

2014 RC Annual Report

Major developments that affected the work of the UNCT in 2014

2014 was a notable and eventful year for the United Nations System's support for promoting sustainable and more equal development in Azerbaijan. Highlights of the year included the first visit of the UNDG Chair and UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, who underscored the government's achievements in many areas of socio-economic development and welcomed Azerbaijan's aspirations to embark on the path of becoming a full-fledged member of the donor community.

The UN System in Azerbaijan, including the non-resident agencies, formulated the **next UN-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework (UNAPF) for 2016-2020**, in consultation with the Government and key stakeholders. Fully aligned with national priorities that are articulated in the 'Vision 2020' strategic plan and recommendations generated by the national consultations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the UNAPF is to be endorsed in March 2015. During the next programme cycle, the UN Country Team will strive to shift its focus from the assistance paradigm to a greater emphasis on an expanded partnership to enhance effectiveness and stronger coherence towards Delivering as One, maximizing its value as a viable partner in increasing development impact and achieving measurable results. The overarching ambition will be to promote sustainable development, inclusive economic growth and accountability to address the social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities affecting society at all levels, with a specific focus on the most disadvantaged groups, including women and youth.

Young people aged 15-29 make up nearly 30 percent of the population in Azerbaijan, representing a challenge, particularly in rural areas, and an opportunity for the government to ensure their equal access to employment, quality education, healthcare and other public services, which will guide the transition from youth to productive adulthood. UN agencies joined up in a concerted effort to promote youth empowerment, as one of the key pillars for sustainable development of the country, and ensure that youth related issues are given high priority in both national and global development agendas. To provide evidence and insights into the discussions around youth related policies and programmes, at both national and global levels, UNDP led **the 2nd round of the national consultations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda**, in partnership with UNFPA, National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In recognition of the value of the dialogue with young people, the UN Country Team established a **UN Youth Advisory Council (UNYAC)** in June 2014, with support from UNICEF. The UNYAC participated in the UNAPF formulation process, contributed to the national post-2015 consultations, and will be invited to certain UNCT meetings to join the discussions on UN joint initiatives to deepen the youth focus in the national development policies and further promote synergies between youth policies and broader development policies, particularly in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

The Government, in partnership with the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, UNDP, UNESCO, and Council of Europe, hosted the **first Global Forum on Youth Policies** on 28-30 October 2014, which brought together over 700 participants from 165 Member States to advance youth development in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The *Baku Commitment on Youth*

Policies was adopted as an outcome of the Forum discussions to shape a common understanding of key guiding principles for integrated and inclusive youth policy development that will serve as a milestone in defining and exemplifying what is needed to advance youth policy development and implementation with and for youth, as a renewed commitment to the 1995 UN World Programme of Action for Youth. In support of the *UN Secretary-General's Five-year Action Agenda*, which includes addressing the needs of young people, the Ministry of Youth and Sports signed a MoU with the United Nations HQs in New York to strengthen cooperation with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth for the period 2014-2016.

At the time of serious economic constraints in the world and the low oil prices in the world market, oil-rich Azerbaijan has so far maintained the pace of economic development, but this will become a challenge in 2015 and beyond. The annual growth rate of GDP was 2.8 percent for 2014. The country continued to exhibit robust growth in the non-oil sector. The value added in non-oil sector grew by 7 percent and its share in GDP increased to 61 percent. Azerbaijan's exports exceeded imports by 2.7 times; the strategic currency reserves increased up to \$54 billion. The EBRD's *Transition Report for 2014* finds that, although oil output disruptions remain the biggest challenge in Azerbaijan, relatively low levels of public debt, combined with sizeable reserves and oil fund assets, will help mitigate sovereign risk. The business environment outside the oil and gas sector is improving. According to the *Global Competitiveness Report 2014-2015*, Azerbaijan is ranked 38th (among 144 countries), with the major improvements in country's capacity to attract and retain talent. The World Bank's *Doing Business 2015* report ranks Azerbaijan at 80th (of 189 countries), indicating that country has made improvements to the regulations for starting a business, registering property, obtaining construction permits, and paying taxes. However, further business reforms are required for strengthening the institutional environment, in particular, the legal environment, and broadening access to finance to spur investment and innovation.

