

As of 2012-2013, after years of dictatorship followed by sanctions and three major conflicts, Iraq was achieving notable gains. Economic growth was projected to reach 9 percent on average over the period 2014 to 2018. However, the situation was reversed by the end of 2014 due to a resurgence of violence and the collapse of the price of oil. It is important to recognize that the conflict against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which started in January 2014 in Anbar and led to the fall of Fallujah, was the culmination of a progression of armed conflicts that weakened the State and fractured Iraqi society over decades.

At the end of 2018, the humanitarian crisis entered a new phase. Combat operations against ISIL had ended in December 2017 and hundreds of thousands of displaced persons were returning to their homes and communities. Assessments conducted by the Ministry of Planning and analysed by the World Bank estimate that reconstruction will take at least 10 years and cost over US\$88 billion.

UNDP support to Iraq was designed to address the most pressing needs in areas newly liberated from ISIL while maintaining reduced, core programmatic support in other areas. The country programme for 2016-2020 was developed during 2015 and did not provide an adequate guiding framework for this new situation. The Independent Country Programme Evaluation therefore covers the period 2015 to 2018, following the structure designed in April 2017 as a result of a management transition process which organized programmatic work around four pillars: stabilization; economic diversification and employment; governance and reconciliation; and environment and energy. The evaluation also covers the UNDP role in the coordination of the Emergency Livelihoods and Social Cohesion Cluster.

Findings and Conclusions

UNDP in Iraq has successfully created a model of intervention under the stabilization component to support key political objectives and recovery in the immediate post-conflict space. It has demonstrated the importance both of retaining programmatic flexibility in the immediate post-conflict setting and of adjusting the programme to address emerging needs. UNDP is delivering the largest stabilization programme to date with significant results¹ and is considered a highly valued partner. Even highly vocal critics recognize the value of the work delivered by UNDP. Institutional partners in Iraq are clearly committed to continue working with UNDP and supporting it directly if possible.

Newly liberated areas and areas receiving large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) received strong support through the stabilization component, with relatively limited attention paid to the country's priorities outside these areas. Southern areas are experiencing major difficulties and are currently covered only by small interventions. Major programmes which managed to continue to operate outside of newly liberated areas and areas receiving IDPs have not progressed from the delivery of outputs to outcomes. Less attention has been paid to the three other pillars, although a limited number of programmes have been implemented. This is not unusual for a country office responding to an emergency, although the return to regular programming has taken longer than it might have.

While UNDP Iraq has effectively managed the delivery of the largest stabilization programme to date, innovated operational processes and improved turnaround time to increase transparency and efficiency, it lacks a coherent and comprehensive programme structure in line with national and regional priorities that is matched

¹ As analysed by the evaluation team, the Funding Facility for Stabilization is the largest stabilization programme to date, even when the multi-project and multi-partner stabilization programmes are considered. This means that the entire stabilization programme (including the Iraq Crisis Response and Resilience Programme) is by far the largest stabilization effort to date.

by resource mobilization efforts which capitalize on recent successes. Because of limited quality assurance and monitoring functions and the absence of evaluation capacity, there is insufficient analysis of performance and effectiveness to support programme development,

prioritization and implementation. The absence of knowledge management and information-sharing has exacerbated the tendency to implement programmes in isolation, thereby limiting the opportunity to exploit synergies and leverage expertise.

Recommendations

- In developing the new country programme, UNDP should: (1) align its contributions to the changing priorities in Iraq, driven by the shift to a more stable environment; (2) identify its comparative strengths and key areas where it is able to deliver effectively; (3) develop clear and supporting theories of change for its work; and (4) support its strategic approach with strong resource mobilization efforts which build on the high level of trust by donors and institutional counterparts established through the stabilization programme and aim to expand the UNDP presence and expertise based on emerging needs. The country programme development process should ultimately strengthen the strategic focus of the programme, develop synergies across pillars and ensure sustainability.
- Emphasis must be placed on preventing conflict arising from the lack of reliable access to services on a sustained basis and on preventing secondary migration. UNDP senior management, with support from donors and the Special Representative for Iraq of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), should advocate strongly with the Council of Ministers and Minister of Finance for reliable allocations from the national budget for recurrent and operational costs associated with services and infrastructure rehabilitated by UNDP. This should be combined with a programme to support local-level social cohesion, in coordination with UNAMI, which is mandated to support cohesion at national level.
- The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator should encourage relevant United Nations agencies to provide support to schools, hospitals, clinics and industrial plants rehabilitated by UNDP/Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS) to ensure long-term sustainability in line with Security Council resolution 2421 (2018).
- Building on the revision of the UNDP Programme and Project Management Manual of 2018 which introduced the possibility of a “bridging programme”,² UNDP should consider developing an instrument for post-conflict stabilization in lieu of a country programme for countries in the midst of conflict where flexibility and political objectives become the priority.
- The country office should strengthen its results-based systems and practices. These efforts should be driven by the need to establish clarity and a sense of priority over what UNDP is seeking to achieve in Iraq. It should also carefully monitor the efficiency gains of delivering all development projects through the Service Centre established to deliver the stabilization projects and ensure that adequate measures are in place to maintain the current level of transparency and efficiency. The Service Centre may experience a significant increase in workload if, as expected, areas of work outside stabilization grow significantly, while the stabilization component, and the FFS in particular, remains active. Additionally, if UNDP continues in a leading role, senior management should ensure that the Emergency Livelihoods Cluster is resourced with adequate human resources, specifically a National Cluster Coordinator and an Information Management Officer who are independent of UNDP programming and dedicated to cluster work.

² “Programme and Project Management (PPM)”, UNDP Prescriptive context rewrite, section B5.14, June 2018.