

**Identification of Bulgarian Training and Academic
Institutions and Their Programs in the Crosscutting Area of
Environmental Protection and Regional Development**

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Integrating Global Environmental Issues into Bulgaria's Regional Development Process is a joint project of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW), funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

FOREWORD

In the recent years, several political and socio-economic changes predetermined some of the opportunities for mainstreaming global environmental objectives into the regional development. Probably, the most important one is the accession of Bulgaria to EU on January 1 2007 and the associated emphasis on sustainable regional development that offers some important opportunities for explicitly incorporating the mandates of the UNCBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD into the regional development and spatial planning processes. Crossing the threshold of EU, Bulgaria has embarked on a different, systematic regional development planning approach. The responsibility for determining the regional development path lies with the Ministry for Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW), and this development path will be articulated through a series of documents. Another factor is the EU Structural Funds – they account for over one third of the European Union budget and are used to tackle regional disparities and support regional development. They also have put a new emphasis on protecting the environment and achieving a more sustainable pattern of development.. On the other hand, the Ministry of Environment and Water (MOEW) in Bulgaria is assigned the prime responsibility for implementing the Conventions. The main challenge will be to identify the exact linkages between the Conventions within and between the sectors for which these two ministries are responsible, and to match these linkages with their set priorities of these two institutions. National and regional development policies should accommodate global environmental concerns in order to reverse the current practice of treating these issues as a stand-alone agenda of limited concern to national or local development priorities.

The project “Integrating Global Environmental Issues into Bulgaria’s Regional Development Process” (the Rio Conventions Project) is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW) and the Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW), financed by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). It has been identified as a priority for Bulgaria by the National Capacity Self Assessment (NCSA) for furthering its commitments under the CBD, UNFCCC, and UNCCD. The project is based on the outcomes of the NCSA. However, NCSA and subsequent discussions with key stakeholders during the Project Development Phase identified that proactive integration of global environmental issues into the very process of regional and local development in Bulgaria is still not in place. One of the reasons for this gap is the lack of an accredited training program in Bulgaria which can provide sufficient theoretical background and practical skills to public officials and experts at governmental institutions on the integration of global environmental objectives into the regional and local development policies and practices, as well as into spatial planning documents.

The Rio Conventions Project (RCP) seeks this explicit inclusion of global environmental objectives in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of regional development and spatial planning documents so that global environmental objectives can be realized along with other socio-economic development objectives.

Therefore, by developing capacity of the two ministries to integrate global environmental considerations, this project could not only ensure that planning documents take into account UNCBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD commitments, but also future programming of resources can be garnered to this end.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
EU	European Union
ExAs	Executing Agencies
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IAs	Implementing Agencies
MDPs	Municipal Development Plans
MOEW	Ministry of Environment and Water
MOF	Ministry of Forestry
MRDPW	Ministry for Regional Development and Public Works
NCSA	National Capacity Self Assessment
NOPRD	National Operational Program for Regional Development
NSFRD	National Strategy for Regional Development
OP	Operational Program
PMU	Project Management Unit
RDA	Regional Development Act
RDPs	Regional Development Plans
REDA	Regional Economic Development Agency
SEAs	Strategic Environmental Assessments
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
TDA	Territorial Development Act
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

INTRODUCTION

The Rio Conventions Project aims at promoting a proactive integration of global environmental issues into the very process of regional and local development, as well as spatial planning, both of which are managed by Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works. To achieve these objectives, the capacity of MRDPW and MOEW is to be developed to integrate global environmental objectives into the regional and local development policies and practices, as well as into spatial planning documents. The present Review of potentially suitable Bulgarian academic/training institutions is an important part of the overall effort of the Project.

One of the primary tasks under the RCP's Output 1.1 "*Accredited training program on the integration of UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD objectives into regional development and spatial planning processes is established*" is to facilitate and support the integration of these objectives by developing a national accredited training program. Therefore, the Rio Conventions Project has to organize and facilitate the design and establishment of a medium to long-term inter-disciplinary training program (3 to 6 months) for the employees of MRDPW and MOEW, regional governments, municipalities, well as practitioners and experts from other organizations in cooperation with Bulgarian and international educational institutions. This training program will be targeted to the integration of the objectives of the Rio Conventions (UN Convention on Biodiversity, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and UN Convention to Combat Desertification) into the regional development and spatial planning processes. The national accredited training program will provide sufficient theoretical background and practical skills to public officials and experts at governmental institutions on the integration of global environmental objectives into the regional and local development policies and practices, as well as into spatial planning documents. However, prior to engaging in the actual training programme development, the Project has to identify potentially suitable Bulgarian academic/training institutions that would be able to develop such a training program in cooperation with an international partner institution.

The Consultant conducted a review of the accredited higher education and vocational institutions, training centers and NGOs and their educational activities (programs, disciplines, subjects, courses, etc.) related to/or directly working in areas of environmental protection (biodiversity, climate change and desertification in particular) and/or regional development and spatial planning. As a result of the review, a database of existing accredited institutions and training organizations that offer educational activities in the above-mentioned areas was created. These organizations are identified as potentially suitable for cooperation with the Project in the development, accreditation, and offering of an interdisciplinary training program. The present Review offers a general but exhaustive database of available training and academic programs of higher education institutions, colleges, vocational training centres, NGOs, etc. in Bulgaria, which activities are closely linked to either the crosscutting area of environmental protection and regional development, or some of their aspects. The database was compiled by the means of web-based research and review on entity-by-entity base. It was used for development and conducting a questionnaire survey and one-to-one interviews. The survey was conducted among HEI and training centers that were short-listed from the database on RCP's pre-set criteria. Further, the Review analyses and discusses the results from the conducted survey among representative sample of higher education institutions and their training centers. The collected data is used for the ranking of the academic/training organizations and for the explorative analysis of the general academic environment.

The present Review intends to help the management of the Rio Conventions Project Team in the final selection of academic/training institution in terms of its suitability as a potential partner for the development of *an accredited training program on the integration of UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD objectives into regional development and spatial planning processes*. The review also has

identified some of the challenges that can be expected in the process of designing and delivering an interdisciplinary training program. It also discusses the factors of sustainability that are reflected in the survey's results.

The analysis and recommendations in this Review do not necessarily reflect the views of UNDP. Hopefully, the upshot of this effort will be a good guidance for RCP Management Team and its partners. It could provide input and back their decision-making process regarding the final judgment on the most suitable educational/training venue, as well as of the best approach in developing and delivering such a training program. In addition, the Review will also be useful in the planning and directing project's resources for the implementation of RCP objectives.

I. METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the Assignment is the identification and review of Bulgarian academic/training institutions and their educational programs in the areas of environmental protection (biodiversity, climate change, and desertification) and regional development (and spatial planning), or possibly in a cross-cutting area of all these. The ultimate objective of this effort is the evaluation and final ranking of the identified organizations in terms of their capacity and suitability as potential partner/partners for development of an accredited training program on the integration of UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD objectives into the processes of regional development and spatial planning. In the course of the preliminary discussion between the UNDP representative, the RCP Management Team and the Consultant on the scope and approach of the work, it was decided to extend the scope of the web-research and include also NGOs and training entities that may have educational/training programs or projects in the above-mentioned areas.

With these considerations in mind, the following methodology was used: firstly, compilation and review of a database/s of organizations that have or had educational activities in the discussed areas. Then, based on a short-list of potentially most suitable institutions, one of the rapid appraisal methods is used to assess and compare across the academic/training institutions, and namely – a questionnaire survey and one-to-one interviews. While no method can comprehensively and cost-effectively assess all the facets of institutional capacity for a specific topic in such a complex environment as education (across all 51 accredited higher education institutions and a multitude of their substructures), the proposed method tried to capture a specific set of features that can be generalized for all organizations (higher education institutions, training centers, companies, and NGOs).

The web-based research and review yielded generalizable data on each of the identified educational/training organization. The data takes in information regarding education/ training activities in the areas of regional development and spatial planning, biodiversity, desertification, climate change, environmental protection and sustainable development. The data was collected in a sufficiently extended range of potential organizations and their substructures: a) higher educational institutions and vocation centers, their substructures, and associated academic units/centers and b) other training centers, private companies, and NGOs. Thus, the comprehensive research and review of existing educational /training organizations in Bulgaria resulted in creation of a database of HEI and other training organizations (private companies, centers, and NGOs).

With a view to the desired outcome of the work (identification of an education/training venue for developing and implementing internationally accredited training programs in the cross-cutting area of environmental protection and regional development in Bulgaria), a short list of education/training organizations was developed out of the database. As it was not expected that the data collected for the short-listing of organizations would yield definitive conclusions about their training capacity in regard the desired crosscutting area, the organizations were also looked at on entity-by-entity basis.

The selection criteria for the proposed by the Consultant short list of HEI and other organizations (training centers, companies, NGOs) is the availability of: 1) educational activities in the areas of regional development (&spatial planning) and environmental protection, and /or any educational activities related to biodiversity, climate change, and desertification, 2) Educational activities in area of sustainable development also was taken into account and gave weight for the selection, 3) Experience in delivery of adult training, and 4) Experience in development of training materials.

The final decision for the inclusion of an organization into the short-list¹ of organizations to be contacted was based on the compiled general information (the database), specific organization's

¹ See Attachment 1, RCP Short list

features oriented to the RCP objectives, and the project-wise discretion of the RCP Management Team.

Two semi-structured questionnaires (one for the group of HEI and one for the other training institutions) were specially developed for the survey and one-to-one interviews. They had to provide both descriptive and explorative data on the discussed topics, as well as to validate the findings from the internet-based research. The structure of the questionnaires covered four areas of capacity in terms of the organization's suitability to develop and accommodate an interdisciplinary training program: 1) *development of interdisciplinary program*, 2) *previous experience of the organization*, 3) *current educational and training programs*, and 4) *general information about the organization*.

The key respondents from the short-listed organizations were contacted for questionnaire survey and one-to-one interviews. The respondents were selected based on their knowledge, position, and diversity of views. To the extent possible, they provided their opinion on the discussed training topics, training target groups, availability of time and resources, institutional capacity, etc. While conducting the one-to-one interviews, the Consultant was enabled to receive inside information by framing some questions during the interview. Eventually, the one-to-one interviews sought in-depth information about institutional capacity and about past, present and planned accredited academic and training programs. This method also provided general descriptive data, understanding of attitudes and behaviours, and information to interpret quantitative findings. The survey (questionnaires and interviews) also tried to relate the perceptions of these key informants as a whole to the "objective" data from the web-based research and validate its findings. It also provided general understanding of the academic /educational environment.

As the survey was used for collecting both descriptive and explorative information, the data was separately processed after receiving the completed questionnaires and the conducting of the interviews.

Based on the compiled database, the obtained descriptive data, and a specially developed Scoring Matrix², the Consultant, in consultation with RCP staff, ranked the short-listed academic/ training institutions in terms of their suitability as a potential partner for the development and delivery of *an accredited training program on the integration of UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD objectives into regional development and spatial planning processes*. The collected explorative data was used for the analysis of the general academic environment and some conclusions about the most appropriate organization and delivery of an interdisciplinary training program.

² See Attachment 2, Scoring Matrix

II. WEB-SURVEY AND IDENTIFIED HEI AND OTHER TRAINING ORGANIZATIONS

In pursue of the Assignment's objectives, the Consultant performed a web-based research and compiled a full database of Bulgarian academic/training institutions and their educational programs, especially those pertaining to the crosscutting area of environmental protection and regional development. The collected data was used for the short-list of higher education and vocation training institutions to be surveyed by questionnaires and one-to-one interviews.

The web search was based on unique words, distinctive names, etc. associated with the research topics. Societies, organizations, or groups that might have information on the subjects of regional development, biodiversity, climate change, desertification, environmental protection were also searched for and reviewed. Any phrases or word strings and their combinations together in a certain order were used for the web-search. Existing databases on the Web (such as the database of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency³ and the one of the BlueLink Information Network⁴) were also searched for, reviewed, and used for the final identification of suitable academic/training institutions. Unfortunately, the Bulgarian Internet Portal on Biodiversity (established under UNDP's Clearing House Mechanism Project -CHM), which is maintained by MOEW and the Faculty of Biology of Sofia University. did not work at the time of the research. The Consultant had two meetings and several discussions on the phone with the CHM staff, but the problem with the CHM website could not be solved.

In spite of this and other technical challenges, the web-based search was conducted and the database of potentially suitable academic and training institutions was compiled as a result of that effort. The research work included identification and review of all 52 accredited higher education institutions in Bulgaria and their training/qualification/specialized centers, 8 other training centers and private companies, 11 other entities (associations, REDAs, etc.), and about 80 "green" NGOs. Because of the specifics of the web-based research, many other entities were also "intercepted" and checked in the process of identification of HEI and educational/training entities.