Remaining in the high human development category, Azerbaijan maintained progress towards all its HDIs. The *UNDP Human Development Report for 2014* positioned the country at 76th out of 187 states and territories (increasing from 82nd in 2012), and ranked 62nd out of 149 countries in the Gender Inequality Index value of 0.340, illustrating positive changes in the inclusive sustainable human development in Azerbaijan.

To ensure sustainable growth, the government strives to turn the non-oil sector into a driving force for the national economy. A targeted state support is provided for agro-industry, tourism, and information technology, which have been identified as priority sectors for the national economic diversification agenda.

The government declared 2014 as the **Year of Industry** and made efforts to bolster industrial development, promote new innovative industries and technologies, seeking to provide attractive employment opportunities. With support from UN agencies, the government concentrated its efforts to further develop industrial and high-tech parks as well as petrochemical industry. In partnership with UNIDO and GIZ, Azerbaijan hosted an international conference on 26-27 November to review the main industrialization trends and consider modern approaches using various policy instruments to foster inclusive and sustainable industrial development in emerging economies in Europe and Central Asia. The government approved a *Framework Cooperation Programme with UNIDO for 2014-2018*.

Three Presidential Decrees were signed in 2014 to further improve **the agriculture sector**, mainly through (i) accelerating institutional reforms to increase export potential and gain access to regional and global markets, and (ii) introducing reforms in the land cadastre and introducing a new

agricultural electronic monitoring system to enhance food market transparency and encourage coordination of policy action. In line with the government's strategy, FAO contributed to improving food security and rural livelihoods. A new *FAO-Azerbaijan Partnership Programme* was finalized. IFAD formulated a *Development Strategy of Agribusiness for 2014-2020* to promote adoption of the innovative approaches to boost rural transformation. The new partnership programmes of FAO, IFAD and UNIDO are aligned with the UNAPF priorities.

Azerbaijan sustains its leading position among CIS countries in promoting **the ICT sector**. *The Global Information Technology Report 2014* ranked Azerbaijan in the Networked Readiness Index 49th among 148 states, compared to the 56th place a year earlier. The ICT sector in Azerbaijan has become the second largest recipient of foreign investment after the oil industry. New incentives will be introduced this year to further encourage entrepreneurship through the State Fund for the Development of Information Technologies, which awarded grants to 31 start-up projects and loans to 12 entrepreneurs in 2014. The government supported several e-government, e-signature and non-cash transactions related initiatives to reduce opportunities for corrupt practices. A Presidential Decree was signed in February to establish e-court proceeding system, facilitating easy access to the justice and improving the court case management, and the new online system will be effective this year. A new *National Strategy for Information Society Development in Azerbaijan for 2014-2020*, which was developed with support from UNDP, was endorsed by the Government in April. Promotion of e-governance has remained a central component of UNDP's support. Within the South-South and Triangular Cooperation, UNDP partnered with the Ministry of Communications and High Technologies to provide support to the counterparts in Afghanistan for developing a viable and sustainable ICT sector and share Azerbaijan's experiences in establishing e-government.

The State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations was set up in 2013 as the principal integrator of e-government solutions to improve transparency, reduce bureaucracy and eliminate corruption in the provision of public services. UN Agencies continued expanding cooperation with the State Agency's single-window ASAN Service Centres to further promote good governance and human rights. UNDP cooperated with ASAN Centre on formulating its longer term strategy. UNICEF, in partnership with the Azerbaijan Lawyers Confederation, launched a pilot Child Legal Aid Service in one of the (four) ASAN Centres in Baku to provide first-ever publicly available access to legal services for children, as part of the national justice sector reform and strengthening the child rights protection mechanism in the country. The joint initiative is expected to eventually scale up to similar services at all seven ASAN Centres countrywide.

UN agencies in Azerbaijan teamed up with national counterparts and development partners to promote **a human rights-based approach to development and advance gender equality**. The UN Country Team, under the leadership of the UN Task Force for Human Rights chaired by OHCHR, provided its support to the missions of:

- (i) UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (18-24 May). The protracted internal displacement has lasted more than 20 years and the ongoing negotiations over the occupied territories in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, which are led by the OSCE Minsk Group, have not succeeded in reaching a peaceful settlement to the conflict yet. During a debriefing with media, the Special Rapporteur emphasized that "development of a rights-based approach to durable solutions for IDPs in Azerbaijan is a matter of urgency." The mission report is to be submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in 2015;

- (ii) the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises (18-27 August). The mission report is due in 2015;
- (iii) the Sub-committee on Prevention of Torture (8-17 September). The mission was foreshortened and the Committee is ready to return to complete the work in 2015.

