



RBAS Regional Programme  
**Mid-Term Review of the Regional Programme  
for Arab States (2022-2025)**

**Final Report**



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## Acknowledgements

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A total of 41 people shared their time and experiences during interviews, and additional 62 people participated in focus group discussions and workshops. I am grateful for their inputs. Finally, the present report could not have been finalized without the critical and competent feedback on draft versions. I am grateful for the commitment of all those colleagues who commented and contributed to preparing UNDP's Regional Programme for Arab States for the challenges of the future.

Programme Information		
<b>Programme title</b>	Regional programme document for Arab States (2022-2025)	
<b>Corporate outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Outcome 1: Poverty and inequality reduced through enhanced regional cooperation</li> <li>2- Outcome 2: Governance accountability increased to foster more resilient communities</li> <li>3- Outcome 3: Impact of climate change reduced, sound water management promoted, and access to sustainable energy improved</li> <li>4- Outcome 4: Women and youth empowered for a more inclusive and sustainable future</li> </ul>	
<b>Region</b>	Arab States region	
<b>Date RD signature</b>	January 2022	
<b>Programme dates</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>Planned end</b>
	01 January 2022	31 December 2025
<b>Programme budget</b>	US\$ 33,078,600 (initially planned budget)	
<b>Programme expenditure</b>	US\$ 26,130,079 (for 2022 / 2023, updated in February 2024)	
<b>Funding source</b>	Multiple donors, including CIDA, France, AYC, TBHF, Sida, KOICA, EU, TRAC, MBRF, DEN and UNDP	
<b>Implementing party</b>	UNDP	

Mid-Term Review information		
<b>Review Subject</b>	Regional programme document (RPD) for Arab States (2022-2025)	
<b>Scope</b>	Regional projects that fall under the RPD	
<b>Type</b>	Mid-term Review	
<b>Period under review</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>
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## Acronyms

ACIAC	Regional Project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in the Arab Countries
AHDR	Arab Human Development Report
AKP	Arab Knowledge Project
BPPS	UNDP Bureau for Programme and Policy Support
CB	Crisis Bureau
CGIAR	Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers
CO	Country Office
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ERP	Enterprise Resources Planning System
EU	European Union
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GEN3	Gender Marker Level 3
GPN	UNDP Global Policy Network
GSSC	UNDP Global Shared Services Center
ICESCO	Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
INJAZ	Jordanian NGO supporting Youth Employment and Inclusion
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
LAS	League of Arab States
LNOB	Leave No One Behind Principle
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MADAD	EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis
MBRF	Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSU	Management Support Unit
MTR	Mid-term Review
OC	Outcome
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
PDIA	Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation methodology
PESTEL	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environment
PIP	Project Initiation Plan
PSU	Programme Support Unit
RBAS	UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States
RBM	Results-Based Management
RD	Regional Director
ROAR	UNDP Results-Oriented Annual Report
RP	Regional Programme
RPD	Regional Programme Document
RRF	Results and Resources Framework
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDG CF	Sustainable Development Goals Climate Facility
SMEs	Small and Medium-size Enterprises
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SRF	UNDP Syrian Response Facility

ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNCAC	United National Convention Against Corruption
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDP GRES	UNDP Gender Results Effectiveness Scale
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

## Executive Summary

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The purpose of this independent Mid-term Review (MTR) was to assess the ability of the UNDP Regional Programme for Arab States (RP) to deliver on its vision captured in the Regional Programme Document 2022-2025 (RPD) and to ensure continuous relevance in the volatile environment in the region. The methodology of the Midterm Review is based on the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria and UNDP evaluation guidelines from June 2021. It has been additionally designed to maintain a practical, forward-looking character while considering dynamic programme management principles required for successful RP implementation in the given operating context. In addition to the review and analysis of various RP related documents, the MTR findings are based on a series of 41 interviews, 6 focus group discussions, as well as 2 strategic workshops at the beginning and towards the end of the review process. In total, over 100 people were involved in discussions on achievements to date, lessons, and the way forward for the RP.

### Key findings

The current RBAS Regional Programme has the potential to make a lasting difference in the region. Preliminary contributions, after 2 years of implementation, to higher-level results by the RP are promising and show the potential of sustainability, while there is space for improvements in terms of dynamic programme management, RP governance structures and capacities as well as and project level implementation strategies in view of results sustainability.

While the RP will likely only be able deliver on 50% of its outcome level targets, the current outcome trajectory can nevertheless be considered as adequate. Notably, the RP has managed to introduce and launch a regional climate security agenda, including country-level follow-up. RP interventions are also contributing to addressing the regional knowledge and digital divide, the programme has facilitated the establishment of a nascent yet functional network of conflict mediators in the region, and interventions are gradually introducing transparency and anti-corruption measures in public offices across the region. While some of the RP interventions are drawing on progress made during earlier RP cycles, as it should be, the contributions of the present RP are highly relevant and commendable.

In fact, relevance and coherence of the RP 2022-2025 can be overall confirmed with some reservations. The programme is based on a comprehensive review of regional challenges and opportunities as well as lessons from the previous programme cycles. Moreover, the RP vision as expressed in the RPD, is anchored in the regional SDG agenda and aligned to UNDP's corporate strategic plan and its six signature solutions. While the RP vision is comprehensive, however, its outcome structure and its theory of change - while well developed - remain general and high-level. This lack of specificity leads to a disconnect between RP outcomes and outputs, as well as between outputs and output indicators. The latter are therefore not sufficient to measure progress against results.

The RPD has been translated into a relatively balanced set of projects and has allowed to achieve a number of remarkable results. However, funding gaps challenge the implementation of the overall RP vision and should be addressed swiftly. Programme complementarity and support to country programme interventions has been confirmed in discussions with country offices, who see overall alignment with country-level needs. At the same time, more frequent RP-CO interaction at strategic / coordination level would be beneficial for programme effectiveness, in especially country-level follow-up on achievements. This should also include more transparency with regards to RP resources allocation as well as clarity in terms of rules of engagement between RP and country offices.

RP effectiveness to date is overall promising but requires some adjustments to ensure results achievement. Progress against output indicator targets is by-and-large on track. Key contributing factors for results progress to date were adequate funding, solid implementation structures and alignment with regional, country-level and donor priorities. Across RP projects, beneficiaries have welcomed the pro-active support received from RP project teams and highlighted the responsiveness of project focal points. The caveat remains, however, that even full indicator target

achievement will likely not translate into output achievement due to the disconnect between output targets and outputs. In addition, larger financial investments are necessary to ensure overall RP effectiveness. Ideally, country offices would also more systematically follow up on initial investments of the RP and use pilot activities for resources mobilization at their level.

Principles for programme implementation including gender mainstreaming, “Leave No-One Behind” (LNOB), and conflict sensitivity are key elements of the RP vision as expressed in the RPD and its ToC. They are being integrated in RP project implementation strategies but should overall be more systematized. Pragmatic, but solid integration of gender considerations, especially through the systematic targeting of women across programme activities, can be confirmed and must be commended. With regards to the LNOB principle, this is being considered across programme activities but in the absence of RP-level guidance every project has defined its own approach. When it comes to conflict sensitivity, finally, project stakeholders expressed their concern that key activities were implemented without the guidance of an adequate, updated conflict analysis. Indeed, the MTR has found little evidence of continuous conflict and political economy analysis guiding programme and / or project implementation.

Due consideration has been given to context volatility and the need for adaptation in the RPD, but the application of adaptive (or: dynamic) management practices has for the time being been limited to RP general risk management. In fact, the RP would benefit from continuous, learning-informed prioritization and adaptation through stronger cross-sectoral work between GPN teams as well as through strategic partner engagement. More systematic, strategic engagement of, and exchanges between RP partners would have also enhanced programme and project-level relevancy and effectiveness. RP coordination is well aware of this, and efforts are ongoing to introduce more dynamic, adaptive programme management. Among others, this aspect was specifically integrated in the MTR TOR and RP coordination and the RBAS innovation teams are currently jointly developing a highly promising approach.

RP efficiency to date is adequate despite financial, procedural and capacity-related bottlenecks. RP project-level implementation over-all is on-track and partners and beneficiaries welcome the proactive RP management approach. Notably, dedicated and adequately capacitated project management structures have proven effective to drive implementation, while there is room for improvements of the technical quality assurance and learning function. Yet, some serious implementation-related delays happened, due to a combination of external, corporate, and RP-internal factors.

While RP staff capacities are overall adequate, there are gap areas critical for RP positioning and sustainability including RP-internal knowledge management, data & information management, partnerships management, communications, and resources mobilization support. Additionally, processes require clarifications internally and externally, and RP implementation support arrangements need to be adjusted.

Arrangements in place to for substantive quality assurance of the Regional Programme through effective linkages to the GPN advisory teams of the Amman Hub are only partially working and should be strengthened.

More attention should also be given to strategic engagement with donors and regional institutions beyond the project level, and to communication and resource mobilization, in exchange with the RBAS partnership team and country offices. The RP pipeline is well developed, but currently available resources for 2024 and 2025 are tight and require a major resources mobilization effort to ensure overall RP sustainability.

## Conclusions

The current RBAS Regional Programme has the potential to make a lasting difference in the region. Preliminary contributions, after 2 years of implementation, to higher-level results by the RP are promising and show the potential of sustainability, while there is space for improvements in terms of dynamic programme management, RP governance structures and capacities as well as project level



implementation strategies in view of results sustainability. Regional programme relevance and coherence can be confirmed with some limitations. RP effectiveness to date is overall promising but requires some adjustments to ensure results achievement. RP efficiency to date is adequate, but financial, procedural, and capacity-related bottlenecks constitute limiting factors. In terms of its impact, the Regional Programme has in the past two years made promising contributions to higher-level change in the region. It will likely only be able deliver on 50% of its outcome level targets. Nevertheless, the current outcome trajectory should be considered as adequate. Overall, the MTR therefore concludes that the Regional Programme implementation progress across review criteria is satisfactory, with opportunities for improvements.

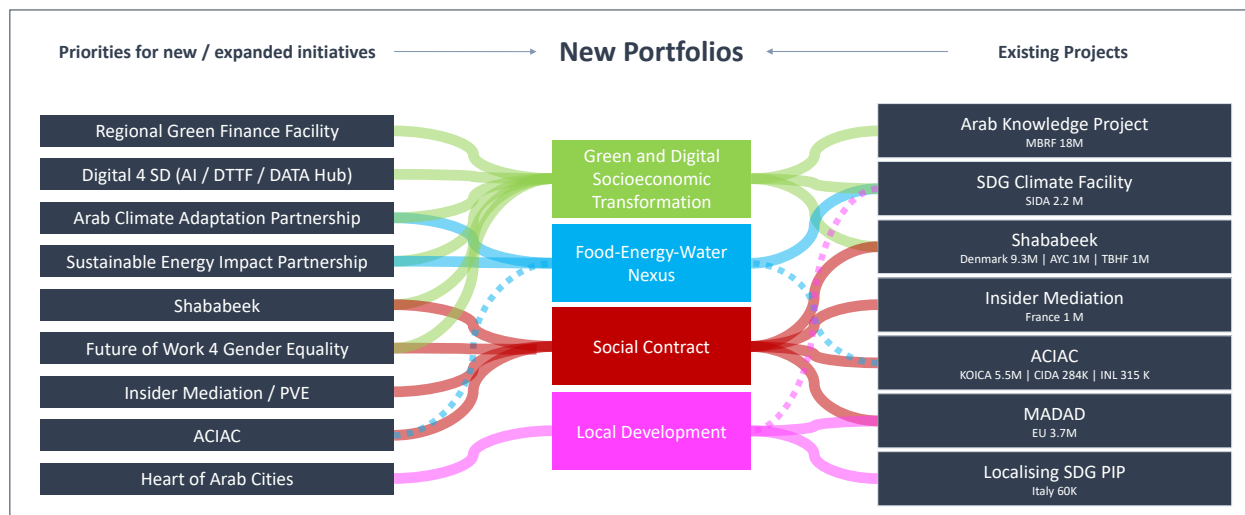
*Textbox 1: Overview of main conclusions of the MTR process*

- Where RP initiatives were integrated into country office activities, the RP has managed to produce remarkable results. In fact, continuous exchanges between RP coordination, RP projects and country offices throughout the programme implementation cycle in some thematic areas greatly contributed to effectiveness.
- A more specific and less siloed outcome structure would have further increased programme relevance and effectiveness. This would also ensure RRF coherence by strengthening the relationship between output targets and outputs.
- Capacity constraints due to implementation support inefficiencies and management of project-level bottlenecks have limited the engagement of RP coordination in strategic (dynamic, adaptive) portfolio management, including the identification and continuous calibration of priorities.
- Project-level implementation improves where the sustainability of results guides the choice of implementation practices, such as the selection of beneficiaries. Projects should purposefully move away from attempting to demonstrate immediate impact and adopt a longer-term implementation horizon. This will require discussions and agreement with relevant donors. In fact, donors do understand the benefits of a longer-term implementation framework and are open to discussions.
- Partners and beneficiaries are asking to be more involved in strategic programming questions. This is an opportunity to strengthen the “red threat” of the programme and involve them in dynamic portfolio management.
- Since strategic risk management is closely linked to dynamic (adaptive) portfolio management, strengthening the latter will automatically enhance the former, and thus programme effectiveness.
- Where substantive quality assurance and support through GPN teams was systematized, such as between the SDG Climate Facility and the GPN Environment team, project implementation has benefitted. Moreover, given that the RP is operating in a region of rising tensions and conflict, the strengthened conflict sensitivity, and the systematic use of conflict analysis, will be critical.
- Unsurprisingly, adequate project capacities and clarity with regards to process requirements and steps are critical for efficient implementation. Where projects encountered capacity bottlenecks due to staff departures or insufficient staffing, implementation suffered.

## Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the MTR proposes a set of five overall recommendations for the way forward. First, it is recommended to gradually introduce the newly emerging vision and portfolios. The two MTR workshops have generated four new priority areas, which should inform the revision of the RP outcome structure, facilitate dynamic / adaptive portfolio management, and guide the development of new RP initiatives. The four areas are: the Green and Digital Socio-Economic Transformation, the Food-Energy-Water Nexus, the Social Contract, and Local Development. Ongoing projects can contribute to these priority areas (portfolios) as shown below, and a number of new or expanded initiatives should address existing gaps. Existing workplans need to be adjusted to the new RP vision and strategic priorities expressed in the 4 statements of intent. The MTR

recognizes that this will require a gradual process. Yet, the annual planning process 2024 is an opportunity to trigger and drive this alignment.



