and uncertainties, but also access to best practices and lesson learned. The evaluation found a number of examples of national measures launched based on regional exchanges, such as the piloting of opioid substitution therapy (OST) in a number of Central Asian countries. The RP rationale also provided a way to mainstream DDR priorities across the region, and streamline relevant responses according to national preferences, cultures and capacities. At national levels, the programme was praised by most interviewed stakeholders working in the health sector for its endless, serious and genuine efforts to reach out and include all levels and sectors of governments. Traditionally read as a criminal justice issue, the health-related problems caused by illicit drugs have for long constituted second priorities, while a coordinated and cross sectoral approach to drug prevention was hampered by a lack of common understandings of the issues at stake, and long-run policy silos and history. UNODC was supportive in providing policy advice and dialogue settings that facilitated inter-ministerial interactions and national policy designing in a coordinated manner.

UNCT AND THE ONE UN

As with all other programmes in the region, there are positive indicators of RP engagement with UNCTs, and of the commitment of the RP to One UN processes and priorities, although sister UN Agencies comment on UNODC engagement in the UNCT more than on the engagement of a specific programme, i.e., they do not separate the RP from any other programme. The absence of a regional secretariat for UNODC was mentioned as a possible obstacle to consolidate ties with the UN presence in the region. Examples of competing regional visions and structures within the UN family were also mentioned, questioning UNODC's strategic vision. Nevertheless, some encouraging progress has been made, notably at country level, (Iran is an example) to align country and regional rationales with UNDAF mechanisms and priorities. The RP is working with other UN Agencies, although this interaction is somewhat limited by mandate.

REGIONAL PROGRAMMING COHERENCE

Coherence between the RP and the other four programmes being evaluated was the single area of contention encountered by the evaluation. It is, therefore, looked at in some detail. There is evidence that the structural relationship between the other programmes and the RP is no longer articulated effectively and requires updating or a re-set. This is a significant issue in the relationship between the Programme for Central Asia and the RP - some issues exist with the other programmes, but in a much more limited sense.

While there is significant support across GC in all of the countries of West and Central Asia for a regional approach there is no UNODC definition of a 'regional programme' – the only reference found for regional programmes, in the Programme and Operations Manual, states 'there is no set model for a Regional Programme' and the 'design of a Regional Programme is a partnership process between UNODC experts, both at Headquarters and in the field, and with the countries in the region.'¹⁰ UNODC does not have a definition nor a set of criteria for an 'Office', including when a 'country office', 'programme office' or 'regional office' will be established and why. It is clear across the five programmes

¹⁰ UNODC Programme and Operations Manual.

(and between the five programmes) that work is required to strengthen definitions, roles and the practical day-to-day collaboration. The absence of these definitions creates unclarity on roles and functions of programmes, offices and management of these programmes that actively contributes to the reduced efficiency, effectiveness and coherence across UNODC programming in West and Central Asia. Failure to define and decide between these key concepts and structures will make disentangling programme overlaps and duplication more difficult and, by dint of this, make the creation of important programme synergies more difficult to achieve.

There are in fact two frameworks that go beyond a single country that overlay the work of UNODC in the region. One is the RP (over all 8 countries in the region) the other is the Programme for Central Asia (over the five countries of Central Asia). While there has been, historically, a clear separation of the roles and responsibilities of these two frameworks, particularly as the Programme for Central Asia was developed to sit nested within the overarching RP structure, over time the linguistic and cultural differences distinctive to Central Asia, the perception among both GC and Programme for Central Asia programme managers that Central Asia is in practical terms a stand-alone region and can be operated as such, and a failure to (in some cases) recognise and (in others) address such problems of clarity has led to the present circumstance. The evaluation found the defined structure for delivery of UNODC's strategy in West and Central Asia is at three levels: Country, Region, Global. This model is detailed in the RP's programme document and coherence with the RP is referenced in all programme documents for the other programmes. This model does not however operate in reality. The bulk of evidence from the evaluation's enquiry would indicate that this described role as 'UNODC's framework' of support, and the aim of bringing countries together and strengthening effectiveness of collective responses, is not currently functioning in the ways envisaged in the RP's programme document and agreed in the design of all five programmes.¹¹ While it is understood that the Programme for Central Asia is not a 'regional programme', it is referred to generally, by GC and many other stakeholders, as the Regional Programme for Central Asia. The office for the Programme is called, formally and extensively, the Regional Office for Central Asia (ROCA). In Central Asia, in many conversations the expression 'regional programme' is used, and it is not clear if the speaker refers to the RP or the Programme for Central Asia.

The name of the Regional Programme (Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries) may no longer be appropriate for its role and function. When the programme was addressing solely counter-narcotics, and the impact of Afghanistan's drug production on the region and the rest of the world was of singular importance, the name made sense. In the context of the content and focus of current regional programming an emphasis on the whole region may better freight directions and priorities.