The UNCT, with support from the UN Gender Theme Group (UN GTG) led by UNFPA, helped the Government:

- (i) to undertake a comprehensive national review of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, as part of the 20th anniversary of the Declaration (B+20), which was also used as an opportunity for an inclusive consultation on accelerated efforts to achieve the MDGs by the end of 2015 and contribute to shaping the post-2015 development framework;
- (ii) to prepare the 5th periodic CEDAW national report and engage the government delegation in a constructive dialogue in an open public hearing of the state report at the 60th session of the CEDAW Committee taking place in Geneva on 16-18 February 2015. Twenty government officials representing various line ministries and agencies attended a mock session, which was facilitated by Ms. Pramila Patten, Vice-Chairperson of the CEDAW Committee. UNCT joined efforts to develop a Confidential Report, which will be presented by the UN Resident Coordinator and UN GTG Chair who will join the national delegation for the upcoming CEDAW session. The UN System will continue providing joint high-value and evidence-based policy support to the government to follow up the CEDAW concluding observations due in March 2015.

Human mobility worldwide also makes an impact on Azerbaijan, which has become an attractive destination for international migrants, as a result of realization of large-scale projects in the energy, construction and transport sectors. IOM and ILO provided support to the Government to take measures to expand opportunities for legal labour migration management, prevention of illegal migration, and human trafficking. IOM finalized a *Country Strategy for 2014-2020*, which aims to help the Government protect the fundamental rights of the migrants and unlock the potential of migration as an enabler for sustainable human development, encompassing both its inclusive economic and social dimensions. IOM will continue its close cooperation with the UN System to create synergies between migration and sustainable development through adequate cross-sectoral policy mix, comprehensive legal frameworks and viable partnerships.

The following high-level UN officials, while visiting the country, met with the UN Country Team:

- *Ms. Helen Clark*, Chair of UN Development Group, UNDP Administrator
- *Ms. Cihan Sultanoglu*, Chair of the Regional undg Team, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the RBEC
- *Mr. Magdy Magdy Martínez-Solimán*, Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
- *Mr. Alberic Kacou*, UNDP Chief of Staff
- *Mr. Maher Nasser*, Acting Head of the UN Department of Public Information
- *Ms. Lakshmi Puri*, Assistant Secretary-General, UN Women Deputy Executive Director
- *Ms. Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir*, UN Women Regional Director and Representative to Turkey
- *Mr. Heimo Laakkonen*, UNFPA Regional Director

- *Mr. Zahidul Haque*, UNFPA Country Director for the South Caucasus, Representative in Turkey
- *Mr. Chaloka Beyani*, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs
- *Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi*, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (who met the UNCT several times, though was unable to join the UNCT meetings)
- *Mr. Alexander Schischlik*, UNESCO Chief of Section for the Youth and Sport Team
- *Mr. Roman Shpak*, Regional Desk Officer for the South Caucasus, DPA New York
- *Mr. Zack Taylor*, UNDP Regional Conflict Prevention Advisor

Highlights on progress on joined up work

- i) Support to the Government in the advancing the achievement of the Millennium Declaration/MDGs, and activities related to the Post-2015 Agenda:

Azerbaijan has made substantial progress towards achieving most of the MDGs over the last years. However, some of the goals remain valid and relevant, given their people-centred approach. The UN system in Azerbaijan provided support to the Government to address the major MDG-related challenges (such as the inadequate access and quality of primary education; underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions; inadequate access to primary health care and reproductive health, which impacts on reaching the health MDGs for socially excluded groups; insufficient sanitation in rural areas) by integrating them into national development strategies, adjusting national policies in view of maximizing their effective impact, encouraging a policy dialogue and providing technical support.