As a web-based review, it was not expected that a fully reliable data could be obtained, sometimes even because of the frustrating web-site message like "Under construction", "Server not found", etc. Furthermore, changes in the wide world web (WWW) occur all the time, due in part to its virtual nature and because of regular updates, existing activities of the reviewed organizations, and some technical problems. In the light of these considerations and the fact that this is a time-constrained document, the present web-based review and its results, i.e. the identification of academic/training institutions, is only "a WWW snapshot" of the existing situation and it can be possibly amended and updated depending on future needs.

What Rio Conventions Project needed was just this "snapshot" of education/training entities and the related comparable information for contacting and later ranking of the identified institutions in terms of their suitability as a potential partner for the development of an accredited training program on the integration of UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD objectives into regional development and spatial planning processes.

The final database that is created according to the set criteria includes 21 HEI and their training/qualification/specialized centers, 7 training centers/companies, and 5 NGOs.

The table below (Table 1) visualizes the identified organizations as of the moment of the web-research. The organizations are grouped into (A) Accredited higher education institutions and training centers and (B) Other training entities.

³ <http://www.neaa.government.bg/index.php?lang=en>

⁴ <http://www.bluelink.net/en/index.shtml>

The legend below shows a subjective identification of desired crosscutting of educational activities in the identified higher institutions and other academic/training organizations in the database. This identification is based on the web-based review. It intends to help any further scrutiny of the most suitable education venue.

Legend:	Color
B - Biodiversity	
CC - Climate change	
D - Desertification	
RD&SP – Regional Development and Spatial Planning	

For better readability of the present document, the two tables below provide only the list of identified organizations and the crosscutting related areas of their educational activities. The full database is given as Attachments 3 and 4. In the full database, the processed data for each organization is structured in information components that cover institution's contact details, accreditation validity, international cooperation, official Bulgarian institutional score, and a full description of identified faculties, departments and training units within a HEI or a private company, a center, or an NGO, as well as the educational activities that they offer.

A. Accredited higher education institutions and training centers

Nº	Institution	Crosscutting-related areas						
1.	AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY-PLOVDIV	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="background-color: #00FF00;">B</td> <td>CC</td> <td style="background-color: #FFFF00;">D</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="background-color: #FF4500;">RD&SP</td> </tr> </table>	B	CC	D	RD&SP		
B	CC	D						
RD&SP								
2.	UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS-VARNA	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>CC</td> <td style="background-color: #FFFF00;">D</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="background-color: #FF4500;">RD&SP</td> </tr> </table>	B	CC	D	RD&SP		
B	CC	D						
RD&SP								
3.	TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-VARNA	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="background-color: #00FF00;">B</td> <td>CC</td> <td>D</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="background-color: #FF4500;">RD&SP</td> </tr> </table>	B	CC	D	RD&SP		
B	CC	D						
RD&SP								
4.	BURGAS PROF. ASSEN ZLATAROV UNIVERSITY	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>CC</td> <td>D</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="background-color: #FF4500;">RD&SP</td> </tr> </table>	B	CC	D	RD&SP		
B	CC	D						
RD&SP								
5.	UNIVERSITY OF ARCHITECTURE, CIVIL ENGINEERING AND GEODESY (UACEG)	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>CC</td> <td style="background-color: #FFFF00;">D</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="background-color: #FF4500;">RD&SP</td> </tr> </table>	B	CC	D	RD&SP		
B	CC	D						
RD&SP								
6.	VARNA FREE UNIVERSITY “CHERNORIZETS HRABAR”	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>CC</td> <td>D</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="background-color: #FF4500;">RD&SP</td> </tr> </table>	B	CC	D	RD&SP		
B	CC	D						
RD&SP								
7.	TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-GABROVO	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>B</td> <td style="background-color: #0000FF;">CC</td> <td>D</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="background-color: #FF4500;">RD&SP</td> </tr> </table>	B	CC	D	RD&SP		
B	CC	D						
RD&SP								
8.	UNIVERSITY OF FORESTRY	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="background-color: #00FF00;">B</td> <td>CC</td> <td style="background-color: #FFFF00;">D</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="background-color: #FF4500;">RD&SP</td> </tr> </table>	B	CC	D	RD&SP		
B	CC	D						
RD&SP								
9.	UNIVERSITY OF MINING AND GEOLOGY “ ST. IVAN RILSKI”	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>CC</td> <td style="background-color: #FF4500;">D</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="background-color: #FF4500;">RD&SP</td> </tr> </table>	B	CC	D	RD&SP		
B	CC	D						
RD&SP								

10.	NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY	B	CC	D	RD&SP
11.	PLOVDIV UNIVERSITY	B	CC	D	RD&SP
12.	ROUSSE UNIVERSITY- "ANGEL KANCHEV"	B	CC	D	RD&SP
13.	D. A. TSENOV ACADEMY OF ECONOMICS	B	CC	D	RD&SP
14.	ST. CYRIL AND METHODIUS UNIVERSITY OF VELIKO TARNOVO	B	CC	D	RD&SP
15.	TRAKIA UNIVERSITY	B	CC	D	RD&SP
16.	UNIVERSITY OF NATIONAL AND WORLD ECONOMY	B	CC	D	RD&SP
17.	UNIVERSITY OF CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGY AND METALLURGY	B	CC	D	RD&SP
18.	KONSTNTIN PRES LAVSKI UNIVERSITY OF SHOUMEN	B	CC	D	RD&SP
19.	SOUTH-WEST UNIVERSITY "NEOFIT RILSKI "	B	CC	D	RD&SP
20.	SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI	B	CC	D	RD&SP
21.	AUBG (Elieff Center for Education and Culture) - Center for European Programs	B	CC	D	RD&SP

B. Other training entities

Training Centers and Companies

№	Organization	Crosscutting-related areas			
		B	CC	D	
1.	Prime Consulting	B	CC	D	RD&SP
2.	Ecological Consultancy	B	CC	D	RD&SP
3.	Sustainable Land Management Project	B	CC	D	

		RD&SP		
4.	Scientific and Research Institute on Management of Regional Projects	B	CC	D
		RD&SP		
5.	Institute of Public Administration and European Integration (IPAE)	B	CC	D
		RD&SP		
6.	National Center of Public Health Protection	B	CC	D
		RD&SP		
7.	Plant Protection Institute (PPI)	B	CC	D
		RD&SP		

