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United Nations Development Programme

# INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION BAHRAIN



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# Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the Independent Country Programme Evaluation (ICPE) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the first conducted in the country by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO). This evaluation covers the cooperation programme between the State of Bahrain and UNDP for the period 2017-2020.

As a net oil exporter, Bahrain is a high-income country with a very high human development index, and performance on development indicators comparable to OECD countries. Under UNDP corporate policy, Bahrain is in the category of Net Contributing Country (NCC), for which UNDP programmatic and operational presence should be fully funded by the host government, making UNDP interventions fully demand-driven and owned by the national government. In this regard, the UNDP programme in Bahrain aims to support national institutions to advance economic diversification, deliver inclusive and sustainable social services, and enhance government performance in line with the King's Economic Vision 2030, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Given the high-income status of the country, the evaluation found the added value of UNDP to be its country presence, impartiality, international recognition and its ability to source and provide cost-effective advisory services to support the implementation of innovative policies and practices. This manifested mainly in the development

of short-term activities or output-driven projects. However, there are also examples of UNDP successfully building engagement incrementally over time, resulting in more substantive and longer-term engagement. The unfavourable fiscal and budgetary context in the country limited opportunities for engagement and challenged the implementation of the planned country programme, though the evaluation found scope for UNDP to leverage its comparative advantage more fully, in order to meet expectations in the context of a high income NCC such as Bahrain. In particular, UNDP could have better leveraged its long-standing global presence and wealth of experience for its work in Bahrain, while promoting Bahrain's experience and potential contribution to development objectives in other countries where it operates.

I would like to thank the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the various national stakeholders, and colleagues at the UNDP Bahrain country office and the Regional Bureau for Arab States for their support throughout the evaluation. I am sure that the findings, conclusions and recommendations will strengthen the formulation of the next country programme strategy.



**Indran A. Naidoo**  
Director, Independent Evaluation Office





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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>BIPA</b>	Bahrain Institute for Public Administration
<b>CPD</b>	Country Programme Document
<b>DERASAT</b>	Bahrain Center for Strategic, International, and Energy Studies
<b>ECOSOC</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Council
<b>ERC</b>	Evaluation Resource Centre
<b>EWA</b>	Bahrain Electricity and Water Authority
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GEPMI</b>	Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative
<b>GLOC</b>	Government Contributions to Local Office Costs
<b>GRES</b>	Gender Results Effectiveness Scale
<b>IASIA</b>	International Association of Schools and Institutes in Administration
<b>ICPE</b>	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
<b>IEO</b>	Independent Evaluation Office
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>MENAPAR</b>	Middle East and North Africa Public Administration Research network
<b>NCC</b>	Net Contributing Country
<b>NHDR</b>	National Human Development Report
<b>POPP</b>	Programme and operations policies and procedures
<b>RBAS</b>	Regional Bureau for Arab States
<b>ROI</b>	Return on Investment
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SEU</b>	Sustainable Energy Unit
<b>SIU</b>	Special Investigation Unit
<b>SPF</b>	Strategic Partnership Framework
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN Habitat</b>	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>VNR</b>	Voluntary National Review



# 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.



# CHAPTER 1

## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Purpose, objective and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has conducted this Independent Country Programme Evaluation (ICPE) in Bahrain to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP contributions to development results at country level, and the effectiveness of the UNDP strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts for achieving development results. The purpose of the ICPE is to support the development of the next UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD), and strengthen the accountability of UNDP to national stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board.

This is the first independent country level evaluation conducted by UNDP in Bahrain. This ICPE answers three main evaluation questions (see box 1), and will serve as an input for the formulation of the new CPD for 2021-2024.

The ICPE examines UNDP performance in Bahrain based on the first two years of implementation of the current CPD (2017-2018). All UNDP activities and interventions in the country were considered by the evaluation, including projects and activities started in previous CPD periods and still active during the period under review. The ICPE also covered non-project activities, such as coordination and advocacy, considered important for the country's political and social agenda.

## 1.2 Country context

The Kingdom of Bahrain is an island state located in the Arabian Gulf between the Qatar peninsula and the north eastern coast of Saudi Arabia. It is the smallest country in the Middle East region, both in terms of population (1.5 million in 2018) and size (780 km<sup>2</sup>).<sup>1</sup> Bahrain was the first country in the Gulf

### BOX 1. Main evaluation questions

1. What did the UNDP country programme intend to achieve during the period under review?
2. To what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives?
3. What factors contributed to or hindered UNDP performance and, eventually, the sustainability of results?

region to discover and exploit oil in the 1930s. As a net oil exporter, Bahrain is a high-income country with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of \$22,600 in 2017.<sup>2</sup> It has a very high human development index, of 0.846 in 2018, ranking 43rd out of the 189 countries and territories in the index.<sup>3</sup> All but one (ensuring environmental sustainability) of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were reportedly achieved in 2015.<sup>4</sup>

With the smallest oil reserves among its neighbours from the Gulf Cooperation Council, Bahrain engaged in early efforts to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on the oil industry. Over the 1970s and 1980s, Bahrain established itself as a key regional financial centre, and a pioneer for Islamic finance in the region and globally. In 2017, Bahrain ranked second, just after Malaysia, on the ICD-Thomson Reuters Islamic Finance Development Indicator,<sup>5</sup> and the financial sector was estimated to contribute about 17 per cent of the country's GDP, the second largest sector of the economy.<sup>6</sup>

The industrial sector has emerged as the second largest non-oil sector of the economy, accounting for about 14.5 per cent of GDP in 2017, led by heavy industries in the area of petroleum processing and refining, aluminium smelting, iron palletisation, fertilisers and ship repair. The country has positioned itself as a commercial and investment gateway to the region's markets, attracting foreign direct

<sup>1</sup> Information and eGovernment Authority, Kingdom of Bahrain

<sup>2</sup> <http://data.un.org/en/iso/bh.html>

<sup>3</sup> UNDP Human Development Report, Bahrain, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.bahrain.bh/wps/wcm/connect/0ac0d57f-338a-4d93-808f-6fac5f43cf04/MDG\\_2015\\_English.pdf?MOD=AJPERES](https://www.bahrain.bh/wps/wcm/connect/0ac0d57f-338a-4d93-808f-6fac5f43cf04/MDG_2015_English.pdf?MOD=AJPERES)

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/ifg-publications/ifgRegister/231017094152F/>

<sup>6</sup> Bahrain Economic Development Board 2018: <https://bahrainedb.com/app/uploads/2017/06/BEQ-March-2018.pdf>



investment and a large expatriate workforce, which accounts for about half of the country's population today. Furthermore, the country has developed as an important regional tourism destination, receiving 11.4 million visitors in 2017, accounting for about 5 per cent of GDP in 2016.<sup>7</sup> Overall, the share of hydrocarbons in the GDP dropped from about 44 per cent in 2000 to around 18 per cent in 2017.

Despite progress in diversifying the economy, the oil industry still constitutes around half of Bahrain's exports and 80 per cent of government revenues, exposing the country to the volatility of international prices.<sup>8</sup> The decline in global oil prices since 2014 has put significant pressure on the State's model of redistribution of hydrocarbon revenues by a large public sector, and increased the country's fiscal vulnerabilities. This has caused a deterioration of reserves and the current account balance, and increased public debt, estimated by the International Monetary Fund at 89 per cent of GDP for 2017.<sup>9</sup> In response, in October 2018 the Government of Bahrain announced a fiscal balance programme aimed at eliminating the country's budget deficit by 2022, with financial support from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.<sup>10</sup> Some early measures towards fiscal consolidation have included raising taxes on tobacco and alcohol, introducing fees for government services, and the introduction of VAT in 2019, while pursuing an economic diversification agenda towards a knowledge-based economy.

In part due to its geographical situation, the Kingdom of Bahrain is exposed to periodic natural hazards such as droughts and dust storms. 92 per cent of the country is desert and only about 2 per cent of its lands are arable. The only natural source of water, the Dammam aquifer, is threatened by overuse and salinization. As a result, the country relies on desalination for approximately

90 per cent of its potable water. Other environmental issues include desertification, and land reclamation activities which have posed serious threats to the country's rich biodiversity. The environmental sustainability of Bahrain is also exacerbated by the rapid industrial and demographic growth recorded between 2000 and 2010, during which the total population of the country doubled.

Formerly an emirate, Bahrain became a constitutional monarchy in 2002, with a bicameral national assembly composed of an upper house (Shura Council) and a lower house (council of representatives). The king holds wide executive powers, including the appointment of the national government and the members of the upper house. The transition to the current political system in 2002 was preceded by a period of uprising demanding democratic reforms. Through the 2001 referendum, the National Action Charter of Bahrain was approved by voters and cemented the current constitutional system in place. The period that followed saw the introduction of reforms in the areas of human rights and political representation, and increased international commitment through the ratification of several UN human rights treaties.<sup>11</sup>

In 2011, Bahrain experienced some political and social unrest following the waves of protest that spread throughout countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Following reports of human rights violations in the handling of protests, the King commissioned the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate, and in 2012 established a national commission to follow up on the recommendations of the Commission, with a view to reform the justice, human rights, law enforcement, security services, and media sectors and bring them in line with international practices.

<sup>7</sup> Bahrain Economic Development Board 2017: <https://bahrainedb.com/app/uploads/2017/06/Tourism-A4-Brochure-Jun2017.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> IMF Press release 18/294: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2018/07/13/pr18294-kingdom-of-bahrain-imf-executive-board-concludes-2018-article-iv-consultation>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> See: [https://www.mofne.gov.bh/fbp\\_en.pdf](https://www.mofne.gov.bh/fbp_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Between 2002 and 2011, Bahrain became party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Bahrain has taken active steps to reduce gender gaps of all dimensions, with the most notable progress achieved in access to health and education. The percentage of Bahraini women with a high school diploma or higher reached 57.7 per cent in 2010, an increase of 11 per cent between 2001 and 2010. Parity in primary and secondary school enrolment was achieved during the 2012 academic year.<sup>12</sup> The November 2018 parliamentary elections saw the number of women elected to the lower house double, with six women out of 40 elected legislators (15 per cent), and the election of the first woman speaker. Gaps remain, however, notably in terms of labour force participation for women aged 15 and above, which stands at 44 per cent compared to 87 per cent for men. Although Bahrain was among the top performing countries in the MENA region on the global gender gap index in 2017 (0.637), its regional ranking fell from fourth to eighth in 2018 (0.627),<sup>13</sup> due to a widening gender gap in incomes between 2017 and 2018.

### 1.3 Overview of UNDP in Bahrain

The first cooperation agreement between the Government of Bahrain and UNDP was signed in 1978. Over the last decade, this partnership has been formalised through three CPDs, to a total budget of \$ 28.3 million. Based on UNDP classification, Bahrain is in the Net Contributing Country (NCC) category,<sup>14</sup> and according to corporate policy UNDP presence should be fully funded by the host government. Consequently, UNDP programmes and operations should be fully demand-driven and owned by the national government. Recently, the funding of UNDP in Bahrain has come from two different national streams. The Ministry of Finance, through the central budget, provides government contributions to local office costs (GLOC),<sup>15</sup> which funds the operational presence of UNDP including

staffing, offices and transportation, and includes in Bahrain the in-kind provision of office facilities. Programme activities are funded by different line ministries. According to the CPD, the implementation and oversight of the country programme is led by a coordination committee comprising the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Office of the First Deputy Prime Minister, the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, and UNDP.

