UN DP — Independent Evaluation Office
United Nations Development Programme

# INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION
# SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

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# INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION
# SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

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**INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION: SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC**

# Acknowledgements

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP would like to thank all those who contributed to this evaluation.

# Foreword

I am pleased to present the Independent Country Programme Evaluation for the Syrian Arab Republic, the second country-level assessment conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the country. This evaluation assessed the programme period 2016 to 2019.

The evaluation covers a fast-evolving period where parts of the country are transitioning out of conflict amid a national emphasis on redevelopment, while other areas are still in conflict and need humanitarian assistance. Large parts of Syria need reconstruction and redevelopment support simultaneously.

UNDP has contributed to the most significant priorities of early recovery and rehabilitation in Syria while working under challenging circumstances. UNDP supported rehabilitation of the critical infrastructure, which is essential for normalization. Contributions were made to restoration and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and services, which was significant to the reactivation of local services and enabled the initial return of some internally displaced people and refugees from the region.

Despite its development mandate, UNDP's engagement in Syria was largely confined to early recovery and rehabilitation activities predominantly within a humanitarian framework. The evaluation cautions that unless international community efforts substantively address the significant needs of the communities with sustainable solutions, there is a risk to the fragile peace in Syria.

I hope the findings, conclusions and recommendations will help in strengthening UNDP's programme response for the benefit of the Syrian people.

**Oscar A. Garcia**
**Director**
**Independent Evaluation Office**

# Contents

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **CSO** | Civil society organization |
| **ERL** | Early Recovery and Livelihoods |
| **FBO** | Faith-based organization |
| **GDP** | Gross domestic product |
| **GEN** | Gender marker |
| **HRP** | Humanitarian Response Plans |
| **ICPE** | Independent Country Programme Evaluation |
| **IDP** | Internally displaced person |
| **IEO** | Independent Evaluation Office |
| **MAPS** | Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support |
| **OCHA** | UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| **PWD** | Person with disabilities |
| **RBAS** | Regional Bureau for the Arab States |
| **SDG** | Sustainable Development Goal |
| **SWM** | Solid waste management |
| **T4A** | Training for All project |
| **TPM** | Third-party monitoring |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNDP** | United Nations Development Programme |
| **UNICEF** | United Nations Children's Fund |
| **UNFPA** | United Nations Population Fund |
| **UNSF** | Strategic Framework for Cooperation between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Nations |

# Evaluation Brief: Syrian Arab Republic

The nine years of crisis in Syria have severely impacted human development. The devastating toll of human casualties, displacement, and deteriorating living conditions have reversed the country's development gains by three decades. Over half of all Syrians have been displaced at least once; over 5.5 million Syrians have sought asylum in the neighbouring countries, and nearly 6.5 million are internally displaced. The social and economic consequences are large and growing, with most households in extreme poverty. The war has destroyed housing, infrastructure, and hundreds of hospitals and schools. The impact of the crisis has been severe on the social fabric of the country.

UNDP's programme assistance in Syria predates the conflict. The organization has adapted its programming in the country to meet basic needs of the people, providing the groundwork for community recovery. The 2016-2018 country programme, extended to 2020, seeks to enhance the resilience and socio-economic stabilization of individuals and communities by revitalizing disrupted livelihoods and restoring, rehabilitating and maintaining sustainable basic services and infrastructure in damaged areas and host communities. To this end, UNDP has opened seven field offices and partnered with over 50 community organizations.

Given the international isolation of Syria, there are restrictions on UNDP's formal development engagement and partnerships with the national institutions. This programme context had significant consequences for UNDP's role and engagement, more oriented to humanitarian support.

UNDP has contributed to the most significant priorities of early recovery and resilience in Syria while working under challenging circumstances. UNDP has emphasized integrated support for local communities that build on the UN humanitarian efforts.

UNDP supported rehabilitation of critical infrastructure essential to normalization. Contributions were made to the restoration and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and services and livelihoods, which enabled the initial return of some internally displaced persons and refugees from the region. UNDP's infrastructure and basic services rehabilitation efforts contributed to the reactivation of local services (primary education and health services, sewage and water networks, local markets). Debris clearance has been important as it is a prerequisite for infrastructure rehabilitation. Restoration of power plants, grid system repairs, and installation of affordable heating and solar lighting units contributed to efforts towards normalcy in crisis-affected areas. While solid waste management made urban areas more accessible and liveable, the short-term nature of the support and one-off initiatives did not contribute to community service resilience. Recovery of livelihood assets and employment linkages, although of a small scale, added to the ongoing efforts towards economic revitalization. A substantive engagement in economic revitalization to promote medium to longer-term solutions, institutionalizing rehabilitation of infrastructure or waste management is lacking given the humanitarian mode of support.

The embargo by some countries on Syria was a factor for not formally partnering with the national entities and, as a consequence, the limitations in the institutionalization of the outputs and progress made. Despite the evolving security and stability on the ground, a strong focus on the humanitarian response remains, with UN agencies largely responding individually to the situation. The pause on development programme support for nine years has undermined UNDP's positioning and programme contribution.

The implications of providing humanitarian support in an evolving context has received attention but was not addressed because of the restrictions on development support. In providing the recommendations the evaluation takes this into consideration.

**RECOMMENDATION 1.** UNDP should start planning on how it can transition to more sustainable development support while it continues to work within the existing programming parameters, seeking to deepen and expand its local community resilience efforts. UNDP should implement a multi-track strategy to address simultaneously areas still in crisis and those which are moving out of conflict.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** UNDP should invest in efforts to promote a UN common vision for integrated local resilience to serve as a platform for rehabilitation and institutionalized early recovery. UNDP should leverage its area offices to develop a more comprehensive local resilience programme beyond project implementation.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** UNDP should pay specific attention to youth employment. Jointly with other UN agencies, UNDP should take concrete measures to address the gender implications of the crisis in select sectors. The demographic imbalance after the crisis presents a renewed opportunity to further pursue gender equality and women's empowerment at the policy level.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** UNDP should further develop and institutionalize stronger partnerships with other UN agencies in complementary areas of employment and livelihoods, service delivery and women's empowerment.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** UNDP should ensure conflict sensitivity and gender analysis inform programme interventions. Further emphasis should be given to strengthening the programme and management efficiencies.

# CHAPTER 1

## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Objectives of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted an Independent Country Programme Evaluation (ICPE) of UNDP's programme in Syria in 2019. An ICPE is an independent evaluation carried out to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results at the country level, as well as the effectiveness of UNDP's strategy in facilitating and leveraging efforts for achieving development results. The objectives of the ICPE is to support the development of the next UNDP country programme to be implemented starting in 2021, based on evaluative evidence of past performance; and strengthen the accountability of UNDP to national stakeholders and the UNDP Executive Board.

UNDP Syria has been selected for an ICPE as its country programme will end in 2020. This ICPE covers the period from 2016 to September 2019 of the current programme cycle, including all projects active during this period. Primary audiences for the evaluation are the UNDP Syria country office (CO), the Regional Bureau for the Arab States (RBAS), the UNDP Executive Board and national stakeholders.

## 1.2 Programming context

The crisis in Syria that started in March 2011 has had a devastating loss of human lives and livelihoods impacting the economy, delivery of basic services and maintenance of infrastructure. Over half of all Syrians have been displaced at least once. The displacement and movement of Syrian refugees to bordering countries has been massive, estimated to exceed half the Syrian population. Almost 5.65 million registered Syrians have fled to nearby countries for asylum,[1] and 6.2 million are displaced within Syria.[2] While the number of war casualties cannot be confirmed, it is considered high – and close to 400,000, according to UN estimates. The social and economic consequences are large and growing, and the impact of the crisis has been severe on the social fabric of the country.

The crisis has reversed development gains in the country by three decades and has severely impacted human development. Prior to the conflict, considerable progress was made on major Millennium Development Goals targets such as poverty reduction, primary education and gender parity in secondary education, decrease in infant mortality rates and increasing access to improved sanitation,[3] there has been a reversal of some of these gains and a decline in human development progress. The UNDP Human Development Index value for Syria in 2018 is estimated at 0.549, ranking it 154th out of 189 countries, a significant decline from a value of .644 and rank of 121st among 188 countries in 2010.[4] Syria has a Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.547, ranking it 136th out of 162 countries in the 2018 index. While 37.1 percent of adult women have reached at least secondary education compared to 43.4 percent of their male counterparts, female participation in the labour market is 12.0 percent compared to 70.3 for men.[5]

The conflict has precipitated an economic collapse, with an estimated $254 billion in cumulative gross domestic product (GDP) loss. Syria's GDP, which was $60.2 billion in 2010, dropped by the end of 2015 to $27.2 billion.[6] The severe decline in oil receipts due to an embargo by some countries and disruptions of trade, particularly with the European Union, has placed additional pressure on Syria's external

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1    UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response Portal, last updated 9 January 2020: 5,556,732 registered Syrian persons of concern: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria.

2    OCHA, 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) Syrian Arab Republic, August 2019, 6. Estimate of UN IDP Task Force, as of August 2018.

3    Third Millennium Development Goal Progress Report: Syria, 2010. The report assesses that Syria had achieved or was highly expected to achieve the MDGs for universal primary education, reduction in child mortality, maternal health, HIV, AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and environmental sustainability, with insufficient progress to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and achieve parity in girls' education: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/report/MDGR-2010-En.pdf.

4    UNDP, Human Development Data (1990-2018): http://hdr.undp.org/en/data, accessed on 3 February 2020.

5    UNDP, Briefing note for countries on the 2019 Human Development Report: Syrian Arab Republic, 2019: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/SYR.pdf.

6    ESCWA/UN, 'Syria at War - Five Years On', 2016: https://www.unescwa.org/publications/syria-war-five-years.

balances and international reserves. According to the World Bank, the cumulative GDP loss from disruptions in economic organization exceeds that of physical destruction by a factor of 20. Although the country is under severe foreign-exchange constraints, the economy resumed expansion in 2017 with the growth in reconstruction activities.[7]

Over 50 percent of Syrians are unemployed (75 percent of youth) and 69 percent of households are in extreme poverty.[8] An estimated 7 million people are food insecure and a further 2 million people are at risk of food shortage.[9] Food consumption has diminished among 39 percent of Syrians, putting them at risk of malnutrition; and there is growing adoption of risky and unsustainable mechanisms to access food.[10] Severe hardship has compelled many to resort to negative coping strategies such as 'armed struggle' or 'illegal' economic activities, child labour, and early marriage.[11]

The impact of war on the infrastructure has been huge. Roads, sanitation, and electricity systems, and hundreds of hospitals and schools were destroyed. Destruction of housing and infrastructure is estimated at around $90 billion; the total area under cultivation has fallen by 40 percent. About 2.8 million Syrian children have never attended or missed school during the conflict.[12] To date, over 2.1 million children in Syria do not attend school regularly.[13]

## 1.3   UNDP programme

UNDP's programme assistance in Syria predates the conflict. The UN Development Assistance Framework operated from 2007 to 2011 and was extended annually until 2015. In 2015, in discussion with the Government of Syria, the UN developed a two-year Strategic Framework for Cooperation (2016-2017,[14] later updated for 2016-2018). This Strategic Framework comprised three key programming pillars focusing on support to i) capacity development and institutions, ii) essential services and infrastructure, and iii) livelihoods, economic recovery, and social protection. The framework informed the Annual Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

UNDP developed a country programme for 2016-2017 in alignment with the Humanitarian Response Plan.[15] UNDP participates in all three pillars. The overall strategic goal is to enhance the resilience and socio-economic stabilization of individuals and communities by: (a) restoring the disrupted livelihoods of the affected communities, and (b) restoring, rehabilitating and maintaining sustainable basic services and infrastructure in damaged areas and host communities. The programme intended to take an area-based approach and emphasized including women as beneficiaries and addressing gender-related concerns. Both programme outcomes are aligned with UNDP Strategic Plan 2014-2017 (outcome 6, on recovery and rapid return to sustainable development pathways, are achieved in post-conflict and post-disaster situations); and Strategic Plan 2018-2021 (outcome 3 on strengthening resilience to shocks and crisis). UNDP's programme outcome areas and partnerships outlined in the country programme and annual plans are as follows.[16] Resilience as used in the country programme is enhancing the ability of individuals,

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7   UNCTAD, 'World Economic Situation and Prospects', 2019: https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wesp2019_en.pdf.

8   UN OCHA, '2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) Monitoring Report, January-June 2018'. Figures as of 31 May 2018.

9   UN OCHA, 2019 HRP, August 2019, p.52.

10  2017 Humanitarian Response Plan.

11  UN OCHA, '2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview', November 2017.

12  ESCWA/UN, 'Syria at War - Five Years On', 2016: https://www.unescwa.org/publications/syria-war-five-years.

13  Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, "They have erased the dreams of my children": children's rights in the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/43/CRP.6, 13 January 2020, p.17: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=25465&LangID=E.

14  United Nations in Syria, 'Strategic Framework for Cooperation between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Nations 2016-2017': https://www.undp.org/content/dam/syria/docs/Framework/UN%20Strategic%20Framework%20for%20Syria%202016-17.pdf.

15  'Country Programme Document (CPD) for the Syrian Arab Republic (2016-2017)', DP/DCP/SYR/3: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/815250/?ln=en; Humanitarian Response Plan, 2017: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria/document/2017-syrian-arab-republic-humanitarian-response-plan.

16  Ibid.

households, and communities, to adapt, respond and recover positively, while maintaining an acceptable level of functioning.

> **Outcome 1.** Households and communities benefit from sustainable livelihood opportunities, including economic recovery and social inclusion

This programme area is aligned with the third pillar of the UN Strategic Framework for Cooperation aimed at "improving the socio-economic resilience of the Syrian population" for the reactivation of the production process and provision of sustainable livelihood resources for the Syrian population.

Initiatives aimed to promote the recovery of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, local markets, and value chains, and create new businesses opportunities. Programmes tried to emphasize businesses and value chains, such as clothing and dairy and agricultural livelihoods. Market-relevant vocations (such as welding and carpentry), vocational training for enterprise development, apprenticeship and on-the-job training complementing existing and emerging livelihood opportunities were supported. The UNDP country programme emphasized the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWD), female-headed households, and youth.

> **Outcome 2.** Basic and social services and infrastructure restored, improved and sustained to enhance community resilience

This programme area is aligned with the second pillar in the UN Strategic Framework for Cooperation, "restoring and expanding more responsive essential services and infrastructure" and contributes to national priorities related to the responses and provision of basic needs of Syrian communities and people. UNDP aimed to support the stabilization of local communities and promote the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) by restoring and repairing basic social infrastructure and services in severely affected crisis areas with limited access. This includes activities such as restoring electricity supply (in addition to exploring renewable and alternative energy sources); repairing schools; rehabilitating health facilities; citizen service centres rehabilitation and legal aid assistance; supporting debris management; and rehabilitating roads, sanitation networks, commercial areas and businesses, in cooperation with local authorities, municipalities, technical directorates, and local communities. Needs of female-headed households, PWD, and youth groups were to receive adequate emphasis in programme design and implementation.