As a result of the joint UNCT advocacy effort co-led by WHO and UNICEF over the last four years, the Government of Azerbaijan, finally, approved a transition to the international Live Birth Definition, effective 1 January 2015, within a newly approved State Programme on Maternal and Child Health. WHO and UNICEF supported the Government to successfully introduce new vaccines, which, along with new policies and protocols, had a significant impact on reducing child mortality. In 2014, Azerbaijan was included in the list of eight of the 97 countries that are classified by WHO as being in the malaria elimination phase.

With support from WHO and UNICEF, the Government has improved the availability of safe water supplies through the Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation; the latest estimates of which suggest that Azerbaijan is likely to meet the MDG target for drinking water and sanitation by 2015.

With support from UNICEF and UNHCR, a community-based social advocacy mechanism was introduced in three districts to increase awareness and knowledge of IDPs on the implications of the harmful practices of child marriages. Three community-based social advocacy groups developed a response plan and prevented 22 attempted child marriages in the IDP communities.

UNFPA and UNDP shared the results of the joint analysis of the demographic trends in Azerbaijan and their impact on economic and social development. The study recommendations will feed into national policies to address the existing and potential demographic challenges, including the *State Programme on Population Development and Demography for 2014-2025* to be formulated this year, with support from UNFPA.

IOM and UNDP presented the findings of a joint survey of migrants' spouses and family members staying behind, which revealed the existing gaps in policy and support programmes. The survey

report underscored the need for improving the development opportunities, rights and social protection of migrants' spouses and families staying behind, and raising awareness among policymakers to improve legal support and access procedures for the legal assistance.

UNDP and UNFPA co-led the second round of consultations on Post-2015 Development Agenda. A two-month dialogue focused on youth and engaged nearly 800 participants who expressed their aspirations, including via MY World survey, during the consultations in Guba (which was announced as 2014 National Youth Capital), Ganja (which was declared 2016 European Youth Capital), and a final consultation in Baku where they validated the findings at the Model UN Conference hosted by the ADA University. The recommendations generated by the consultations in Azerbaijan were shared at the Global Meeting on Partnerships with Civil Society (20-21 October, Siem Reap, Cambodia) by the representatives from the UNCT and two youth NGOs.

Last year's highlights of the UNCT's joint work include extensive and inclusive consultations with the Government, development partners, civil society, private sector and media to formulate the UN-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework for 2016-2020, which has identified the following three inter-related strategic programming and advocacy priorities: (i) boosting economic development and generating decent work; (ii) strengthening institutional capacities and effective public and social services, and (iii) improving environmental management and resilience to natural hazards and human-induced disasters.

- ii) Support to the Government in integrating a human rights-based approach into national development processes:

Human rights mainstreaming has been central to the UN system. The UN Working Group on Human Rights chaired by OHCHR provided support to the Government in the implementation of the country's commitments within the UN human rights mechanisms and promoted the role of civil society in advocating for implementation of the UPR and Special Procedures' recommendations.

UNICEF provided support to the Government for developing a National Strategy for Children for 2015-2020, which is expected to be endorsed this year. A comprehensive national action plan will be formulated to ensure that the strategy has an inherent inter-sectoral coordinated approach towards its implementation. Three strategic policy recommendations were presented to the Government, based on a study of institutional response to violence against children in domestic and public settings, which specifically focused on addressing child marriages and domestic violence, among other challenges.

WHO teamed up with the WB to form a new partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, which co-hosted the First National Conference on Disability Assessment in Azerbaijan in December, calling for fundamental disability policy reforms to be based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, as a conceptual basis for the definition and measurement of health and disability using qualitative and quantitative research methods.

With support from UNICEF, the Government developed a draft Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPD), which incorporated the recommendations provided by the UN Committee on the RPD, aligning the draft Law with the fundamental principles and requirements of the Convention on the RPD. The reforms that have been implemented in Azerbaijan over the past few years in the juvenile justice system are yielding results (e.g. the measures of restraint imposed upon juveniles decreased by 30 percent over the last 7 years; the number of children sentenced to pre-trial detention dropped by 50 percent in the past 8 years; employment of judges specialized in the area of juvenile

justice has improved, etc.). The Government was encouraged to further focus on introducing the transformative national policies to effectively take concerted action for preventing juvenile delinquency and youth crime.