These cohesion issues impact on programme effectiveness, as communication between staff of the two programmes is inconsistent and there is evidence of a lack of coordination, duplication and overlap of efforts and activities which has a negative impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of UNODC programming in the region. Further, there is substantive evidence from the evaluation that these are management, rather than programming, issues and that programme coherence and the resolution of future directions in the region requires engagement from higher levels of UNODC management.

EFFECTIVENESS

The programme document reflects a results framework with achievable, sustainable and timely measures. Specific MS needs and priorities are updated annually via a Programme Steering Committee of GC and including other key parties such as donors. While the RP is primarily focused on regional level

¹¹ This resonates with findings of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluation of UNODC (May 2020): see page 18, para 39 - <https://oios.un.org/file/8536/download?token=DfiDT1fC>

activity, it is implicit that benefits accrued at this level should flow back into national capacity at the country level.

The evaluation found a range of evidence on the RP's effectiveness. UNODC staff stressed that success depends on maintaining good relationships with GC, developed over time through face-to-face interactions, building the trust that enables the RP to provide a platform that brings together countries that would otherwise be segregated from one another due to political sensitivities. Effectiveness is demonstrated in the covering of regional issues and operations, such as Operation Reflex and Operation Substitute, within sub-programme 1. These operations were ratified by GC, coordinated and executed successfully and were followed by debriefs in which lessons learned and best practices were shared among MS.

Evidence from the evaluation's research indicates that this is one of the most valuable aspects of the RP, with positive impacts on national and regional partnership widely noted by national counterparts. There was consistent positive commentary on the RP's focus on bilateral partnerships and formalising of relationships through MoUs and related instruments such as the previously described cross border cooperation institutionalised with the introduction of the ARIN-WCA structure. There are other strong examples of this partnership, including:

- Partnership in Financial Investigation Units (FIU).
- Cooperation with mutual legal assistance (MLA) processes.
- Engagement in the Triangular Initiative (TI).
- Initiatives related to the Istanbul Process - Heart of Asia.¹²
- Engagement with the Paris Pact.

The RP has been effective in providing policy makers, decision makers and practitioners with knowledge, structures and skills for the development of comprehensive, evidence-based drug use prevention programmes and systems.

Having said this, the evaluation found evidence that the RP is losing momentum, partly as a result of the above-discussed cohesion issues, partly related to issues with funding and partly due to (related) staffing decreases. Funding is seen as a significant issue for the RP, particularly although not exclusively in relation to sub-programme 3, in terms of achieving outputs and outcomes and underlying all of this in a loss of overall momentum. The RP has mitigated this to a certain extent by joining forces with both global programmes and some of the country programmes in the region.

EFFICIENCY

UNODC has a strategic framework¹³ which includes the definitions of nine sub-programmes. Of the nine, two are not relevant to regional programming. The other seven are:

- Countering TOC.
- Countering the world drug problem.
- Countering corruption.
- Terrorism prevention.
- Justice.
- Research, trend analysis and forensics.
- Policy support.

¹² <https://www.hoa.gov.af>

¹³ UNODC Strategy 2021-2025

While there is a loose correlation in the structure and naming conventions of the different sub-programmes across the five programmes, and documentation indicates an intention for close correlation, the evaluation found that inconsistency in detail does not aid in understanding the structure and content of the different sub-programmes and their regional coherence, nor coherence with the higher-level frameworks of UNODC as a whole. There are specific examples:

- The Country Programme for Afghanistan has separated its work in Sub-programme 3 into two separate initiatives (AFGZ89 and AFGZ97) while all other programmes treat alternative development and health within a single project framework.
- The Country Partnership Programme in Iran (I.R. of) splits what is Sub-programme 3 in the other programmes into Sub-programme 3 and Sub-programme 4.
- The Country Programme for Pakistan has a project (J85) that is separate to Sub-programme 3 and a project (PAKW20) that is separate to Sub-programme 1, although each appears to fit well within the relevant sub-programme.
- Sub-programme 2 for the Regional Programme (international/ regional cooperation in legal matters) does not appear well aligned with the other Sub-programmes 2 due to its predominant focus upon legal matters, including judicial, legislative and regulatory cooperation and harmonisation. While this usefully touches on some aspects of criminal justice, including corruption, it does not touch on many other aspects of activities of Country Programmes that could benefit from a regional approach, including the sharing of information, experience and best practice in areas such as crime prevention and alternatives to imprisonment, or in combatting specific types of crime such as gender-based violence.
- The Sub-programmes 1 can be seen as law enforcement or border management and is not consistent across programmes.
- The Country Programme for Afghanistan and the Country Programme for Pakistan do not have a Sub-programme 4 and it is not clear why the Monitoring of Opium Production in Afghanistan project (AFGF98) is not Sub-programme 4.
- Prevention of terrorism does not appear except in one sub-programme.

