**Evaluation of UNDP Bahrain**

**Country Programme 2012-2016**

2016

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**List of Acronyms**

BIPA - Bahrain Institute of Public Administration

BIPD - Bahrain Institute for Political Development

CBO - Community Based Organization

CPAP - Country Programme Action Plan

CPD - Country Programme Document

CSR - Corporate Social Responsibility

GCC - Gulf Cooperation Council

GEPMI - Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative

M&E - Monitoring and Evaluation

MDG - Millennium Development Goals

MENAPAR - Middle East and North Africa Public Administration Research

MoIC - Ministry of Industry and Commerce

MoSD - Ministry of Social Development

MoLSD - Ministry of Labour and Social Development

NCC - Net Contributor Country

NGO - Non-governmental Organization

NIM - National Implementation Modality

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

SIU - Special Investigation Unit

UN - United Nations

UNCTAD - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNEP - United Nations Environmental Programme

UNDESA - United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs

UNESCWA - United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

UNDAF - United Nations Development Assistance Framework

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UoB - University of Bahrain

UPR - Universal Periodic Review

WTO - World Trade Organization

1. SUMMARY

The objective of this evaluation is to review and assess the results of the current UNDP Bahrain Country Programme 2012-2016.[[1]](#footnote-1) It provides a number of lessons learnt from the activities of the current programme and makes set recommendations for improvements of modalities and management approaches in the upcoming programme.

UNDP is one of the most important UN agency in the country. It has a longstanding and continued partnership with the Kingdom of Bahrain, dating back from August 1978. Although Bahrain has acquired the status of a high-income country since many years now, there have been considerable opportunities for substantive UNDP engagement in key development areas. Both the government and UNDP have taken advantage of these opportunities and have made good use of their joint partnership.

During the 2012-2016 cycle, UNDP supported a number of government and other partners’ initiatives. For example, UNDP, working with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD)[[2]](#footnote-2), supported the formulation and the first phase of the implementation of the social strategies on the persons with disabilities and children (aged 0-18 years) in close collaboration with UNICEF. Furthermore, UNDP supported the Minister of energy office in establishing and guiding the work of the Sustainable Energy Unit which is driving national efforts to diversify Bahrain’s energy mix by enhancing energy efficiency and increasing the use of renewable energy. Additionally, supporting the Ministry of Industry and Commerce together with UNCTAD, UNDP played an instrumental role in supporting the adoption and implementation of Bahrain’s Free Trade Agreements. Moreover, the Bahrain Institute for Public Administration (BIPA), which was the result of a UNDP project, was further supported in its role as a provider of training, research, and advice to Bahrain’s public administration. UNDP and BIPA drove the launch and operationalization of the Middle-East and North Africa Public Administration Research (MENAPAR) network, a successful regional public administration initiative that spearheads collaboration and networking in public administration-related issues and research in the Arab region. Other areas of support included capacity development for the Parliament and the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) of the Public Prosecutor’s Office, technical support for the Bahrain’s Institute of Political Development and the E-Governance Authority, and other activities.

The UNDP programme was implemented on the basis of the National Implementation Modality (NIM). Moreover, with Bahrain being a Net Contributing Country, the UNDP programme was fully funded by, and therefore entirely dependent on, the Government of Bahrain. The programme made a considerable contribution to the building of capacity within the Kingdom of Bahrain, despite a number of exogenous factors (including the global drop in oil prices in 2014 and global economic recession) that negatively affected UNDP’s operating environment. Another important factor that is worth noting is the fact that the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) was not signed after the endorsement of the CPD. A lot of effort and energy was expended on reaching bilateral agreements with national partners and securing funding for projects. All these factors combined presented serious challenges to the implementation and financing of UNDP programmes and initiatives, but which were nevertheless overcome by the country office and its partners. Although the evaluation has found that the programme was relatively relevant and aligned with Bahrain’s national priorities and international commitments, not all activities were implemented as set out in the CPD’s results and resources framework (RRF) mainly because of the lack of a signed CPAP and or available funding.

UNDP’s programme contributed to the development of institutional capacity of its partners in key areas such as formulating relevant national policies and strategies, establishing necessary institutional infrastructure, building skills and knowledge of partners, and strengthening national coordination in the relevant sectors. Moreover, the approaches adopted in programme activities have effectively integrated crosscutting issues such as gender. Similarly, real efforts were made in terms of promoting human development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with systematic identification of these objectives across all proposed activities.

In the context of Bahrain, the issue of ownership does not seem to be an issue, given that all activities were agreed and implemented by national institutions under the NIM modality and were fully financed by the government. The programme was largely coherent, with certain activities continuing from previous projects. However, there remains a broad spread of areas of activity and there appears to be a need for a strengthened strategic approach to programming.

In terms of effectiveness, interviews with stakeholders show that UNDP activities provided national institutions with access to international approaches and with new experiences and ideas. However, the effectiveness of some projects was moderate, as their expected results were not achieved in full and they did not generate significant or sustainable impact.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The level of efficiency with which programme activities were managed can be overall qualified as satisfactory. However, one common problem from which most projects suffered was schedule overruns ranging from one to three years as no new projects were signed. The lack of predetermined programme funding from the government represented a serious limitation on UNDP’s ability to develop a coherent and strategic programme. This was exacerbated by the inadequate approval process of new projects and/or initiatives.

The evaluation generated a number of lessons learned, which will be useful in the development of the new country programme. These lessons learned are organized below on the basis of three themes which emerged as the most important during the evaluation process. Moreover, a set of recommendations are generated for each theme and presented in the box further below.

a) *Strategic approach to programming and positioning*

Certain activities were too thinly spread across a number of areas and this resulted in limited impact and sustainability. For UNDP to stay relevant in a high-income environment such as Bahrain where high-quality support and cutting-edge advice is essential, more depth and specialization will be necessary. The UNDP should be cognizant of both its own strengths and limitations, and thus be explicit about what it can and cannot deliver. The Bahraini government has outlined the country’s development goals and UNDP should identify those areas in which it can make meaningful contributions. UNDP should take a more purposeful and strategic approach to addressing the country’s development challenges and priorities.

b) *Sustained and predictable funding*

The lack of regular and predictable funding presented a serious challenge for UNDP’s effectiveness in its current programme cycle. This constrained its ability to develop a more strategic, structured and cohesive programme. As already described in this document, country office concerns about mobilizing funding for its sustainability detracted attention from longer-term engagements which were more strategic and sustainable for UNDP. UNDP needs to find a sustainable solution if it is to develop a long-term relationship in the country and contribute to national development in the areas where support is needed and requested.

c) *Transparency and visibility*

Although UNDP has overall succeeded in creating a good public image of its contribution and gaining the full trust of a number of government and non-government counterparts as a long-term development partner, communication problems with some of its partners hampered certain aspects of its programme. UNDP should communicate more about its mandate, its programmes and above all the results of its work, and should pay particular attention to improvements of transparency and communications with partners and the public by strengthening the country office’s media and communications capacities.

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| **List of Recommendations**  ***Strategic approach to programming and positioning***   1. UNDP should create more depth, consolidation and synergies by focusing on a more limited number of high-impact activities where UNDP has a clear comparative advantage and can add significant value. It should focus on areas where small scale activities can catalyze large-scale and sustainable changes and innovations in the working of national institutions, both in the government and the society. Also, more can be done with respect to providing world-class development experience to Bahrain and disseminating the country’s good development practices in countries where such experience may be needed. 2. One area in which UNDP should strengthen its involvement is the advancement of women. Given that it represents a core aspect of UNDP’s global mandate, it will be important for the country office to reengage more intensively with the relevant stakeholders through a renewed approach and revitalize UNDP’s contribution to the advancement of women. 3. UNDP should engage more non-governmental partners such as research centers, universities, civil society and the private sector and capitalize more effectively on their expertise and strengths. UNDP should also continually tap knowledge resources through global knowledge networks and practices. 4. Cooperation with other UN agencies could be further strengthened at different levels to capitalize more effectively on their strengths and resources. For example, the planning of signing in 2017 a common Strategic Framework for all UN agencies operating in Bahrain is going to be very useful. Moreover, UN agencies can be involved more effectively in the UNDP programme through joint projects. 5. UNDP should put its neutrality and independence to better use, by acting more effectively as interface and coordinator for public institutions. This is a role UNDP has already played effectively in the areas of MDGs, UPR, Parliament, SIU, corporate social responsibility, etc. 6. UNDP should be a force for innovative proposals, focusing on transversal themes and promoting inter-sectoral working, alongside pilot projects in the field. This can be done by strengthening and reorganising existing skills or by drawing on others, particularly in the area of policy advice. UNDP should consider how innovative solutions could become a key component of the development of new projects and what replication criteria and methodologies should be put in place for the scaling up of successful pilots. These interventions require a clear exit strategy, so that the process is ‘owned’ by national institutions and becomes sustainable. 7. UNDP should strengthen the country office’s capacities to fulfil high quality service needs in Bahrain. In addition to the core staff in the country, UNDP should build a network of professionals to use their expertise in delivering effective and timely services. The staff restructuring process that is underway should be harnessed to strengthen the capacity of the country office to respond to country needs more effectively.   ***Sustained and predictable funding***   1. UNDP should work with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to make the funding of its programme more predictable. The signing of a CPAP with a clear commitment from the Ministry of Finance on the financing envelope and a timeline of installments for the upcoming programme cycle will be a step in that direction. 2. The Ministry of Finance should confirm its support for the UNDP programme and should encourage line ministries to explore partnerships and project ideas with UNDP. 3. UNDP should create more flexibility for its programme development work. A special fund should be created to support the exploration and development of new project ideas outside of the framework of partnerships with specific institutions. This fund should be replenished by the government on a regular basis. 4. UNDP should seek to mobilize additional funding from non-traditional domestic (such as the private sector and foundations) and international sources. UNDP should undertake a concerted campaign to access private sector and private foundation funding. 5. UNDP should seek to leverage its physical presence in the country to develop funding partnerships for the UNDP programmes in other countries. In the current fiscal climate this will be difficult, but initial steps can be taken so that the country office is well position when the economic environment has improved.   ***Transparency and visibility***   1. UNDP should communicate more about its mandate, its programmes and above all the results of its work. For example, UNDP should periodically develop communication materials and publicize its results in coordination with its partner institutions. 2. UNDP should pay particular attention to improvements of transparency and communications with partners and the public by strengthening the country office’s media and communications capacities. While communication strategies or plans have been drawn up for different projects on paper, more should be done to implement them effectively in practice. 3. The Coordination Committee could be used as an instrument to strengthen communication and coordination by serving as a deliberation forum. It could also improve transparency by serving as a strategic and decision-making body. 4. UNDP should have solid finance and programme documentation systems that are easily accessible to government departments like the Ministry of Finance. Results-based principles and tools should be applied systematically to all projects and to the programme as a whole in order to be able to demonstrate results. This should include establishing clear guidelines for reporting to clients. 5. Also, the practice of aligning the audit methodology with that of the Ministry of Finance in terms of how to report will ensure common language and better understanding and communication. The provision of training on UNDP rules and procedures for staff from the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be further strengthened. 6. These measures and the agreed role of the Coordination Committee, should be incorporated in the CPAP to be signed as part of the new country programme. Additional measures that should be explored during this programming cycle are the inclusion of a dedicated budget line for communications in projects, regular visibility events organized with partners, etc. |

1. INTRODUCTION

**Objective and scope of the evaluation**

This is an independent evaluation of UNDP Bahrain’s Country Programme 2012-2016. Its main objective is to review and assess the results and role of UNDP activities and their contribution to the country’s development results in the 2012-2016 period. It provides an objective assessment of the achievements, constraints, performance, results, impact, relevance and sustainability of the UNDP outcomes. It also provides lessons from experiences in the respective intervention for the duration of the Country Programme and generates lessons from experiences in the project formulation, implementation and operational set up of projects under the current CPD. The evaluation identifies whether past results represent sufficient foundation for future progress in the same areas. The evaluation also assesses UNDP’s strategic positioning in the country relative to other UN agencies and development partners based on its strengths and comparative advantage.

