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United Nations Environment Programme

**Terminal Evaluation of the Project**

**Best practice of sub-regional cooperation: Partnership for the support of the Carpathian Convention and other Mountain Regions**

**(Project CP/5023-04-82)**

**First Draft Report**

**November 2014**

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ADA | Austrian Development Agency |
| AL | Albania |
| ALPARC | Alpine Network of Protected Areas |
| ANPED | Northern Alliance for Sustainability |
| ASC | (UNEP) Administrative Service Center |
| AT | Austria |
| BiH | Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| BSP | Bali Strategic Plan |
| CADSES | Central, Adriatic, Danubian and South-Eastern European Space |
| CASALEN | Carpathian Sustainable Learning Network |
| CBD | Convention on Biological Diversity |
| CC | Carpathian Convention |
| CCIC | Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee |
| CEI | Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative |
| CERI | Carpathian EcoRegion Initiative (follow-up) |
| CH | Switzerland |
| CNPA | Carpathian Network of Protected Areas |
| COP | Conference of Parties  |
| CSO | Civil Society Organizations |
| CWI | Carpathian Wetlands Initiative |
| CZ | Czech Republic |
| DABEO | Dinaric Arc and Balkan Environmental Outlook |
| DEPI | Division of Environmental Policy Implementation |
| DEWA | Division of Early Warning and Assessment |
| DEZA | Direktion für Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit (Swiss Development Cooperation) |
| EC | European Commission |
| ECNC | European Centre for Nature Conservation |
| EEA | European Environmental Agency |
| EF | Environmental Fund |
| ENSI | Environment and Schools Initiative |
| ENVSEC | Environment and Security Initiative |
| EO | Evaluation Office (in UNEP Headquarter Nairobi) |
| ERDF | European Rural Development Fund |
| ESD | Education for Sustainable Development |
| EU | European Union |
| EURAC | European Academy (in Bolzano) |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| FRO | First Reporting Officer (UNEP) |
| FYRoM | Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia |
| GEF | Global Environmental Facility |
| HL | High-level (intermediate states) |
| HQ | Headquarter |
| IAEA | International Atomic Energy Agency |
| ICIMOD | International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development |
| ICPDR | International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River |
| IMIS | Integrated Management Information System |
| IMP | International Mountain Partnership |
| IR | Inception Report |
| ISCC | Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention |
| IUCN | International Union for Conservation of Nature |
| IYM | International Year of the Mountains |
| LL | Low-level (intermediate states) |
| MDG-F | Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund |
| M&E | Monitoring & Evaluation |
| MEAs | Multilateral Environmental Agreements |
| ML | Medium-level (intermediate states) |
| MNE | Montenegro |
| MP | Mountain Partnership |
| MoC | Memorandum of Cooperation |
| MoE | Ministry of Environment |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MTS | Medium-term Strategy |
| N/A | Not applicable |
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| NBSAPs | National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans |
| NFPs | National Focal Points |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| OMV | Oil and Gas Company with Headquarter in Austria |
| OSCE | Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe |
| PA | Protected Area |
| PD | Project Document |
| PIMS | Programme Information Management System |
| PL | Poland |
| PoW | Programme of Work |
| PPP | Public Private Partnership |
| PR | Public Relations |
| PRC | Project Review Committee |
| RBM | Result-Based Management  |
| RDO | Regional Desk Officer |
| REC | Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe |
| RO | Romania |
| ROE | Regional Office for Europe (UNEP) |
| ROtI | Review of Outcomes to Impacts |
| RSO | Regional Support Office |
| S4C | Science for the Carpathians Initiative |
| SAP | Strategic Action Plan |
| SARD | Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development |
| SCC | Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SEE | South-Eastern Europe |
| SER | Serbia |
| SK | Slovak Republic |
| SMART indicators | Stands for: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound indicators |
| SNV | Netherlands Development Organization (Balkan Office) |
| SRO | Second Reporting Officer (UNEP) |
| SWOT analysis | Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats Analysis |
| TEN-T | Trans-European Transport Network |
| TIM | Transboundary Institutional Mechanism |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| UA | Ukraine |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCCD | United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification |
| UNCT | United Nations Country Teams |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| UNECE  | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| UNON | United Nations Office Nairobi |
| UNOPS | United Nations Office for Project Services |
| UNOV | United Nations Office Vienna (Vienna International Centre) |
| UNSCR | United Nations Security Council Regulation |
| WCMC | World Conservation Monitoring Centre |
| WG | Working Group |
| WSSD | World Summit for Sustainable Development |
| WTO | (UN) World Tourism Organization |
| WWF | World Wide Fund for Nature |

# Executive Summary

A. Introduction

1. At the request of the Ukraine government, UNEP promoted and serviced the negotiations aimed at developing the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention), which was adopted and signed by seven countries in May 2003 in Kyiv, Ukraine. The Parties called for a UNEP serviced interim Secretariat and requested UNEP’s Regional Office for Europe (UNEP-ROE) to provide the arrangements. The Carpathian Convention entered into force in January 2006.
2. The UNEP project ***‘Best practice of sub-regional cooperation: Partnership for the Support of the Carpathian Convention and other Mountain Regions’*** supporting the Carpathian Convention process started in October 2003. With the establishment of UNEP Vienna – Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (ISCC) in 2004 the project scope was broadened. UNEP Vienna – ISCC was given the additional mandate to act as the environmental focal point within the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, to promote cooperation in Central and South Eastern Europe and to serve as UNEP’s focal point for Austria-based international organizations. The Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention held in the Czech Republic in September 2014, designated UNEP Vienna officially as the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (UNEP Vienna – SCC)[[1]](#footnote-1).
3. The terminal evaluation of the project covers more than ten years of operation of a project, which in the course of its implementation underwent many revisions, and will be finalized in December 2014. The evaluation is looking at the performance of the project in delivering services, in short-comings in project implementation, and is identifying lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation. The findings of the evaluation are based on a desk top review of relevant documents and – to the extent possible under the limited resources available – on interviews with selected key stakeholders.

B Evaluation findings and conclusions

1. The first conclusion is that this project cannot be compared with ‘normal’ projects having a clear goal to be achieved at the project’s end. The implementation of the Convention – including its outreach to other mountain regions in the world – is an ongoing process.
2. There is clear evidence that signing of the Convention as a sub-regional instrument for the Carpathians – based on the needs of governments and other stakeholders – was an excellent idea to strengthen regional cooperation. UNEP played a major role in the support and leadership of this process.
3. As regards **institutional issues and implementation arrangements**, the evaluation concludes that clear and solid operational structures to implement legal, policy and strategic decisions are essential. The Carpathian Convention itself is a solid structure with guiding, coordinating and implementing bodies in place. The establishment of UNEP Vienna, servicing the Convention process and implementing its additional mandates, was an important and sustainable institutional arrangement, with a broader importance for UNEP, and which will continue after the end of this project.
4. The **reconstructed Theory of Change analysis** reveals that the project is following a logical pathway leading towards the intended future impact. So far the project successfully produced the programmed activities and outputs as outlined in the adopted Programme of Work (PoW) of the Convention and UNEP’s PoW. The Convention process provides the overall framework, and there is evidence that UNEP Vienna – SCC is providing leadership and is effective in servicing the Convention process and steering cooperation amongst Parties. In the Balkans, UNEP Vienna – SCC is successful in promoting and steering cooperation within and between countries, proven by its prominent role in the ENVSEC Initiative, and the increasing project portfolio.
5. With respect to **coordination and networking**, the evaluation discloses the importance of the inter-governmental platform, specifically for providing a platform for discussion, identification of needs, information sharing and the development of joint projects. Furthermore, the important role UNEP Vienna – SCC had and should continue to have as a Focal Point for International Mountain Partnership (IMP) and the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiatives in the Balkans is highlighted.
6. The project provides the bases for **regional approaches** and for **capacity building processes** on different levels. There is clear indication that the project is on a good way to achieve its primary objectives related to the facilitation of regional cooperation for the protection and sustainable development in the Carpathians, and to provide best practice examples for sub-regional cooperation and partnership in other mountain regions.
7. UNEP Vienna – SCC is aware of the importance to apply **integrated approaches**, the project tries – wherever possible – to adapt to changing conditions and to promote integration of sectoral approaches, both on policy and on project level, to ensure sustainability of the results.
8. Nevertheless, there are some **shortcomings and critical voices** as regards project implementation. These voices regret that the Convention is seen as a ‘soft’ legislation, different than EU directives and regulations, where real possibility of financial fines and sanctions exist. There is a gap between the environmental commitments made on paper and practical implementation, and a pressing need for putting priorities at the decision making levels. In some meetings, too much time is spent with endless discussions with no real output or impact, for instance on the question of the scope of the Convention and the location of its Permanent Secretariat.
9. The overall rating of the project is **satisfactory** and the assessment is summarized in the following table.

| **Criterion** | **Summary Assessment** | **Rating** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **A. Strategic relevance** | The evaluation reveals that the project is of strategic relevance for global and regional policies and is fully in line with UNEP strategies and programmes. | **HS** |
| **B. Achievement of outputs** | Outputs and activities mentioned in the planning documents, both as regards the PoW under the Convention and UNEP’s PoW, were fully achieved (some with delays explained in the respective sections). | **HS** |
| **C. Effectiveness: Attainment of project objectives and results** | The project contributed effectively to all objectives and produced the results and Outputs are generally of high quality. | **S** |
| 1. Achievement of direct outcomes
 | The reconstructed ToC shows that some direct outcomes as well as some ‘low-level intermediate states’ have partly already been achieved.  | S |
| 1. Likelihood of impact
 | There are already visible impacts in terms of increased cooperation and capacity building, increased visibility of the region, enlarged project portfolio, etc., but there is still a long way to go (in follow-up projects) to reach the intended long-term and ongoing impact. | S |
| 1. Achievement of project goal and planned objectives
 | The project was successful in achieving the goal and objectives. UNEP Vienna – SCC is successfully acting in its capacity as the Secretariat, but also plays a key role in strengthening cooperation and partnerships in the Carpathians, the Balkans and other mountain regions.  | S |
| **D. Sustainability and replication** | Implemented activities have a high replication value moving towards removal of barriers and opening doors and opportunities for integrating lessons learned through practical projects into policy and decision-making. | **L** |
| 1. Financial
 | The **financial sustainability** is seen as critical. Risks, posed by the absence of structural UNEP support, the impact of the economic crisis, the low priority of environment, etc., have to be addressed and mitigated. | L |
| 1. Socio-political
 | The project contributes to **socio-political sustainability** through partnerships with and support by EU macro-regional strategies and funding programmes. As many projects are demand-led, activities are contributing to government and local level ownership.  | L |
| 1. Institutional framework
 |  The **institutional framework and governance sustainability** of the Convention process is vested in the commitment of the Parties and will sustain beyond the life of the project. The sustainability of UNEP Vienna – SCC as a multifunctional sub-regional office and Centre of Excellence in the UNEP family deserves to be fully recognized and supported. | L |
| 1. Environmental
 | As regards **environmental sustainability**, conflict between nature protection and economic development can be mitigated by appropriate measures and the project addresses these issues on several levels | HL |
| 1. Catalytic role and replication
 | Applied approaches are supporting institutional changes, catalyzing projects and stakeholder behaviour and the replication potential is extremely high. | HL |
| **E. Efficiency** | UNEP Vienna – SCC was efficient in managing project activities and successfully contributed to all planned objectives. | **S** |
| **F. Factors affecting project performance** |  | **S** |
| 1. Preparation and readiness
 |  Appreciating the flexible and adaptive approaches of the project, the design and planning was done according to UN standards in 2003, not applying the today’s methodology/terminology (designing the new project will take the current standards into account). In terms of readiness, the project was reacting on given opportunities at that time (proven by the success of achievement of results). | S |
| 1. Project implementation and management
 | The effectiveness of project management is generally well perceived and acknowledged. There is a motivated and qualified team in place. Nevertheless, there is clear indication, that staff is overloaded with work, which may have implications for the quality of work in future. Practical work could be further scaled up with stronger UNEP support and a strengthened mandate for the Vienna Office. | S |
| 1. Stakeholders participation and public awareness
 | The evaluation clearly demonstrates that UNEP Vienna – SCC is very good and effective in stakeholder involvement by providing a platform for combining national, sub-regional and global aspects and all activities are organized in a participatory way. But there is the need for improved participation mechanisms and awareness raising, as well as for strengthening stakeholder involvement on different levels.  | S |
| 1. Country ownership and driven-ness
 | The project was demand-led at the beginning and ownership and driven-ness were high among most national partner institutions, which slightly decreased during implementation in some of the countries, in others its constantly increasing, through continuous integration and increase of participation of other line ministries.  | S |
| 1. Financial planning and management
 | Financial operations are well managed, services provided by supporting Divisions are satisfactory, but administrative capacity in UNEP Vienna – SCC has to be strengthened.  | S |
| 1. UNEP supervision and backstopping
 |  The delegation of authority to UNEP Vienna – SCC has to be optimized and clarified following requests by the COP. The overall supervision and backstopping should be within the full powers and authority of Director UNEP ROE and Head of UNEP Administrative Service Center (ASC). | S |
| 1. Monitoring and Evaluation
 |  | **MS** |
| 1. M&E Design
 | At the beginning, the design of M & E was not according to professional standards used today, but was fully in line with UNEP requirements at the time of project design.  | MS |
| 1. Budgeting and funding for M&E activities
 | Costs for monitoring are included in staff time and are not separately specified. No funding for external evaluations were set aside. | MS |
| 1. M&E Plan Implementation
 | Originally, a monitoring plan was not included in the project document, but monitoring has improved over time. There is continuous and effective monitoring on several levels and progress and financial reports are accurate and in time. | S |
| **Overall project rating**  |  | **S** |

C. Lessons learned

1. The most important lessons learned are listed below and are captured and discussed in detail in the report.

Lesson 1: The importance of robust, operational and financially secured institutional frameworks to guarantee sustainable governance structures.

Lesson 2: Leadership and strong coordination at regional level is strengthening cooperation towards sustainable mountain development, and on national levels, it enhances ownership and sharing experiences among stakeholders.

Lesson 3: Capacity building through joint projects responding to and implementing policy decisions (‘learning by doing’) is leading to improved communication and contributing to awareness raising.

Lesson 4: Biodiversity protection is only possible through regional, integrated and participative approaches.

Lesson 5: Investing in catalytic interventions with the potential of transferability of results contributes to make mountain development in other regions of the world more environmentally sound.

Lesson 6: Project design, development and implementation should be subjected to administrative rules and procedures, which are flexible enough to allow for efficient delivery of services in a continuously changing process oriented environment.

Lesson 7: Ensuring the required stable organizational framework and strengthened and clarified institutional mandate of the Vienna Office as a prerequisite for efficient and effective management of a project.

Lesson 8: The Carpathian Convention is perceived by stakeholders as a neutral and consensual framework of cooperation jointly “owned” by all participating countries, organizations and institutions.

D. Recommendations

1. It has already been decided, that there will be a follow-up phase of the project with the same intentionality starting in 2015. The following recommendations should be considered in the development of the project document for the next phase of this process. Actionable proposals and responsibilities are proposed in section 5.3.
2. As regards **institutional arrangements**, it is important to have robust governance structures in place, and to continue to building up and effectively manage these structures. Independently of the Secretariat responsibilities, there is the clear need for UNEP to build on the de facto role and functions and track record of achievements of UNEP Vienna – SCC, and secure its multi-functional mandate as well as the necessary cash and in kind support, to ensure long-term presence in the region and as UNEP’s global resource centre for sustainable mountain development.
3. There is need for commitments from governments and political will to steer development towards sustainability. Parties to the Convention are encouraged to focus on strategic issues, to further develop and implement new Protocols, such as on agriculture, energy, mining, etc. The role of National Focal Points should be strengthened to effectively promote the Convention.
4. For the Balkan countries it is advisable to keep responding to current, actual country needs, because it is benefiting the countries, UNEP and in the long-term, the environment. A follow-up project should look for new partnerships and further support governments in the development and revision of strategic policy papers, as well as in the design and implementation of projects.
5. As regards **coordination, cooperation and networking** good (semi)legal instruments are in place and should be further used and strengthened, specifically looking for synergies and new partnerships and the negotiation of additional Memoranda of Understanding and Cooperation.
6. Although a lot has been done in the project, **capacity building** is an ongoing process. Capacity building efforts should be an important component in a follow-up project. Activities in this regard should be strengthened at different levels, and the support and collaboration with relevant UNEP Divisions should be invoked and secured, as there is still a long way to go to achieve the intended impacts as regards sustainable development and environmental protection.
7. There is a clear need for more **integrated approaches** to land management and the linkages between nature protection and other environmental management sectors. A follow-up project should support such approaches on policy and project level, ensuring a greater focus on land use and spatial planning and incorporating biodiversity aspects into other sectoral policies.
8. The project has proven to be successful with respect to **stakeholder participation**. Nevertheless, there is the need for continued strengthening of stakeholder involvement, specifically as regards the Civil Society Organizations. There are proposals to stronger involve the community level (county councils, mayors, business, etc.). Furthermore, there is the need to have a strategic approach towards the involvement of the European Commission, e.g. foster the relationship through participation in working groups and meetings, and to receive UNEP support for soliciting and obtaining EU involvement and support. It is very important to focus on cooperation with sub-national authorities and to create a flexible platform for their cooperation across borders.
9. Ensure a good mix of formal processes on policy level and **projects**, there should be a balance of top-down and bottom-up approaches linking institutional work with practical on the ground. Follow the current path in catalyzing projects, but improve project design and the elaboration process of projects by better involvement of partners from the very beginning and looking at their experience and real capacity for implementation. Both for the Carpathian Convention process and for projects in the Balkans, additional UNEP support, e.g. from the Environment Fund would be needed to enhance the project portfolio and UNEP’s reputation in the region.
10. **Sharing and learning from experience** made in the Carpathians and further building up the global mountain agenda has a high potential for promoting the Carpathian experience and enhancing UNEP’s role, but relevant activities would need a strengthened and clarified UNEP-internal mandate and support. On request of governments, UNEP Vienna – as a resource centre for sustainable mountain development – should be ready and enabled to support the negotiations for similar environmental agreements in other mountain regions, adapted to the political, ecological and economic situation.
11. There is the obvious need to invest more resources as regards **communication and awareness raising**. Specifically, the UNEP website providing information on activities other than the Convention has to be newly designed and expanded. Synergies with and support from partners should be thought upon as regards the promotion of the Convention and other mountain related activities. A strategic approach toward collaboration with municipalities and communities as regards awareness raising is needed.
12. In terms of **funding**, UNEP Vienna – SCC is heavily depending on project funding, which might not be sustainable on the long-term. There is the need to strengthen the involvement of participating countries and encourage governments – whenever possible – to increase their yearly contributions or provide additional in-kind support. As regards EU money the question of co-financing, which is sometimes very difficult to arrange for partner organizations, should be taken seriously and solutions found. There is also the need for increased, predictable and stable financial support from UNEP and for making internal UNEP administrative procedures more compatible with donor procedures. With respect to UNEP Vienna’s role for liaison work and strengthening the mountain partnership, there is the need for additional resources to effectively implement activities and to sustain the outcomes. There is also the need to strengthening the explicit mandate of the Vienna office for liaison with Vienna Based Organizations.
13. With respect to the **performance of the Secretariat**, although there is a qualified and motivated team in place and the project management is well perceived, there is the clear indication that the exceptional wide range of activities cannot be effectively and efficiently managed with the current resources, meaning that human and financial resources should be adequate to the numerous tasks.