UNDP is the lead agency for the Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ERL) sector of the HRP and chairs the Interagency Task Force on Syria and the Post-Agreement Planning Exercise.[17]

UNDP's programme portfolio has expanded since 2014, mainly because of the focus on early recovery and rehabilitation support, and not development-related support. Delivery has grown from $10.3 million in 2014 to $65 million in 2018. Figure 1 illustrates the delivery trends since 2015 and projections up to 2020. Indicative resources for the two outcomes for 2014-2019 are $195.7 million (See Table 1).

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17    UNDP, 'Supporting Syrians and the Region: Results and Programme Update, April 2018': http://www.undp.org/content/dam/brussels/docs/UNDP%20and%20the%20response%20to%20the%20Syria%20Crisis-April%202018.pdf

**TABLE 1.** Country programme outcomes and indicative resources (2014-2019)

| Country programme outcome | Indicative resources (Million US$) | Expenditure to date (Million US$) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Outcome 1:** Households and communities benefit from sustainable livelihood opportunities, including economic recovery and social inclusion | 64.3 | 49.1 |
| **Outcome 2:** Improving housing services, including drinking water and sanitation, and increasing the number of beneficiaries and improving quality (number of the people provided with services, share per capita and quality indicators). | 117.2 | 85.8 |
| **Other** | 14.1 | 7.1 |
| **Total** | 195.6 | 142 |

Source: UNDP Atlas financial records (2014-2019), 12 December 2018.

**FIGURE 1.** Financial portfolio 2015-2020 (delivery and projections), Million (US$)
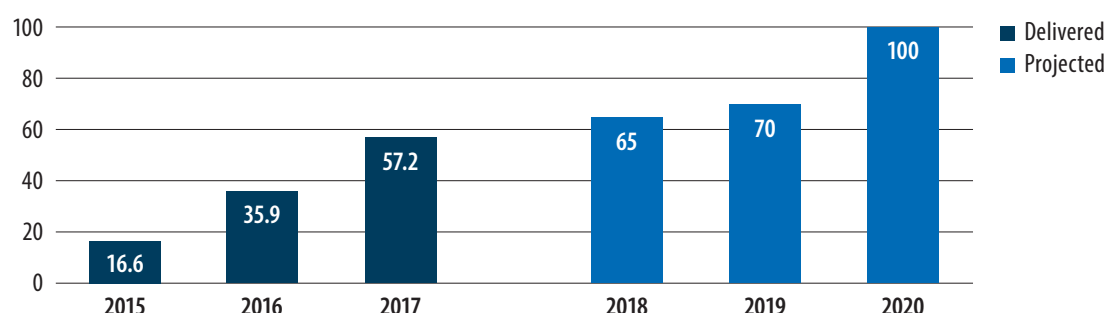


Source: UNDP Syria

To implement programmes more effectively, UNDP has established seven field offices which are expected to expand in operations and become field hubs. UNDP Syria reached over 4.6 million beneficiaries (4.1 million indirectly and 0.5 million directly) in nine governorates: Aleppo, Al-Hasakeh, Damascus, Deir Ezzor, Hama, Homs, Latakia, Rural Damascus, and Tartous, through field presence, outsourced personnel, private service providers, or partner NGOs.[18] The country office has a Field Management Unit which coordinates the work of the nine field offices. There are ongoing measures to restructure the country office to align them with field offices, strengthen internal control framework and oversight capacities as well as enhance arrangements for operations, partnerships and communications.

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[18]    The 2017 UNDP Syria annual report states that UNDP partners with more than 51 non-governmental local actors including NGOs, CBOs and FBOs.

## 1.4  Methodology

The evaluation assessed three and a half years of the ongoing country programme 2016-2020, UNDP programmes and 'non-project' activities such as advocacy and convening role of UNDP that have relevance for informing public policies or convening various development actors to enhance development contribution. Given the early recovery and rehabilitation programme focus at the governorate and municipal level, the evaluation carried out field visits to Aleppo, Homs, and Rural Damascus.

The evaluation methodology is structured around the following main questions: (i) what did the UNDP country programme intend to achieve during the period under review? (ii) to what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives? and (iii) what factors contributed to or hindered UNDP's performance and eventually, to the sustainability of results? The theory of change and the methodology used to evaluate UNDP's contribution is presented in Annex 1 (available online). The evaluation was guided by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards and the ethical Code of Conduct[19] and was carried out within the overall provisions contained in the UNDP Evaluation Policy.[20]

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[19]  United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms & Standards and the ethical Code of Conduct: http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/100
[20]  UNDP Evaluation Policy: http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.shtml

# CHAPTER 2

## FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of UNDP's role and contribution to humanitarian, early recovery, and rehabilitation efforts in Syria. The programming context in Syria is unprecedented in its complexities.

According to United Nations estimates, close to 400,000 lives have been lost in the nine-year conflict and over half the country's population has been displaced. The challenge this has posed is significant for the national and international response. The scale of the reconstruction, economic revitalization, restoration of the services, and peacebuilding efforts that are needed are enormous in several parts of Syria. Also, simultaneous efforts are needed towards accelerating sustainable development in areas not severely affected by conflict while strengthening the interface of humanitarian and development interventions in areas that are recovering from the crisis.

Despite such immense needs, the current international support to Syria is predominantly humanitarian response and within this parameter focuses on rehabilitation of necessary infrastructure. The implications of such restrictions are huge for a rapid return to peace, stability and development, and minimizing negative coping mechanisms of the citizens. There are also considerable constraints placed on the scope of support UNDP can provide in Syria, limiting UNDP's role to recovery and rehabilitation activities in a humanitarian mode. The analysis of UNDP's role and contribution in Syria presented below, considers these challenges.

The analysis of the two outcomes is presented below in five sections. Section 2.1 provides an analysis of UNDP's positioning and factors that affected its role and contribution. This is followed by Section 2.2 on support to employment generation and livelihoods. Section 2.3. presents the findings on infrastructure and rehabilitation services, which covers debris clearance, local infrastructure, electricity and renewable energy, and solid waste management. Section 2.4. analyses cross-cutting themes, viz., social cohesion and community peace, local resilience, gender mainstreaming, and youth development and empowerment. Lastly, Section 2.5 focuses on programme management.

## 2.1 UNDP programme positioning

This section analyses UNDP programme positioning and key factors in UNDP response in Syria. A key factor that emerged strongly during the evaluation is the constraints on UNDP in working on development issues outside of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). In addition, other factors in UNDP positioning, namely the programme approach and partnerships are analysed.

UNDP's overarching framework of engagement in Syria is three-fold. It includes the UNDP country programme, the Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) and the United Nations Strategic Framework for Cooperation (UNSF). The current Syria country programme was formulated in 2015, almost four years into the crisis when there was a growing concern with declining human development and growth trends and increasing unemployment. The situation called for a more development-oriented approach to build resilience and socio-economic revitalization of individuals and communities by re-establishing the disrupted livelihoods of the affected communities; and restoring, rehabilitating and maintaining basic services and infrastructure in affected areas.[21] The 2018 HRP underscored the need to increase the resilience of affected communities, host communities, through measures to enhance livelihood opportunities, and improve sustained and equitable access to basic social services, rather than mere rehabilitation support.

Since 2016, the UNDP programme is within the framework of UNSF. The UNSF rightly emphasizes resilience-building and aimed to: (i) strengthen institutional capacities to gather data and to develop, implement and monitor evidence-based policies, strategies, plans and resilience programmes; (ii) concentrate investments on programmes that deliver basic essential services to the population at

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[21]    UNDP CPD 2016-2018.

the national and local levels; and (iii) foster a more resilient society through sustainable livelihood opportunities, economic recovery and social inclusion, access to social care services, and addressing specific environmental challenges.[22] While this framework recognizes the need for humanitarian work, it also underscores the importance of simultaneously pursuing resilience-based programming and called for a collaborative approach between the UN and Syria.

Within the UNSF agenda, UNDP has outlined a resilience-based development approach as a new programming and organizational framework for protracted contexts, allowing to better conceptualize the humanitarian-development nexus. This approach took a medium-to-longer-term perspective focusing on strengthening the capacity of communities to cope with the crisis through immediate emergency interventions and simultaneously bolstering livelihoods and productive assets, housing, infrastructure and basic services. Central to this framework were measures to sustain recovery and rehabilitation outcomes and linking them with efforts that would promote and protect development gains.[23] Interlinked and multifocal programme strategies were envisaged to be pursued simultaneously for 'coping' (urgent needs to help stabilize livelihoods and early economic recovery and strengthen the ability to manage crisis), 'recovering' (early recovery efforts to enable medium- to long-term local economic recovery processes, with programmes to boost sustainable employment, income generation, and reintegration) and 'transforming' (enable long-term employment creation and inclusive economic growth, aimed to strengthen and transform institutional capacities to accelerate development). This three-pronged strategy is well conceptualized taking into consideration the humanitarian and development needs in Syria. But the UNSF was not fully implemented and the HRP did not have similar scope for UNDP to pursue this.

**Finding 1. Multiple constraints to programming impacted UNDP's positioning and a response that is commensurate with its comparative advantage. UNDP's role in Syria was largely confined to humanitarian-related support and the organization could only engage in early recovery and resilience activities.**

The unprecedented humanitarian, reconstruction and development needs in Syria needed an equally unparalleled response. The nature, scale and complexity of the crisis have led to a reversal in development gains by three decades with vast implications for the social fabric of the country. There are, however, different interpretations of the response the situation warrants, with international assistance entangled in the political considerations of aid and programming in Syria. Given this context, UNDP's role and contribution have been hugely constrained. Besides, UNDP's programme implementation was subject to the very volatile situation on the ground with dynamic changes and widespread programme needs in different parts of the country, ranging from development, early recovery, reconstruction, to humanitarian requirements.

Although it has been challenging, UNDP has managed to achieve a programmatic response that balances donor priorities and host government constraints, while adhering to its mandate, and responding to the needs of the Syrian population affected by conflict. UNDP had to navigate this complex landscape and conflicting priorities for over nine years, resulting in a programme largely focused on humanitarian-related support. Donor funding has been mostly tied to short-term humanitarian responses, and very limited early recovery and resilience programming.

UNDP played an important role in supporting early recovery and rehabilitation efforts in Syria despite constraints in what programme areas the organization can support and the modality it can use.

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22    UNSF, ibid.

23    UNDP, 'Resilience-based Development Response to the Syria crisis', 2013: https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/SyriaResponse/
      Syria_Resilience_Brochure_final_Eng_v3_Jan_14.pdf.

UNDP programmes adapted to the diversity and changing subnational contexts, evolving conflict and its ramifications and recovery needs. UNDP's support to rubble clearance, infrastructure rehabilitation, and restoration of services and livelihoods responded to critical recovery needs that form the basis for socio-economic stabilization of individuals and communities. Economic revitalization and social cohesion efforts were prioritized, but such efforts lacked conflict sensitivity and needs analysis that would enable customized response. In the past three years, several studies and market assessments have been conducted, which are yet to be applied during programme design and implementation.

UNDP progressively expanded its programme with improvements in security and stability on the ground. The programme portfolio increased to $65 million in 2018 from $16 million in 2015. Areas such as economic revitalization and local development had more challenges in mobilizing resources. A factor that impacted UNDP's resource mobilization was the choice of geographical locations for programme implementation.

Lack of institutional anchoring of programme initiatives reduced their contributions to municipal and governorate-level processes. Development-oriented programming models such as early recovery and resilience approaches could not be systematically pursued given the restrictions to supporting development programming, limiting the scope and depth of UNDP interventions. UNDP is well-positioned to bring a resilience dimension to humanitarian and early recovery efforts. However, it could not play this role in Syria due to funding constraints and its lack of proactive engagement in early recovery support, which demanded an expansion of the funding partnerships and greater innovativeness in resource mobilization. Besides ongoing conflict in different parts of the country over the years, UNDP programmes have been subject to restricted access to certain areas, slow processing of permits, which delayed programme implementation. Funding tied to specific geographic areas and activities also significantly limited UNDP's capacity to implement programme strategies.

**Finding 2.** **A resilience-based approach with complementary strategies to enable a medium-term development perspective underpins UNDP programme strategies in Syria. The country programme strategy, however, is yet to translate into practice. The disconnect between the narrative of the importance that the UN and donors place on humanitarian-development linkages and its actual practice in Syria constrained UNDP's capacity to exercise its resilience programming.**

During the last two years, many parts of Syria have moved out of conflict, partly or fully (some parts even six years back). There is increasing pressure on UNDP from the Syrian authorities to pursue a development programming given the ground realities and high government expectations. Opportunities for institutional and policy strengthening are being missed. This situation, therefore, warrants a change towards a humanitarian-development nexus and development support, which is difficult for UNDP within current funding conditionalities and intense political pressures. However, without such a transition to address reconstruction and development needs, there is a risk to the fragile peace. A prolonged humanitarian response without a development approach prevents re/development and can reverse peace gains. The promotion of unsustainable solutions could potentially increase the risk of discontent and instability and have negative dividends for peace.

In general, UNDP has been unambiguous about acknowledging the importance of simultaneously pursuing humanitarian and development efforts in Syria for a speedy recovery.[24] A challenge, however, has been that this position of supporting development efforts was not implemented. While Security Council Resolutions, such as SCR 2165, provided avenues for humanitarian support, Syria needed a multipronged approach to address humanitarian

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24    Statement by Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator, Ministerial Conference on Syria in Brussels: https://www.undp.org/content/brussels/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/video-statement-by-achim-steiner--undp-administrator-ministerial.html.

and development needs simultaneously. It also needs to be pointed out that the Security Council Resolutions or the principles and parameters did not prevent resilience support. Other UN agencies such as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) are collaborating with the Government to provide policy and programming support. There remain limitations in UNDP efforts in clarifying what its resilience support will entail.

The international sanctions restricted UNDP's programme choices. There is a gap between a well-conceptualized programme and its implementation. Most of the interventions focus mainly on rubble clearance, provision of essential basic services, early economic revitalization, and activities aimed to rehabilitate or replace infrastructure. UNDP is yet to enable community resilience in a comprehensive manner. Confinement to basic early recovery efforts weakened UNDP's positioning in enabling more durable solutions for sustainable economic recovery.

**Finding 3. Building on its decades of development cooperation in Syria and partnerships with national and local government entities, UNDP could facilitate a speedy early recovery. Since the onset of the conflict, partnerships at the national level are not formalized due to restrictions on development cooperation.**

UNDP has a long history of working in Syria in support of the Government as a neutral, objective and credible partner in policy development, technical facilitation and providing development support services. Donor restrictions on development cooperation notwithstanding, UNDP did not exercise its mandate, which significantly constrained UNDP's programme partnerships. This implied that, following UNDP corporate guidance, the UNDP country office could not pursue formal programme partnerships with the Government through the establishment of memorandums of understanding (MoU). Although UNDP has coordinated closely with several technical national entities such as the

Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) and the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment, the restrictions proved detrimental to development programming partnerships with national entities. Yet, other UN agencies such as UNICEF have been able to do so and have ongoing partnerships with their respective line ministries in the Government, allowing them to provide direct capacity development and policy support. Government expectations for UNDP to support development policies are high and if not managed carefully could undermine the position of UNDP in the country.