This evaluation was commissioned by UNDP Bahrain with the overall purpose of:

* Supporting the country office’s accountability in its reporting to the UNDP Executive Board;
* Supporting the country office’s accountability to Government of Bahrain, national stakeholders and other partners;
* Serving as an instrument of quality assurance for UNDP activities and initiatives at the country level;
* Contributing to learning at the country, regional and organizational levels; and
* Providing inputs for the development of the new UNDP Bahrain Country Programme.

**Methodology**

The evaluation methodology was developed in line with the evaluation manual and the ethical guidelines compiled by the United Nations Evaluation Group, as well as the guidance provided by UNDP in its “Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Results”.

The evaluation assessed primarily UNDP’s contribution to development results in the social, economic and governance spheres through its programme outcomes and strategies. It examined key intended and unintended outcomes of the UNDP programme. Strategies pursued by UNDP were evaluated for their consistency with the needs of the country in achieving development goals. Analysis of outcomes and the projects that contributed to them formed the basis for evaluating the UNDP role and positioning in Bahrain’s development context. The evaluation process identified key areas of contribution and factors that influenced UNDP performance, including:

* Strengthening human and institutional capacities;
* Providing cutting-edge development services;
* Promoting gender equality;
* Using partnerships for development;
* Facilitating informed international development cooperation;
* Approaches to UNDP programming in a high-income/net contributor country; and
* Approaches to strengthening coordinated UN programming in a high income/net contributor country.

The evaluation used a set of evaluation criteria and a number of questions organized in the manner shown in the box below.

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| **Evaluation Criteria:**  ***Relevance***: How relevant was the UNDP programme to the national development challenges and priorities as identified by the government in line with best practices of development? What was the degree of coherence of the UNDP programme to human development needs, the UNDP mandate, existing country strategies and policies, adequacy of financial/human resources, according to standards and recognized good practices? Was the UNDP programme aligned with the national priorities, strategies and development goals? Were there any obvious gaps that UNDP’s programme could have addressed but did not address? Did the UNDP programme respond appropriately and flexibly to Bahrain’s evolving situation and development needs?  ***Effectiveness***: How effective was UNDP in achieving its outcomes, especially the outcomes contained in its programming documents? What results, positive or negative, intended or unintended, were generated. What longer term effects (outcomes) were achieved or what progress was made towards their achievement? To what extent these outcomes were a result of UNDP’s involvement? Would these outcomes have happened if UNDP has not been involved? Did the UNDP programme initiate dynamic changes and processes that contributed to long-term outcomes?  ***Efficiency***: Did UNDP make good use of its financial, institutional and human resources? Could it have achieved more with the same resources or made the same contributions with fewer resources? How could resources have been used better (with more impact)? Were there any identified synergies between UNDP initiatives that contributed to reducing costs while supporting results?  ***Sustainability***: Were the results to which UNDP contributed sustainable? Did UNDP outcomes contribute to long lasting outcomes? What indications are there that the UNDP programme outcomes will be sustained, e.g., through requisite capacities (systems, structures, staff, etc.)? |

The evaluation also assessed UNDP’s strategic positioning in Bahrain on the basis of its comparative advantages and the specific strategies it used to support the country’s efforts towards development. The evaluation also assessed the way and extent to which the UNDP programme promoted key UN values through its activities.

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| **Evaluation Criteria:**  ***Strategic positioning***: How was UNDP Bahrain positioned in relation to Bahrain’s development needs and priorities? How was UNDP positioned relative to other UN agencies and development organizations (including private consulting firms which are ubiquitous in the GCC region)? What was UNDP’s role in MDG process in the country? How was its engagement with the SDG process? Were there overlaps in what UNDP did with other organizations? If so, in which areas? How did UNDP coordinate with other UN organizations?  ***Promotion of United Nations values***: Did UNDP undertake its activities from a human development perspective? Did UNDP in particular effectively support government efforts to strengthen policies, institutions and human resources? To what extent was the UNDP programme designed to appropriately incorporate into each outcome area contributions to the attainment of gender equality and human rights? Was UNDP considered capable of providing leadership and contributing to substantive and high-level policy dialogues on human development issues, particularly on potentially sensitive issues? |

The evaluation also addressed significant cross-cutting factors such as advancement of women and gender equality, capacity development, South-South cooperation, partnerships, strengthening of civil society and coordination among UN agencies. These issues constituted an integral part of the Country Programme Document (CPD) 2012-2016 as cross-cutting themes.

**Data collection**

The evaluation used a mixed method approach, using different methods and collecting data from different sources (secondary and primary), including interviews (face-to-face and telephone), desk reviews of available documentation and information, and field visits. Data and information collected from various sources and methods were triangulated to strengthen the validity of findings.

The following secondary data was reviewed:

* Background documents on the national context, including national strategies and policies prepared by the government and documents prepared by international partners during the period under review;
* Country programme documents and project documents for completed, ongoing or proposed UNDP projects, including preparatory phase documents, annual reports and financial data;
* Country office reviews of the country programme and annual reporting; and
* Independent research reports and academic publications on various subjects about Bahrain.

The evaluation involved directly or indirectly a broad range of stakeholders, including government representatives of ministries and agencies, civil society organizations, private-sector representatives, United Nations organizations and stakeholders that were not direct UNDP partners.

Interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders, including government officials, beneficiaries, donors, development partners, UN agencies and UNDP staff members. Efforts were made to meet a wide range of stakeholders and programme partners, in particular to address any limitations pertaining to areas where programme documentation and monitoring had not been sufficient.

While collecting evaluative evidence to identify UNDP contributions, the approach adopted for the evaluation included understanding the nature of UNDP initiatives (what did the interventions do exactly?) and document the nature of ‘value added” by UNDP activities (e.g. technical skills and expertise, conceptual frameworks and methods that were not present before).

**The process**

The evaluation process consisted of three phases.

* The preparation phase included the development of the terms of reference (by the country office) and the design of the evaluation framework.
* The second phase consisted of data collection and analysis. Data collection was guided by the evaluation framework. The assessment of programme outcomes enabled the evaluation consultant to make linkages to the overall development context and to UNDP contributions to national development results. After preliminary data analysis, the evaluation consultant presented initial observations and findings to the country office in the form of a draft report.
* The third phase involved further analysis based on the feedback from the country office and the preparation of the final version of the evaluation report.

1. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Over the last few decades the Kingdom of Bahrain has made great social and economic progress, despite challenges at home and in the region. By capitalizing on the wealth from its natural resources and strategic geographical position, the country has achieved a high income status, has reached high levels of performance in health, education and other social spheres and is committed to achieving both national and global development goals. Bahrain is well-integrated in the regional and global economy and is an active member of a number of important international organizations and agreements.

On the political front, in 2011 protests took place against the backdrop of the Arab uprising. The escalation of the situation was successfully contained, with the government taking a number of measures to address the grievances expressed by the protestors. The government appointed the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which developed a set of recommendations for reforming the justice and security sectors by implementing a series of changes in policy, legislation and administrative procedures. In 2012 the government followed up with the establishment of a national commission tasked with the oversight of the implementation of recommendations and a series of constitutional amendments, which included the creation of a Special Investigation Unit (SIU) within the office of the Public Prosecutor dedicated to the investigation of cases of violation of human rights by security forces, and an increased role for the Parliament in the political arena, among others.

On the economic front, Bahrain’s achievements have been impressive. Beginning with a boom in oil development in the 1970s, Bahrain has experienced an astonishing pace of modernization accompanied by rapid urbanization and increases in personal income and living standards. According to statistics from Bahrain’s National Development Strategy (2015 – 2018), between 2003 and 2014 the country’s Gross Domestic Product increased by about 66%, employment rose by about 40% and wages increased by about 25%. Also, the process of diversification of the economy gathered momentum during this period. In 2003 the oil and gas sector made up about 40% of the economy, whereas in 2013 it constituted only about 20%. Progress has also been made in the area of governance. In 2014, Bahrain ranked as the 29th most economically free nation in the world by Fraser Institute and the 13th freest economy in the world by the Heritage Foundation. Also, Bahrain’s position in the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators rose from 66% in 2007 to 69% by 2012. Its position in the transparency of government policy-making indicator of the the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report improved from 31st in 2008-2009 to 26th in the 2013-2014, while staying in the 17th position in the wastefulness of government spending indicator.

In the last few years, the United Nations Development Programme has consistently placed Bahrain in its “High Development” category in the Human Development Index (HDI), measuring three dimensions of human development: long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and decent standard of living (HDR-2015). According to the same report, Bahrain HDI’s value increased in the years 1980-2014 from 0.679 – 0.824; an increase of 21.3 percent or an average annual increase of about 0.57 percent. By 2015, Bahrain had achieved ten years ahead of schedule MDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Significant progress has also been made on MDG 7 (environmental protection), although challenges remain especially as a result of the geography and Bahrain being a limited and water-stressed landmass.

Such progress represents great achievements for a small country like Bahrain. Yet, like any other society, Bahrain is not immune from risks and pressures which require coordinated action from the government, private sector, the society and partners. The following are some of the greatest challenges Bahrain faces in the short to medium run.

***Economic competitiveness -*** Bahrain’s economy is dependent on oil (and to some extent aluminum) revenues and lacks competitiveness in other sectors which makes it sensitive to external shocks such as a drop in the price of oil. Although Bahrain’s GDP is now composed of four major sectors (oil and gas, financial services, manufacturing and government services), limited economic diversification represents a vulnerability and remains a serious challenge which the government is committed to tackle. Bahrain needs to shield itself from external risks by diversifying its economic activities and gaining access for its products to broader markets. This challenge has been recognized in the government’s Economic Vision 2030, National Development Strategy, as well as the Government Action Plan 2015-2018 and will require reforms, especially in the area of private sector development, trade policy, innovation and technological advancement. Private sector development and innovation will require the right mix of skills and qualifications in the labour force, particular attention to tertiary and vocational education and training and incentives to get more Bahrainis, particularly women, to participate in the labour market.

***Social Development -*** Another key challenge Bahrain currently faces is the conversion of the impressive gains it has made in the economic sphere into social improvements for the whole society (provision of education, healthcare, housing, welfare supports and other social services, especially for those most in need so as to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to advance and the right to a life with dignity). Bahrain’s government is committed to the quality and access to public services for all citizens and has made great progress over the last decade in investing in schools, universities, hospitals, social service centers, social welfare programmes, etc. The challenge in the coming years will be not only to maintain these achievements in the face of fiscal adversity and external economic shocks, but also to further strengthen and expand them, especially when considering the expanding population will require more social services and will therefore put a strain on them.