NGOs

Nº	Organization	Crosscutting-related areas		
1.	Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation	B	CC	D
		RD&SP		
2.	Borrowed Nature	B	CC	D
		RD&SP		
3.	TIME Foundation	B	CC	D
		RD&SP		
4.	National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB)	B	CC	D
		RD&SP		
5.	Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR)	B	CC	D
		RD&SP		

III. ANALYSIS AND RANKING

A. The survey – general remarks

The questionnaire survey and the one-to-one interviews were conducted by the Consultant in the period between April 4 and April 19, 2007. The sampling was based on the data in the compiled Database of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and the Database of Training Centers, Companies, and NGOs actively working in the areas of environmental protection (biodiversity, climate change and desertification in particular) and regional development and spatial planning. Based on this data, a short-list of 10 HEI and their training centers to be contacted for interview was prepared by the Consultant. The selection criteria for the short-listed organizations were 1) the availability of educational activities in the area of regional development (&spatial planning) and the area of environmental protection, and /or any educational activities related to biodiversity, climate change, and desertification (at faculty level), as educational activities in area of sustainable development also were considered for the selection, 2) experience in delivery of adult training (at university/faculty level), 3) experience in development of training materials (at university/faculty level).

The information was obtained through semi-structured questionnaires and one-to-one interviews. The two questionnaires (for HEI and training centers/NGOs) were developed by the Consultant. Their final versions were edited and agreed by the RCP management team. They were designed to serve the rapid appraisal method that provided general descriptive and explorative data, general opinion, and understanding of attitudes. The descriptive data was used for comparative analysis and ranking of the organizations in terms of their capacity and suitability for development of an accredited training program on the integration of UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD objectives into the regional development and the spatial planning processes in partnership with an international training organization. The explorative questions and the one-to-one interviews aimed at obtaining in-depth information about the current academic environment, existing relations, academic educational methods, modes and forms of training delivery, general attitudes and behaviors.

After reviewing the compiled databases of HEI and training center/NGOs and 10 short-listed organizations and their training/qualification/specialized centers proposed by the Consultant, the RCP Team decided to send the questionnaire to 30 organizations – 24 HEI and 6 academic training centers, as 7 of the organizations were also contacted for one-to-one interviews. The respondents in these institutions were selected for their position, knowledge, and diversity of views. After receiving the questionnaire, not all of the seven organizations selected for one-to-one interview understood that they would be personally approached. Four of them had sent back their completed questionnaires before the Consultant arranged meetings for interview with the identified respondents in these organizations, one of the contacted organizations did not agree to provide responses and two organizations agreed to hold one-to-one interview. Sixteen (16) responses (completed questionnaires) were collected, which implies a response rate of 53% and could be considered representative for the accredited academic institutions in Bulgaria. The responses were received, as follows: 3 by post, 1 by fax, 2 from one-to-one interview, and 10 by e-mail.

B. Ranking

The final ranking is a numerical value integrating the descriptive results of the completed questionnaire on the presence of *objective factors* (i.e. working experience on topics related to the Rio Conventions & regional development and /or spatial planning, delivered training /courses focusing on EIA or SEA, current educational activities, average time needed for development

educational activities, available material base, ever trained governmental officials, etc.). It also considered some *subjective perceptions* of the respondents related to the development of an interdisciplinary training program in the crosscutting areas of environmental protection and regional development in Bulgaria (such as how a *medium to long-term inter-disciplinary training program* should be developed, organization's interest in cooperation with other educational establishments, acceptance to deliver such a program, etc.).

As already mentioned, the assessment covered four major capacity areas of interest for the Rio Conventions Team: *development of interdisciplinary program, previous experience of the organization, current educational and training programs, and general information about the organization*. The closed-ended and open-ended questions under these areas of assessment covered organizational capacity elements and respondent's professional opinion and view, respectively. Each answer had an assigned score depending on its importance to the RCP Team. The answers could assume a minimum of “-1” and maximum of “2” . The value of “-1” is equivalent of “not acceptable to RCP”, “0” - not important or not applicable to assess indicator, “1”- essential, but not important, and “2” – essential and important to RCP. The maximum and minimum number of scores for the different areas (sections) is as follows: for Section A – max. “5” / min. “-2”; for Section B – max “12”/ min. “0”; for Section C – max. 21”, min. “-1”; and for Section D – max. “20”/min “0”. The maximum number of scores that one organization can get is “58”, and the lowest – “-3”.

The average of scores for each capacity area gives the sub-total rating for the respective area. The final rating of an organization is an average of all four capacity areas. The final ranking of organizations is based on their final rating.

It should be noted here that both the Questionnaire and the Ranking Index are a kind of pattern. They are developed and used according to the specific needs and objectives of the Rio Conventions Project.

A. Institutions of higher education

RANKED	ORGANIZATION	SUB-TOTALS				TOTAL
		A (Interdisciplinary program development)	B (Previous experience)	C (Current training programs)	D (General data of organization's activity)	
1.	TRAKIA UNIVERSITY- Stara Zagora FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE, APPLIED ECOLOGY AND ZOO-HYGIENE DEPARTMENT	4	7	20	19	50
2.	NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT “EARTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES”	4	11	16	16	47
3.	UNIVERSITY OF ARCHITECTURE, CIVIL ENGINEERING AND GEODESY (UACEG) FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE URBAN PLANNING DEPARTMENT	4	8	15	15	42
	SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI	4	9	13	16	42

	<i>FACULTY OF GEOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY</i>					
4.	UNIVERSITY OF FORESTRY <i>FACULTY OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT</i>	4	12	13	12	41
	UNIVERSITY OF FORESTRY <i>FACULTY OF FORESTRY</i>	4	11	14	12	41
5.	UNIVERSITY OF CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGY AND METALLURGY <i>FACULTY OF CHEMICAL AND SYSTEM ENGINEERING</i>	5	5	16	13	39
6.	PLOVDIV UNIVERSITY <i>FACULTY OF CHEMISTRY</i>	4	2	15	15	36
	KONSTANTIN PRES LAVSKI UNIVERSITY OF SHOUMEN <i>FACULTY OF NATURAL SCIENCES AND FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS AND COMPUTER SCIENCES</i>	3	9	14	10	36
7.	PLOVDIV UNIVERSITY <i>FACULTY OF BIOLOGY</i>	2	7	14	12	35
8.	SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI <i>FACULTY OF BIOLOGY</i>	3	8	9	14	34
9.	SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI <i>FACULTY OF CHEMISTRY</i>	4	2	10	10	26