Since 2008, Bahrain's national priorities are framed in the King's Economic Vision 2030.<sup>16</sup> This seeks to consolidate a socio-economic pathway for the country based on the three principles of competitiveness, fairness and sustainability. This overarching vision provides a blueprint for the country's national development policies and strategies. The overall ambition is to double the disposable income of Bahrainis through economic transformation and by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public services and social assistance programmes targeting less privileged citizens such as women, older people, youth and disabled people. This vision is operationalised through a quadrennial planning framework and a biennial national budgeting process guiding the work of the Government.

In line with priorities set out in the national plan, the last two UNDP country programmes (2008-2016) aimed to support policy development and institutional capacity building in the areas of economic diversification, participatory governance, sustainable energy and natural resource management, government efficiency and effectiveness, and inclusive and sustainable growth with an emphasis on women, youth, the elderly and disabled people. The implementation of the previous CPD (2012-2016) was affected by challenges in the relationship between UNDP and the Government of Bahrain. As a result, no Country Programme Action Plan was signed

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.scw.bh/en/MediaCenter/Documents/Final-Numbers-May-2016.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2018. [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2018.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> According to Annex B of Document DP/2017/39, UNDP define NCCs as countries which sustain a Gross National Income per capita above \$12,475 for a period of two consecutive years. Following this two-year transitional period, countries become ineligible for core programmatic and institutional resources, excluding the cost of a resident coordinator or resident representative.

<sup>15</sup> In accordance with provisions of the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement Article VI – Paragraphs 4 and 5 that govern UNDP operations in programme countries, host governments are expected to contribute towards the local cost of UNDP country offices.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.evisa.gov.bh/Vision2030Englishlowresolution.pdf>

with the Government between 2012 and 2016, and the partnership almost ceased. UNDP was gradually able to rebuild trust with the Government of Bahrain, leading to the signing of a new CPD in 2017.

Under the current country programme (2017-2020), UNDP aims to provide support to policy development and institutional capacity building in two key areas. The first area, sustainable and inclusive economic diversification, works for the delivery of social services by harnessing Bahrain’s preferential trade market access, the development of policies and services that target Bahrain’s less privileged citizens, the mainstreaming of gender in policies and strategies, and the integration of environmental considerations in national policies and strategies. The second area of accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of Bahraini institutions in line with international standards and practices, was supported through evidence-based policy making, innovation and the re-engineering of government processes. To support the achievement of these

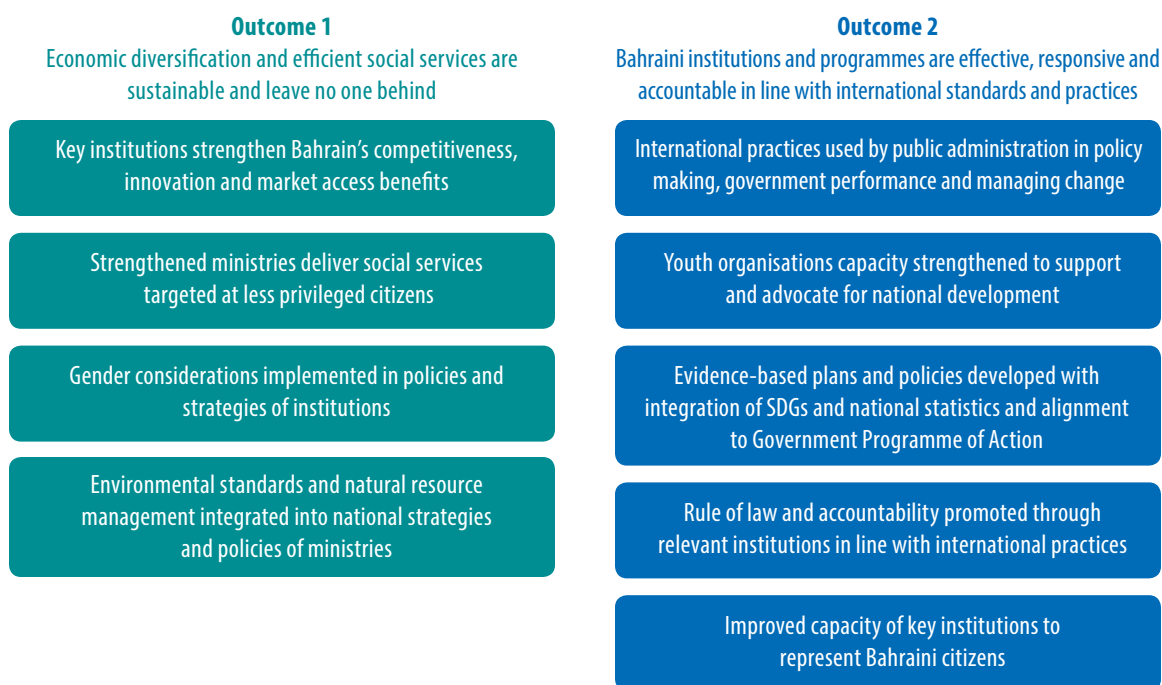
outcomes, nine related outputs frame the expected contributions of UNDP, in terms of improved capacity of institutions and policy development, with emphasis on sustainability, inclusiveness and alignment with international standards and practices. These are presented in figure 1 below.

For this evaluation, the projects were clustered across outcomes, under five distinct thematic areas: economic diversification, social services, energy, public sector effectiveness, and the mainstreaming of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Economic diversification<sup>17</sup>**

With a total planned indicative resource of \$6.6 million, the country office aimed to support economic diversification efforts through policy and capacity development in three streams of work: the strengthening of key institutions to leverage the benefits of market access; innovation to support the country’s market competitiveness; and supporting women’s economic empowerment, participation in decision making and contribution to economic performance.

**FIGURE 1. UNDP Bahrain programme 2017-2020**



<sup>17</sup> CPD outputs 1.1, 1.3, and 1.4

In addition, UNDP aimed to support the country's competitiveness through the integration of policies and standards that consider the environment, climate change and natural resource management, and the implementation of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures.

### **Social services<sup>18</sup>**

With a total planned indicative resource of \$1.8 million, the country office planned to support the capacities of ministries to develop and implement policies to reach less privileged Bahraini citizens, through the efficient delivery of social services for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. In addition, support was envisaged to update the country's housing policy to support the Government's efforts to ensure housing for all citizens with a reduced waiting period.

### **Public sector effectiveness<sup>19</sup>**

With a total indicative resource of \$2.7 million, the country office aimed to support selected institutions to integrate and align international standards and practices into their policies and operational management. This was expected to support the capacity of individual Bahraini civil servants, by enhancing the delivery of training by the Bahrain Institute for Public Administration (BIPA). Public sector effectiveness was also expected to be strengthened through public accountability and the promotion of rule of law in the judicial and human rights sectors. The country programme also sought to enhance the responsiveness and representation of Bahraini citizens through strengthening the individual capacity of members of parliament and the institutional capacity of its Secretariat.

### **Mainstreaming SDGs in national initiatives<sup>20</sup>**

With indicative resources of \$0.9 million, the final thematic area related to the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into national policies and strategies. To some extent,

this area of work can be considered as cross-cutting. It includes the integration of SDG targets and indicators into the Government's Plan of Action 2019-2022 and national information systems, to strengthen alignment with, and monitoring of, the Government's progress against these global goals. In addition, the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda was envisaged as an entry point for engagement with selected youth organisations through awareness campaigns and the organisation of conferences to strengthen their engagement in national development.

## **UN system in Bahrain**

UNDP is one of four UN agencies with a presence in Bahrain, but the only one with a specific country programme.<sup>21</sup> In October 2017, the Government of Bahrain signed a Strategic Partnership Framework (SPF) for 2018-2021,<sup>22</sup> providing an overarching vision for the partnership between the country and the United Nations system, in line with the priorities set out in the national Economic Vision 2030 and Government Programme of Action 2015-2018. The SPF was signed by 16 UN agencies, most of which are non-resident.<sup>23</sup> It articulates the contributions of the UN system to a subset of 32 high priority target programmes, falling under five of the six mid-term strategic priorities of the Government Priority Framework, namely:

- Promote security and stability, the democratic system and foreign relations;
- Establish a strong and diversified economy and a stable financial system and currency;
- Empower Bahrainis to raise their contribution to the development process;
- Promote sustainable management of strategic resources and ensuring sustainable urban development; and

<sup>18</sup> CPD output 1.3

<sup>19</sup> CPD outputs 2.1, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5

<sup>20</sup> CPD output 2.2

<sup>21</sup> UNEP, UNIDO and WMO

<sup>22</sup> See Bahrain Strategic Partnership Framework.

<sup>23</sup> UN Women, UNESCO, UN-Habitat, UNHCR, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, ILO, FAO, UNODC, ESCWA, IAEA

- Enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of government performance.

Given the context, contributions to the policies and programmes covered by the SPF were envisaged under two areas. As outputs, development results related to the availability of new skills and abilities, products or services. As service lines, they related to short-term technical assistance in response to specific requests from the Government.

## 1.4 Methodology

The evaluation was guided by the United Nations Evaluation Group Norms and Standards,<sup>24</sup> and ethical Code of Conduct.<sup>25</sup> A theory of change approach was used in consultation with the UNDP country office, focusing on mapping the assumptions behind the programme's desired changes, and the causal links between interventions and the intended country programme outcomes. As part of this analysis, the progression of the CPD over the review period was also examined.

The effectiveness of the UNDP country programme was analysed through an assessment of progress made towards the expected outputs, and the extent to which they contributed to the intended CPD outcomes. In this process, positive and negative, direct and indirect, intended and unintended results were considered. Specific factors that influenced UNDP performance and the sustainability of results in the country, positively or negatively, were examined. In assessing the evolution of the CPD, the evaluation examined the capacity of UNDP to adapt to the changing context and respond to national development needs and priorities. Other aspects assessed included the utilisation of resources to

deliver results (including managerial practices), the extent to which the country office fostered partnerships and synergies with other actors (through South-South or triangular cooperation), and the extent to which the key principles of the UNDP Strategic Plan<sup>26</sup> were applied in the design and implementation of the CPD.<sup>27</sup>

Special attention was given to integrating a gender-responsive approach to data collection methods. To assess gender across the portfolio, the evaluation considered the UNDP gender marker assigned to the different project outputs,<sup>28</sup> and the IEO gender results effectiveness scale (GRES). GRES classifies gender results into five categories: gender negative, gender blind, gender targeted, gender responsive, and gender transformative.

The evaluation used data from primary and secondary sources, including a portfolio analysis and desk review of corporate and project documentation. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with about 40 individuals, including government representatives, civil society organisations, and staff from the UNDP country office and Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS). Data and information collected from different sources and means were triangulated before the evaluation reached conclusions and recommendations.