# Introduction

1. This report presents the Terminal Evaluation of the project ‘*Best practice of sub-regional cooperation: Partnership for the Support of the Carpathian Convention and other Mountain Regions’.* This project was initiated in October 2003 and has undergone several revisions to date. The project duration is 123 months, and the completion date is December 2014, with a budget amounting to USD 6,310,246.00 $. Table 1 below shows some of the project details.

Table 1: Project Identification Table

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **UNEP PIMS ID:** | 01294 | **IMIS number:** | 3477 (CB5023-04-82) |
| **Sub-programme** | (2010-2011 & 2012-2013) SP4 Environmental Governance | **Expected Accomplishment** | (2010-2011 & 2012-2013) EA c  |
| **Managing Division** | UNEP Regional Support Office (RSO)[[2]](#footnote-2) | **Linkage with PoW Outputs** | 2010/11-4322010/11-4342012/13-4312012/13-4322012/13-434 |
| **Geographical Scope:** | Regional | **Region:** | Europe |
| **Participating countries:** | Austria, Italy, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovak Republic, Ukraine, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Slovenia, Switzerland, possible extension to other Alpine, South East European and other mountain regions of Europe. |
| **Expected Start Date:** | October 2003 | **UNEP approval date:** | 16 October 2009 |
| **Actual start date:** | October 2003 | **Planned duration:** | 123 months |
| **Intended completion date:** | December 2013 | **Actual completion date:** | December 2013 |
| **Planned project budget at approval** | $6,310,246.00  | **Secured budget\*:** | $6,310,246.00  |
| **Mid-term review/evaluation****(actual date):** | Not conducted | **No. of revisions:** | 19 |
| **Date of last Steering Committee meeting:** | N/A | **Date of last Revision:** | February2014 |

# Evaluation Background

## Objectives and purpose

1. The terminal evaluation of the project ‘*Best practice of sub-regional cooperation: Partnership for the support of the Carpathian Convention and other Mountain Regions’* was carried out in line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy[[3]](#footnote-3) and the UNEP Evaluation Manual[[4]](#footnote-4) between May and ….. 2014 with an input of 20 working days. The goal of the evaluation was assessing the project performance in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, determining outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability.
2. The purpose of the evaluation was two-fold:

(i) to provide strategic and selective evidence of results meeting accountability requirements, and

(ii) to promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, governments, international and national executing agencies.

1. Therefore, the evaluation looked at the performance of the project in delivering services, short-comings in project design and implementation, and identified lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation. The evaluation focused on a certain set of key questions, based on the project’s intended outcomes and impacts (Annex B).

## Methodological approach

1. The findings of the evaluation are based on a desk review of relevant documents, an online questionnaire (for guiding questions see Annex B) which was sent to a selected group of people, and – to the extent possible under the limited resources available for conducting this evaluation – interviews with selected key stakeholders (list of respondents see Annex C).
2. An introductory meeting was held with staff of the UNEP Vienna – SCC with the objective to discuss the scope of the evaluation, agree on the working arrangement, timing and deliverables following the procedures of the UNEP Evaluation Office (EO) in Nairobi.
3. The first draft of the inception report was delivered on 27 June, 2014 and comments made by the Evaluation Office were incorporated. This is the first draft of the terminal evaluation report that has been prepared for circulation and review by key stakeholders in order to obtain their views on the findings and capture these in the final evaluation report.
4. The project is scheduled to expire by 31 December 2014. Although this is a terminal evaluation usually done at the end of the project, it takes place before the project end. The preliminary evaluation findings were presented to over 200 stakeholders at the Fourth Conference of the Parties of the Carpathian Convention (COP4) that took place in September2014, where important decisions on the further course of action as regards this project were taken. The document can be found on the Convention’s web site[[5]](#footnote-5) ([www.carpathianconvention.org](http://www.carpathianconvention.org)).

## Limitations to the Evaluation

1. It has to be understood that the project evaluation covers more than ten years of operation of a project, which in the course of its implementation underwent many changes and adaptations, such as the adaptation of the Convention process to the decisions of the COP, and changes as regards the mandate of UNEP Vienna – SCC, etc. (cf. section 3.6).
2. The original project document proposed that the project would be jointly evaluated by the project coordinator and the desk assessment team; neither a mid-term evaluation nor an independent terminal evaluation had been foreseen. Consequently, only very limited funds could be made available for conducting this terminal evaluation.
3. Because of the financial constraints, time constraints, and in light of the huge number of activities in a continuously changing institutional, administrative and financial context, not all projects carried out or supported by UNEP Vienna – Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention that are likely to contribute to expected outcomes and intended impacts have been studied in detail. The consultant tried to overcome this deficiency by asking appropriate questions during the interviews.
4. For similar reasons, regarding financial issues, it was not possible to study all financial reports in detail (already with 19 revisions) and to provide a detailed breakdown of financial figures according to specific budget lines.
5. Furthermore, it is only possible to present a desk-based reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC)[[6]](#footnote-6) and impact-pathway without any direct involvement and input from stakeholders. Due to the resource limitations, there was no opportunity for the evaluator to present the draft ToC prepared in the inception phase to stakeholders and to discuss their understanding of the project logic.
6. Although the project has access to a huge network of people, the on-line questionnaire has been sent out only to beneficiaries, project partners and a small group of selected stakeholders, as the consultant would not have been able to analyze hundreds of replies due to time limitations. Furthermore, no country/field visits were scheduled, only selected people were interviewed either personally (based in Vienna) or through skype calls.

# The Project Background

## Context

1. Before and during the International Year of the Mountains (IYM) in 2002, UNEP’s mountain-related work was coordinated jointly by the UNEP Regional Office for Europe (ROE) and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC). This was based on the UNEP-wide paper entitled ‘The UNEP contribution to the IYM 2002’ (March, 2001) followed by a strategy paper entitled ‘UNEP before and during the IYM’ (May, 2004). During that period, ROE serviced at request, negotiations on (i) a Central Asian Mountain Charter (request by Kyrgyzstan), (ii) a Charter/Convention for the Protection of the Caucasus Mountains (request by Armenia), and (iii) a Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (request by Ukraine).
2. Partly due to a lack of resources the Central Asian Mountain Charter never materialized. Cooperation on the mountain ranges of the Caucasus was under discussion following a Meeting of Ministers and High level Officials of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Russian Federation and Turkey that was hosted by Liechtenstein in Vaduz in November 2007. These discussions were serviced by UNEP Vienna, but despite a number of meetings only little progress was recorded due to the political situations and tensions in the Caucasus region.
3. The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) was adopted and signed by the seven Parties (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine) in May 2003 in Kyiv, Ukraine, and entered into force in January 2006. The region hosts up to 20 million people and contains Europe’s greatest reserve of pristine forests. It is a refuge for brown bears, wolves, bison, lynx, eagles and some 200 unique plant species found nowhere else in the world. It also plays a vital role in ensuring Europe’s fresh water supplies.
4. The Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Carpathian Convention meets every two (now three) years and provides guidance to its inter-sessional Implementation Committee and a suite of Working Groups. To date it has met four times, in 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2014 (cf. section 4.2). Milestones reached at these meetings include, among others: the adoption of Protocols on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity, Sustainable Forest Management, and Sustainable Tourism, and Transport; the establishment of the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas; and the development and implementation of major programs and projects on *inter alia* spatial planning and bio-region protection.
5. In adopting the Convention, the Carpathian countries called for a UNEP serviced Interim Secretariat. The Mountain Partnership[[7]](#footnote-7), officially launched at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg (September, 2002), underlined the catalytic role UNEP could play in making mountain development environmentally sound. UNEP Vienna was thereafter officially opened on 15 July 2004 (see Annex H) with the mandate to: act as the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention; perform the role of an environmental focal point within the Mountain Partnership Secretariat; promote cooperation in Central and South Eastern Europe; and serve as UNEP’s focal point for Austria-based international organizations. Since 2004, the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention has been administered by UNEP Vienna – an out-posted Office of UNEP's Regional Office for Europe located in Geneva.
6. In 2003, UNEP ROE organized the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit. A multi-stakeholder Secretariat of the Mountain Partnership was established in Rome with the direct participation of UNEP through the Vienna Office, which acted as the Environmental Reference Centre of the Mountain Partnership. UNEP Vienna acted until 2011 as the UNEP corporate Mountain Focal Point and since then as the alternate Mountain Focal Point.
7. In December 2004, UNEP through its office in Vienna was requested by the Minster of Environment of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to ‘facilitate intergovernmental consultations aiming at enhanced regional cooperation for the protection and sustainable development of mountain regions in South Eastern Europe’. Consequently, two meetings were organized by UNEP Vienna – SCC, after which the initiative de facto was submerged in the ministerial process on the ‘Sustainable Development of the Dinaric Arc and its Neighbouring Regions’. Although there has been no tangible follow up at governmental level to date, the cooperation has led to the establishment of a support unit for the Dinaric Arc Initiative[[8]](#footnote-8) in UNEP Vienna.
8. UNEP Vienna – SCC, based on the project objective of facilitating environmental cooperation in South East Europe (SEE), successfully established SEE as a new sub-regional initiative under the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC)[[9]](#footnote-9) for the South East European region. UNEP Vienna also became the provider of the Regional Desk Officer (RDO) for ENVSEC in SEE and successfully raised resources for a sub-regional programme on transboundary mountain biodiversity, as well as hotspots from the montana/mining industry. In 2009, the ENVSEC Management Board passed the main RDO function to the Regional Environmental Center REC in Szentendre, which posed considerable challenges for UNEP to keep its leading position in the Balkans, but were overcome through the development of a bundle of country-level projects by UNEP Vienna.
9. Because of its emerging presence, role and expertise in the region UNEP Vienna – ISSC serviced and is servicing an increasing number of projects provided by / through UNEP, the SEE and the Balkans, and as a consequence established an office in Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina, as a small project outfit of the Regional Office for Europe.
10. The project is executed in the Danube-Carpathian region, in Balkan countries in South-Eastern Europe and furthermore, is bringing inputs to other mountain regions, such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, Andes, etc. Target groups include, among others: governmental institutions, state agencies, international institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), and the scientific community.

## Project objectives and components

1. According to background documents, the original title of the project was: *‘Best practice of sub-regional cooperation: Partnership for the support of the Carpathian Convention’* (without an outreach to other regions). The original Project Document (PD) with a project time frame from 1 October 2003 to 30 September 2006, focused on the implementation of the Carpathian Convention and described the following objectives:
2. To be a permanent framework of cooperation
3. Enhance implementation of existing instruments
4. Stimulate partnership and attract donors
5. Prevent rather than cure
6. Foster integration and coordination between sectors
7. The original PD furthermore described the needs, results, outputs and activities. In the evaluator’s opinion the needs can be interpreted as intended impacts and there is confusion as regards the terminology, e.g. the results and partly also the outputs and activities are described as objectives.
8. With the establishment of UNEP Vienna – SCC in 2004, the scope of the project was broadened. UNEP Vienna – SCC was given the additional mandate to:
* perform the role of environmental focal point within the Mountain Partnership Secretariat;
* promote cooperation in Central and South Eastern Europe; and
* serve as UNEP’s focal point for Austria-based international organizations.
1. Furthermore, UNEP Vienna – SCC is also working to transfer its experiences in response to sub-regional or transboundary challenges to other mountainous regions. The project documents describe **four main outputs**:
2. UNEP programme support to the Interim Secretariat of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians strengthened.
3. Strengthened Environmental Focal Point mechanism for the Secretariat of the Mountain Partnership.
4. Focal point mechanism for cooperation with Central and South-Eastern European (SEE) countries, and sub-regional Focal Point for South Eastern Europe enhanced.
5. Liaison between UNEP and organizations based in the region supporting in-region UNEP action strengthened.
6. The measure in which these outputs served as a framework for the actual activities under the project has to be evaluated against the changes in the institutional and country context referred to in section 3.6.
7. As stated by former and current UNEP staff, the project was originally designed to be adaptive to the needs of the Parties and has been seen as a long-term process. Therefore, no milestones and indicators were described in the original project document to keep the flexibility. Only since 2011, have the supplement project documents included a Logical Framework presenting milestones and indicators to monitor the stated project outputs.
8. Implementation milestones can be divided according to the four main outputs as described above:
9. Progress reports and decisions including Ministerial Declaration of COP1, COP2 and COP3 reveal a huge number of achieved milestones: amongst them the adoption of Protocols, which are the most important means in order to complete and facilitate the implementation of the general principles constituted in the Convention itself; the establishment of the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA), constituting a thematic network of cooperation of mountain protected areas; the Carpathian Wetlands Initiative (CWI), facilitating the cooperation between the CC and the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention); and the development and implementation of major programmes and projects on *inter alia* spatial planning and biodiversity protection.
10. Project reports describe the achievement of milestones and several interview partners (e.g. ADA, Austrian MoE, UNEP staff) refer to milestones as regards the Mountain Partnership: UNEP representation in Mountain Partnership events (World Mountain Forum), Mountain Side Event in Rio 2012, Open Working Group in New York – climate change and disaster risk reduction, thematic mountain policy briefs, activities in the Caucasus, etc.
11. As regards cooperation in Central and South-Eastern Europe, the ENVSEC Initiative was the most important instrument. Implementation of the project was led by UNEP Vienna – SCC and statements of the donor agency ADA – the Austrian Development Agency – prove the good cooperation and the timely delivery of the milestones. Other milestones include, the publication of the report on Climate Change Adaptations in SEE, transboundary consultation meetings in Sharr (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – FYROM), in Prokletie /Bjehket e Nemuna (Albania – AL, Montenegro – MNE, and Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/99), and the development and submission of country level follow-up projects (Global Environmental Facility – GEF projects).
12. Milestones related to the liaison function of the office, including UNEP contribution to the World Environmental Day, yearly International Mountain Day celebrations, cooperative activities between International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and UNEP, etc. have been fully achieved.

## Implementation arrangements

1. As regards implementation arrangements for the CC, the rules of procedures and financial rules for the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Carpathian Convention were agreed during COP 1 in December 2006. The COP meetings – providing guidance to its inter-sessional Implementation Committee and the Working Groups – took place in Kyiv (December 2006), Bucharest (June 2008), Bratislava (May 2011) and Mikulov (September 2014).
2. The Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee (CCIC) consists of representatives of the CC and meets at least once every year. It oversees the preparation of the political decisions of the COP. This includes the consideration, development and recommendation for adoption of additional Protocols, strategies, or other measures and recommendations relevant for the achievement of the objectives of the Convention. Furthermore, the CCIC monitors compliance of the contracting Parties with the provisions of the Convention and its Protocols, and prepares the meetings of the COP. The Parties also monitor the performance of the (interim) Secretariat on a continuous basis.
3. Thematic Working Groups (WG) were established in accordance with the Convention and related Protocols and are composed of the National Focal Points (NFPs) of the CC and/or persons nominated by them. The meetings of the WGs are open for observers, representatives of different partner organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The WGs provide technical assistance, information and advice on specific issues related to the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians. To date eight Working Groups have been established and are operational: 1) WG on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity, 2) WG on Spatial Development, 3) WG on Agriculture and Rural Development, 4) WG on Sustainable Forest Management, 5) WG on Sustainable Industry, Energy, Transport and Infrastructure, 6) WG on Sustainable Tourism, 7) WG on Cultural Heritage and Traditional Knowledge, and 8) WG on Adaptation to Climate Change.
4. At the request of Contracting Parties, UNEP Vienna has been serving as the Interim Secretariat for the CC since 2004 as an out-posted office of UNEP’s ROE located in Geneva and hosted by Austria in the Vienna International Centre. The core team consists of three UNEP employees (Head of UNEP Vienna – SCC, Programme Officer and Financial Assistant). These employees are supported by one staff member seconded by the European Academy (EURAC). Currently eight professional and support staff are working on a consultancy basis (UNOPS, UNEP) and are financed through projects. Moreover, one shared officer UNEP-GRID Arendal[[10]](#footnote-10) based in Vienna is supporting the international mountain work.
5. Since the opening of the UNEP Vienna – SCC, the office has been ensuring UNEP’s liaison with the Secretariats of the Alpine Convention, the International Partnership for Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions (hosted by FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) and the Danube Protection Convention; it also assists UNEP in its contacts and collaboration with the Regional Environmental Centre (REC). According to a memorandum dated 24 September 2013, UNEP Vienna – SCC fulfils liaison functions for Vienna-based international organizations. In addition, UNEP Vienna – SCC is acting as a Focal Point for the ENVSEC Initiative in the Balkans and plays a major role in promoting cooperation between and implementing the UNEP Programme of Work (PoW) in the countries of SEE and the Danube-Carpathian region.
6. By decisions of COP4, UNEP Vienna has been formally designated as the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention. In case the Parties would agree on another location for the Secretariat the situation will be reviewed at COP5.

## Project finances

1. Financial figures from UNEP Vienna – SCC show a total project budget of US$ 6,310,246[[11]](#footnote-11). The ToR document mentions in-kind contributions from UNEP, which are used to cover the cost of core operations of UNEP Vienna – SCC. According to UNEP ROE administration staff, this ‘in-kind contribution’ refers to an estimate of de facto services provided by UNEP for the project and it is therefore difficult to assess it in absolute numbers. Going through the financial Original Project Document 2003, only US$15,000 is mentioned under ‘in-kind contributions (which reflects the three months salary of the project coordinator in the beginning of the project). The majority of activities are funded through external donors, and projects are being implemented with or through a number of partner organizations and the Vienna office is performing either a leading, coordinating or cooperating role. Table 2 shows the planned project budget (originally for the period 2003 – 2006), the planned project budget as per the regular revisions and the total funds available. The final exact figures will only be available once the project closure is finalized.

Table 2: Project costs

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Planned Project Budget (Original Project Document for 2003 – 2006)** | **$ 534,090** (plus 15,000 in-kind) |
| **External Project Funding** | **$ 5,761.156** |
| **Planned Project Budget (as per approval process):** | **$ 6,310,246.00** |
| **Co-Financing Total:** | **$ 0.00**  |
| **Total Funds Programmed (annual expenditures + current allotment):** | **$ 6,310,246.00** |

Source: UNEP Vienna – SCC

1. The project is financed through counterpart contributions. UNEP provides in-kind support through staff (administration officer), as well as a project coordinator from UNEP/UNOPS for the first three months of operation.
2. After the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention, the Carpathian countries agreed to support the interim services of UNEP Vienna – SCC with yearly voluntary financial contributions, which would be up to EUR 198,500 or US$ 269,335 (rate 0.737) in total per year.
3. The project underwent 19 revisions mostly to include new earmarked contributions received as the project progressed, as well as to amend timelines, activities and outputs. The project also experienced various revisions to cost estimates in order to take into account the difficulties encountered by UNEP to fully meet the funding requirements estimated at design, and the savings made during the implementation of the project.
4. All funds earmarked as project funds include also State contributions and were handled as such prior to the establishment of the Trust Fund (cf. para 70).