***Advancement of women -*** Another challenge for Bahrain is expanding women’s economic and political opportunities. Although Bahrain has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and has committed to advancing the rights of the female population by adopting a National Action Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women (2013-2022), women continue to face significant challenges and barriers. Although women represent more than 50% of graduates from higher education institutions, their labour force participation is lower than men’s, which represents wasted economic potential. Women have less access to credit, capital, information and technology, which leads to a sub-optimal allocation of credit, capital and other resources in the economy. Gender inequalities are also reflected in the political life. Bahrain has only one female cabinet minister and three elected women out of 40 members of Parliament. The government, with the support of international partners such as UNDP, has taken steps to address this situation by developing policies that support employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for women. It has also established Equal Opportunity Units in institutions. However, more incentives are needed for women to participate in productive activities, especially through targeted training and educational activities.

***Opportunities for Youth in Education and Employment -*** Bahrain has a young population, with 48% of its people being under the age of 30 as of 2014. Creating sufficient employment for the youth will be one of Bahrain’s key challenges. Measures to expand economic activity and generate new jobs will need to be combined with measures to strengthen education and training for young people so that they can be able to compete internationally with their skills and products. Government programmes supporting young people need to be further strengthened and work more closely work with universities and vocational training institutions to strengthen their curricula and teaching methods. Although a National Youth Strategy that addresses these issues exists, its implementation mechanisms need to be strengthened further for it to be effective.

***Environmental challenges –*** Another set of challenges is related to environmental sustainability, especially with regards to biodiversity, sea-level rise and water scarcity. With most of the island’s land being used for commercial or residential purposes, land reclamation has been pursued intensively, which has had a negative impact on marine habitats. Also, being located in one of the most water-stressed regions in the world, Bahrain faces a significant challenge in how it manages its water resources.

1. UNDP PROGRAMME OUTLINED IN CPD 2012-2016

UNDP activities carried out in the period 2012-2016 were based on the CPD 2012-2016, endorsed at the UNDP Executive Board session of July 2011. The adopted 2012-2016 CPD identified the following expected outcomes:

1. ***Improved governance: Strengthened capacity to formulate plans and policies more efficiently, fairly and transparently;***
2. ***Inclusive sustainable development: More women empowered, youth unemployment reduced and national environmental protection actively pursued;***
3. ***Economic development: Knowledge-based and private-sector growth for sustainable pro-poor and pro-women development.***

The outcomes identified in the CPD were underpinned by a set of proposed activities which are listed below (*taken from the Country Programme Document 2012-2016*).

1. ***Outcome 1***- To achieve the first outcome, UNDP will continue to support institutionalization of a democratic culture, focusing especially on the role of women and youth in public life. Support will be provided to build capacity for performance-based and gender-responsive budgeting and to strengthen parliamentary oversight of Government. UNDP will focus its assistance on new MPs to build their skills in oversight and outreach functions and to improve dialogue with the executive branch, including on drafting effective legislation. Strengthening the capacities of the Bahrain Institute for Political Development to implement high-quality programmes in democratic and political reforms will be pursued.
2. ***Outcome 2*** - To contribute to more inclusive development, the goal of the second outcome is to build capacities in the Supreme Council for Women and women’s NGOs. Collaborating with the Bahraini Men’s Network to End Violence against Women, UNDP will support strengthening of legislative frameworks and increasing awareness and coordination among relevant governmental bodies and NGOs working to end violence against women. A major focus will be building capacities within civil society and academia, to prepare women for decision-making posts in the public and private sectors. Building on past cooperation with the Government, UNDP will support implementation of the National Environment Strategy. This will include provision for monitoring and safeguarding against sea-level rise, water scarcity and related environmental concerns.
3. ***Outcome 3*** - In pursuit of the third outcome and the challenges under the NES, UNDP will work with the Government, Economic Development Board, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the private sector to better align education and training with future job market demands. UNDP will also contribute to formulation of economic policies, knowledge systems and frameworks that create knowledge jobs through innovation, diversification and pro-poor and sustainable growth in the private sector. Particular efforts will be made to encourage investments in women and girls and promotion of private-sector partnerships, aiming to increase women’s participation in economic activity. UNDP will also support linkages between businesses and the United Nations and global networks such as the Global Compact and other initiatives. It will prepare frameworks for public-private partnerships and corporate social responsibility to increase the private sector’s role in human development.

The CPD also emphasized the role UNDP would play in accelerating progress towards the full and sustainable achievement of the MDGs. Also, a number of issues cutting across, and mainstreamed through, all three programme areas were identified and included support for gender equality and women’s empowerment, a human rights-based approach and building capacity in civil society and the government.

The list of projects with an active status during the period 2012-2016 is shown in the table below. Eight projects were still active during the time of the evaluation (February – March 2016). Seven projects were closed in the first two years of the country programme cycle (2012 – 2013).

**Table 1: Projects which had an active status during the 2012-2016 period**

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| **Ongoing Projects** | | | |
| **Project Title** | **Implementing Partner** | **Status** | **Budget** |
| Supporting Political Reform in Partnership with the Bahrain Institute for Political Development | Bahrain Institute of Political Development | Ongoing | 1,270,500 |
| Enhancing Institutional Capacity for Global Economic Environment and Governance | Ministry of Industry and Commerce | Ongoing | 1,427,160 |
| Strengthening the Capacity of the Parliamentary Secretariat and Members of Parliament | Nuwab and Shura Councils | Ongoing | 300,000 |
| Support to the Development of the National Childhood Strategy and National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities | Ministry of Social Development | Ongoing | 378,800 |
| Establishing the Capacity Development Facility | Bahrain Institute of Public Administration | Ongoing | 884,255 |
| Gender and Economic Policy Management | University of Bahrain | Ongoing | 3,340,000 |
| Bahrain Unit for Sustainable Energy | Office of the Minister of Energy | Ongoing | 6,700,000 |
| Capacity Building of the Special Investigation Unit of the Public Prosecution | SIU, Public Prosecution Office | Ongoing | 250,000 |
| **Closed Projects** | | | |
| **Project Title** | **Implementing Partner** | **End Date** |  |
| Micro Finance | Ministry of Social Development + Ahli Bank (partial funding) | 30/6/2013 |  |
| Bahrain UPR Implementation | MoFA | 30/6/2013 |  |
| Women Empowerment Programme | Supreme Council for Women | 31/12/2013 |  |
| Updating National Youth Strategy & Action Plan | Supreme Council for Youth | 31/12/2013 |  |
| Drug Control National Strategy for Bahrain | Ministry of Interior | 30/6/2013 |  |
| Creation of Arab eContent Centre | E-Government Authority | 30/6/2012 |  |
| Phasing out of Ozone Depleting Substance of CFCs (TPMP) | Public commission for the protection of marine resources, environment & wildlife | 31/12/2012 |  |

1. PROGAMME ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

With its activities during the 2012-2016 cycle, UNDP responded to important country needs. The country programme was built in response to specific requests for support by government and non-governmental partners. Some of UNDP’s work in this period was the continuation of prior activities, with new projects following on from preparatory assistance or other recently-completed projects. This ensured a certain degree of coherence in the programme.

One important drawback in this programme cycle was the impact of the aftermath of the 2011 unrest on UNDP activities. Following the 2011 events, UNDP was forced to interrupt some of its programme activities temporarily as they required a reassessment and recalibration. The adoption of the 2015-2018 Government Action Plan by the Parliament represented a good opportunity for UNDP to resume some of its activities with a renewed approach.

During the programme period, UNDP’s programme aimed to support national governmental and non-governmental entities to enhance human and institutional capacities and strengthen policy advocacy as part of its technical cooperation with the government. The country programme involved work with partners in the areas of governance, economic integration and development, national social strategies, energy efficiency, information and communication technology, gender, among others. Capacity building, advocacy and awareness raising on issues of social inclusion and human rights were key elements that were weaved throughout project activities.

Most UNDP activities during this cycle took place in the framework of specific projects designed and implemented on the basis of Project Documents signed jointly with various public institutions. A number of additional activities took place outside the framework of specific projects and were carried out by the country office as part of its daily agenda of substantive work. Such activities focused on core UNDP corporate priorities such as reporting on human development indicators, awareness raising and reporting on the MDGs, preparatory work on the SDGs, gender mainstreaming, etc.

UNDP activities during this programme cycle can be categorized into three clusters, which broadly correspond to the three outcomes outlined in the CPD:

1. Good Governance
2. Social Inclusion
3. Economic and Sustainable Development

The following is a brief description of three clusters.

***Good Governance***

Activities in the good governance cluster were focused on capacity development support in the areas of policy, management, leadership and institutional reform, within the public sector and civil society. The following four projects, which were active during the programme cycle, were assessed in the framework of the evaluation.

* Establishing the Capacity Development Facility within the Bahrain Institute of Public Administration
* Parliamentary Capacity Development
* Strengthening Governance & Civic Education by Supporting the Bahrain Institute of Political Development
* Strengthening the Capacity of the Special Investigation Unit of the Public Prosecution Office
* Supporting the Creation of the Arab eContent Centre

***Establishing the Capacity Development Facility within the Bahrain Institute of Public Administration***

Through this project, UNDP helped the Bahrain Institute for Public Administration (BIPA) strengthen its capacity and enhance its research and consulting services in support of Bahrain’s public institutions. Initially, the project supported the conduct of a detailed capacity assessment which amongst other things outlined a strategy for BIPA in its capacity development efforts towards the public sector. Subsequently, the project helped BIPA develop training programmes for internal consulting capacity in the public sector, conduct market surveys, stakeholder analyses, develop a Strategic and Business Plan, build an experts’ database, prepare reference manuals for consulting products, develop a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework and Marketing Strategy, etc. With the support of this project, BIPA organized international conferences and executed major research projects in Arab countries by enrolling institutional members from across the region. It also ran workshops on academic research in public administration, on developing a research agenda for public administration, and held a showcase event on best practices in Arab public administration. The project helped BIPA establish the Middle East and North Africa Public Administration Research (MENAPAR)[[4]](#footnote-4), a network for research collaboration in public administration in the Middle East. Collaboration agreements between regional public administrations were signed and are being implemented under the umbrella of the MENAPAR. Currently, MENAPAR is actively exploring, researching and supporting the implementation of innovative approaches to public administration management through evidence-policy studies, experimentation with emerging techniques and tools for citizen engagement in policy-making, and capacity development initiatives.

During the interview conducted in the context of this evaluation, BIPA representatives expressed satisfaction with the contribution of the UNDP project. When asked which aspects of the collaboration with UNDP they found most useful, they singled out the following: (i) the low cost of UNDP assistance compared to private sector consulting companies; (ii) the quality of consultants the UNDP project had mobilized; (iii) the transparent recruitment process through the consultants database operated by UNDP; and, (iv) excellent relationship with the country office staff. When asked about challenges faced during the implementation of the project, the BIPA representatives highlighted the following: (i) rigid UNDP procedures that delay certain processes (for example, the signing of project documents takes too long, the recruitment process can be lengthy, etc.); (ii) Project Managers should to be selected very carefully and have strong management and technical skills relevant to the area of work (for example, the first Project Manager hired for this project was not sufficiently skilled and by the time he was replaced precious time had been wasted). BIPA representatives were overall pleased with the results of the project and were keen on continuing the cooperation with UNDP further in the new Country Programme.