UNFPA, jointly with the Office of Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman), undertook an assessment of implementation of the UPR/CEDAW recommendations on sexual and reproductive health rights, and convened a Stakeholder Dialogue Meeting to launch the process of monitoring of the implementation of UPR/CEDAW recommendations.

UNFPA, UNDP and UNHCR teamed up with civil society actors to uphold the rights of victims of domestic violence and address the major challenges that impede the Government to successfully drive progress in implementing the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, which was adopted in 2010. A set of policy recommendations (including the development of a draft National Action Plan and a comprehensive multi-sectoral national strategy, introduction of a national referral mechanism, improvement of access to justice as well as preventive, protective and rehabilitative services for victims of violence) was particularly highlighted with high-level officials representing various state institutions, as part of a joint '16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence' campaign. UNFPA and IOM pooled their efforts to safeguard the rights of victims of domestic violence and help combat harmful practices, which affect victims' security. A Center of Support for female victims of violence and their children was set up and operationalized in Khachmaz, providing services to 36 female victims of violence (out of whom 24 women received small business grants for start-ups).

UNFPA published a report illustrating the findings and policy recommendations stemming from a first-ever qualitative and quantitative analysis of the gender-biased sex selection abortions in Azerbaijan, given that the skewed sex ratio has increased from the reasonable margins (103-106) to as high as 120-124 over the last 20 years.

UNHCR provided support to the State Migration Service to strengthen and bring national legislation and implementation of refugee status determination procedures up to international standards, and continued its advocacy work to ensure that gaps in the provision and access to basic services and legal assistance to IDPs are addressed and duly included in the national planning.

With support from IOM, a Gap and Needs Analysis of the Migration Legislation in the Area of Readmission Management was conducted. Policy recommendations stemming from the analysis were formulated for the preparation of standard operating procedures for the temporary accommodation of vulnerable migrants in Azerbaijan, in the context of the development of integrated border management, and presented to the Government to effectively implement readmission agreements with due regard to universal human rights standards.

iii) Progress on preparedness, crisis and Post-crisis transition results achieved in cooperation with UN peacekeeping, peace building, political, and humanitarian actors

With technical support and guidance from WHO, the Government well-established and practiced infection control procedures, preventing cases of the outbreak of Ebola virus. No cases of imported infectious disease were registered in the country.

UNHCR moved from cash to electronic bank transfer of targeted financial assistance to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers, while continuing its advocacy work to get the Government to allow their full access to the labour market, education, health and basic social services.

Azerbaijan announced a contribution of US\$1 million to the UN Ebola Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund, which will ensure a coherent UN system contribution to the overall Ebola outbreak response.

Results of joined up approaches

i) New partnerships formed in 2014

UNDP is in the process of creating a new partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture to address the key challenges of conservation and sustainable use of valuable agro-biodiversity in the steppe, arid and semi-arid zones in Sheki, Goranboy and Kurdemir provinces to promote land integrity and food security.

As part of justice sector reform, UNICEF formed a partnership with a 'single-window' ASAN Service Centre in Baku to offer free legal aid services for children and/or their caregivers/representatives. The services were rendered to nearly 90 children over the last four months, and the viable cooperation is expected to expand countrywide eventually, with funding from the state budget.

UNICEF facilitated to develop a new partnership between the Ministry of Health and Ankara University on Early Detection, Prevention of Childhood Disabilities and Early Interventions (EDPEI), which has resulted in the development of the ministry's plan for piloting the EDPEI in several facilities of Baku and implementation of the tool for Monitoring of Child Development.

UNFPA formed a partnership with the Public Health and Reforms Center, which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. The Centre was selected as an implementing partner, based on its operational and institutional capacity to implement a set of reproductive health related sensitive tasks in emergency situations.

IOM initiated a partnership with the Institute on Human Rights and Conflict Studies, which is under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, to collaborate with the Government in developing national migration policies and legislation to comply with international migration law and regional/international standards and more effectively protect migrants' rights in Azerbaijan.

ii) Results of joint resource mobilization

Following the requirement for using WHO pre-qualified vaccines for vaccination of children, the Government of Azerbaijan started the process of procurement of vaccines for routine immunization of children through UNICEF Supply Division, enabling UNICEF and WHO Country Offices to save nearly 2 million AZN (Azerbaijani Manat), which were used for the vaccination campaign against measles and rubella among children aged 11-15 in Baku and selected districts that were affected by the measles outbreak in 2013.