This lack of direct correlation detracts from both coherence and efficiency, particularly in how programmes report on what they are doing and achieving. Reporting from a programme is not as effective in commenting on contributions in defined strategic areas, and aggregation of results is also difficult without a tighter correlation. This is true within any given programme, and specifically here, in the regional programming of UNODC in West and Central Asia.

As with all programmes in the region, some components in the programme are underfunded or receive no funding. This is particularly true in the Drug Demand Reduction (DDR) components across the region, which governments have historically given a lower priority, and with work on HIV - the core of UNODC assistance to the health dimension was made through Country Programmes and the Programme for Central Asia. Efficiency was also recognised to be undermined, however, by high levels of rotation among GCs to whom technical training had been delivered, such as in relation to the tracing of stolen assets, identifying new forms of illicit finance, or new means of detecting illicit financial flows.

The efficiency of a programme will always in some part be determined by what is measured. The evaluation found issues with the capacity of current indicators to capture longer term change and transformation. The programme's results framework adequately captured the more process-based elements of its work, but it is not apparent how the framework captures longer term impacts such as, for example, those flowing from national counterpart participation in and use of the ARIN-WCA network. This concern was echoed by respondents in Headquarters and in other UN agencies working alongside UNODC in the financial crime area.

IMPACT

A key component of the work of the RP is catalysing regional cooperation for mutual benefit, in support of which it provides assistance toward partnership building at regional and international levels. Expert working groups on precursors and related training, as well as expert exchanges across the 8 countries, are examples of this successful cooperation. The ARIN-WCA network, a clear, regional result of the RP, illustrates clearly impact potential, and there is a clear plan for this impact to be sustainable over time. Such will need to be demonstrated, but early signs are encouraging. Other indications of the impact-oriented partnership building are the potential for establishing arrangements for the cross-border transfer/return of sentenced prisoners, although this initiative is currently without funding, and the work on implementation of and responses to demands of the UNCAC and FATF demonstrate the possibility of enduring impact. Within DDR, with the SFP and FAST, the RP has been effective in influencing development of an evidence-based early prevention strategy built on common standards in the region, but it is difficult at this stage to be certain of the medium to long term impact of this work.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is best perceived through the evaluation's feedback on GC ownership of processes and initiatives, as there are a range of important examples that indicate the ways in which MS drive RP processes and take responsibility for the Programme. The Programme Steering Committee, in its role as secretariat, is particularly critical in identifying MS needs and priorities and bringing them to the centre of programming. In Kazakhstan and to some extent in Iran and Uzbekistan, the SFP has been scaled up into national and/or school curricula, and into the provinces.

The evaluation found evidence of increased knowledge and skills, i.e., capacity, as contributing to sustainability. Specifically noted in this context is:

- MoUs, including on regional counter-narcotic strategies, with a particular focus on increased information sharing and good practices related the knowledge of law enforcement agencies on the emerging threat of synthetic drugs.
- Skills-based capacity through regional structures such as ARIN-WCA - the initiative has drawn less experienced national counterparts into regional and international networks of colleagues to support learning and effective responses.
- Hand-in-hand work with GCs to sustaining DDR on political agendas.

Some GCs note their growing confidence in their own capacities and their belief that implementation would continue to some extent without continued support. Individual agencies have established networks of regional cooperation, as well as personal relationships and a broader understanding of the work that each other does and the issues that each are facing. However, countries noted that UNODC provides a good platform for success and that decreased external support would create significant challenges.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

The formulation of activities for the current phase of the RP took gender and HR into greater consideration, but there is not a clear and driving commitment to established UN priorities on these areas visible in programme design or implementation. The RP has taken steps to explicitly incorporate gender and human rights dimensions into its work - a Gender and Human Rights focal point has been appointed in the RP's Strategic Planning and Interagency Affairs Unit (SPIA) and staff were provided gender mainstreaming training. Efforts were also made to incorporate gender and human rights into training with law enforcement, but this is described as 'not easy', and it can be difficult to link gender equality to the training subject. The human rights focus is much more visible than any consideration of gender equality priorities. However, some emphasis is provided to gender and human rights in training

content, with reported results with GC in terms of sensitisation to gender mainstreaming from training programmes and a clear human rights' focus when addressing balanced responses to terrorism and violent extremism. The right to health has been a positive umbrella to raise awareness on the negative impact of stigmatization of vulnerable populations and there is a stronger focus on treatment provisions to those dependent on drugs, and through planned advocacy and communication activities with a gender focus. Implementation has demonstrated a focus on the policy and specialised systems and structures, rather than on the targeted vulnerable populations themselves.