***Parliamentary Capacity Development***

This project supported Bahrain’s parliament (Council of Representatives and the Shura Council). UNDP is the only international organization with which Bahrain’s Parliament has had a joint project. Through this project, UNDP helped the Parliament strengthen its procedures and practices and improve its ability to adopt legislative and oversight approaches grounded in human rights. Some concrete activities that were supported by the project included the enhancement of the skills of Parliamentary Secretariat’s staff through on the job training, the creation of databases capable of supporting the parliament’s implementation of its constitutional prerogatives, the improvement of services provided to MPs by support staff, building of the career progression system for parliamentary staff, and the strengthening of the capacities of the human resources department within the Parliamentary Secretariat. UNDP internal assessments of the project, which were reviewed in the course of this evaluation, have found that the project’s overall result has been satisfactory. The main reported outcome is that the parliament has improved its openness and its responsiveness to citizens’ needs.

The performance of the project was overall assessed satisfactory by the Parliament staff interviewed for this evaluation. The achievements mentioned in the previous paragraph were confirmed by interviewees. However, a number of challenges were identified. First, the project has taken too long and certain activities have stalled at certain points. The Project Document was signed in 2009 and the project was scheduled to end in 2011. However, the project is still running and has been extended a few times. Certainly, crucial constitutional changes took place in 2012 that also changed the role of the Parliament. Also, delays in the communications between the two chambers of Parliament were identified as reasons for delays in the project. However, other factors endogenous to the project seem to have played a role as well. For example, the Parliament staff interviewed for the evaluation pointed out that too many Project Managers have been changed during the lifetime of the project, which created instability and lack of consistency in project activities. At the time of the evaluation there was no Project Manager or Project Coordinator involved, which according to the interviewees represented a weakness. A major challenge they identified was the lengthy recruitment process and the lack of flexibility in the way project staff were paid (for example, advance payments are necessary when a foreign national is hired as a Project Manager and asked to relocate in Bahrain). Interviewees emphasized the need to upgrade recruitment procedures and identify more effective ways for the payment of consultants in time.

***Supporting Political Reform in Partnership with the Bahrain Institute for Political Development***

This project was conceived to strengthen the capacity of Bahrain Institute for Political Development (BIPD) through the creation and implementation of information and communication systems. The idea was to enhance the political and institutional climate in the country by strengthening the effectiveness and efficiency of BIPD services, which are centered on the provision of information and education about elections and political institutions. While the initial intent of the project was to provide a wider range of supports to BIPD, the scope of the new phase of the project which corresponded with the new Country Programme narrowed during the implementation stage to a mainly IT focus due to changing priorities within the BIPD which were mainly the result of change in BIPD management. The main contribution of this project was the development of BIPD’s website which includes a section in the English language for Bahraini residents who are non-Arabic speakers. Project activities concentrated on providing technical solutions and developing the content of the website (materials and links on political and constitutional awareness, democracy, human rights and civic education, etc.).

This is a long-standing project which was extended in 2013. For a long period the project was stagnating due to difficulties experienced in the relationship between UNDP and BIPD, which were mainly a result of changes in BIPD’s management and the difficult political environment that followed the 2011 unrest. However, recently project activities have gathered momentum and three project staff have been hired. While progress has been made on the website and email system, there is outstanding work that is expected to continue on the e-library system in 2016. The current phase (2014 – 2016) will end this year, but will probably be extended again to allow for the completion of activities. Project staff who were interviewed for this project weren’t able to say whether a new project of cooperation with UNDP will be requested by BIPD.

***Strengthening the Capacity of the Special Investigation Unit of the Public Prosecution Office***

This project focused on a very critical and sensitive area of Bahrain’s complex political and institutional context. Its goal was to strengthen the capacity and independence of the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) of the Public Prosecution Office in line with best international practices. Mandated to investigate cases of human rights abuses by security forces, SIU was established by the King of Bahrain in the follow up to BICI and the constitutional changes that were undertaken by authorities in its aftermath.

The project conducted an assessment of the forensic services of the Public Prosecution and the facilities of the Ministry of Health, which included an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of relevant institutions, recommendations for improvements in procedures and services (staff skills, facilities and equipment, interagency and international cooperation, and appropriate ways of dealing with cases of torture and mistreatment) and measures needed to implement the proposed changes. The project organized jointly with the SIU, the Institute of Judicial and Legal Studies, Ministry of Justice, the Public Prosecution Office, a workshop to strengthen capacities and technical procedures of these institutions to meet practices and standards in accordance with the Istanbul protocol and good international practices. The project also provided recommendations on the technical structure of the database operated by SIU and initiated the development of a Case Management database. Support was also provided on media and communications relations and the preparation of a draft of SIU’s Outreach Strategy.

SIU staff interviewed for this evaluation were satisfied with the UNDP project. They valued the level of expertise that the project had made available to them and assessed the results that had been achieved by the project as highly relevant and effective. They expressed their desire to continue the cooperation with UNDP and open new areas of work through a future project (they identified capacity building for the “victims and witnesses assistance unit” and “judicial police” as potential future areas of cooperation). One weakness that SIU staff identified during the interview was the long time that it takes to get approval from the Ministry of Finance for UNDP projects.

***Creation of Arab e-Content Centre***

UNDP’s cooperation with Bahraini authorities on issues related to e-governance goes back to 2007/2008. At that time UNDESA produced a report which ranked countries by their e-government readiness. Bahrain fared fairly poorly in the ranking and a decision was made by the government to address this weakness with the help of UN agencies. An “E-Government Authority” was established and a number of cooperation initiatives were initiated with UNDESA and UNDP. Since 2008, the E-Government Authority in cooperation with UN agencies has organized capacity building workshops, convened regional events and undertaken other important steps which have successfully help Bahrain rise in the international rankings. Now Bahrain is the top country in the GCC region in the area of e-governance.

The “Creation of an Arab e-content center” project was developed jointly by the E-Government Authority and UNDP, with the participation of UNDESA, and was kick-started in 2010. The e-content center was intended to provide governance-related material and information in the Arabic language to users from all over the Arab region. In the course of this project, external consultants developed standards for the content of the center, equipment was purchased, the infrastructure was established and tests of the system were conducted. Despite these achievements, after the project came to an end in 2012, activities stalled. The center was not formally established, as conceived in the Project Document, and ever since it has not been functioning. In hindsight, it is clear that this project lacked sustainability.

Representatives of the “E-Government Authority” explained that the reasons for the lack of progress in the establishment of the center might have been two-fold – first, they pointed out that the priorities of the Board of the E-Government Authority had changed by the time the project ended (not least, as a result of the financial constraints resulting from the fiscal challenges Bahrain started to experience), and, secondly, they argued that the model of the project was perhaps not very effective – relying on just one consultant and not involving more people might have made the project too reliant on one single resource. Given the current financial constraints, the likelihood of a continuation of this project remains low and a likely scenario seems to be the transfer of the equipment and content to the Polytechnic with the aim of achieving the project’s ultimate goals.

***Social Inclusion***

The Social Inclusion cluster focused on protecting, promoting and strengthening the position and human rights of vulnerable groups in the society. The focus of UNDP activities in this area was on enhancing economic opportunities for women and improving the delivery of social services for children, disabled persons and the elderly. This cluster consisted of two key projects:

1. Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative
2. Support to the Development of the National Childhood Strategy and National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

***Gender and Economic Policy Management***

Modelled on a similar initiative implemented by UNDP in Africa, the “Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative” (GEPMI) had the potential of being one of the most interesting gender projects in the region. The concept involved the development of an educational programme on the “interaction of gender and economic productivity” at the University of Bahrain (UoB). The objective of the project was two-fold: 1) to develop a short-term training programme for government officials from the region on the interlinkages of trade and gender (using gender mainstreaming strategies, such as gender analysis, the use of data disaggregated by sex and age, as well as gender-sensitive studies, guidelines and checklists); and, 2) to establish an interdisciplinary Master’s programme on gender and economic development at the UoB.

The project had a smooth start, with an international Project Manager recruited to manage its activities on a day-to-day basis. In the initial phase, the content of the training programme was developed in close cooperation with the UoB – twelve training modules covering different aspects of the gender-economic development relationship were produced. However, in the beginning of 2015, halfway into the project schedule, activities were interrupted abruptly. The training of the government officials on the basis of the developed training programme did not take place and the Master’s programme was not established. As of the time of the evaluation, there had been no further progress with the activities of this project.

UoB representatives and the former Project Manager who were interviewed for this evaluation stated that the reason the project was stopped was that the Ministry of Finance was not fully aware and informed of this project and had not cleared the procedure for continued disbursements under the project. More effective triangular communications between UNDP, the UoB and the Ministry of Finance could have avoided the complications that arose in the Ministry of Finance. The stopping of the project was unfortunate because the UoB representative highly valued the nature of this project for the university and the country. The UoB representative was optimistic that activities would resume and the outcomes defined in the Project Document would be achieved.[[5]](#footnote-5)

***Support to the Development of the National Childhood Strategy and National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities***

Through its project “Support to the Development of the National Childhood Strategy and the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities for the Kingdom of Bahrain”, UNDP supported the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD)[[6]](#footnote-6) to lead the development of a National Childhood Strategy and a National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities. These were the first two comprehensive strategies Bahrain had ever developed in these areas.[[7]](#footnote-7) The strategies’ fundamental purpose was to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights for children, persons with disabilities and elderly by providing guidance to government institutions, NGOs, the private sector, professional groups, educators, advocates and other members of civil society regarding the tasks that need to be accomplished to ensure that the human rights of these vulnerable groups are effectively observed and realized. The project prioritized support to the implementation of the three strategies with the objective of delivering expanded and improved services to the people of Bahrain. The implementation process was supported by enhancing the capacity of the main actors – MoSD and its Centers, other social sector ministries (Health, Education, Labour, etc. ) and government institutions, National Committees, NGOs, academia, etc. Moreover, UNDP helped MoSD enhance social service delivery by strengthening policies and the coordination of government related efforts. The project supported MoSD in the management of a number of activities across a number of areas, the coordination of many stakeholders, the enhancement of the monitoring and evaluation framework, structural changes in related programmes and institutions, revisions of the policy framework, etc.

The final evaluation of the project conducted by an independent evaluator in May 2014 concluded that the objectives of the project were achieved successfully. It found that the process of developing the strategies was both inclusive and participatory. It also concluded that the project intervention was sustainable with a high likelihood of continued long-term benefits for both children and persons with disabilities. Moreover, Ministry representatives met during the CPD evaluation express overall satisfaction with the project. The weaknesses that they identified were primarily related to the fact that Ministry counterparts at the beginning of cooperation had little understanding of UNDP projects and how they are run and operated. They pointed out that the orientation training sessions organized by UNDP at the beginning of the project were very useful in getting Ministry staff to become familiarized with the principles and procedures of UNDP projects. They suggested that such training events be organized upfront with other counterparts in the future. The main strengths of the project that were pointed out by MoSD staff were related to the opportunities that the project created for a broader involvement of stakeholders, the high level of expertise that was mobilized and made available through international consultants, and the level of recognition and validation that UNDP’s involvement gave to the work that was conducted.