For the analysis of results by subject area, the evaluation considered all UNDP project-level interventions active during the period 2017-2018, and included projects which closed during the previous or current CPD period with cumulated expenditure of at least \$100,000. In order to provide a more coherent perspective of UNDP performance in implementing the project portfolio, the findings of

<sup>24</sup> [United Nations Evaluation Group Norms & Standards](#)

<sup>25</sup> [UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN system](#)

<sup>26</sup> These principles include: national ownership and capacity; human rights-based approach; sustainable human development; gender equality and women's empowerment; voice and participation; South-South and triangular cooperation; active role as global citizens; and universality.

<sup>27</sup> This information is extracted from analysis of the goals input in the enhanced results-based management platform, the financial results in the Executive Snapshot, the results in the Global Staff Survey, and interviews with management/ operations in the country office.

<sup>28</sup> A corporate monitoring tool used to assign a rating to project outputs during design and track planned expenditure towards outputs for advances or contributions to achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. The gender marker does not reflect actual expenditures assigned to advancing gender equality and empowerment of women. As the gender marker is assigned by project output, a project can have several outputs with different gender markers.

the evaluation are organised by subject area rather than CPD outcomes.

## Process

The IEO developed the terms of reference for the ICPE in December 2018 (see Annex 1), and conducted a desk review of available programme and project documentation. A one-week data collection mission was carried out by the IEO lead and associate evaluators in February 2019. At the end of the mission, preliminary findings and results were shared with the country office for joint reflection and validation. This evaluation was carried out in parallel with a country level audit exercise by the UNDP Office of Audit and Investigation. The data collection mission was coordinated and jointly conducted with the audit team, enabling several joint interviews with UNDP staff and stakeholders to reduce transaction costs for the country office and its stakeholders. This also enabled information sharing between the two processes.

The draft ICPE report was quality assured by an IEO internal reviewer and an external expert (member of IEO Evaluation Advisory Panel), submitted to the country office and RBAS to check for errors, and shared with the Government and other national partners for comments. A stakeholder workshop to present the evaluation results was held virtually in January 2020, providing an additional opportunity to discuss results and recommendations, and obtain feedback and clarification on the report prior to its finalisation.

## Limitations

The evaluation process faced a number of limitations. At the outset, the nature and focus of UNDP engagement in Bahrain, partly conditioned by its

NCC status, de facto limits the range and number of stakeholders with whom the UNDP engages, to essentially government stakeholders. Given the focus of UNDP projects on upstream support to the Bahraini Government, the interviews conducted for this evaluation mainly focused on direct project stakeholders within national agencies, in line with the areas of engagement of the country programme. Several meetings with non-government counterparts were organised but, because of budget, time and access limitations, the evaluation was not able to engage with indirect stakeholders of UNDP interventions, such as civil society groups or the broader population, to ascertain the impacts and outcomes of policy changes to which UNDP may have contributed.

The data collection phase was affected by challenges for the UNDP country office to secure timely meetings with government officials, partly due to the Government's requirement that the scheduling of meetings be coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As a result of late and tight scheduling of meetings, important stakeholders could not be met, including the Supreme Council for Women, the Supreme Council for the Environment, and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce with whom the country office had an active project which accounted for more than 15 per cent of total programme expenditure between 2012 and 2018. In addition, meetings with stakeholders were held in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To some extent, these limitations were mitigated with an in-depth desk review and corroboration of data through extensive research of publicly available information, and by refocusing the evaluation on the current years of implementation 2017-2018.

A decorative graphic consisting of a dotted white line that starts at the top left, goes down, then right, then down again, and finally right. It features six colored dots: a yellow dot on the first vertical segment, a blue dot on the second vertical segment, a green dot on the first horizontal segment, a yellow dot on the second horizontal segment, a blue dot on the third horizontal segment, and a green dot on the fourth horizontal segment.

# CHAPTER 2

## FINDINGS

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## 2.1 Overview of the country programme

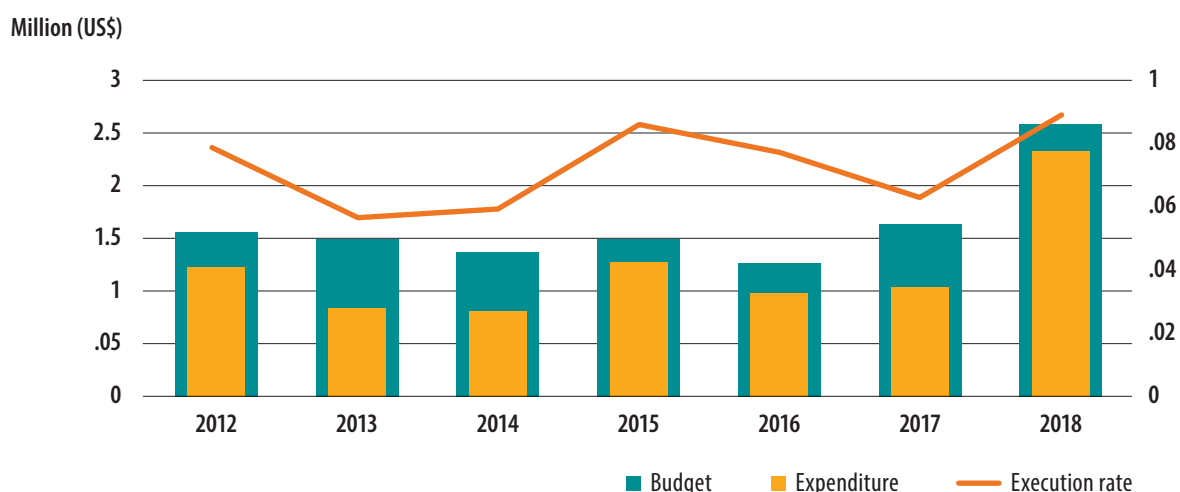
According to the UNDP Bahrain CPD,<sup>29</sup> the minimum expected resources committed for the 2017-2020 programme was \$12 million. \$4.2 million was budgeted for 2017-18 and, as of February 2019, \$3.3 million had been implemented, with an average execution rate of 80 per cent.<sup>30</sup> This represents about one third of the planned total CPD budget at mid-point in its implementation. Trends in programme expenditure show that expenditure increased from the start of the CPD, by a factor of 2.5 between 2017 and 2018, and the programme budget nearly doubled. Expenditure in 2018, of \$2.5 million, was the highest annual programme expenditure ever recorded by UNDP in the country.<sup>31</sup> This increase was largely related to one project in the area of energy, started in 2015, which increased by 150 per cent between 2017 and 2018.

Between 2017 and 2018, UNDP had 13 active projects, seven of which were carried forward from the previous CPD period. Three projects initiated in the previous CPD and open since 2010-2011 phased

out, and five new projects were initiated. Projects fell under two outcomes defined in the CPD, as presented in figures 1 and 2. The first, to contribute to economic diversification and social services in Bahrain, accounted for \$2.1 million, about two-thirds of 2017-2018 expenditure. The second, to support the effectiveness and responsiveness of Bahraini institutions and programmes, accounted for the remainder, about \$1.3 million over the two years. The energy thematic area represented 67 per cent of expenditure in 2017 and 2018, equivalent to around one third of total programmatic expenditure between 2012 and 2018. The other 33 per cent was spread across the other 12 projects in the portfolio. The second largest thematic area by expenditure relates to public sector effectiveness, accounting for about 13 per cent of expenditure over the same period.

UNDP Bahrain is composed of a total of 17 staff, including the Resident Representative, six programme staff, four analysts and two associates. In addition, the country office has been hosting the Sustainable Energy Unit (SEU) on behalf of the Ministry of Energy and Water, composed of nine staff.<sup>32</sup> For the period covered by the evaluation, UNDP staffing included three additional staff for the

**FIGURE 2. Evolution of programme budget and expenditure 2012-2018**



<sup>29</sup> DP/DCP/BHR/3

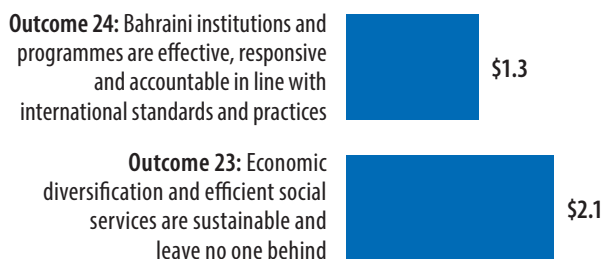
<sup>30</sup> Source: Atlas data extracted, February 2019

<sup>31</sup> Based on Atlas data available up to 2008.

<sup>32</sup> UNDP Bahrain country office organigram dated January 2019



**FIGURE 3. Expenditure by outcome 2017-2018**  
(million US\$)

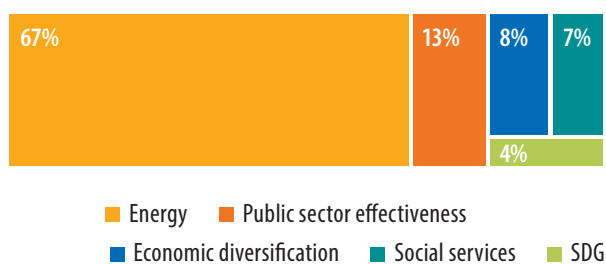


resident coordinator office. However, in January 2019, the resident coordinator function was delinked from UNDP, in line with wider UN reforms to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Prior to the delinking of this function, there was an additional post of deputy resident representative.

### Theory of change

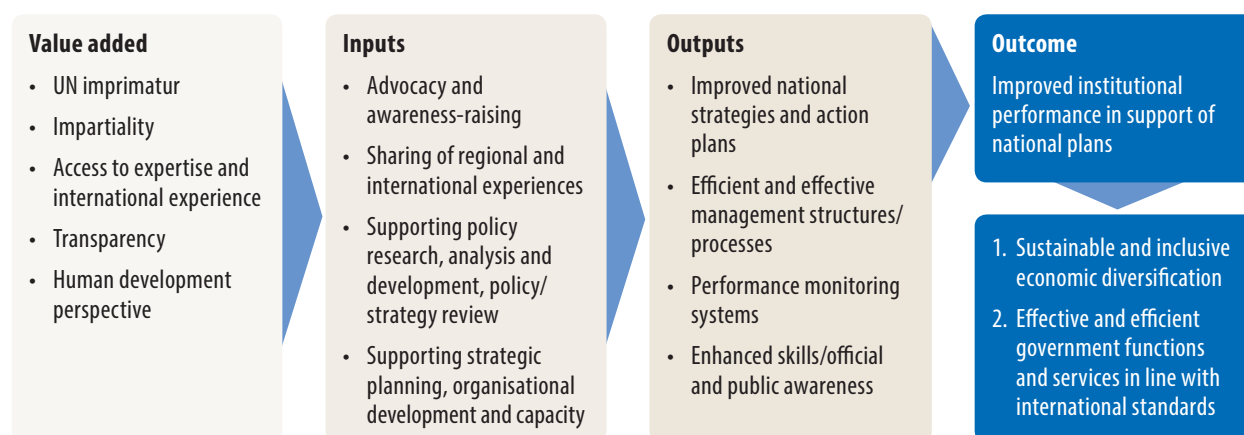
Drawing from an analysis of the programme portfolio and IEO evaluations, the evaluation team developed an abridged theory of change for the

**FIGURE 4. Share of expenditures by thematic areas**  
2017-2018



UNDP country programme to illustrate the nature of UNDP support in Bahrain and causal pathways within the high-income context. While recognising the specific context of Bahrain, the positioning and orientation of the country programme shares common features with other NCCs, including other countries in the region.<sup>33</sup> UNDP support revolves primarily around the provision of advisory services and technical expertise to strengthen capacity development and upstream policy development for improved institutional performance. In the

**FIGURE 5. Abridged theory of change of the country programme**



### Assumptions

- There are capacity gaps in the implementation of national plans
- UNDP support provides and advocates for innovative solutions
- Advisory and technical expertise is of high quality to respond to high expectations
- UNDP demonstrates effectiveness and efficiency in operational and programme management
- The enabling environment is favourable to output delivery and contribution to outcomes

<sup>33</sup> UNDP ICPE Kuwait, 2018; ADR United Arab Emirates, 2012; Evaluation of UNDP contribution in NCC of the Arab States Region, 2008

context of Bahrain, improvements in institutional performance are expected to support the implementation of national development frameworks in the areas of economic diversification, government performance, and delivery of social services.