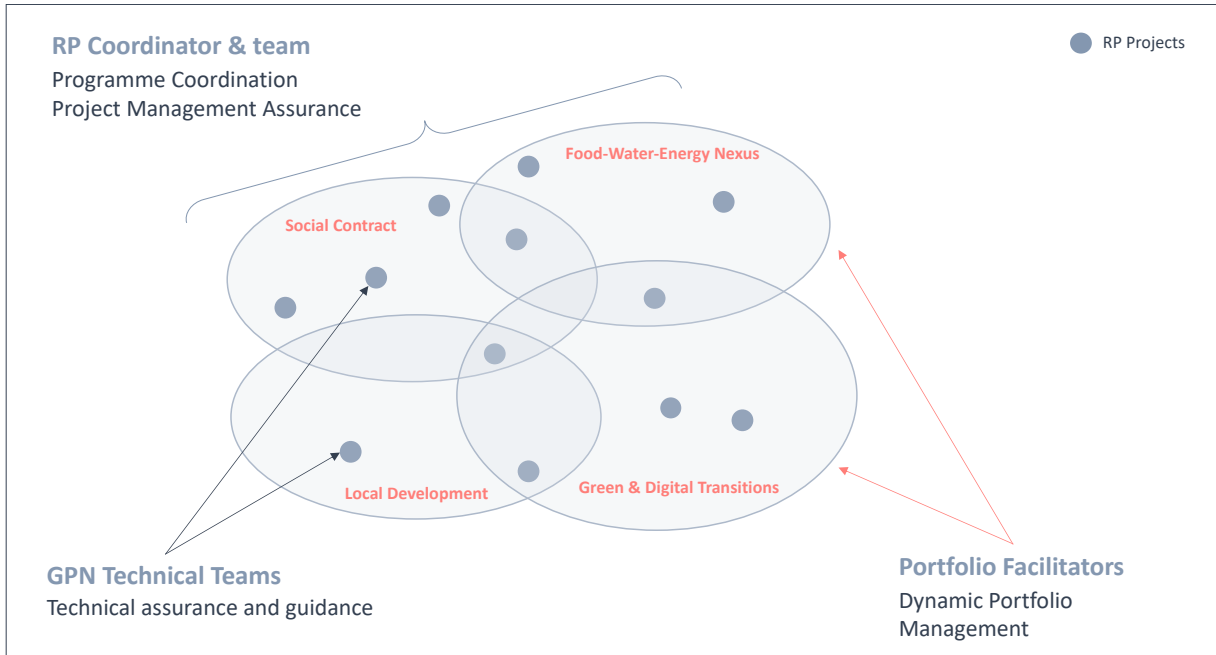
Secondly, and together with changes of the programmatic structure, it is recommended to adjust the RP governance and implementation arrangements, as shown in the below figure. While arrangements for project management assurance and strategic coordination are adequate assuming that identified capacities will be strengthened as per the recommendations of the separate report “Review of required capacities to support programme implementation” from April 2023, technical assurance arrangements require strengthening.<sup>1</sup> The MTR recommends the establishment of secondary, technical reporting lines for project or project component managers where these are unambiguous. Where there is ambiguity, the reporting line would be to the closest/most dominant thematic area. In addition, the MTR recommends that GPN team leaders establish technical working groups or pools in areas that are not adequately covered by the 4 new portfolios, including gender, and in which technical RP staff should actively participate.

Thirdly, the MTR proposes the introduction of dynamic (or: adaptive) portfolio management as part of the RP management arrangements. Based on experiences in various UNDP business units, it is proposed to do this in a gradual and pragmatic way. It is suggested that a facilitator is designated for each of the 4 new portfolios, ideally a GPN team leader most closely related from a technical point of view. The task of the facilitator will be to establish linkages between projects contributing to the common portfolio intent and to facilitate the continuous learning and knowledge distillation process leading to strategic adaptations of the portfolio, including RP projects, GPN staff and partners contributing to the thematic portfolio.

This will also require investments in the capacities of RP staff in terms of the “how” of experimentation, dynamic M&E and learning from implementation and to create a dedicated support capacity. This capacity should draw on available new technology, including artificial intelligence, to continuously generate and analyze contextual and thematic information feeding into the dynamic portfolio management process.

Fourthly, the use of key programming principles should be systematized across RP projects to enhance results sustainability. This includes the systematic use of conflict analysis to inform decisions at programme and project level, the systematic consideration of “change potential” and “results sustainability” and the LNOB-principle to guide choices including the selection of beneficiaries of RP projects, as well as progressive gender integration including the dedication of 15% of the budget for GEN3 outputs, in line with the global UNDP policy.

<sup>1</sup> Among others, the report recommends the strengthening of communication and partnership capacities, through the establishment of a dedicated position.



Fifthly, there is a need to strengthen real-time, up-to-date internal and external communication and strategic partner engagement. The UNDP’s regional programme, i.e., its initiatives, achievements and knowledge products are representing UNDP’s “DNA” in the region and should be widely known and understood. Among others, the RP website needs to be continuously updated. As part of more pro-active communication, there also is an opportunity to strengthen existing and create new partnerships through a continuous vision-driven engagement process. It is therefore proposed that donors and relevant technical partners be involved in dynamic portfolio management, thus also being at the core of discussing and possibly funding new opportunities as they are identified.

A more **detailed discussion of recommendations** can be found in the recommendations section of the strategic outlook chapter and the proposed **action plan** in annex 7.



## Introduction

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### Context

The RBAS Regional Programme is an important vehicle to implement regional initiatives, establish regional platforms and networks, produce and exchange regional knowledge, engage regional institutions, and provide additional substantive capacities contributing to UNDP's Global Policy Network in support of country offices. As stated in the final evaluation of outcome 2 of the previous RP cycle conducted in June 2021,

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*“the primary value added by a regional programmes has been through: (a) facilitating regional networking and dialogue on regional issues and matters which are sensitive to be raised directly at country level; (b) research and knowledge development, exchange, sharing and learning within the region; (c) introducing innovative methods and international standards in programming; (d) bringing about a coherence in approach among various countries to addressing some of the globally complex issues and priorities like SDGs, anti-corruption, violent extremism, etc; and (e) advocacy on sensitive issues by mobilizing regional institutions and networks.”<sup>2</sup>*

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The RP is based on a dedicated programme document, which encompasses all RBAS regional programming (projects, PIPs, and other initiatives). The current RPD was approved by the UNDP Executive Board in February 2022 and covers the period 2022-2025. It defines a set of results and interventions in 4 areas:

- Poverty and inequality reduced through enhanced regional cooperation.
- Governance accountability increased to foster more resilient communities.
- Impact of climate change reduced, sound water management promoted, and access to sustainable energy improved.
- Women and youth empowered for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

The RP is implemented under the overall strategic guidance of the Regional Director and managed on a day-to-day basis by the Amman Regional Hub, specifically the Hub Manager and Regional Programme Coordinator. A dedicated Management Support Unit (MSU) performs RBM and financial oversight functions and a Project Support Unit (PSU) provides day-to-day implementation support to regional projects. The structure stems from the period before 2014, when the programme was implemented by UNOPS, with some adjustments during the transition to direct implementation by UNDP.

The programme volume for the period 2022-2025 amounts to a total of \$14.8 million regular resources and prospective \$103 million of other resources, including current hard and soft pipelines. Programme delivery stood at \$13.5 million in 2021, \$13 million in 2022 and \$16.8 million in 2023.

## Scope and Methodology

### Purpose

According to the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the review its objective is to “assess the ability of the RP, in terms of focus and resources, to be scaled up to the envisaged ambition and to adjust to the volatile environment in order to contribute across its four outcomes.” As such, the MTR intends to guide RBAS Senior Management, RP coordination and RP project managers in adjusting as required the RP after 2 years of implementation.

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<sup>2</sup> Abhijit Bhattacharjee, Independent Consultant, July 2021: “Final Evaluation of Outcome 2 of the Regional Programme Document for Arab States (2018-2021)”.

As part of the process, the review was requested to assess the Theory of Change (ToC) and recommend adjustments in view of the evolving context; review the fitness for purpose of the current regional programme to scale results against the outcomes, including partnership strategies and resource mobilization; and assess progress against effectiveness of the results framework, the relevance of output indicators and corresponding baseline, milestone, and target values. Moreover, the terms of reference of the review foresaw the design and organization of a strategic adaptation and future-scoping workshop involving UNDP RP and GPN staff. The workshop was expected to inform possible changes to outcomes and outputs, as well as of the overall implementation strategy.

In general, the review was collaborative and consultative in nature, drawing on the knowledge and experience of a broad range of internal and external stakeholders. It has attempted to facilitate a judgement-free environment for UNDP colleagues of all seniority levels at regional, RP and CO levels to engage and share their insights.

Specifically, the following principles guided the review:

- **Impartiality:** The review will operate in an impartial and unbiased manner and give a balanced presentation of the strengths and weaknesses of the RP.
- **Confidentiality:** The review will respect people’s right to provide information in confidence and make participants aware of the scope and limits of confidentiality, while ensuring that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source.
- **Transparency:** All RP stakeholders will be informed about objectives, methodology, activities and results of the review.
- **Applicability:** Findings and conclusions will be drawn in a way that will generate applicable, practical lessons learned and recommendations.
- **Future Orientation:** The overall orientation of the review is to inform decision-making on the way forward for the RP during the second part of the current cycle and beyond.

## **Approach and Analytical Framework**

The MTR is mainly based on the contribution analysis method. However, it additionally uses elements of the outcome mapping, most significant change, systems dynamics and participatory evaluation approaches to corroborate findings and calibrate recommendations. Specifically, the different methods informed the development of the analytical framework as well as the design of the two workshops conducted as part of the MTR.

Overall, the MTR has followed the scope and methodological guidance outlined in the terms of reference. However, at the request of the Regional Director, the MTR has also facilitated an RBAS visioning process on the newly emerging RBAS vision and related RP programmatic adjustments. See annexes 4 and 5 for more information in this regard.

For the qualitative analysis, information was collected against the different sections of the below outlined analytical framework (see also annex 2), and subsequently cross-checked in follow-up discussions. The quantitative analysis focusing on progress against indicator targets and financial delivery was used to further corroborate emerging findings.

With regards to the review of the integration and use of LNOB, Gender and Conflict Sensitivity principles, the review and analysis of key programming documents (work plans, RRF, reports) and targeted discussions with managers and beneficiaries were the main information sources. A dedicated gender impact analysis using the UNDP GRES methodology, beyond the scope of the MTR, is recommended as follow-up action to be conducted by the Amman-based GPN Gender team.

In terms of data availability and access to staff and beneficiaries, the MTR has not encountered any major difficulty despite the significant regional events including the escalation of the Gaza conflict that happened end of 2023 and beginning of 2024.

The analytical framework of the MTR was based on the six OECD-DAC evaluation criteria as revised in 2019, as well as the UNDP evaluation guidelines as revised in June 2021. It has been designed to

emphasize a practical, forward-looking character and to consider as adequate adaptive management principles in light of the highly volatile operating context of the region.

As such, the review framework was structured into four analytical clusters:

### Relevance and coherence

- **Main question:** To what extent is the current regional programme vision and ToC in line with the evolving regional development priorities and complementary to ongoing CO work?
- **Aspects considered:** Vision and strategic adaptation, theory of change, RP governance, RP contributions to UNDP country programmes.

### Effectiveness

- **Main question:** To what extent has UNDP contributed to results relevant at regional level? Were the principles of LNOB and gender mainstreaming integrated in RP programming?
- **Aspects considered:** Results progress, target group reach, strategic enablers, partnerships.

### Efficiency

- **Main question:** To what extent has the RP been effectively implemented, and was the RP management structure used efficient to ensure good use of resources and to generate the expected results?
- **Aspects considered:** Management arrangements, RP capacities, resources, Monitoring and Evaluation systems.

### Impact

- **Main question:** What difference is the RP making? To what extent can the RP be expected to generate significant positive or negative higher-level change?
- **Aspects considered:** Initial indications for impact, risk management.

### Sustainability

- **Main question:** Will the change last? Are there already at this stage indications that the region and / or its countries will benefit from RP interventions in the longer-term?
- **Aspects considered:** Initial indications for lasting change.

For details including the guiding questions used, key informants, and data sources, please refer to annex 2 and 3.

## Approach to data collection

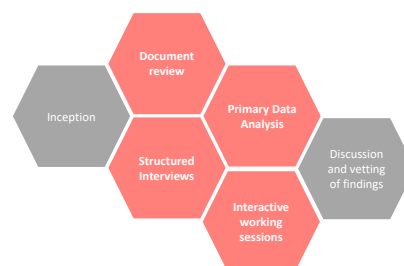
The review has used the following four tools:

- a detailed document review,
- structured interviews,
- interactive working session, and
- primary data analysis.

Discussions and methodological adjustments during the MTR process ensured relevancy of findings and applicability of recommendations.

A **comprehensive set of documents** has been made available by RBAS and RP coordination, serving two purposes: As primary sources for analysis (project outputs, products, M&E updates, delivery data, etc.), and secondly as meta sources to better understand the RP, its context, and

Figure 1: Overview data collection and review tools



priorities as well as issues and recommendations identified in earlier analysis. Documents reviewed include:

Document	Type	Year(s)
UNDP Strategic Plan (2022-2025)	General/Global	2022-2025
Regional Programme Document (2022-2025)	RP / General	2022-2025
RP Results Oriented Annual Report (ROAR)	RP / General	2022
Regional Programme - Overview & Achievements	RP / General	2022-2023
Project Documents	Project Specific	As per the start of each project
Progress Reports (Annual)	Project Specific	2022
RBAS Vision and Programmatic Offer	RBAS / General	2023
Project Board Meetings	Project Specific	2022/3
RPD Theory of Change	RP / General	2022-2025
Draft Regional Gender Strategy	GPN Gender Team	2024
Project Workplans	Project Specific	2022/3
Financial Monitoring Reports	RP / General	2022/2023
Annual Work Plans/Project Initiation Plans	Project Specific	2022 and 2023
Regional Programme - Results Monitoring Framework	Regional	2022
Regional Programme - Financial Monitoring Reports	Regional	2022 and 2023
AEISD Final Project Evaluation Report	Project Specific (AEISD)	2020
List of Potential Stakeholders	Reference	2022-2023

**Structured interviews and discussions** were conducted with 38 stakeholders (see list in annex 7). The purpose of these discussions was to capture the knowledge and experience of colleagues involved in RP implementation, to generate information in view of specific analytical questions (see annex 3) and to delve deeper into subjects identified during preliminary document review.

The below table provides an overview of the category and number of people that were interviewed during the analytical phase of the engagement.

Category	Number of stakeholders interviewed
RBAS Leadership	3
RBAS GPN Teams	11
Country Offices	4
RP Project Managers	5
RP Coordination	1
RBAS Strategic Support	4
RP Project Partners & Beneficiaries	8
UN Sister Agencies	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>

The interviews focused on specific aspects for the review, depending on the function / category of the interviewee. Please refer to annex 3 for more details on the interview structure.

**Two workshops and six focus groups** attempted to draw on collective knowledge of colleagues, ensuring that a range of different perspectives and experiences were considered. Notably, the following sessions are held:

- Focus Group RP Communications
- Focus Group RP Monitoring & Evaluation
- Focus Group RP Financial Sustainability
- Focus Group RP Management Modalities
- Focus Group RP CO linkages and engagement
- Focus Group RP Programming Principles (Gender, LNOB, Conflict sensitivity)
  
- Workshop I (RP and GPN staff): RP Visioning and Strategic Adaptation
- Workshop II (RP and GPN Staff): MTR recommendations & portfolio consolidation

All focus group discussions and workshops were conducted in-situ in Amman / Jordan and the Dead Sea.