UNDP's inter-UN agency cooperation has been constructive, according to other resident UN agencies in Syria. Collaborations materialized in various forms according to the local context. For example, in Latakia, coordination was pursued through monthly meetings between UNDP, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and World Food Programme (WFP) and local authorities to discuss issues such as vocational training and social cohesion, safe houses and gender-based violence. An MoU with the WFP facilitated joint initiatives, including vocational and skills training. Collaboration also took place in rehabilitation work of primary schools with UNICEF, and gender equality with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). In Aleppo, a joint preparedness plan guided all UN agency interventions with the governorate and the city council. This notwithstanding, UN interventions on the ground are still fragmented and more is needed to improve coordination and build synergies between UN support programmes. Despite the evolving security and stability on the ground, a strong focus on the humanitarian response remains, with UN agencies largely responding individually to the situation. The increased attention and urgency on bridging the humanitarian-development divide has not been translated into a coordinated positioning of the UN, with limited success reversing the narrative. The principles and parameters for UN engagement in Syria, applied by all UN agencies working in Syria, present restrictions on long-term development work

and reconstruction, noting that "the UN's support for post-war reconstruction will be conditional on progress in political talks" and cautioning "against 'development' programmes being included in its Humanitarian Response Plan".[25]

UNDP is yet to enhance synergies and complementarities with other UN agencies, drawing on UNDP's approaches in area-based development, governance and social cohesion. While joint initiatives with UN agencies exist, there is scope for greater collaboration in furthering nexus approaches, as UN joint efforts can be more persuasive and substantive. Other UN agencies recognize the need for UNDP leadership in areas such as local development and social cohesion, but also highlight the need for more transparent cooperation, which could transcend into mutual collaborations in the field.

Partnerships with the private sector are still evolving, partly also due to challenging enabling environment and limitations of UNDP development engagement. The war and international sanctions on Syria have significantly constrained private sector engagement. Partnerships with the chamber of commerce in Aleppo can provide avenues for private sector engagement and for expanding such efforts in areas such as infrastructure development and energy. There have been efforts to engage the private sector from inside and outside Syria. Three meetings have been organized to further build upon these networks.

Collaborations with NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) have been subject to government approval processes, which delayed the initiation and implementation of some projects. Regulations on NGO permissions for funding, which took effect at the beginning of 2018, seriously hindered the extent to which non-faith-based organizations could implement projects. This limited enabling environment meant that UNDP had to work more with faith-based organizations (FBOs) rather than a broader range of

CSOs. The FBOs as implementing partners have low capacities as they mostly rely on volunteers and have high staff turnover. As further analysed in Finding 14, better balancing partnerships with different types of CSOs are critical to prevent monopolization trends and enhance social cohesion interventions.

UNDP, as the lead agency for the Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ERL) sector of the HRP, conducted several consultative and capacity-building events for the ERL sector partners. ERL working groups have been set up in five governorates as well as in Gaziantep and Amman.[26] However, such efforts are not sufficient for an early recovery and livelihood leadership, coordination, and partnerships and to mobilize donor funding to address needs at scale.

There have been steady partnerships with bilateral donors which were mutually beneficial. UNDP's speedy implementation of infrastructure and livelihood projects are largely well considered. Donors are yet to fully capitalize on the UNDP potential in enabling resilience-based recovery and reconstruction. UNDP, for its part, is yet to diversify its funding partnerships to non-traditional donors to support development efforts.

**Finding 4. UNDP has supported Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation through micro-level pilots on SDG advocacy among youth and methodological support to the SDG national report. There is scope for UNDP to build on its role as an integrator to work on the localization of the SDGs as an entry point for local development, promotion of peace and social cohesion.**

The SDG agenda and its commitment to leave no one behind provide a framework for advocacy for the development agenda and results. The Syrian Government is currently interested in more active engagement on the SDGs. In 2019, it published the first national report on the SDGs, which presents

25    Emma Beals, 'Exclusive: UN shelved 2017 reforms to Syria aid response', *The New Humanitarian*, 26 February 2018: https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2018/02/26/exclusive-un-shelved-2017-reforms-syria-aid-response.

26    UNDP, 'Leaving No One Behind: UNDP Syria Annual Report 2018' p. 37: https://www.sy.undp.org/content/syria/en/home/library/LEAVING_NO_ONE_BEHIND_2018.html.

government data on progress between 2000 and 2015. UNDP supported developing the methodology for the assessment, while the Government took the lead and ownership of the process, content and data generated. This process, which included several workshops at the national and subnational level, has provided the foundations to further engage and use the SDG framework in the future. Despite quality issues, the national SDG report is an important step forward for further consolidating efforts to strengthen development data and reporting on SDG progress. Given the openness of the Government to work on the SDGs, there is scope for UNDP to develop an overarching framework for engagement. Such a framework could include the alignment of the new national development plan, currently being prepared by the Government, within the framework of the SDGs; the risk-informed and fragility-sensitive application of the UN Development Group Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) strategy; and support to SDG monitoring as part of the Voluntary National Review.

At this stage, SDG-related initiatives are still ad hoc and UNDP is yet to build on its role as an 'integrator' or 'accelerator' to link the SDG localization with local resilience, social cohesion and peace. Initiatives such as the workshop on SDG financing are important to engage the private sector in SDG discussions. But ensuring financing requires more concerted engagement and workable plans to enthuse private sector actors. There was some modest private sector financing to UNDP's local-level initiatives on SDG advocacy with university students and youth leaders. UNDP in Syria is well-positioned to take the lead in integrating the SDGs at the local level and use them as an entry point to create multi-stakeholder dialogues for articulating joint solutions to local problems. Innovative models tried by UNDP in other countries, such as SDG caravans in Venezuela, are yet to be explored.

## 2.2 Employment generation and livelihoods

The livelihoods outcome entailed a programme expenditure of US$49 million between 2016 and mid-2019 (Figure 2). Resources received for this outcome totalled $76 million as of mid-2019, reaching an 88 percent execution rate for the 2016-2018 period. Compared to the other outcome on infrastructure and basic services, this was a smaller area of support. As of September 2019, the portfolio comprised 13 projects.

The crisis has extensively disrupted the livelihoods and local economy, leading to increased poverty and vulnerabilities, unemployment and competition for job opportunities. As a response, UNDP programmes aimed to generate employment opportunities, revitalize livelihoods, and provide skills training for income generation for vulnerable populations. Activities under the employment and livelihoods outcome were designed to be implemented in four areas: i) rural and agricultural livelihoods; ii) active labour market; iii) inclusive private sector recovery; and iv) disability inclusion.

**Finding 5. UNDP employment and livelihoods programmes represented a range of micro-level activities oriented towards emergency relief and recovery. While the stated objectives of individual projects were largely achieved, the portfolio lacks a comprehensive strategy to go beyond immediate employment needs to support livelihood efforts sustainably. Overall employment and livelihood efforts lacked consolidation and had limitations in technical depth and context specificity.**

UNDP's support to economic revitalization and livelihoods addressed the needs of the household and local economic recovery. UNDP distributed livestock (sheep, poultry and bees), supported the building of dairy production units, and provided farming inputs such as seeds. Also, support to the cultivation of herbs, composting organic waste and revival of damaged orchards were important

for the farming households. There were examples of the positive impact of livestock and agriculture assets support in Latakia and Al-Hasakeh. Similar to other areas such as infrastructure and services support, the distribution of assets remained insufficient, given the enormous needs at the rural household level.[27] Even when positive benefits happened, they were too small to lead to any bigger change at the household level. In the area of rural agricultural development, this evaluation as well as the outcome evaluation point to the absence of local value chain development for the distribution of assets and revival of productive assets.

The evaluation recognizes that sustainable livelihood outcomes cannot be enabled through UNDP interventions alone. However, provision of livestock or seeds was made in an isolated way, without adequate consideration of other related elements such as irrigation, cooperatives, value chains, market linkages, financial inclusion and access to finance, therefore achieving only limited outcomes. Most households received multiple forms of similar support. In cases where there were synergies of such support with other agencies, although not by design, the outcomes at the household level were better. Given their limited scope, most initiatives are not oriented towards sustainable medium-term livelihood

opportunities. Closer cooperation and systematic partnerships with other actors, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) with specialized agricultural expertise, would be key to engagement in the area of agricultural livelihoods and value chains.

Among other interventions, UNDP piloted a rural development centre, but there is limited evidence of its use given high transaction costs. UNDP did not conduct full viability and needs assessment before starting the pilot. The role of the rural development centre is yet to be fully conceptualized and the present form lacked clarity of purpose and how it would link with other government institutions at the national and subnational levels.

UNDP redefined its livelihood programme strategy in 2018, in line with the UNSF three-track approach which sought to address sustainable economic recovery through a systems-approach. Most of the initiatives could be characterized as routine coping responses or to some extent recovery responses. The strategy has not yet translated into tangible transformative results on the ground for medium-term development. UNDP's most recent engagement with national institutions to develop a national strategy for small and medium enterprises, which represent most of the country's private sector, is a much-needed step.

**FIGURE 2.** Sustainable livelihoods outcome, Million (US$)
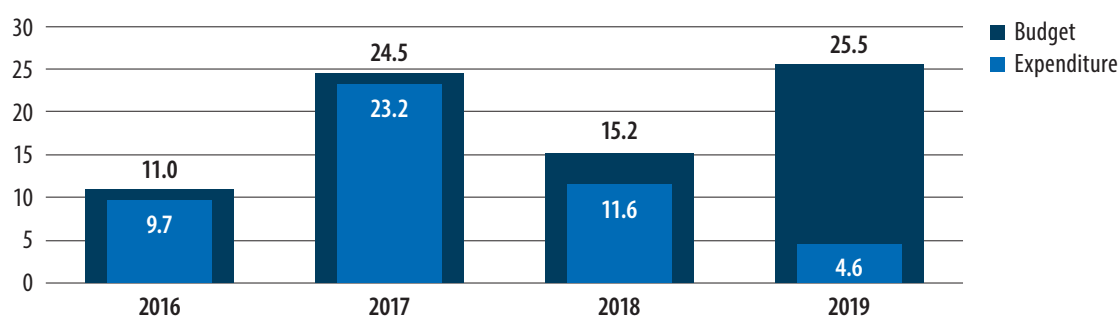


Source: UNDP Atlas financial records (2014-2019).

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[27]    TAGCO-IFAS, 'Impact Evaluation of Selected Interventions of Livelihood and Economic Recovery Portfolio', 2019: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9482.

In the area of active labour market, activities focused on vocational training, apprenticeship and on-the-job training for employment generation. Although such initiatives generated interest and provided livelihood skills, their market relevance had limitations. Market absorption capacity also remained low. Programmes were not of sufficient duration to enable suitable employment and sufficient income. The livelihoods outcome evaluation shows that, while participants were able to put their skills to use, income generation was not always promising, forcing them to take up other employment than putting in efforts into enterprise development. Given the short-term nature of interventions, UNDP did not provide assistance across the employment cycle (training, job placement, business development and marketing). Based on the market assessment, UNDP shifted women's empowerment outside vocational and skills training interventions to self-employment and cooperatives, while vocational and skills training concentrates on market needs such as construction. While it is not easy to break gender barriers to employment and livelihoods in a short period, greater attention nevertheless could have been paid to making vocational training less gendered, at least in the areas of computers and software skills which women are more likely to pursue.

Challenges remain in the coordination of vocational training initiatives on the ground by the Government. Parallel systems within the Government constrain a more systematic approach to vocational training. Inter-ministerial committee for tertiary education is yet to be launched. Multiple vocational trainings by various agencies are often supply driven. A larger challenge is the lack of a national accreditation system, or standardization of vocational training at the national level, a constraint in the institutionalization of training processes and curriculum by UNDP and other agencies. Given these challenges, vocational training was usually conducted through NGOs. UNDP has facilitated minimum standards on the number of hours or type of curriculum to assure the private sector to recognize the training as an informal certificate. Strengthening of national employment

service centres through the reactivation of their curricula and stronger linkage with the private sector is fundamental to the market demand-driven vocational training system, providing skills that would increase the income generation potential. While there have been efforts to support government technical and vocational education and training in the past two years, they lack donor support.

There were initiatives on sustainable employment creation which targeted the youth through internship schemes, practical learning-by-doing and entrepreneurship promotion in Homs, Aleppo, and other areas. Youth empowerment service centres have been piloted in eight governorates to provide employment support on coaching, counselling and guidance, in collaboration with MoSAL. UNDP provided training to young students who want to be entrepreneurs, to support them in the creation of innovative start-up business. These initiatives have the potential to promote entrepreneurship and enable income generation but subject to the enabling environment such as financial instruments and private sector linkages. In the absence of an overarching job creation strategy for youth, such initiatives lacked the momentum needed to provide programme models that would facilitate practical solutions to the huge employment needs in the country. See Section 2.6 for further analysis of youth-related programming.

UNDP supported several initiatives to rehabilitate damaged business infrastructure and kick-start businesses with the replacement of assets to generate income. Different approaches are used across governorates: the most common modality is direct procurement of equipment, despite the operational burden it represents for UNDP or providing conditional cash transfers as used in Deir Ezzor. Beneficiaries preferred to receive capital grants or loans to launch their enterprise and procure equipment. Although businesses already possessing know-how are prioritized, market assessments did not always inform such initiatives, such as with the rehabilitation of the market in Homs. Finance and market linkages remained a challenge for the

sustainability of micro-enterprises. Lack of microfinance infrastructure and services and minimal access to other financial instruments pose significant challenges to business revival and development. Support to private sector engagement and development is still evolving. Engagement with private sector actors working in the textile industry in Aleppo, for example, is yet to be concretely pursued.

Cash for work provided temporary income for beneficiaries, breaking the cycle of unemployment. These initiatives contributed to quick and temporary income generation, essential for sustaining the households. While such initiatives are key in the initial stages of the recovery, the protracted nature of the situation required more durable employment generation solutions, particularly for the youth. This is further discussed in Section 2.4. on infrastructure.

**Finding 6. Support for medical rehabilitation services improved capacities of service providers to deliver prosthetics to PWD. In addition to enhancing the dignity, the prosthetics increased inclusion and participation of PWD and their access to other socio-economic opportunities, not necessarily by UNDP.**

An outcome of the conflict in Syria is the increase in the number of people with disabilities due to injuries. Although there is no official data, estimates point to at least 3 million people living with disabilities, out of which 1.3 million need prosthetics.[28] An assessment conducted in western Aleppo, Idleb and Raqqa governorates showed an increase in the number of PWD by 30 percent.[29] UNDP response to this huge need is highly relevant, reinforcing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the crisis context.