The theory of change emphasises the added value of UNDP in Bahrain, in relation to its key functions and attributes. In 2007, a perception survey conducted as part of an IEO thematic evaluation of NCCs in the region identified the added value of UNDP as its capacity to facilitate access to international expertise and experience, including UN expertise. UNDP support is different from other non-profit and private sector actors, as it is impartial, transparent and carries the UN imprimatur, and it delivers support with a human development orientation. While this analysis is more than a decade old, it was considered valid during more recent evaluation exercises in similar operating contexts such as Kuwait<sup>34</sup> and United Arab Emirates.<sup>35</sup>

The theory of change is underpinned by some fundamental assumptions about the relevance, quality and cost-effectiveness of UNDP inputs in line with national plans. The CPD recognises that a critical success factor is the ability to ensure a “high level of expertise and cutting-edge programming to meet the expectations of the Government of Bahrain”, emphasising the need for innovative solutions.<sup>36</sup> Given Bahrain’s NCC status, the theory of change also assumes a favourable enabling environment for output delivery, notably effective funding and working relationships.

## 2.2 Key findings by thematic area

### Support to inclusive and sustainable economic diversification

**Finding 1:** While it is a core national priority, UNDP has provided limited support to the economic diversification agenda as initially envisaged in the CPD.

Economic diversification is at the centre of Bahrain’s national objectives framed by the 2030 economic vision and subsequent national action plans. Bahrain was a pioneer among the Gulf States in economic diversification, and while the share of non-hydrocarbon sectors in its GDP has increased, government revenues are still heavily reliant on the sector. Though the largest deposits of hydrocarbons have recently been discovered, the country’s economic sustainability continues to depend on its capacity to diversify.

In its previous CPD, UNDP supported the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to more effectively engage with international and regional trade agreements, through individual and institutional capacity development. Overall, the objective of the programme was to support capacity in the area of economic governance to enable the country to optimise its positioning and benefits from the international trade system. UNDP, in partnership with UN entities with a mandate in trade-related issues such as the UN Conference for Trade and Development, the International Trade Centre and the World Intellectual Property Organisation, delivered training activities in the areas of free trade agreements and protocol and industrial property and measurement standards. This project, initiated in 2010, phased out at the beginning of the current programme cycle in 2017. The evaluation was not able to confirm whether the capacity development provided contributed to improvements in economic governance or onwards towards economic diversification. The country office reported a contribution to trade policy achievements,<sup>37</sup> though these are not fully evident in available documentation. Furthermore, the evaluation was not able to engage with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce during the in-country data collection mission.

During the current cycle, the objective of economic diversification was supported through work in the energy area (presented below), and the publication

<sup>34</sup> ICPE Kuwait 2018, IEO

<sup>35</sup> ADR United Arab Emirates, 2012, IEO

<sup>36</sup> UNDP Bahrain, country programme document

<sup>37</sup> UNDP Results Oriented Annual Reports

of Bahrain's third national human development report (NHDR) focused on sustainable and inclusive economic diversification. The report, prepared in 2017 through a project with the Bahrain Centre for Strategic, International, and Energy Studies (DERASAT), addresses economic diversification through the lens of the 2030 agenda with emphasis on sustainability and human capital.

The preparation of the report was formalized through a project with DERASAT in 2017. UNDP facilitated a series of workshops to share the human development report approach and methodology and, with participation of DERASAT, recruited an international consultant as lead author, along with eight national and international contributors. In addition, UNDP accompanied the NHDR process by participating in the project board, convening workshops with participation of the UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, and engaging staff from the UNDP headquarters Human Development Report office for quality assurance. Bahrain's third NHDR was published in November 2018,<sup>38</sup> 17 years after the previous one.<sup>39</sup>

The NHDR did not have a conventional focus on human development, noted by stakeholders and in the report itself.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless it constituted a positive contribution to strengthening the human development paradigm in line with the Economic Vision 2030 and the UNDP mandate. Through this lens, the report included discussions on the role of women and migrant workers in the Bahrain Economy. Despite minor issues raised around delays in the launch of the project and the recruitment modality for the lead author,<sup>41</sup> the exercise was valued and appreciated by DERASAT. The institute confirmed the capacity development aspect of the project, having internalised the human development report methodology, and its readiness

to fully lead the publication of the next NHDR for Bahrain. The report was launched at an event which gathered academics and policy makers, and a series of dissemination and discussion events around the background papers that fed into the report were anticipated. The country office reported that, in November 2019, DERASAT and the American Political Science Association organised a conference on Women in Development, drawing on the groundwork of the NHDR.

## Energy

**Finding 2:** UNDP has facilitated advisory and development service support to the Government of Bahrain to establish institutional capacity to initiate implementation of national action plans on renewable energy and efficiency policies set out in the country's strategy for energy sustainability. Implementation of measures is at an early stage, but the national ownership and progress achieved so far suggest a strong likelihood of contribution to the diversification of the country's energy mix, and potential to create new markets and jobs moving forward.

The cost and supply of energy has been a growing concern in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Hydrocarbon extraction and transformation has been at centre of its economy. At the same time, increasing local demand for energy accelerates the depletion of local hydrocarbon reserves, reduces potential export revenues from the sector, and increases the environmental footprint of the country. Estimates from Bahrain's Electricity and Water Authority (EWA) project an annual growth in electricity demand of 6-8 per cent between 2015 and 2030.

Through its project "establishment of the sustainable energy unit", UNDP supported the Government of Bahrain to articulate a road map for a subset of

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<sup>38</sup> The report formulates 40 policy recommendations for promoting sustainable economic growth and includes sections on macro- and micro-economic topics of prominence in Bahrain's economic vision including questions of human capital, innovation and technology, sustainable energy, and on the place of women and migrant workers in the country's economy.

<sup>39</sup> The last NHDR for Bahrain was published in 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Page 240 of the Bahrain NHDR, as part of broader recommendations, indicates that enhancing the quality of data would enable future NHDRs to tackle more conventional questions relating to human development in greater detail.

<sup>41</sup> The lead author was recruited under an international consultant contract, which did not allow his presence in the country for the entire duration of the project.

its energy policies on renewable energy and energy efficiency; and to facilitate the establishment of a dedicated unit under the Ministry of Electricity and Water to operationalise it. A project between the National Oil and Gas Authority and UNDP began in 2011 to prepare a study on energy conservation, a feasibility study for a centre on energy conservation and planning, and a programme to support the establishment of such a national centre.<sup>42</sup>

Based on the results of the studies, UNDP and the Government of Bahrain engaged to establish the Sustainable Energy Unit (SEU). After initially seeking to launch the unit from within the Ministry of Water and Energy with the support of seconded UNDP staff, it was decided that it would be hosted within UNDP. The SEU was established in 2014, composed of seven staff contracted by UNDP and physically hosted within the United Nations House as a UNDP project. An inter-ministerial committee was established to monitor and follow up on the implementation of the action plans, chaired by the Minister of Electricity and Water Affairs and composed of ten key ministries.<sup>43</sup>

Since its establishment, the SEU has articulated a roadmap, through the design of two action plans for energy efficiency and renewable energy in Bahrain, endorsed through cabinet resolutions in 2017. These set national targets for increasing the share of renewable energy in the country's energy mix by 5 per cent by 2025 and 10 per cent by 2035; and for improving energy efficiency by 6 per cent by 2025, based on average consumption between 2009 and 2013. The SEU is already achieving important progress in the implementation of the two action plans, including in 2018 the launch of several measures expected to support the production of 131 megawatts through renewables, which is already reaching 52 per cent of its target for 2025 (see box 2).<sup>44</sup> Initiatives have engaged with various

government entities, including the ministries of works, industry and commerce, and finance.

While too early to observe the expected contribution of SEU to economic diversification, this area of work is already supporting environmental and fiscal objectives, through the reduction of emissions, as well as enabling the reduction of hydrocarbon energy subsidies, a key objective of Bahrain's fiscal programme. Moving forward, it is expected that reduction in energy intensity will support increased revenue generation from hydrocarbon exports, and capacity development of private operators will initiate job creation through the emergence of new markets and job opportunities. Funding for the work of the SEU has been secured up to 2020 through cabinet decision, and EWA confirmed its intention to fully integrate the unit into the governmental architecture, upgrading its status from unit to centre, and enhancing its status and sustainability in the government apparatus.

UNDP support and added value in the establishment of the SEU resided in its impartiality, and its access to external international and domestic expertise through its global network of country offices. By hosting the project, UNDP provided an administrative anchoring for the unit which facilitated the launch and the recruitment of international expertise and speeded up implementation, avoiding institutional challenges related to the positioning of the unit within the government apparatus. The hosting of the unit by UNDP enabled pilot trials which may not have been possible otherwise, notably in its staffing. In addition, UNDP involvement in establishing the unit was perceived as conducive to achieving acceptance and buy-in for the initiative, building on its positive reputation and credibility as a Government partner.

<sup>42</sup> The Centre was needed to fill an identified gap in the Government's capacity to undertake holistic energy planning and policy across the different intersecting energy sectors in Bahrain, and to oversee implementation of both supply and demand to ensure policy coherence and effectiveness.

<sup>43</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Ministry of Finance, Industry, Commerce and Tourism, Transportation and Telecommunication, Housing, Ministry of Works, Municipalities and Urban Planning, Ministry of Oil, National Oil and Gas Authority, Supreme Council for the Environment, the Economic Development Board.