**Primary data analysis** has focused on the following areas complementing interviews and discussions,:

- RP delivery & financial sustainability
- RP (knowledge) products
- RP indicator progress data

**Two additional tools** developed in collaboration with stakeholders were used to support the analysis and visioning process:

- Financial and Pipeline analysis
- Visioning and future-scaping exercise

### Process Overview

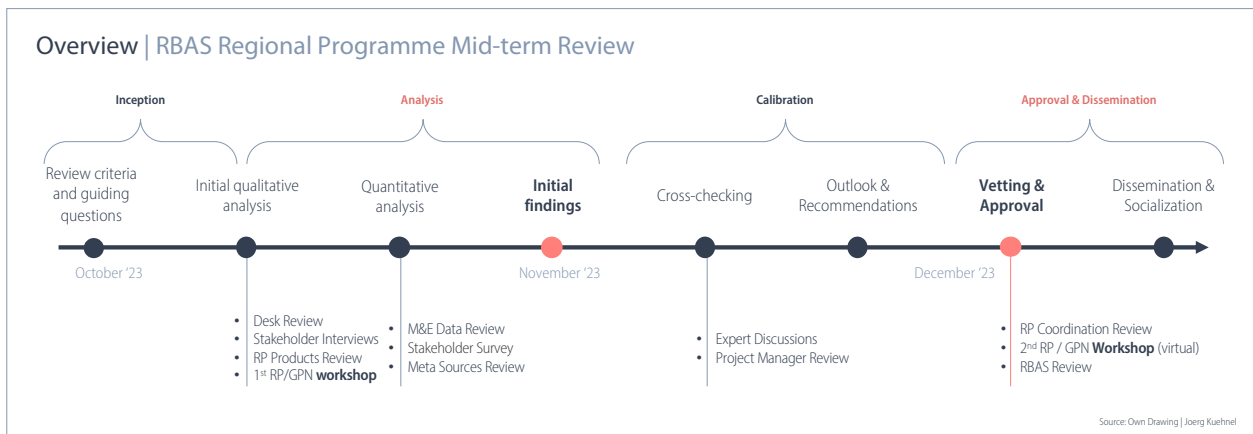
The review was structured in **4 phases**. The inception phase entailed an initial desk review, initial stakeholder discussions and the development of the inception report (including a detailed planning of the interactive phase).

The second, analytical phase included the complete review of documentation, the review of RP products, initial focus group discussions and the first visioning & strategic workshop.

Stakeholder interviews and additional focus group discussions were conducted during phase 3 (“calibration”), upon the development of initial findings, to calibrate conclusions and to formulate viable recommendations.

The final phase including final discussions and the second workshop were used to review and vet findings and recommendations.

Figure 2: Assignment phases (see annex 1 for larger version)





## RP overview

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### RP Results structure

The Regional programme is implemented under the overall supervision of the Bureau Director and addresses UNDP's regional priorities, in alignment with UNDP Strategic Plan. The results framework, intervention strategy and implementation arrangements of the RBAS Regional Programme are defined in the Regional Programme Document (RPD), submitted for the approval of the Executive Board of UNDP every four years. A separate document details the RP theory of change.

The RPD 2022-2025 is structured into 4 outcomes aligned to the 6 signature solutions of the UNDP Strategic Plan (see figure 1). Through its interventions it is aiming to:

1. Advancing regional cooperation and policy dialogue on pro-poor, inclusive and sustainable growth.
2. Promote accountable institutions for inclusive governance by strengthening capacities to respond to protracted crises, curb poverty and inequality, and sustainably manage natural resources.
3. Spearhead sustainable solutions supporting a transition to climate resilient, sustainable energy pathways, and the sound management of ecosystems and scarce water resources.
4. Launch targeted initiatives on women and youth, ensuring the inclusion of both populations in the achievement of the SDGs.

Within each of the outcome areas, the RPD proposes a wide range of possible interventions thereby offering flexibility to shape and adjust the programme in view of continuously evolving realities and needs of the region.

The day-to-day management and oversight of implementation of the regional programme is delegated to the Amman Regional Hub (Hub Manager and Regional Programme Coordinator). The Regional Programme management support function consists of a Management Support Unit (MSU) performing RBM and financial oversight functions and hosting a Project Support Unit (PSU) providing day-to-day implementation support to regional projects. Linkages of RP projects to the hub-based GPN teams such as a technical support and oversight are currently no systematized.

The relationship between the RP and country offices in the region is mainly based on the interaction between RP projects and their in-country interventions and / or RP technical and financial support to CO interventions. At the strategic level, the Amman Regional Hub reaches out to country offices to discuss support needs and changes, also with regards to the Regional Programme through a regular survey as well as during compact discussions with each CO.

### Key Stakeholders

In view of its regional character and its intent to complement country office programming, the RP has both regional and national stakeholders. The regional level, the two regional institutions of the League of Arab States and ICESCO represent overall main stakeholders. In addition, each RP project works with several specialized regional institutions and networks. The RP main financial partners are SIDA, KOICA, Denmark and the EU. At country level, the main stakeholder is the respective host government. Additional stakeholders depend on the programmatic interventions in the country. With regards to internal stakeholders, the RP works closely with Amman-based GPN teams and their bureaux (BPPS, CB). In addition, it complements and supports UNDP country offices in the region.

### Contributing projects

There are currently four projects at scale under implementation, primarily supporting the promotion of the knowledge economy (RP outcome 1 on poverty and inequality), anti-corruption (outcome 2 on governance), climate security (outcome 3 on climate change, water and energy), and youth.

A new smaller project on insider mediation is also contributing to the conflict prevention component of outcome 2, together with a joint RBA-RBAS project on the prevention of violent extremism. A separate initiative connected to the anticorruption project is promoting the role of women in anticorruption policies. A dedicated AHDR project, funded by RP core resources only, has guaranteed the continuation of human development research at the regional level. These smaller initiatives are managed by staff with other primary tasks.

There are outputs envisaged in the RPD, which are currently not associated to ongoing initiatives. These include markets and SMEs (although these issues are tackled through the youth and climate projects), social protection, development finance, digitalization (where the RP has dedicated considerable resources to support country-level initiatives), human mobility, and women economic participation. Electoral support is currently being provided through a global project managed from the Hub.

In parallel, 4 Project Initiation Plans (PIPs) have been developed to establish new portfolios focusing on poverty alleviation, governance & peace, climate & energy and gender. The PIPs are managed by the relevant GPN team leader, in collaboration with the RP coordinator.

### **Financial scope and delivery**

While the 2018-2021 Regional Programme delivered \$50 million, the ambition for the 2022-2025 cycle is to expand delivery to at least \$100 million. Available / confirmed funding of all RP projects for 2023-25 currently stands at \$32.2 million across all sources (see table 1). The top three 3<sup>rd</sup> party donors are Denmark (\$7.5 million), the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation (\$6.8 million) and the European Union (\$3.7 million).

The RP delivered \$13.48 million and \$13 million, respectively, in 2021 and 2022. In 2023, the RP has delivered \$16.8 million, and it is projected that of the currently available resources \$9 million will be delivered in 2024 and \$7 million in 2025.

The current RP hard pipeline stands at roughly \$1.3 million, the total soft pipeline amounts to \$116.6 million (see below figures 4 and 5). This pipeline is composed of several new initiatives that the RP is developing following its strategic workshop and retreat in May 2022 through the establishment of Project Initiation Plans. At the same time, project portfolios including the Youth portfolio, the Arab Knowledge Project, and ACIAC have developed follow-up proposals. The three most important soft pipelines are in the areas of Youth Livelihoods (\$36 million), Green Recovery (\$24 million), and Conflict & Peace (\$23 million).

Figure 3: High-level overview of the RP Results Structure

<b>Poverty and inequality reduced through enhanced regional cooperation</b>	<b>Governance accountability increased to foster more resilient communities</b>	<b>Impact of climate change reduced, sound water management, and access to sustainable energy</b>	<b>Women and youth empowered for a more inclusive and sustainable future</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SDG Monitoring</li> <li>2. Market Access (SMEs) &amp; Productive Capacities</li> <li>3. Social Protection</li> <li>4. Development Finance</li> <li>5. Policy Innovations</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anti Corruption</li> <li>2. Conflict prevention &amp; Peacebuilding</li> <li>3. Elections &amp; Inclusion</li> <li>4. Digitalization</li> <li>5. Mobility &amp; Migration</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Investment in Biodiversity</li> <li>2. Sustainable energy</li> <li>3. Green recovery</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Women’s leadership and participation</li> <li>2. Women’s economic empowerment</li> <li>3. Youth livelihoods &amp; jobs</li> </ol>

Table 1: RP Delivery 2023 and projections based on available funding

Project Portfolios	Delivery			Projections	
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
ACIAC	1,625,427	2,062,948	2,330,000	1,050,000	-
ACIAC-Gender	-	218,818	260,000	-	-
AHDR	340,489	479,217	150,000	-	-
AKP	1,288,078	2,348,653	2,166,010	2,300,000	2,300,000
Digital	-	252,224	223,000	370,000	370,000
Elections	-	96,866	96,866	-	-
Energy	68,016	41,740	-	-	-
Insider mediation	46,107	-	300,000	736,557	-
Local Development	90,015	52,391	-	-	-
MADAD	2,865,526	772,827	3,733,853	-	-
Outcome 1 - Poverty	-	210,427	350,000	-	-
Outcome 2 - Governance and Peace	-	440,997	379,651	-	-
Outcome 3 - Climate and Energy	-	111,193	262,823	-	-
Outcome 4 - Gender	-	213,226	225,000	-	-
RBAS Engagement Fac / NEW	561,934	607,582	1,246,500	-	-
SDG climate Fac.	2,500,250	2,922,845	2,119,165	-	-
Shababeek (youth portfolio)	854,479	966,800	2,938,955	4,550,000	4,350,000
Trade	1,432,056	362,816	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>11,672,377</b>	<b>13,003,040</b>	<b>16,781,823</b>	<b>9,006,557</b>	<b>7,020,000</b>

Figure 4: RP Pipeline by Output Area

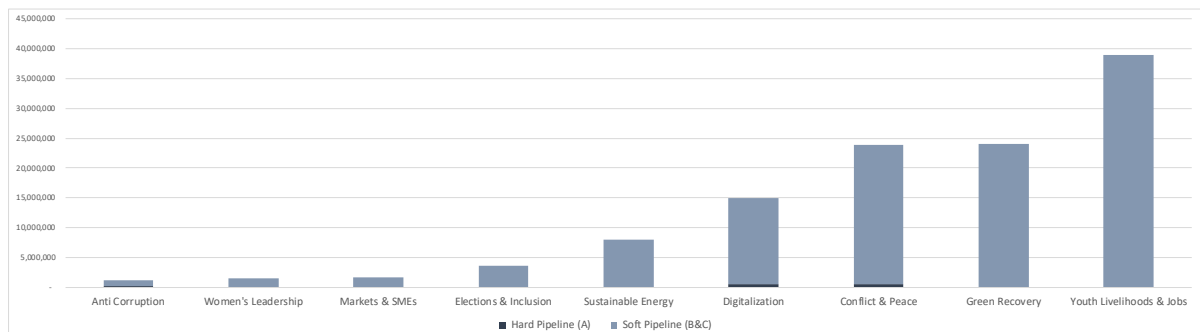
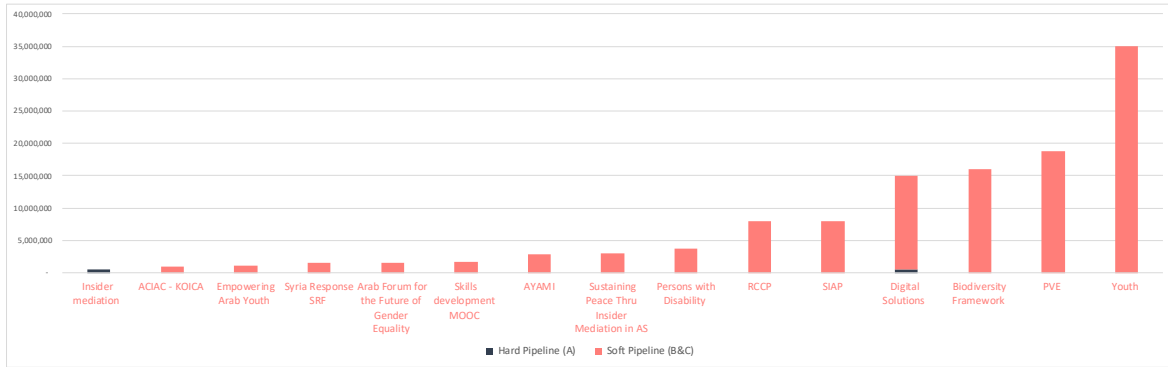


Figure 5: RP Pipeline by Project Initiative



## Analytical Review

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The following sections represent the analytical core of the midterm review. Following the review criteria as outlined in the methodology section, the structured inquiry offers main findings and recommendations in respective areas.

### Relevance and Coherence: A broad vision for a diverse region?

1. With regards to relevance and coherence, the MTR has tested to what extent the RP vision and Theory of Change (ToC) are in line with the regional, evolving development priorities and complementary to ongoing country-level development work. This involved a review of the clarity of vision, its adaptation to changing needs, its translation into a theory of change adequate to guide implementation. Moreover, it included a review of the RP programme coherence complementarity as well as the RP's ability to support country-level programming in the region.
2. The RBAS Regional Programme 2022-2025 is based on a comprehensive overview of regional challenges and opportunities as well as lessons from the previous programme cycle. Distinguishing socio-economic, socio-political and environmental vulnerabilities, the RPD provides a solid summary analysis of key challenges at the moment of drafting, including a data-based outlook in terms of anticipated future developments in the three focus areas. This constitutes a strong basis for the RP vision. Moreover, the RPD defines and outlines the added value of a regional programme in its complementarity to country programmes.
3. The RP vision as expressed in the RPD, is anchored in the regional SDG agenda and aligned to UNDP's corporate strategic plan and its six signature solutions. The RPD translates these linkages into 4 outcomes and related portfolios of intervention: poverty and inequality; governance and resilience; water, energy, and environment; and gender and youth empowerment. The four outcome areas are well unpacked and explained in the RPD. Each outcome area and related results descriptions are well developed, and objectives of each of the outcome areas are well defined.
4. While the RP vision is comprehensive, it is too ambitious for a 4-year programme and lacks the level of specificity that would make it unique for the Arab States region. As defined by its outcome statements, the RP vision is to work towards a region characterized by enhanced regional economic cooperation, strengthened government accountability, more resilient communities, mitigated risks of climate change and empowered youth and women. While compelling, this vision does not link to specific entry points – either opportunities or challenges – unique to the Arab region. Relatedly, while some opportunities for cross-sectoral work and synergies were identified, the outcome structure remains “siloed” in the sense that it maintains UNDP's classic substantive distinctions. This poses a challenge for the RP leadership to coordinate interventions between the four outcome areas and to create synergies, and thus to deliver on the overall vision.
5. Due consideration has been given to volatility and the ensuing need for adaptation in the RPD, but the application of the principle has been limited to RP general risk management practices. Pro-active adaptive management in fact requires a cross-sectoral governance mechanism as well as dedicated capacities at the coordination level. In the absence of these, programme leadership will likely be absorbed by day-to-day implementation challenges and miss the opportunity for more strategic reflection. The RPD includes elements of an overarching cross-sectoral governance mechanism through the Hub advisory board and its linkages to programme coordination and the GPN teams. Yet, it misses the opportunity to introduce adaptive management practices through which the RP would continuously consider and enact adaptation based on cross-sectoral strategic reflection.

6. **Country offices, partners and beneficiaries are not aware of the overall RP vision and how projects contribute to the latter.** Discussions with donors, beneficiaries and counterparts have revealed that they were aware of project objectives and interventions but have not been made part of the linkages between the project and the broader RP vision. Two aspects can explain this finding. First, there is a communication gap, certainly also related to relatively weak RP communication capacities.<sup>3</sup> This might also explain why the UNDP RP website still refers to the previous programme cycle.<sup>4</sup> At a moment when all international attention is on the Arab region, it is critical for UNDP to demonstrate its relevance and agility. The importance of up-to-date communication of what UNDP is offering and trying to achieve in the region – also through the RP – cannot be overestimated. Secondly, the vision misses the specificity and sharpness required to attract broad attention and support.