Support for prosthetics services for PWD improved their physical well-being, dignity, and livelihood opportunities. For example, in Damascus, physical rehabilitation activities have increased their dignity and quality of life. It has contributed to decreasing stigma and discrimination, contributing to mental well-being. Initial targets have been achieved, with 110 persons benefiting from physical rehabilitation in 2016, 3,751 in 2017 and 3,694 in 2018,[30] compared to 1,500 planned.[31] UNDP initiatives focused on disability related to lower limb due to conflict-related injury. Although to a limited extent, conditional cash-based interventions for persons with severe disabilities were also implemented linked to rehabilitative treatment.

UNDP supported four FBOs in Damascus, Tartous, Aleppo, and Qamishili to establish and provide prosthetic services and physical rehabilitation, activities which were new to them. In the absence of social protection framework to cover PWD and slow production of prosthetics by government units, the FBOs cover a critical gap. Capacity development of local institutions and professional skills training to experts in physical rehabilitation improved the ability of FBOs to respond to prosthetics service needs. Sustainability of these services is constrained by lack of continued resources, although FBOs are diversifying services to raise resources and assembling the prosthetics locally to reduce costs. An issue with the prosthetics is that although they are cheaper, they are also heavier and less durable. Lighter and more durable prosthetics are available in Syria, but they are several times more expensive than what UNDP-supported FBOs produced; in the interest of reaching more PWD, the heavier option was chosen.

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[28]   HRP 2019.

[29]   HRP 2019.

[30]   UNDP Annual Report 2018.

[31]   There are discrepancies in the actual number of beneficiaries reached, as the numbers indicate PWD receiving different types of services such as physiotherapy, rehabilitation, prosthetics, and livelihood support. UNDP corporate data show that, in 2016 and 2017 respectively, 3,596 and 11,082 PWD directly benefited from livelihoods opportunities created. However, the interviews conducted by the evaluation point that UNDP livelihood support to PWD is quite recent and has remained very limited to a few persons. UNDP attributed livelihoods of the PWD to the prosthetics services it provided. While it is true that the prosthetics support made them better able to pursue their vocation, such extrapolation may not always be correct as a large number of PWD already have vocations or receive support from other sources.

Interventions that supported PWD had three tracks of physical rehabilitation, livelihoods support and enabling environment. UNDP efforts to provide employment and livelihoods support to PWD had limitations. Although some programme participants have been able to maintain their jobs despite their disabilities or access new jobs, the promotion of employment and specialized and tailored vocational training for PWD is essential to promote inclusion, active participation and access to economic opportunities. To enable this, UNDP is well-positioned to work on social protection policy issues and related capacity development.

## 2.3 Infrastructure rehabilitation and services

The infrastructure and services outcome entailed a programme expenditure of $79.2 million between 2016 and mid-2019 (Figure 3). Resources received for this outcome totalled $117.2 million as of mid-2019, reaching a 68 percent execution rate for the 2016-2018 period. As of September 2019, the portfolio comprised 17 projects.

Damage related to infrastructure and basic services have been massive. Roads, water supply, sanitation, electricity systems, and hundreds of hospitals and schools have been destroyed. Destruction of housing and infrastructure is estimated at around $90 billion; the total area under cultivation has fallen by 40 percent. An estimated 2.8 million Syrian children have never attended or missed school during the conflict.[32] UNDP aimed to support local communities and promote the return of IDPs by restoring and rehabilitating basic social infrastructure and services in severely affected crisis areas. This includes restoring electricity supply (in addition to exploring renewable and alternative energy sources); repairing schools (in partnership with UNICEF); rehabilitating health facilities (for which WHO provides equipment and medical supplies and UNFPA provides maternal health facilities); supporting debris management;

and rehabilitating roads, sanitation networks, commercial areas and businesses, in cooperation with local authorities, municipalities, technical directorates, and local communities.

### Debris clearance

**Finding 7. UNDP support to debris and waste removal gave access to destroyed city centres and residential neighbourhoods and provided emergency income to returnees and IDPs. Debris removal was also a prerequisite for other infrastructure projects such as rehabilitation of drinking water and sewage systems, schools, health centres and local market areas. Notwithstanding geopolitical factors that inhibited return, particularly in Homs, overall debris clearance from public spaces is an essential step for rehabilitation.**

UNDP support to debris removal represented an important contribution to the rehabilitation of urban areas, providing access to severely destroyed residential neighbourhoods and paving the way for the rehabilitation of essential community infrastructure (schools, health centres, sewage and water networks). At the same time, the clearing of debris is a labour-intensive approach. Cash-for-work schemes generated emergency income to returnees and IDPs, including women from female-headed households and youth, hence also supporting local economic revitalization.

Debris removal in historical city centres contributed to the conservation of historical buildings, especially in areas experiencing extensive irreversible damage. Support to the rehabilitation of historical urban centres such as in Aleppo and Homs contributed to the protection and rehabilitation of important heritage, including cultural heritage sites listed by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Archaeological restorations included careful recycling of original building materials to ensure that rehabilitated historical buildings and local markets corresponded to original designs. Visits to Aleppo and rural Damascus areas for this evaluation point

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32    ESCWA/UN, 'Syria at War - Five Years On', 2016: https://www.unescwa.org/publications/syria-war-five-years.

that the debris clearance contributed to the initial return of IDPs. According to the citizen perception survey conducted by the UNDP outcome evaluation, debris removal was a factor encouraging most of the participating residents to stay (85 percent) and for return (86 percent ).[33] In Homs, several other factors impacted the return of IDPs, which has been more limited.

The debris clearance modality needed careful consideration to maximize rehabilitation efforts, but several external factors constrained UNDP from exploring more efficient options. There was a protection factor from the unexploded remnant of war, especially in areas with a high percentage of the returnees. Manual labour was a necessity in the narrow alleys of historical city centres and provided much-needed cash-for-work support. On the other hand, the logic of providing manual work may not be pertinent in all cases. Outside historical areas, the direct procurement of heavy machinery, equipment and transport vehicles could have cleared the debris much faster. Although this was the preferred option of the local municipalities to speed up debris clearance, funding conditionalities prevented such an approach: cash for work was a tied precondition and large-scale funding of municipal machinery and equipment could not be considered an alternative.

Shortage of workforce was an added constraint in UNDP support to debris removal and similar service areas. UNDP field offices had set gender targets to support female-headed households. For example, Deir Ezzor debris removal targeted a women's participation rate of 50 percent. However, while female-headed households, in particular, struggled to cover basic needs, employment of female workers for manual labour such as debris removal was not in accordance with local customs and traditions and often looked down on. Young people, on the other hand, preferred other options as alternative income-generation opportunities became possible.

The selection of intervention areas, and hence the priorities of UNDP's area-based response plans, was mainly based on a dialogue with the governorates, and, to a lesser extent, local authorities. UNDP's local situational analyses played a limited role in the choice of places of rehabilitation. Whether it is debris clearance or other areas of rehabilitation, a resilience approach was needed for accelerating the transition to medium-term development processes. As residents returned to their homes and newly accessible urban areas begin to function more normally, municipalities in areas that have moved out of conflict started a process of re-development within the scope of their limited

**FIGURE 3.** Infrastructure and services, Million (US$)
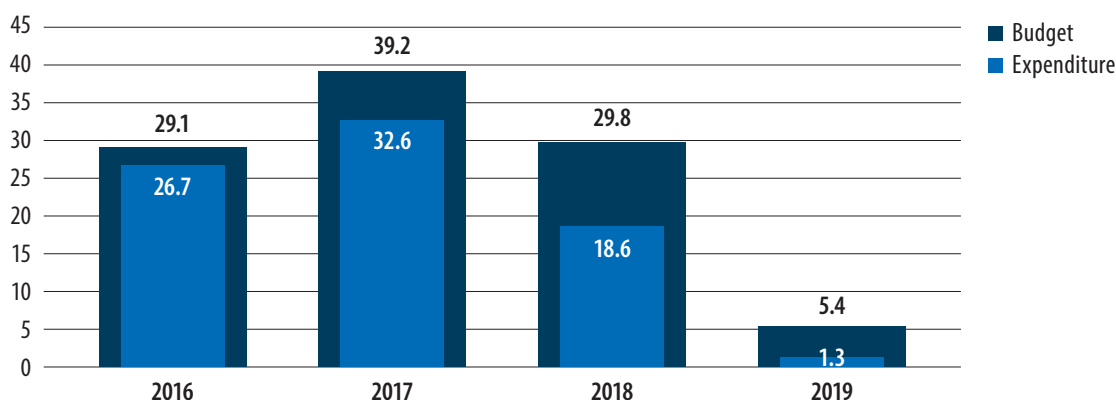


Source: UNDP Atlas financial records (2014-2019).

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[33]    Triangle, 'Final Evaluation Report of Outcome II: Basic and Social Services & Infrastructure Restoration to Enhance Community Resilience', 2019, p. 56f: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9483.

resource envelopes. As a consequence, support in line with a development-humanitarian nexus approach became critical for such municipalities. There is a need for a more programmatic approach to municipal capacity development than allowed by the current humanitarian support modality.

## Local infrastructure

**Finding 8. Although the scale of UNDP response was not commensurate with the huge demand for infrastructure and services, the evaluation shows positive contributions in enabling services.**

UNDP support to the light rehabilitation of infrastructure and basic services was key to the reactivation of primary education, health services, sewage systems and water networks. This improved access reduced exposure to waterborne diseases and provided emergency income for crisis-affected local communities. UNDP's resilience approach stabilized local communities through rehabilitation of basic and social infrastructure and reactivation of social services such as primary education and health centres. In combination with cash-for-work schemes, rehabilitation work also provided emergency employment and a basic livelihood for returnees and IDPs, including vulnerable groups such as female-headed households. The evaluation findings corroborate the citizens' perception survey conducted for the country programme outcome evaluation, which also confirmed the positive contributions. For example, UNDP's rehabilitation of water supplies improved access to water according to 85 percent of the respondents, although 34 percent of the respondents, mostly returnees and IDPs, still experience water shortages and cuts. In Aleppo, UNDP's water network rehabilitation reduced their exposure to waterborne gastrointestinal diseases, reduced the level of disease-carrying pests and effectively mitigated blindness caused by parasitic diseases in the drinking water. The same survey also

shows that UNDP's contribution to social infrastructure interventions improved access to and quality of primary education and healthcare services.[34]

In many areas with heavy destruction of infrastructure, the rehabilitation initiatives were determined by the scale of the population living there. Larger the population, greater were rehabilitation efforts. In Harasta, for example, given the small population left behind, there was no interest among agencies to rebuild services and social infrastructure. On the other hand, unless the infrastructure was rebuilt, people would not return. According to interviewees, 40 percent of Harasta is now cleaned and 70 percent of services are restored. UNDP's contribution was important in the return of the population to Harasta.

Maintenance of solar street lighting remains an underfunded municipal task, with no municipal operational and maintenance budget line. Urgent repairs are needed to sustain UNDP solar lighting solutions after being some years in use. This was observed in Homs where the street lighting system established by UNDP three years ago requires the replacement of batteries to avoid becoming dysfunctional, but municipal funds are not available for this work. The deployment of solar PV street lighting and the sustainability of UNDP electricity interventions are affected by the absence of a more strategic approach to renewable energy in Syria, which the short cycle project approaches did not fully capture.

**Finding 9. Multiple constraints beyond UNDP's control limited further rehabilitation and reactivation of markets. Needs outpaced UNDP funding envelope and small-scale joint UN initiatives were insufficient.**

The scale of rehabilitation of city centres and residential neighbourhoods remains small compared to the scale of destruction. Conflict-generated poverty and a lack of mortgage credits, commercial credit schemes, and banking services constrain

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[34] For example, survey respondents rated the level of healthcare services as good (36 percent), acceptable (54 percent) or poor (8 percent) prior to UNDP's rehabilitation of health centres, while after rehabilitation, service ratings improved to very good (46 percent), good (41 percent) or acceptable (13 percent). See Evaluation of CDP Outcome II, 2019, p.60f.

quick rehabilitation in newly accessible areas. Serious challenges remain in the housing and service needs of returnees and prevent faster reactivation of local markets. In some areas, a shortage of workforce was an added constraint for the debris removals.

The mismatch of funding and needs is becoming more obvious. With the increase of returnees and/or IDPs who will be settling permanently in new locations, there will also be increased demand for housing, critical infrastructure, livelihood and services. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service, the 2019 HRP appeal only met 58 percent of requirements, with coverage as low as 7 percent for protection, 10 percent for shelter and non-food items, and 13 percent for early recovery and livelihoods.[35] While there are examples of joint UN initiatives to mitigate the adverse impact of underfunding, they remain insufficient in enabling more structured support. UNDP, in collaboration with other UN-agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, UN Human Settlements Programme and FAO, established partnerships to maximize the outreach of service provisions. For example, UNICEF provided support to light rehabilitation work of primary schools, where UNDP supported heavier rehabilitation work in areas that were 20 to 25 percent damaged by the conflict. Overall, there is scope for more collaboration and synergy between UN agencies. A coherent UN approach with an emphasis on sustainable services is yet to be prioritized.

Syria needed initiatives that enabled responses of scale that would address institutional bottlenecks. It is difficult for local authorities to follow up on the debris removal and meet the demand of returnees and resident IDPs for infrastructure, housing and services at scale. Cities like Homs, Damascus and Latakia experience increased numbers of returnees and IDPs that have settled permanently, leading to a growing demand for housing and social services. In addition, returnees lack sufficient funding for rehabilitation of private homes. As more than 50 percent of Syrians are unemployed (75 percent of youth) and 69 percent of households are in extreme poverty,[36] household incomes plummeted during the conflict and 70 percent of households earn less than $100 per month, with little to spare for the rehabilitation of homes damaged by the conflict. Suitable banking services and access to mortgage credits for rehabilitation of private homes are also lacking. Missing property deeds is another problem for returnees, affecting as many as 30 percent of all returnees in the city of Deir Ezzor.[37] In combination with poor employment and livelihood opportunities and lack of local services, this may prevent the return of IDPs and refugees.

Limited credit and financing services also significantly constrained the reactivation of local markets. Debris removal paved the way for the rehabilitation of markets and commercial areas, including rehabilitation of local markets and shops in historical city centres. This led to the return of the first shop owners. However, local market reactivations are still limited due to lack of banking and financing services and limited market linkages. These broader challenges linked to financial services for commercial activities remain a persistent sustainability concern for small enterprises, which they share with both young entrepreneurs/start-ups and larger manufacturing enterprises.

Interventions faced operational and efficiency issues at times beyond the control of UNDP. A shortage of local competitive contractors, skilled workforce or materials caused delays in infrastructure projects. These issues negatively impacted the quality and cost-effectiveness of programme interventions. Shortage of suitable materials caused by import restrictions and overall scarcity of products at the local level also constrained the support for basic services and infrastructure. Moreover, local contractors

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35    OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS), Syria Humanitarian Response Plan, 2019, accessed on 3 February 2020: https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/663/clusters. The 2019 appeal requested $3.293 billion; incoming funding was $1.924 billion.