The SFP is again an exception, with increased gender-balanced participation and a real effort to adopt a more inclusive approach to the concept and practice of family, involving equally fathers and mothers. It should also be noted the possible effect of existing structural gender bias on SFP gender balancing at the participation level- education and health sectors at the local level being generally dominated by female practitioners in the region, while positions of power within ministries for example are still male-dominated.

GC note the importance of gender and human rights to donors, a fact that provides assistance to UNODC's application of these cross-cutting principles, and it is also noted that most countries in the region accept and follow international norms and regulations in relation to human rights, also providing a basis on which programming can be implemented and priorities emphasised.

CONCLUSIONS

RELEVANCE

The RP demonstrates clear relevance to GCs across the region, with significant support to the alignment, flexibility and ability to address areas of concern. Of great importance in this is the capacity of the RP to increase cross-border communication and cooperation in a number of areas, and the linkage of this cooperation to a sharing and implementation of good practice in areas of GC responsibility. All aspects of this cross-border collaboration and engagement deserves a consistent and continued focus in coming programming.

Programme planning and detailed design would benefit from intentionally addressing the longer-term context of the RP. As the engagement of UNODC in West and Central Asia, through the RP, enters into a third, 5-year strategic framework, and does so within what is described as a programmatic approach, it becomes more relevant to consider the longer-term implications, outputs and outcomes of this work, including specific attention on the higher-level outcomes and contributions to impact that result from the Regional Programme. This is likely to include a discussion on and representation of the impact vision for the programme, i.e. the ongoing nature of UNODC engagement over time, how the proposed inputs and outputs contribute to change over time and how this longer-term change is monitored and reported on. This later aspect is particularly important as there is currently no reporting framework that addresses the accumulation of results/ change across programme cycles. With the Programme entering this third 5-year framework, a need for this longer-term view becomes more important. Such a design approach offers the possibility for addressing the finer details of strategic and structural relationships and interactions with the other programmes in the region.

COHERENCE

It appears that the coherent linkages and coordinated direction-setting with which the RP is defined, and which establish coherence with the other programmes in West and Central Asia, have slipped. The evaluation concludes that it would be a mistake for programming for the next phase to be undertaken without these issues being resolved, as they are significant and impact on the day-to-day operations of the RP and the Programme for Central Asia in particular. A re-establishment of frameworks between

the RP and all programmes in the region would benefit all design and implementation elements in the coming 5-year period. Included in discussions in this area should be definitions of and criteria for 'region', 'regional programme' and even 'country programme' and 'country office', as a significant lack of clarity exists within UNODC itself in these areas.

EFFECTIVENESS

The RP has been effective in providing policy makers, decision makers and practitioners with knowledge, structures and skills for the development of comprehensive, evidence-based drug use prevention programmes and systems.

The key component of RP effectiveness, and a notable feature of its approach as noted by stakeholders including GCs and NGO implementing partners is partnership/ relationship building. It is noted that this is important between the RP and these stakeholders but also the assistance the RP has provided in this area *between* stakeholders. This is particularly visible in both national and regional partnerships, and in the formalisation of relationships visible in ARIN-WCA, FIUs, MLA processes, the TI, the Paris Pact and the Istanbul Process – Heart of Asia.

The reported losing of momentum is of significant concern. There are so many initiatives, as well as the underlying framework of partnership/ relationship, that would be negatively affected by a slipping of RP activities and results. GC and NGO partners acknowledge the importance and effectiveness of RP support, and as noted in the Effectiveness section, this support is very important in ongoing efforts to build regional responses to regional issues and challenges.

EFFICIENCY

UNODC has a strategic framework which includes the definitions of nine sub-programmes. Of the nine, two are not relevant to regional programming. The programme structure of the RP, and of the other programmes in the region, maintain a loose correlation to these sub-programmes of UNODC's strategic framework. They do not, however, correlate directly, neither with the strategic framework nor with each other. This lack of direct correlation detracts from both coherence and efficiency, particularly in how programmes report on what they are doing and achieving. Reporting from a programme is not as effective in commenting on contributions in defined strategic areas, and aggregation of results is also difficult without a tighter correlation.

As the programme is entering the planning for a new 5-year phase, it is important to consider how the RP is properly measured and reported on. This is important to ensure that the story of change and impact, brought about by significant inputs over a significant period, is told. Clearly this is linked to the conclusion above on the longer-term context of the programme. It is important for this story to be told based on evidence, evidence that is presented against clearly delineated outcome and impact indicators and address the importance of how the proposed inputs and outputs contribute to change over time and how this longer-term change is monitored and reported on. This later aspect is particularly important as there is currently no reporting framework that addresses the accumulation of results/ change across programme cycles. It is likely that without a focus on gathering and sharing evidence of change, an appreciation of what has occurred will be lost.