7. **Efforts are ongoing to improve cross-sectoral, adaptive management.** To achieve this, programme leadership has launched a review of RP coordination and implementation capacities in early 2023<sup>5</sup> and included a possible programmatic reorientation in the present review, notably through the inclusion of a strategic adaptation workshop as part of the process. Given capacity constraints<sup>6</sup> of the regional programme, these two initiatives represent pragmatic solutions to promote strategic RP adaptation. In fact, with regards to coordination capacities, the report entitled “Review of required capacities to support programme implementation” of 1<sup>st</sup> May 2023 recommends among others to strengthen strategic coordination and adaptive management capacities, while at the same time enhancing the efficiency of programme delivery support function. These two measures, once implemented, can be expected to strengthen RP strategic governance.

8. **The RP Theory of Change (ToC) as illustrated in a separate document is well articulated and contributes to expressing the RP vision.** Not only does the ToC highlight and explain linkages between development challenges and solutions, but it also provides a well-developed catalogue of assumptions. It is noteworthy that the assumptions presented in the document do not simply paraphrase ToC risks as often the case, but indeed explain underlying programmatic assumptions, which can be monitored and tested during programme implementation. As such, the RPD ToC is solid and of high quality.

9. **The ToC, however, attempts to encompass the entire region without distinguishing context differences and remains general in nature.** This reduces the value of the ToC for programme monitoring and adaptation since high-level changes can only – if at all – be observed towards the end of the implementation cycle. This finding can be illustrated by assumptions such as “diversified and renewable energy will increase resilience and mitigate climate change” (RPD ToC document). It is highly unlikely that this assumption can be tested during a 4-year implementation cycle. It should therefore be considered to distinguish a longer-term regional ToC expressing UNDP’s vision related to the regional agenda 2030 vision, while the RP cycle-specific theory of change should be more specific and focused on output-level linkages and assumptions. Moreover, different existing country typologies encompassing among others net-contributing countries, middle-income countries, least developed countries, and protracted and post-crisis countries, requires typology-specific distinctions and / or assumptions.

10. **The RP Results framework is only partially reflecting the ToC. Specifically, output indicators and targets defined to monitor progress are not adequate to measure progress against results.** While indicators used are specific, measurable, achievable and timebound, they are only partially relevant because they do not allow to measure and monitor output level progress. Relatedly, the defined targets and annual milestones, albeit realistic, do not add up to the outputs. The output-indicator mismatch applies to 7 or 33%, and the target-result mismatch applies to 9 or 40% of the 21

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the Report “Review of the UNDP Regional Programme Implementation Capacities” from May 2023 for an overview of existing communication capacities.

<sup>4</sup> Please refer to: <https://www.undp.org/arab-states/our-regional-programme> (accessed: 5<sup>th</sup> November 2023).

<sup>5</sup> See separate report mentioned in footnote 1.

<sup>6</sup> See below section on programme efficiency for details on the capacity constraints.

indicators (please refer to annex 6 for a detailed analysis). In the view of the author, there are two main reasons for this. First, the RPD is trying to use as many UNDP Strategic Plan Indicators as possible, in compliance with corporate guidance. Many of the SP indicators, however, are not a good fit for the regional programme. In fact, all but one of the most problematic indicators are SP indicators (see annex 6). Secondly, outcomes and outputs are too ambitious and cannot realistically be achieved in the 4-year programme cycle. To address this and keep the programme manageable, more realistic progress indicators and targets were chosen. While this was a pragmatic choice, it would have been recommendable to adjust the results framework and the ToC to be more realistic.

11. An example might be illustrative: Indicator 1.1.1 “Number of Arab countries with data collection mechanisms (...) to monitor progress towards the SDGs” is the sole indicator measuring progress towards output 1 (“The 2030 Agenda and other inter-governmentally agreed frameworks integrated in national and local development plans, measures to accelerate progress put in place, and budgets and progress assessed using data-driven solutions”). Indicator baseline is 2, and the target for 2025 is 4. First, 4 countries with data systems in place cannot be representative for a region of 20 countries.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, even if all countries of the region establish adequate data collection systems, it still does not mean that the 2030 Agenda is integrated into national and local development plans.

12. **The RPD vision and ToC have been translated into a relatively balanced project portfolio.** As stated in the RPD, dedicated projects are the vehicles to implement its vision. The existing project portfolio and the RP pipeline were therefore reviewed to assess the degree to which the vision is being translated into relevant projects. As shown in figure 6, the 8 key projects currently under implementation are distributed in an overall balanced way over the four outcomes. Note that three of these projects have already been under implementation during the previous cycle and as such reached a certain maturity. Only the output area of social protection (relevant RP output: “1.3. Social protection services and systems strengthened across sectors with increased investment”) is not addressed by RP projects. With regards to the results contribution of the projects, please refer to the section on programme effectiveness.

13. **Funding gaps challenge the implementation of the overall RP vision.** Several output areas including women’s leadership and economic empowerment, digitalization and economic transition are not founded. When considering available funding, as shown in above table 1 there are currently four projects at scale under implementation, primarily supporting the promotion of the knowledge economy (RP outcome 1 on poverty and inequality), anti-corruption (outcome 2 on governance), climate security (outcome 3 on climate change, water and energy), and youth (outcome 4 on youth). In parallel, 4 Project Initiation Plans (PIPs) have been developed to further develop the RP project portfolio focusing on poverty alleviation, governance & peace, climate & energy and gender. The currently existing soft pipeline developed through the PIPs mostly focuses on green recovery and green recovery (see figures 4 and 5). Yet only two projects are currently funded sustainably until end of the RP cycle (Shababeek / Youth and AKP). This might challenge the translation of the RP vision into programme interventions and results.

14. **The principle of “leave no one behind” and of gender mainstreaming and female empowerment are key elements of the RP vision as expressed in the RPD and its ToC.** Country offices, beneficiaries and counterparts confirmed in discussions that the two principles were to some extent integrated in activity design and implementation. In terms of relevance and coherence, the RP has therefore done justice to these principles. For a review of their effectiveness, please refer to the relevant below section. Conflict sensitivity, however, is not mainstreamed as a programming principle.

15. **RP complementarity and support to country programme interventions has been confirmed in discussions, but stronger RP-CO linkages are required.** Discussions with country offices and a review of relevant documentation allow for three main conclusions. First, the RP has contributed to advancing country programme interventions in some areas, especially with regards to climate

<sup>7</sup> Please note that the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States covers 20 countries.

security, conflict mediation and youth economic and socio-political empowerment. Secondly, it has introduced and / or addressed difficult topics (Government accountability, fight against corruption) and has contributed to triggering policy innovations across the region (Global Knowledge Index, as part of the AKP). Thirdly, however, related interventions have only partially triggered country level resources mobilization and more comprehensive country programming in these areas. Donors and country offices explain this partially with the complicated international funding environment, but also suggest a lack of consistent follow-up and / or coordination between regional and country level.<sup>8</sup>

16. **Country offices confirm overall alignment of RP interventions with country-level needs.** The different regional interventions streams also facilitated country office engagement with counterparts. In Morocco, for instance, the regional platform served to re-launch youth-related initiatives and to involve counterparts in beneficial regional and international exchanges and learning processes. Similarly, the SDG CF supported the Somalia CO in initiating discussions with counterparts and partners on the climate and security nexus.

17. **In summary, regional programme relevance and coherence can be confirmed with some reservations.** However, both deserve further sharpening and focus to ensure continued relevance and coherence. Specifically, the RP would benefit from a more focused and specific vision that is explicitly articulated and pro-actively communicated, the integration of continuous cross-sectoral strategic reflection and programme adaptation as part of the implementation cycle, and the creation of stronger RP-CO linkages. It is recognized, however, that the implementation of these recommendations requires capacities that currently cannot easily be freed from day-to-day programme implementation.

Figure 6: Project contribution to RP outcome areas

#	RP Output	ACIAC	AHDR	AKP	Digital	Climate F	Youth	Insider	PVE	#P	#S	Legend
1	SDG Monitoring		P	S						1	1	Primary
1	Markets & SMEs				S					0	1	Secondary
1	Social Protection									0	0	
1	Development Finance					S				0	1	
1	Policy Innovations			P						1	0	
2	Anti Corruption	P			S					1	1	
2	Conflict & Peace							P	P	2	0	
2	Elections & Inclusion				S					0	1	
2	Digitalization				P					1	0	
2	Mobility & Migration								S	0	1	
3	Biodiversity					S				0	1	
3	Sustainable Energy					S				0	1	
3	Green Recovery					P				1	0	
4	Women's Leadership	S					S			0	2	
4	Women's Economic Participation						S			0	1	
4	Youth Livelihoods & Jobs			S	S			P		1	2	
#P		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			
#S		1	0	2	4	3	2	0	1			

### Recommendations

- Adapt the RP vision and theory of change to make it more specific, focusing on priorities and aligning the results framework. As part of this, adjust the most problematic indicators and targets highlighted in annex 6.
- Systematize thematic guidance and technical oversight of RP projects by relevant GPN teams.
- Organize regular follow-up exchanges between RP coordination, RP projects and country offices
- Proactively involve partners in regular strategic reflection exercises

<sup>8</sup> Examples include the country level climate security road maps produced but only used by some COs such as Somalia for subsequent funds mobilization and programming at country level, the use of knowledge transition action plans produced by the ICESCO and supported by the AKP by UNDP country offices and the consistent implementation of regional anti-corruption policies at country level.



- Develop a resources mobilization strategy that is guided by newly defined and well-focused RP priorities.

## Effectiveness: Good progress, but limited learning

18. This section reviews overall progress against RP results as defined in the RPD, and the extent to which principles of “Leave No One Behind” (LNOB) and gender mainstreaming are being integrated across programme interventions. It includes an overview of results progress, mostly focusing on output level results in view of the early stages of implementation. Moreover, target group reach and strategic partner engagement were reviewed. While project level results were considered, the MTR will not review these against respective project documents and workplans. Rather, project level results will be considered in terms of their contribution to RP targets.<sup>9</sup>

19. Progress against output indicator targets is by-and-large on track, but as explained above this will likely not translate into RRF output achievement. Progress on eleven out of seventeen indicator targets (65%) is on track, and there is some progress on additional 5 targets (see below table 3). Reviewing progress to date against targets for each outcome area, OC1 stands at 66% achievement of targets set for 2023, OC2 at 80%, OC3 at 100% and OC4 at 84%. To illustrate the good progress with some numbers: the total number of RP beneficiaries stands at above 150,000, more than \$4,000,000 have been leveraged to support green recovery, nineteen action plans for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the region have been adopted (PVE, reintegration and reconciliation), over twenty effective measures to strengthen accountability and mitigate corruption risks have been implemented, and 4 countries of the region have strengthened their data collection mechanisms to feed into the Arab Knowledge Index and measure SDG-level progress.

20. The caveat remains, however, that even full indicator target achievement will not ensure output achievement. As discussed in above paragraph 10, this is partially due to the fact that several of the corporate SP indicators used are not adequate and partially because of the attempt to equip an overly ambitious results framework with realistic indicators. That said, in the view of the author it is more important to establish whether RP progress and achievements to date “go in the right direction” and whether there are good indications that the RP is triggering relevant change. As shown above and further discussion on the chapter in impact, the current results trajectory of the RP is positive and promising. To strengthen strategic monitoring, the RP vision (“which change do we want to trigger, no matter what?”) should be adjusted to be more region-specific and more focused, and the ToC should be revised accordingly.

21. Key contributing factors for results progress to date were adequate funding, solid implementation structures and alignment with regional, country-level and donor priorities. Unsurprisingly, progress is most noticeable in areas that are well funded and where implementation structures are well established. In other words, the main contributions to progress against results were made to date by the 4 largest projects (SDG CF, ACIAC, Shababeek, AKP). Some promising initial results were also achieved by the insider mediation project but remain for the time being pilot experiences. Alignment of interventions with regional or country-level agendas has proven to facilitate results progress. Where, on the other hand, interventions were outside country priorities, progress was limited. For example, the SDG CF supported the development of country-level climate security road maps which were intended to trigger subsequent country-level action. Despite an adequate level of consultations at the country level, however, not all the road maps were for the time being taken forward (exception: Somalia) and there is a risk that they will gradually lose relevance. In the view of interviewed stakeholders, the road maps represent highly relevant action plans for critical issues. Yet, UNDP country offices did not manage to mobilize donor funding for implementation except for Somalia where the GCF-funded climate security hard pipeline stands at

<sup>9</sup> At the time of finalizing the MTR (January 2024), 2023 annual project reports were not yet available, while the RP ROAR was available in draft form. The review of progress against results is therefore additionally based on 2022 annual reporting, 2023 workplans and interviews with RP project managers and beneficiaries.

rough \$50 million. In addition, the League of Arab States who was initially supportive is not proactively promoting the initiative. In other words, the three factors of adequate funding, solid implementation structures and alignment with regional, country-level and donor priorities need to coincide to allow for results achievement.

22. **Across RP projects, beneficiaries have welcomed the pro-active support received from RP project teams and highlighted the responsiveness of project focal points.** This was identified as an additional factor facilitating results achievement. Specifically, interviewees highlighted the fact that RP focal points were sensitive to country contexts and needs and showed the required level of flexibility to adjust implementation strategies in discussion with the country-level teams in charge of implementation. Given the diversity of country typologies and contexts covered by the RP and ranging from countries with active conflict to stable middle income and net contributing countries, this is commendable.

23. **Larger financial investments, including systematic country-level resource mobilization for RP pilot initiatives, are necessary to gradually expand RP effectiveness.** Beneficiaries suggested that resource envelopes were adequate for pilot initiatives and to prove concepts. For longer-term, sustainable results, however, larger investments are necessary. In this context, it is important to note that RP investments into country-level activities are in most cases meant to serve as seed funding promoting local resource mobilization. 16 instances were identified during the MTR where this objective has been achieved. The RP contribution included in these cases not only the provision of seed funding or the organization of technical workshops, but at times also direct engagement with donors and counterparts as well as support to the development of concept notes. As shown in below table 3, RP investments through the SDG Climate Facility and the ACIAC project of \$2.6 million have generated over \$24 million additional resources from various sources across 9 countries, and an additional pipeline of \$59 million. This is a very promising tendency, which should be expanded across all RP projects. To that end, continuous communication and follow-up between the regional project team and the relevant UNDP country office beyond activity implementation is required to define and drive country-level RM strategies.

24. **More systematic regional exchanges and networking is required to create momentum for regional transformation.** Several beneficiaries and stakeholders, including those of the SDG Climate Facility and the Shababeek Youth project requested more opportunities for regular regional exchanges and networking. For the insider mediation project, this is part of the implementation strategy but has not yet been implemented. Stakeholder exchanges could potentially enhance country-level implementation through the identification and socialization of best practices. Moreover, it could create regional momentum facilitating the promotion of country-level enabling environments. In the absence of these, instead, beneficiaries see themselves as individual, unconnected actors and cannot tap into regional dynamics and experiences.

25. **Collaboration with relevant regional bodies, a critical driver of effectiveness, was mitigated.** While collaboration, for instance, with the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) is seen as very collaborative and successful through the Arab Knowledge Project, the collaboration with the League of Arab States in the area of Climate Security as part of the SDG Climate Facility has been described as less successful. The example of collaboration with ICESCO is highly illustrative in the sense that it significantly increased the reach and momentum of the RP project-supported Global Knowledge Index and its use to drive country-level improvements. It can thus serve as an example for other RP areas of interventions. With regards to the League of Arab States, more proximity through continuous presence in Cairo would have likely helped to strengthen the engagement.