36    UN OCHA, '2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) Monitoring Report', January-June 2018. Figures as of 31 May 2018.

37    'Provision of Life-Saving Assistance and Supporting Communities', End of Year Report, 2018: https://www.unhcr.org/sy/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/02/End-of-Year-2018-S.pdf.

found it difficult to bid against foreign companies due to the depreciation of the local currency and the inherent risks of procuring foreign goods in hard currency as part of the contractual obligations. In other cases, Syrian companies registered in neighbouring countries, usually Lebanon, could mitigate risks associated with hard currency interactions, but this again increased the overall cost of UNDP interventions.

Lengthy government approval procedures for building works also constrained infrastructure rehabilitation, causing delays and inefficiency according to local authorities met by the ICPE evaluation team. For example, centralized approval procedures linked to quality assurance of building rehabilitation work, e.g. primary schools, meant that finalization of the work was delayed although it was completed according to contract specifications. In such cases, local authorities had to wait for weeks before the rehabilitation work could be concluded, as the municipal engineers could not settle quality-assurance issues with the contractor. Given the restrictions on the nature of its support, UNDP could not pursue capacity development of local authorities or re-establish direct accountability links to respond to this challenge.

## Electricity and renewable energy

**Finding 10.** Improving access to energy supply and installation of solar street lighting increased the security of local communities and accelerated the return of IDPs and refugees. Sustainability of such interventions remains at risk because of weak institutional anchoring.

Along with other essential infrastructure, the energy sector endured massive destruction during the conflict with loss of power plants, transmission systems and skilled workforce. The energy crisis was further aggravated by the migration of IDPs from the north and east towards the south and the coastal region, which increased the pressure on power supply in these areas. UNDP provided support to the energy sector with the rehabilitation of power plants in the Tartous, Homs and Hama governorates, the rehabilitation of the hydroelectric plant in Raqqa governorate, the introduction of photovoltaic (PV) solutions and grid system repairs. The installation of solar lighting units in the cities also paved the way for the return of IDPs and refugees. These efforts were complemented by technical support to the energy sector under the T4A project, with training sessions in Egypt, Japan and South Africa. Initiatives mostly focused on urban areas and rural needs were often overlooked, such as the restoration of water pumps for irrigation for agricultural revival, which was very critical but received limited attention.

UNDP support to the energy sector had several positive outcomes. The rehabilitation of power plants and electricity grids to households, markets and private sector manufacturing enabled the rehabilitation of other critical infrastructure and social services, ensuring more reliable access to clean drinking water and sewage systems, improved water and sanitation and a drop in waterborne diseases. Notably, the establishment of solar street lighting in urban areas stimulated the local economy and increased the security of local communities, both in well-being and in more tangible terms. Local authorities and communities consulted for this evaluation in Zabadani, Harasta, Aleppo and Homs emphasized the positive impact of solar street lighting on security, deterrence of crime and theft, and enabling IDPs and returnees to resettle. Solar lighting increased their perceptions of safety, and improved movement after dark.[38]

Like other infrastructure support, UNDP electricity and energy initiatives suffered from significant delays and increased costs. The limited access to private service providers and qualified technicians represented important operational constraints for renewable energy projects. UNDP tried to mitigate these risks through regional procurement, overseas training and recruitment of regional technicians, but this increased costs, which probably is understandable given the circumstances.

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[38] The outcome evaluation also pointed to similar findings. Final Evaluation of Outcome II, p.63f.

## Solid waste management

**Finding 11.** UNDP support to solid waste man-agement (SWM) complemented debris removals, which made urban areas affected by the conflict accessible.

UNDP's support to SWM aimed to clear destroyed rural areas, urban centres and riverbeds, thereby minimizing adverse health issues from unmanaged waste disposals, including waste from households, commercial areas and hospitals. UNDP strategy for waste removal was to a large degree vested in local CSOs and private contractors which ensured waste removal. This was considered suitable as munic-ipalities lacked sufficient capacity. Cash-for-work schemes were linked to waste collection services and provided residents, IDPs and returnees with emergency incomes, employment and livelihoods for youth and women.

Municipal waste collection services covered 80 percent of all urban areas in Syria before 2011 and waste collection was de facto heavily subsidized as waste fees covered less than 20 percent of service costs.[39] Although services in conflict-affected areas were interrupted, a considerable part of the country is evolving out of conflict. So, UNDP support needs to adopt a more resilient approach, with a defined pathway for the rehabilitation of municipal solid waste management. While governorates are respon-sible for planning and implementing regional SWM strategies, the law on local administration assigns municipalities full responsibility for all SWM activ-ities, particularly day-to-day management and operation of SWM systems, fee and tax collection, and private sector contracting. Institutionalizing support to SWM, which can bridge CSO and private contractor management of waste collection schemes with more long-term municipal waste management solutions, were difficult due to the short-term nature of the support. In some places, such as Hama, the exit strategy implemented was merely an awareness campaign for residents on efficient waste removal

and proper use of waste bins. In others, such as the Zabadani Municipality in Rural Damascus, had sufficient vehicles, manpower and municipal tax col-lection in place to continue waste collection at scale. More often service gaps increased when UNDP sup-port stopped as most municipalities lack funding, equipment and workforce to reactivate their waste collection services.

The support to solid waste management remained short term with important sustainability concerns as outsourcing strategies were not always clear for enabling municipal handover. To ensure sustain-ability, a more comprehensive approach is needed, where municipalities can scale up staffing, equip-ment and service coverage and introduce more sustainable solutions, addressing cost-recovery and affordability issues. Besides, municipal landfills need upgrading and proper management, an area which was not addressed through UNDP interventions.

Cost recovery for waste collection needs to be reintroduced whether municipalities upscale their in-house waste service provisions through additional workforce and equipment or choose to outsource it. Support for municipal waste services, therefore, required careful consideration and can only be introduced in line with the pace of resettlements of returnees and IDPs in areas which have come out of conflict. Service affordability has to match the low household incomes in Syria. However, municipalities still need to recover their costs, be it from col-lected waste fees or through transferred subsidies. Previously, household waste fees were collected with the electricity bill and retained by municipalities, but the funds were not earmarked for solid waste management. This indicates a need for more funda-mental solutions regarding local finances.

Environmental and health concerns are yet to be addressed more sustainably, and opportunities were lost given the humanitarian mode of support. Before the crisis, Syria adopted a national SWM master plan as well as with a supportive policy framework, but it

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[39] World Bank Mediterranean Environmental Technical Assistance Programme on SWM: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTMETAP/Resources/SWM-SyriaP.pdf.

was not implemented. Ensuring sustainability would require a phased national SWM strategy, which would re-establish local government waste management and gradually increase attention to sustainable waste management practices according to national policy targets. Most municipal landfills were unmanaged dumpsites without basic membranes, although larger cities such as Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus developed SWM plans with international assistance and upgraded or initiated upgrades of their landfills. In many areas, there is scope to reintroduce such initiatives.

This evaluation found that the criteria applied for the selection of community workers for waste collection schemes were not always clear or sometimes co-opted into by local rent-seeking practices. As in the case of debris collection, UNDP preferences for youth and women from female-headed households also met resistance. There were instances where youth were not available or did not want to engage in waste collection, as other employment opportunities became available, particularly around Damascus. Older people, on the other hand, were often more open to the idea of waste collection, but this meant a change in UNDP's criteria. Female waste collectors were frowned upon for cultural reasons, making the engagement of women an unviable proposition.

## 2.4   Cross-cutting programme themes

This section discusses two areas UNDP intended to pursue but where engagement has been limited viz., social cohesion and community peace and local development. Also analysed are efforts to promote gender equality and youth development.

### Social cohesion and community peace

**Finding 12. Social cohesion initiatives were implemented in an isolated way instead of using them as a programming approach across all areas, along with conflict sensitivity and community peace. Given the dispersed and limited scale of such initiatives, contributions remain minimal.**

Mistrust between communities increased since the conflict, weakening the social fabric in affected areas. UNDP initiatives to enhance social cohesion included training to youth on local peacebuilding and conflict management, promotion of local and inter-faith dialogues led by youth, community activities for peace such as arts, sports, civic engagement, and rehabilitating social spaces and support community dialogue on social issues. Most of these activities were, however, very limited in scale to reduce tensions between communities. Communities consulted by the evaluation also questioned the relevance of these activities, such as the construction of a small playground, considering the other basic needs they were facing. Although consultations were held with the community, the process used to identify priorities for investments was not clear or adequately explained to the communities.

While both approaches are needed, standalone social cohesion activities, instead of social cohesion as a programming approach to enhance community security and unity at the local level, reduced the contribution of UNDP. Working effectively on social cohesion and community security would require viewing it as a lens for all programme activities, as a mutually reinforcing approach. UNDP is yet to consider more substantive initiatives such as support to dialogue processes to manage disputes and strengthening the rule of law and access to justice at the local level. Also, social cohesion can be better promoted if the various programmes of UN agencies can be leveraged. UNDP is yet to provide thought leadership in this area.

### Local development

**Finding 13. Despite several initiatives at the subnational level, there is no structured engagement in local development. Opportunities for broader engagement during rehabilitation support were not utilized for strengthening local development processes. The area-based development approach is in the early stages and yet to take into consideration the particularities of the Syrian context and the importance of working with the local government institutions.**

UNDP support in Syria has predominantly been at the local level, with contributions to enabling the return of IDPs and the first refugees from the region. Unlike in other programme countries, the UNDP approach to local-level engagement in Syria has not been through local government institutions but implemented primarily by CSOs.

Government authorities at central and local levels generally found UNDP's support relevant in addressing urgent humanitarian and recovery needs in Syria. However, not engaging with local government structures during restoration and rehabilitation or livelihood initiatives reduced the contribution of UNDP. Local elections were conducted in government-controlled areas in 2018, and the context calls for a more strategic local development approach as local authorities, in general, suffered a loss of assets and revenues and reduction of workforce weakened their capacities. At best, municipal budgets were maintained at pre-war levels and did not reflect the currency depreciation, the vast destructions and/or significant increases in the number of returnees, IDPs and service needs. At the governorate and municipal level, action plans need technical, human and financial resources. While UNDP facilitated the UN and government meeting on strengthening local governments, this agenda could not be pursued due to restrictions on engaging in capacity development. Given the stance of international cooperation to not to work with the government institutions, the rehabilitation programmes could not strengthen the capacities of the local institutions.

UNDP did put in initial efforts to promote an area-based approach, but in the absence of linkages to local government institutions, the progress has been limited. UNDP uses the area-based approach mostly as a flexible instrument for dialogue with local authorities on setting the priority of programme interventions in specific governorates. The scope of the area-based approach would very much depend on UNDP's ability to engage in local and regional institutional structures and plans, explore opportunities for topic-specific alliances and pilot and support a more participatory and responsive governance

approach. Also, central to area-based development is enabling local government institutions to coordinate activities of various agencies, channelling resources to well-conceptualized local plans. With an increase in the areas that are emerging out of conflict in the past two years, the local-level interventions should have an emphasis on enhancing peace, including community development at scale, improved livelihoods and services. To engage in this process, the area-based approach needs to evolve into a more structured, evidence- and demand-driven approach based on transparency and participation and aligned with the emerging challenges of local development.

Within the UNDP portfolio, there are various pilots which may inform future local development capacity-building approaches. The joint Technical Cooperation for Long-Term Capacity Building for Syrian Experts 'Training for All' or T4A project is an example of a more cross-cutting approach, which addresses competency gaps through training courses for the Government, CSOs, and the media, among others. T4A also includes a local governance project with youth, participatory components and space for national workshops to discuss the future direction of local governance. Overall, the T4A modality is basic training delivery, but it may lead towards more strategic capacity development frameworks when project results have been analysed. The pilot project 'Recover Aleppo with the Crowd' is an attempt to innovate local economic development through crowdfunding and citizens participation in a five-year recovery and redevelopment strategy targeting the Aleppo Industrial City (Sheikh Najjar). Lessons from such pilot interventions may inform future participatory approaches in local development, including private sector participation.

Governorates screened international cooperation interventions before approvals. Overall, traditional governance approaches lacked responsiveness and participation and most decisions were top-down and local decision-making first and foremost vested in the governorates, in particular, the Governor. Accordingly, the space for local development and UNDP's area-based approach differed, depending on the priorities of the Governor. Some governorates

were open to social cohesion initiatives; for example, Hama governorate actively supported UNDP's promotion of access to justice. Others preferred infrastructure support, while social cohesion initiatives were not appreciated. Such variations in preferences were also found among local authorities.

The limited space for local governance also constrained a more coherent approach towards transparency, accountability and participation in local development. Although UNDP piloted some participatory initiatives, the governorate and local authorities ultimately established local priorities with limited public participation processes. To this end, and based on extensive citizens perception surveys, the country programme outcome evaluation concluded that "even though communities were occasionally consulted during programme design, this process was haphazard and lacked a systematic nature. As a result, the selection of intervention areas and modalities are largely based on local authority recommendations as well as donor priorities".[40]

Opportunities are lost in pursuing the local governance agenda in Syria. While there are opportunities to leverage its pilots, the current country programme is yet to systematically pursue innovation in local humanitarian-development nexus support. UNDP is well-positioned to strengthen the local development agenda in Syria, pending more conducive funding conditionalities. Regional and local planning frameworks can be subnational entry points for local development support. Regional development planning was tentatively discussed with Latakia governorate, but it did not move forward due to the current funding conditionalities. Before the crisis, there were discussions with Latakia and Tartous governorates to merge their respective plans into one regional economic development plan. Reactivation of such initiatives could revitalize assets of the Mediterranean coast, including the four development centres of Tartous, Latakia, Baniyas and Jablah and the two main marine gateways, Latakia and Tartous deep-sea ports. Rehabilitation

of Aleppo as the economic powerhouse of Syria is another long-term challenge, which needs to be addressed at scale. The local governments have a crucial role in localizing the SDGs through inclusive development, provision of basic services, upholding security for vulnerable groups and facilitating community reconciliation. The humanitarian support provides avenues for strengthening local institutional capacities and enabling a common vision for the local government system, which can serve as a platform for future reforms.

**Finding 14.** UNDP support to capacity development of CSOs is relevant to the Syrian context and has the potential to professionalize CSO governance and management in line with good practices. Institutionalized efforts are needed to enhance the role of CSOs as advocacy bodies and service providers in areas of high demand. Partnerships confined to FBOs inadvertently contributed to monopolizing of service provision by a section of CSOs.