UNFPA mobilized US\$40,000 to widely promote new Live-Birth Definitions (LBD), which were recently adopted by the Ministry of Health. In partnership with the Chiesi Foundation (Parma, Italy), the LBD modules, protocols and clinical audit will be developed through a series of capacity-building activities to be carried out in 15 regions of the country.

iii) Innovations in the programme and operations to address key development challenges

UNICEF, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance, launched a pilot initiative to introduce a new cost-effective model of school readiness. The novelty of the approach is to provide access of six-year-old children from the disadvantaged rural areas of Azerbaijan to pre-school education. The initiative has been successfully implemented in 135 schools of Shabran, Yardimli and Gedabey provinces, and, according to the Ministry of Education, over 4,000 children in these districts (about 88 percent of six-year-old children) benefitted from the newly provided service. As a result of the joint advocacy efforts, the Ministry of Finance formally endorsed financing of the programme, including the increased teachers' salaries, in the three pilot districts from the state budget.

UNHCR supported the Office of the Ombudsperson to compile and publish a consolidated legal framework, including the Presidential Decrees covering refugee/IDPs issues.

UNFPA pursues a 'more with less' approach, given the financial constraints and reduced staffing level. The country programme is aligned with a new UNFPA Strategic Plan and distinctive modes of engagements (Business Model), based on the upstream policy and advocacy/policy development, which would enhance the contribution of UNFPA to improving evidence-based policy making and amplifying rights-based advocacy schemes to deliver a transformational impact. Capacity development and knowledge management will concentrate on policy development exclusively. The country office received its integrated budget (ceiling) until 2017, which demonstrates a gradual decrease (by 20%) in core funding of the programme. UNFPA will strengthen its efforts to promote cost-sharing and seek new funds to advance the ICPD agenda in the country.

UNHCR advocated for allocating state budget for a rights-based national asylum system management, along with providing support for the Government's commitment to identifying the scope of statelessness and establishing a statelessness determination procedure in the country.

Upcoming opportunities for 2015

'2015 is a year of global action,' the UN Secretary-General said in his remarks at the World Economic Forum's plenary session in Davos, emphasizing that 'this will be a time for a strong commitment' for sustainable development, gender equality and climate change. This year's global milestone events include four international summits - the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (14-18 March, Sendai, Japan), the 3rd International Conference on Financing for Development (13-16 July, Addis Ababa), the Special Summit on Sustainable Development where new global development goals are expected to be agreed (25-27 September, New York), and the UN Climate Change Conference to produce a new global treaty on tackle climate change (30 November–11 December, Paris). This year's highlights also include celebration of the 70th anniversary of the United Nations.

The UN System in Azerbaijan will make committed efforts to help the Government engage in international fora and better address the existing/emerging multi-dimensional and interlinked development challenges by acting together with the Government, development partners, private sector, civil society, non-state actors and other stakeholders to maximize the value of cooperation as an efficient and relevant partner in achieving development results, with a special focus on the most vulnerable segments of the society.

2015 will be another important year for the country. Azerbaijan will hold parliamentary elections in November and host the following key high-level events:

- *The 3rd Global Shared Societies Forum* led by the Club de Madrid (28-29 April), which will focus on the Post-2015 Agenda and building trust in wider Europe. The UN may join the discussions to highlight the efforts made to promote social cohesion for sustainable development and growth, both globally and in Azerbaijan.
- *The 48th Annual Meeting of the ADB Board of Governors* (2-5 May).
- *The 3rd Baku World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue* (20-21 May) and preparatory arrangements for hosting *the 7th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations* in Baku in 2016. The preparatory arrangements may be used as an opportunity for the UN to highlight the importance of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and promote universally recognized human rights as well as strengthening social cohesion and democratic governance as the essential dimensions of sustainable development.
- *The First European Games* (12-28 June), which will bring together some of the biggest sporting names in the world and may provide opportunities for raising awareness of recognition by the United Nations of the positive influence that sport can have on the advancement of social and economic development as well as human rights.