<sup>44</sup> Based on a report from EWA

## BOX 2: Examples of initiatives launched through the SEU in 2017-2018<sup>45</sup>

	Completed	Ongoing
Renewable energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Net metering policy</b>, approved by the Cabinet Resolution no. 2 of 2017</li> <li>• <b>Bahrain's first wind atlas</b>, finalised in December 2017</li> <li>• <b>Solar photovoltaic training courses for private companies and government organisations</b>, 202 candidates trained in 2018</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tender Based Feed in Tariff</li> <li>• Renewable Energy Mandate for new buildings</li> <li>• Solar PV systems for government buildings and new town developments</li> <li>• National Waste Management Strategy being developed</li> <li>• Large-scale solar farm on available land</li> <li>• Renewables in infrastructure projects</li> </ul>
Energy efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Green Building Code and rating scheme</b>, guidelines and roll out in June 2019 approved for government buildings by Ministry of Works, First Deputy Prime Minister's office, and ministerial infrastructure committee</li> <li>• <b>Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS)</b> and labelling of air conditioning successfully introduced and market reviewed for compliance</li> <li>• <b>Vehicle Efficiency Standards and labelling</b>, labelling introduced and market reviewed for compliance</li> <li>• <b>Government building lighting replacements</b>, implementation of replacement programme to install low energy lighting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Energy Labelling</li> <li>• Government Building Energy Management Systems</li> <li>• Industry programme</li> <li>• District cooling</li> <li>• MEPS and labelling for appliances and lighting</li> <li>• Green public procurement guidance and training</li> <li>• Street light refurbishment</li> <li>• Introduction of Smart metering in new buildings and replacement programme</li> <li>• Electricity and transport subsidy reforms</li> <li>• Institutional capacity building and training for market actors</li> </ul>

### Social services

**Finding 3:** Building on a partnership initiated in 2002, UNDP and UN Habitat supported the Government of Bahrain to revise its housing policy. Despite limited funding, this project was able to achieve intended outputs.

UNDP facilitated collaboration between the Ministry of Housing, the Office of the First Deputy Prime Minister and UN Habitat, which does not

have a presence in the country, providing an institutional and administrative base for activities. This included the creation and oversight of the project, participation in consultative meetings, and substantive contributions to draft documents to ensure adequate economic and social interlinkages. UN Habitat provided the technical and substantive services required to review the housing policy. Despite a significant reduction in the budgeted implementation funding, the project was able to

<sup>45</sup> Based on reports of the SEU, as of February 2019

deliver the two planned outputs, a national housing profile report and a proposal for policy review. UN Habitat deployed an expert to the Ministry of Housing for the duration of the exercise, to support implementation. At the time of the evaluation, activities had been completed, and the revised policy was in the process of being endorsed by the Cabinet. Once approved, implementation is expected to be supported by a follow-up project, at proposal stage at the time of the evaluation.

Implementation of this project faced some challenges, in part related to the availability of funding as per the original design. Concerns were expressed over the quality of the expertise and the outputs delivered, which a perception that UNDP should have had a more proactive role in guiding the substantive work. Expectations were based on the extensive and comprehensive work that was delivered in 2002 to set up the original policy, which benefited from the deployment of more significant technical expertise, and stakeholders described the 2018 policy review as succinct. The final output was the subject of some re-drafting before its submission for endorsement, leading to mixed perceptions about the quality of the work.

The evaluation did not seek to review the substantive value of this input, but interviews pointed to misunderstandings over what could be realistically achieved with available resources. They also raised questions as to the relative level of UNDP accountability for its quality assurance role. Despite its limited role in the substantive work around the housing policy review, some stakeholders considered that UNDP could have done more to ensure the quality of delivery by UN Habitat. While issues around accountability are not uncommon in UN joint programmes, UNDP Bahrain is exposed to additional risks and expectations as the only implementing agency with a formal country presence.

## Supporting public sector effectiveness

**Finding 4:** Building on long-standing engagement, UNDP effectively supported the Bahrain Institute for Public Administration (BIPA), to fulfil its core mandate by providing a business model for its training, consultancy and research activities, helping it to become a respected and recognised public administration institution within and outside Bahrain.

UNDP has been supporting the development of BIPA since 2011,<sup>46</sup> when the relationship was formalised in a project to strengthen BIPA capacity and enhance its research and consulting services in support of Bahrain's public institutions.<sup>47</sup> The project aimed to promote and transfer the UNDP capacity development methodology,<sup>48</sup> to support the development of the BIPA strategy, and to build the capacity of BIPA to use the methodology in its services to government institutions. Between 2011 and 2018, the project provided training and technical assistance to BIPA which included capacity needs assessments, the development of its strategic plan and, most notably, the development of its business model for consultancy and research services through the production of procedural and training manuals. The project also promoted the research capacity of other public sector institutions through training on research methods, which materialised in the submission of several research outputs to the 2014 Congress of the International Association of Schools and Institutes in Administration (IASIA). Work has begun to transfer the UNDP innovation lab approach to BIPA, following the capacity development facility project approach.

BIPA is now fully established and recognised among Bahrain's institutions. Since its inception, it reports to have provided training to 21,899 government employees, representing 45 per cent of public sector employees; provided 14 consultancy services to government institutions; 1,820 assessment

<sup>46</sup> BIPA was established by Royal Decree 65 in 2006 with the aim of supporting Bahrain's economic and social development plans by upgrading the country's public administration through research, advisory work and training for ministries and governmental organizations.

<sup>47</sup> Establishing a capacity development facility in BIPA in the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2011-2018

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/capacity-development/undp-capacity-assessment-methodology/UNDP%20Capacity%20Assessment%20Users%20Guide.pdf>

services; and published 407 research papers.<sup>49</sup> BIPA has developed a set of generic and customised training curricula addressing different levels and needs of government institutions, such as the national leadership programme that is embedded into the career development of civil servants in Bahrain, or the Executive Masters programme in Public Management in partnership with Aix Marseille University and Ecole Nationale d'Administration of France. Furthermore, attesting to its established status as an internationally credible public administration institute, BIPA received the 2017-2018 Global Return on Investment (ROI) Best Study Award for Training Impact Assessment,<sup>50</sup> based on a ROI study of two of its training programmes.

UNDP is highly regarded by the leadership of BIPA for the strategic and operational support provided, as well as the quality of expertise sourced from its regional and headquarter offices and network of consultants. The international access, global network and external outreach of UNDP was gradually integrated into the project approach and greatly benefitted the international profile of BIPA, notably through the establishment of the Middle East and North Africa Public Administration Research (MENAPAR) network.

**Finding 5:** The establishment and development of MENAPAR, spearheaded by BIPA and UNDP, is a positive example of promotion of South-South and triangular cooperation in the area of public management research. While there is no direct evidence that MENAPAR has enhanced BIPA's core function performance at this stage, the initiative was highly valued by BIPA for affirming its global reputation and expanding opportunities for collaboration.

MENAPAR, the first regional network of public administration institutes, seeks to enhance networking and research on public administration in the Arab Region, and promote regional cooperation for the development of common applied research on public administration. The idea was developed by BIPA and UNDP during the International Conference on Administrative Sciences hosted by IASIA in Bahrain, and was developed under the framework of the Capacity Development Facility project, until its formal launch in 2014.

Administratively hosted by BIPA and UNDP, the network has hosted five annual conferences in different countries of the MENA region, allowing for knowledge exchange, networking and collaboration in the area of applied public administration research.<sup>51</sup> The network collaborates with the European Group for Public Administration, a member of IASIA, and the Aix Marseille University to organise the Euro-MENA Dialogue on public management conference every two years.<sup>52</sup> The conference provides a platform to produce research and foster dialogue between researchers on governance and public administration concepts and approaches in the two regions.

MENAPAR is one of the most visible and successful outcomes of the project with BIPA. The evaluation team cannot confirm the extent to which MENAPAR research outputs (reportedly in the hundreds) have been used or leveraged in BIPA's work. However, MENAPAR has helped BIPA engage and raise its profile among its regional and international peers and establish a solid network and reputation which opens opportunities highly conducive to the core mission of BIPA in Bahrain, while promoting South-South and triangular cooperation. It also raises the visibility and participation of Bahrain in new international fora, with a regional leadership role. MENAPAR joined the Global Coalition of Think Tanks initia-

<sup>49</sup> Strategy of the Institute of Public Administration 2016-2018

<sup>50</sup> The ROI Institute Awards Program strives to recognize excellent practices in the application of the ROI methodology and honour individuals and organizations for outstanding work in measurement, evaluation and analysis.

<sup>51</sup> Bahrain, Tunisia, Jordan, Palestine

<sup>52</sup> The Euro MENA Dialogues on Public Management are an extension of the Euro- Mediterranean Dialogues on Public Management held by the European Group for Public Administration and Aix Marseille University. The collaboration with MENAPAR happened in Oman (2016) and Grenada (2018).

tive for South-South cooperation,<sup>53</sup> a knowledge exchange platform established by UNDP and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation.

Based on the success of this experience, in 2017 UNDP and BIPA signed a specific project supporting the institutionalisation of MENAPAR (which had previously been hosted by BIPA and supported by UNDP), the organisation of the 2018 Euro MENA dialogue conference, and the development of a regional research curriculum for the network. The network required a legal identity to ensure its sustainability and credibility, and allow it to operate as intended and pursue its perceived growth opportunities. At the time of the evaluation mission in February 2019, MENAPAR was in the process of being registered as a non-governmental organisation based in Belgium, with a secretariat in Bahrain hosted by BIPA. Financing arrangements for network activities had not been clarified at the time of the evaluation, but the initiative was highly valued by both partners, BIPA and UNDP, who intended to continue to support MENAPAR and capitalise on its success.

**Finding 6:** UNDP makes a modest but valuable contribution to Bahrain's efforts to strengthen rule of law through institutional capacity development of the special investigation unit (SIU) in charge of prosecuting police misconduct and abuse of authority.

Following 2011 events in Bahrain in the wake of the Arab spring, the King established the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, tasked with investigating and reporting on allegations of human rights violations and recommending appropriate reforms. In particular, it examined alleged cases of abuse of authority in the handling of protests, including the circumstances and conditions of arrests and detentions, and allegations of disappearances and torture. In November 2011, the commission delivered a public report containing 26 recommendations, fully accepted by the Government, among which was the establishment

of an independent capacity to investigate human rights violations, transferring jurisdiction from the Ministry of the Interior to the Public Prosecution Office. Accordingly, the SIU was established within the Attorney General's Office in 2012, with responsibility for determining "criminal accountability of those in government who have committed crimes of killing or torture or mistreatment of civilians, including those in the chain of command under the principle of superior responsibility."<sup>54</sup>

Since 2014, UNDP has supported operationalisation of the SIU with advisory services and capacity development support for the application of international frameworks in line with the Istanbul Protocol. UNDP facilitated access to expertise, including high-level judicial experts to advise the formation and development of SIU, provide an assessment of forensic services and procedures, and ensure that the operational structure of the unit met international standards and practices. UNDP also supported development of a media and communication strategy for SIU, to strengthen its public outreach capacity. Workshops were organised to strengthen the capacities and technical procedures of the Institute of Judicial and Legal Studies, the Ministry of Justice, and the Public Prosecution Office.<sup>55</sup>

Activities under this project were slower during the current CPD period, with only about 5 per cent of total expenditure recorded between 2017 and 2018. Building on bilateral cooperation between Bahrain and the United Kingdom (UK), UNDP facilitated practical training through study tours to the UK in 2018, where the head of SIU was able to attend the trial of a police officer charged with misconduct in Liverpool and visit the public prosecution standard-setting department. The project also facilitated the participation of the unit in the 18th UK Professional Standards and Ethics Conference.