B. Training centers

RANKED	ORGANIZATION	SUB-TOTALS				TOTAL
		A (Interdisciplinary program development)	B (Previous experience)	C (Current training programs)	D (General data of organization's activity)	
1.	UNIVERSITY OF CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGY AND METALLURGY Center of ECOLOGY	4	10	16	19	49
2.	NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY Center for Public Administration	4	3	18	19	44
3.	AUBG (Elieff Center for Education and Culture) Center for European Programs	4	7	10	15	36
4.	AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY- PLOVDIV Agroecological Center	4	5	13	7	29

C. Universal Ranking (HEI & Training Centers)

RANKED	ORGANIZATION	SUB-TOTALS				TOTAL
		A (Interdisciplinary program development)	B (Previous experience)	C (Current training programs))	D (General data of organization's activity)	
1.	TRAKIA UNIVERSITY- Stara Zagora, <i>FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE</i>	4	7	20	19	50
2.	UNIVERSITY OF CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGY AND METALLURGY Center of ECOLOGY	4	10	16	19	49
3.	NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT "EARTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES"	4	11	16	16	47
4.	NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY Center for Public Administration	4	3	18	19	44
5.	UNIVERSITY OF ARCHITECTURE, CIVIL ENGINEERING AND GEODESY (UACEG) FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE <i>URBAN PLANNING DEPARTMENT</i>	4	8	15	15	42
6.	SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI <i>FACULTY OF GEOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY</i>	4	9	13	16	42
7.	UNIVERSITY OF FORESTRY <i>FACULTY OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT</i>	4	12	13	12	41
8.	UNIVERSITY OF FORESTRY <i>FACULTY OF FORESTRY</i>	4	11	14	12	41
9.	UNIVERSITY OF CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGY AND METALLURGY <i>FACULTY OF CHEMICAL AND SYSTEM ENGINEERING</i>	5	5	16	13	39
10.	PLOVDIV UNIVERSITY <i>FACULTY OF CHEMISTRY</i>	4	2	15	15	36
11.	KONSTNTIN PRES LAVSKI UNIVERSITY OF SHOUMEN FACULTY OF NATURAL SCIENCES AND <i>FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS AND COMPUTER SCIENCES</i>	3	9	14	10	36
12.	AUBG (Elieff Center for Education and Culture) Center for European Programs	4	7	10	15	36
13.	PLOVDIV UNIVERSITY <i>FACULTY OF BIOLOGY</i>	2	7	14	12	35

14.	SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI FACULTY OF BIOLOGY	3	8	9	14	34
15.	AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY-PLOVDIV Agroecological Center	4	5	13	7	29
16.	SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI FACULTY OF CHEMISTRY	4	2	10	10	26

C. Explorative analysis

The analysis is based on the data obtained through the explorative questions in three of the four sections: *Section A. Development of Interdisciplinary Program*, *Section C. Current Educational and Training Programs*, and *Section D. General Information about the Organization*.

For **Section A. Development of Interdisciplinary Program**:

To the question **how a medium to long-term inter-disciplinary training program should be developed**, of 16 organizations in total:

- ⇒ 9 responded that such a program should be developed jointly by a Bulgarian and international institution;
- ⇒ 6 - jointly by Bulgarian institutions;
- ⇒ 2 - by one Bulgarian institution;
- ⇒ 1 suggests "other option": educational/professional association.

The total number of responses is 18 as 2 organizations gave more than one answer. As expected, it is quite obvious that such an interdisciplinary program will require the joint efforts of various institutions with different knowledge and skills. There is also a high level of readiness/willingness among the Bulgarian academic institutions to work jointly with an international training institution.

On the question about **the appropriate size of a group for this type of training** the respondents provided either a fixed number or rather wide ranges. The responses were summarized in the ranges of: *up to 15 people*, *15 to 20 people*, *20 to 25 people*, and *25 to 30 people*. They are distributed as follows:

- ⇒ 6 organizations think that such a group should consist of 15 to 20 people;
- ⇒ 5 - in the range of up to 15;
- ⇒ 3 - in the range of 20 to 25;
- ⇒ 1 - in the range of 25 to 30; and
- ⇒ 1 - in the range of 20 to 30.

The immediate conclusion here is that the optimal size of a group of trainees, which consist of experts and/or working people, is about 15 people.

On the question about **the frequency of the training sessions** we had the following responses:

- ⇒ 9 organizations think that the frequency should be up to 2 sessions/ weekly;
- ⇒ 5 - between 2 to 5 sessions/ weekly;

- ⇒ 1 - 6-8 sessions/ weekly;
- ⇒ 1 - recommends 5 sessions x 8 hrs / 7 sessions x 8 hrs + a break for individual preparation

Apparently, the considered optimal range is between 2 to 5 sessions weekly. However, the number of sessions will depend on the form of attendance – regular or other form (extramural, weekend, distant, etc.). The recommendation for 5 sessions x 8 hrs / 7 sessions x 8 hrs + a break for individual preparation came from the Center for Public Administration of the New Bulgarian University during a one-to-one interview. The respondent considers the use of weekly modules as the best form of training for this type of trainees. The regular form of training was recommended. The respondent also mentioned the advantages of having experts/working people together for exchanging peer-to-peer views and “the incentive of not going to work”.

Related to the previous question is the question about **the duration of each session**. We have the following summarized responses regarding training of experts and working people:

- ⇒ 6 organizations suggest between 3 to 5 academic hours;
- ⇒ 5 - 6 to 10 academic hours;
- ⇒ 5 - Up to 3 academic hours.

Clearly, the “golden mean” is about 5 academic hours.

Related to the previous question is the question about **the delivery mode** of such training for this type of people. Here, we obtained the following responses:

- ⇒ 8 organizations suggest extra-mural delivery mode;
- ⇒ 7 – weekend training;
- ⇒ 4 – regular training;
- ⇒ 1 – combination of regular and extra-mural; and
- ⇒ 1 - After working hours.

Some respondents gave more than one answer. One did not answer this question.

Obviously, the extra-mural and weekend training is the most recommendable delivery mode for this type of trainees.

According to the responses, **the most appropriate venue** for this type of training of experts is:

- ⇒ 11 organizations consider HEI as the most appropriate place;
- ⇒ 6 – special training center;
- ⇒ 2 – HEI & workplace.

The answers exceeded 16 because 3 gave more than one answer.

The prevailing response here is “HEI”. However, the option of special training center should also be considered when deciding about the place of training with a view to some other characteristics of the training for adults.