26. **Key principles for programme implementation (gender mainstreaming, “Leave No-one Behind”, conflict sensitivity) are being integrated in RP implementation, but should be more systematized.** A review of these principles has yielded mixed results. Gender targeting has been by and large used across projects and interventions when designing implementation strategies, selecting beneficiaries, and targeting interventions. For example, the Shababeek project and the SDG CF have systematically targeted young female entrepreneurs, with ratios up to 65% in the case

of supported female entrepreneurs in Lebanon. In Yemen, implementing the “Qat-to-Coffee” initiative, UNDP managed despite the culturally difficult context to support over 30% of female farmers with dedicated training. This has indeed been explicitly communicated as part of annual workplans and progress reports. The SDG CF annual progress report for 2022 states for example that

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*“UNDP has engaged women associations and women community leaders to inform about appropriate measures in the implementation of the resilience grants, which ensured women's representation for gender-responsive actions, and participation. For instance, in Palestine the project installed a 1-megawatt solar PV plant in Arrabah which benefits 12,356 persons (49.3% female), and a 1.65-megawatt plant in Qabalan which benefits 8,771 persons (48.6% female). In Iraq, the solar PV water plants are expected to directly benefit at least 1,500 persons (50% female), while the train-the-trainers programme on solar PV systems and related awareness raising campaigns on climate change and water conservation targets 1,000 persons (50% female). In Jordan, the number of expected beneficiaries from the resilience grant is expected to reach 13,620 persons (24% of whom are women and 63% are youth).”<sup>10</sup>*

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In this context, it needs to be positively noted that the SDG CF team involved the gender team in reviewing grants proposals. It is recommended for this engagement to happen systematically, across all RP projects. Moreover, applying the UNDP gender results effectiveness scale (GRES) to the RP projects reviewed, many activities can indeed be rated as “Gender Targeted”, and some activities as “Gender Responsive”. A dedicated, systematic analysis of RP effectiveness across projects in terms of gender equality using the UNDP GRES methodology is recommended in this context as a follow-up activity to further guide efforts to strengthen RP gender targeting and results.

27. *With regards to the LNOB principle, every project has defined its own approach of implementation.* The AKP uses the knowledge index to improve society-wide access to information across the region; the ACIAC project targets civil servants, judges and policy makers as direct beneficiaries intending to improve public service delivery for all citizens; insider mediation establishes community-level mediation capacities in areas with elevated conflict risks; Shababeek includes targeted activities for youth with disabilities; the SDG CF includes targeted country-level support to most vulnerable populations. MADAD has overall targeted populations affected by the Syrian crisis and were therefore highly vulnerable. In monetary terms, a high-level calculation indicates that over 30% of RP resources benefited vulnerable populations. As such, the MTR can confirm the adequate integration of the principle across RP projects.

28. *When it comes to conflict sensitivity, project stakeholders expressed their concern that key activities were implemented without the guidance of an adequate, updated conflict analysis.* The MTR has reviewed this concern. It concludes that while implementation of RP activities in conflict and post-conflict countries has been informed by available country-level conflict analysis and knowledge, the practice should be strengthened at the regional level where activities were only to some extent guided by conflict analysis. A positive example for the latter is the report “Anticipatory Action in MENA region: State of Play in Accelerating Action” supported by the SDG CF, which informs a better understanding of the barriers, opportunities, and entry points for anticipatory action in conflict contexts. The systematic review and adjustments can be best included in future RP coordination practices that are more driven by portfolio-and-adaptive management practices.

29. *The RP would benefit from continuous, learning-informed prioritization and adaptation through stronger cross-sectoral work among GPN teams as well as strategic partner engagement.* Results-oriented choices and continuous prioritization are essential in view of limited resources and

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<sup>10</sup> UNDP (2022): Climate Action for Human Security. Annual Report for the SDG Climate Facility.

a continuously evolving regional context. Therefore, and to facilitate the joint targeting/collaboration between regional projects, RP coordination in collaboration with the GPN innovation team is considering the introduction of dynamic (adaptive) programme management practices. The MTR finds that this will be highly beneficial, especially if it is accompanied by strengthened cross-PGN team collaboration. In addition, it will require strengthened programme and context monitoring and learning capacities informing strategic reflection loops.

30. **More systematic, strategic engagement of, and exchanges between RP partners would have contributed to programme and project-level relevancy and effectiveness.** The MTR established that external partners are not sufficiently aware of the RP vision and linkages between its projects and interventions and are therefore only focusing on project-level interventions. Partners interviewed were also not solicited to contribute to programme-level, strategic discussions. With regards to project-level engagement of partners, there is a significant difference between projects. While some donors welcomed UNDP’s availability and the fact that donor-level concerns and suggestions were as much as possible accommodated, other donors very much regretted the absence of such exchanges. Overall, more systematic communication and networking with stakeholders and donors at regional and project levels, e.g. as part of regular moments of strategic reflection or learning loops, would have allowed to maintain and adapt as required the common vision for respective projects and therefore continuously improve the relevance and efficiency of interventions.

31. **In sum, RP effectiveness to date is overall promising, but requires some adjustments to ensure results achievement.** These should include stronger strategic engagement with relevant regional institutions, a greater emphasis across all projects on conflict sensitivity and conflict analysis and the establishment of a process to ensure continuous learning-informed prioritization and adaptation. While a detailed analysis of results progress of RP projects is beyond the scope of the MTR, the review of documents and discussions with beneficiaries and donors have allowed to identify a number of noteworthy achievements illustrating the relevance and effectiveness of RP interventions. Four of these are highlighted in the below textbox 2.

### Recommendations

- Strengthen strategic engagement with relevant regional institutions beyond project-level collaboration.
- Increase the emphasis across all projects on conflict sensitivity and conflict analysis guiding and strengthening programme and project implementation.
- Conduct a gender GRES analysis of RP projects, and subsequently systematize the inclusion of context-sensitive strategies to promote gender equality across RP projects.
- Establish a process facilitating effective integration, continuous learning-informed prioritization, and adaptation. Engage RP partners in this process.

Table 2: Progress against RP indicator targets

Outputs	Progress against targets	Rating	Related RP Projects
Structural transformation accelerated, particularly green, inclusive, and digital transitions			
The 2030 Agenda and other inter-governmentally agreed frameworks integrated in national and local development plans, measures to accelerate progress put in place, and budgets and progress assessed using data-driven solutions	On track	2	PIP OC1, AHDR, AKP
Capacities developed for progressive expansion of inclusive regional economic integration (regional specific)	On track	2	PIP OC1, AEISD
Social protection services and systems strengthened across sectors with increased investment	On track	2	PIP OC1

Public and private financing for the achievement of the Goals expanded at regional, and national levels	No progress	0	PIP OC1
Access to basic services and financial and non-financial assets and services improved to support productive capacities for sustainable livelihoods and jobs to achieve prosperity	Some progress	1	PIP OC1, Shababeek
Innovation capabilities built to promote knowledge-based economies and expand policy options at regional, national, and sub-national levels	Some progress	1	PIP OC1, AKP
<b>Governance accountability increased to foster more resilient communities</b>			
Open, agile, accountable, and future-ready governance systems in place to co-create and deliver solutions to accelerate Sustainable Development Goals achievement	On track	2	Digitalisation, ACIAC
Capacities for conflict prevention, resilience and peacebuilding strengthened at regional, national, and subnational levels and across borders	Some progress	1	Insider Mediation, PIP OC2
Democratic institutions and processes strengthened for an inclusive and open public sphere with expanded public engagement	On track	2	Elections, ACIAC
Institutions equipped with strengthened digital capabilities to contribute to and benefit from inclusive digital societies	On track	2	Digitalisation
Integrated development solutions implemented to address the drivers of irregular and forced migration, enhance the resilience of migrants, forcibly displaced and host communities, and expand the benefits of human mobility	Some progress	1	MADAD
<b>Impact of climate change reduced, sound water management promoted, and access to sustainable energy improved</b>			
Public and private investment mechanisms mobilized for biodiversity, water, oceans, and climate solutions	On track	2	SDG CF
Energy gap reduced	On track	2	SDG CF
Transition to renewable energy accelerated capitalizing on technological gains, clean energy innovations and new financing mechanisms to support green recovery	On track	2	SDG CF
<b>Women and youth empowered for a more inclusive and sustainable future<sup>11</sup></b>			
Women's leadership and participation advanced through strengthening institutions and civil society and addressing structural barriers, to advance gender equality, including in crisis contexts	On track	2	Shababeek, Elections
Regional and national capacities and policies strengthened to advance women's economic empowerment	On track	2	Shababeek, PIP OC1&4
Access to financial and non- financial assets and services improved to support productive capacities for sustainable livelihoods and jobs for youth	Some progress	1	Shababeek, PIP OC1&4

Table 3: RP Funds Investment / Mobilization Ratios (funds mobilized at country level)

RP Area	Country	RP Investment \$	Funds mobilized \$	Source	Status
SDG CF	Somalia	1,000,000	50,000,000	GCF	Pipeline
	Palestine	250,000	300,000	JSB	realised
	Palestine		2,350,000	Private Sector	realised
	Jordan	450,000	1,000,000	JSB	realised
	Tunisia	415,000	850,000	GEF	realised
	Tunisia	300,000	500,000	National Government	realised
	Tunisia		825,000	Municipalities	realised
ACIAC	Tunisia		900,000	Private Sector	realised
	Lebanon	350,000	4,500,000	EU	realised
	Lebanon		3,500,000	Denmark	realised
	Iraq	250,000	15,000,000	EU	realised
	Algeria	50,000	500,000	KOIKA	realised

<sup>11</sup> Please note that the RP indicators have not yet incorporated the Gender Justice initiative, which has generated some strategic achievements.

	Palestine	150,000	1,720,000	FCDO	realised
	Djibouti		200,000	Global Funding Window	realised
	Tunisia		16,000,000	Netherlands	realised
	Kuwait	50,000	9,000,000		Pipeline
<b>TOTAL Pipeline</b>		<b>1,000,000</b>	<b>50,000,000</b>		
<b>TOTAL Realised</b>		<b>1,115,000</b>	<b>6,725,000</b>		

*Textbox 2: Examples of noteworthy RP project-level achievements<sup>12</sup>*

### **Vital support to the new Lebanese Anti-Corruption Commission**

Lebanon's Anti-Corruption Commission was established on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2022 through Law 175/22 and its president and judges were nominated. However, until today, the bylaws that would provide the commission with a dedicated budget has not been approved and the commission is therefore operating in challenging conditions. As part of the Regional Programme's Antic Corruption project ACIAC, UNDP has provided critical support to the commission providing essential training and equipment, but also establish contact with regional and international AC networks and relevant institutions of other countries of the region. The commission has recently started to receive and process citizen complaints and to request and review asset declarations of over 20,000 civil servants. A digital system to receive and process both is currently being established with UNDP support. As per the president of the commission, UNDP's continuous and reliable support has greatly facilitated the work and functioning of the commission. However, UNDP's support was not always provided without obstacles. For instance, the purchase of critical equipment experienced a number of delays, which in the current context of Lebanon negatively impacted work progress.

### **Promotion of private sector green initiatives (Jordan)**

Through the country grant mechanism, the SDG CF has supported a number of green start-ups in several countries of the region. In Jordan, UNDP supported among others the start-up "Smart WTI" which facilitates innovative water management of public and private entities using smart technology. A small device and an application allow communities and companies to monitor and manage their water consumption. This is particularly relevant in regions with increasing water scarcity. Through UNDP's support, the system was installed in a local Department of Agriculture in Northern Jordan and a public building hosting Syrian refugee. Water management teams were established and trained. Regular follow-up shows that the teams continuously use the system to manage water usage, indicating a good sustainability prospective. As emphasized by the Smart WTI representative, it is now critical to scale up the initiative and roll the system out to a much larger number of institutions in Northern Jordan order to significantly reduce water consumption of the region.

### **Incubation of young start-ups in Lebanon**

As part of its activities, the Shababeek Youth project is promoting young start-ups creating economic perspectives for young entrepreneurs. In Lebanon UNDP worked with the local NGO INJAZ to support 8 of these start-ups of which 5 are led by female entrepreneurs. Support provided is tailor-made for each start-up and includes a needs assessment, business model development and prototyping, organizational development and marketing support. It also includes a small grant for tools and equipment. A dedicated mentorship programme allows for continuity and follow-up after the initial support package has been delivered. While the support received is appreciated, INJAZ has emphasized the importance of careful selection of start-ups and of longer-term support cycles to ensure sustainability of results. The gradual establishment of an alumni network of entrepreneurs that received support through the programme would additionally promote sustainability.

### **Data-driven incentives for knowledge-based socio-economic models**

Through Arab Knowledge Project, UNDP in partnership with the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation has developed the Global Knowledge Index, a tool measuring knowledge-related

<sup>12</sup> The descriptions are based on interviews conducted with beneficiaries of the 4 initiatives in November 2023, as well as the review of official project reports.

performance of countries in the Arab region and globally. The index encompasses composite sub-indices covering education, ICT, research, development, and economy. The index has now been incorporated as a standing agenda item of the annual general assembly meeting of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) and its 54 member states. ICESCO uses the index to facilitate the knowledge transition of its member states, identifying country-level gaps and developing and monitoring action plans. Of specific concern to UNDP and ICESCO, the Index allows to monitor and address the digital and knowledge divide in the region. In future, ICESCO suggests that UNDP engages in action plan implementation specifically targeting less developed countries of the region.

## Efficiency: Steady implementation despite process & capacity bottlenecks

32. With regards to RP efficiency, the MTR has inquired to what extent RP coordination and management arrangements were adequate to ensure good use of resources (financial and other) and to generate expected results. It has considered RP capacities, management and coordination arrangements, financial resources, work processes and monitoring and evaluation systems.

33. RP project-level implementation over-all is adequate and partners and beneficiaries welcome pro-active support received. The review of documentation and interviews conducted during the MTR confirm that the RP projects are implemented adequately, meaning that activities were by-and-large implemented in accordance with annual workplans and the related budgets. Across RP projects, beneficiaries have welcomed the pro-active support received from RP project teams and highlighted the responsiveness of RP coordination and project focal points to solve problems. Country offices felt that RP colleagues understand context-related implementation challenges and provide flexibility to adjust implementation plans as and where needed.

34. Dedicated and adequately capacitated project management structures have proven effective to drive implementation, while there is room for improvements of the technical quality assurance and learning function. Unsurprisingly, the implementation of projects with a dedicated implementation team was more efficient than the implementation of new, smaller projects with less capacity. This seemingly commonsensical observation is made since there has been discussions as to whether project implementation could possibly be ensured by GPN teams thus creating cost efficiencies. In the view of the author, it is important – for the benefit of RP effectiveness and efficiency – to ensure functional clarity and distinguish the following functions: project management / implementation; technical quality assurance and guidance and learning; and cross-project coordination. The value added of the GPN teams clearly is with technical quality assurance and learning, and an additional responsibility for project management would negatively impact both functions. The technical assurance function and management arrangements related to these can be further strengthened (see below paragraph 40 and the last chapter of the report “Strategic Outlook”).

35. Yet, some serious implementation-related delays happened, due to a combination of external (corporate) and internal factors. Certainly, the tail end of the COVID pandemic constituted an obstacle. Moreover, ongoing organizational changes including the clustering of key operational functions and especially the introduction of the new corporate ERP system “Quantum” have triggered important delays with regards to procurement and payments. It is to be noted that these changes impact the implementation of both, regional processes managed by the operational team of the Hub in Amman and country-level processes managed by respective country offices. Colleagues observed that partners intending to respond to calls for proposals and invitations to bid struggle to establish their profiles in Quantum. Moreover, ensuing delays posed challenges for especially smaller and younger companies – those that UNDP is seeking to support. Accordingly, colleagues in several country offices stated their concern that UNDP’s reputation has been negatively affected by significant delays caused by the transitions.