Based on Bahrain's report to the human rights council in the context of reporting to the International

<sup>53</sup> The South-South Global Thinkers is a community where think tank networks from the Global South and the North come together to engage in policy dialogues, share knowledge, expertise and most importantly Southern perspectives. See: <https://www.ssc-globalthinkers.org/>

<sup>54</sup> Article four of Decision (8) of 2012, Establishing a Special Investigations Unit

<sup>55</sup> Evaluation of Bahrain Country programme 2012-2016



Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,<sup>56</sup> up to January 2018, the SIU received 561 allegations of torture and 839 allegations of ill-treatment and excessive use of force by members of the public security forces. Of these, 56 cases involving 120 accused persons were referred to the competent courts, and nine cases referred to the Military Courts.<sup>57</sup> In cases where the accused was found guilty, the sentences imposed ranged from one month to seven years in prison.

The SIU highly valued the UNDP contribution, in particular enabling access to high level expertise to support its operationalization in alignment with international practices and standards. For example, the project was able to mobilize the expertise of a prominent public prosecutor with extensive international experience. While noting challenges with delays on UNDP procurement and lack of clarity over the UNDP quality assurance role, and a slow-down in project activities during the period under review, the SIU reported satisfaction with the services rendered and foresaw continuation of the cooperation moving forward.

## Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda in national initiatives

**Finding 7:** Building on a strong commitment of the Government of Bahrain to promote the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNDP has played an active role in supporting awareness-raising on the SDGs and their mainstreaming into national initiatives, while supporting the participation and visibility of Bahrain in UN international fora.

Following its engagement with the MDGs, the Government of Bahrain has been a strong advocate for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>58</sup> Building on this strong commitment, UNDP has

played an active role in supporting the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda through formal project engagement and, outside of this, through partnerships.

UNDP supported the Government of Bahrain to engage in UN fora through the development of its first Voluntary National Review (VNR), part of the mechanism to review and follow up on commitments embodied in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As part of this project, UNDP supported the Information and eGovernment Authority of Bahrain<sup>59</sup> to produce the VNR report and present it at the 2018 United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) High Level Political Forum. UNDP supported the process through coordination of national consultation workshops and capacity building to ensure compliance with the VNR methodology, and provided translation and editorial support. For the production of the VNR, 106 NGOs, 88 private firms, and 32 academic and parliamentary stakeholders were consulted.<sup>60</sup> Through this consultative approach, the process was able to map key national priorities against the SDGs, establish a baseline for monitoring future progress, and strengthen integration of the SDGs into the new Government Plan of Action 2019-2022.

In addition, to support youth engagement, UNDP provided advisory support to set up the King Ahmad Award, launched in 2017 during the ECOSOC Youth Forum. The award seeks to promote youth participation in sustainable development, by rewarding youth-led initiatives which facilitate engagement and action for the SDGs. A UNDP project provided support to the Ministry of Youth and Sports to establish the criteria for award selection, set up a jury panel composed of UN

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<sup>56</sup> CCPR/C/BHR/Q/1/Add.1

<sup>57</sup> In 541 cases, having completed its investigations, SIU dismissed all suspicion of an offence after concluding that there was insufficient evidence to support allegations.

<sup>58</sup> As reported in its VNR report, Bahrain actively participated in the process of negotiation and consultation leading up to the adoption of the agenda, notably through hosting the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development in 2015, and hosting the sixth meeting of the group of experts on SDG indicators; in which it represented Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Since the adoption of the global agenda, the Government established a National Information Committee, chaired by the Minister of Cabinet Affairs with representation from various ministries and government entities, to monitor and report on progress against the SDGs.

<sup>59</sup> IGA is the responsible national agency and is the national authority for statistics, eGovernment and ICT.

<sup>60</sup> Based on Voluntary National Review report.

country and regional office staff, and strengthen the international reach of the initiative through the UN inter-governmental platform of ECOSOC. The country office took advantage of opportunities to mainstream advocacy around the SDGs in its project implementation. For example, the 2018 NHDR, focused on sustainable economic growth, established strong linkages with the SDGs in its analysis, despite not fully addressing human development questions. UNDP also engaged with BIPA to raise awareness around the SDGs in its Masters and flagship leadership programmes for Bahraini civil servants, with the University of Bahrain.

Outside of formal project engagement, the country office leveraged its convening role to raise awareness of the global agenda, through its participation in initiatives of the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Capital Governorate of Manama. Most notably, using the 2030 Agenda as an entry point, the country office facilitated the establishment of a global partnership between UNDP and Al Baraka group, Bahrain's largest banking group and a leading global provider of Islamic finance.<sup>61</sup> UNDP Bahrain provided Al Baraka with advisory support to articulate its renewed social corporate vision in alignment with the SDG goals and targets, strengthening UN-private sector linkages. Through this engagement, Al Baraka was able to connect with global platforms such as the 2018 SDG Business Forum on the margins of the ECOSOC High Level Political Forum, where it participated in side events sharing its experience of private sector engagement in the SDGs.

Through its support for advocacy, knowledge sharing and global outreach, UNDP Bahrain facilitated linkages with RBAS, leading to the formalisation of a cooperation framework for engagement between UNDP country offices and Al Baraka branches in countries across the region. The memorandum of understanding, though not operationalised at the

time of the evaluation, is expected to enable all banks in the MENA region to engage with UNDP country offices to collaborate on country-level interventions in the SDG areas prioritised by Al Baraka.

## 2.3 Cross-cutting findings

**Finding 8:** Most projects are reported to contribute to gender equality significantly (GEN2), or in some way (GEN1), though overall the country office has had limited opportunities to mainstream gender into its projects.

The country programme included a specific output focused on the mainstreaming of gender into national policies, with indicative resources of \$1 million, but no active project specifically addressed this objective during the period observed. Drawing from the gender marker rating reported by the country office, about half of projects (six) did not intend to contribute in a significant way to gender equality (GEN1). Another six aimed to significantly contribute to gender equality in some way (GEN2). Based on a review of the project portfolio, the evaluation notes that, in general, projects marked as GEN 2 have had limited contribution to advancing gender equality. Using GRES,<sup>62</sup> the implementation of interventions can be characterised for the most part as gender targeted. For instance, it is not clear how the projects to establish the SEU and support the capacity of BIPA, marked as GEN 2, were designed to significantly contribute to gender equality, beyond measures to promote equity and gender parity among beneficiaries of its activities.

The only project reported as having gender equality as its main objective (GEN3) is the Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative (GEPMI), initiated in 2012 and active in the current CPD period. Initiated in the MDG era, GEPMI is a UNDP corporate programme that aims to deliver compre-

<sup>61</sup> Based in Bahrain, the Al Baraka group is present in 17 countries of the MENA region, Asia and Europe.

<sup>62</sup> The GRES, developed as part of a corporate evaluation of the UNDP contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment, classifies gender results into five categories: gender-negative = result led to a negative outcome that reinforced/ aggravated gender inequalities/ norms; gender-blind = result had no attention to gender; gender-targeted = result focused on equity (50:50) of women and men in targeting; gender-responsive = result addressed differential needs of men and women and equitable distribution of benefits, resources, status, rights, etc.; and gender-transformative = result contributed to changes in norms, cultural values, power structures and the roots of gender inequalities and discrimination.

hensive capacity development and advisory services to support gender mainstreaming in economic policies, through the design and delivery of country-specific training courses.<sup>63</sup> However, this project was postponed due to a change in priorities. The evaluation team was informed of discussions underway to reframe the project objectives to focus on sustainable development more broadly, rather than gender specifically.<sup>64</sup>

Outside of formal project engagement, the country office was able to leverage its convening role to broker a partnership with Microsoft and its private certified training provider in Bahrain, Thinksmart, to promote women's economic empowerment. UNDP engaged with Thinksmart to refocus one of its existing programmes towards women's digital literacy. The original programme, "Forsati", delivered IT training and Microsoft certification to promote youth employability and entrepreneurship, in partnership with Tamkeen, a semi-autonomous government agency promoting private sector competitiveness through skills training and financing. The new programme "Forsati for her" specifically targeted women students at the University of Bahrain for digital literacy and coding backed by Microsoft certifications. Reportedly, discussions are underway to broaden this to other stakeholders in Bahrain including universities, public administration, the Supreme Council for Women, and Zain, a regional telecom company, and expanding the programme to other Gulf countries.

UNDP is considered to have played an important role in advising and brokering partnerships between the private sector training provider and the University of Bahrain and bringing the role of women in technology to the fore. While it is too early to assess the impact of this partnership, and though not formally part of UNDP portfolio, the initiative is gender-responsive and has the potential to be transformative in the future.

**Finding 9:** As the only UN entity with a formal country presence in Bahrain,<sup>65</sup> UNDP has provided a platform for the Government to engage with, and access the expertise of, various entities in the UN system. Recent changes in the national and global UN context may challenge this dimension of UNDP added value in Bahrain in the future.

A trend can be observed in UNDP support to Bahrain, in its dual role implementing its country programme in line with the UNDP core mandate, and facilitating access to the UN system to meet requests for support and expertise. In 2008, the evaluation of UNDP in NCCs in the Arab States established the UNDP added value as "a conduit as well as window to the UN system".<sup>66</sup> This has led UNDP to offer support within the range of its core mandate and available expertise, and also outside of the scope of what it can directly provide, for which UNDP has engaged other UN system entities.

In the past, this has included project-level engagement with the UN Conference for Trade and Development and the World Intellectual Property Organisation for the delivery of capacity development to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and collaboration with UNICEF for the formulation and implementation of social policies for people with disabilities, older people, and children. During the current CPD period, engagement was established with UN Habitat for review of the housing policy, with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research for the delivery of training to Ministry of Foreign Affairs personnel on the functioning of UN inter-governmental processes, and with the UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia for a workshop on economic diversification, technology and innovation.

The evaluation could not establish the exact nature of these partnerships and their drivers, though the country office demonstrated positive leveraging of technical capacities of the UN system in its

<sup>63</sup> See: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/GEPMI/GEPMI%20Global%20Brochure.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> The country office indicated plans to relaunch the GEPMI project with activities to be resumed in 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Other UN resident agencies include UNEP regional office, and a UNIDO project office. During the evaluation mission, it was indicated that UN Women was in the process of establishing a country presence.

<sup>66</sup> Evaluation of UNDP in NCCs in the Arab States, UNDP, IEO, 2009.

implementation strategy. In each of the cases cited above, and other engagement with UN agencies, UNDP physical and operational presence provided an anchor point for the programmatic engagement and involvement of other UN system entities. Though engagement with other agencies has been mostly at activity level (with the exception of the housing policy project with UN Habitat), UNDP has provided a form of representation for the whole UN system, including as host of the resident coordinator system.