The question about **the most frequent difficulties in designing an interdisciplinary** training program, which is important not only concerning the design, but also to the sustainability of a training program, received the following responses:

- ⇒ 6 see the difficulties in the preparation of materials and the training curriculum, the identification of adequate issues, the optimal proportion of related but yet different

- educational topics (on biodiversity, climate change, desertification, regional development and spatial planning); the combination of issues that are different in nature;*
- ⇒ 4 see the difficulties generated by the previous preparation and the different professional background of trainees, i.e. homogeneity of trainees' group, that come from different institutions;
 - ⇒ 3 organizations think that the difficulty lays in the different visions of the developers and personal preferences, lack of unified vision, regarding the training program;
 - ⇒ 3- inadequate coordination of the program and its topics;
 - ⇒ 3 find the difficulties in finding qualified, good interactive trainers,
 - ⇒ 1 indicated the lack of experience in development of interdisciplinary program and the highly specialized programs as a problem.

No matter the number of responses for each area/s of difficulty, the Rio Conventions Program should take into account all of these “bottleneck” issues when selecting the developers and the trainers, designing the training materials, and instituting the training and its organization. Moreover, this has to happen at the very beginning of the process of establishing an interdisciplinary training program.

The **cost-setting elements** when designing an interdisciplinary training program are the following according to the views of the respondents:

- ⇒ 10 - *trainers' fees*;
- ⇒ 8 - *payment for development and preparation of training materials, and overall coordination of training materials design*;
- ⇒ 6 - *material resources, consumables, technical equipment*;
- ⇒ 5 - *administrative management & logistic costs (incl. transportation, duty trips, field work)*;
- ⇒ 3 - *purchase of literature and information*;
- ⇒ 3 - *rents*;
- ⇒ 1 - *per diem for the trainees*;
- ⇒ 1 - *purchase of software*
- ⇒ 1 - *Translation*.

All cost-setting elements indicated by the respondents are regular budgetary items that are usually considered when developing any kind of program. A special attention should be paid to the last three cost-setting elements. Although rather an exception than a norm, trainees are provided with per diem money sometimes (especially if they come from a city that is a different from the place of training). The purchase of software and the translation costs are indicated only once, but they have major shares in any program's budget. Unfortunately, these expenditures tend to be always forgotten and implementing organizations frequently find themselves in an impasse, if they have forgotten or “skipped” these major budget items.

The important question about what guarantee the **sustainability of an interdisciplinary training program** received the following answers:

- ⇒ 7 organizations see the adequate and professional development of the program that meets real needs, provide specific professional or business opportunities, i.e. its quality, as a major factor for its sustainability in time;
- ⇒ 3 - highly motivated trainers and their team;
- ⇒ 3 - availability of trainees and constant interest to the program;
- ⇒ 3 - good organization and management of the program and the training process;
- ⇒ 2 testing system for the knowledge applied in practice;

- ⇒ Only 1- the material base;
- ⇒ Among the other factors indicated by all respondents are self-education and training; contacts with trainers after the end of training; ongoing resumption, update, cyclic recurrence of the training; issuance of legitimate certificates.

The RCP Team should have a careful look at these responses as they directly relate to the question about the most frequent difficulties in designing an interdisciplinary training program.

About a **potential interest in such an interdisciplinary training program by other target groups** (besides the officials from MRDPW and MOEW), the respondents' answers could be summarized as follows:

- ⇒ 8 – municipalities and municipal structures of MoEW, MRDPW, regional directorates and inspectorates;
- ⇒ 6 - private companies;
- ⇒ 4 - MoAF, National Advisory Service in Agriculture, National Forestry Board;
- ⇒ 4 –experts;
- ⇒ 2 – NGOs;
- ⇒ 2 - Students and teachers.

Obviously, there will be an interest in such an interdisciplinary training program at central, regional and local levels of government. The “good news” here is the expected interest from private companies and experts as their interest could be directly related to the sustainability of the training program in time. It is advisable that representatives of these target groups are exposed to the developed training program at its very start in order to create a desirable level of demand for its delivery.

For **Section C. Current Educational and Training Programs**

The summarized response to the question about the **average duration (in # of semesters) of educational activities at present is:**

- ⇒ 8-10 semesters for a bachelor program;
- ⇒ 3-4 semesters for a master's program;
- ⇒ 1-4 semesters for a discipline.

The summarized response to the question about **the average time needed for the development of these programs is:**

- ⇒ 12-24 months master's and bachelor's programs;
- ⇒ 1-2 months for a discipline;

The Rio Conventions Project should take into account this average time for developing these types of educational programs when deciding and negotiating with eventual developer of an interdisciplinary training program. Most probably, the time periods required for developing of any program could be optimized by good organization, coordination, and the unified vision about the training program that should be developed.

The **forms of delivery of these activities** are:

- ⇒ 15 organizations offer regular delivery of these educational activities;

- ⇒ 12 - extra mural;
- ⇒ 5 - distant; and
- ⇒ 1 - Mixture.

The **funding for designing the educational activity/ies** is provided from (*the respondents provided more than one response*):

- ⇒ 8 organizations funded the development of these activities from their own revenues;
- ⇒ 5 – from Tempus & and other European/international projects;
- ⇒ 5 – from the state subsidy;
- ⇒ 1 – from the Ministry of Finance;
- ⇒ 1 – from the Ministry of State Administration/US Government.

On the question the **listed educational activities have a paid form of training**, the form of free tuition is offered in all but one organization and, at the same time, almost all educational activities also have a paid form. There is one exception where the training is paid by the Ministry of State Administration.

The **average tuition fee** per a trainee per semester for these educational activities is

- ⇒ Bachelor's - BGN 150-250;
- ⇒ Master's - BGN 250-500
- ⇒ 1 EU master's course – BGN 800

Extramural education is almost twice cheaper, training centers offer education programs at a lower tuition fee.

For **Section D. General Information about the Organization**

To the question about **from what organizations the external lecturers come** to the HEI in 2006, we have the following answers:

- ⇒ In 12 organizations the external lectures/trainers come from other HEI;
- ⇒ In 5 – from private business;
- ⇒ In 5 – from the state administration;
- ⇒ In 5 – NGOs;
- ⇒ In 1 - from the other faculties;
- ⇒ In 1 - 100 % own lectures;
- ⇒ In 1 – from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

It is good that, besides the academia, the private business and the NGOs, as well as the state administration could also be viewed as a good source of educational expertise.