***Economic and Sustainable Development***

The Sustainable Development cluster centered on economic development and supported the Bahraini government’s priorities of economic diversification and competitiveness. Programme activities focused on the promotion of energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy and on supporting Bahrain’s integration into global and regional trade initiatives. This cluster consisted of two projects:

1. Bahrain Unit for Sustainable Energy
2. Enhancing Institutional Capacity for Global Economic Environment and Governance

***Bahrain Unit for Sustainable Energy***

This project has started only recently and is still gathering momentum. As such, it is too early to provide an assessment of its contribution to development results. The following is a brief description of the activities that have taken place so far. The Project Document was signed in November 2014 and implementation started in 2015. A full-time Project Coordinator has been hired, supported by a part-time staff. The Project Coordinator is located in the UNDP office for the time being until a permanent arrangement is agreed with the Ministry of Energy. Recruitment of a number of consultants in key expertise areas in underway. Through this project UNDP is assisting the Ministry of Energy to promote national policies and targets on energy efficiency and renewable energy, as well as revisit the energy mix in the country. The establishment of a Sustainable Energy Unit (SEU) will support national efforts on energy efficiency and increased use of renewable energy. The two other major outputs expected from the project are the formulation of a National Energy Efficiency Plan and a National Plan for Renewable Energy. The project will develop national capacity and support policy and implementation of national targets. The SEU will promote energy efficiency, including in decentralized solutions like energy efficient air conditioning. Programme staff are in the process of identifying in discussions with government counterparts the location of the SEU within the broader institutional structure related to the energy sector.

***Enhancing Institutional Capacity for Global Economic Environment and Governance***

UNDP has a longstanding involvement with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) which is the implementing partner for this project. This is the third project UNDP implements with MoIC. The main goal of the project was the strengthening of Bahrain’s participation in the international trade system. The project supported MoIC to engage more effectively in the international and regional trade agreements, and in particular the World Trade Organization and regional Free Trade Agreements. The project supported the conduct of an institutional analysis of domestic trade policies and proposed a re-arrangement of the institutional set-up, including the establishment of new structures such as the Business Advocacy sub-unit. The project also helped with educational and awareness raising activities on various trade-related issues. Moreover, MoIC staff were trained on several aspects of international trade protocols and agreements and a number of studies on regional trade agreements and free trade agreements were carried out. Additional technical support was provided in the area of industrial property and standards for metrology.

Overall, MoIC staff interviewed for this evaluation expressed satisfaction with the UNDP project and were keen to further extend this cooperation into the new programme cycle. The only area of activities for which they expressed reservation was the trademarks/patents component. According to them, results in this area could have been better. The main strength of the partnership with UNDP they identified was the opportunity to access high-level international expertise at a relatively low cost. On the other hand, what they identified as the major weakness was related to what they perceived as a lack of high flexibility and agility in UNDP’s recruitment procedures.

***Cross-cutting activities***

***Human Rights***

The protection and promotion of human rights was a key theme that ran through a number of activities and projects implemented in the current programme, making it a programme with a significant focus on human rights. During this cycle, UNDP promoted human rights not only in “traditional areas” such as support for equality and social integration of children, women, disabled persons, etc., but also in very political and sensitive arenas such as the SIU of the Public Prosecution Office, the Parliament, political parties (through the partnership with BIPD) and the public administration (through the partnership with BIPA). It is also worth mentioning in this context another important UNDP contribution in the area of human rights - its support for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its engagement with, and reporting obligations for, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

***Gender and Empowerment of Women***

Another cross-cutting theme that UNDP pursued throughout its programme was gender advocacy and the empowerment of women. Gender-related activities were pursued in three different ways – a) through dedicated gender-focused projects such as GEPMI; b) by including the empowerment of women as an aspect of project focused on various other substantive areas (such as the strategies for children and disabled persons); and, c) as stand-alone activities undertaken by the country office outside the scope of the ongoing projects (i.e. advocacy events on women’s day). Although gender-related activities were a key part of the programme, UNDP could have done more to strengthen the position and situation of women in the country. Given the absence of UN Women in the country, UNDP has a central role to play in this domain and could have worked more closely with the Supreme Council for Women.

***Mainstreaming MDGs and preparing for the SDGs***

As an agency mandated to support the achievement of the MDGs worldwide, UNDP actively promoted the MDG agenda in Bahrain and supported government efforts in embedding them in the national development agenda. MDG-related activities took place at several levels. First, real efforts were made with the systematic identification of MDG-related objectives across all UNDP programme activities. Second, a lot of effort focused on creating the necessary awareness within the government and civil society about the use of MDGs as the overarching framework for national strategies and planning. Third, UNDP actively helped the government in the process of reporting on the MDGs at different levels and through different channels. Another important part of UNDP’s work during the current programme cycle was focused on helping national authorities prepare for the national SDGs target setting process. It should be noted that Bahrain’s government was a great supporter of MDGs and played a very active role in the SDG process both domestically and internationally. For example, Bahrain hosted a regional conference on SDGs in May 2015 prior to the declaration and adoption of the Agenda 2030 and the new development goals (UNESCWA and UNEP took the lead in the process, but UNDP too provided considerable support). Bahrain is also taking the lead on a number of upcoming SDG-related regional events (such as the implications of SDGs for youth in the region).

***South-South cooperation***

In the current programme, UNDP Bahrain drew on its global network of expertise to encourage the sharing of experiences and introduce examples of best practices, particularly in terms of South-South cooperation. UNDP tried to facilitate the sharing of best technical resources, international practices, experiences and knowledge with Bahraini counterparts. In many cases, leading international experts were involved in the process, bringing a wealth of experiences and practices to the country. In particular, exchanges with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Arab countries were promoted.

Although the benefits of South-South cooperation were unequally applied, depending on the subject area in question, certain areas of the programme clearly benefitted more from this practice. The areas in which UNDP put its global network to effective use were the MDG/SDG agenda, public administration, gender and development, institutional development and human rights, trade policy, and social policies and strategies. These cooperation activities led to a broadened range of policy options available to Bahraini institutions and resulted in more effective policy uptake in those projects where South-South cooperation was involved. Concrete results were visible in the area of public administration with the establishment of MENAPAR, the MDG/SDG cooperation framework at the level of the Arab region, etc. To facilitate South-South exchanges, UNDP Bahrain tapped in particular into the rich networks of the UNDP Regional Office and UNESCWA.

***Civil society capacity***

Given that the current programme was entirely funded by the government, it would be fair to expect the programme to be government-focused. Despite this, the country office made commendable efforts to include non-governmental organisations in its activities. Most non-governmental organisations and associations in Bahrain have little capacity and limited resources. Recognizing this, UNDP’s programme sought to play a role in changing the situation in favour of civil society by strengthening their participation in governance processes and policy-making.

The projects that had a particular focus on civil society issues were the ones on social strategies, public administration, gender, MDGs/SDGs, etc. The country office sought to involve not only NGOs and community based organizations (CBOs), but also to some extent research institutes, universities, academics, journalists, etc. Civil society was also actively engaged by the country office outside the framework of the ongoing projects, such as in the activities related to the promotion and reporting of MDGs and SDGs. Most UNDP country office events were actively attended by representatives of civil society.

It terms of ultimate impact, it can be said that civil society in Bahrain remains fragile, with limited access to policy and decision making in the public sphere and largely dependent on the government for funding. In sensitive areas, such human rights, civil society organizations remain particularly weak. But this can be attributed to the political environment and the fiscal crisis, rather than UNDP’s overall involvement.

**Programme outcomes**

Comparing activities listed in the CPD 2012-2016 with the activities that were in reality carried out in the 2012-2016 period reveals that not all activities listed in the CPD actually did take place. UNDP operated on the basis of the NIM modality of implementation and was fully funded by the government, which made it difficult to develop a multi-year work plan for the office because support demand may come at any time and outside the scope of original country programme. Some of the implications of the NIM modality and other factors that affect the predictability of the UNDP programme will be discussed further in this document.

Based on the review of documents and interviews with programme staff and partners, the following three outcomes, to which the UNDP programme has contributed to, can be identified. Although not identical to the outcomes identified in the CPD, these outcomes are largely in line with them.

* ***Strengthened governance institutions and functions through increased capacity of national institutions in the areas of policy, management, leadership and institutional reform, within the public sector and civil society.*** UNDP activities that contributed to this outcome supported the Bahrain Institute of Public Administration in its role in support of public administration reforms in the public sector, the Parliament in strengthening the capacity of its Secretariat, the Bahrain Institute of Political Development in its role in support of political reforms, the newly-established Special Investigation Unit of the Public Prosecution Office which investigates sensitive cases of violations of human rights by security officials, etc.
* ***Strengthened capacity of national institutions to protect and promote the position and human rights of vulnerable groups, including women and youth.*** The focus of UNDP activities in this area was on enhancing economic opportunities for women and improving policy formulation and the delivery of social services for children, disabled persons and the elderly. UNDP activities that contributed to this outcome also supported the Supreme Council of Women in its activities in support of women empowerment, assisted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the implementation and reporting of activities related to the UPR, and provided support to Bahrain’s engagement with the MDGs and SDGs processes.
* ***Strengthened national capacity in supporting economic and sustainable development.*** UNDP activities that contributed to this outcome supported the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in taking advantage of Bahrain’s participation in WTO processes and the Ministry of Energy in initiating improvements in the policy and institutional framework aimed at enhancing Bahrain’s energy efficiency and access to renewable sources of energy.

**Programme relevance and country ownership**

The 2012-2016 country programme was largely aligned with national priorities, policies and strategies. Its design and implementation was grounded in the country’s major strategic frameworks – the Government Programme of Action 2015-2018, the Government Priority Framework and the Vision 2030 document[[8]](#footnote-8). Moreover, programme activities were demand-driven and paid by the government, and as such they clearly responded to priorities of national partners. The programme and projects were developed, implemented and monitored jointly with the respective national authorities or entities.

In most areas, the UNDP programme was quite strategic and cohesive. For example, the work on the social strategies, UPR, MDGs/SDGs and empowerment of women, created synergies that translated into combined impact. The same can be said about the work on institutional development with BIPA, SIU and the Parliament, MOIC and Ministry of Energy. In other areas, such as the work with BIPD or the E-Government Authority, activities were of a very technical nature and narrowly-focused (i.e. mainly IT support). Such activities operated in isolated arenas and did not clearly fall into the area of UNDP’s comparative advantage. While it was tempting to undertake such activities at the request of government entities for support, they were not fully strategic, lacked potential for significant impact and scalability and diluted to some extent the focus of the programme portfolio.

Given the limited resources available, UNDP’s funding was spread across a significant number of projects and activities. It is arguable that the effect of the programme might have been more significant if resources were concentrated in fewer core activities more closely linked to each other. Therefore, it would have been more appropriate for UNDP Bahrain to have focused on quality over quantity by keeping a clear and limited focus and being more selective in its interventions. The programme could have prioritized a few high-impact initiatives that demonstrate the value-added of working with UNDP, highlight its leadership and have great innovative potential. For example, the programme’s focus could have been on key priorities that address strengthening institutions and human resources and contribute further to national capacity development.