Secondly, a clear picture of what has been done and what has been achieved will, in all likelihood, provide a clearer and more detailed perspective on where programming should go in the future. Given that past, successful programming has built a foundation for success, visible in the trust and quality of relationships visible with GCs, donors and with NGO implementing partners, it makes sense to build up from the most solid of those foundations. Understanding what these are requires analysis based on evidence. While this includes forward thinking, it is as important in ensuring the foundations laid and

successes achieved over the past programming are not lost, neither in reporting nor in planning for future initiatives and making use of these foundations.

IMPACT

Given the success the RP has had in encouraging regional exchanges and broadening the vision of GCs on policy options related to drug prevention and treatment, some further thinking on and possible engagement in formalisation of the regional interactions may be of value. These approaches would benefit from a regional thematic expert who could focus on professional and policy-maker networking that has a thematic, i.e., not project, focus. There are conceptual similarities in this with both CARICC in the law enforcement area and the ARIN-WCA network in relation to financial crimes. All of these initiatives have an impact focus and should be positioned in this way.

SUSTAINABILITY

Much of the commentary on Effectiveness above resonates with conclusions on sustainability, given the importance in all aspects of RP work on capacity (knowledge, skills, practice). Each of these is a focus, and the establishment of cross-border MoUs for example are critical aspects of sustainable impact, as is the establishment of regional networks such as ARIN-WCA which has the potential for significant impact on financial crime. The role and importance of UNODC engagement with civil society, and the focus found in sub-programme 3 on the health aspects of drugs and drug dependence offer both wider perspectives on partnership beyond law enforcement and related agencies and significant potential for impact in social structures and community engagement with UNODC initiatives.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

The work being done in sub-programme 3, notably on the SFP, is significant in engaging with and delivering outcomes focused on leaving no one behind. This work gives a clear priority to gender, human rights and vulnerable members of the population. The RP as a whole gives a clear priority to human rights priorities and issues, across all sub-programmes. A greater emphasis could be placed on gender equality priorities, a difficult area of focus in the region but nevertheless one of importance. The levels of trust expressed by GCs towards UNODC, and their acknowledgement of both global frameworks and donor priorities in this area open a door through which the RP should pass. As well as results that can be achieved, taking leadership with its close counterparts in this area may well create funding and programming opportunities, directly with donors and also within the context of UNCTs across the region.

LIMITATIONS TO THE EVALUATION

The Covid-19 global health crisis impacted significantly on the processes of the evaluation, notably in forcing all evaluation enquiry to be undertaken online. No face-to-face interviewing was possible, no site visits were undertaken and no observation of activities, as a field tool, was possible as the scheduling of programme activities was limited and none took place during the period of field research.

The evaluation did not address questions/enquiry to the general population nor to indirect beneficiaries – all enquiry is with key stakeholders, including project staff, implementing partners, donors and direct beneficiaries.

EVALUATION MATRIX - REGIONAL PROGRAMME FOR AFGHANISTAN AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Question	Sub-Programme 1: Regional Law Enforcement Cooperation (RERV07)	Sub-programme 2: Phase II International/ Regional Cooperation in Legal Matters (RERV08)	Sub-Programme 3: Drug use prevention, drug dependence treatment and care, HIV and AIDS prevention and care in the community and in prison settings (RERV09)	Sub-Programme 4: Trends and Impact (RERV10)
Relevance	1. Were the programmes designed based on evidence (research, lessons learned from past programming, evaluations)?	<p>Comprehensive process directed the RP design, including research, relevant situational and risk analyses, post-project surveys, the establishment of baselines against which progress could be measured, and extensive consultations with GC.</p> <p>Alignment with national and regional priorities, with GC noting linkages.</p> <p>Internal programme processes, including steering group meetings, are effective at engaging with GCs to understand changing needs and priorities and reset annual objectives.</p> <p>Design and Steering Committee guidance approach reflects clear design grounded in utility and ownership for GCs.</p> <p>No long-term thinking (i.e. beyond the 5-year programming) in RP design documentation.</p>			
	2. To what extent does the defined structure of programmes in the region align with current regional practice and future directions?	<p>Across the region (with the noted exception of Iran, where the evaluation was unable to interview GCs and questionnaire feedback was limited and schematic) GCs were overwhelmingly supportive of the alignment of the programme with their needs, its role in facilitating regional concerns and its flexibility in the face of changing circumstances.</p> <p>SP3 under the RP functions as both a complement to ongoing assistance at the national and sub-regional levels and a strategic dialogue avenue (nationally and regionally) to reach common ground on the prioritisation of DDR and HIV prevention, including the vulnerable populations.</p>			