The country office management envisages this approach to continue to gain prominence in the programmatic offer of UNDP in Bahrain, in line with the “integrator role” stated in its Strategic Plan 2018-2021. While there is scope to further expand this, the delinking of the resident coordinator system from UNDP in January 2019, and the development of the SPF, open up opportunities for the 16 participating agencies to directly engage with the Government, and may be a challenge to this strategy moving forward. It is likely that UN agencies and the resident coordinator office will continue to rely on UNDP for its operational anchoring in Bahrain, at least in early stages, though their development may challenge the traditional role and utility of UNDP in Bahrain as a conduit to the rest of the UN system.

**Finding 10:** There is scope for the country office to more actively leverage the wealth of UNDP global experience in support of Bahrain’s national plans and to support the sharing of Bahrain’s experience in other countries.

A strong dimension of UNDP perceived comparative advantage lies in its ability to access international expertise and experience. As mentioned, on several occasions UNDP has facilitated the provision of expertise from UN entities without a formal presence in Bahrain. Cost-effective access to international expertise for training and service delivery unavailable in the country, has been a central

feature of UNDP engagement in Bahrain. Another element of the perceived comparative advantage of UNDP is the knowledge and exposure gained through its long-term universal presence. Across the projects reviewed for this evaluation, there has been limited evidence of UNDP leveraging this key comparative advantage in its programme delivery. Apart from engagement with BIPA, which benefited from the expertise of RBAS, and supporting the participation of Bahrain in regional initiatives such as the youth leadership programme, UNDP facilitation of experience sharing and linkages with other ongoing initiatives has been limited.

While satisfied with the input of UNDP, many respondents indicated that they expected the country office advisory assistance to involve more knowledge sharing of the experience of other countries in which UNDP is present. Building on previous UNDP evaluations in NCC countries, this dimension of its comparative advantage is considered a two-way channel, drawing on global standards of excellence and yielding valuable experience of countries for each other’s benefit.<sup>67</sup> This has materialised in some projects developed by the country office, such as the development of MENAPAR, the partnership with Al Baraka, and a project explicitly designed to enhance the position of Bahrain as a global partner.<sup>68</sup> However, there is scope for UNDP to further leverage its global presence for the exchange of experiences to develop innovative solutions to address priorities in Bahrain, and strengthen its positioning as a global knowledge broker. In this regard, while recognising their different contexts, UNDP presence in other NCC countries in the region presents a particular opportunity.<sup>69</sup>

## 2.4 Factors constraining performance

**Finding 11:** The implementation of the country programme is challenged by low availability and predictability of funding. The unfavourable fiscal and budgetary context and funding modality

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Project ID 00102573: Strategic and partnership project

<sup>69</sup> The country office indicated collaboration with UNDP Kuwait in late 2019 to share experiences on behavioural insights in the context of setting a public service innovation lab in Bahrain.

limits opportunities for engagement. An expected reduction in GLOC is likely to further reduce the ability of the country office to operate and implement its programme.

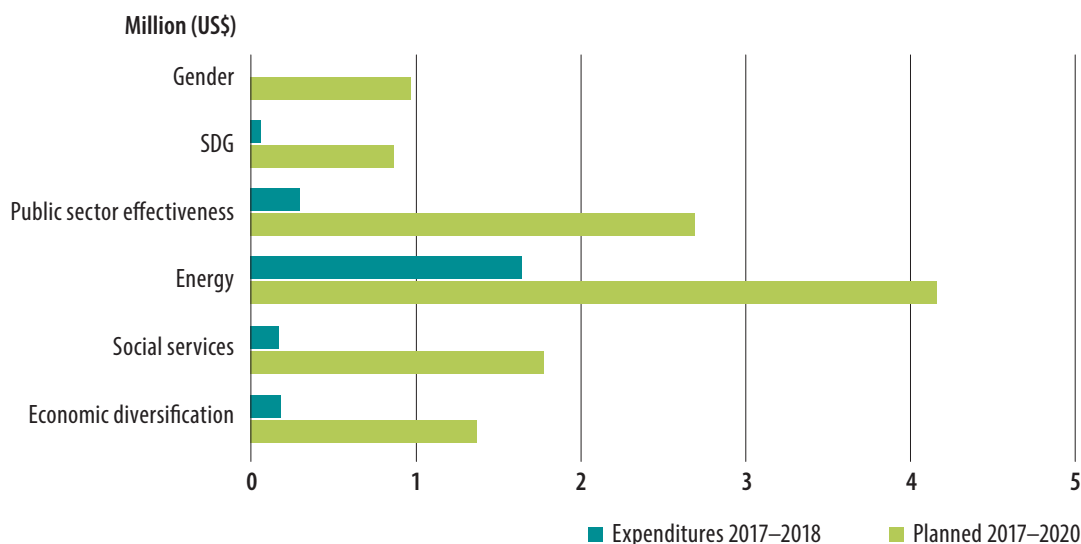
As previously mentioned, UNDP programmes in Bahrain are funded on a cost-sharing basis between the Government’s central budget, mainly covering the GLOC, and the budgets of line ministries for specific project engagement. Under this model, programme development depends on budget availability in line ministries and agencies, and on the capacity of UNDP to attract such funding. This puts UNDP in a situation where it must compete with other service providers for funding, generating a lack of predictable funding which provides an additional challenge for UNDP to support broad national strategic objectives, as intended in the CPD.

At the same time, funding is not available to invest in resource mobilisation or to initiate pilot planning or project development which require investment to match the quality of proposals from other actors. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for the country office to plan over the four-year country programme timeframe, or to attract additional or seed funding, as might be the case in other country

settings. This situation is further constrained by the difficult fiscal climate in Bahrain, which has had to contract public budget spending. This is noted in the reduced funding for CPD pipelined projects, such as the housing and SEU projects, as well as delays to launch projects in 2017 due to delays in the approval of national budgets by Parliament.

As a result, despite being demand-driven, there is a significant gap between the expected results agreed in the CPD and the nature and scope of projects developed. Given the implications of the NCC context, it could be assumed that the CPD, building on consultation and with oversight from the coordination committee, would stand almost directly as an action plan and only include clear commitments, unlike CPDs in countries which are contingent on funding from third party mechanisms and tend to be more aspirational. However, the structure of the programme portfolio in Bahrain shows a gap between the intentions of the CPD and actual programme development. This is reflected in the gap between planned resources for the CPD duration, and actual expenditure at midpoint in implementation of the country programme (2017-2018), as shown in figure 6.<sup>70</sup>

**FIGURE 6: Planned versus actual expenditures 2017-2018 by thematic area**



<sup>70</sup> Expenditure data are based on data extracted from Atlas, as of February 2019.

In January 2019, the Government of Bahrain formally notified UNDP of its intention to decrease its annual GLOC by a third, and requested a restructuring of the country office. The reasons for the decision to decrease funding are tied to fiscal constraints that the country has been facing, as well as a response to the delinking of the resident coordinator system. This means that the funding of the resident coordinator function no longer falls under the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement between UNDP and the Government of Bahrain.

As per country presence arrangements, UNDP is dependent on GLOC for its operational presence as well as its staffing, through direct project costing.<sup>71</sup> According to a Ministry of Foreign Affairs directive, up to 35 per cent of resources from GLOC can be charged to support functions for project implementation (policy advisory and quality assurance) and implementation support (such as finance, procurement, human resources and administration). Thus, this reduction in GLOC will inevitably have an impact on UNDP capacity to develop a programmatic offering and respond to demand.

**Finding 12:** Gaps in programme management and oversight of UNDP interventions may affect the capacity of the country office to demonstrate its contributions and added value.

As previously mentioned, oversight of implementation and progress of the country programme is assumed by a coordination committee composed of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Office of the First Deputy Prime Minister, the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, and UNDP. The coordination committee is also responsible for strategic decisions on the country programme, review of progress and ensuring alignment with national priorities. The evaluation team found no evidence of such meetings occurring during the period under

review. In addition, formal project board meetings, which would involve ministerial members of the coordination committee, have not systematically taken place during the period covered.<sup>72</sup>

Interviews gave no evidence that the formal project board had affected project-level performance. The relatively small scale of projects, and their engagement with specific line ministries, limited the number of stakeholders and meant that project boards were not always essential for performance. However, in the absence of consistent coordination committee meetings, ministries playing a central role in appraising and allocating funding for UNDP programmes could not gain a transparent view of progress against commitments.

Concerns were raised about the overall level of transparency in UNDP interventions from both programmatic and operational angles. In 2018, coordination committee meetings were replaced with quarterly meetings of the SPF, chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and bringing together all agencies engaged in the framework. While important, it is not clear that SPF meetings can assume the role in UNDP programmes intended for the coordination committee.

Furthermore, the evaluation team noted gaps in the monitoring and evaluation of programme results which, together with the gaps in oversight, may affect perceptions of UNDP performance. According to the CPD, budget is expected to be available for UNDP to support monitoring and evaluation of projects, using data gathered for analysis and communication purposes. The evaluation plan of the CPD is to identify lessons learned to support the replication of successful initiatives.<sup>73</sup> However, the internal audit conducted during the data collection phase of this mission noted that project budgets did not include provisions for monitoring and evaluation activities,<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> As per UNDP POPP, direct project costs are organizational costs incurred in the implementation of a development activity or service provided by UNDP country offices and headquarters units that can be directly traced and attributed to that development activity (projects and programmes) or service. Therefore, these costs are included in, and charged directly to, the project budget for the development activity and/or service.

<sup>72</sup> Audit report No 2036, OAI, UNDP

<sup>73</sup> DP/DCP/BHR/3

<sup>74</sup> Audit report No 2036, OAI, UNDP

and the country office had commissioned a limited number of evaluation exercises.

The last project-level evaluation from Bahrain posted by the UNDP Evaluation Resource Centre (ERC) was in 2014, although during the evaluation data collection mission two other evaluations were made available, despite posting on the ERC being an organisational requirement.<sup>75</sup> The CPD included a mix of seven project- and outcome-level evaluations scheduled for 2019 with an overall planned budget of \$145,000, although uncertainty over funding cast doubt as to whether the country office would be able to implement them. Progress reports fulfil their accountability purpose in relation to project-level activities, but do not reflect the performance of UNDP in the execution of projects, or the contribution of projects to desired outcomes.

This evaluation recognises limitations for the country programme to engage in monitoring and evaluation activities, given the nature of engagement in an NCC like Bahrain. Given the modest level of programmatic engagement of UNDP Bahrain, its influence on outcome-level results may be limited. However, UNDP performance in meeting demands and expectations remains an important element of its perceived added value and comparative advantage, particularly in the competitive context in which it operates in Bahrain. The ability of UNDP to demonstrate its added value, which ultimately resides in its ability to deliver and demonstrate results, is thus critical.

**Finding 13:** The implementation of the country programme is challenged by the requirement to adapt UNDP corporate procedures and programmatic tools to a high income NCC context.