**Effectiveness**

The evaluation found that most projects had largely achieved their expected objectives. Exceptions were those projects which had had very little time to produce any significant impact or projects which did not result in sustainable outcomes. For example, the SEU project was still underway at the time of assessment, so it was too early to gauge its effectiveness. Moreover, the “Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative” and the “Creation of Arab e-Content Centre” were the two projects where expected outcomes have to some extent been incomplete or unsustainable. The rest of the projects were found to have created tangible outcomes and lasting impact in the policy areas they operated.

Overall, the main programme results achieved over the period under assessment were in the areas of capacity development for state and non-state institutions, support for policy and strategy implementation, and support for improved access to public services. Government representatives interviewed for the evaluation were largely satisfied with the quality of UNDP services. They valued the level of expertise UNDP brought to their institutions and considered it similar to what they have been receiving from sophisticated consultancy firms operating in the region.

**Efficiency**

Although the level of efficiency with which programme activities were managed can be overall qualified as satisfactory, one common problem from which most projects suffered was schedule overruns ranging from one to three years. One of the reasons provided for the practice of keeping projects running with small amounts of funds and activities was the fact that it is difficult to obtain approval for new projects by the Ministry of Finance. Therefore, existing projects are used to maintain partnerships with existing counterparts.

One observation that emerged from the interviews was that projects tended to be more efficient when thorough preparatory efforts were made before they were designed (e.g. they were based on needs assessments with full stakeholder participation) and flexibility was maintained during the implementation process. For example, the project with MoLSD was inclusive (involving a wide range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders), incremental (building on the results of the previous project and based on a well-sequenced package of activities that support and reinforce each other) and based on key principles (such as country ownership, gender equality, human rights approach, etc.). Also, success was more likely when there were synergies between projects under the programme (i.e. social strategies, MDGs, gender, public administration etc.), based on structural proximity in government functions. This led to mutual reinforcement of the objectives and means of implementation.

Some efficiency weaknesses identified during the evaluation were the timeliness of project start-ups, efficient recruitment processes, communication and transparency, as well as sufficiency and timeliness of funds disbursements. All these issues are discussed in more detail further in this document.

**Sustainability**

The sustainability of results and impact achieved by the programme appears to be greater in the case of strategic and larger projects than for smaller and less strategic projects. For example, the projects with MoIC, BIPA, MoSD and SIU seem to have achieved sustainable results and generated dynamics that are still playing out after UNDP’s involvement. All these projects have potential for further activities, building on the foundations that have already been created. Sustainability seems to be associated with a higher degree of ownership of the results, the availability of resources and national technical capacity. Projects which were less strategic – such as the e-governance or the BIPD project – seem to have suffered from weak sustainability. They provide the country office with good lessons for what areas to enter with the new country programme.

A key factor of sustainability, as well as one of UNDP’s key advantages, was the piloting and scaling up of innovative initiatives. Successful pilots were those initiatives which were designed, planned and executed with great care. Few programme activities in the current cycle made good use of piloting initiatives by focusing on innovations. One good example of innovation and piloting was the work with BIPA on the establishment of MENAPAR. This is an area which the upcoming UNDP programme should pay greater attention to.

**Other Issues:**

**Programme Management**

There are a number of programme management issues that emerged during the evaluation, but three key issues stood out as most important and are taken up in this analysis in a bit more detail:

1. Structure of programme staff
2. Timeliness of project activities

* ***Programme staffing*** – Due to the small size of the programme and the absence of core resources from the headquarters, the country office is too small. The programme unit at the time of the evaluation consisted of three national programme officers, as well as the three international staff in management positions (Resident Representative, The Deputy Resident Representative and the Senior Programme Advisor). Responsibilities for the programme are divided among the three programme officers, each of them being responsible for a particular portfolio of projects. Given the spread of the country programme, for programme officers it has been quite a challenge managing activities in a wide variety of areas, some of which quite technical and require deep expertise. Moreover, programme officers have had a large array of responsibilities for the programme, starting with project development and maintaining contacts with national counterparts, to project management, monitoring and evaluation, communications, networking with international partners and UN agencies, etc. The breadth of roles programme officers play makes it difficult for them to build depth in areas of their interest. At the time of the evaluation, the country office was in the midst of a restructuring exercise which was aimed at improving the programme staffing structure and reprofiling some of the staff qualifications to make them more responsive to the requirements of the programme. The new programme will be divided in two clusters and each cluster will be overseen by a set of two programme officers. The two senior programme officers will lead activities their respective cluster, whereas the two junior officers will focus more on communications and public relations issues. This reorganization is expected to make it easier for programme officers to deepen their technical expertise in the areas they cover and improve UNDP communications with partners and external audiences. Overall, the country office management expects that the restructuring process will improve programme management and relations with government partners.
* ***Timeliness of project activities*** – Based on interviews with counterparts, it appears that some activities took much longer than they should have, and some government stakeholders had to wait for long periods to be updated on the status of their activities with UNDP. This created complications for some government agencies which adhere to strict government requirements of efficiency, accountability and annual reporting on project progress. A number of causes for these delays were identified by interviewees in this area. One key issue that came up in a few cases was the ability of projects to hire qualified Project Managers quickly. A number of projects had suffered by frequent changes of Project Managers or longer periods when a Project Manager was absent. The availability of qualified local staff is a major problem in the GCC region where public sector jobs pay high salaries by UNDP standards. But, still, there was a feeling shared by most interviewees that UNDP recruitment procedures could be strengthened to enable a more efficient process and faster outcome. Another problem was that some projects had no Project Manager because the project budgets were so small that they could not afford to have a dedicated person responsible for the day-to-day management of project activities. Most interviewees thought that the position of a Project Manager is vital for creating the necessary accountability and momentum in a project. Therefore, developing projects that have sufficient scope for recruiting a Project Manager who can deal with project management issues on a day-to-day basis is important. In some cases, interviewees expressed concern about delays in the recruitment process and payment of consultants (examples were provided in the description of programme activities). The country office has already taken a number of steps to address procurement issues. The procurement process has been revised and streamlined. Another positive step has been the provision of training on UNDP procurement procedures for national partners who are new to UNDP projects.

***Predictable funding***.

UNDP’s work in this programme cycle (similarly to previous cycles) was hampered by the lack of predictable funding from the Government of Bahrain. Being a Net Contributor Country (NCC), Bahrain is not included in UNDP’s core programme (Regular Resource) allocation which means that to finance its programme and country operations UNDP Bahrain has to rely entirely on the government for funding. In the current programme cycle, the country office did not have predetermined programme funding commitments from the government. Although the country programme document was approved by the UNDP Executive Board, the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) was not signed, as the Ministry of Finance did not want to commit to a three-year funding horizon.

The lack of predetermined programme funding from the government represents a serious limitation on UNDP’s ability to develop a coherent and strategic programme. Pursuing broad national strategic objectives identified during the development of the country programme without a commitment of funds can be extremely challenging. The country office is under pressure to pragmatically pursue objectives linked to available funding which might not be in line with the ultimate goals agreed in the CPD. To ensure the sustainability of its operations the country office has to constantly follow up with various government departments in search of business opportunities and funding. As a result, the country office is forced to take a short term perspective and to respond to ad hoc requests for support. Also, this was the main reason why actual activities in the programme cycle did not correspond exactly to the activities outlines in the CPD. Furthermore, the country office lacks the ability to explore project opportunities outside the framework of a relationship with a particular institution which has funding available. UNDP needs more flexibility to develop innovative project ideas for which no concrete funding is available from an institution. This will require a special fund provided by the Ministry of Finance which can be tapped flexibly whenever UNDP feels it needs to explore a particular idea.

UNDP country office has made efforts to address this situation. First, to strengthen coordination, the Coordination Committee was established, consisting of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, The Prime Minister’s Court, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNDP. Second, for the upcoming programme cycle, and under the leadership of the Coordination Committee, a multi-year funding envelope will be discussed with the government on the basis of which the “results and resource framework” will be formulated. Third, it has also been decided that, to ensure good coordination, the upcoming programme cycle will be fully aligned to the government’s planning and budget cycle. Finally, the government and UNDP will sign a CPAP.

Looking forward, a factor that might have a negative effect on the funding situation of the upcoming programme is the fiscal austerity that the government has initiated in response to the fall of oil prices. This has significantly affected the budgets of many UNDP partners. To counter related risks, UNDP should come up with a strategy for the diversification of its sources of funding, including tapping more effectively into private sector funding.

***Coordination with national institutions***

The two key government counterparts of UNDP are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the main interface within the government for all UN agencies in Bahrain and is the national agency responsible for the execution of the UNDP programme. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for approving and financing the UNDP programme. UNDP also interacts directly with a number of ministries and departments with which it implements joint projects, as well as new partners it intends to work with. Such a process of interactions and collaboration requires a strong partnership strategy for engaging with the government and partners and ensuring that counterpart agencies are fully informed about the various activities of UNDP.

The establishment of the Coordination Committee is expected to resolve some of the communication and coordination challenges by bringing the UNDP and the key ministries, including the Ministry of Finance, closer together. The challenge will be for the Coordination Committee to commit to the process and have committee meetings convened on a regular basis. UNDP’s role will be important in this context – it will have to provide sufficient and meaningful information about project activities and results. Another good model of strengthened coordination with individual ministries and departments is the example of the project with the Ministry of Labour and Social Development in which one UNDP country office staff was seconded to the Ministry for one year. This had a great effect on strengthening ties with the Ministry staff and improving their understanding of UNDP processes, procedures and values. Another example worth mentioning here is the provision of training for government staff on UNDP rules and procedures which has been initiated by the country office. Such initiatives will help strengthen the counterparts’ understanding of UNDP’s operating procedures and should be further expanded (especially with the Ministry of Finance).

***Communications and visibility***

An area in which UNDP’s programme has displayed weaknesses during the current cycle and which could greatly benefit from more focus and improvement is communications with partners and visibility with the public. Interviews with programme staff and partners indicated that issues of communications with counterparts played a negative role in certain projects. The country office lacked a dedicated communications specialist during this programme cycle. Moreover, some projects suffered negative consequences from the lack of effective communication with government counterparts. Also, the lack of visibility with the general public was identified as ad issue that requires more attention. The GEPMI project is an example of a project in which communications with national partners could have been handled more effectively. This must be remedied in the new programme in order to increase UNDP’s credibility and improve its image. While communication strategies or plans have been drawn up for different projects on paper, more should be done to implement then effectively in practice. New measures have already been put in place by the country office management team to improve communications. For example, in the framework of the restructuring of the office personnel, communication roles and responsibilities will be given to two additional programme staff. This is a major step in the right direction because the presence of officers with communications responsibilities is expected to improve coordination with project partners and visibility with the public. Overall, UNDP should communicate more effectively about its mandate, its programmes and above all the results of its work.