To the question about who makes the **final decision for introducing a new educational program** in the faculty/department, we have almost the same response:

The educational activity is offered by the department/faculty, then discussed and approved by the faculty council/academic council.

In some cases, the educational activity is finally approved by the dean of the faculty.

In one case only (Ellieff Center/AUBG), the final decision is made by the director of the center solely.

To the question about the **funding sources (in %)** in your faculty/department in 2006, we could have rough summary of the responses as follows:

- ⇒ *The state budget covers 70% to 98% of funding;*
- ⇒ *International projects cover 2 to 10 % of funding;*
- ⇒ *Economic activities cover 10 to 50 % of funding;*
- ⇒ *Other - tuition fees, post qualification training, etc. – 5-20 % of funding.*
- ⇒ *In 3 organizations 100 % of funding comes from the state budget.*
- ⇒ *One organization has 100 % own budget.*
- ⇒ *There are two cases that differ from the general trend:*

In one HEI the funding is 45 % from the state budget, 50% from economic activities, and 5% from post-qualification training

In one training center 30% of funding come from international projects and 70 % from own budget.

To the question whether the organization has ever offered a **program, a subject, or a course developed by an external organization**, we have the following responses:

- ⇒ *5 organizations responded positively;*
- ⇒ *11 – Negatively.*

An important note should be made here: the positive answers (3 from HEI and 2 from training centers) come exactly from the organizations that take the first positions in the final ranking. Probably, one of the conclusions that could be drawn here is that these are not capsulated organizations; they are pro-active and open to different types of cooperation.

To the question about what were the **conditions/requirements under which the respective externally developed program** was offered, we have varying responses: “*Under contract*”, “*According to our own standards*”, “*Cooperation and adapting*”, “*Joint development*”, “*Individual payment of tuition*”, therefore it would be difficult to draw one general conclusion.

To the question about whether the **organization has ever worked with foreign partners** for designing an educational activity, *all but one organization gave positive answers.*

The **foreign experts/partners had various roles** when working with the Bulgarian organization:

- ⇒ *Joint development of curriculum, joint delivery of lectures;*
- ⇒ *Methodological support and transfer of know-how to training process;*
- ⇒ *Provision of foreign programs and literature;*
- ⇒ *Financing and organization of workshops;*
- ⇒ *Consultants.*

Other comments: Five respondents provided additional comments and recommendations. The information and the opinions obtained during the one-to-one interviews are also included here. These can be summarized as follow:

- ⇒ *Training needs analysis should be conducted before the development of training program;*
- ⇒ *Coordination and development team should be established;*
- ⇒ *The discussed topics (environment, regional developments, biodiversity, climate change, desertification) are very important and there is a pressing need for training of the target group (MEDPW&MoEW);*
- ⇒ *This type of training for experts and working people should not be “a homily from the pulpit”. In other words, the training should utilize various interactive training methods and it should not be just a straight lecturing;*
- ⇒ *The control of trainees’ attendance should be taken into consideration;*
- ⇒ *The payment of developers’ and the trainers’ fees should not go into “the common pot”, but they have to receive adequate remuneration for their efforts;*
- ⇒ *The HEI are willing to cooperate with the two ministries (MEDPW&MOEW) and they rely on the responsiveness of these ministries.*

Undoubtedly, some of these opinions should be considered in the organization and the development of an interdisciplinary training program by the RCP Team.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the technical capacity comparisons across the accredited HEI and their training centers and the explorative analysis of the general academic environment, both of which have been based on targets and criteria that result from the Rio Conventions Project’s Output 1.1 “ *Accredited training program on the integration of UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD objectives into regional development and spatial planning processes is established*”, we can conclude that

- 1) The development of a medium to long-term inter-disciplinary training program will require the joint efforts of various institutions with different knowledge and skills. Further, the Bulgarian academic institutions are willing to work jointly with an international training institution to this end in view,
- 2) The most frequent difficulties regarding the design of an interdisciplinary training program could be expected when developing the training materials and the curriculum that incorporate different technical areas (regional development, biodiversity, climate change, desertification), i.e. the training materials have to be at an adequate technical level but well understood and comprehensible for all learners. Thus, the adequacy and the optimal proportion of training topics that are different in nature should be carefully considered. Building a unified vision of the developers of the program that come by and large with different personal preferences and professional backgrounds will guarantee the adequacy of the program’s format, content, and training methods. In addition, this has to be a training program that meets real needs and provide specific professional or business opportunities. Its quality will be a major factor for its sustainability in time.
- 3) The issues concerning the mechanisms for updating the program and testing in practice the knowledge acquired by trainees, as well as awarding trainees with legitimate certificates, should be considered as stimuli for a lasting interest to the program and verification of its technical adequacy. Moreover, these are elements of any quality education and major factors of sustainability.
- 4) The individual involvement of developers and trainers in the design and delivery of the training is another important factor. Even if RCP decides to have a formal agreement at an organization’s level (with a university, a faculty, or a training center), individual incentives for people involved in the work should be considered. When planning the design and the delivery of the program, besides the principal cost-setting elements such as trainers’ fees, development, preparation, coordination of training materials, purchase of literature and