Table 3: Project costs and co-financing table

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Component** | **Amount in US $** | **Percentage** |
| Earmarked contributions from governments, partner organizations, EU Programmes and private sector | 6,310,246 | 99,75 |
| Total direct costs of the project | n/a |  |
| 2% of direct cost (programmesupport)????? | n/a |  |
| In-kind contributions UNEP | 15,000 | 0,25 |
| Environmental Fund | 0 | 0 |
|  |  |  |
| **Total** | **6,310,246 + 15,000** | **100** |

Source: UNEP Vienna – SCC

## Project partners

Project partners have included the governments of Carpathian and Balkan countries and all UNEP Divisions. External partners include the following:

* The Alpine Convention
* The European Academy (EURAC) in Bolzano, offering scientific inputs, press and PR, logistics and meetings, and is part of the Secretariat arrangement in Vienna by having placed an out posted EURAC staff member in Vienna in support of the Secretariat;
* World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) International Danube Carpathian Programme, working on issues of conservation, communication, public participation and awareness raising;
* International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR);
* European Commission (EC) as a partner and an important donor;
* ENVSEC partners;
* GRID Arendal;
* GRID Wasrsaw;
* European Environment Agency (EEA);
* FAO Budapest;
* World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

## Changes in the design during implementation

1. The project underwent many changes and adaptation during the last ten years. Linked to the changing landscape of the institutional context the project over time covered different countries and groups of countries, both within the SEE region and in a global context. Some examples of these changes include the following:
* The development and adoption of Protocols to the Convention on Biodiversity, Forestry, Tourism and Transport opened avenues of contact, cooperation and support – in cash and/or in kind – from/to a great variety of organizations and entities active in these areas, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), FAO Budapest, UNWTO, Alpine Convention, ICPDR, WWF, EURAC and the European Commission. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), cooperative projects and activities with these organizations and entities emerged and were implemented;
* Following the International Year of Mountains and based on constitutional decisions regarding the establishment of the International Mountain Partnership, UNEP Vienna – SCC was designated and acted as the global focal point for environment in the IYM Secretariat, a role which in preparation of RIO +20 was claimed by UNEP Nairobi but as far as the activities are concerned, left in the hands of UNEP Vienna – SCC as the de facto Centre of Excellence on these matters;
* Following the establishment of the Environment and Security Initiative, UNEP Vienna – SCC was the designated secretariat focal point for SEE, a role which later was shifted to the REC, leaving however, part of the implementation work in the hands of UNEP Vienna – SCC;
* Based on requests of individuals from Central Asian, the Caucasus region and SEE countries – generated in the context of the IYM – UNEP Vienna – SCC with the support of Italy and some other donors serviced negotiations and implemented related work towards the development of legal instruments for mountain protection and development in these regions;
* Because of its emerging presence, role and expertise in the region, UNEP Vienna is servicing an increasing number of projects provided by / through UNEP, the SEE and the Balkans, and as a consequence has established an office in Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina, as a project outfit of the Regional Office for Europe;
* The project is executed in the Danube-Carpathian region, in Balkan countries in South-Eastern Europe and brings inputs also to other mountain regions, e.g. Caucasus, Central Asia, Andes, etc.
1. At COP3 members agreed to establish a Trust Fund[[12]](#footnote-12) (Annex I) to cover the costs of administering and meeting the objectives of the Carpathian Convention and related Protocols, including the functioning of its Secretariat, and requested the Executive Director of UNEP to assume the responsibility of administering the Trust Fund.
2. With the establishment of the Trust Fund for the Carpathian Convention, the core secretariat services provided by UNEP Vienna – SCC were separated from the project and the contributions from the seven Carpathian Governments are now handled through the Trust Fund under the management authority of the Carpathian Convention Secretariat.
3. This means that this project (and the follow up project) will exclusively focus on UNEP support to the Programme of Work of the Carpathian Convention, to the work of UNEP Vienna in South-East Europe and other mountain regions including related to the International Mountain Partnership, and to enable UNEP Vienna to exercise its liaison function. A project concept according to this new restricted scope has already been approved as part of the UNEP Programme Framework and will be developed fully to be operational by the end of 2014. The secretariat services for the Carpathian Convention provided by its Secretariat hosted by UNEP Vienna are therefore handled as part and parcel of the services which the COP requested UNEP to provide to this MEA.
4. A further specification of the request by the Carpathian Convention to UNEP for possible continuation of secretariat services was made at COP4 in September 2014.

## Reconstructed Theory of Change of the project

1. The GEF Evaluation Office developed an approach to assess the likelihood of impact. Annex 6 of the ToR on *‘Introduction to Theory of Change / Impact Pathways, the ROtI Method and the ROtI Results Score Sheet’* describes the Theory of Change (ToC) approach. The ToC depicts the causal pathways from project outputs, over outcomes towards impact. It also depicts any intermediate changes required between project outcomes and impact and defines the external factors that influence change along these pathways – referred to as either drivers (factors which the project has a certain level of control) or assumptions (factors beyond project’s realm of influence). The application of this methodology has three distinct stages:
	1. Identifying the project’s intended impacts
	2. Review of the project’s logical framework
	3. Analysis and modelling of the project’s outcomes-impact pathways: reconstruction of the project’s Theory of Change
2. Using the ToC methodology, it is possible to assess to what extent the project has to date contributed towards achieving the intended impact. The following diagram (Figure 1), taken from the ToR, outlines a generic ‘impact pathway’ schematic showing causal pathways from outputs, through intermediate states, assumptions and impact drivers, and over to the intended Impact. (Annex J also depicts a reconstructed ToC developed by the Evaluation Office).

**Figure 1: A schematic ‘impact pathway’[[13]](#footnote-13)**



1. The Logical Framework of the project is the primary source of information for understanding the project logic. As the Logical Framework provided in the project documents is very basic, there was a need to reconstruct the project logic retrospectively. The current analysis was done based on available information, project documentation and discussions with selected key UNEP Vienna – SCC staff during personal interviews. Therefore, the methodology was only briefly discussed during an initial meeting with selected staff of the UNEP Vienna – SCC and the evaluator elaborated a desk-based identification of the project’s impact pathways during the inception phase of the evaluation.
2. Neither the original project document (PD) nor any of the revision documents define the intended impact of the project. The original PD mentions the need to “*ensure effective regional cooperation for the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians”* (covering only the implementation of the Carpathian Convention), of which– if successfully implemented – can be interpreted as intended impact.
3. As the scope of the project extended during implementation, using information in relevant documents, the evaluator formulated the intended impact as follows: ***‘Sustainable development and environmental protection of mountain regions through strengthened regional and inter-regional cooperation in Central and South-Eastern Europe with an outreach to other mountain regions in the world’,***which was discussed and agreed upon with the Head of UNEP Vienna – SCC.

# Evaluation Findings

## Strategic relevance

### Relevance to UNEP strategies and programmes

1. If one considers the broad range of issues and areas addressed by the CC and its Protocols, as well as the scope and content of work under the other components of the project (capacity building and technical assistance to countries of the Balkans and SEE; liaison with Vienna-based organizations; and environmental inputs and contributions to mountain related policies and programmes in other regions of the world), the project touches upon and has relevance for a great number of elements of UNEP’s MTS 2010-2013 and its biennial PoW.
2. As regards consistency with UNEP’s and other partners’ mandates and policies, the desk study as well as statements made by UNEP staff reveal the clear evidence that the project is in line with UNEP’s PoW As regards ecosystem management and environmental governance, the project fully contributed to the objectives outlined in the Medium-term Strategy 2010 – 2013, and the project also contributes to the objectives and expected accomplishments described in the current MTS 2014 - 2017[[14]](#footnote-14).
3. The proposed follow-up project will also remain relevant under the MTS 2014 – 2017 as integrated approaches to sustainable development are more urgent than ever. Global emerging issues are covered by the project, such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, integrating biodiversity across the ecological and economic agendas, and reconnecting science and policy.
4. Starting in 2003, the project was seen as part of UNEP’s Environmental Governance thematic priority, contributing also to UNEP’s biannual programmes of work and the Montevideo Programme on Environmental Law. According to background documents, the project corresponds to UNEP’s core mandate to provide early warning and assessment, to foster regional cooperation, and to assist governments in the development of international environmental law. The high strategic relevance of the project has been confirmed by the fact that it led to the successful conclusion of a sub-regional, Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) – the Carpathian Convention –, which was signed at the Fifth Ministerial Conference ‘Environment for Europe’ held in Kiev, Ukraine in May 2003.

### Relevance to global policies and strategies

1. The project and its activities interact with major global policies and strategies in fields, such as biodiversity, climate change, natural resources management, environment and security, and mountain development, as specified in the articles of the CC. Several interviewees referred specifically to the Convention on Biological Diversity and its PoW on Mountain Biodiversity and related events in Nagoya, Japan (2010) and Rio+20 in 2012.
2. Also in the Balkans, several examples can be listed, amongst them: support to selected Balkan countries for the Revision of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs); Development of Fifth National Report to the CBD in Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH); and support for development of National Action Programs aligned to the UNCCD 10-Year Strategy and Reporting Process under UNCCD in BiH, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRoM) and Montenegro (MNE). Furthermore, UNEP Vienna – SCC signed Memoranda of Understanding with CBD (together with the Alpine Convention) and the Ramsar Convention.

### Regional policy relevance

1. Two main components of the project – Carpathian Convention and Protocols and ENVSEC – focus entirely on sub-regions in pan Europe and were constituted as part of the Inter-governmental Environment for Europe process, which – through conferences and other activities – sets the stage for regional and sub-regional policies and programmes in the Pan European region.
2. Statements made by persons who have been involved in the preparation and negotiation process of the CC reveal that the project objectives were realistic and were agreed and approved by the Parties to the Convention. According to current and former UNEP staff the project was very timely, responding to the real needs at that time.
3. The high interest and need for a regional cooperation agreement (as expressed by government as well as NGO representatives), the momentum of the Bucharest Summit[[15]](#footnote-15), and the dynamics during the negotiation process confirm the project’s relevance at the national and regional level in the area of protection and sustainable development of the Carpathian mountains. Another factor was Ukraine’s interest to finalize negotiations and to have the convention ready for signature at the Kiev Environmental Ministers Conference.
4. The project builds on existing initiatives (e.g. the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative – CEI), policies, programmes and project documents prove the linkages to European Strategies, e.g. the Danube[[16]](#footnote-16) and the future Alpine Strategies. Numerous projects under the umbrella of UNEP Vienna – SCC demonstrate the complementarity with other ongoing and planned UNEP projects (among others, the ENVSEC Initiative, Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund/MDGF[[17]](#footnote-17) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and One UN[[18]](#footnote-18)), and contribute also to GEF focal areas strategies and priorities.
5. As regards steering cooperation amongst countries, interviewees had different perceptions and it became clear that the subject cannot be generalized and has to be analyzed on different levels (governmental, thematic and project level). A Romanian official perceives that it is too early to see results, but the process, started through UNEP support has good perspectives. The importance of establishing a governance structure is highlighted by several interviewees. The same perception was expressed by a Czech representative, mentioning increasing cooperation and information exchange between the Czech Republic and Poland.
6. Also UNEP Vienna – SCC staff see clear indications of increased cooperation and interaction, mainly on expert level, e.g. regular talks between Poland, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic, joint initiation of projects (currently a project related to ‘improving the ecological connectivity in mountain regions in the Danube Basin’ is under development). According to interviewees this is due to the very open approach, such as COP meetings, which are open to everyone, and cooperation improved even beyond the implementation of the CC. For example, before government representatives attend global meetings, consultations are organized amongst them as part of the preparation.
7. Project partners are supporting arguments for increased cooperation on thematic issues, e.g. activities of the CNPA or the development of the Carpathian Red List of Species, the Work Package on connectivity within the BioREGIO Carpathian Project. The fact that countries are requesting UNEP Vienna – SCC support, is supporting the argument of the need for steering cooperation in the region.
8. Steering cooperation in the Balkans is slightly different than in the Carpathians, as there is no mountain agreement in place and the area is larger and more scattered. According to an Austrian donor organization, however, UNEP contributed a lot to improving and steering cooperation, for example through the ENVSEC Initiative. UNEP Vienna – SCC staff also state increased cooperation through joint efforts, partnership approaches and transboundary activities e.g. feasibility studies for transboundary protected areas[[19]](#footnote-19) and a report summarizing results and providing recommendations[[20]](#footnote-20)*.*
9. Worth to mention is the successful cooperation between entities in BiH due to UNEP facilitation – the first ever State of Environment Report was elaborated, published in 2012 and adopted by both Parties – which is a major political success reported by a government official from BiH.
10. The rating on ‘strategic relevance’ is **highly satisfactory.**

## Achievement of outputs

1. The project documents list four project outputs:
2. UNEP programme support to the Interim Secretariat of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians
3. Facilitation and support to inter-regional and global mountain partnerships
4. Provision of technical assistance and advisory services to countries in Central and South-East Europe for sub-regional and transboundary cooperation
5. Liaison to relevant organizations in the region
6. According to progress reports and information provided by UNEP staff, the project successfully produced the programmed activities and outputs as outlined in UNEP’s internal planning documents, both as regards the adopted PoW of the CC and UNEP’s PoW. In total UNEP Vienna – SCC organized and/or attended 143 events, such as conferences, regional workshops, working group meetings, steering group meetings, stakeholder meetings, consultation meetings, etc. (Annex D). Furthermore, the Secretariat played an important role, either as the lead or as project partner, in 19 projects covering activities in the Carpathians and Alps, and as regards the Balkans, various projects under the ENVSEC Initiative and 7 GEF project (Annex E). The number of publications produced is also considerable, over 50 different publications are available, ranging from reports, handbooks, feasibility studies, leaflets, etc. (Annex F).
7. Supporting statements as regards quality, usefulness and timeliness of the project outputs were made by several interviewees. An Austrian government official emphasized UNEP Vienna – SCC’s good expertise and know-how related to environment and sustainable development in mountain regions, which is of utmost importance for regional development cooperation. Several interviewees referred to the high quality of experience exchange between Alps and Carpathians as a consequence of a series of joint meetings, workshops and projects.
8. COP1, held in Kiev, Ukraine in December 2006 adopted 19 decisions, a Ministerial Declaration, rules of procedures, financial rules and a report on credentials by the Executive Secretary. COP2 was organized in Bucharest, Romania in June 2008, and 16 decisions were adopted and the Ministerial Declaration was published. In May 2011, COP3 took place in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, where 16 decisions and the Ministerial Declaration emerged. In September 2014, COP 4 was held in Mikulov, Czech Republic, adopting 19 decisions. All the decisions were and are implemented, with progress reports provided to the CCIC and the COPs and all documents are available on the Convention’s website: <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/>.
9. The Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) and the Carpathian Wetlands Initiative (CWI) were established and key documents developed and approved, amongst them a Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for the Implementation of the Biodiversity Protocol, the CNPA Medium Term Strategy, Action Plan for a Regional Framework Approach for Promotion of Renewable Energies in the Carpathian Region, Sustainable Tourism Strategy, Climate Change Strategic Agenda, etc. (also available on the Convention’s website).
10. Some examples for other achievements of the project in producing its planned outputs include:
* UNEP Memorandum as of 24 September 2013, stating that UNEP Vienna – SCC has been included in the revised UNEP organizational chart – besides other roles – as a Liaison Office for Vienna-based international organizations;
* Finalization and operationalization of an inter-regional mountain project managed by UNEP Vienna – SCC on behalf of Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI);
* Successful organization of the Workshop on the Dinaric Arc Initiative, as well as the ongoing provision of UNEP SEE focal point in the ENVSEC Secretariat;
* Development of a Draft Practical Arrangement between UNEP and IAEA;
* Yearly celebration events on ‘World Environment Day’ (June 5), ‘International Mountain Day’ (December 11), and ‘International Day for Biological Diversity’ (May 22) in the Vienna International Centre;
* Cooperation with UNIDO and UNODC was supported by UNEP Vienna – SCC on many occasions, with OSCE – mainly in connection to ENVSEC Initiative.
1. Original ideas for a possible regional instrument were mainly related to biodiversity issues, as reported in NGO documents. But already during the first steps in the negotiation process, it became clear that the Convention is implemented in countries with economies in transition with fast developments as regards transport, agriculture, mining, etc., which partly have negative impacts on the environment. Based on the example of the Alpine Convention, the CC took the concept as a framework for a regional environmental agreement, setting general objectives and principles for environmental protection and sustainable development, which will be tailored into obligatory goals or measures in the so-called Protocols for specific sectors. In the evaluator’s opinion, threats to biodiversity have partly already been addressed in the Articles of the Convention, as the Protocols respond directly to the main issues in the region, such as forestry, transport, tourism, etc. NGO representatives are seeing the threats addressed mainly in policy papers, but state that implementation is week or absent.
2. Several interviewees consider that threats and root causes have only been partly addressed. Main progress has been made in terms of commitments to biodiversity protection, but the key to securing this protection lies in addressing pressures in other areas which are often sensitive issues, such as development of infrastructure for transportation and energy, mining issues, etc. There were statements made by UNEP staff that root causes are only addressed to the extent possible in the capacity of the project. They are mostly outside of environmental aspects, often related to social issues, which can only be tackled in cooperation with others due to the limited UNEP mandate, at least for the Carpathians. Therefore, only ‘soft measures’ are applied, not dealing with investment projects.
3. To successfully achieve the planned outputs, the project has to be adaptive. During previous years, impacts of climate change appeared on the environmental agenda and according to UNEP staff the project reacted to the changing conditions and adapted its approach. Appropriate measures – to the extent possible – have been introduced, e.g. COP3 adopted the Working Group on climate change and supporting projects are being implemented, such as Carpatclim, Carpivia, CarpatCC (see the list of project in Annex E). In this respect there is close cooperation with relevant initiatives in the Alps. During COP4 the ‘Joint Alpine – Carpathian Statement on Adaptation to Climate Change’ and the ‘Climate Change Strategic Agenda’ was adopted.
4. There is a general agreement that biodiversity protection and functioning ecological networks are important elements for achieving sustainable development and the topic of ecological connectivity becomes more and more important. The ‘green infrastructure’ is under imminent threat from fragmentation due to ‘grey infrastructure’ development, in particular roads, railway lines and intensive land management. UNEP’s – SCC adaptive response is to work closely with NGOs and other partners on the policy level[[21]](#footnote-21) and to develop pilot projects, in order to mitigate conflicts between natural capital protection and economic development, trying to facilitate sustainable development[[22]](#footnote-22).
5. Strategic interventions in the Balkans are different than in the Carpathians due to the absence of a regional environmental agreement. A government representative affirmed that UNEP Vienna – SCC is the leading organization in addressing the threats, developing projects in this respect and involving stakeholders e.g. in land degradation, adaptation to climate change, or mining issues. An Austrian official confirmed that through the ENVSEC Initiative, UNEP is dealing with root causes of environmental degradation in Balkan countries.
6. The rating on ‘achievement of outputs’ is **highly satisfactory.**