***Monitoring and evaluation***

During the current programme cycle, UNDP was challenged and pressed for more evidence-based monitoring on progress towards and communication on programmatic results. The transparency and visibility of UNDP projects is critical. The need for demonstrating results and impact was raised by a number of interviewees during this evaluation. In the absence of predictable financial commitments, the challenges for UNDP to identify measurable results and indicators are understandable. Considering the small size of the office, UNDP had no M&E officer, even though project and programme staff monitored projects. Although there was an evaluation plan for the programme, it was not fully implemented. Some projects were evaluated, others weren’t. In some cases, the costs of undertaking an evaluation were not included, even for large projects.

In the absence of elaborated monitoring and evaluation systems, the sharing of information on programme processes, implementation and progress with national counterparts was unsystematic and sporadic. Efforts to further evaluation culture on the part of UNDP could have been more intensive. The feeling of interviewees was that there is a clear need for stronger project and output monitoring and stronger implementation of Results Based Management.

Over the past years, the country office has taken a number of steps, including training sessions for counterparts such as MOFA and MOF and sharing of reports from project audits. The restructuring of the programme staff will enable programme staff to spend more time on monitoring and communications, which is expected to improve the situation. Also, the new country programme could benefit from a dedicated budget line for the monitoring and evaluation of the projects. These steps are expected to improve transparency and relations with key partners. However, additional efforts are required to strengthen monitoring and evaluation tools in the country programme.

1. STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF UNDP

**Comparative Advantage and Relevance**

With Bahrain being both a high income and a net contributor country, UNDP Bahrain operates in a quite sophisticated and competitive environment from an institutional capacity perspective. As such, UNDP’s biggest challenge is to maintain its relevance by providing high quality and innovative services. The extent to which UNDP can remain relevant in a context such as Bahrain’s will largely depend on its strategy to build on its core advantages while at the same time developing capacity to provide cutting edge services.

As already highlighted, Bahrain’s development challenges are similar to those experienced in other net contributor countries. The UNDP programme has targeted several of these development challenges, including building local capacity for policy-making and institutional development, social policy and services, public administration and governance, supporting the Parliament, promoting gender equality, etc. UNDP initiatives in these areas have relied primarily on government demand. The added value of UNDP in these areas has been in furthering the human development perspective, facilitating capacity and institutional development, policy formulation, providing expertise and international standards, knowledge management and global partnerships.

National stakeholders value UNDP for its neutrality and impartiality. Even in sensitive areas, UNDP interventions have been welcomed by the government institutions. This is reflected, for example, in the projects with the Special Investigation Unit and the Parliament. Government stakeholders noted that they prefer UNDP because it provides services that bring the ‘principles of the UN’. The trust, respect and neutrality commanded by UNDP and the access it has to government officials as well as civil society place UNDP in a good position to play a strong advocacy role on the one hand, and, on the other, to undertake pioneering initiatives.

**Global and regional partnerships and linkages with other UN agencies**

UNDP activities have involved partnerships with government agencies, civil society organizations, universities and the private sector. The nature of these partnerships has been both vertical and horizontal – a combination that has maximized UNDP’s strength.

***Civil Society and Private Sector***

Bahrain has a number of non-governmental organizations which often have better access, resources and understanding of context-specific needs. Partnerships with such institutions are important for UNDP because they not only enhance UNDP’s ability to respond to government needs in a timely manner, but also strengthen local research and knowledge transfer.

UNDP has actively pursued partnerships with civil society and the non-profit sector and has sought to build on their strengths. In some cases, as in the project on social strategies, UNDP has successfully acted as an interface between the government and civil society. In other cases, such as the promotion of gender equality, UNDP has partnered with local non-governmental organizations working on issues of equal rights for women and gender-based violence and has helped move the agenda forward.

Bahrain also has a growing and vibrant private sector. Certain efforts have been made to engage with the private sector in the current programme. For example, UNDP has held a workshop on private sector development and brought in an expert from the Istanbul center, has sought private sector partnerships in the post-2015 campaign and has made efforts in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development and other agencies to promote corporate social responsibility (CSR). During the current programme cycle, the country office has pursued a few joint initiatives with the private sector as part of its CSR agenda. However, given Bahrain’s status as a high-income country and the presence of a strong private sector, there is a lot more potential for cooperation with the private sector. UNDP activities in the upcoming programme could benefit from a more intensive involvement of private sector actors. For example, a certification scheme for companies which engage in CSR activities could be an effective instrument for engaging them into joint community development projects. Moreover, UNDP’s partnership strategy could focus more on the role of the private sector. Also, in the current programme UNDP partnerships with private philanthropic foundations have been not very intensive. More concerted efforts may be mobilized in order to build strong partnerships with the foundations working in Bahrain and the region.

***Research Institutions***

There are many research and policy institutions and expert networks in Bahrain and the GCC states. These institutions should be viewed as credible partners whose expertise can be quickly mobilized to meet high quality service requirements in Bahrain. One of the dimensions of UNDP’s work in the current programme has been its cooperation with research and policy institutions, as well as national and regional experts’ networks with good access to local knowledge. The work with BIPA and UoB was an important step in this direction. It is necessary to further strengthen collaboration with these institutions in order to capitalize on their strengths and bridge UNDP capacity, human resource and technical resource gaps. Strengthening collaboration with local research institutions and universities to provide development services will open further opportunities in the areas of policy advice, knowledge transfer, capacity building, institution strengthening, etc. Such partnerships are also essential in providing faster services to the government.

***Regional Partnerships***

The country office has leveraged successfully a number of ongoing regional initiatives and contributed to further strengthening Bahrain’s position in the region. The project with BIPA had a very strong regional focus, especially with the establishment and strengthening of MENAPAR. Also, the projects with MoLSD, SIU, E-Governance Authority, Parliament, etc., had elements of regional engagement or accessed regional expertise. The GEPMI project as well had a strong regional focus, despite the lack of progress in its implementation. UNDP successfully engaged the services of the UNDP Regional Office and ESCWA in its programme.

One regional aspect in which UNDP Bahrain can further strengthen its involvement is the promotion of Bahrain’s best practices in the region and beyond. Interviewees shared the view that Bahrain has a lot to share with GCC members and countries in the region. Discussions revealed that there are no systematic mechanisms for identifying best practices in Bahrain for replication in other countries. This is an area in which UNDP can establish a niche. UNDP should further explore ways of sharing best practices from Bahrain with other countries in the region and beyond.

***International Partnerships***

Building on regional practices and best practices Bahrain has to share, there is an increased role Bahrain can play internationally. Engaging Bahrain in international organizations and debates would be of mutual benefit. The current fiscal challenges and austerity measures that have resulted from the decline of oil prices limit financing opportunities. However, with the recovery of oil prices, the potential for development assistance in targeted areas relevant to Bahrain could be an area where UNDP can support and play a liaison role. Systemizing aid processes in Bahrain requires that UNDP take a more structured approach to resource mobilization. The country office is currently working with MOFA to produce a partnership report highlighting its international contributions.

**Coordination with other UN agencies**

Given Bahrain’s high income status, the level of engagement of UN agencies with the country is not very elevated. However, a number of UN agencies do have activities in the country and offer great opportunities for cooperation with UNDP. Overall, UNDP’s cooperation with other UN agencies has taken place at two levels – bilaterally and multilaterally.

Bilaterally, UNDP has cooperated with a number of UN agencies in the current programme. Although UNDP projects have benefitted from the involvement of other UN agencies in the provision of certain services that are outside of typical UNDP areas, most interaction with other agencies took place at the level of information sharing. The following are some examples of more substantive cooperation - UNCTAD was involved in the trade project with MoIC, UNICEF was involved in the project on social strategies, UNDESA was involved in the e-governance project, UN Women was a partner and contributed funds to GEPMI, the office partnered with ESCWA on MDG reporting, and UNEP was involved in the development of the Unit for Sustainable Energy project. The project with BIPA made good use of UNDP’s network of experts and country offices. UNDP’s Regional Office was also involved in a number of activities, including the project on social strategies, the project with BIPA, the project with the Parliament, the work on MDGs and SDGs, etc. Moreover, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia was involved in the planning and execution of a number of substantive activities. These are good examples of cooperation with UN agencies, yet more benefits could be drawn by developing and implementing joint projects with the full involvement of two or more UN agencies.

Multilateral coordination among UN agencies has been more challenging. Bahrain is a special case for the UN country team because very few agencies are present in the country. Moreover, even those agencies which are located in Bahrain mainly serve other countries in the region and elsewhere. Therefore, there was no perceived pressing need for a common UN programme framework or a United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), which is not required for a Net Contributor Country (NCC). At the same time, the need for in-country mobilization of resources to fund programmes has encouraged competition among UN agencies and has contributed to a lack of cohesion in response to government initiatives. Attempts have been made to strengthen thematic cooperation through specialized working groups (such as the environmental working groups), but these efforts have not been very successful. Coordination and cooperation among UN agencies remains overall weak. More recently efforts to promote stronger coordination and a common programming framework for UN agencies have been undertaken by the Resident Coordinator.

1. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation of the current UNDP programme generated a wealth of information and revealed a number of lessons learned and opportunities for improvement. Many of these lessons were addressed in the previous sections. This section will summarize the issues which are most essential and whose improvement will generate the biggest results for the country programme. These issues will be clustered in three groups.

1. ***Strategic approach to programming and positioning***

The evaluation has concluded that overall the 2012-2016 programme was relatively relevant, grounded in national priorities and goals and aligned with the country’s international commitments[[9]](#footnote-9). It was also largely owned by the national counterparts through the National Implementation Modality. Most UNDP activities in Bahrain matched the context and development needs and/or priorities of the country (high-income status, significant achievements in human development indicators and capacities to access top-notch development services). In the current country programme, UNDP maintained its relevance when responding to demand for high quality and timely development services.

However, certain activities were too thinly spread across a number of areas and this resulted in limited impact and sustainability. For UNDP to stay relevant in a high-income environment such as Bahrain where high-quality support and cutting-edge advice is essential, more depth and specialization will be necessary. The UNDP should be cognizant of both its own strengths and limitations, and thus be explicit about what it can and cannot deliver. The Bahraini government has outlined the country’s development goals and UNDP should identify those areas in which it can make meaningful contributions. UNDP should take a more purposeful and strategic approach to addressing the country’s development challenges and priorities.

In the upcoming programme, UNDP should further strengthen its strategic approach to programming and delivering by moving away from the piecemeal approach to developing projects with individual national partners. Given that UNDP is a fairly decentralized organization, there is considerable leeway for the country office to develop an appropriate strategy suitable for a more meaningful and long-term engagement with the national institutions beyond providing ad hoc services. The signing of a CPAP with authorities will be a step that will help in making the programme more strategic and more responsive to the real needs of the country. The following are a few specific recommendations related to UNDP’s strategic focus.