UNDP engaged with local CSOs in several social cohesion projects and delivery of local services, in particular, health services and prosthetic support to PWD. While CSO-based service provision is still emerging, the best performing and most mature CSO projects in the UNDP portfolio demonstrated good potential for service provision, facilitation of social cohesion initiatives and local community development. One such example is the Al Sanabel vocational centre in Homs, which supported skills development in plumbing and welding, as the demand grew for locally produced items like kitchen sinks, gas stoves and repair services. What started as small-scale training courses have since developed into seemingly successful spinoff workshops, owned and run by former training participants. It would be beneficial to document lessons learned from such projects to understand how they succeeded and how to improve future CSO support for specific service areas. This may also serve to broaden the CSO base and promote greater diversity among CSOs.

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[40]    Final Evaluation Report on Outcome, p.12.

UNDP also started addressing a more fundamental need to develop CSO capacities, as most of them are local charities with little background in basic governance and self-regulation, management and membership. During the crisis, local charities started responding to demands for social services as intermediary implementing agencies of international actors. Accordingly, many charities quickly grew from small FBOs into more regular CSOs without the necessary capacity to operate according to laws, regulations and good practices.

The space available for CSO in service provision and advocacy is still limited in Syria and subject to tight government regulations. CSOs also have to mature as service providers and advocacy bodies to play a more proactive role. The Government sees an improvement in the support to CSOs and now finds them better organized. It also encourages more support to CSOs, especially support to PWD and vocational training. UNDP supported CSO capacity development by addressing regulatory, governance and management aspects at both institutional and individual levels and applied a mix of direct and online training delivery. Training sessions were partly delivered in partnership with the umbrella organization for charities in Damascus. This partnership is still in a piloting stage and covers only a small number of CSOs, but it has the potential to broaden its outreach to CSOs and charities from all areas of the country. While the present scope of UNDP engagement remains small, there is also potential to strengthen the role of civil society in social cohesion efforts and community engagement in local development.

The FBOs got a head start in the development of the CSO sector as they were quicker to mobilize and engage in community service delivery. Government approvals appear to have been processed more easily for FBOs compared to other CSOs, while donor conditionalities also strengthened a bias towards FBO support when Christian charities were preferred. Both factors strengthened the position of FBOs in CSO-based service delivery and meant that FBOs received a comparatively large share of the donor support. To this end, there is a need to broaden the range of CSO support beyond FBOs, as

a skewed preference may otherwise have negative dividends in an already fragile context. For example, social cohesion interventions would benefit from a broader CSO engagement in confidence-building and conflict resolution dialogues. Moreover, there is a lack of an explicit gender strategy among CSOs, which in general seems to be a difficult topic to articulate across most UNDP interventions.

## Gender mainstreaming

**Finding 15.** UNDP initiatives ensured the participation of women to increase their economic opportunities; however, the types of activities implemented were not geared towards addressing the gender considerations of the crisis, particularly changes in the roles of Syrian women. The change in male-female demography and its implications for recovery and development interventions in the coming years is yet to be addressed by international cooperation in general.

Through its corporate gender strategy, UNDP has committed to integrating gender concerns into all programmes and areas. UNDP in Syria has set a minimum target of 30 percent women beneficiaries in all programmes and exceeded this target for the assessment period. However, UNDP experienced challenges in women's participation in livelihood activities unless the activities were seen as culturally appropriate. For example, the participation of women in infrastructure projects was limited, and therefore could not achieve the set targets in including women as beneficiaries.

As a result of the crisis, traditional gender roles have changed, with women having to take on more responsibilities and head households. With the increase in the number of women-headed households, women face many challenges to access income and economic opportunities given their low skills and capacities, cultural barriers, and lack of family documents. Activities aimed at increasing access to livelihood opportunities included the provision of vocational training and start-up toolkits, mostly on sewing, embroidery, needlework, hairdressing, beauty care, food preservation and processing. This

allowed motivated women to start home-based businesses, creating economic opportunities and promoting self-reliance and self-confidence in the short term. Such initiatives, however, did not always result in income generation or a steady source of livelihood, as market demand did not inform the initiatives. The training and toolkits provided were expected to be tailored to invest in available local skills, but they are inadequate to enable women to become economically self-sufficient.

Despite the need to balance cultural norms, the job opportunities offered are gendered and do not promote equality and empowerment of women nor increase women decision-making power. In a context with major changes in demography and an increase of women-headed households, gender and market analysis should inform employment creation and livelihood initiatives to avoid stereotyping women's engagement and potential negative dividends in the long run. Yet, many organizations have stereotype programmes on employment and economic empowerment of women (for example, pickle making and baking where there may not be a market for the products).

A challenge not typical to the UNDP programme is that the initiatives focused mainly on ensuring women's participation, and not so much on addressing inequitable gender roles and better empowerment of women. While there were some awareness-raising initiatives for women on their rights, there was no follow up on, for example, ensuring legal aid.

UNDP has outlined a gender action plan for the country programme, yet it is not reflected properly in the programmes. it lacks simple minimum standards that enable easy integration, taking into consideration the sensitivities of Syrian context. For 2016-2018, based on the gender marker data, 1 percent of projects were GEN0 with no noticeable contribution to gender equality; 64 percent were GEN1 which included women as beneficiaries; 23 percent were GEN2 with gender equality as

a significant objective; 12 percent were GEN3 and aimed at gender equality as a principal objective.[41] GEN3 outputs were primarily under the sustainable livelihoods outcome and included a mix of social cohesion and livelihoods projects. These criteria, while allowing the track of expenditures, are yet to inform UNDP strategies on accelerating women's empowerment.

In terms of gender architecture, the role of gender focal point has been evolving, as the staff member is temporarily covering gender equality and women's empowerment along with work on NGO capacity strengthening and local governance. UNDP has developed a gender action plan around five pillars: i) partnerships, ii) programme and projects, iii) results and impacts, iv) capacities development, and v) knowledge management, which is in the early stages of implementation.

## Youth development and empowerment

**Finding 16. Specific efforts were made to include youth in employment and social cohesion programmes. There were changes at the individual level, but interventions remained fragmented at the micro level. The Syrian context needs a strategic approach to youth development which was lacking, and merely including youth as beneficiaries and one-off short-duration projects of employment and empowerment are insufficient given the socio-economic challenges youth confront.**

Youth were identified as an important vulnerable group in both the HRPs and UNDP country programme strategy, as their empowerment and employment are key for stabilization and peace. UNDP interventions have paid a specific consideration to youth employment through vocational training, and start-ups. Youth were also engaged in social cohesion and peace initiatives. In specific projects, initial targets have been achieved in the area of social cohesion and employment creation. Participation of youth in local-level projects has

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41    Programme expenditure data as of 16 July 2019, Atlas/PowerBI.

often been de facto as the young men were the only group available to participate, for example, in areas such as rubble clearance.

UNDP has tried to improve livelihood opportunities for youth, particularly with vocational training. Before the crisis, the unemployment rate for youth was at 30 percent of the overall 11 percent unemployment for Syria.[42] In line with the UN No Lost Generation initiative, UNDP initiatives targeting youth aimed to address the labour market mismatch by prioritizing practical/core skills needed by businesses and developing an internship scheme and practical learning-by-doing in a real work setting to gain work experience. UNDP supported entrepreneurship promotion through assistance to start-ups such as the Dedicated Youth Programming (Young Entrepreneurs of Syria – Y.E.S.) with three months' incubation and seed funding to 15 youth leaders.[43] Consultations in Aleppo point that youth are keen to establish micro or small projects, particularly in clothing, food and agricultural industries.

Social cohesion activities targeted youth as agents of change and peace through a range of activities, facilitating local dialogue, tolerance and acceptance, awareness-raising campaigns, sports, arts, theatre, social media and building communal spaces. An SDGs hub for youth in As-Sweida governorate was established with activities such as SDGs advocacy activities and SDGs Weekends with youth and local communities.

One of the limitations of UNDP initiatives, whether employment or social protection, is the limited scale of the programme support. UNDP has been part of the committee to revise the national multisectoral framework for youth and adolescents 2017-2018. The progress on this has been limited. Youth initiatives were at the micro level, implemented as isolated activities, targeting a small number of young

people at the local level contributing in a limited way to employment support or skills development. There is anecdotal evidence of training provided by UNDP leading to employment. Poor coordination with other agencies engaged in similar initiatives as well as lack of engagement with government agencies reduced the possibility of scaling, medium-term focus and promotion of sustainable programme models. Although youth working groups have been established both within UNDP and between UN agencies, it remains a sensitive topic not very well received among national partners. Evidence-based youth strategies are important for systematically addressing youth issues, but they are currently not available. The available reports refer to youth as being mostly affected by conscription issues and do not underscore the specific negative coping mechanisms they may resort to and the positive role they can play in supporting their communities. Youth are particularly at risk as they lacked access to formal education or vocational training, and unemployment has further increased.[44] A related challenge is the lack of data on the impact of conflict on youth in general and specific challenges of young men and women. Although the space to work on youth policies, laws and institutional arrangements is limited, UNDP should explore avenues to engage at the policy level.

## 2.5 Programme management

**Finding 17. There is space to improve data analysis for evidence-based programming. Given the impact of the crisis on the social fabric of communities, rigorous conflict sensitivity analysis should inform programme strategies.**

To bridge data gaps, UNDP conducted various assessments, including eight livelihoods and market system assessments, a preliminary examination of local

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42      World Bank 2016 cited in UNDP et al, 'Jobs Make the Difference: Expanding Economic Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities', 2017, p.30: https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/crisis-response0/jobs-make-the-difference.html.

43      A seven-day workshop was conducted with 202 applications received and 48 participants, in partnership with the UNDP regional youth leadership programme and cooperation with SEBC and MoSAL.

44      UNDP RBAS, 'Never Too Early to Plan: Lessons Learned for the Post-Agreement Reconstruction of Syria', 2016: https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/crisis-response0/never-too-early-to-plan-.html

drivers and capacities for sustaining peace, context analysis on access to justice and justice mechanisms and context analysis on women, radicalization and the legacy of violent extremism. Since 2016, UNDP started to carry out regular updates of needs assessments in Aleppo City, Al-Hasakeh, Dar' a, Deir Ezzor, Hama, Homs, Latakia, Raqqa, Rural Damascus and Tartous City.[45] These assessments allowed to capture the main historical socio-economic characteristics in the governorates, the priorities and needs of affected groups, partnership opportunities and potential entry points and priorities for assistance. Local context analyses have also been in demand by most other UN agencies, which used them in programme interventions in combination with agency-/ sector-specific analyses.

UNDP programmes are yet to leverage their various assessments sufficiently. Limited attention paid to conflict sensitivity and needs assessments meant that use, sustainability, market relevance and complementarities were not always factored into programme design.[46] Poor attention to conflict sensitivity has at times resulted in programme interventions being developed in places where the possibility of return is limited.[47] Given the highly diverse situations at the local level, localized needs analyses have the potential to make UNDP interventions relevant and inclusive. However, one important limitation of the UNDP's needs assessments is the weak conflict-sensitivity analysis that otherwise could have provided a deeper understanding of the risks and drivers of conflict between the communities. While UNDP conducted geographical targeting based on the severity of the impact of the armed conflict, this by itself was not sufficient to allow right targeting and prioritization. Analysis of capacity for labour absorption and creation, accessibility, the presence of local partners to support implementation, and factors enabling stability was essential for informing appropriate programmes.

UNDP intended to use an area-based approach to identify the appropriate implementation modalities to respond to the specific needs of the affected communities. By targeting specific geographical areas in a country, characterized by a particularly complex development problem, the area-based approach allows a holistic way of addressing specific problems, considering the interplay between actors and factors, and moving away from financing and managing detached projects. This approach is expected to support programme adaptability and flexibility based on context-sensitivity. While the area-based approach is yet to be implemented, moving this approach forward will be important for a coherent UNDP response, engaging the Government at the subnational level, promoting synergies with other UN agency programmes and getting donor agencies on board as well.

**Finding 18. There is considerable scope for building on programme synergies across and within programme areas and themes. The UNDP programme is yet to translate into a more integrated approach to early recovery and rehabilitation. Programme silos are undermining the coherence of UNDP response.**

Overall opportunities for pursuing a humanitarian- development nexus approach, linking humanitarian support with medium-term development efforts, have been lost in Syria given the excessive emphasis on humanitarian mode of support. Given this context, UNDP's efforts to promote a humanitarian-development nexus approach within the UN system were also limited. At the programme level, there were opportunities, more so since 2016, to pursue a multipronged approach, linking complementary themes across programme areas, such as employment and social protection, or infrastructure, livelihoods, and local development; such opportunities were not utilized. There is still scope for identifying key elements of integrator dimensions that will be catalytic for stabilization and the current situation is congenial.

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[45]   UNDP Syria 2018 Annual Report, p.30.
[46]   See also OUTCOME I_UNDP Syria CO - Country Programme Evaluation Livelihoods, March 2019.
[47]   It is not evident that developed tools such as the Stress Index are being used for targeting and programme design have differentiated approaches.

**Finding 19.** Frequent changes within UNDP country office senior management (three different country representatives during the programme period) impacted programme management.

Given the complexities and highly political stakes of any programming in Syria, a strong, continuous and dynamic UNDP leadership is needed. Since 2015, the country office experienced three different UNDP country directors. While it is not within the scope of this evaluation to assess the leadership capabilities of the UNDP country offices, interviews with programme partners pointed out that UNDP leadership was well regarded. While leadership changes may be justified, the frequent changes in a short time-frame negatively impacted UNDP positioning, resource mobilization, and the comprehensiveness of its response in the country.

**Finding 20.** The field offices improved UNDP's ability to respond to recovery and rehabilitation needs and deliver more efficiently on the ground. The potential of the area offices to expand programme scale and depth and respond to the diversity of contexts is yet to be fully leveraged. Issues related to efficiency gains in programme management structure are yet to be addressed.

UNDP projected a continuous increase in the delivery up to $100 million in 2020. In response to this portfolio increase, the country office structure and operational arrangements were reviewed to deliver on the ground more effectively. The changes included the establishment or strengthening of seven area offices, with a redistribution of roles and responsibilities. As local needs, types of responses and opportunities vary from one location to another, this expansion was a step in the right direction. A Field Management Unit was also created to strengthen the internal control framework and oversight.

The field offices are an essential part of UNDP's response in Syria with ongoing programmes in 14 governorates. UNDP demonstrated the capacity to reach communities in conflict-affected areas under government control and implement recovery initiatives in a speedy and timely manner. The significance of this advantage in the context of Syria is enormous given the constraints the conflict on the ground pose and the speedy response required. UNDP's engagement with national and local institutions before the conflict has been an enabling factor in building a strong local presence. The value of field offices was immense in enabling access, security, logistical support and understanding community specificities.

UNDP is yet to systematically use its local office structure to pursue area-based development in recovery and rehabilitation support. The sustainability of the area offices is currently an issue, particularly those headed by international staff. UNDP should review if the field offices need international staff support, given the availability of highly skilled national staff, an option that can considerably reduce the cost.

UNDP is yet to determine the core purpose of the field offices, in addition to their role as project implementers. There remains a mismatch between the importance of the field offices, the role they can play, and their actual resources. The field offices lacked a well-conceptualized programme framework and a resource mobilization strategy, and have a limited delegation of authority, constraining the autonomy and speed of the response. Until recently, the area offices were not involved in the design of project proposals which constrained customized responses. Communication remained a challenge with limited tools for remote management and with ad hoc exchanges and lessons learned across sub-offices.