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	3. To what extent are the objectives of the Programmes aligned with regional priorities and UNDAFs/ UNSDCFs/ SDGs?	<p>Feedback from Country Teams feeds into RP planning, but there is a lack of clarity as to how UNDAFs (and in the future, UNSDCFs) inform RP programming.</p> <p>The programme document states that the RP is in full alignment with UNDAFs, and driven by the SDGs, particularly SDG 16 with a focus on security matters, peace, and protection of human rights in the region, including security matters.</p> <p>Reporting notes UNODC membership in UNDAF results-groups (based on the strategic area of focus) and UNDAF monitoring, evaluation and coordination groups. Stakeholders confirm this alignment in field interviews.</p> <p>In relation to the SDGs, reporting notes the establishment of the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network (ARIN) as a contribution to SDG 16.4 and 16.5. The Strengthening Families Programme is also pointed to as a direct contributor to SDG 3.5, as well as SDGs 16, 5 and 10.¹⁴</p>			
	4. To what extent do the programmes respond to the changing and emerging regional and national (Member State) priorities and needs?	<p>The programme document is flexible, allowing rapid response to the changing/emerging needs of member states, including current challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Support particularly appreciated in areas of fast-moving change, such as methods of complex financial crime, where national-level expertise is low or absent.</p> <p>RP project revision processes include a Programme Steering Committee on which donors are also represented, that allows refining and updating of annual programme objectives.</p> <p>GC report strong alignment with their national counternarcotic strategies, recognising the programme as a critical platform to bring MS together, especially in light of political sensitivities- “It is the only way we can talk to one another”.</p>			

¹⁴ 2018. Annual Programme Progress Report – Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries.

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Coherence	5. To what extent did the programmes develop or strengthen existing and new partnerships at bilateral, regional and international levels?	<p>Relationship between the RP and PCA is not functioning, with a range of conflicting views on the effectiveness and coherence between the two.</p> <p>Despite efforts by the RP related to planning and documentation, some PCA staff state they are unclear what the RP's role is, as they understand the PCA as a regional programme and in that respect self-sufficient.</p> <p>GCs and donors are both aware of this lack of cohesion but practical impacts appear more important internally to UNODC.</p> <p>GC recognise the importance of regional interconnectivity in terms of their national priorities.</p> <p>RP and GC have a firm, mutual understanding of the complexities behind regional cooperation and partnership in law enforcement, with the neutrality of UNODC seen as critical to building bridges between MS.</p> <p>Creating a solid relationship with GCs in each country is vital to strengthening regional cooperation.</p> <p>Creation of the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network for West and Central Asia (ARIN-WCA) widely noted as valued by national counterparts.</p> <p>MoUs have been an important initiative in encouraging bilateral collaboration.</p> <p>Networking opportunities, such as increasing engagement with the Heart of Asia initiative, have been created.</p> <p>The regional rationale brings coherence and encourages stakeholders to a pro-active emulation of policy ideas (methadone and OSTs examples).</p> <p>At the national level, solid feedback from stakeholders working in the health sectors on the quality, genuineness and seriousness of programme efforts to engage all levels and sectors of government.</p> <p>While synergies have been pursued with UNODC Global and Country initiatives, stakeholders underlined the need to clarify mandates and avenues of cooperation.</p>			

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	6. To what extent do the programmes contribute to the One UN, UNDAF, and other UN system-wide coordination mechanisms (e.g. participation in UN Country Team) and the extent to which UNODC participation in UN activities influences its performance?	Despite some positive experiences at country levels where RP staff take part in most UN joint platforms (notable in Iran), there was limited information available to the evaluation team to gauge how far the RP contributes to ONE UN mechanisms.			

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Effectiveness	7. To what extent were the objectives and outcomes stated in programme documents achieved?	<p>Program document reflects a results framework with achievable, sustainable, timely measures, but lack of data from GC makes measuring effectiveness difficult.</p> <p>Positive impacts on national and regional partnership widely noted by national counterparts.</p> <p>Not all programmed activity was undertaken due to funding shortfalls, but the programme worked with Global and Country programmes to enhance effectiveness with budget constraints.</p> <p>Building of partnership and cooperation achieved through large- and small-scale initiatives, ranging from ARIN-WCA network to bilateral MOUs that speed information flows and reduce barriers to cooperation.</p> <p>The RP was effective in providing policy and decision makers and practitioners with knowledge, structures and skills for the development of comprehensive evidence-based drug use prevention programmes and systems (output 1). In that line, the SFP and FAST programmes were successful examples.</p> <p>Key GC and UNODC stakeholders stressed on UNODC continued efforts to advocate and dissemination International Prevention and Treatment Standards as recommended by UNODC and WHO, however it was difficult to evaluate the concrete translation of the knowledge learned and the policy decision made at the operational level.</p>			
	8. How effectively did the programmes address national and regional needs and priorities?	<p>RP and GC report the importance of soft outcomes-results enhancing regional mechanisms and capacities.</p> <p>Specific needs were updated and prioritised annually via a Programme Steering Committee of national counterparts.</p> <p>Development of trust allows the RP to have some limited influence on the political sensitivities that can prohibit GC engagement with one another, but otherwise political sensitivities cannot be addressed at all.</p> <p>Was effective in providing opportunities for partnership, training and information sharing networks.</p> <p>The methods used in the SFP were particularly appreciated for having been theoretically and empirically tested, and for being easily replicated and adapted to country contexts.</p>			