36. **While RP staff capacities are overall adequate, there are critical gap areas.** The RP has coordination and implementation support capacities as well as dedicated project teams for the larger projects (Shababeek, Insider mediation, ACIAC, SDG Climate Facility), the latter perform technical and project management functions. In December 2023, the total number of staff amounted to 38 colleagues: 10 colleagues are based in Amman, 21 are based in Beirut, 2 staff in Dubai and 5 staff working home-based. The RP Coordinator and a support staff are based in Amman and 8 implementation support staff are based in Beirut. The other 28 staff are members of specific project teams. With regards to contract types, there are 22 FTA holders, 6 IPSAs, 6 NPSAs and 6 NUNVs. Figure 7 shows staff by contract type, project and location.

37. A review of RP implementation capacities conducted in October 2023 has analyzed the different functions and capacities relevant for RP implementation.<sup>13</sup> The review concludes that “(...) several functions critical for RP positioning and sustainability are not adequately capacitated. Most important among these are RP-internal knowledge management, data & information management, partnerships management, communications, and resources mobilization support. While the RP can to some extent draw on guidance and advice from existing RBAS capacities, the RP-related ‘leg work’ in these areas will need to be done by a dedicated capacity that currently does not exist.”

38. **Processes require clarification internally and externally.** With slowly increasing clarity with regards to systems and processes the impact of these obstacles can be expected to gradually decrease. Yet, it is critical that procedures and operational requirements will be proactively clarified internally vis-à-vis involved colleagues as well as externally vis-a-vis RP partners and vendors. The RP and the Amman Hub will benefit from a succinct procedural manual. In addition, it might be beneficial to offer information sessions on procedures and requirements to partners and prequalified vendors at country or regional level, depending on the location and engagement channel of the partner.

39. **RP implementation support systems require improvements.** Referring to operational workflows, the report on RP implementation capacities from October 2023 states that “workflows within the MSU/PSU team as well as between MSU/PSU and ARH operations colleagues are not optimized. This review has identified communication gaps, functional overlaps, and process unclarity which have resulted in at times significant delays.” In this context, it is noteworthy that the Hub Operations Team has recently developed new SOPs also taking into consideration Quantum-related changes. Furthermore, face to face training (procurement, travel, finance) has been provided by Hub operations staff to newly recruited RP PSU colleagues in August/September 2023 in Lebanon. The training clarified the roles and responsibilities of both PSU and Operations and clarifies the different processes under each area. This is a commendable practice, which can be expected to greatly improve early identified process-related bottlenecks.

40. **Arrangements in place for substantive quality assurance of the Regional Programme through effective linkages to the GPN advisory teams of the Amman Hub are only partially working.** The relationship between GPN teams and RP projects is not yet defined and systematically structured. The interaction between the two capacities therefore changes from project to project, and from GPN team to GPN team. Deliberations as part of the “Amman Hub Light Review” conducted in 2021/2022 had therefore suggested to introduce matrix reporting for project managers to the RP coordinator and the relevant technical GPN team. Some GPN colleagues go further and suggest a 2ndary reporting line for all RP technical staff to the relevant GPN team leader, in addition of the matrix reporting arrangement of project managers. There is a risk, however, that ensuing arrangements become overly complex and are therefore not implementable. An approach to strengthen substantive quality assurance and guidance should be guided by pragmatism and realism. The last chapter “Strategic Outlook” of the present report offers detailed recommendations on how this can be achieved.

41. **More attention should be given to donor engagement at RP coordination level.** Donor satisfaction with RP projects is overall good, but varies from project to project. Reporting is overall

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<sup>13</sup> See footnote 1.



perceived as satisfactory and timely. However, several donors request to be involved in RP strategic discussions. While they feel adequately engaged at the project level, no donor is aware of the RP vision and linkages to other RP projects. At the same time, RP colleagues feel that donors often did not manage to join RP activities because of capacity and / or time limitations. It is therefore recommended that RP coordination and Hub management dedicates more attention to engaging donors in strategic dialogue, rather than focusing donor discussions only on project-level progress and solutions to implementation problems.

42. **Strategic engagement with regional institutions beyond the project level should be strengthened.** Most of the RP projects have established strategic channels of engagement with related regional partners and institutions, such as the AKP with ICESCO. Similar to the engagement with RP donors, however, the relationship with regional institutions and partners would benefit from strengthened strategic engagement as part of regular RP strategic moments of reflection or learning loops. This of course requires a dedicated capacity supporting RP coordination, as proposed by the separate report on RP implementation capacities.

43. **More transparency with regards to RP resources allocation as well as clarity in terms of rules of engagement between RP and country offices is needed.** Country offices of the region and some partners have requested more transparency in terms of RP resources allocation as well as clarity in terms of how the RP engages with country offices. The MTR confirms that there currently indeed is not platform providing up-to-date information on the RP, its key areas of intervention, resources, and delivery. While both the Hub management and the RP coordinator engage frequently with country offices on a range of topics, an annual standing meeting informing all COs on part performance and future planning in addition to an intranet platform is recommended. With regards to engagement principles between RP and country offices, this gap has in the meantime be addressed by RP coordination following exchanges with COs. With an evolving regional context and RP resource envelop, the rules should be regularly reviewed, adapted as needed and communicated.

44. **RP communication and resource mobilization should be strengthened, in consultation with the RBAS partnership team and country offices.** First of all, it will be critical for RBAS and the Regional Programme to update its website. The information on the RP website dates back to the previous programme cycle. During a time where international attention on the region has increased, updated and compelling website information is a critical first step for successful UNDP positioning. In addition, the RP should make it a habit to communicate key activities and launch, where adequate, knowledge products through media, website and email updates to key partners. This outreach is an additional opportunity to socialize UNDP's vision in the region and relevant strategic adaptations to the evolving context. This of course needs to be closely connected to the overall strategic positioning activities of UNDP in the region. It therefore needs to be done in close collaboration with the RBAS partnership team as well as with RBAS country offices.

45. **The RP pipeline is well developed, but currently available resources for 2024 and 2025 are tight and require a resources mobilization effort to ensure RP sustainability.** The RP pipeline currently stands at \$118 million, of which \$1.3 million are hard pipeline. As can be seen from the above figures 4 and 5, the pipelines are most developed in the areas of youth livelihoods, green recovery, and conflict & peace. Available funding, however, stands at only \$9 and \$6 million, respectively, for the coming 2 years. The detailed analysis in the separate report on RP implementation capacities has established the minimum resources mobilization target for RP sustainability for 2023-2025 at \$14 million, and a major push needs to be done to realize this.

46. **The RP monitoring and evaluation function is compliant with corporate requirements, but more dynamic monitoring and learning would be beneficial for RP efficiency and effectiveness.** As outlined under the above section on effectiveness, this function could, and should, play a key role in creating synergies between projects in support of RP objectives and facilitate cross-project learning. This would require a capacity that can continuously monitor (a) changes in the regional context and political economy, (b) progress with regards to outputs and outcomes, and (c) cross-analyze implications for the RP. This capacity would also contribute to regional learning processes, especially

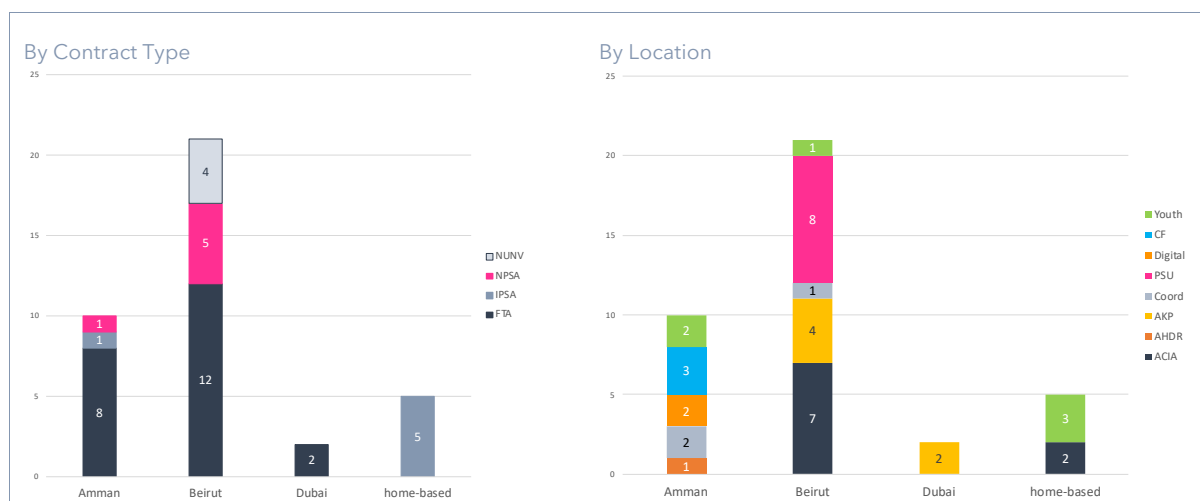
in view of the ongoing strategic reorientation of the regional programme (see below section on the strategic outlook).

47. In conclusion, RP efficiency to date is overall adequate, but financial, procedural and capacity-related bottlenecks constitute limiting factors. Implementation efficiency would gain from more systematic technical quality assurance, a dynamic cross-project (portfolio) learning function as well as strategic partner engagement at the regional level.

**Recommendations**

- Address and resolve project-level capacity gaps without delay.
- Continuously update review and local (hub-level) business processes to enhance efficiency.
- Adjust MSU/PSU capacities and structures as per the recommendations of the separate report on RP implementation capacities.
- Strengthen RP knowledge management, data & information management, partnerships management, communications, and resources mobilization capacities.
- Ensure continuous engagement with current and potential donors.
- Systematize and structure substantive quality assurance and support through GPN teams.

Figure 7: Overview of RP Staff Composition



**Impact: Promising contributions to change in the region**

48. While it is too early to assess and confirm impact-level change after two years of implementation, the MTR has analyzed outcome-level trends and identified areas where the RP is likely contributing to higher-level change in the region. In addition, risk management practices have been reviewed since these are necessary to ensure longer-term RP success.

49. Towards the end of the second year of implementation, RP contributions to outcome level change are of mixed success, with relevant RP contributions for 50% of RP outcome indicators. A combined qualitative and quantitative review of RP contributions to outcome level results indicates that the programme can be expected to make relevant contributions to 6 out of 14 outcome indicators, and to make some contribution to additional 4 outcome areas (see table 3). Expressing this quantitatively while recognizing the limitations of such an expression, current progress trends

indicate a possible 50% outcome level delivery by the end of this cycle. Much in alignment with the current funding picture, the RP outcome-level contributions are most pronounced for outcome 3 (climate, natural resources management, energy) and outcome 4 (youth and women empowerment), closely followed by outcome 2 (governance accountability). Support to structural transformation in the region (outcome 1) is currently falling short of planned results. There are two main explanations for this finding. First, as mentioned above, the RP results framework is very broad and therefore overly ambitious. Secondly, UNDP has for the time being not managed to develop a sizable, funded portfolio for outcome area 1.

50. **The RP has managed to introduce and launch a regional climate security agenda, including country-level follow-up.** One of the most promising interventions of the RP with regards to higher-level regional change is the launch of a regional climate security agenda through the SDG Climate facility funded by the Government of Sweden. Given the interlinkages between climate and security in most countries in the region, the relevance of this activity can hardly be overestimated. The activities of the RP in this area have led to a region-wide debate on climate-security linkages, the establishment of a Climate Security Secretariat within the League of Arab States and the development of country-level climate security roadmaps in 5 priority countries.

51. One partner raised the concern that the RP has failed to create lasting momentum on this topic in the region, and the MTR has therefore assessed in more detail past and ongoing activities. It finds that the launch of the climate security agenda can be clearly attributed to RP interventions. In this context, UNDP has also managed to establish a strategic partnership with two key players among UN agencies, WFP and UNEP-FI. This partnership is certainly critical, and agencies confirm constructive and fruitful collaboration. It is to be noted, however, that the involved agencies have the tendency – as in many other cases seen by the author before – to present activities and achievements as their own independent from the collaboration within the SDG Climate Facility managed by UNDP. In the view of the author this does require correction.

52. The MTR also finds that while there is scope for improvement RP follow up, through the SDG CF team, with countries on climate security roadmaps was adequate and moderately successful. In Somalia, for instance, the activities facilitated the subsequent establishment of a climate security portfolio and the mainstreaming of climate security activities across the CO programme. In addition, a \$50 million GCF proposal on climate security is at an advanced stage of finalization and has high chances of being awarded. This portfolio aims, among others, to facilitate and fund the implementation of essential elements of the roadmap. As such, it is highly likely that the interventions of the RP in this area will have a critical regional impact, thanks to relevant donor investments.

53. **RP interventions are contributing to addressing the regional knowledge and digital divide.** The diversity of countries in the region, i.e. of their income and development levels, is significant and the knowledge and digital divide is a critical element possibly leading to a continued cementation of these differences. In this context, the Global Knowledge Index developed by UNDP through the Arab Knowledge Project as part of the Regional Programme and in partnership with the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation has contributed to addressing the divide, as explained by a representative of ICESCO, the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The index, which has now been integrated in regular ICESCO General Assembly deliberations, has guided the development of action plans for those countries most affected by the divide, and the monitoring and follow-up on their implementation. Moreover, since the index is disaggregated by gender and age, it has allowed to develop gender- and age-specific interventions. In this sense, the RP interventions can be expected to contribute to higher-level regional change, notably the reduction of the regional knowledge and digital divide.

54. **The RP has facilitated the establishment of a nascent network of conflict mediators in the region.** Through the insider mediation project funded by the government of France, UNDP has established a platform and network for conflict mediation currently spanning the countries of Lebanon, Sudan and Jordan. The project uses individuals who “derive their legitimacy, credibility and influence from a socio-cultural closeness to all groups of society, endowing them with strong bonds of trust” (citation from the project document), trains them and connects them at country and

regional level. Even though the network has just been established, it has already started to play a role in Southern Lebanon to reducing tensions following the escalation of the Gaza conflict through the fact-checking and correction of unverified information. These early interventions illustrate the potential of the initiative for lasting, regional change.

55. **Interventions through the ACIAC project are gradually introducing transparency and anti-corruption measures in public offices across the region.** As emphasized by one international partner interviewed as part of the MTR, the change of mind-sets and deeply entrenched practices requires time and persistence. The ACIAC project has therefore adopted a multi-dimensional approach to fostered regional cooperation promoting the effective and inclusive implementation of the United National Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). Interventions included regional workshops that helped participants identify and share good practices and lessons learned on priority reform topics; technical assistance to anti-corruption agencies (Jordan, Morocco and Lebanon); and the organization of the first regional meeting for anti-corruption education and training institutions in the Arab region. In 2022/23, approximately 2,660 public officials and 2,450 non-governmental practitioners were trained, including 1,680 government officials, 490 anti-corruption and audit officials, 490 judges and prosecutors, 30 members of Parliament, 1,450 civil society representatives, 210 representatives of business associations and 790 representatives of youth groups. Based on the information provided by beneficiaries during interviews, the MTR concludes that the approach which simultaneously uses several entry points while addressing actually needs and responding to urgent requests is likely to trigger longer-term regional change in this area. It will be critical, however, to maintain the level of interventions in the medium-term so as to ensure the anchoring of knowledge and practices at institutional and societal levels.