- information, rents, material resources, consumables, technical equipment, administrative management & logistic, RCP Management Team should allocate funds for purchase of legal software and translation of materials, if needed. Naturally, the required budget resources will depend on the level of technical equipment of the organization, or the organizations that is/are going to be selected for development and offering the program. It is very likely that they can afford and be willing to allocate some of their own resources, both technical and financial, for development and delivery of the program.
- 5) With a view to the sustainability of the training program, the Rio Conventions Program should take into account all “bottleneck” issues (such as the different nature of the educational topics (on biodiversity, climate change, desertification, regional development and spatial planning), the professional background of trainees, i.e. homogeneity of trainees’ group, different visions and personal preferences of the developers, the lack of experience in development of interdisciplinary program and the forbearance from development of a highly specialized program, etc.) that are identified by the explorative analysis in this report. Then, RCP has to pick carefully the organization to work with, select motivated (or motivate) program developers, and identify qualified interactive trainers
 - 6) The average time needed for the development of a master’s and bachelor’s program is 12-24 months and 1-2 months for a discipline, however if RCP find, organize, and coordinates individual academic experts for the development of the program, it is very likely that the work will require a shorter period of time.
 - 7) The tuition fee will depend on the provided educational level (Bachelor’s, Master’s, or a certificate course) in conformity with the average tuition level in the country. In some cases, i.e. for the governmental officials, the respective ministries can pay them.
 - 8) The optimal organization of a “*Rio Conventions Project Class*” would look like this: a homogeneous group of 15 trainees that come from the interested institutions. The criteria for homogeneity should be set by the very beginning of designing the training materials. The RCP Class is exposed to 2 to 5 training sessions organized in extra-mural or weekend training sessions. Each session is of about 5 academic hours, as the duration will depend on the form of attendance – regular or other form (extramural, weekend, distant, etc.) and with a break for individual preparation. The training program is taught by motivated trainers from HEI, governmental institutions, or private business. They have both academic and practical background in their areas of expertise and are skilful in techniques of interactive training of adult people. The in-class work of the RCP Class trainees will be also a good venue for exchanging peer-to-peer views and enhancement of knowledge in technical areas different from their professional background. This will help a better understanding of crosscutting technical issues and generate a political and technical environment for integration of these into the processes of regional and local development, as well as spatial planning.
 - 9) A closer cooperation with the two ministries (MEDPW&MoEW) at different levels of management is recommendable so that they can become more receptive and supportive to the work of RCP.
 - 10) The analysis shows that there is a high level of certainty across the academia about the potential interest in such an interdisciplinary training program. This interest is believed to come from other target groups at central, regional, and local levels of government, as well as from private companies and experts. It is advisable that these target groups are engaged in the overall process of the RCP’s work in order to create a desirable level of demand across different professional strata and institutions. It would be wise if representatives of all target groups, i.e. the academia, MRDPW, MoEW, municipalities, specialized private companies and individual experts, and NGOs have some general notion of the work and objectives of the Rio Conventions Project. In other words, the broader the base is at the

initial stage of the project implementation, the better understanding, the higher interest, and a brisker demand will be for its final outputs. There should be representation and involvement both at a political and technical level of the respective organization. This approach will secure both a feeling of ownership over the process and will build political commitment to a lasting training program.

- 11) Following the previous considerations, it is highly recommendable to set up a coordination and development team. It could be in the form of a working group, a steering committee, a panel, etc. involving all target groups - a kind of RCP focal point, where different political perspectives and versatile technical knowledge are brought together, as well as a common vision is build, to facilitate the dialogue among these groups. And, the last but not the least, such a formal entity could prevent or resolve any professional disagreement or political reluctance in the future. RCP can work with these experts to identify best practices cases to illustrate the challenges and opportunities in the active integration of Rio conventions into various policies and plans, or for writing up hypothetical cases (based on real examples from Bulgaria, if any) for learners to practice various tools for such integration.
- 12) In addition, RCP Management Team has to be clear with the target groups that advancing the active integration of global environmental concerns is situational – that no right answers exist and the training should not be expected to provide such ready-made answers. The collaborative efforts of “a working group” for assessing, analyzing, and organizing information will allow RCP to confirm and /or validate any analysis with target groups before engaging in the actual training design. Coming to agreement on the matters of training purpose, target participants, general content, timing, and location at this point in training development and delivery forestalls the sorts of misunderstanding or unmet expectations that can easily derail a training program. This is the place to gain useful consensus on existing conclusions and recommendations, to solicit feedback, revise the analysis as necessary until all stakeholders are comfortable with the training proposal. Another reason for setting up such a “working group” is the simple fact that the RCP Management Team will administer the organization and the coordination of the design and delivery of training throughout the life of the project. However, the sustainability of the project’s outcomes will depend on an instituted structure, which has to take over the work after the end of RCP.
- 13) Finally, about the ultimate purpose of the work under the present Assignment - identification of Bulgarian academic and training institution/s in terms their suitability as a potential partner for the development of *an accredited training program on the integration of UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD objectives into regional development and spatial planning processes (English and Bulgarian):*

Based on the collected quantitative data from the survey and following ranking of HEI and their training centers the Consultant would recommend that RCP contacts the following organizations with a request for proposal for development of an interdisciplinary program in cooperation with an international partner institution:

- 1. Trakia University - Stara Zagora, Faculty of Agriculture, Applied Ecology and Zoo-hygiene Department**
- 2. University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy, Center of Ecology**
- 3. New Bulgarian University, Department “Earth and Environmental Sciences”**
- 4. University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy (UACEG), Faculty of Architecture, Urban Planning Department**
- 5. Sofia University St. Kliment Ochridski, Faculty of Geology and Geography**
- 6. New Bulgarian University, Center for Public Administration**

Further, given the explorative analysis and the above drawn conclusions, the Consultant would recommend *two possible options for the venue of development and delivery of training*:

- The first option considers **only one HEI or one training center** of the above-listed organizations to be selected based on the quality of the proposal offered by the organization and its level of own/internal expertise in all considered areas– biodiversity, climate change, desertification and regional development;
- The second option is to have **the Center for European Programs of AUBG** in Sofia (Elieff Center for Education and Culture) organize developers/trainers with different academic and practical expertise in all considered areas – biodiversity, climate change, desertification, and regional development. This provides the opportunity of selecting almost without bias the best-known experts from different academic or other institutions to develop the training materials and curriculum and start the delivery of an interdisciplinary training program in cooperation with an international organization under the supervision of RCP Management Team. This option is likely to solve the issue of individual incentive and adequate payment for developers/trainers (Money is not going in “the common pot”.) In addition, the center is well known for being successful in working with external academic and other expertise resources from the governmental and private sectors, and from abroad. The Center also has excellent technical equipment, material base, and a good history of training experts and working people. In addition, the fact that the final decision for introducing a new educational activity in the Center is solely taken by its director could be viewed as a good advantage in the light of the time constraints of the Rio Conventions Program. Finally, being a part of the prestigious AUBG system, the Center is likely to turn the new interdisciplinary program into a highly marketable educational activity. As always the case with options, this one probably has its drawbacks (it is likely to be a more expensive place, how the organization is viewed by the target groups of the RCP, etc.), but these could be equally valid for any other venue of development and delivery of the desired training program.

V. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this Review is to help RCP identify potentially suitable Bulgarian academic/training institutions that would be able to develop an interdisciplinary training program in cooperation with an international partner institution. However, there are some other aspects to be considered by RCP Management Team, if not yet. RCP should have a very good understanding and have the opinion of those that will be exposed to this training program. With that end in view, **a training needs analysis should be conducted before the development of training program**. It will help RCP identify more specifically the areas requiring attention, including areas where more information has to be gathered to appropriately plan for the training and its specific elements – objectives, content, learning methods and aids, methods of evaluation, etc.

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