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	9. To what extent are the programmes effective in strengthening and promoting cross-border cooperation and collaboration with regional entities?	<p>The RP reports that cross border cooperation and cooperation is where the programme has become most effective.</p> <p>Regional structure key in exchange of knowledge and networking across the region and in all fields.</p> <p>Regional connectivity with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran is fundamental to the success of cross border operations/collaboration.</p> <p>RP report some successes in cross border operations, allowing lessons learned and best practices to be shared amongst participating member states. Specific mention is made of cooperation being institutionalised within the ARIN-WCA structure.</p> <p>National counterparts valued focus on bilateral partnerships and formalising of relationships through MoUs and related instruments.</p> <p>The RP has enhanced regional dialogue and experience sharing, but the need for a more robust and institutionalised platform for strengthening regional cooperation in relation to drug prevention, treatment, and drug-related HIV care services was recognised. The example of a drug demand oriented CARICC type of structure was proposed as an option.</p>			
Efficiency	10. Were the resources and inputs converted to outputs and outcomes in a timely and cost-effective manner?	<p>UNODC does not define a ‘regional programme’, nor a ‘programme’ nor an ‘office’, and there are no criteria therefore for when a particular type of office should be described and defined.</p> <p>The programme structure of the RP, and of the other programmes in the region, maintain a loose correlation to these sub-programmes of UNODC’s strategic framework. They do not, however, correlate directly, neither with the strategic framework nor with each other.</p> <p>Funding levels for the RP have reached critically low levels that threaten its operational viability and impacts daily on the delivery of activities in all sub-programmes.</p> <p>Efficiency is further undermined by issues with coordination and overlap between the RP and PCA, and a lack of communication and engagement.</p> <p>Donor driven argument not always sustainable when it comes to DDR – can be a reason but also lack of political will and difference levels of prioritization at national levels. Coordination at government level can be an issue.</p>			

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Impact	11. To what extent did the programmes contribute to Member State implementation of relevant international Conventions and other instruments?	<p>The evaluation found support for the role played by the RP in assisting MS in their work on implementation of and response to demands of UNCAC and FATF.</p> <p>The ARIN-WCA network is a clear, regional result of the RP and illustrates clear impact potential.</p> <p>The evaluation also found evidence pointing to the alignment of the RP’s work with conventions related to illicit trafficking.</p>			

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	12. To what extent can long-term sustainable results be expected for all stakeholders from current programme implementation?	<p>A key component of the work of the RP is catalysing regional cooperation for mutual benefit, in support of which it provides assistance toward partnership building at regional and international levels. Expert working groups on precursors and related training, as well as expert exchanges across the 8 countries, are examples of this cooperation.</p> <p>Programme purpose is focused on catalysing regional cooperation for mutual benefit, so provides support and assistance toward partnership elements of implementation.</p> <p>Able to initiate bilateral or regional discussions of issues such as transfer of sentenced prisoners, though this is currently unfunded.</p> <p>Examples such as ARIN-WCA illustrate potential for sustainable results, but questions of funding remain (cf. CARIN, funded by the EU). Self-funding mechanisms are being explored.</p> <p>While Sub-programme 3 has been effective in positively influencing the development of an evidence-based early prevention strategy built on a minimum of common standards in the region mainly through SFP and FAST programs, it is difficult to evaluate the medium to long term impact of the SP as a whole.</p> <p>SP3 mainly impacted the structural level of DDR in the region. Thanks to the activities of diffusion and adaptation of international standards to national contexts, health service quality can be evaluated and some policy initiatives taken forward (draft laws, national strategies, evaluation frameworks) based on these standards.</p> <p>Virtual training increasingly used during the COVID pandemic, being pursued as a sustainable, cost effective initiative.</p>			