## Effectiveness: Attainment of project objectives and results

### Direct outcomes from the reconstructed ToC

1. The core interest of this evaluation is the extent of the achievements of project outcomes and the analysis of the sustainability of project results. The objectives of the project are realistic, but the timeframe is not applicable, as the project is an ongoing, long-term process. There will be a follow-up project starting in January 2015.
2. The intervention logic and the causal pathways from project outputs through outcomes towards impacts are shown in Figure 2, providing an overview of the project’s ‘Theory of Change Analysis and Results to Impact Analysis’ following the methodology explained in section 3.7. Each column has a different colour (Outputs are green, Outcomes are orange, Intermediate States are brown and the intended impacts are yellow.
3. As regards **‘Outputs’**, originally, there was only ‘Output A’ (UNEP programme support to the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention), mentioned in the project document as of 2003. As explained in section 3.2, the scope of the project and the mandate of UNEP Vienna – SCC were broadened in 2004, and three ‘Outputs’ were added (‘Output B’: Facilitation and support to inter-regional and global partnerships; ‘Output C’: Provision of technical assistance and advisory services to countries in Central and South-East Europe and transboundary cooperation; and ‘Output D’: Liaison to relevant organizations in the region).
4. The reconstructed ToC lists seven **‘Outcomes’**. According to UNEP staff and statements made by certain interviewees, the proposed activities are appropriate, are successfully implemented and are likely to produce the intended outcomes, but not within the project’s time frame as, again, this is an ongoing and continuously changing, long-term process.
5. The same is valid for driving changes along the intended causal pathways. These external factors – **assumptions and drivers** – are also included in Figure 2 and are highlighted in blue. As regards assumptions (factors, which the project has no control of), some have been derived already from the original project design, and some have been added during the evaluation exercise. One of the original assumptions *‘Experience exchange within the Danube-Carpathian and other mountain regions in Europe’* turned into an impact driver (factors which the project has a certain level of control) through broadening the scope of the project.
6. The reconstruction of the project logic uncovered a wide range of drivers. This is a major advantag**e as drivers – contrary** to assumptions – can be influenced to a certain extend by the project. The project is already investing a lot in this direction, to name a few examples, continuous lobbying at government and donor level, using integrated approaches in all projects, strengthening and adding new partner*ships either through MoU or projects. If the outlined assumptions prove valid and influe*ncing the impact drivers in a strategically planned way, this will lead the countries to different level of the intermediate states.
7. Due to the complexity of the project, the reconstructed ToC reveals a long list of **intermediate states** between project outcomes and intended impacts. To make ratings more effective, the evaluator split intermediate states into three levels: low-level (LL), which can also be seen as high-level outcomes, medium-level (ML) and high-level (HL) intermediate states.
8. The project already successfully contributed to several low-level intermediate states, but there is still a long way to go. In addition, not all of the intermediate states can be achieved only by the project’s interventions (which is also true for the outcomes). A more detailed analysis would be necessary in the follow-up project.
9. The intended impact *‘Sustainable development and environmental protection of mountain regions through strengthened regional and inter-regional cooperation in Central and South-Eastern Europe with an outreach to other mountain regions in the world’* contributes to the objectives and expected accomplishments as regards ecosystem management and environmental governance outlined in UNEP’s Medium-term Strategy 2010 – 2013 and MTS 2014 – 2017 and more generally, to global environmental benefits, specifically in the context of the GEF projects in the Balkans (cf. section 4.1).
10. The first level outcomes (orange in Figure 2) – as an immediate result of the project outputs are described in detail in the following sub-sections.

**Figure 2: The project ‘Theory of Change’ diagram**



#### Countries agree on joint objectives, e.g. Protocols of the Convention

1. Concerning the CC, ratification and implementation is well underway. To the present date four Protocols have been adopted:
* Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians;
* Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians;
* Protocol on Sustainable Tourism to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians;
* Protocol on Sustainable Transport to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians.
1. Numerous policy documents implementing the Protocols have already been approved (Annex F) and useful implementing structures have been established, e.g. the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) and the Carpathian Wetlands Initiative (CWI), both are fully operational on the regional level. Nevertheless, with respect to the CNPA, the management structure is still under discussion and not yet clarified.

#### Countries develop and enable laws, policies and programmes in coherence with regional priorities

1. Interviewees declare that both the Convention and the Protocols, which were /are to be adopted, are in principle in line with the national legislation of the Contracting Parties. Some articles are the consequence of common denominator of national legislation, others have inspired countries to change and adapt their legislation. Implementation Plans have been developed or are in the process of being developed for all the Protocols. Also these plans partly derive from existing national programmes and plans. They also partly instigate the development and increase in attention and/or funding for new activities under the national programmes and plans.
2. According to the NFPs of the CC the main driving forces for implementation of the Convention are the responsible Ministries of seven countries and subordinated agencies, as well as environmental NGOs and Protected Areas Directorates. As described in a UNEP publication*[[23]](#footnote-23)*, a specific strategy or action plan for the Carpathian region does not exist in the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania. Serbia has passed a National Law on Ratification of the Biodiversity Protocol. Due to the territorial extent of the Carpathians in the Slovak Republic, the country adopted a Strategic Plan on Biodiversity that is applicable to the entire national territory. Ukraine has issued two ministerial documents and a decision of Oblast Councils on local action plans. In Hungary, the execution of wolf and lynx Strategic Action Plans and local management plans is in progress.
3. COP3 approved the Terms of Reference for the Working Group on Adaptation to Climate Change by its Decision COP3/15. Since then, this WG has been very active in aiming to support the Parties to the CC by providing advice on adaptation to climate change in the Carpathian region and providing guidance and recommendations for the development of policy proposals in line with the objectives of the Carpathian Convention and the European Commission’s White Paper on Adapting to Climate Change. The CARPIVIA project is supporting the WG (see Annex E).
4. Summarizing statements made during personal interviews, from both government officials and NGO representatives, indicate that there is still a long way to go to achieve coherence with regional priorities. Although the CC is the framework for thinking and deciding on a regional level, and despite the need for a consensus for approval of Protocols and Strategic Action Plans, the countries have to take on more responsibility in this respect.

#### Countries cooperate at different levels in all relevant sectors

1. Compared to the situation a decade ago and knowing that there is no tradition of cooperation, there is clear indication and an agreement among interviewees that cooperation between countries increased, either through relevant WGs for developing policy papers or through specific projects; a good example is the joint development of the Carpathian Red List of Species within the BioREGIO Carpathian Project. There is an interesting fact that the CC brought together different countries, which share almost nothing outside of the Carpathians, e.g. Poland and Serbia, but the Convention work brought them together, according to a representative of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
2. Also a government official from BiH reported the improved cooperation of his country with Serbia and Montenegro in selected sectors, which was absolutely impossible in the past, and countries starting to overcome historical obstacles. His statement ‘UNEP Vienna – SCC connects us’ was also supported by an Austrian donor agency and a reference was made to a successful GEF Focal Point meeting in Vienna together with representatives from FYRoM, BiH and MNE.
3. The ENVSEC Initiative by its very nature interlinks care for the environment with the promotion of peace and stability within and between countries. In addition, its multi-agency set up was praised as an outstanding example of implementation of the so called Paris Guidelines for inter-agency cooperation (quotation from correspondence with former UNEP staff).
4. Article 15 of the CC provides the legal basis for the establishment of strategic partnerships, which is of utmost importance when talking about cooperation. Up to date, UNEP Vienna – SCC has signed seven MoUs and one Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) (Annex G).

#### Countries actively develop and implement joint projects and initiatives in support of commonly agreed objectives

1. The CC process, the ENVSEC Initiative and the Mountain Partnership have been strong and successful catalysts for joint programming. Usually UNEP mandates are rather targeting policy level, but the approach used in this project was a different one, having a strong component of practical implementation.
2. A wide range of publications, progress reports and information obtained during interviews prove the success related to this outcome. Countries recognize the fact that there are more and more possibilities for partnerships and the interest from the region for the development of joint projects is increasing. The CC provides the framework, projects are not isolated, they are based on existing initiatives, take country needs into account, and reflect political reality. Activities are designed to implement policy documents and results are supposed to feed back into the policy level.
3. Although there are several excellent examples that project ideas are coming from the grass-root level (e.g. Big Foot[[24]](#footnote-24), Move4Nature[[25]](#footnote-25), InRuTou[[26]](#footnote-26)), the evaluation finds that bottom-up approaches still have to be strengthened and examples from the implementation of the Alpine Convention should be taken into account, as stated by a representative from an Alpine country. Also references to efficiently and effectively implemented activities of the ICPDR were made, but noting that the structure of the instrument and the leadership/culture is different.

#### Stakeholders are actively involved and benefit

1. The CC process is especially unique in entertaining a wide variety of stakeholders, both in the formal meetings and in the area of Convention and Protocol implementation. According to progress reports and publications, the implementation of the project offers many examples of active stakeholder involvement since its very beginning, taking into account their priorities and needs. The project was built on preparatory work carried out in collaboration with many different organizations and using established networks and synergies, e.g. the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative[[27]](#footnote-27).
2. One of UNEP Vienna – SCC guiding principles is strong stakeholder involvement on different levels. All activities are organized in a participatory way and in a good atmosphere and meetings are open for all stakeholders, but funding for participation is the limiting factor, according to NGO representatives. UNEP staff is listening to stakeholder needs and providing ‘space’ for discussion and interaction, e.g. the project successfully supports NGOs through local projects, policy papers are provided to guide NGOs through implementation of local initiatives and give them credibility to be seen by governments, which is seen as a benefit for stakeholders and is appreciated by several interviewees.
3. According to information from one interviewee not directly involved in the implementation of the project, the approach is too much top-down and only few local stakeholders are involved. This statement discloses that there is the need for improved participation mechanisms and awareness raising and to strengthen stakeholder involvement on different levels. Also UNEP staff confirms that participation is not yet institutionalized, except in the WGs of the CC.
4. As stated by UNEP staff, there is increasing interest, but for some countries the approach is quite new and benefits are not yet visible, specifically for Balkan countries. With support of UNEP Vienna – SCC, stakeholder discussions are organized as regards compliance with laws and conventions.

#### Science – policy interface strengthened

1. A good example is the S4C – Science for the Carpathians Initiative[[28]](#footnote-28). In consideration of global trends and guided by European policies, the initiative listed priority topics for current activities in the ‘Research Agenda for the Carpathians: 2010 – 2015’ and several project are under implementation (see list of project Annex E). Activities include the organization of ‘Forum Carpaticum’ and a wide field of topics is covered, like effects of climate change, monitoring of air and water pollution, natural hazards threatening mountain communities, land use and land cover change and its impact on biodiversity, forests as most important natural resources in the Carpathians, research on ecosystem services, etc. Research results are supposed to feed into regional policies.
2. With respect to Balkan countries, the project supports reliable data collections on different topics, and helps to connect different scientific institutes. National databases are established, data are fed into competent authorities to provide decision-makers with a trustworthy basis for arguments, awareness is raised and therefore, the project is helping the countries to comply with conventions, according to information obtained through interviews.

#### Sustainable financing and commitment of resources

1. According to financial reports and information obtained from UNEP staff, the project is implemented with finances from different sources. Governments are paying yearly contributions, as agreed by the Parties to the CC (several interviewees think that the contributions should be increased as they are at a very low level since the beginning). Activities of the CC are of direct relevance to most of the work being undertaken by UNEP under the topic ‘Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development’ (cf. section 4.1).
2. At COP3 members agreed to establish a Trust Fund (cf. para 70) to cover the costs of administering and meeting the objectives of the CC and related Protocols, including the functioning of its Secretariat. COP3 – through decision COP3/14 – requested the Executive Director of UNEP to assume responsibility of administering the Trust Fund, and to delegate the necessary administration authorities to the Secretariat placed in Vienna.
3. The majority of funding is coming from external donors for specific projects. For the Carpathians, funding is mainly through the EU from different angles, such as accession programmes, development portfolio, territorial cooperation, etc., as well as from bilateral government contributions, e.g. Austria, Switzerland, Germany, etc. Since its very beginning, UNEP Vienna – SCC has been good at fundraising, as stated by UNEP staff in ROE.
4. Information obtained from interviewees differs substantially as regards financial resources. On one hand UNEP is seen as a good, trustful international partner with good reputation for developing new projects in an open and participatory way. Furthermore, the CC is seen as a mechanism to access funding involving many countries and using integrated approaches. On the other hand, for example in the Czech Republic, the CC didn’t help to access financial resources, as donors see the implementation of a convention as a national obligation, which has to be financed from national budgets. Therefore, the CC is not a tool for attracting finances according to a CZ government representative. A statement from one Romanian official goes on the same line; compared to other UNEP projects, the CC is not attractive for big donors and the lack of resources can be overcome by involving local communities, county councils, entrepreneurs (ICPDR is a good example) and by increasing the country contributions. However, the Carpathian Convention proved to be successful to attract the EU as a big donor, interestingly through the angle of regional development programmes rather than environmental programmes. Moreover, the work in South-East Europe has found its way into the mainstream of GEF operations and a number of sequel projects financed by GEF are currently implemented by UNEP Vienna – SCC at the country level, in closest cooperation with UN country teams.
5. As regards project funding, the limiting factor is the co-financing for EU projects, which is sometimes very difficult to arrange for partner organizations, e.g. BioREGIO Carpathian Project. Other constrains are related to internal administrative procedures, as expressed by several interviewees, which are often not compatible with EU requirements. According to statements made by NGOs, financing of core activities of the process is not sustainable, e.g. stakeholders are invited to all activities but there are no funds available for their participation. On the other hand, UNEP staff argue that it is not the task of a Convention to finance stakeholders, and other sources have to be found.
6. Concerning finances for UNEP Vienna – SCC activities in the Balkans and other mountain regions, an Austrian government official and the main donor organization for the ENVSEC Initiative state very positively ‘low money but big inputs’. Nevertheless, Austria would like to see basic annual funding for strengthening UNEP’s liaison work. A Balkan country representative mentioned that UNEP Vienna – SCC is enhancing its role in the Balkans and is currently the leading implementation agency as regards GEF funding for environmental projects. In the evaluator’s opinion there is a huge potential for UNEP to increase its portfolio in this region.
7. Summarizing the achievements of direct outputs, the project serves as a good example of regional cooperation and effectively managed – to the extent possible in the given time frame – the implementation of the Carpathian Convention, and ensures that experiences gained and lessons learned can be replicated in other mountain regions.
8. The rating on ‘achievement of direct outcomes’ is **satisfactory.**

### Likelihood of impact using Review of Outcomes to Impact (RoTI) approach based on reconstructed ToC

1. The reconstructed ToC summarizes the intended impact as ***‘sustainable development and environmental protection of mountain regions through strengthened regional and inter-regional cooperation in Central and South- Eastern Europe with an outreach to other mountain regions in the world’*** (Figure 2). Full impacts often accrue only after considerable time-lags, probably only in several decades after finalization of the project activities. Therefore, the project’s likelihood for impact achievement is reviewed along the pathways from outcomes to intended impact.
2. When assessing the likelihood of impact using the ROtI approach, it can be stated that the project has made progress towards achieving the intended impacts. This is proven through the fact that some intermediate states – those on the lower-level, have partly already been reached, although there is still a long way to go. An overview of the project’s impact pathways based on the ROtI assessment, including scoring and justification, can be found in Table 4 at the end of this section.
3. Information gathered through interviews and personal correspondence revealed that the CC has created the network and institutional base, which allows project development, financing and implementation – not only in the Carpathian countries, but also in South-Eastern Europe, whereas the emerging project portfolio provides the catalytic financial support for keeping the convention process going. According to UNEP Vienna – SCC staff, the CC process is an engine and evolving centre of expertise for similar initiatives in other regions, the Mountain Partnership and UNEP’s work in the Balkans.
4. The following sub-sections describe the **Low-level** **Intermediate States** along the causal pathway of the project (Figure 2), whereas the Medium-level and High-level Intermediate States are not discussed, as they can only be reached in the future. Nevertheless, they should not be ignored, as they provide valuable information that completes the result chain from outputs to impacts and are needed to enable the project achieve its impacts.

#### Capacity strengthened on different levels and technical tools provided

1. UNEP staff reported that capacity building processes started from the very beginning of the project and were still ongoing. In all Working Groups of the Convention, systematic capacity building of stakeholders and civil society is a main focus. Interviewees report progress in making links between WGs, such as climate change, forest and protected areas (PAs) experts. Another example was mentioned, as there is no WG on water, this sector is covered under sustainable agriculture and sustainable energy (developing a project together with ICPDR on sustainable hydropower). Capacity building activities are implemented also through several projects (see list of projects with UNEP Vienna – SCC’s role in Annex E). Already in the REC Project that began in 2004[[29]](#footnote-29), national workshops were organized to train civil servants. Capacity building activities are included in almost all UNEP Vienna – SCC projects, most effectively within the CNPA, amongst others related to database and information systems as important technical tools.
2. Nevertheless, capacity building efforts have to be strengthened on different levels and a follow-up project should have a focus on capacity building on different levels. A government representative from Romania suggests a stronger involvement and building up capacity of County Councils and mayors, as it seems that this stakeholder group is only moderately aware of the CC and there is willingness to contribute, either to support and promote the CC, but possible also in-kind contributions, at least in some areas of Romania.
3. For the Balkan countries, interviewees observe capacity building efforts on policy level, e.g. UNEP Vienna – SCC staff was involved in and facilitated the elaboration of several policy documents, amongst others, the State of Environment Report (2012) in BiH and the preparation of National Reports to the CBD; furthermore, in the development of National Action Programmes and Reporting Process under the UNCCD in Macedonia and Montenegro or working on municipalities level in Macedonia regarding desertification issues.

#### Platform for coordination and exchange between different stakeholders provided

1. A representative from an Alpine country involved in activities of the Alpine Convention and in several experience exchange workshops stressed the importance of the process for CC implementation, specifically for providing a platform for discussion, identification of needs and the development of joint projects.
2. A government official from the Czech Republic highlighted the importance for information exchange with other countries and mentioned that implementation activities have ‘changed the picture’ and participants are seeing now the bigger context of different thematic aspects. In addition, such meetings are seen as a source of inspiration and impulse to outputs, which would not have been possible without CC in place, and the inter-ministerial steering committee meetings in the Czech Republic were positively highlighted. A representative of an international NGO reported that very often stakeholders have not been aware of CC in the past, but through these inter-governmental platform meetings they receive information. NGOs more and more use Convention as the framework for their projects. In addition, the usefulness of the WGs was mentioned, specifically the fact that participants are coming from different sectors and integrated approaches are applied.
3. According to information obtained from an Austrian donor agency, UNEP Vienna – SCC in its role as a Focal Point for the ENVSEC Initiative has good contacts, is well positioned in the Balkan region and contributes effectively to networking, both in working groups related to specific projects and also within the Mountain Partnership. As a positive example UNEP’s involvement in the Bhutan project was mentioned, which is related to knowledge management for sustainable development in mountain regions, carried out together with the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (DEZA).