* UNDP should create more depth, consolidation and synergies by focusing on a more limited number of high-impact activities where UNDP has a clear comparative advantage and can add significant value. It should focus on areas where small scale activities can catalyze large-scale and sustainable changes and innovations in the working of national institutions, both in the government and the society. Also, more can be done with respect to providing world-class development experience to Bahrain and disseminating the country’s good development practices in countries where such experience may be needed.
* One area in which UNDP should strengthen its involvement is the advancement of women. Given that it represents a core aspect of UNDP’s global mandate, it will be important for the country office to reengage more intensively with the relevant stakeholders through a renewed approach and revitalize UNDP’s contribution to the advancement of women.
* UNDP should engage more non-governmental partners such as research centers, universities, civil society and the private sector and capitalize more effectively on their expertise and strengths. UNDP should also continually tap knowledge resources through global knowledge networks and practices.
* Cooperation with other UN agencies could be further strengthened at different levels to capitalize more effectively on their strengths and resources. For example, the planning of signing in 2017 a common Strategic Framework for all UN agencies operating in Bahrain is going to be very useful. Moreover, UN agencies can be involved more effectively in the UNDP programme through joint projects.
* UNDP should put its neutrality and independence to better use, by acting more effectively as interface and coordinator for public institutions. This is a role UNDP has already played effectively in the areas of MDGs, UPR, Parliament, SIU, corporate social responsibility, etc.
* UNDP should be a force for innovative proposals, focusing on transversal themes and promoting inter-sectoral working, alongside pilot projects in the field. This can be done by strengthening and reorganising existing skills or by drawing on others, particularly in the area of policy advice. UNDP should consider how innovative solutions could become a key component of the development of new projects and what replication criteria and methodologies should be put in place for the scaling up of successful pilots. These interventions require a clear exit strategy, so that the process is ‘owned’ by national institutions and becomes sustainable.
* UNDP should strengthen the country office’s capacities to fulfil high quality service needs in Bahrain. In addition to the core staff in the country, UNDP should build a network of professionals to use their expertise in delivering effective and timely services. The staff restructuring process that is underway should be harnessed to strengthen the capacity of the country office to respond to country needs more effectively.

1. ***Sustained and predictable funding***

The lack of regular and predictable funding presented a serious challenge for UNDP’s effectiveness in its current programme cycle. This constrained its ability to develop a more strategic, structured and cohesive programme. As already described in this document, country office concerns about mobilizing funding for its sustainability detract attention from longer-term engagements which are more strategic and sustainable for UNDP. UNDP needs to find a sustainable solution if it is to develop a long-term relationship in the country and contribute to national development in the areas where support is needed and requested.

The country office management has been looking for a definite solution to this problem since 2011. Its plan is to address this challenge in the new programme cycle by agreeing, under the leadership of the Coordination Committee which consists of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Office of the First Deputy Prime Minister, the Prime Minister’s Court and UNDP, a fixed funding commitment from the Government of Bahrain. Such a funding arrangement would underpin the new Country Programme’s results and resources framework and would be replenished periodically to ensure financing of projects. Moreover, the country office management is seeking to ensure more effective coordination by aligning the UNDP programme with the government’s budget cycle and by planning the UNDP programme for four years to ensure that the mid-term review coincides with the formulation of the new four-year national Government Plan of Action. These are necessary steps toward the resolution of the funding problem. In addition, the country office could consider the following recommendations which relate to funding.

* UNDP should work with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to make the funding of its programme more predictable. The signing of a CPAP with a clear commitment from the Ministry of Finance on the financing envelope and a timeline of installments for the upcoming programme cycle will be a step in that direction.
* The Ministry of Finance should confirm its support for the UNDP programme and should encourage line ministries to explore partnerships and project ideas with UNDP.
* UNDP should create more flexibility for its programme development work. A special fund should be created to support the exploration and development of new project ideas outside of the framework of partnerships with specific institutions. This fund should be replenished by the government on a regular basis.
* UNDP should seek to mobilize additional funding from non-traditional domestic (such as the private sector and foundations) and international sources. UNDP should undertake a concerted campaign to access private sector and private foundation funding.
* UNDP should seek to leverage its physical presence in the country to develop partnerships for the UNDP programmes in other countries. In the current fiscal climate this will be difficult, but initial steps can be taken so that the country office is well position when the economic environment has improved.

1. ***Transparency and visibility***

A good image in the eyes of the public and trust by government partners in its potential to deliver quality development services are critical for enhanced UNDP engagement in the country and securing regular support. Although UNDP has largely succeeded in creating a good public image of its contribution and in gaining the full trust of a number of government and non-government counterparts as a long-term development partner, more can be done to improve its visibility and substantive presence in the country. During the 2012-2016 programme cycle, communication problems with some of its partners hampered certain aspects of UNDP’s programme. To address this issue, the country office management has initiated a number of measures to improve communications, transparency and visibility. For example, the structural changes, which include the appointment of two officers responsible for communications and monitoring and the placement of project managers/coordinators within partner institutions, are expected to further enhance coordination with counterparts and create greater visibility of results. The following are a few specific recommendations to further strengthen UNDP’s transparency and visibility.

* UNDP should communicate more about its mandate, its programmes and above all the results of its work. For example, UNDP should periodically develop communication materials and publicize its results in coordination with its partner institutions.
* UNDP should pay particular attention to improvements of transparency and communications with partners and the public by strengthening the country office’s media and communications capacities. While communication strategies or plans have been drawn up for different projects on paper, more should be done to implement them effectively in practice.
* The Coordination Committee could be used as an instrument to strengthen communication and coordination by serving as a deliberation forum. It could also improve transparency by serving as a strategic and decision-making body.
* UNDP should have solid finance and programme documentation systems that are easily accessible to government departments like the Ministry of Finance. Results-based principles and tools should be applied systematically to all projects and to the programme as a whole in order to be able to demonstrate results. This should include establishing clear guidelines for reporting to partners.
* Also, the practice of aligning the audit reporting with that of the Ministry of Finance in terms of how to report will ensure common language and better understanding and communication. The provision of training on UNDP rules and procedures for staff from partner ministries should be further strengthened.
* These measures and the agreed role of the Coordination Committee, should be incorporated in the CPAP to be signed as part of the new country programme. Additional measures that should be explored during this programming cycle are the inclusion of a dedicated budget line for communications in projects, regular visibility events organized with partners, etc.

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| Annex: I  **Interviews Conducted for the CDP Evaluation** |

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| **Internal Meeting with Senior Management** | * Mr. Peter Grohmann, Resident Representative * Ms. Limya Al Tayeb, Deputy Resident Representative * Mr. Amin Sharkawi, Senior Advisor to the Resident Representative |
| **Meetings with UNDP Programme Officers** | * Mr. Mohammad Al-Sharif (ARR) * Ms. Jehan AlMurbati * Mr. Ali Saleh |
| **Meeting with MoFA** | * H.E. Dr Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmed Al Khalifa – Undersecretary of International Affairs |
| **Interview with MoFA** | * Mr. Hamad Waheed Sayyar |
| **Meeting with Ministry of industry and Commerce** | * H.E. Mr. Zayed Bin Rashed Al Zayani * Shaikh Hamad Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Director of Foreign Trade Relations * Ms. Eman Al Doseri, Assistant Undersecretary for Foreign Trade |
| **Meeting with Special Investigation Unit of the Public Prosecution Office** | * H.E. Dr. Ali Bin Fadhel Al Buainain, Public Prosecutor * Mr. Nawaf Abdulla Hamza, Attorney General |
| **Meeting with Nuwab and Shura Councils (Parliament)** | * H.E. Ahmed bin Ebrahim Al Mullah, Chairman of the Council of Representatives * Mr. Yaser Al Shirawi, Deputy Secretary General of the Nuwab Council * Mr. Mohammed Saleh Al Dawood, Head of the Administrative Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives |
| **Meeting with BIPD** | * Mr. Fawaz Shakrallah, Project Manager |
| **Interview with the Office of Minister of Energy** | * Mr. Jassim Shirawi |
| **Meeting with Ministry of Labor & Social Development** | * Ms. Badriya Al Jeeb, Assistant Undersecretary for Socail Welfare and Rehabilitation * Mr. Khaled Ishaq, Assistant Undersecretary for Community Development |
| **Interview with the University of Bahrain** | * Dr. Waheeb Isa Al-Nasser, Vice President for academic pogrammes and graduate studies |
| **Interview with Former Project Manager of the GEPMI project** | * Ms. Ameena Al-Rashid |
| **Meeting with BIPA** | * Dr. Sofiane Sahraoui, Senior Advisor of Consulting and Research, BIPA |
| **Meeting with e-Governance** | * Mr. Mohamed Ali Al Qaed, Undersecretary & CEO of the of the Informatics and e-Government Authority |
| **Meeting with Supreme Council for Women** | * Ms. Daweya Al Alawi, Assistant Secretary General |
| **Meeting with UNEP** | * Ms. Melanie Hutchinson |
| **Interview with CIO** | * Dr. Nabeel Shams |

Annex: II

**Middle East and North Africa Public Administration Research**

MENAPAR is a brainchild of BIPA that first was introduced during the 2013 IIAS/IASIA conference in Bahrain, where the overall idea was endorsed. MENAPAR was subsequently further developed under the leadership of BIPA during a working sessions with attendance of various UNDP staff members and a limited number of external guests in Bahrain (November 2013). During this gestation period, the process was supported by UNDP through the CDF cooperation arrangement between UNDP and BIPA.

The mission statement is: ***MENAPAR will promote evidence-based policy and decision-making in public administration through***:

* Developing thinking and a research culture about strategic issues in Public Administration
* Building research capacities within public administration
* Building a network and harnessing the collective efforts of its members.

MENAPAR aims to:

* Provide a forum for research, analysis and academic-practitioner exchange on urgent topics of managing PA reforms and transitions.
* Serve as an incubator testing ground for the development of a permanent regional think tank group for PA.

The MENAPAR strategic objectives are:

* Promote Bahrain as an intellectual hub for public administration research in the MENA;
* Harness the collective efforts of organizations in the region to promote evidence-based policy-making;
* Promote a research culture and research capacities in the regions public sectors;
* Develop research about public administration, public policies, and good governance in the region;
* Participate in and coordinate debates about public policies and governance in the region;
* Serve as a regional forum for the exchange of ideas between the various actors in the field of PA and public policy;
* Form a network of PA-related institutions, both governmental and non-governmental,
* Create an intellectual link in the region by feeding IIAS/IASIA, regional organizations and network members with local research and policy impact assessment;
* Organize colloquia, forums, seminars, conferences and other types of meetings about PA issues in the region, with broad participation and co-sponsorship by other organizations, both regional and external to the MENA;
* Suggest strategies to develop capacities and expertise in the areas of public policies and governance.

1. The current programme is implemented on the basis of the UNDP Bahrain Country Programme Document (CPD) 2012-2016, which was endorsed at the UNDP Executive Board session of July 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In the course of a government restructuring process that took place in 2015, the Ministry of Social Development was merged with the Ministry of Labour to form the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MoLSD). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Specific information about these projects will be provided further in the document. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Annex II for a more detailed description of MENAPAR. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In the course of the discussion of the draft evaluation report, the Country Office provided the information that UoB, MOFA and UNDP had agreed to launch the policy courses. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In late 2015, the Ministry of Social Development was merged with the Ministry of Labour and the new ministry is now called the Ministry of Labour and Social Development. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A third strategy for the elderly, which acknowledges the contributions of senior citizens and their participation in the decision-making process at all levels, was developed independently by MoSD. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Vision 2030 document is the country’s long-term strategy. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This relates to activities in support of human rights, women’s empowerment, rights of children and disabled persons, etc., which are key areas where Bahrain has made commitments through the adoption of international norms, conventions, laws, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)