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	13. To what extent did the programmes contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals?	<p>Under sub-programme 1, there is strong evidence of linkages between the work of the RP and SDG 16 across the region. GC emphasised that the negative impacts of narcotics trafficking permeate across all aspects of society, on the stability of the government, on the health of the population, and undermine legitimate economies.</p> <p>SDGs are implemented at country level, but the RP contributes to international/regional dimensions and addresses specific goals, such as around good governance and reducing corruption.</p> <p>National counterparts reported sensitisation impacts from RP training events that brought SDG priorities to their attention.</p> <p>Raised national counterpart awareness of how regional work (eg, countering illicit financial flows) directly supports national progress on SDG indicators.</p>			
Sustainability	14. Has national ownership of the programmes been generated? In what ways? What factors have hindered or facilitated this ownership?	<p>Sustainability is best perceived through the evaluation’s feedback on GC ownership of processes and initiatives, as there are a range of important examples that indicate the ways in which MS drive RP processes and take responsibility for the Programme.</p> <p>The Programme Steering Committee, in its role as secretariat, is particularly critical in identifying MS needs and priorities and bringing them to the centre of programming.</p> <p>In Iran, Kazakhstan and to some extent in Uzbekistan, the SFP has been scaled up into national and/ or school curricula, and into the provinces.</p> <p>Some GCs note their growing confidence in their own capacities and their belief that implementation would continue to some extent without continued support. Individual agencies have established networks of regional cooperation, as well as personal relationships and a broader understanding of the work that each other does and the issues that each are facing.</p> <p>However, all countries noted that UNODC provides a good platform for success and that decreased external support would create significant challenges.</p>			

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	15. How have the programmes developed national capacity to support sustainability of effort and benefit?	<p>The Programme Steering Committee, in its role as secretariat, is particularly critical in identifying MS needs and priorities and bringing them to the centre of programming.</p> <p>In Iran, Kazakhstan and to some extent in Uzbekistan, the SFP has been scaled up into national and/ or school curricula, and into the provinces.</p> <p>Some GCs note their growing confidence in their own capacities and their belief that implementation would continue to some extent without continued support. Individual agencies have established networks of regional cooperation, as well as personal relationships and a broader understanding of the work that each other does and the issues that each are facing.</p> <p>RP focus is on skills-based capacity and supporting national capacity through regional institutional structures such as ARIN-WCA, actively used by national counterparts.</p> <p>Dovetailed regionally and internationally focused programming with Country Programme efforts to develop national capacity: ‘the spectrum of assistance has been broad and timely’.</p> <p>Drawn less experienced national counterparts into regional and international networks of colleagues to support learning and effective responses.</p> <p>The RP focused on developing local capacities in the educational system on a broad range of risky behaviours, including drug use.</p> <p>Despite being relevant and effective, the SP3 coverage and ownership appear too low to anticipate sustained efforts without UNODC support.</p>			

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Leaving no one behind	16. To what extent have human rights and gender priorities and principles, including the needs of vulnerable groups, guided programme design (reference framework, planning structure)?	<p>The formulation of activities for the current phase of the RP took gender and HR into greater consideration, but there is not a clear and driving commitment to established UN priorities on these areas visible in programme design or implementation. The human rights focus is much more visible than any consideration of gender equality priorities.</p> <p>GC note the importance of gender and human rights to donors, a fact that provides assistance to UNODC’s application of these cross-cutting principles.</p> <p>Most countries in the region accept international norms and regulations in relation to human rights, with application of norms and regulations providing a basis on which programming can be implemented and priorities emphasised.</p> <p>HRG elements are limited by the regional level of work but are reflected in programmed goals such as the (unfunded) transfer of sentenced prisoner initiative.</p> <p>The formulation of activities in SP3 has taken gender and HR into greater consideration through a stronger focus on treatment provisions to those dependent on drugs, and planned advocacy and communication activities with a gender focus.</p> <p>The SFP’s approach to the family concept and practice helped to discuss social inclusion priorities. Cultural tailoring was a plus in conveying the message.</p>			

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	17. To what extent have specific measures been taken to address the needs and priorities of human rights, gender and vulnerable groups during implementation of the programmes?	<p>There are challenges in creating linkages between gender equality and law enforcement. Programming of these elements is seen as complex and as potentially crossing into matters of national sovereignty and causes alienation of some MS - tends to be better received across Central Asia.</p> <p>No defined measures to forward HR and gender in implementation other than inclusion in agendas for events and training for SP1.</p> <p>Efforts to drive gender mainstreaming in training participation have achieved positive results.</p> <p>HR focus in SP2 particularly noted in trainings associated with balanced responses to terrorism and violent extremism.</p> <p>The implementation of SP3 demonstrated a focus on the region’s policy and specialised systems and structures to promote health and evidence-based responses that would better respond to and support targeted vulnerable populations. Data and assessments are however scarce on the return and impact of UNODC’s work beyond the policy-making level.</p> <p>Women participation was overreached for the SFP. One should however note the gender bias of the sector of implementation (education and health) in the region.</p> <p>Ministry cultures, political perceptions and cultural belief make it however difficult to deconstruct the figure of criminal attached to so-defined vulnerable populations of drug users, female or pregnant women using drugs, children, disabled people who use drugs etc.</p> <p>The influence of regional powers, of cultures and regional history constrains further any progress on HR related issues.</p> <p>NGOs interviewed in the framework of the PCA demonstrated to be good intermediaries to push this agenda forward.</p>			