#### Experiences and lessons disseminated, mutually shared between countries and replicable to other mountain regions

1. In this respect the project offers numerous positive examples described in publications, progress reports and interview statements. Above all, experience sharing with the Alpine Convention has to be mentioned, which started already before the signature of the CC. The Alpine-Carpathian cooperation among protected areas has a long tradition; the Alpine Network of Protected Areas (Alparc) helped to establish the network in the Carpathians (CNPA) by providing lessons learned, advice and information exchange, and several topics were identified as priorities for the cooperation, such as PAs management and large carnivore management, with a focus on transboundary issues, tourism aspects, and implementation of European Union nature legislation. A publication elaborated by Alparc and financed by several Alpine countries summarizes the results[[30]](#footnote-30). There is a strong cooperation with the Alpine Convention confirmed by a MoU between the two conventions, as well as a MoU signed by the Alpine Convention, the Carpathian Convention and the CBD. Moreover, a ‘Joint Alpine – Carpathian Statement on Adaptation to Climate Change’ was adopted during COP4, to be presented at UNFCCC COP20 in Lima.
2. Another successful example is reported from the Czech Republic; since 2006, the CZ Ministry of Environment has been organising annual round tables for stakeholders to share information and enhance cooperation. The CC has offered an opportunity to think and deal with different thematic issues in a broader context. Such activities are inspired from best practice in information sharing and best practices in the design of new projects, reflecting local, national and Carpathian experience and building on outcomes of other CC related initiatives.
3. There is common agreement among interviewees that lessons learned from implemented projects (e.g. the elaboration of the Carpathian Red List of Species and the ecological connectivity issues in the BioREGIO Carpathian Project) and best practice examples are effectively shared among the countries. Sharing experiences in WGs of the Convention is seen as an asset by many people, and the process can be transferred to other regions, but has to be adapted to the political, ecological and economic situation in the countries. All implemented projects have included thoughts related to the replicability of experiences. Worth to mention is the publication *‘Synthesis report on transferability of the project results in the Balkans (Dinaric Arc)’* within the BioREGIO Carpathian Project’[[31]](#footnote-31).
4. According to a Romanian Protected Areas manager, experience sharing is of utmost importance and with respect to replicability there are already requests to the CNPA from Danube Parks for joint meetings and from Balkan countries for help to establish a network in this sub-region.
5. Several interviewees referred to the increased activities of UNEP Vienna – SCC as regards mountain cooperation on a global level. The original idea to use experiences gained and to develop a similar environmental agreement in the Caucasus region failed, due to political constraints. Amongst them, the Russian – Georgian war, a conflict between the countries along with the [separatist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separatism) regions of [South Ossetia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Ossetia) and [Abkhazia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abkhazia), which took place in August 2008. Adapting to the political situation, UNEP Vienna – SCC approached the issues from a different angle, and started the process and activities on the level of scientific cooperation between the countries.
6. Within the Mountain Partnership, the Carpathian and the Alpine Conventions are seen as best practice examples, having an outreach and are acknowledged by other mountain regions, e.g. Pyreneans, Andes, ICIMOD in the Himalaya region, African Mountain Forum, etc. As evidenced by several statements, this is due to UNEP Vienna – SCC excellent information sharing and effective presentations of results at relevant events.
7. The Austrian Government highlighted the involvement and important role in experience-sharing in the Pavilion for the Global Mountain Partnership, which was opened during the Rio+20 Conference in June 2012.

#### Awareness raised among stakeholders on different levels

1. In all countries where project activities are taking place, the internet and specifically websites are playing an increasing role with respect to awareness raising. The Carpathian Convention website[[32]](#footnote-32) together with the websites of all partners and projects are valuable sources of information. During interviews some valuable recommendations for improving the Convention website were made. There was also the suggestion to restructure and update the website [www.unep.at](http://www.unep.at).
2. In the context of awareness raising, the important role of UNEP Vienna – SCC in producing and publishing reports, documents, folders, etc. (see a list of relevant publications in Annex F) is stressed. Several interviewees evidence the high quality in presenting the results through publications, power point presentations, among other products.
3. Several interviewees confirm increased visibility of the Carpathian region and the recognition of ‘being part of something bigger’, as there is greater awareness on the local level. People on the ground are becoming aware of the common space and understand that they are part of a bigger region. Locals are more and more fascinated, and they appreciate projects adapted to local conditions, according to UNEP staff working on tourism and education issues.
4. The project contributes to awareness raising on the European, regional and global levels (information received during interviews and from correspondence). There is increased visibility and awareness of the existence of the Carpathian and Balkan sub-regions and the shared resources, and UNEP Vienna – SCC contributed to bringing mountain issues on the global agenda. The following examples were mentioned:
* the Rio+20 Conference – calling upon strengthening existing mechanisms and developing new ones – mentioned the Carpathians;
* the Resolution of the UN General Assembly (December 2013), which made a reference to the Convention with respect to its constructive new approaches to the integrated, sustainable development of the Alps and the Carpathians; and its importance as a forum for dialogue among stakeholders;
* As regards the European level, UNEP Vienna – SCC has in the past and is still assisted countries in drafting the relevant paragraphs of EU policy papers.

#### Public participation and access to information enhanced

1. As regards public participation and access to information, interviewees immediately refer to events in the Vienna International Centre regularly organized by UNEP Vienna – SCC. The following examples of public events were highlighted:
* Organization of regular events on the ‘International Mountain Day’ on 11 December; for example, in 2013, when the SWOMM[[33]](#footnote-33) dissemination event, presenting the results of the ACCESS2MOUNTAIN Project; and the Future of Mountain Conference[[34]](#footnote-34) in 2012;
* Regular celebrations on the World Environment Day on 5 June, e.g. the Symposium: The Future of Biodiversity in 2010 ;
* A symposium ‘Value of Diversity – Diversity of Value[[35]](#footnote-35) on 28 May 2010
* Other events with respect to the ‘International Year of Biodiversity 2010’.

#### Projects catalyzed

1. There is concurrent evidence that the project is successful in catalyzing projects. Many projects are connected and linked with the CC, and results from these projects feed into Working Groups of the CC, where Protocols and Strategic Action Plans are elaborated, and which complements the policy cycle.
2. UNEP Vienna – SCC is planting the seed and some of the NFPs together with partner organizations are initiating projects. The number of projects is steadily increasing (the list of projects and UNEP’s role can be found in Annex E). EU recognition in terms of financing for regional projects was mentioned in interviews – with the limitation that funding for activities in Ukraine and Serbia has to be covered through other sources.
3. Although, there is concurrent evidence that the project is successful in catalyzing regional projects, recommendations were made during interviews to ensure a better involvement of partners in the design of projects, specifically looking at their capacity and experience during the proposal development phase (e.g. in the BioREGIO Carpathians Project two partner organizations failed to comply with planned results and had to be replaced, which led to delays in implementation).
4. There seems to be a high potential to increase the project portfolio in South-Eastern Europe, providing an even wider range of benefits resulting in a much greater UNEP success, in case there would be additional UNEP support, besides in-kind contributions, (according to the financial statements the project is only funded by voluntary government contributions, bilateral and project funds).
5. Summarizing this section, the project started to contribute to improved cooperation and partnerships towards the achievement of the Convention and other mountain related work as a result of these immediate ‘Outcomes’. There is the likelihood that these will lead to further positive changes as regards improved environment and human living conditions, but only under the condition that there will be well designed follow-up projects.
6. The rating on ‘likelihood of impact’ is **satisfactory.**  Table 4 below presents a summary of the assessment of the project’s likelihood for impact achievement.

**Table 4: Overall likelihood of impact achievement**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Results rating of project entitled:**  | **‘*Best practice of sub-regional cooperation: Partnership for the support of the Carpathian Convention and other Mountain Regions’***  |
| **OUTPUTS** | **OUTCOMES** | **RATING** | **INTERMEDIATE STATES** | **RATING** | **INTENDED IMPACT** | **Rating (+)** | **Overall** |
| A) UNEP programme support to the Interim Secretariat of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians | 1. Countries agree on joint objectives, e.g. Protocols of the Convention2. Countries develop and enable law, policies and programmes in coherence with regional priorities3. Countries cooperate at different levels in all relevant sectors4. Countries actively develop and implement joint projects and initiatives in support of commonly agreed objectives5. Stakeholders are actively involved and benefit6. Science – policy interface strengthened7. Sustainable financing and commitment of resources | **B****Rating justification:**The project’s intended outcomes were delivered to the extent possible in the available time fame – taking into consideration that the project is a long-term process – and a follow-up project, starting in January 2015, is already in preparation.The seven outcomes – a result of the reconstructed Theory of Change – are designed to feed into the ongoing process and are described in detail in subsection 4.3.1. | **Low-level intermediate states*** Capacity strengthened on different levels and technical tools provided
* Platform for coordination and exchange between different stakeholders provided
* Experiences and lessons disseminated and mutually shared between countries and replicable to other mountain regions
* Awareness raised among stakeholders on different levels
* Public participation and access to information enhanced
* Projects catalyzed
* CNPA effectively managed
 | **A****Rating justification:**The evaluation concludes that the activities and measures designed and implemented to move towards intermediate states have started and have partly already produced results, which clearly indicate that they can progress towards the intended impact. | Sustainable development and environmental protection of mountain regions through strengthened regional and inter-regional cooperationin Central and South-Eastern Europe with an outreach to other mountain regions in the world |  | **BB****Likely** |
| B) Facilitation and support to inter-regional and global mountain partnerships | **Medium-level intermediate states*** Collaborative arrangements and agreements
* Trans-disciplinary research programmes and projects implemented
* Connecting environmental risks with understanding of environmental security enhanced
 | **B****Rating justification for medium-level and high-level intermediate states:**The evaluation finds, that activities and measures are designed to move towards higher-level intermediate states, but at the current stage it is not foreseeable, if and when they can be reached, as it depends on many external factors (assumptions) e.g. political stability and commitments, economic developments, financial resources, etc.  |
| C) Provision of technical assistance and advisory services to countries in Central and South-East Europe for sub-regional and transboundary cooperation | **High-level intermediate states*** Long-term vision and holistic approaches adopted
* Integrated and inclusive approaches for SMD in planning and decision-making
* Regional knowledge management and policy actions harmonized
* People have access to resources
 |
| D) Liaison to relevant organizations in the region |

### Achievement of project goal and planned objectives

1. The objectives described in the original PD (framework for cooperation, enhance implementation of existing instruments, stimulate partnerships, attract donors, prevent rather than cure, foster integration and coordination between sectors) are fully in line with the CC and – due to broadening the scope of the project in 2004 – also with UNEP’s PoW (cf. section 4.1). The yearly project document supplements contributed to the fine tuning of the design of the project, and incorporating the decisions taken during the meetings of the COP and other relevant steering bodies.
2. As far as progress reports and personal interviews reveal, the project is on a good way to achieve its primary objectives related to the facilitation of regional cooperation (on several levels) for the protection and sustainable development in the Carpathians, and to provide best practice examples for sub-regional cooperation and partnership in other mountain regions. All people contacted are aware that project implementation is a long-term process and statements can be summarized as: ‘it is a good start, but there is still a long way to go’.
3. Several interviewees stressed the fact, that achievements so far are due to the effective management by UNEP Vienna – SCC. A wide range of examples were mentioned, e.g. through implementation of regional projects with activities on the ground and feeding the outcomes into the relevant Working Groups of the Convention, the project is linking the policy with the project level (and vice versa) and in addition, strengthening cooperation between countries and sub-regions. In the Balkans, the policy dialogue and the preparation and implementation of GEF Projects contributes to the achievement of objectives and results.
4. A decade ago, the Carpathian Mountains were a ‘blank area on the map’. According to information obtained from interviews, one major result of UNEP Vienna – SCC’s services is that the Carpathian Mountains appeared on the European and global agendas. For example, references to the Carpathians are made in international fora, e.g. CDB meetings, UN General Assembly, Rio+20 events and the Carpathians are included in EU policy papers.
5. Unlike other treaties, implementing a framework convention is a big advantage according to one Romanian official, as the scope is very broad and covers many sectors, and work moves now into fields beyond biodiversity, like agriculture, tourism and climate change. This is stimulating networking, partnerships and coordination. Within the framework of the global Mountain Partnership, the project was very effective in sharing experience made in the Carpathians with mountain regions all over the world, such as the Andes, the Caucasus, the Karakoram-Himalaya Hindukush regions.
6. In the evaluator’s opinion and according to statements made by UNEP staff and government representatives from Austria and Romania, this project cannot be compared with ‘normal’ projects having a clear goal to be achieved at the project’s end.
7. The implementation of the CC – including its outreach to other mountain regions in the world – is an ongoing, long-term process. The same is true for the functions to catalyze sub-regional cooperation in the Balkans, global mountain cooperation and liaison..
8. The project has achieved so far many results (cf. section 4.2). To name a few, the negotiation and adoption of four Protocols has been achieved (biodiversity, forestry, tourism, transport), whereas some other protocols are under development, e.g. cultural heritage. Negotiations for additional agreements, such as energy, agriculture, regional development and spatial planning, will be initiated beyond the current project’s time frame. Furthermore, the evaluation reveals successful communication and information events including the production of materials (Annex F), as well as many capacity building activities.
9. As regards the planned objectives, the evaluation finds that UNEP Vienna – SCC is successfully acting in its capacity as an interim secretariat, promoting swift ratification, entry into force and effective implementation of the Carpathian Convention.
10. UNEP Vienna – SCC plays a key role in strengthening cooperation and partnerships, exchange of experience and mobilization of funds, not only in the Carpathian region, but also in Central and South Eastern Europe. Through its open and transparent approach (as evidenced by the fact that workshops, events, and COP meetings are open to everybody), UNEP Vienna – SCC encourages and ensures stakeholder participation in its activities and identifies best practice examples of sub-regional and transboundary cooperation. As the environmental focal point within the Mountain Partnership, UNEP Vienna – SCC transfers its experiences to other mountain regions. According to staff, the goals of PoW have been achieved, with some exceptions, e.g. there was no follow up on the Protocol on Cultural Heritage, instead a Ministerial Declaration on cultural heritage was adopted at COP4. Another constraint stressed by some project partners, is the fact that sometimes there are delays in implementing activities due to the lack of human and financial capacity within the SCC.
11. Summarizing this section, the project achieved the results outlined in the original PD (including revisions). The Project Document Supplement as of April 2014 displays milestones including indicators and means of verifications for each of the ‘Outputs’ and the targets (number of meetings, communication events, trainings, or policy drafting), which have been reached, some with slight delays. (See section 4.2).
12. The overall rating on ‘effectiveness: attainment of project objectives and results’ is **satisfactory** (as an overall judgment of the evaluator).

## Sustainability and replication

1. As regards sustainability of outcomes and benefits, the CC itself is a sustaining strategy, and projects designed within this framework replicate experiences in other mountain regions in Europe, such as the Balkan’s Dinaric Arc and in other regions, such as the Caucasus, etc.
2. As regards **financial sustainability,** the results of interviews present a mixed picture. There might be risks as the project addresses countries with economies in transition, and the financial and economic crisis may have impacts, such as the decline of voluntary contributions by governments, which may in turn affect implementation specifically on the national level. The fact that environmental issues have low priority on the political agenda increases the risk further. Possible negative impacts have to be addressed (e.g. UNDP/GEF Project[[36]](#footnote-36)) and need to be mitigated, which is one of the core principles of the CC.
3. On the other hand, there are many opportunities for project funding, either from the EU or other donors (c.f. sub-section 4.3.1.7). With respect to EU funding, UNEP Vienna – SCC has to be very creative as not all countries in the region are eligible for funding, e.g. in the case of the Carpathians, Ukraine and Serbia are not EU Member States and therefore, not eligible for funding under EU budget lines. In the Balkans, there is a high potential for increased funding from GEF. Nevertheless, relying only on project funding is not sustainable, core functions and activities need regular budget allocations.
4. Another fact to be considered in this respect is the division between the finances for the PoW of the Convention and UNEP’s PoW. As regards the CC, the established Trust Fund is covering the costs (cf. para 70), but for UNEP’s portfolio, it seems that Europe is not attractive for financial contributions within the UNEP family (according to internal communication). UNEP Vienna – SCC is recognized for the quality of engagement, but the majority of funding from the UNEP Environment Fund is embedded in other continents. It would be advisable to allocate a UNEP core budget to support corporate functions for activities related to the UNEP PoW in the context of sustainable mountain developments and liaison functions.
5. The rating on ‘financial sustainability’ is **likely.**
6. The project is addressing socio-political factors likely to influence the project results and tries to ensure **socio-political sustainability** through partnerships (as important drivers) with and support by EU macro-regional strategies and funding programmes (Decision COP3/10, EU Strategy for the Danube Region and the accompanying Action Plan, EU Strategy for the Alpine Region, MoU with the Alpine Convention, Workshops ‘Towards an EU Strategy for the Carpathian Region’ in May 2013 and June 2014). Many projects are demand-led and therefore, activities are contributing to government and local level ownership (also an important driver), which strengthen the implementation of several EU-funded projects, e.g. SARD-M Project[[37]](#footnote-37), ACCESS2MOUNTAIN[[38]](#footnote-38), BioREGIO Carpathians, etc. Even after project end there is considerable interest expressed by several stakeholders to have a follow-up and leveraged funding is being searched. This fact addresses issues of sustainability and interviewees mentioned several examples, where additional funding is urgently needed (e.g. education and awareness raising projects, projects aiming at ensuring ecological connectivity in fragmented landscapes by applying integrated approaches, etc.). were mentioned by interviewees.
7. The rating on ‘socio-political sustainability’ is **likely.**
8. The sustenance of results and the progress towards intended impacts is heavily depending on robust **institutional frameworks and governance structures**. Sustainability is laid down in the Convention itself as a sustaining strategic approach, which will sustain beyond the life of the project. The project itself created the governance structure, the rules of procedures, and financial rules of the CC (cf. section 3.3). The governments of the signatory parties, especially the respective Focal Points and related staff, support the project and create positive impressions for long-term sustainability despite the many political changes in SEE countries. Institutional structures are important for implementing legal, policy and strategic decisions, e.g. the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas and the Carpathian Wetlands Initiative. Both structures are fully operational on the regional level and developed key documents, such as the Strategic Action Plan for the implementation of the Biodiversity Protocol. Civil Society Organizations (CSO) representatives and other stakeholder groups seem to have a high level of ownership in these structures.
9. On the other hand, UNEP’s secretariat services have been on an interim basis for the duration of the project. It is only at the most recent COP4 that UNEP Vienna was confirmed as the Secretariat of the Convention in the understanding that the situation will be reviewed, if by COP5 in three years time, the Parties reach an agreement on another location of the Secretariat.
10. The evaluation could make clear that the establishment of UNEP Vienna – SCC was an important and sustainable institutional arrangement, one of broader importance for UNEP. The organization should recognize the important contributions UNEP Vienna is delivering to the international mountain agenda and should institutionalize – as soon as possible – its role as a corporate resource centre to support UNEP activities of all sub-programmes and divisions regarding sustainable mountain development.
11. The rating on ‘institutional framework and governance sustainability’ is **likely.**
12. As regards **environmental sustainability**, infrastructure development (in particular roads and railway lines under the TEN-T Programme[[39]](#footnote-39)), hydropower development and intensive land management might have negative environmental impacts (if not carefully planned), leading to habitat fragmentation and biodiversity loss. The conflict between nature protection and economic development can be mitigated by establishing ecological corridors for the maintenance of ecosystem resilience and sta**bility an**d secured through integrated participatory planning and management approaches. The project addresses these issues on several levels, e.g. working group on spatial planning, the negotiation of relevant protocols (transport, energy), the development of future project, e.g. within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, etc.
13. The overall rating on ‘environmental sustainability’ is **highly** **likely**.
14. In terms of **replication and catalytic effects**, a wide range of examples are available (cf. sub-section 4.3.2.6). There is agreement that lessons learned from implemented projects and best practice examples are effectively shared among countries, within the Carpathians, but also in other regions. Worth to mention is UNEP’s focal point role in the ENVSEC Initiative, with the overall goal to contribute to the reduction of environment and security risks and increased cooperation both between and within countries of the SEE region.
15. Also the Convention work and related projects are offering examples and lessons learned. In this respect interviewees referred to the important role of the CNPA, provided major contributions and lessons learned through their activities. Results from on-going and/or completed projects are processed and information and experience is made accessible to the key stakeholders at regional, national and international level, as stated by UNEP staff. An excellent example is presented in the BioREGIO Carpathian Project which under the work package 7 (Integrated management of biological and landscape diversity for sustainable regional development and ecological connectivity in the Carpathians) produced the publication *‘Synthesis Report on Transferability of the BioREGIO Carpathian Project Results in the Balkans (Dinaric Arc)’* (cf. para 156). Also other projects, e.g. the Big Foot Project (see Annex E), which involved close cooperation with local governments, agencies and NGOs in Italy, Greece and Bulgaria is sharing experiences of intergenerational learning as a tool for local sustainable development and nature protection with other mountain regions.
16. Other activities in the Balkans, such as the project *‘Enhancing Transboundary Biodiversity Management in South Eastern* Europe’ with a summarizing publication[[40]](#footnote-40), providing a good overview on the benefits of protected areas networks, the potential for establishing the mountain protected area network in South-East Europe and current initiatives**.**
17. The rating on ‘catalytic role and replication’ is **highly likely**.
18. The overall rating on ‘sustainability and replication’ is **likely.**

