

# Evaluation Brief: ICPE Bahrain

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted an Independent Country Programme Evaluation (ICPE) in the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2019, covering the period from 2017 to 2018, namely the first two years of the 2017-2020 country programme cycle. Based on UNDP classification, Bahrain is a net contributing country (NCC), meaning that UNDP operational and programmatic presence should be fully funded by the host government and, consequently, its programmes are fully demand-driven and owned by the national government. Building on its predecessors, the current country programme was designed to support the advancement of national priorities in terms of inclusive economic diversification, inclusive and efficient social services, and public sector effectiveness. This is in line with the King's Economic Vision 2030 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## Findings and conclusions

Given the high-income context of Bahrain, the strategic and comparative advantage of UNDP has been its physical presence, impartiality, international recognition, and ability to facilitate cost-effective development services with a human development perspective, to support the Government in the implementation of its national plans. In addition, as the only UN agency with a formal presence in Bahrain, and given its broad mandate and historical hosting of the resident coordinator system, UNDP has acted as a gateway for the wider UN system in the country.

During the period under evaluation, and notwithstanding the advisory role that may have existed at the start of the project, this has manifested in the

development of short-term projects which have been largely activity driven. There are, however, successful examples whereby UNDP found entry points for longer-term engagement. Notably, UNDP support for the development of the country's policies for renewable energy and energy efficiency and public administration performance, initiated in previous programme periods, was able to develop incrementally into substantive and longer-term engagement and demonstrate positive results.

At the same time, the evaluation identified several factors affecting the performance and implementation of the country programme. The availability and predictability of funding was affected by the unfavourable national fiscal and budgetary context, which limited opportunities for engagement and project development. Furthermore, shortcomings were noted in programme management and the oversight of UNDP interventions, and in adapting UNDP corporate policies and procedures to the NCC context.

The change in context related to the adoption of the Strategic Partnership Framework (SPF) for Bahrain and the delinking of the resident coordinator system, increased the scope for the country office to leverage the UNDP comparative advantage, so as to meet expectations and maintain its positioning in a high income NCC such as Bahrain.

Previous evaluations of UNDP programmes in NCCs in the region identified the added value of UNDP in such contexts to be its impartiality and transparency, and its access to international and UN expertise, through which it can provide a window to the UN system and a wealth of global experience. In addition, in such a competitive environment, with high capacities and competition from the private

sector, UNDP competitive advantage also resides in its ability to deliver on its strengths in a cost-effective manner.

This evaluation found that UNDP Bahrain has leveraged some of its comparative advantage, providing access to the wider UN system and expertise. There was less evidence of UNDP explicitly leveraging its own

experience and global presence or proactively bringing Bahrain's experience and potential contribution to bear on development objectives in other countries. The Government of Bahrain is eager for opportunities to increase its visibility and contribution to the global agenda, notably through its participation in international fora as reflected in several of the projects covered in this evaluation.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** Given the nature and scope of UNDP engagement in Bahrain, the results and performance framework of the next CPD should reflect the UNDP comparative advantage and added value in a high-income context. This should include thematic areas in which UNDP can provide technical assistance, as well as more explicitly reflecting UNDP development support services for national objectives.

**Recommendation 2:** Building on its existing engagement, the country office should

use the facilitation of development support services as an entry point to develop longer-term project engagement in line with its human development mandate.

**Recommendation 3:** UNDP Bahrain should seek to balance the demand-driven nature of its engagement in a NCC context, with a more forward-looking approach to project development and resource mobilisation based on clear and proactive communication of its value proposition to government authorities, in line with its mandate and

operational capacity, and within the framework of national priorities.

**Recommendation 4:** With the support of the Regional Bureau for the Arab States, UNDP Bahrain should proactively engage with the UNDP global network and roster of expertise to develop a programmatic offer that promotes innovative solutions and practices in support of Bahrain's national objectives, and for opportunities to leverage Bahrain's assets and experience to benefit other countries where UNDP operates.