In Bahrain, UNDP capacity to operate is strictly limited by the host government's ability and willingness to fund it. As such, the Government can define areas of engagement and the footprint of

UNDP country presence. While this has the value of ensuring total ownership of interventions by the Government, it also limits the way UNDP engages in the country. Current areas of UNDP engagement have remained in line with its human development mandate, but do not always reflect its full potential. Like other high-income countries, there are human development challenges in Bahrain on which UNDP, given its mandate and comparative advantage, is well placed to engage in advocacy and policy dialogue. However, in the absence of specific demand and core funding from the Government, UNDP advocacy capacity in Bahrain is limited to project implementation support.

Despite its NCC status, UNDP corporate programme tools and procedures are the same as for any other country setting, with no differentiated frameworks despite the significant difference in context. UNDP corporate programme and operations policies and procedures (POPP) do not include specific consideration of NCCs. Several independent evaluations in NCCs have shared this observation. Likewise, there are no corporate policy guidelines that frame a different approach to UNDP engagement in high-income contexts.

The country programme results framework is pitched at a level of results contributions, showing a disconnect between the input of UNDP and expected outcome-level results. A similar situation occurs at the project level, where the country office has had to frame ad-hoc and very short-term support within a project document to meet corporate requirements, although in many cases activities consisted in support services.<sup>76</sup> Corporate requirements to report on contributions to outcomes are not necessarily in line with the inherent nature of UNDP engagement in a high-income context like Bahrain, which is more oriented towards support services. The scope of UNDP to contribute to outcome level achievements as defined in the CPD is de facto limited by

<sup>75</sup> Evaluation of UNDP country programme 2012-2016; and Evaluation of the project "capacity development facility established at BIPA".

<sup>76</sup> As per UNDP POPP, is defined as "UNDP support services to national implementation have traditionally been concentrated in procurement and recruitment. (...) support services may also include carrying out activities such as organizing strategic events or conferences and producing outputs such as research products. In this context, UNDP is responsible for the quality and timeliness of services, with programmatic control and accountability with the implementing partner."

the nature of engagement, given the high-income and NCC context. Reviews of UNDP project and programme management in 2018 provided greater recognition and simplifications for the line of development services that UNDP provides.<sup>77</sup> The adapted

programme management process, and clarifications around roles and accountabilities in the delivery of services, may be more adapted to the type of engagement in high-income contexts, but it is not clear how this should be reflected in a CPD.

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<sup>77</sup> See UNDP POPP, Development Services. UNDP project and programme management defines development services as support services that contribute to development results. In this engagement, the partner is accountable for design and oversight, and UNDP is only accountable for the quality of service provision.





# CHAPTER 3

## CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP  
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**This section provides the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation.** Recommendations are formulated within the limitations presented in section one, and in a non-prescriptive manner to allow flexibility for the country office to adapt their implementation to the context. The timing of this evaluation coincided with the communication of the intention of the Government of Bahrain to significantly reduce UNDP funding, and request for restructuring of the country office by June 2019. However, the following conclusions and recommendations could not be informed by this ongoing exercise.

### 3.1 Conclusions

- **Conclusion 1. Given the high-income context in which it operates, the strategic and comparative advantage of UNDP in Bahrain has resided in its physical presence, impartiality, international recognition, and its ability to facilitate efficient support to the Government to implement its national plans. While this may have resulted in the provision of niche, short-term support, some successful projects established by UNDP suggest that there is room to build on ad-hoc engagement to develop a longer-term line of services.**

The main implication of the NCC status for the programme is that UNDP engagement is fully demand-driven and dependent on its perceived added value in supporting the implementation of specific government priorities. In addition, given its broad mandate, its past hosting of the resident coordinator system, and as the only UN agency with a formal presence in Bahrain, UNDP has acted as a gateway for the wider UN system. Given the high-income status of the country, UNDP added value has been its ability to provide advisory services and to cost-effectively source and facilitate relevant international expertise to support the implementation of innovative policies and practices. During the evaluation period, this has manifested in the development of short-term projects which have been largely activity- or output-driven such as, for example, projects for the delivery of knowledge products and technical expertise. However, there are also examples where UNDP found entry points for longer-term engagement which has built incrementally over

time. For example, the work with BIPA and EWA demonstrates niche areas of engagement for incremental support which accumulate over time to result in more substantive and longer-term lines of engagement.

- **Conclusion 2. The context for UNDP in Bahrain has changed, with the adoption of the SPF and the delinking of the resident coordinator system. However, there is scope for the country office to more fully leverage its comparative advantage to meet expectations and maintain its positioning in the context of a high income NCC such as Bahrain.**

Previous evaluations of UNDP programmes in NCC countries in the region identified the added value of UNDP in these contexts to be its impartiality, transparency, access to international expertise (including UN expertise), UN imprimatur, access to the wider UN system, and its wealth of global experience. In addition, in a competitive environment, with high capacities and competition from the private sector, another dimension of UNDP competitive advantage resides in its ability to deliver on these key dimensions in a cost-effective manner. This evaluation found that UNDP Bahrain is perceived to have leveraged some of its key comparative advantage, in particular as an access point to the wider UN system and expertise. However, with the adoption of the SPF in Bahrain and the delinking of the resident coordinator system from January 2019, this aspect of UNDP comparative advantage may not hold moving forward. Overall, there has been less evidence of UNDP explicitly leveraging its global wealth of experience and long-standing global

presence or proactively leveraging Bahrain's experience and potential contribution to apply to development objectives in other countries. The Government of Bahrain is eager for opportunities

to increase its contribution and visibility in the global agenda, notably through participation in international fora as reflected in several of the projects covered in this evaluation.

## 3.2 Recommendations and management response

### 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.

There are limitations in the operating context, which affect the value of the CPD as the main accountability tool for the UNDP Executive Board and for monitoring and evaluating performance. In this regard, the design of the next CPD should be more aligned with the nature of engagement and provide greater transparency and accountability over UNDP performance. This should include a mix of output- and process-level performance indicators, and reflect on the range of development services that UNDP can deliver. Focusing performance monitoring around the key advisory and support service functions of the country office will provide a more accurate and transparent performance framework for the country office for national stakeholders and the UNDP corporate reporting system.

### Management Response:



The current CPD was the outcome of intensive working sessions with the Government of Bahrain held in late 2015 and 2016, at a time when SDG indicators were not fully available and during the previous Strategic Plan cycle and previous Government Plan. The current CPD will be extended to allow for the completion of the implementation of some key projects, and finalise the office functional review and re-profiling. For the new CPD (2022-2025), the country office will align closely with the Government Action Plan (2019-2023), and work towards improving the performance monitoring framework around the key functions of the country office. This added emphasis will go hand in hand with the renewed objectives, functions, and capacities of the country office upon completion of its ongoing realignment.

Recommendation 1 (cont'd)

Key Actions	Time frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Extension of the current CPD (2017-2020) by one year to complete implementation of pending relevant projects in the current cycle	2020-2021	UNDP		
1.2 Preparation of the next CPD (2022-2025) in alignment with the new Government Action Plan and the updated UN Cooperation Framework, ensuring performance monitoring indicators, highlighting key country office functions	2020-2021	UNDP		
1.3 Implementation of the office re-profiling to align the structure with the Government's vision, available financial resources, and UNDP value added and mandate	Q3 2020	UNDP		Ongoing

## 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.

The nature of engagement in Bahrain results in requests for UNDP support that are often ad-hoc and narrow in the scope of development services provided. However, the experience of the country office suggests that there is room to build on the delivery of ad-hoc services to ministries and incrementally build project-level engagement oriented around capacity development, innovative policy development and service delivery, conducive to the achievement of national plans.

## Management Response:



The NCC characteristics of the country have prevented the mobilisation of resources from external donors for larger-scale projects. In collaboration with the Government, the country office has tried to move the programmatic portfolio towards fewer, broader, and more long-term projects with relevant line ministries. While this has been possible in some cases (sustainable energy, BIPA, to some extent SIU and SDGs), it has proven more difficult in other areas, particularly due to the two-year government budget cycle, as well as the ongoing austerity measures affecting government expenditures and programmes since 2017. Nevertheless, the effort to ensure coherence and reduce micro-projects and more ad-hoc requests will continue, to seek firmer commitment on broader and more long-term projects.

Key Actions	Time frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Increase use of non-project arrangements and the need for enhanced outreach to seek counterparts' engagement in longer term projects	2020	UNDP		Ongoing
2.2 Promotion of design and signature of broader projects in next CPD and programming and government budget cycle	2021-2024	UNDP		

### Recommendation 3.



UNDP Bahrain should seek balance between 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.

Bahrain is a competitive funding environment for UNDP, despite being a NCC context, due to the high capacity and fiscal restrictions. Based on the funding modality in place, UNDP may have to adopt a more forward-looking approach to its programme development and resource mobilisation. This in turn requires UNDP to develop clear and detailed communication of its value proposition to attract engagement within the SPF. This should include clarity over the type of development services and areas of technical expertise available to support implementation of national plans, and conditions under which UNDP can facilitate them. Dependent on budget availability for cost sharing by line ministries, these efforts should be aligned with the government budget process to maximise chances for financing.

### Management Response:



UNDP in Bahrain has participated actively in the Strategic Partnership Framework Committee, and meets regularly with key national government counterparts to review ongoing initiatives and promote new collaborations. As the offer from UNDP is changing after the de-link from the resident coordinator system, and with the new Government Action Plan in mind, the country office will promote a more systematic strategy of communications with government authorities and other partners in the country, to promote project development.

Key Actions	Time frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Strengthening and implementation of county office strategic communications strategy, to ensure more clarity on UNDP role, activities, while promoting the offer provided by the country office	2020	UNDP		
3.2 Continued expansion of the country office engagement in products and activities that promote and position the UNDP mandate and value added in Bahrain	2020-2021	UNDP		

#### Recommendation 4.



With the support of the Regional Bureau for 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.

The NCC context in which UNDP operates in Bahrain requires it to demonstrate the full strength of its comparative advantage to compete for funding and find entry points to advocate for its human development agenda. In the absence of resources to invest in programme development and resource mobilisation efforts, the country office needs to be actively supported by the UNDP corporate architecture to fully leverage its global network of knowledge and access to experience of other countries relevant to Bahrain's national priorities. Such efforts should also seek to identify opportunities to promote and share Bahrain's experience with other countries where UNDP operates.

#### Management Response:



The country office drew on valuable technical resources offered by the Regional Hub in the programmatic areas of sustainable energy, communications and innovation, and operationally in the area of procurement. More support will be needed in emerging areas of work, particularly as the country office transitions towards a new CPD, restructures and gears up to support the Government with its new Action Plan.

Key Actions	Time frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Generation of a strategy of support in key programmatic areas, tapping on a roster of expertise for innovative solutions, developed in consultation with the Government, to respond to national priorities and reflecting the UNDP renewed mandate	Q3 2020	UNDP		
4.2 Collaboration and promotion of South-South cooperation and innovation-driven activities, that can generate solutions from and for Bahrain vis-a-vis the region and the rest of the world	2020-2021	UNDP		

\* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database.





# Annexes



Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the IEO at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9897>

**Annex 1.** Terms of reference

**Annex 2.** Country at a glance

**Annex 3.** Country office at a glance

**Annex 4.** Project list

**Annex 5.** CPD results framework and status of indicators

**Annex 6.** Persons consulted







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