## Efficiency

1. Originally, the project’s duration was three years (2003 – 2006), but in fact the project ended in December 2014. Within this – more than ten years – timeframe, 19 revisions took place. This was a necessary measure both from the points of view of programming and of financial management, as the project was specifically designed to support on-going processes. From the programmatic pointy of view, the project had to be regularly revised in order to include the new programme(s) of work adopted buy each Conference of the Parties as well as to include new work streams approved by the ENVSEC management Board. Moreover, the progress of work the Carpathian Convention Working Groups had to be taken into account, in order plan ahead, adapt the related implementation schedule, and eventually apply time saving measures, as appropriate.
2. From the financial management point of view, revisions were required in order to include the new funds provided on a yearly basis as voluntary contributions by the project’s governmental supporters and external donors. This modus was a necessity particularly before the establishment of the Trust Fund system including the commitment of assessed contributions to the Convention. Since UNEP financial rules do not allow to anticipate the budgeting of pledges before they are actually deposited in UNEP accounts, these yearly voluntary contributions and additional donor support had to be budgeted upon receipt of the funds.
3. The system proofed to be appropriate because it did allow the UNEP Vienna to coordinate the monitoring measures of substantive progress and financial management in close interaction with the constituent partners and donors, to optimize the time schedule and to apply cost control, as appropriate.
4. The project was built upon existing initiatives and partnerships, worth mentioning is the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative with a huge network of partners and a baseline for data sources, but also other programmes and projects (World Wide Fund for Nature/WWF, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River/ICPDR, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe/UNECE, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations/FAO, United Nations Development Programme/UNDP, EU-programmes, Convention on Biological Diversity/CBD, Ramsar Convention, Carpathian Wetland Initiative, Green Belt) and synergies were efficiently used according to the judgment of the evaluator.
5. The project was meant to be flexible and adaptive, and UNEP Vienna – SCC’s response to changing situations was efficient. Time efficiency has been slightly hampered due to political reasons (within the normative work risk management measures had to be applied in cases were political agreement was not found or delayed), but also due to complicated internal administrative procedures.
6. In terms of financial efficiency, despite not receiving funding from the Environment Fund (EF) of UNEP (only in-kind contributions) – the project surviving on counterpart contributions, bilateral and international donors, – it is providing a broad range of services and benefits to UNEP’s PoW. According to a statement of an Austrian donor organization ‘*low input but high impact’*.
7. The rating on ‘efficiency’ is **satisfactory.**

## Factors affecting project performance

### Preparation and readiness

1. NGO representatives as well as several partners stressed the fact that it was the ‘right moment’ to start the project. Many interviewees were referring to the momentum of the Bucharest Summit in April 2001 and the following highly professionally guided negotiation process – supported by Governments of the Alpine countries – , which led to the signing of the Carpathian Framework Convention during the Kiev Environmental Ministers Conference in May 2003.
2. As regards stakeholders’ identification during project preparation in 2003, the project was built upon existing initiatives (cf. para 205) and was designed according to the needs of the countries, as it builds up on the inter-governmental negotiation process and guides, facilitates, and implements decisions made by Parties to the CC and the requested mandate to act as an interim secretariat.
3. Project objectives were specified in a very general way as the project provides a framework for a long-term process. Reviewing in detail the original project document, the evaluator finds that project development and planning was not strategically done. As the currently accepted terminology of project management planning was not taken into account, several inconsistencies can be observed. For example, the original PD does not define any impacts and does not specify any outcomes (defined as behavioral or systematic effects and changes towards impacts), but lists results of proposed activities. There was no Logical Framework included in the original PD. In the project document supplements the term ‘outcome’ is differently used, and from 2011 on, a series of results of the project are condensed as four project ‘Outputs’, which are also laid down in a Logical Framework, the latest project document supplement is dated 24.04.2014.
4. Having said the above, one cannot expect to apply the today’s methodology and terminology to a project designed more than ten years ago. The flexible project design back in 2003 was fully in line with UNEP requirements at the time and was well thought through and one of the keys to success of the high performance of this project both in substance as well as in resource mobilization.
5. Implementation and partnership arrangements were properly determined and negotiated, but the rules of procedures and financial rules were only officially approved during COP 1 in Kiev in December 2006 (cf. section 3.3 and para 97).
6. UNEP administrative staff stressed the fact that UNEP – ROE provided enormous support when the project started in 2003 and overtook the managerial duties. In the evaluator’s opinion it seems that the opening of the Vienna office in 2004 – as an out-posted small office with international status – was the most efficient and cost-effective management structure, and the location and its proximity to the sub-regions is an advantage.
7. The rating on ‘preparation and readiness’ is **satisfactory.**

### Project implementation and adaptive management

1. The Ministerial Declarations and Decisions of COP1, COP2, COP3 and COP4 of the CC acknowledge the services of UNEP Vienna – SCC and state the effectiveness as regards implementing the PoW of the CC, the administrative and financial management, and the support in implementing related projects.
2. The effectiveness of project management is generally well perceived. Partners, both in the Carpathian countries as well as in the Balkans, describe the cooperation with UNEP Vienna – SCC as uncomplicated and effective. Transparent, integrated, client-orientated but sensitive approaches are applied and delivery is result-based, which is appreciated by several countries. Specifically, the responsiveness and excellent cooperation with UNEP Vienna – SCC as regards the preparation of documents for COP and CCIC meetings was mentioned, although a reference was made by several interviewees to the low human resource capacity in the office and the need for additional staff was stressed.
3. According to internal statements, UNEP Vienna – SCC is successfully applying a results based management approach in its operations (as a result of proper training and system-wide introduction of RBM approaches in the UN). The achieved results are the basis for the further support by the donors and the ownership of recipient countries in the present and future.
4. Donor organizations, several government and CSO representatives appreciate the networking skills of UNEP Vienna – SCC, not only related to the implementation of the CC and the networking within the working groups, but also in the frame of the Mountain Partnership. Specifically, donor organizations appraise UNEP‘s role and competence as mediator in environmental issues, the good reputation and it’s advocating role on policy level.
5. Since its beginning the office has been growing due to increasing activities and a wide range of projects. Although there were many changes in the project design during implementation, the management structure proved to be adaptive in the evaluators’ opinion. The project reacted to changing conditions, amongst others, through hiring staff on a consultancy basis funded through projects, and bringing in additional expertise to provide support to the three UNEP employees. Other examples for adaptation are: 1) UNEP’s approach towards a regional instrument for the Caucasus Mountains, by changing the inter-governmental negotiation approach to activities on the level of scientific cooperation between the countries due to political constraints; and 2) UNEP listening to the needs and priorities of the countries in terms of climate change adaptation on the regional level and supporting the revision of relevant national policies and strategies (as stressed by an Austrian government official).
6. The team is well managed by the head of the office and well accepted by partners. Interviewees describe the following characteristics of the SCC staff: motivated, dedicated, enthusiastic, committed team, extremely robust, devoted and feeling ownership, open to new challenges, eager to cooperate, and thinking that it can make a change. Despite the increasing overload of work, the performance of the team is described by almost all interviewees as effective, with the limitation as regards human capacity. There was one statement that for the same reason, sometimes meetings are not professionally planned and prepared, the moderation is perceived as weak and valuable time is lost. Only one stakeholder sees UNEP Vienna as too formal and not reaching the local level.
7. There is clear indication, that staff is overloaded with work, which partly has implications on the quality of work. The evaluation finds that practical work of UNEP Vienna – SCC could in some cases be more efficient and effective, which would only be possible with additional human and financial resources and a more stable and predictable support by UNEP plus the institutional upgrading of the office by recognizing its success and strengthening its formal mandates.
8. In terms of internal administration, UNEP Vienna – SCC has to work under UNEP administrative rules and procedures and the administrative support by the Administrative Service Center (ASC) Geneva is excellent, according to the Head of UNEP Vienna. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned, that international donors, above all the EU, require different administrative procedures, partly not compatible with the UN ones, which regularly becomes a burden for staff members. In the view of the increasing project portfolio, a solution has to be found to make the administration more efficient. In the case of UNEP Vienna’s function as the secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, this solution will be made in consultation between the COP and UNEP (handled as part of the Trust Fund and therefore outside of the planned follow-up project). However, for the remaining parts (UNEP support to the substantive activities in the Danube-Carpathian region, and global replication of mountain experience exchange) a solution in line with UNEP policies and programmatic prerogatives will continue to be implemented in consultation with the beneficiary countries. Some formal delegation of authority to the UNEP Vienna – SCC (currently none) would be beneficial.
9. The rating on ‘project implementation and management’ is **satisfactory.**

### Stakeholder participation and public awareness

According to project documentation and personal interviews, the project offers many examples for successful stakeholder involvement since its very beginning (cf. sub-sections 4.3.1.5, 4.3.2.3-5). The project was build up on preparatory work carried out in collaboration with many different organizations and using established networks and synergies. Participatory approaches applied by UNEP Vienna – SCC were highlighted by many interviewees, and references were made to the fact that all meetings are open to everybody, and – whenever possible – priorities and needs of the stakeholders were taken into account.

1. A representative of the Alpine Convention stressed the importance of institutional structures, like the CNPA, which is of high importance for stakeholder involvement. Through the activities of this network, such as thematic workshops (often together with Alparc) on different ecosystems/habitats, tourism, experiences sharing as regard methods and tools, etc., stakeholders from different countries, but also from different sectors, are coming together, and this network is functioning quite well.
2. With respect to the importance of institutional structures, several interviewees also referred to the WG of the Convention, e.g. the chair of the Climate Change WG emphasized the inter-disciplinary approach, and in addition, inviting also experts from other mountain regions, such as Caucasus, Pyrenees, etc. to discuss appropriate adaptation measures in different regions of the world.
3. As regards participation mechanisms, according to UNEP staff, participation is not yet institutionalized, with the exception of the Convention’s WGs. There is room for the involvement of additional stakeholder groups, for example, communities, county councils, etc., as suggested by a Romanian official, which would be important for information exchange on nature-related topics (wetlands, forests, etc.) on this level. The subject should be explored in more detail in the follow-up project.
4. On the local level, stakeholders involved through projects are appreciating the transparent approach and emphasis the fact that UNEP is ‘giving them a space’ for discussion, and the involvement is giving grass-root NGOs credibility, and as policy papers of the Convention are guiding their initiatives, they are recognized by governments.
5. Key drivers for participation mentioned by interviewees were: locally committed persons, the process has to be transparent and facilitated, constant funding sources, involvement of local actors, such as PAs mangers, providing meaningful opportunities and meeting places, ideally integrated in local events. But as already mentioned, for some countries participatory approaches are quite new and only first steps are taken towards such approaches.
6. As regards public awareness, the subject cannot be generalized, it differs from country to country and is depending on many different factors, according to statements made by interviewees, e.g. the commitment of the respective national authority, the motivation and capacity of the NFP, the size of mountain regions within a country, interested journalists and the relation of partners/stakeholders with the media, the existence of awareness raising campaigns organized by stakeholders, etc. Furthermore, web sites – not only the Convention web site, but also the willingness of stakeholders to put information on their respective site – are playing an important role when it comes to awareness. Implementing the public participation strategy should be tackled in the follow-up project.
7. The rating on ‘stakeholder participation and public awareness’ is **satisfactory.**

### Country ownership and driven-ness

1. Generally, there is the perception that UNEP Vienna – SCC is a good listener and pays close attention to countries’ priorities and needs, as stated by many interviewees, which is an important prerequisite for ownership.
2. But there are mixed views among respondents as regards buy-in / ownership; according to UNEP staff and consultants, this issues cannot be generalized, it is different in each of the countries and related to the political and the economic situation in each of them. Furthermore, it also depends on the percentage of the Carpathian area within one country, for example, the Czech representative mentions the low attention on ministerial level due to the extremely small size of the Carpathians; , further, the Czech name of this part doesn’t allow any connection with the Carpathian Mountains and local people don’t link it. The buy-in is also heavily dependent on the nominated National Focal Points. One group of interviewees referred to extremely motivated persons, who are promoting the CC, connecting different stakeholders on the national level, etc. On the contrary, the other group felt the opposite. The truth lies somewhere in the middle, it cannot be generalized, it depends on the countries, the political decisions as regards human resource capacity, the natural fluctuation in competent authorities, and it always comes down to persons.
3. According to the judgment of the evaluator, the level of commitment within Carpathian countries to implement the Convention and other related international treaties has to be strengthened. There is a gap between policy papers, such as the adopted Protocols and practical implementation on the ground. This opinion is also supported by some NGO representatives, who see a basic problem in the fact that the CC is a so-called ‘soft’ legislation, different than EU directives and regulations, where real possibility of financial fines and sanctions exist.
4. According to several statements, there are more and more bottom-up requests, e.g. the number of NGOs in the Carpathian region is enormously increasing and project proposals developed by grass-root organizations are referring to and are using the CC as a framework for their activities. The buy-in also depends on the subject, e.g. for education and awareness raising projects, the Ukrainian, Polish and Romanian representatives are well informed, highly motivated and have started professional networking.
5. The situation is different in the Balkans compared to the Carpathians, as stated by a representative of UNEP – ROE. EU member states more often apply a bottom-up approach, as there is a strong engagement of the civil society, whereas in other countries the challenge is to set up robust governance structures which can further steer the process.
6. Before the involvement of UNEP in the Balkan region, projects often were ‘disconnected’ from the countries’ needs and designed and implemented only according to the donor’s agenda. This statement was made by a government representative from a Balkan country and supported by UNEP staff. Whereas UNEP Vienna – SCC applies different approaches, the ideas have to come from the countries; UNEP Vienna – SCC make it relevant to GEF requirements and link it with UNEP’s PoW, but final endorsement has to come from Focal Points and the relevant ministries. With such an approach there is a joint commitment to agreed goals and a clear distribution of tasks and roles. The judgment is also supported by the fact that the owner of all publications is not UNEP, but the respective countries.
7. The rating on ‘ownership and country-driven-ness’ is **satisfactory.**

### Financial planning and management

1. To ensure sustainability of financial operations, the project revision is on time, according to UNEP – ROE administrative staff.
2. The head of UNEP Vienna – SCC is in principle satisfied with the administration services provided by Operational Service Center (OSC) in Geneva, United Nations Office Vienna (UNOV) and United Nations Office Nairobi (UNON). However, a delegation of appropriate authorities and strengthening the administrative capacity in the Vienna Office would be beneficial for the follow-up project.
3. The project is almost entirely financed by extra budgetary sources. There is however a need to increase UNEP’s co-financing through the Environmental Fund to sustain the office, its project activities and successful follow-up activities.
4. As stated by responsible staff in UNEP – ROE, the project is quite successful as regards the financial and administrative side and no irregularities are reported. The recruitment of staff is guided by UN rules. UNEP Vienna – SCC has only three staff members (head, programme officer, and financial assistant), others are interns or consultants (who are experts on particular jobs and cannot represent UNEP in any meetings. However, consultants and associated EURAC staff can represent the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, because they are recognized by the Parties as being part of the Secretariat).
5. According to financial figures of project documents, UNEP Vienna – SCC is successful in fundraising. Until now the project has leveraged substantial resource since the inception in 2003, the amount increased from around half a million to over six millions US $, which are governmental contributions outside of the CC Parties’ financial commitments (Governments of Austria, Switzerland, Germany, etc.) and from EU budget lines e.g. INTERREG III B CADSES Neighborhood Programme, European Territorial Cooperation, etc. The project serves as a framework for joint projects and has a huge potential for attracting donors and leverage funding. Nevertheless, there is a limited absorption capacity due to the limited human resources, which has to be taken into account in a follow-up project.
6. As regards procedures, UNEP signs contribution agreements with donor agencies and once the money is received, the project revisions are done accordingly. In case of cost savings, the project document supplements re-phase the unspent funds. Not included in these figures are the leveraged resources coming from GEF money for projects in the Balkans. All received resources contribute towards achieving the objectives of the project.
7. The rating on ‘financial planning and management’ is **satisfactory.**

### Supervision, guidance and technical backstopping

1. As UNEP Vienna – SCC is an integral part of UNEP in administrative terms, the Head of UNEP Vienna – SCC reports to supervisors in Geneva. Until 2009, the First Reporting Officer (FRO) was the Director of ROE and the Second Reporting Officer (SRO) was the Director of the Division for Regional Cooperation. From 2010 onwards the FRO is the Deputy Director of ROE and the SRO is the Director of ROE.
2. The Regional Director is the highest representative of UNEP in Europe and provides administrative oversight and political guidance. The Head of UNEP Vienna – SCC serves as Head of the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention and in the evaluator’s opinion a direct reporting line to Regional Director as the first reporting officer and second reporting officer in the UNEP Headquarter in Nairobi would be beneficial.
3. So far, the full implementation of the management decision to upgrade UNEP Vienna – SCC into a liaison office has not yet been fully implemented. This issue has been pending for considerable time and the status of the Vienna office would merit to be further institutionalized and strengthened.
4. Over the duration of the project, some changes affected the scope of the project, for instance, the focal point role to the Mountain Partnership was transferred to DEPI. The result was the loss of continuous donor support for this function by one Alpine State, however, due to the approval and successful fundraising for a new major global mountain project in the UNEP PoW lead by UNEP Vienna, activities could be further strengthened.
5. The transfer of the Regional Desk for South East Europe of the ENVSEC initiative from UNEP (located in the Vienna Office) to the REC considerably affected UNEP’s capacity and credibility in the sub-region. UNEP Vienna – SCC had been involved since the early stages of the ENVSEC initiative, was instrumental in designing the system of Regional Desks, and had fundraised successfully for the South East European region in the overall ENVSEC context. This risk could be appropriately managed by developing a solid activity portfolio for South-East Europe at the country level, while maintaining the sub-regional dimension of UNEP’s presence through taking over the coordinating role of the Dinaric Arc Initiative by UNEP Vienna – SCC.
6. The quality and adequacy of supervision has been varying over the duration of project implementation, while on times fully satisfactory in terms of guidance and administrative support, while on other times the Vienna office was not consulted on time and provided with the full range of institutional security and subject to sometimes unpredictable changes in status and mandate. However, the current situation in the final years of the project is satisfactory.
7. The rating on supervision, guidance and technical backstopping is **satisfactory.**