56. **Programme and operational risk management practices have been adequate.** As per UNDP requirements, risk management is integrated into project-level implementation arrangements as a responsibility of the project manager. In addition, RP coordination has been frequently involved in risk mitigation and risk management, responding to changing political agendas, unexpected staff and partner turn-over, and changing country-level intervention contexts. As confirmed by partners and beneficiaries, this engagement has been critical to ensure continuous RP implementation and can therefore be considered successful.

57. **Strategic risk management at programme coordination level deserves more attention.** As per the RPD, strategic risk management is to be performed by the Regional Hub Advisory Board. Certainly, the Hub Board has discussed RP achievements and provided future direction during its annual meetings.

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*A Regional Hub Advisory Board, consisting of resident representatives from the region and senior management from central bureaux, will provide overall guidance and quality assurance to the regional programme and help monitoring risks.<sup>14</sup>*

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58. Strategic risk management, however, is intrinsically linked to programme-level learning and adaptive portfolio management. It essentially requires the identification of needs for programme adaptation in view of anticipated developments and contextual changes and the application of lessons learned in terms of what works and what does not. This will require some additional capacities and especially space created through efficiency gains (see above paragraph on RP capacities in the efficiency section). This is not to say that the regional hub management and RP coordination did not consider these aspects during the past 2 years. In fact, the hub management triggered strategic interactions between GPN teams and RP teams to facilitate the learning process. As a next step, however, the systematic integration of strategic risk management practices as part of

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<sup>14</sup> Regional programme document for Arab States (2022-2025), p. 10.

dynamic portfolio management is recommended, including the creation of required capacities and the establishment of a related, continuous process.

59. In the past two years the Regional Programme made promising contributions to higher-level change in the region. It will likely only be able to deliver on 50% if its outcome level targets. Nevertheless, the current outcome trajectory should be considered as adequate. It is recommended to focus and capitalize on most promising results in the remaining 2 years of implementation, notably on the four above identified areas and intensify follow-up at both regional and country levels.

### Recommendations

- Focus on, or at least ensure systematic follow-up on achievement in those intervention areas with the greatest potential for lasting impact in the region: climate security, the digital and knowledge divide, community-based conflict mediation and transparency and anti-corruption practices and measures.
- Introduce and interlink strategic risk management and dynamic (adaptive) portfolio management.

Table 4: RP Outcome-level Contribution Trends (outcome indicators) to Date

Outcomes & Indicators	Status	Rating	Related RP Projects
<b>Structural transformation accelerated, particularly green, inclusive, and digital transitions [rating 3/8]</b>			
Number of countries that have national statistical legislation that complies with the fundamental principles of official statistics	Relevant contribution	2	AKP, AHDR
Percentage of Arab trade that is intra-regional	No contribution	0	AEISD
Proportion of the population covered by at least one social protection benefit	No contribution	0	n/a
Proportion of individuals using the Internet	Some contribution	1	Digitalization, AKP
<b>Governance accountability increased to foster more resilient communities [rating 4/8]</b>			
Corruption perception index	Relevant contribution	2	ACIAC
Number of conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population	Some contribution	1	Insider Mediation
Proportion of female positions in national and local institutions	Some contribution	1	ACIAC, Shababeek
Number of forcibly displaced people	No contribution	0	[MADAD]
<b>Impact of climate change reduced, sound water management promoted, and access to sustainable energy improved [rating 5/6]</b>			
Financial flows to developing countries in support of clean energy research and development and renewable energy production	Some contribution	1	SDG Climate Facility
Number of people directly benefitting from mechanisms for biodiversity, water, oceans, and climate solutions funded by public and/or private sector resources	Relevant contribution	2	SDG Climate Facility
Volume of investment leveraged to support green recovery	Relevant contribution	2	SDG Climate Facility
<b>Women and youth empowered for a more inclusive and sustainable future [rating 4/6]</b>			
Percentage of achievement of legal frameworks in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex	No contribution	0	n/a
Proportion of female informal employment	Relevant contribution	2	Shababeek, SDG Climate Facility
Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment, or training	Relevant contribution	2	Shababeek, SDG Climate Facility

## Sustainability: More dynamic programming for lasting results

60. With regards to results sustainability, the MTR has assessed whether the implementation strategy of the RP and its projects was designed to promote results sustainability, and whether there is already at this stage any indication of contributions to lasting change. Given the nature of the review at mid-point of the programme cycle, the below paragraphs can only elaborate on prospective sustainability, rather than on actual sustainability. It is also to be noted that the assessment of results sustainability is very much related to the review of programme impact since higher-level change can only be triggered by sustainable results. Therefore, the conclusions of this section are closely related to the findings of the previous section.

61. **Preliminary higher-level results achieved by the RP after 2 years of implementation show promising sustainability potential.** This is especially the case in the 4 areas outlined above, namely the launch of the regional climate security agenda, the reduction of the regional knowledge divide, the regional network of conflict mediators, and the anchoring of transparency and accountability practices in public institutions. Subject to continuous focus in these areas for the coming 2 years and possibly during the next programme cycle, the RP has the unique opportunity of making a critical and lasting difference in the region.

62. **There is space for improvements of project level implementation strategies in view of results sustainability.** Across projects, beneficiaries and implementing partners emphasize the need for longer-term accompaniment and the scale-up of interventions to ensure results sustainability. In addition, some implementing partners stressed the need to review the criteria for the selection of target beneficiaries. Given the 1-year grants duration, beneficiaries are often selected based on their potential to show quick results. For example, the young start-ups selected as part of the Shababeek project tend to be those who are already well on the way of business success for the simple reason that only reasonably well-established start-ups will be able to produce results within the short timeframes of grants, typically ranging between 10 and 12 months. Implementing partners recommend changing this practice by extending the grants duration and by selecting new start-ups not yet on their way to success. This shift, which can be expected to enhance impact and results sustainability, will require continuous donor and partner engagement to ensure that the approach is understood and supported.

63. **The introduction of adaptive portfolio management practices will contribute to sustainability of results.** Linked to the above finding that strategic risk management deserves more attention (and capacities), the management of results for sustainability at programme (strategic level) should be strengthened through the introduction of dynamic, adaptive programme management practices and the strengthening of related capacities. The more the RP manages to apply continuous learning through regular strategic reflection loops, the more it will manage to drive results sustainability.

64. **Stronger ownership by regional institutions, especially their adoption and follow-up of interventions and approaches, will enhance results sustainability.** Such engagement can be expected to positively impact results sustainability if it leads to the creation of an enabling environment, enhanced programme ownership, and especially if it triggers follow-up actions by these institutions. The most powerful illustration of the sustainability potential of institutional ownership in the context of the RP is the adoption of the Global Knowledge Index developed by the Arab Knowledge Project as standing item of General Assembly deliberations of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), as described in more detail above in the section on effectiveness. Similarly, the creation of a climate security unit within the League of Arab States shows that the RTP has managed to lift this critical topic of regional relevance on the political agenda. Not all projects and interventions of the RP have natural institutional homes at the regional level. Yet, the RP should strive as much as possible to further promote regional institutional ownership for priority topics and interventions, guided by the emerging strategic outlook, namely the four above-described portfolios, and the areas of greatest impact potential. Among solutions, ownership and regional stewardship of the green and digital socio-economic transformation portfolio could possibly be explored with ICESCO, while locally driven and regionally connected conflict mediation would certainly fall under the mandate of the LAS.

65. Approximately \$14 million need to be mobilized in 2024/25 to ensure sufficient scale for impact and sustainability in priority areas. From a financial perspective, the sustainability of results depends on the ability of the RP to mobilize sufficient funds to implement all priority activities in high-impact areas, and to ensure overall financial RP sustainability. The resources mobilization target for 2024/2025 calculated based on these considerations amounts to \$14 million (see section on efficiency, and a detail financial analysis in the separate report “Review of required capacities to support programme implementation” from May 2023. This amount will ensure that planned activities in the areas of climate security, public sector transparency, digital & knowledge divide, and conflict mediation can be implemented at sufficient scale for impact and sustainability.

66. In summary, the RBAS Regional Programme has the potential to making a lasting difference in the region. This finding is subject to strengthened institutional ownership at the regional level, the introduction of adaptive portfolio management practices, fine-tuning of project implementation practices as well as the mobilization of sufficient additional financial resources. The focus on the most promising impact areas and the introduction of continuous learning practices will further promote results sustainability.

### Recommendations

- Explore possibilities with donors to adopt longer-term programming and funding frameworks.
- Systematize strategic engagement with regional institutions to enhance ownership and sustainability of results.
- Systematically use results sustainability as a key criterion guiding choices on project implementation.



## Conclusions & strategic recommendations

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67. This section summarizes the main lessons from the above analysis and proposes recommendations for the way forward, i.e., adaptations to the RP at strategic, programme and project levels. Recommendations have also been informed by findings and conclusions of two workshops with RP staff, GPN teams and RBAS management organized as part of the MTR.

### MTR Conclusions

68. The MTR has generated eight overall lessons. First, where RP initiatives were integrated into or connected with country office activities, the RP has managed to produce remarkable results. In fact, continuous exchanges between RP coordination, RP projects and country offices throughout the programme implementation cycle in some thematic areas greatly contributed to effectiveness.

69. Secondly, a more specific and less siloed outcome structure would have further increased programme relevance and effectiveness. This would also ensure RRF coherence by strengthening the relationship between output targets and outputs and by sharpening the overall RP vision. It would also facilitate vision-based external and internal communications. Based on MTR analysis, four intervention areas of the current RP in particular have shown great potential for lasting impact in the region: climate security, the digital and knowledge divide, community-based conflict mediation and transparency & anti-corruption practices.

70. Thirdly, capacity constraints due to implementation support inefficiencies and management of project-level bottlenecks have limited the engagement of RP coordination in strategic (dynamic, adaptive) portfolio management, including the identification and continuous calibration of priorities.

71. Fourthly, project-level implementation improves where the sustainability and impact of results guides the choice of implementation practices. In view of donor expectations, projects are sometimes inclined to choose those beneficiaries, target groups and partners where results can be demonstrated quickly, i.e. beneficiaries who are already relatively performant. Higher levels of impact and sustainability could be achieved, however, if projects rather targeted those beneficiaries most in need. Projects should therefore deliberately move away from attempting to demonstrate immediate impact and adopt a longer-term implementation horizon. This will require discussions and agreement with relevant donors who have signaled openness for this discussion during the MTR.

72. Fifthly, partners and beneficiaries are asking to be more involved in strategic programming questions. This is an opportunity to strengthen the “red threat” of the programme and involve partners in dynamic portfolio management. In fact, the RP will benefit from more continuous donor engagement and the creation of results partnerships in several ways: enhanced situational reading, better strategic positioning and funding security. Also, intensification of strategic engagement with relevant regional institutions, beyond immediate project-level collaboration, will facilitate programme implementation and regional change.

73. Sixthly, since strategic risk management is closely linked to dynamic (adaptive) portfolio management, strengthening the latter will automatically enhance the former. Continuous learning-informed prioritization and adaptation through stronger cross-sectional work between GPN teams as well as strategic partner engagement will also enhance programme effectiveness. In fact, where substantive quality assurance and support through GPN teams was systematized, such as between the SDG Climate Facility and the GPN Environment team, project implementation has benefitted.

74. Seventhly and unsurprisingly, adequate project capacities are critical for efficient implementation. Where projects encountered capacity bottlenecks due to staff departures or insufficient staffing, implementation suffered. GPN teams will not be able to take charge of project implementation, and RP coordination cannot fill gaps for an extended period.



75. Eighthly, good progress has been made with regards to the review and clarification of business processes. It remains to be seen whether some processes will in the future create bottlenecks, also in view of possible future Quantum and GSSC adjustments. Continuous process monitoring and regular check-ins between the hub operations team, RP coordination, MSU/PSU and project teams is therefore recommended. Moreover, MSU/PSU capacities and structures need be adjusted to enhance efficiency (see separate report on RP implementation capacities).

## Recommendations for the way forward

76. The above lessons, which were formed during focus group discussions and the two MTR workshops (see annex for details and agendas), have generated **five recommendations** for a coherent way forward for the regional programme, which will be outlined in the following paragraphs.

### Recommendation 1

<b>Deals with</b>	<i>Relevance &amp; coherence, and effectiveness</i>
<b>Directed at</b>	<i>RP Programme Coordination</i>

77. **Gradually introduce the new vision and portfolios and adjust existing RP projects.** It is recommended to introduce and gradually refine a more targeted vision and theory of change for the regional programme, within the existing RPD and ideally extending into the next programme cycle. As outlined in the above sections on relevance and coherence and on sustainability, a longer-term programmatic vision is necessary to drive change on complex topics in the region. In terms of the focus and priorities, the RP can thematically only include part of the activities of UNDP in the region, and the selection should be selected based on their value added possibly including:

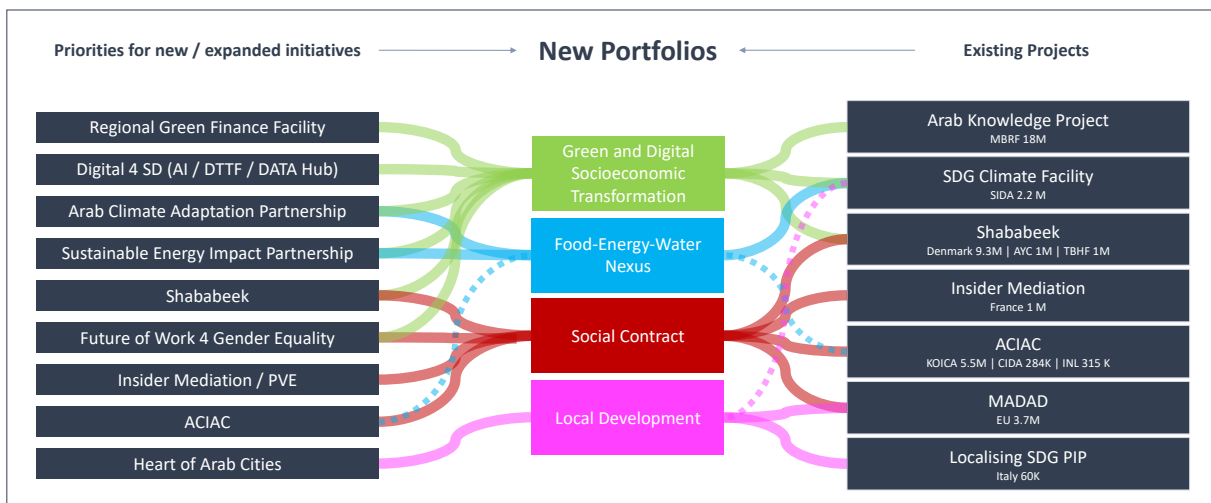
- Ability to scaling approaches (and impact) at regional level
- Potential to advancing regional networking and dialogue
- Contribution to research and knowledge development within region and among COs
- Introduction of innovative methods
- Promoting coherence in addressing complex issues
- Advocacy on critical, but sensitive issues through mobilizing regional institutions and networks

78. Additional criteria supporting the selection of RP priorities that have been developed and used during the first, strategic adaptation and repositioning workshop are captured in below table 4. Using these criteria during a strategic visioning exercise, the workshop has generated four new priority areas, which should inform the revision of the RP outcome structure, facilitate dynamic / adaptive portfolio management, and guide the development of new RP initiatives: the **Green and Digital Socio-Economic Transformation** portfolio, the **Food-Energy-Water Nexus** portfolio, the **Social Contract** portfolio, and the **Local Development** portfolio (see below table 5 for the four statements of intent presented during the second portfolio consolidation workshop). Ongoing projects will contribute to these portfolios as shown in below figure 8, and a number of prioritized new or expanded initiatives confirmed during the portfolio consolidation workshop will address existing gaps.

