**UNDP Bahrain**

**Evaluation Summary of Country Programme 2012-2016**

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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

MoLSD - Ministry of Labor 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

**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 MOLSD 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 trade 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 all of 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 building 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,

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. However, not all activities were implemented, as set out in the CPD’s results and resources framework (RRF), 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.[[2]](#footnote-2)

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 predetermined programme funding Sustainability 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 continuation of regular 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.

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 or coordination of activities. 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 also 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 reporting with clients. 5. Also, the newly agreed practice of aligning the audit methodology with that of 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. 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. 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. Specific information about these projects will be provided further in the document. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)