### Monitoring & evaluation

1. As regards the **design of M & E**, the original PD did not have a sound M & E plan to monitor results and track progress towards achieving project objectives, but it defined clear reporting lines with respect to technical and financial reports. Furthermore, the original PD didn’t include a Logical Framework (cf. para 211), only the Project Document Supplements since 2011 include one.
2. Since 2011, indicators are described for each ‘Output’, which are specific, measurable, realistic and time-bound. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that there are only quantitative indicators related to the process (e.g. number of meetings, communication events, technical trainings, etc.), therefore, nothing can be said about the quality of the interaction. In this respect, there is also no baseline information about the capacity of member states and collaborating partners, to determine their administrative and technical support needs.
3. With respect to the assessment of risk management, in none of the project documents are assumptions and risks identified. The evaluation identified critical risks (economic, social, financial, environmental) as the project is implemented in countries in transition and the project tries to mitigate these risks through several strategies (e.g. lobbying, development of joint projects using integrated approaches, fundraising, etc.). But related assumptions are not clearly specified. There is the need for a clear risk assessment and an accompanying mitigation strategy.
4. The rating on ‘M & E design’ is **moderately satisfactory.**
5. Regarding **budgeting and funding**, the costs for monitoring are not separately shown in the budget, but are included in staff time. With respect to evaluation, neither an independent mid-term nor an independent terminal evaluation were foreseen and budgeted. The original PD states that the project will be jointly evaluated by the project coordinator and the desk assessment team, and the terminal report and the self-evaluation fact sheet will be sent to the Evaluation and Oversight Unit for record keeping and future feedback. Nevertheless, according to internal staff, this was standard at the time of project design. For ENVSEC Initiative an evaluation was carried out in 2010 with extra-budgetary sources.
6. The rating on ‘budgeting and funding for M & E activities’ is **moderate satisfactory.**
7. Concerning **M & E implementation**, UNEP staff states that there is continuous and effective monitoring on several levels: a) within the framework of the CC defined through government mechanism of the CC and regular review by Parties; b) the monitoring of ENVSEC is facilitated by regional consultations and feed-back of beneficiary countries and stakeholders; c) the monitoring of the numerous projects financed through external sources is done on the project level; and d) the UNEP result-based management methodology is applied.
8. Furthermore, progress and financial reports are complete and accurate, and the information provided by the M & E system is always used to improve performance and to adapt, in case of needs.
9. The rating on ‘M & E plan implementation’ is **satisfactory.**
10. The overall rating on ‘monitoring & evaluation’ is **moderate satisfactory.**

## Complementarity with UNEP strategies and programmes

1. Activities carried out by UNEP Vienna – SCC in the frame of the CC as well as in Balkan countries and other mountain regions are of direct relevance to most of the work undertaken by UNEP under ‘Environment Protection and Sustainable Development’. The complementarity with UNEP strategies and programmes has been described under the section ‘Strategic relevance’ (cf. section 4.1).
2. As regards the alignment with the Bali Strategic Plan (BSP)[[41]](#footnote-41), the project contributes, as it clearly is responsive to the BSP objectives regarding for example, complying with international agreements and obligations at the national level, capacity-strengthening for developing coherent international environmental policies, etc.
3. The rating on ‘complementarity with UNEP strategies and programmes’ is **highly satisfactory.**

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Conclusions

1. The very first conclusion is that this project cannot be compared with ‘normal’ projects having a clear goal to be achieved at the project’s end. The implementation of the Convention – including its outreach to other mountain regions in the world – is an ongoing, long-term process.
2. There is clear evidence that signing of the Convention as a sub-regional instrument for the Carpathians – based on the needs of governments and other stakeholders – was an excellent idea to strengthen regional cooperation. UNEP played a major role in the support and leadership of this process, together with supporting initiatives from the Alpine countries, and in addition, managed to transfer experiences and lessons learned to other mountain regions, specifically to the Balkans.
3. The project was originally designed by participating countries as an innovative instrument to foster cooperation, to support harmonization, to strengthen integration and to place the Carpathians within a holistic development perspective. Through widening of the scope in 2004, the project adapted to changing requirements by strengthening communication, coordination, awareness raising and spreading the knowledge and lessons learned in the Carpathians as regards biodiversity protection and sustainable mountain development to other regions in Europe and in the world.
4. Robust **institutional structures** are of utmost importance for implementing legal, policy and strategic decisions and for the sustenance of results and the progress towards intended impact. The Convention created its own structure embedded in several COP decisions and is itself a sustaining structure, currently serviced by the UNEP led Interim Secretariat. The opening of UNEP Vienna – SCC can be considered as an added value. The Convention process provides the overall framework, and there is clear evidence that **UNEP Vienna – SCC is providing leadership and strong coordination**, is effective in servicing the Convention process, and steering regional cooperation amongst Parties. In the Balkans, UNEP Vienna – SCC is successful in promoting and steering cooperation between countries, proven by its prominent role in the ENVSEC Initiative, including transboundary activities and the increasing project portfolio.
5. The **reconstructed Theory of Change analysis** reveals that the project is following a logical pathway towards the intended impact, leading from strategic interventions (carried out under each of the four ‘Outputs’) to ‘Outcomes’ and ‘Intermediate States’. The project successfully produced the programmed activities and outputs as outlined in UNEP’s internal planning documents and is on a good way to achieving its primary objectives related to the facilitation of regional cooperation (on several levels) for the protection and sustainable development in the Carpathians, and to provide best practice examples for sub-regional cooperation and partnership in other mountain regions.
6. As regards **coordination and networking**, the evaluation discloses the importance of the inter-governmental platform, specifically for providing a platform for discussion, identification of needs, information sharing and the development of joint projects. Meetings contribute to improving coordination amongst countries but also ‘to opening the eyes to see the bigger picture’, making participants aware of the connection and inter-dependence of different aspects.
7. The project provides the bases for **regional approaches**, and there is clear indication that cooperation between countries increased. The Secretariat serves to bring together governments, partners, stakeholders, and to focus attention on commonly agreed issues. The evaluation finds not only improved cooperation amongst Carpathian countries, but also good facilitation and cooperation between Carpathian and other mountain regions, such as the Alps, Dinaric Arc in the Balkans and others (Caucasus, Himalayas, Andes).
8. The evaluation concludes that **capacity building processes** on different levels are extremely important to sustain results. The project is investing in systematic capacity building of stakeholders and civil society. Capacity building activities are included in almost all projects and initiatives, most effectively within the CNPA. For the Balkan countries, capacity building efforts are taking place mainly on policy level.
9. The application of **integrated approaches** is a prerequisite to ensuring sustainability. UNEP Vienna – SCC is aware of it and – to the extent possible – tries to promote integration of sectoral approaches. Examples are regional projects related to impacts of climate change or the development of pilot projects to mitigate conflicts between natural capital protection and economic development, ensuring connectivity and trying to facilitate sustainable development. The evaluation finds, though, that there is still a long way to go to achieve the integration of biodiversity issues into sectoral policies and the coherence with regional priorities.
10. It is concluded that UNEP Vienna – SCC is very good and effective in **stakeholder involvement** by providing a platform for combining national, sub-regional and global aspects. The Convention process is especially unique in entertaining a wide variety of stakeholders, both in the formal meetings and in the area of Convention and Protocol implementation. The project offers many examples of active stakeholder involvement since its very beginning, taking into account their priorities and needs. All activities are organized in a participatory way, meetings are held in a good atmosphere and are open for all stakeholders, but funding for participation is the limiting factor according to NGO representatives. Some stakeholder groups are neglected and there is the need for improved participation mechanisms and for strengthening stakeholder involvement on different levels. In the Balkans, there is increasing interest as regards involvement of stakeholders, but for some countries the approach is quite new and benefits are not yet visible. As a starting point, UNEP Vienna – SCC is organizing stakeholder discussions as regards compliance with laws and conventions.
11. **Joint projects** on the ground are of utmost importance for the real implementation of decisions made on the policy level. There is concurrent evidence that the project is successful in catalyzing projects. Many projects are connected and linked with the Convention and therefore, responding to the country needs, and results of projects feed into Working Groups of the Convention, where Protocols and Strategic Action Plans are elaborated, which feeds back and complements the policy cycle. UNEP Vienna – SCC is planting the seed for projects, and some of the National Focal Points together with partner organizations are initiating projects. The number of projects is steadily increasing. Although the project was able to catalyze many projects, the evaluation depicts some weaknesses in the design of projects, specifically looking at the capacity and experience of partner organizations in the planning phase to avoid problems during implementation. There seems to be a high potential to increase the project portfolio in South-Eastern Europe, providing an even wider range of benefits resulting in a much greater UNEP success, in case there would be additional UNEP support.
12. With respect to **sharing experience and replication**, the project offers numerous positive examples described in publications, progress reports and interview statements. Above all, successful experience sharing with the Alpine Convention has to be mentioned, which started already before the signature of the Convention. The Convention has offered an opportunity to think and deal with different thematic issues in a broader context.
13. There is also common agreement that lessons learned from implemented projects and best practice examples are effectively shared among the countries – sharing experiences in WGs of the Convention is seen as an asset by many people – and the process can be transferred to other regions. All implemented projects so far have activities included how to best replicate experiences and to transfer the knowledge to other regions.
14. Increased activities of UNEP Vienna – SCC as regards the global mountain cooperation can be observed. For example, the original idea to develop a similar environmental agreement in the Caucasus region failed due to political constraints, amongst them the Russian – Georgian war. Adapting to the political situation, UNEP Vienna – SCC approached the issues from a different angle, and started the process and activities on the level of scientific cooperation between the countries. Within the Global Mountain Partnership, the Carpathian and the Alpine Conventions are seen as best practice examples, having an outreach and are acknowledged by other mountain regions, e.g. Pyreneans, Andes, ICIMOD in the Himalaya region, African Mountain Forum, etc. This is due to UNEP Vienna – SCC excellent information sharing and effective presentations of results at relevant events, such as the Rio+20 Conference in June 2012.
15. As regards **awareness raising and communication**, the evaluation confirms increased visibility of the Carpathian region and the recognition of ‘being part of something bigger’ as there is greater awareness on the local level. The Carpathian Convention website together with the websites of all partners and projects are valuable sources of information. In the context of awareness raising, the important role of UNEP Vienna – SCC in producing and publishing reports, documents, folders, etc. has to be mentioned. The high quality of the publications as well as of other means, such as power point presentations, is noticeable.
16. The project also contributes to awareness-raising on European and global levels. As regards the European level, UNEP Vienna – SCC has assisted countries in drafting the relevant paragraphs of relevant EU policy papers, and there is increased visibility and awareness of the existence of the Carpathian and Balkan regions and its shared resources. With regard to the global level, UNEP Vienna – SCC contributed to bringing mountain issues on the global agenda, e.g. the Rio+20 Declaration, the Resolution of the UN General Assembly making a reference to the Convention with respect to its constructive new approaches to the integrated, and the sustainable development of the Alps and the Carpathians.
17. As regards **public participation and access to information**, the evaluation highlights events in the Vienna International Centre organized regularly by UNEP Vienna – SCC, e.g. celebration of the International Mountain Day on 11 December, with yearly changing topics, celebrations with respect to the World Environment Day on 5 June and events related to the International Year of Biodiversity 2010.
18. Speaking about **funding**, the project is implemented with finances from different sources. Governments are paying yearly contributions as agreed by the Parties to the Convention. In 2011, Parties agreed to establish a Trust Fund to cover the costs, but the majority of funding is coming from external donors for specific projects. There is EU recognition in terms of financing for regional projects in the Carpathians, interestingly through the angle of regional development programmes rather than environmental programmes. As regards EU funding the limiting factors are the co-financing for EU projects and the fact that UNEP and EU administrative procedures are not really compatible, which puts additional burden on the shoulders of project staff. Additional source are coming from bilateral government contributions, e.g. Governments of Austria, Switzerland, Germany, etc. Moreover, the work in South-East Europe has found its way into the mainstream of GEF operations and a number of sequel projects financed by GEF are currently implemented by UNEP Vienna – SCC at the country level in close cooperation with UN country teams. There is a huge potential for UNEP to increase its portfolio in this region, as UNEP Vienna – SCC is seen as the leading implementation agency for environmental projects.
19. The **performance of the Secretariat** is generally well perceived. Partners, both in the Carpathian countries as well as in the Balkans, describe the cooperation with UNEP Vienna – SCC as uncomplicated and effective. Transparent, integrated, client-orientated but sensitive approaches are applied and delivery is result-based, which is appreciated by several countries. UNEP ‘s role and competence as mediator in environmental issues and it’s advocating role on policy level is apparent.
20. Since its beginning the office has been growing due to increasing activities and a wide range of projects. There is a motivated, robust and committed team in place, which is well managed and accepted by partners. Nevertheless, there is clear indication, that staff is overloaded with work, which may have implications on the future quality of work. The evaluation finds that practical work of UNEP Vienna – SCC could be further up-scaled, if additional human and financial resources, a strengthened mandate, more delegated authority and stronger structural support by UNEP were available.
21. The evaluation concludes that the project is of **strategic relevance,** bothwith respect to global and regional policy levels and to UNEP strategies and programmes.
22. Some **shortcomings** have already been mentioned, but the evaluation wants to draw the attention to additional shortcomings: firstly, there is still no agreement between Carpathian countries on the delineation of the Carpathian Mountains; secondly, the question of the location of the Permanent Secretariat of the Convention is not yet solved (according to the Convention, the location should be within the scope of the Carpathian mountains); and thirdly, a discrepancy exists between commitments made by governments (e.g. the adoption of policy documents) and practical implementation.
23. Ratings for the individual criteria are given in Table 5. The overall rating for this project based on the evaluation findings is **satisfactory.**

**Table 5: Project performance ratings according to the evaluation criteria*:***

| **Criterion** | **Summary Assessment** | **Rating** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **A. Strategic relevance** | The evaluation reveals that the project is of strategic relevance. With respect **to global policies**, the project and its activities interact with major global policies and strategies in fields such as biodiversity, climate change, natural resources management, environment and security, and mountain development as specified in the articles of the CC and support to Balkan countries, specifically to the CBD and its PoW on Mountain Biodiversity and related events and the UNCCD 10-Year Strategy. As regards the **regional policy level**, the two main components of the project – the Carpathian Convention/Protocols and the ENVSEC Initiative – focus entirely on sub-regions in pan Europe and were constituted as part of the inter-governmental ‘Environment for Europe’ process. And there is also a clear relevance to UNEP strategies and programmes. | **HS** |
| **B. Achievement of outputs** | Almost all outputs and activities mentioned in the planning documents, both as regards the PoW under the Convention and UNEP’s PoW, were fully achieved, only some with delays due to political reasons and/or the lack of human capacity. Planned activities were appropriate and have been successfully implemented, many in cooperation and collaboration with partner organizations.  | **HS** |
| **C. Effectiveness: Attainment of project objectives and results** | The project has to be seen as a long-term process. Within the project timeframe, the project contributed effectively to all objectives and produced the results as described in the planning documents. Outputs are generally of high quality. | **S** |
| Achievement of direct outcomes | The reconstructed ToC discloses seven outcomes and shows that some direct outcomes as well as some low-level intermediate states have partly already been achieved. Nevertheless, the process has to go on, many tasks and several challenges are still ahead. The project is able to adapt to changing situations (political ones, e.g. as regards a planned MEA for the Caucasus, or environmental changes, e.g. climate change) and incorporated appropriate measures into the work programmes. | S |
| Likelihood of impact | There are already visible impacts in terms of increased cooperation and capacity building, increased visibility of the region, enlarged project portfolio, etc. but there is still a long way to go (in a new project) ahead to reach the intended long-term impact. | S |
| Achievement of project goal and planned objectives | The project was successful in achieving the goal and objectives. UNEP Vienna – SCC is successfully acting in its capacity as an Interim Secretariat, but also plays a key role in strengthening cooperation and partnerships in the Carpathians but also in other mountain regions.  | S |
| **D. Sustainability and replication** | Implemented activities have a high replication value moving towards removal of barriers and open doors and opportunities for integrating lessons learned through practical projects into policy and decision-making. | **L** |
| Financial | The **financial sustainability** is seen as questionable. There might be risks as the project addresses countries and economies in transition and the financial and economic crisis may have impacts, such as the decline of voluntary contributions by governments, which may affect implementation specifically on the national level. The fact that environmental issues have low priority on the political agenda increases the risk further.  | L |
| Socio-political | The project contributes to **socio-political sustainability** through partnerships with and support by EU macro-regional strategies and funding programmes. Many projects are demand-led and therefore, activities are contributing to government and local level ownership, which strengthens the implementation of several EU-funded projects. There is considerable interest expressed by several stakeholders to have a follow-up and leveraging funding is being searched.  | L |
| Institutional framework | The **institutional framework and governance sustainability** is laid down in the Convention, which will sustain beyond the life of the project. The governments of the signatory parties, especially the respective Focal Points and related staff, support the project and create positive impressions for long-term sustainability despite the fact of many political changes in SEE countries. Furthermore, representatives CSO and other stakeholder groups seem to have a high level of ownership. The sustainability of UNEP Vienna –SCC as a multifunctional sub-regional office and Centre of Excellence in the UNEP family is de facto secured through the solid work and performance of the office and deserves to be fully recognized and supported in the frame and setting of the organization as a whole. | L |
| Environmental | As regards **environmental sustainability**, infrastructure development (in particular roads and railway lines under the TEN-T Programme), hydropower development and intensive land management might have negative environmental impacts, specifically leading to habitat fragmentation. The conflict between nature protection and economic development can be mitigated by establishing ecological corridors for the maintenance of ecosystem resilience and stability and secured through integrated participatory planning and management approaches. The project addresses these issues on several levels, e.g. working group on spatial planning, the negotiation of relevant protocols (transport, energy), the development of future project, e.g. within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, etc. | HL |
| Catalytic role and replication | The project has catalytic effects as the applied approaches are supporting institutional changes, catalyzing projects and stakeholder behaviour. The replication potential is extremely high, based on strategic dissemination efforts, and the ability to adapt to the needs and situation of countries. | HL |
| **E. Efficiency** | UNEP Vienna – SCC was efficient in managing project activities and successfully contributed to all planned objectives. | **S** |
| **F. Factors affecting project performance** |  | **S** |
| Preparation and readiness | Appreciating the flexible and adaptive approaches of the project, taking into account that the design and planning was done according to UN standards in 2003, more emphasis should be given in the preparatory phase for the follow-up project. In terms of readiness, the project started exactly at the ‘right moment’ taken all advantages and reacting on given opportunities, e.g. the momentum of the Bucharest Summit, the interest and request of the Ukrainian Government, the dynamics during the negotiation process, etc. | S |
| Project implementation and management | The effectiveness of project management is generally well perceived. Partners, both in the Carpathian countries as well as in the Balkans, describe the cooperation with UNEP Vienna – SCC as uncomplicated and effective. Transparent, integrated, client-orientated but sensitive approaches are applied and delivery is result-based, which is appreciated by several countries. UNEP‘s role and competence as mediator in environmental issues and it’s advocating role on policy level is apparent.Since its beginning the office has been growing due to increasing activities and a wide range of projects. There is a motivated, robust and committed team in place, which is well managed and accepted by partners. Nevertheless, there is clear indication, that staff is overloaded with work, which has implications on the quality of work. The evaluation finds that practical work of UNEP Vienna – SCC could be further up-scaled, if additional human and financial resources, a strengthened mandate, more delegated authority and stronger structural support by UNEP were available.  | S |
| Stakeholders participation and public awareness | Outcomes of the evaluation clearly demonstrate that UNEP Vienna – SCC is very good and effective in stakeholder involvement by providing a platform for combining national, sub-regional and global aspects. The Convention process is especially unique in entertaining a wide variety of stakeholders, both in the formal meetings and in the area of Convention and Protocol implementation. The project offers many examples of active stakeholder involvement since its very beginning, taking into account their priorities and needs.All activities are organized in a participatory way; meetings are held in good atmosphere and are open for all stakeholders, but funding for participation is the limiting factor according to NGO representatives. Few interviewees, not directly involved in the implementation of the project, think the approach is too much top-down and only few local stakeholders are involved. This statement discloses that there is the need for improved participation mechanisms and awareness raising, as well as for strengthening stakeholder involvement on different levels. In the Balkans, there is increasing interest as regards involvement of stakeholders, but for some countries the approach is quite new and benefits are not yet visible. As a starting point, UNEP Vienna – SCC is organizing stakeholder discussions as regards compliance with laws and conventions. | S |
| Country ownership and driven-ness | The project was demand-led at the beginning and ownership and driven-ness were high among most national partner institutions. During implementation, interest and commitments were decreasing in some countries, always depending on the role and status of the NFP and active contributions from CSOs. In the Balkan countries, increased interest and country-driven-ness can be observed. | S |
| Financial planning and management | Financial operations are well managed, services provided by supporting Divisions are satisfactory, but administrative capacity in UNEP Vienna – SCC has to be strengthened.  | S |
| UNEP supervision and backstopping | UNEP Vienna – SCC is part of the UNEP in administration terms and UNEP plays an adequate role in supervision and backstopping. | S |
| Monitoring and Evaluation  |  | **MS** |
| M&E Design | At the beginning, the design of M & E was not according to professional standards, but consistent with UNEP standards at that time. Since 2011, more emphasis is given to the design of M & E.  | MS |
| Budgeting and funding for M&E activities | Costs for monitoring are included in staff time and are not separately specified. The project did not include funds for external evaluations, neither for mid-term nor terminal evaluations, however a small amount was made available for the current evaluation. | MS |
| M&E Plan Implementation  | Originally, no monitoring plan was included in the project document, but monitoring has improved over time. There is continuous and effective monitoring on several levels and progress and financial reports are accurate and in time. | S |
| **Overall project rating**  |  | **S** |