Azerbaijan has been invited by Turkey to join the *G-20 summit* (15-16 November, Antalya), which will provide a platform for policy coordination where the leaders of the G20 countries will focus its efforts on ensuring *inclusive and robust growth through collective action*. These discussions may also be used as an opportunity for the UN's joint efforts for promoting inclusiveness and investment for growth in Azerbaijan.

As Azerbaijan is stepping up its South-South and Triangular Cooperation and enhancing a development path that will make it an important player in the region, the UN System will provide support to the Government for further unlocking opportunities for its sharing knowledge and expertise to position Azerbaijan as a 'Centre of Excellence' in specific areas, which will ultimately also add to its capacity for export of a wider range of goods and services.

The government declared 2015 as the **Year of Agriculture** for the sector to become one of the main pillars for a more diversified economy and non-oil sector growth. A national plan of action will be developed by early February 2015. The UN System in Azerbaijan, including the non-resident agencies, will provide concerted support to the government to promote rural development interventions that could stimulate rural growth, create decent job opportunities and build vibrant rural communities. An agreement on establishing a *FAO Partnership and Liaison Office in Azerbaijan* will be signed this year. The Government will allocate US\$ 10 million for the period 2015-2019 to set up a *Unilateral Trust Fund* to finance various projects to further improve food security, nutrition, agricultural and rural development in the country. With support from FAO, Azerbaijan will host an international high-level conference to be attended by FAO Director-General. UNDP will partner with the Ministry of Agriculture to launch a project on conservation and sustainable use of globally important agro-biodiversity in Sheki, Goranboy and Kurdemir provinces.

The UNCT will provide support to the Government for building on the progress of the MDGs and contributing to the formulation of a new transformative post-2015 development agenda that will aim to produce broad tangible benefits for all the strata of population in Azerbaijan and will require

strong national Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) capacity to meet the ambition of evidence-based measuring the results and impact of the new sustainable development goals to be launched in 2016.

UN agencies will continue to provide evidence-based analysis for policy making, taking advantage of designating 2015 as the *First International Year of Evaluation* by the UN General Assembly. The UN Country Team will act together to intensify the joint support to further nurture and strengthen national M&E and statistical capacity for greater disaggregation of national data, particularly at sub-national level, using the technical expertise and capacities of the UN system. UNICEF and the World Bank will co-lead UNAPF M&E Group, which will become operational in January 2016, along with three newly established UNAPF Groups to be co-led by UNDP, UNICEF, the WB, ILO and UNEP.

The UNCT identified the following priority areas for joint action and focused coordination towards a coherent approach to promote greater sustainable human development in 2015:

1. **Provide support to the Government for producing the final national MDG Progress Report.** UNDP will take the lead in the UNCT's efforts for providing assistance to the Government for releasing the report in June. Building on the success of the MDGs, the UNCT will help formulate recommendations for convergence with the transformative shifts of the new framework for inclusive and sustainable development.
2. **Finalize the next UNAPF (2016-2020).** The final UNAPF document will be endorsed by the Government, shared with the Regional undg Team, Peer Support Group and DOCO, and uploaded to the undg website, jointly with the Country Analysis and the UNDAF Evaluation. The CPDs will be submitted by UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF to the respective Executive Boards by the September session.
3. **Provide support to the Government for a follow-up on the CEDAW Concluding Observations.** The UN Gender Theme Group will take the lead in the UNCT's joint action to follow up the CEDAW concluding observations due in March 2015, and provide concerted support to national counterparts for safeguarding women's rights, bridging legal provisions, closing knowledge and data gaps, and building solid sex-disaggregated baselines that would reveal persistent gender imbalances for the Government to address.
4. **Develop the UNCT Joint Communications Strategy for 2016-2020 and mark the 70th anniversary of the United Nations.** The UN Country Team will approve the Joint Communications Strategy (by December 2015) to be aligned with the UNAPF (2016-2020) priorities, and will observe the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations, jointly with the national counterparts and development partners, taking the opportunity to showcase the results attained by the unified and coherent UN family in Azerbaijan over the past years.
5. **Support the Government to make progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and contribute to finalising a new global development framework.** The UNCT will provide support to the Government for achieving the MDG targets in the final stretch and contributing to the post-2015 development agenda to be defined and endorsed at the Special Summit on Sustainable Development in September.