Current programme team structures are not commensurate with the scope and scale of UNDP initiatives. Parallel activities by different programme teams and overstaffing of some programme units in anticipation of additional funding are impacting efficiency. While some technical positions need international staff support, national staff can considerably reduce operational costs.

**Finding 21.** UNDP has taken measures to strengthen programme management and project oversight systems and processes. This has allowed to regularly monitor progress on projects, ensure quality control and mitigate operational risks. UNDP is yet to streamline multiple streams of monitoring data to strengthen programme oversight, to identify risks for timely action, and improve learning.

UNDP has set up different tools and mechanisms to collect data from the field, monitor projects, and provide oversight of the activities at the local level across Syria, which can be considered a good practice. UNDP should be credited for using measures such as third-party monitoring (TPM) system, internal monitoring and reporting platform,[48] in addition to the field visits by the programme and project managers for oversight of the programme interventions. One of the limitations is that the various monitoring systems used are currently operating in parallel and isolation. Multiple sources of information have not been streamlined, which would increase their utility and facilitate programme management. There is scope to strengthen and integrate them, based on an annual monitoring plan, to systematically collect data from the field in a structured and integrated manner linked to systems to take concurrent action.

UNDP introduced TPM carried out by a company based in Beirut. This system is based on similar experiences of UNDP in Somalia and Iraq, which were intended to help assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact of the projects. An impetus for pursuing TPM is the challenges posed by the situation on the ground and mandatory travel permissions from the authorities for staff to travel.[49] For the TPM, the firm recruited 300 paid youth at the local level and conducted 17 two-day site visits in 2018 and 20 visits in 2019 to verify and monitor the quality of project implementation. The volunteers received a 3-4 day training on project cycle and monitoring techniques. Volunteers do regular spot checks and provide feedback to area managers based on specific report templates. TPM was regularly used to monitor projects in insecure and hard-to-reach areas, and as external feedback on project implementation to identify common trends across projects.

Interviewees pointed out that TRM has allowed a degree of quality control. For example, in rubble clearance and infrastructure projects, it has helped UNDP to identify and address issues with contractors or lack of correct outreach on cash for work activities. It also helped to mitigate operational risks, particularly of fraud and corruption. There are, however, important lessons to consider based on the Syria TPM exercise. First, the rationale for using TPM should be established given the costs involved. While considerable data has been generated from TPM, a systematic concurrent corrective action was lacking. Concurrent corrective response is critical given the short time-frame of the recovery projects. Projects with a large number of beneficiaries need to strengthen complaints/feedback mechanisms for redressal and increased accountability. Second, TPM fulfilled a limited purpose of reporting on process issues and did not measure the quality, which would require another type of assessment.

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[48]    UNDP rolled out an internal monitoring and reporting platform which provides monthly data disaggregated by type of beneficiary, project, grant and location, and includes some interactive dashboards to visualize data. This allows programme managers to track the implementation of projects against planning figures and identify delays. While the platform currently provides quantitative data structured around funding and related information, there is scope to include qualitative indicators to better understand programme monitoring data from different streams.

[49]    It needs to be noted that the UN Volunteer modality cannot be currently deployed in Syria.

# CHAPTER 3

## CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

This evaluation assessed UNDP's contribution to key programme areas and cross-cutting themes for the period 2016 to 2019. Building on the findings set out in the previous chapter, the conclusions presented here focus on broader programme-level contributions and strategic issues pertaining to UNDP's support to recovery and rehabilitation and local resilience in Syria.

The evaluation recognizes that the contextual period since 2016 has been dynamic, varying significantly over the years, and programming decisions by UNDP should be seen in perspective.

The evaluation's conclusions and recommendations address the extent to which UNDP was able to exercise its mandate and the way forward, emphasizing the type of programme support that is needed for institutionalized early recovery and re/development in Syria. In making the conclusions the evaluation recognizes that UNDP programmes were implemented within the framework of the Humanitarian Response Plans and the principles and parameters of UN engagement.

The recommendations take into consideration the evolving context of Syria. Parts of the country are transitioning out of conflict and there is the emphasis at the national level on re/development, while at the same time there are areas still in a conflict that need humanitarian assistance. The evaluation also acknowledges the volatile situation in some of the refugee-hosting countries which call for a focus on return and creation of an environment enabling safe return.

## 3.1   Conclusions

The conclusions presented here focus on the factors affecting UNDP's positioning, its overall contribution in key areas, how UNDP addressed programming principles, and programme management and efficiency.

- **Conclusion 1. UNDP's engagement in Syria was largely confined to early recovery and rehabilitation activities predominantly within an UN humanitarian framework. Multiple constraints for early recovery programming, using** a resilience-based approach, impacted UNDP's positioning and response based on its comparative advantages.

The protracted conflict made Syria regress from medium-income to low-income country status and the country is dealing simultaneously with conflict and re/development, a huge demographic imbalance, brain drain, displacement, and massive destruction requiring large-scale reconstruction of infrastructure and productive assets. The consequences of the crisis in Syria also impacted significantly neighbouring countries and sub-regional trade. While UN is constrained by the continuing conflict, and until agreements can be reached with the Syrian Government on several issues, besides humanitarian assistance, large parts of Syria are also in need of reconstruction and re/development support simultaneously.

- **Conclusion 2. There is currently a disconnect between the narrative on the humanitarian-development nexus and resilience approaches by the UN and donors and its actual practice in Syria. Despite the evolving security and stability on the ground, a strong focus on the humanitarian response remains, with UN agencies largely responding individually to the situation. The acknowledgment of the increased attention and urgency on bridging the humanitarian-development divide has not been translated into a coordinated positioning of the UN, which is constraining UNDP's ability to provide critically-needed development support.**

UNDP's role in Syria was largely confined to humanitarian-related support. Donor and UN restrictions on institutionalized reconstruction and medium-term development work represented

an important challenge for UNDP programming. Responding to the large-scale early recovery and rehabilitation needs, UNDP has managed to walk the tightrope, although it has been challenging to balance its development mandate with the political particularities of humanitarian programming in Syria. Contextual interpretation by key actors varied with significant programming implications. There remain limitations in UNDP's efforts in clarifying what its resilience Syria would entail.

Differing donor interpretations of needs and restrictions on the type of response meant that appropriate programming models and early recovery and resilience approaches that are critical for addressing recovery and development needs were not pursued systematically. UNDP is yet to find an appropriate programme approach that would support rehabilitation, early recovery and development support needs within the framework of the principles and parameters of UN engagement in Syria.

Although UNDP recognized the importance of policy support and capacity development at the national and local level, this could not be pursued, partly due to UN and donor restrictions on formal engagement with national authorities and, to an extent, lack of sufficient corporate commitment on the part of UNDP. This meant that opportunities were lost in addressing policy and institutional challenges, service delivery and local development issues through recovery and rehabilitation support. Social cohesion and community peace did not get the attention it deserved.

Given the ground realities and government expectations, there is a need and opportunity for UNDP to pursue resilience-focused programming. UNDP's role and contribution in Syria depend on how it can balance the multiple demands on its engagement.

- **Conclusion 3. UNDP contribution to the rehabilitation of infrastructure efforts has been important for improving services and** **enabling normalcy. However, the absence of institutionalization of rehabilitation support reduced the level of achievement of programme outcomes.**

UNDP has contributed to the most significant priorities of recovery and rehabilitation in Syria while working under challenging circumstances. UNDP support to the rehabilitation of infrastructure, which is essential for normalization and reconstruction, demonstrated an openness to share lessons and learn from mistakes. Contributions were made to restoration and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and services, which enabled the initial return of some IDPs and refugees from the region. UNDP's infrastructure and basic services rehabilitation efforts contributed to the reactivation of local services (primary education and health services, sewage and water networks, local markets). Debris clearance has been important as it is a prerequisite for infrastructure rehabilitation. Restoration of power plants, grid system repairs, and installation of affordable heating and solar lighting units contributed to efforts towards normalcy in crisis-affected areas. Yet, important challenges remain in the institutionalization of debris removal efforts and some of the infrastructure initiatives for maintenance of the assets.

Solid waste management made urban areas more accessible and liveable; however, the short-term nature of the support is not sustainable. A more comprehensive solution towards waste management is lacking given the humanitarian mode of support. Municipal cost-recovery and the sustainable management of municipal landfills are yet to be addressed. There is potential in area-based programming to ensure better coherence between infrastructure and basic service interventions and local development. Limited engagement with local government institutions and tied donor conditionalities constrained UNDP from applying the humanitarian-development nexus approach and a more transparent and participatory approach towards local development.

Infrastructure rehabilitation efforts are yet to be used to promote social cohesion and peace-building across divided local communities.

Poor attention to conflict sensitivity reduced the possibility of proper identification of infrastructure rehabilitation that would be used for enabling connections between divided communities. While UNDP carried out several context and needs assessments, lack of application of the insights from them in the project design and implementation reduced UNDP's contribution to infrastructure and livelihoods assets rehabilitation.

- **Conclusion 4. Recovery of livelihood assets and employment linkages added to the ongoing efforts towards economic revitalization. Challenges in applying a comprehensive strategy across the portfolio reduced the scope of promoting employment generation and sustainable livelihood models at scale. Livelihood support lacked consolidation and technical depth to go beyond immediate employment needs.**

UNDP support to a range of micro-level employment and livelihood recovery initiatives has contributed to supplementing household income. Cash for work in debris removal and other infrastructure projects provided emergency income to IDPs and host communities; and also indirectly impacted the stabilization of the local economy. Active labour market initiatives such as vocational training, while generating interest, did not enable suitable employment. Finance and market linkages remained a challenge in the sustainability of micro-enterprises. In the area of agriculture, distribution of assets remained small or less productive in the absence of value chain development.

Routine response in humanitarian mode was not appropriate when there are areas where more advanced solutions are needed. When the situation improves in terms of the agreement with the Government on the way forward, there are opportunities for innovation in agricultural

livelihoods, introducing international best practices. Transformative employment and livelihoods need partnerships and private sector engagement, which are yet to be systematically pursued. Employment and livelihood support can benefit from improved market-needs assessment, rather than humanitarian needs-focused assessment. UNDP recognizes that stabilization of livelihoods, medium-term local economic recovery, and inclusive economic growth should be simultaneously pursued, but current efforts do not match this intent.

Youth development and empowerment did not receive the attention it deserves. Syria needed a comprehensive youth strategy, to address the development and empowerment needs of young men and women, to proactively address possible negative coping mechanism. Apart from engaging youth as beneficiaries in the infrastructure projects, UNDP's youth-related support across the portfolio was largely fragmented, wanting an overarching framework. Vocational training and skill development initiatives, while delivering livelihoods skills, did not always result in income generation. In the absence of financial instruments to support start-ups, and lack of linkages with private sector initiatives, the ecosystem needed for youth development was lacking. Given the humanitarian mode of the response, UNDP was not able to address these constraints at the policy level or through new programme tools.

- **Conclusion 5. Area offices played an important role in early recovery and rehabilitation programme implementation and their expansion is a step in the right direction. There is scope for better utilization of this field presence beyond project implementation.**

UNDP demonstrated the capacity to reach communities in crisis-affected areas under government control and implement recovery initiatives in a speedy and timely manner. Field presence is yet to be leveraged for a coherent and customized

response, galvanizing the role of UNDP for conflict-sensitive sustainable reconstruction. As opportunities vary from one location to another, activities must be tailored to a specific context, but customized local responses are evolving. The area-based development approach is still in a conceptual stage and is narrowly interpreted given the constraints in development and reconstruction support and space to work with government authorities at the subnational level.

Further efforts are needed to capitalize on the potential of the area offices as there is currently a mismatch between their potential and the programme. Sustainability remains an issue as UNDP had limited success in leveraging area offices to expand programme scale and depth. Inadequate sharing of lessons among different field offices reduced the transfer of knowledge, and the weak delegation of authority constrained the speed of the response.

● **Conclusion 6. Given decades of development cooperation in Syria, UNDP successfully established partnerships with national and subnational government entities. However, formal programme partnerships could not be pursued, reducing the level of progress towards the outcomes in different areas.**

The restrictions on the extent of development engagement proved detrimental to strengthening partnership with national entities. Compared to other UN agencies, for example, UNICEF, which have MoUs with national government entities, UNDP has been less proactive in establishing partnerships for anchoring its early recovery and rehabilitation support in national/local processes and engaging in key policy areas. This had led to poor institutionalization of the achievements and missed opportunities in strengthening national capacities for better management of recovery and rehabilitation and improving development processes.

While some joint initiatives with UN agencies exist, there is scope for greater collaboration in furthering humanitarian-development nexus approaches. At the local level, there are far greater opportunities for joint UN efforts, beyond ad hoc project-level collaboration in promoting integrated approaches to rehabilitation and development. International early recovery and rehabilitation efforts in Syria lacked coordinated local-level responses and there are untapped opportunities for promoting joint UN area-based local development solutions.

Balancing partnerships with different types of CSOs is critical to prevent monopolization trends and enhance social cohesion interventions. Currently, programme implementation partnerships with CSOs are skewed towards certain FBOs, which limits a broader engagement on social cohesion issues at the local level. UNDP initiatives to strengthen the capacity of CSOs are important but should also seek to address enabling policy issues.

● **Conclusion 7. Not specific to UNDP programming, gender equality and women's participation in the early recovery and rehabilitation efforts lacked a gender lens.**

Women are included as beneficiaries across programme areas, with tangible outputs in some areas, but such measures by themselves will not be sufficient in addressing the significant challenges women encounter. UNDP's approach to gender equality, particularly in a context with major changes in male-female demography and an increase of women-headed households, is yet to be spelled out. On enabling gender-informed employment and livelihood opportunities, income-generation strategies are yet to take into consideration the current predominance of women-headed households, with women taking greater responsibilities in providing for their families. Notwithstanding the cultural constraints in

promoting shifts in livelihood and employment opportunities, stereotyping of productive roles of women remains an issue.

- **Conclusion 8. Programme silos are undermining the coherence of UNDP response, and issues related to efficiency gains in programme management remain. With a new UNDP senior management in place, there are opportunities to address this and measures are already being taken to bring coherence in UNDP response.**

Frequent changes in the country office leadership impacted programme strategy, country office organization, and performance. Programme team structures are oversized for the current scope and scale of initiatives, although UNDP envisaged a larger team in anticipation of an increase in the programme portfolio which had not manifested. The current organization of the programme and management teams is promoting silos or parallel activities with cross-cutting themes outlined as individual areas rather than mainstreamed across initiatives.

Limited synergies between different projects and programme themes are undermining the contribution of UNDP's programme efforts and reducing the possibility of enabling income generation and service delivery programme models. There remain limitations in pursuing social cohesion and community peace as a cross-cutting theme. Efforts are currently underway by UNDP to restrategize and harness its programme structure and develop an area-based local development approach to strengthen synergies between complementary programme areas.