**NB:** These criteria have been rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU).

‘Sustainability’ and ‘Likelihood of Impact Achievement’ criteria have been rated from Highly Likely (HL) down to Highly Unlikely (HU).

## Lessons learned

1. The lessons learned are anchored in the conclusions of the evaluation. To avoid duplication, the most important lessons learned are only listed below, as all of them have already been captured and discussed in detail in respective sections and sub-sections of the report.

Lesson 1: The importance of robust and operational institutional frameworks to guarantee sustainable governance structures

Lesson 2: Leadership and strong coordination at regional level is strengthening cooperation towards sustainable mountain development, and on national levels, it enhances ownership and sharing experiences among stakeholders

Lesson 3: Capacity building through joint projects responding to and implementing policy decisions (‘learning by doing’) is leading to improved communication and contributing to awareness raising

Lesson 4: Biodiversity protection is only possible through regional, integrated, and participative approaches

Lesson 5: Investing in catalytic interventions with the potential of transferability of results contributes to make mountain development in other regions of the world more environmentally sound

Lesson 6: Emphasis on the project design but keeping a certain decree for adaptation and flexibility

Lesson 7: Ensuring appropriate human capacity according to realistic workloads as a prerequisite for efficient and effective management of a project

Lesson 8: The Carpathian Convention is perceived by stakeholders as a neutral and consensual framework of cooperation jointly ‘owned’ by all participating countries, organizations and institutions.

## Recommendations

1. Although the project ends by 31 December 2014 and this is the terminal evaluation, it has already been decided that there will be a follow-up phase of the project with the same intentionality starting in January 2015. A project identification draft according to the ‘Environmental Governance Template 2’[[42]](#footnote-42), has already been elaborated. The following recommendations should be considered in the development of the full project document for the next phase of this process.
2. As regards **institutional arrangements**, it is important to have robust governance structures in place. Therefore, continue to building up and effectively manage these institutional structures, for example the CNPA and the CWI. Independently of the Secretariat responsibilities, there is the clear need for UNEP to build on the de facto role and functions and track record of achievements of UNEP Vienna – SCC, and secure its multi-functional mandate, as well as the necessary cash and in kind support, to ensure long-term presence in the region and as UNEP’s global resource centre for sustainable mountain development.

**Who will do it?** UNEP, as part of its role and responsibilities as the Interim Secretariat, and outside the Convention process, relevant UNEP entities (UNEP HQ, UNEP-ROE and UNEP Vienna – SCC) as part of their business.

1. There is the need for commitments from governments and the political will to steer development towards sustainability. Parties to the Convention are encouraged to focus on strategic issues, to further develop and implement new Protocols, such as on agriculture, energy, mining, etc. The role of National Focal Points should also be strengthened to effectively promoting the Convention.

**Who will do it?** This is actually outside UNEP’s direct influence, nevertheless, UNEP Vienna – SCC can play a major role in lobbying governments. In addition, the evaluation identified several impact drivers, which can help steer the process in the right direction. As regards the NFPs, the follow-up project may introduce a mechanism, e.g. capacity building, training, and motivation workshops, organized on a yearly basis.

1. For the Balkan countries it is advisable to keep the current approach of responding to country needs because it is benefiting the countries in the management of their environment. While developing and implementing country-level projects, for UNEP as a regionally based agency it is very important to maintain the regional dimension in the Balkans and South East Europe through this project, e.g. through replication of Carpathian experiences in the Dinaric Arc.

**Who will do it?** UNEP Vienna – SCC with additional support and a clear institutional mandate**.**

1. As regards **coordination, cooperation and networking,** good (semi)legal instruments are in place and should be further used and strengthened, specifically looking for synergies and new partnerships. As Memoranda of Understanding and even more importantly, Memoranda of Cooperation, have proven to be successful in the past, it is advisable to negotiate additional agreements.

**Who will do it?** UNEP Vienna – SCC should put emphasis on also involving partners from other sectors, e.g. transport, mining, agriculture, etc., and negotiate relevant MoUs. Furthermore, a stronger cooperation and collaboration with ICPDR should be envisaged, as both organizations are working in the same sub-region.

1. Although a lot has been done in the project, **capacity building** is an ongoing process. Capacity building efforts should be an important component in a follow-up project. Activities in this regard should be strengthened at different levels, and the support and collaboration with relevant UNEP Divisions should be invoked and secured, as there is still a long way to go to achieve the intended impacts as regards sustainable development and environmental protection.

**Who will do it?** UNEP Vienna – SCC in the follow-up project and additional UNEP inputs.

1. There is a clear need for more **integrated approaches** to land management and the linkages between nature protection and other environmental management sectors. A follow-up project should support such approaches on policy and project level, ensuring a greater focus on land use and spatial planning and incorporating biodiversity aspects into other sectoral policies. Due to the need of integrated approaches, a follow-up project should look for additional partnerships and further support governments in the development and revision of strategic policy papers, as well as in the design and implementation of projects.

**Who will do it?** To be included in the project documents for the follow-up project developed byUNEP Vienna – SCC, with a special focus on building up and maintaining strategic partnerships with relevant sectors.

1. The project has proven to be successful with respect to **stakeholder participation**. Nevertheless, there is the need for continued strengthening of stakeholder involvement, specifically as regards the Civil Society Organization. There are also proposals to stronger involve the community level (county councils, mayors, business, etc.). Furthermore, there is the need to have a strategic approach towards the involvement of the European Commission, e.g. foster the relationship through participation in working groups and meetings, and to receive UNEP support for soliciting and obtaining EU involvement and support. It is very important to focus on cooperation with sub-national authorities and to create a flexible platform for their cooperation across borders.

**Who will do it?** UNEP Vienna – SCC with additional UNEP support.

1. Ensure a good mix of formal processes on policy level (the development of additional Protocols and strategy papers) and **projects**, there should be a balance of top-down and bottom-up approaches linking institutional work with practical on the ground. UNEP Vienna – SCC should follow the current path in catalyzing projects, but improve project design and the elaboration process of projects by better involvement of partners from the very beginning and looking at their experience and real capacity for implementation. Both for the Carpathian Convention process and for projects in the Balkans, additional UNEP support, e.g. from the Environment Fund would be needed to enhance the project portfolio and UNEP’s reputation in the region.

**Who will do it?** For the Carpathians, UNEP Vienna – SCC in the frame of the Convention work and it’s role as a Secretariat, putting emphasis on inter-sectoral projects and investing more time in the design and planning of projects (capacity and absorption capacity of partners, risk mitigation strategy, etc.). As regards activities in the Balkan countries and other mountain regions, UNEP should recognize the important contributions and regular support would be advisable, the decision for regular funding from the Environment Fund lies in the hands of the UNEP Management in the HQ.

1. **Sharing and learning from experience** from the Carpathians and further building up of the global mountain agenda has a high potential for promoting the Carpathian experience and enhancing UNEP’s visibility, but relevant activities would need a strengthened and clarified UNEP-internal mandate and support. On request of governments, UNEP Vienna – as a resource centre for sustainable mountain development – should be ready and enabled to support the negotiations for similar environmental agreements in other mountain regions, adapted to the political, ecological and economic situation.

**Who should do it?** There needs to be a decision by the management of UNEP HQ and UNEP-ROE as regards the future mandate of UNEP Vienna – SCC (besides its Convention work), and the officially recognition and promotion as a ‘Centre of Excellence’ for sustainable mountain development, equipped with necessary human and financial resources.

1. There is the obvious need to invest more resources as regards **communication and awareness raising**. Specifically, the UNEP Vienna website, currently providing unstructured and outdated information on activities other than the Convention, has to be newly designed and expanded. Synergies with and support from partners should be thought upon as regards the promotion of the Convention and other mountain related activities. A strategic approach toward collaboration with municipalities and communities as regards awareness raising is needed.

**Who should do it?** UNEP Vienna – SCC to include the elaboration and implementation of a communication strategy in the follow-up project, as well as – together with partner organizations – strategically planned awareness campaigns in selected countries.

1. In terms of **funding**, UNEP Vienna – SCC is heavily depending on project funding, which might not be sustainable on the long-term. There is the need to strengthen the involvement of participating countries and encourage governments – whenever possible – to increase their yearly contributions or provide additional in-kind support. As regards EU money the question of co-financing, which is sometimes very difficult to arrange for partner organizations, should be taken seriously and solutions found. There is also the need for increased, predictable and stable financial support from UNEP and for making internal UNEP administrative procedures more compatible with donor procedures. With respect to UNEP Vienna’s role for liaison work and strengthening the mountain partnership, there is the need for additional resources to effectively implement activities and to sustain the outcomes. There is also the need to strengthening the explicit mandate of UNEP Vienna – SCC for liaison with international Vienna-based organizations.

**Who should do it?** UNEP management to lobby on government level for increased contributions and commitments / support for co-financing joint projects. UNEP internally, to discuss possibilities for simplified/streamlined administrative procedures and regular allocations from the Environment Fund and to clarify the mandate of the UNEP Vienna Office.

1. With respect to the **performance of the Secretariat**, although there is a qualified and motivated team in place and the project management is well perceived, there is the clear indication that the exceptional wide range of activities cannot be effectively and efficiently managed with the current resources, meaning that human and financial resources should be adequate to the numerous tasks.

**Who should do it?** UNEP Management to clarify the mandate and status of UNEP Vienna – SCC and provide sufficient support responding to their actual roles and responsibilities.

# Annexes

**Annex A Terms of Reference of the terminal evaluation** (without annexes)

**Annex B Guiding questions for the evaluation** (from the Inception Report)

**Annex C List of respondents**

**Annex D List of activities and meetings**

**Annex E List of projects**

**Annex F Bibliography – list of documents and publications**

**Annex G List of Memoranda of Understanding**

**Annex H Note ‘Official Opening of UNEP Vienna’**

**Annex I Memorandum and ToR of the Carpathian Convention Trust Fund**

**Annex J Reconstructed ToC as illustrated by the Evaluation Office**

**Annex K Matrix for the Assessment of the Quality of Project Design** (from Inception Report)

**Annex L UNEP Evaluation Report Quality Assessment**

1. The term UNEP Vienna – SCC is used throughout the document [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Formerly Division for Regional Cooperation (DRC) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.unep.org/eou/StandardsPolicyandPractices/UNEPEvaluationPolicy/tabid/3050/language/en-US/Default.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.unep.org/eou/StandardsPolicyandPractices/UNEPEvaluationManual/tabid/2314/language/en-US/Default.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/tl_files/carpathiancon/Downloads/03%20Meetings%20and%20Events/COP/2014_COP4_Mikulov/Follow%20Up/Evaluation_UNEP%20project_%20preliminar%20findings_final.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A theory-based evaluation tool that maps out the logical sequence of means-ends linkages underlying a project and thereby makes explicit both, the expected results of the project and the actions or strategies that will lead to the achievements of results. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Mountain Partnership is a United Nations voluntary alliance of partners dedicated to improving the lives of mountain people and protecting mountain environments around the world. Currently, 53 governments, 13 intergovernmental organizations and 162 Major Groups (e.g. civil society, NGOs and the private sector) are members. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Dinaric Arc Initiative is a broad framework of collaboration between WWF, IUCN, UNESCO-BRESCE, UNDP, UNEP, FAO, EuroNatur, SNV, REC, and ECNC, which aims to add value to the ongoing programmes and activities of all its partners. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ENVSEC is a partnership of six international organizations with specialized, but complementary mandates and expertise, that provides an integrated response to environment and security challenges, by contributing to the reduction of environment and security risks through strengthened cooperation among and within countries in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus, and South-Eastern Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A Centre collaborating with UNEP; established in 1989 by the Norwegian Government as a Norwegian Foundation, with the mission to communicate environmental information to policy-makers and facilitate environmental decision-making for change. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Source: UNEP Vienna – SCC [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Memorandum as of 12 January 2012 on the authority to establish a General Trust Fund for the Core Budget of the Carpathian Convention. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Diagram adapted from GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. To catalyse a transition towards low carbon, resource efficient and equitable development based on the sustainable use of ecosystem services, coherent environmental governance and the reduction of environmental risks for the well-being of current and future generations and the attainment of sustainable development goals. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A Summit devoted entirely to environmental conservation and development in the Carpathian and Danube region. Hosted by the Romanian Government in co-operation with the WWF International Danube-Carpathian Programme; the Summit was held in Bucharest in 2001 and co-chaired by the President of Romania and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, WWF President Emeritus. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. EU Strategy for the Danube Region : ‘The Carpathian Region – a macro region forming an integral part of the Danube region’. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. MDG-F – The MDG Achievement Fund was committed to eradicating poverty and inequality and changing people’s lives around the world and is helping to implement programmes related to the Millennium Development Goals. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The One United Nations Programme is a strategic programme framework for the period 2015-2019 which draws on the full range of expertise and resources of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) to deliver development results. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Feasibility study on establishing a transboundary protected area: Durmitor – Tara Canyon – Sutjeska; Feasibility study on establishing a transboundary protected area: Prokletije / Bjeshket e Nemuna Mountains; Feasibility study on establishing a transboundary protected area: Sharr /Sar Planina – Korab – Desat/Deshat. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. ‘Potential for the establishment of the sub-regional network of mountain protected areas in the Balkans and the Dinaric Arc’. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Proposal for creation of a 'Platform on Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians'. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Currently a project proposal is under development: ‘I-ECONECTICS’ to be submitted under the follow up programme to the SEE European Territorial Cooperation Programme for the Danube Region. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. ‘National achievements and challenges related to the implementation of the Carpathian Convention’, European Academy of Bolzano and UNEP Vienna – SCC, October 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Big Foot – Crossing Generations – Crossing Mountains (see Annex E). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Move 4 Nature ESD – Teacher training programme on Education on Sustainable Development (see Annex E). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. InRuTou - Innovation in Rural Tourism (see Annex E). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative started in 1999 – a unique international partnership facilitated by WWF-International, involving more than 50 organisations from seven countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The Science for the Carpathians Initiative is a regional science network targeting at supporting and streamlining mountain research in the Carpathians. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. ‘Support to the Implementation of the Carpathian Convention financed through the Italian Trust Fund’. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. ‘Towards a Carpathian Network of Protected Areas’. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. All documents produced during the BioREGIO Carpathian Project can be downloaded on: <http://www.bioregio-carpathians.eu>. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. <http://www.carpathianconvention.org>. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Scientific Workshop on Mountain Mobility and Transport. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The organization of the event has been facilitated by the EURAC Vienna Office together with UNEP Vienna - SCC and UNIS Vienna in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water of Austria, the Austrian Development Cooperation, BOKU University, Environment Agency Austria (UBA), the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention, and further supported by the projects "CARPATCLIM" and "CARPIVIA". [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Symposium organized by the Austrian NGO “die umweltberatung” (Eco Counselling Austria), in co-operation with the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Vienna Office and the United Nations Information Service (UNIS) Vienna. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. UNDP/GEF project in cooperation with Romsilva, the National Forest Administration and WWF, with the objective to secure the financial sustainability of Romania’s Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) as a model for replication to the entire Carpathian Network of Protected Areas. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. SARD-M Report for the Carpathian Countries Member States – An Assessment of Policies, Institutions and Processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. The project ACCESS2MOUNTAIN aims to achieve durable, environmentally friendly tourism, as well as to ensure accessibility and connection to, between and in sensitive regions of the Alps and the Carpathians. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. European Union’s new transport infrastructure policy that connects the continent between East and West, North and South. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. ‘Towards the network of mountain PAs in the Balkans and the Dinaric Arc’, UNEP Vienna – SCC, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. The Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building(BSP) is an inter-governmentally agreed framework for strengthening the capacity of governments in developing countries and countries with economies in transition to coherently address their needs, priorities and obligations in the field of the environment.  [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. UNEP working document template [↑](#footnote-ref-42)