UNDP has developed a 'programme and project management system' for oversight, which in many ways is a best practice. Streamlining multiple sources of monitoring information will further increase the utility of the system and will make it easy to access for programme management and oversight.

## 3.2 Recommendations and management response

An ineffective response to the crisis in Syria can have high costs in terms of negative dividends for the fragile peace and stabilization and promoting negative coping mechanisms among affected communities. Not having an appropriate strategy that would enable a systematic approach to re/development, facilitate responsive processes and strengthen governance can have a huge irreversible impact for a generation of Syrians as well as the development in the subregion. UNDP has an added responsibility of going beyond the humanitarian mode of early recovery and rehabilitation efforts to support capacity development for a well-designed early recovery and re/development of Syria and the safe return of refugees in the neighbouring countries.

The recommendations acknowledge that UNDP operations are guided by the parameters and principles of UN engagement.

## Recommendations and Management Response: UNDP Syria country office

**Recommendation 1:**

**UNDP should start planning on how it can transition to more sustainable development support while it continues to work within the existing programming parameters, seeking to deepen and expand its local community resilience efforts. UNDP should implement a multi-track strategy to address simultaneously areas still in crisis and those which are moving out of conflict.**

UNDP should be proactive in identifying key areas for institutionalized early recovery and resilience for substantive engagement, with emphasis on sustainable employment, strengthened local governance, improved service delivery and local development. Measures should be taken to anchor recovery and rehabilitation work within local government frameworks to strengthen service delivery processes.

For sustainable reconstruction, that is inclusive and helps address some of the root causes of conflict, UNDP must engage with the Government at different levels and establish formal partnerships as other UN agencies have done. The expectations for UNDP support to re/development are high and have to be carefully managed. Unmet expectations could undermine the strategic role UNDP can play in Syria's return to peace and development. UNDP should explore programming arrangements that would uphold its mandate.

**Management Response:**

UNDP takes note of the recommendation. It will continue to apply a resilience-based approach to humanitarian interventions and recovery working through the Early Recovery and Livelihoods Cluster in the HRP and through engagement with the UN Country Team in general. UNDP will further enhance its analytical and knowledge management capacities to offer evidence-based responses and policy choices.

| Key Action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible Unit(s) | Tracking* | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | | Status | Comments |
| 1.1 Focus on local planning capacities for resilience and equitable gender-sensitive essential service delivery.<br>a. Strengthen municipal services and community participation.<br>b. Support country and local workshops on long-term local governance issues, the role of women in LG and evidence-based planning.<br>c. Strengthen technical skills to deliver essential infrastructure services and support early recovery. | 2020-2023 | Social Cohesion and Local Development and Basic Services and Infrastructure portfolios | In progress | Initiated |
| 1.2. Spearhead the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at local level with youth groups and others. | 2020-2023 | Strategic Policy and Planning Unit, with all portfolios | In progress | Initiated |
| 1.3 Review and establish a strategic planning and analysis hub within the office to ensure timely socio-economic and context-sensitivity analysis and evidence underpin the UNDP programme. | December 2020 | Strategic Policy and Planning Unit, with all portfolios | In progress | Initiated |
| 1.4 Expand outreach and dialogue with partners and stakeholders on the importance of scaling up resilience and context-sensitive early recovery programming in support of the most vulnerable and in line with UN parameters and principles. | 2020-2023 | Senior Management, and Strategic Policy and Planning Unit | In progress | |

**Recommendation 2:**

**UNDP should invest in efforts to promote a UN common vision for integrated local resilience to serve as a platform for rehabilitation and institutionalized early recovery that is inclusive and conflict sensitive. UNDP should leverage its area offices to develop a more comprehensive local resilience programme beyond project implementation.**

To bridge humanitarian efforts and local development, UNDP should promote area-based integrated local development solutions in a phased manner to strengthen services and improve sustainable employment and livelihoods. This should be done by engaging key actors, including the Government, UN, and the private sector in providing more holistic solutions. In areas it chooses to support, UNDP should engage substantively as against one-off micro initiatives on a range of themes.

UNDP is well-positioned to provide context-specific programme models for employment and livelihoods. It should put greater emphasis on providing viable programme models for sustainable employment at scale rather than short-term income generation initiatives which target a small group. Routine enterprise development responses that do not address market linkages, access to finance, and linkages to private sector investments are bound to produce limited impact. As UNDP resources will not be sufficient to address the full range of issues, UNDP should use the right set of tools and partnerships while supporting vocational training and enterprise development. UNDP should pursue opportunities for innovation in agricultural livelihoods, drawing on international best practices and partnerships with relevant UN agencies.

When conditions improve, a deliberate approach to service delivery areas such as solid waste management, water management, and energy efficiency should be pursued for strategic engagement. UNDP should develop a phased approach for a national solid waste management strategy, which would re-establish local government waste management in terms of manpower and cost-recovery and gradually increase attention to sustainable waste management practices according to national policy targets. UNDP should also engage in the upcoming national energy strategy and promotion/integration of renewable energy options.

An additional area where UNDP should strategically engage in is the facilitation of private sector engagement. Despite the crisis, there is considerable private sector engagement in Syria, and this will increase in the future. Building on the current initiatives, UNDP should identify appropriate tools and areas for systematically pursuing private sector engagement and development, especially in Aleppo. Social cohesion and community peace efforts should be integrated across programmes at the local level.

| Management Response: | UNDP agrees with this recommendation and has incorporated an area-based development approach to underpin its draft country programme document for 2021-2023 and will promote a UN common vision through pilot initiatives with key UN partners. UNDP will also continue investing to develop programming models that deliver conflict-sensitive early recovery and resilience interventions. |
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| Key Action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible Unit(s) | Tracking | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Status | Comments |
| 2.1 Leveraging its area offices and early recovery coordinators, UNDP will develop area-based strategies and plans to foster community resilience and to tailor integrated programmatic interventions targeting most vulnerable groups of women, youth and PwDs. | 2020-2022 | Strategic Policy and Planning Unit, Management Support Unit and Area Offices and all portfolios | In progress | UNDP has prioritized this in the forthcoming country programme |
| 2.2 Engage in context-specific social cohesion and gender-responsive programme initiatives at the local level to foster peaceful and cohesive communities. | 2020-2022 | Social Cohesion Portfolio | In progress | |
| 2.3 Support local planners to better understand the current context and develop a new phase of the local strategy based on building capacities of related technicians for managing solid waste. | 2020-2022 | Basic Services and Infrastructure portfolio | In progress | Initiated |
| 2.4 Explore and test system-based approaches including through Accelerator Lab that will be a platform for an integrated local development. | 2020-2023 | All portfolios and Accelerator Lab | In progress | Initiated |

## Recommendation 3:

**UNDP should pay specific attention to youth employment. Jointly with other UN agencies, UNDP should take concrete measures to address the gender implications of the crisis in select sectors. The demographic imbalance after the crisis presents a renewed opportunity to further pursue gender equality and women's empowerment at the policy level.**

The crisis further exacerbated gendered social norms, inequalities, and vulnerabilities with an additional challenge of imbalance of male-female ratio and a significant increase in the female-headed households. This situation needs both women-oriented responses as well as gender-informed recovery and reconstruction strategies. This is an area where UNDP contribution will be enhanced with partnerships. While there are ongoing partnerships with UN agencies, further joint efforts are needed for a comprehensive response to address gender- and women-specific issues in early recovery and resilience.

The Syria context also requires a strategic approach to youth development and not merely including youth as beneficiaries in one-off short-duration projects on employment and empowerment. Given the significant role youth play in peacebuilding and development of Syria, UNDP should facilitate systematic youth employment strategies.

## Management Response:

UNDP agrees with the recommendation and will continue to pay special attention to initiatives that aim to provide youth with the skills, tools and opportunities for decent employment, and will pursue the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda by empowering women leaders and targeting young women for entrepreneurship, employment and training opportunities. UNDP will partner with other UN agencies for a comprehensive response.

| Key Action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible Unit(s) | Tracking | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | | Status | Comments |
| 3.1 Establish a network to guide UNDP on social cohesion, gender, community security and cross-sectoral programmatic and advocacy initiatives. | Q1 2021 | Social Cohesion and Local Development portfolio | In progress | Initiated |

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| 3.2 Strengthen the social, civic, and digital engagement of youth and fostering of volunteerism, addressing negative gender dynamics and social cohesion-building. Promote youth as partners rather than beneficiaries. | 2020-2023 | Social Cohesion and Local Development portfolio | In progress | |
| 3.3 Explore and pilot women and youth economic empowerment that will address social, cultural and economic challenges women and youth face, including promoting women and youth as partners for co-designing and integrated approaches. | 2020-2023 | Local Economic Development and Livelihoods portfolio | In progress | |

**Recommendation 4:**

**UNDP should further develop and institutionalize stronger partnerships with other UN agencies in complementary areas of employment and livelihoods, service delivery and women's empowerment.**

Partnerships with UN agencies are critical for the repositioning of UNDP as well as the UN in responding to institutionalized early recovery and resilience programming needs in Syria. UNDP should pursue programme partnerships with UN agencies in complementary areas of employment and livelihoods, service delivery, and cross-cutting issues such as women's empowerment and social cohesion. Partnerships with the UN need to be institutionalized with a clear purpose and targets. The area-based approach in select thematic areas should be pursued with other UN agencies to provide integrated solutions.

An area where concerted joint efforts with the UN are needed is the strengthening of development statistics at the national and subnational levels and needs and market assessments at the subnational level. Building on its ongoing work in this area, UNDP should invest resources in conducting conflict sensitivity and market assessments to enable evidence-based programming in Syria. As there is an increased interest in mainstreaming the SDGs at the national level, UNDP should support efforts towards strengthening development data systems to enable SDG monitoring, an area where joint UN efforts can be more productive. UNDP should consider support to policy analysis and specific assessments such as implications of brain drain.

| Management Response: | A comprehensive area approach is already part of the UNDP mandate in Syria. Partnership with UN agencies is already in place especially in the areas of light rehabilitation of social service infrastructure (for example, water supplies for irrigation purposes, health and education facilities) and climate change resilience. UNDP collaborates with WHO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, FAO and UN-Habitat. These links will be strengthened within the new CPD. |
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| Key Action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible Unit(s) | Tracking | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Status | Comments |
| 4.1 Active participation in UN gender working group and integrate gender and protection issues in UNDP programme. | 2020-2022 | Social Cohesion and Local Development portfolio | In progress | Gender is a cross-cutting issue in the new country programme document where outcomes and outputs are sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive. |
| 4.2 Develop an agreement on a joint initiative with UN agencies to:<br><br>a. Support efforts towards climate change resilience of communities through sustainable and climate-change-resilient integrated natural resources management. | 2020-2023 | Basic Services and Infrastructure portfolio | Initiated | Initiated in collaboration with UN agencies in the area of water infrastructure rehabilitation |
| b. Provide support to respond to the urgent community need for water resources for irrigation. | 2020-2022 | Basic Services and Infrastructure portfolio | Initiated | |
| 4.3 Promote complementarity between UN agencies in rehabilitation activities considering the mandate and added value of each to support outcome achievement. | 2020-2022 | Basic Services and Infrastructure portfolio | In progress | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4.4 Leverage UNDP's technical leadership in the socio-economic response to COVID-19 and its lead of the socio-economic outcome under the UN Strategic Framework to facilitate joint initiatives. | 2020-2021 | Local Economic Development and Livelihoods portfolio | In progress | |
| 4.5 Elaborate specific area based interventions with UN agencies based on joint assessments and analysis, including UNHCR, UNICEF and UNFPA. | 2021-2022 | All portfolios and Area Offices | Initiated | |

**Recommendation 5:**

**UNDP should ensure conflict sensitivity and gender analysis inform programme interventions. Further emphasis should be given to strengthening the programme and management efficiencies.**

Currently, needs analysis is carried out with a humanitarian response goal. For sustainable employment, livelihoods and inclusive service delivery, broader needs and market assessments are required. In addition, conflict sensitivity and gender analysis should inform UNDP programme interventions. With the change in the country's demography, the importance of gender analysis in programming should be emphasized.

UNDP should also strengthen linkages between and within programme areas as parallel interventions on similar themes are undermining UNDP's contributions. It would be important to revisit programme team structures for greater efficiency gains and consolidate programme team structures and themes to strengthen UNDP's response and contribution. UNDP should identify key integrator elements that will be catalytic for institutionalized early recovery and resilience.

UNDP has made a considerable investment in developing a monitoring system with different streams of data, including an online data portal. Attention should be paid to streamline multiple sources of data into one online database system to reduce redundancies and for effective use of this data for programme management and oversight and for sharing lessons.

**Management Response:**

UNDP agrees with the recommendation. During the current country programme period, UNDP has carried out several conflict sensitivity and market assessments. UNDP will undertake further assessments and put in place mechanisms to apply conflict sensitivity and market analysis in the design and implementation of the UNDP programme. UNDP has also prioritized gender-sensitivity analysis in programme formulation and implementation. Measures are already being taken to review internal structures and processes to strengthen programme and management efficiencies.

| Key Action(s) | Time-frame | Responsible Unit(s) | Tracking | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Status | Comments |
| 5.1 Adopt a multi-goal and multi-disciplinary planning approach to support gender mainstreaming, capacity-building initiatives, and information by:<br>a. Developing minimum gender standards<br>b. Conducting training/ orientation session to enhance gender-related capacity in programme design, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring<br>c. Conducting a study and analysis on the impact of the Syrian crisis on the gender dynamics and the situation of most vulnerable groups of women, adolescents, girls, female youth to guide gender evidence-based programming and responses. | June 2021 | Social Cohesion and Local Development portfolio | Initiated | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5.2 Continue conducting and updating local context analysis and thematic conflict analysis to inform current and future programme interventions and engage UN and partners in analysis and advocacy. | 2020-2023 | Strategic Policy and Planning Unit | Initiated | |
| 5.3 Adopt a context-sensitive approach into all programme interventions to minimize their potential negative impacts on the context through a do-no-harm approach and maximize positive impact to alleviate tensions and increase efficiency of the response. | 2020-2023 | Strategic Policy and Planning Unit | Initiated | |
| 5.4 Undertake a review of programme support functions and processes and implement recommendations in order to ensure alignment and synergies that promote programme and management efficiencies. | December 2020 | Senior Management | In progress | |
| 5.5 Continue facilitating coordination for market assessments as the lead in socio-economic recovery outcome under the UN Strategic Framework to facilitate joint initiatives. | 2020-2023 | Local Economic Development and Livelihoods portfolio | In progress | |

* 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 Independent Evaluation Office at: https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12288

**Annex 1.** Terms of reference

**Annex 2.** Country office at a glance

**Annex 3.** People consulted

**Annex 4.** Documents consulted

**Annex 5.** Status of country programme indicators

**Annex 6.** Project list