79. It is further recommended that the four intervention areas where the MTR has found high potential to instilling regional change will be fully integrated and consistently pursued as part of the portfolio work to realize this potential:

- (1) Ongoing work on the climate security agenda, including country-level follow-up, will be pursued as part of the Food-Energy-Water Nexus and the Local Development portfolios and should be anchored in regional climate initiatives as well as the insider mediation project.
- (2) Activities addressing the regional knowledge and digital divide implemented as part of the Arab Knowledge Project, and the Shababeek project will contribute to the Social Contract and to the Digital & Economic Transition portfolios.
- (3) The expansion of the regional network of conflict mediators driven by the insider mediation project will contribute to the local development and social contract portfolios.
- (4) Interventions through the ACIAC project aiming at gradually introducing transparency and anti-corruption measures in public offices across the region, finally, will contribute to the Social Contract, Local Development and Food-Energy-Water Nexus portfolios.
- (5) The nascent gender equality programme will contribute to the 4 areas, as per the regional gender equality strategy.

Figure 8: Emerging RP portfolio structure



80. As shown in figure 8, the existing RP projects can be very well aligned with the four new RP portfolios. Instead of doing business as usual at project level, however, existing workplans need to be adjusted to the new RP vision and strategic priorities expressed in the 4 statements of intent. It is recognized that this will be a gradual, dynamic process. Yet, the annual planning process 2024 is an opportunity to trigger and drive this alignment. As per the discussions during the MTR, there is sufficient space within the existing project frameworks to make these adjustments. It will of course be critical to involve all donors and partners in this process. Likely, this is also an opportunity to strengthen existing partnerships and create new ones, as per the above finding on the need for stronger partner involvement in strategic matters.

81. The Shababeek project has been developed as a youth portfolio bringing together a complex set of activities and processes for economic empowerment and youth participation. After roughly two years of implementation, it is time to weigh and compare the value of maintaining the current structure with the value of splitting the project into two separate implementation structures within the new RP portfolio architecture. It is recommended that the RBAS hub management facilitates the decision-making process on this question. There are strong arguments for both avenues. While ensuring a coherent approach focusing on the youth of the region, the existence of a youth portfolio with its own portfolio management structure will add an element of complexity and bears the risk of unnecessary layers.

## Recommendation 2

<b>Deals with</b>	<i>Efficiency</i>
<b>Directed at</b>	<i>RBAS &amp; Amman Regional Hub Management</i>

82. **Strengthening of RP capacities and management arrangements.** Together with changes of the programmatic structure, it is recommended to adjust the RP governance and implementation arrangements. Four different management functions are relevant in this context: project management assurance, technical assurance and guidance, dynamic portfolio management, and strategic programme coordination. While there are linkages between these functions, they can be distinguished as follows:

- **Project management assurance:** Ensuring that RP projects are managed in compliance with UNDP rules and regulations and project-specific requirements, including adequate planning of implementation processes, timely workplan & budget implementation, reporting, the conduct of project boards, etc.
- **Technical assurance and guidance:** Guiding project activities ensuring that they are of highest technical quality and incorporate best international technical standards.
- **Dynamic portfolio management:** Ensuring that interlinkages are identified and managed, as well as continuous learning and generation of portfolio-relevant insights from project implementation, identifying adaptation needs and new options to trigger system change, and guiding the portfolio towards its intent.
- **Strategic RP coordination:** Ensuring overall coordination and interaction between portfolios, the RP learning process and overall accountability for RP results.

83. Project management assurance and strategic RP coordination are currently mainly performed by the RP coordination team, in close collaboration with relevant project managers. In view of MTR findings, this arrangement is adequate assuming that coordination capacities will be strengthened, and space created as per the recommendations of the earlier mentioned report "Review of required capacities to support programme implementation". The implementation of the recommendations of this separate report will facilitate the introduction of dynamic portfolio management, and overall allow the RP coordination team to focus on more strategic tasks.

84. Technical assurance requires adjustments. In fact, a light review of the Amman regional hub conducted in 2021 had already recommended to establish systematic linkages between RP projects and GPN technical teams through the introduction of secondary reporting lines between project managers and GPN team leaders where technical relationships are unambiguous. There are initial experiences with such arrangement, notably the Shababeek project technically linked to the Lead Economist, the Insider Mediation project linked to the GPN Governance & Conflict Prevention team, and the SDG CF linked to the GPN Energy & Environment team. The feedback of all involved parties with regards to this arrangement is positive. Several colleagues also suggest the establishment of pools by GPN team leaders of all technical colleagues involved in a common substantive area such as economic recovery, gender, etc., to which RP colleagues should actively contribute.

85. There are several factors that need to be considered with regards to the way that technical assurance can effectively be strengthened. First, the supervisory arrangements need to remain manageable. Too many reporting lines to various people will be unmanageable and counterproductive. Secondly, the purpose of respective reporting lines needs to be well defined to avoid overlaps and conflicts. Thirdly, not all forms of collaboration require a formal reporting line. Technical peer support and exchanges, for instance, are more efficiently managed through horizontal collaboration arrangements than through additional reporting lines. In view of these considerations, the MTR recommends the establishment of secondary, technical reporting lines for project or project component managers where these are unambiguous. In addition, GPN team leaders should consider the establishment of technical working groups or pools in areas that are not adequately covered by the 4 new portfolios, with gender certainly being one of these areas as per the suggestion in the regional gender strategy. Practically speaking, relevant GPN team leaders

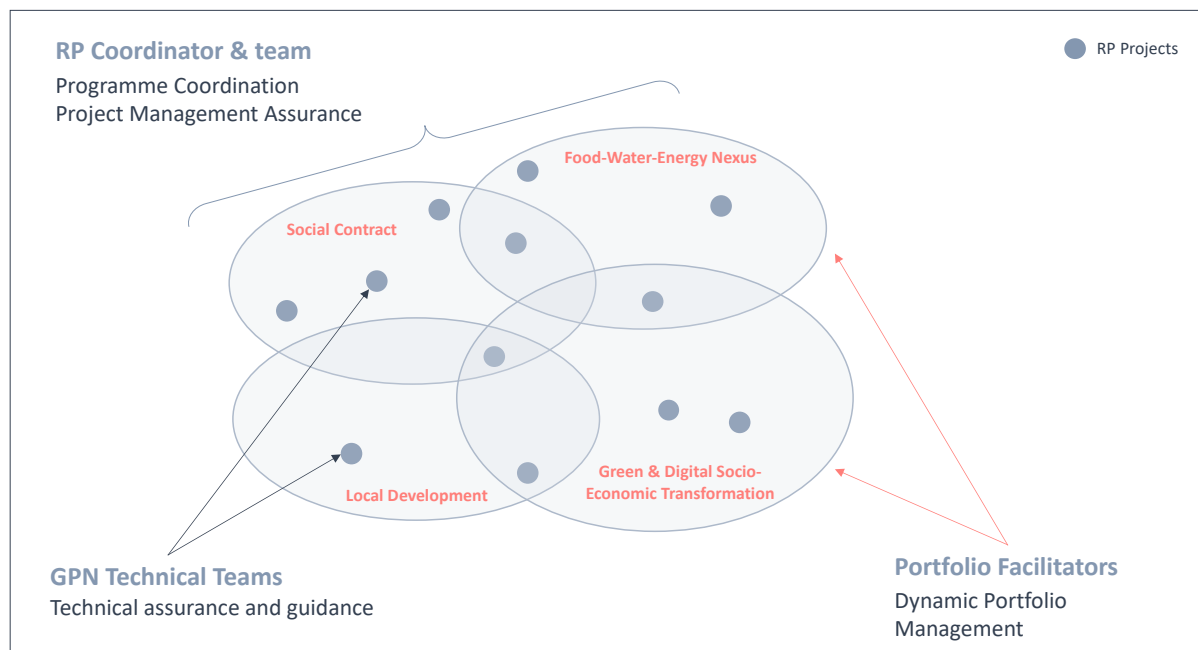
should be designated by hub management to facilitate these pools, and the Job Descriptions of all related technical staff including RP project colleagues should include the responsibility to actively participate the pools.

### Recommendation 3

<b>Deals with</b>	Effectiveness
<b>Directed at</b>	RP Coordination & GPN Team Leaders

86. **Introducing dynamic portfolio management (Recommendation 3).** The MTR proposes the introduction of dynamic (or: adaptive) portfolio management. Based on experiences in various UNDP business units, it is proposed to do this in a gradual and pragmatic way and to support the process through the strengthening of relevant capacities. Discussions held during the MTR process indicate that there is a variety of views and expectations when it comes to portfolio management, and it is therefore critical to clarify and establish a common understanding with regards to the approach among all involved colleagues. Importantly, the introduction of the 4 new portfolios will not replace current hub and RP management structures. Rather, the MTR proposes that a facilitator is designated for each of the 4 new portfolios, notably the GPN team leader most closely related from a technical point of view. The main task of the facilitator will be to guide the continuous learning and knowledge distillation process leading to strategic adaptations of the portfolio, including RP projects, GPN staff and partners contributing to the thematic portfolio. It is important to note that the facilitator will not be responsible for project management assurance and RP project coordination. Instead, s/he is expected to co-design and facilitate a process that ensures the timely identification of adaptation opportunities and / or needs in view of newly generated knowledge - at portfolio level, within the region or globally - and in response to contextual changes.

Figure 9: Proposed distribution of RP management related functions



87. Adaptive portfolio management requires a continuous “finger on the pulse” in terms of portfolio progress and in terms of contextual changes. Continuous context monitoring, including of the political economy, and of progress towards results is essential to identify adaptation needs and new opportunities. Experience shows that it is mostly due to capacity gaps in these areas that adaptive portfolio management is not successfully implemented. It is therefore recommended to

invest in the capacities of relevant staff in terms of the “how” of experimentation, dynamic M&E and learning from implementation.

88. In addition to investing into the capacities of existing staff, it is proposed to create a dedicated capacity continuously informing the dynamic portfolio management process. The capacity should maintain an analytical and trends-focused dialogue with country offices and external partners in the region and systematically draw on available corporate data sources and analysis (such as DFX, future trends, Geohub) as well as new technology, including artificial intelligence, to continuously generate and analyze contextual and thematic information. The concept of the “strategic learning & renewal engine” presented during the portfolio consolidation workshop is an excellent starting point for such a capacity, especially since it also provides information and lessons of relevance from other regions. To do justice to dynamic portfolio management, this analytical engine would need to additionally incorporate the capacity to monitor and detect context changes in key results areas of the four portfolios and monitor regional ecosystems in which the portfolios are operating. This can partially be automated with the use of artificial intelligence but will in the view of the author also require a standing staff capacity of one or two analysts. There are natural interlinkages with the Arab Knowledge Project, of course, which might provide entry points to funding such a capacity. Given its strategic importance, however, it is essential to establish and maintain this capacity as a UNDP RBAS core capacity.

#### Recommendation 4

<b>Deals with</b>	<i>Impact &amp; Sustainability</i>
<b>Directed at</b>	<i>RP Coordination, RP Project Managers</i>

89. **Systematize the use of programming principles across RP projects to enhance effectiveness and results sustainability.** While the gender targeting is systematically done across projects to support implementation and enhance sustainability, a deeper analysis using the UNDP GRES methodology is recommended to further guide gender equality efforts. Moreover, there are gaps with regards to conflict sensitivity and the systematic application of the LNOB-principle. Overall effectiveness and sustainability of the RP can be further enhanced through the use of conflict analysis to inform decisions at programme and project level as well as the systematic consideration of “change potential” and “results sustainability” to guide choices including the selection of beneficiaries of RP projects.

#### Recommendation 5

<b>Deals with</b>	<i>Effectiveness, Impact &amp; Sustainability</i>
<b>Directed at</b>	<i>Amman Regional Hub Management, RP Programme Coordination</i>

90. **Strengthen real-time, up-to-date internal and external communication and strategic partner engagement.** The UNDP’s regional programme, i.e., its initiatives, achievements and knowledge products are representing UNDP’s “DNA” in the region and serve as a starting point for partnership opportunities. Given the international spotlight, relevant up-to-date communication through the most important channels including the website and social media therefore needs to be strengthened. As outlined above, this will require a minimum standing capacity. The above discussed strengthened knowledge management and analytical capacities will provide content ensuring continued relevance of communications.

91. At the most basic level, every project manager should make sure to have regular meaningful engagements with relevant donors. The MTR process has shown that there are some differences between RP projects, and project managers should discuss possibilities to further improve engagement practices as part of the annual planning process 2024. Beyond the project level,

however, there is an opportunity to strengthen existing and create new partnerships through a continuous vision-driven strategic engagement process. It is therefore proposed that donors and relevant technical partners be involved in dynamic portfolio management, thus also being at the core of discussing and possibly funding new opportunities as they are identified.

Table 5: Criteria supporting the selection of RP priorities

Regionality	Impact	Feasibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regional relevance</li> <li>▪ Potential for cross-country collaboration</li> <li>▪ Complementarity / Added value to CO programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Potential for scale</li> <li>▪ Reach of beneficiaries</li> <li>▪ Applicability of “Leave no one behind” principle</li> <li>▪ Sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Political space</li> <li>▪ Capacities &amp; resources</li> <li>▪ Mandate &amp; positioning compared to other partners</li> </ul>

Table 6: Statements of intent of the four new RP portfolios

<p><b>Green and Digital Transformation for Socio-Economic Development</b></p> <p>The intent of the Green and Digital Transformation for Socio-Economic Development is to ensure that the ongoing digital and green transformations are human-centered and inclusive, leveraging UNDP’s capacities and partnerships as thought leader and convener to promote sustainable development throughout the region. This will include the design and implementation of an integrated approach in the Arab Region for policy and programming to leverage the synergies between the green-digital transitions and related technologies for inclusive socio-economic transformation, providing future-proven jobs, enabling business environments and better services, while managing the trade-offs between the Twin Transition. It will instigate the following effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inclusive access to opportunities for future jobs and digitally backed public services and financial assets.</li> <li>▪ Strengthened institutions and systems that prioritize data-informed gender-responsive development policies and decision-making process cultivating a culture of data-driven decision-making and sustainable development in the region.</li> <li>▪ Inclusive green digital infrastructure to ensure affordability, accessibility, and adoption for socio-economic development.</li> </ul> <p>Potential entry points are data and emerging technologies, inclusive green digital infrastructure, regional Network for Arab Economic Transformation, MSMEs Development, the Green Finance Facility and green digital governance.</p> <p><b>Climate Action for the Water, Energy and Food Nexus in the Arab Region</b></p> <p>The intent of the portfolio “Climate Action for the Water, Energy and Food Nexus in the Arab Region” is to design and deliver development solutions and results in the Arab Region to enhance climate resilient forms of food, water and energy security, and creating a framework that bolsters the nexus and integrated approaches, especially for the poor and vulnerable in society. Leveraging its technical and financial capacities, coordination role, its role as trusted partner to the government, regional, national, local, and international stakeholders, UNDP’s interventions at the regional level will instigate the following effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accelerated water-energy-food nexus solutions and sustainable development pathways that bolster community resilience</li> <li>▪ Enhanced resource management models that ensure equitable access to water, food, and clean energy for all and empower local communities as agents of change for responsible production and consumption</li> <li>▪ Strengthened partnerships on climate action to safeguard integrated planning for governance, design and management of scarce natural resources based on the principle of leaving no one behind.</li> </ul>
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**Re-imagining the social contract in the Arab region**

The intent of the portfolio “Re-imagining the social contract in the Arab region” is to reimagine a social contract for a more inclusive, just, and peaceful society where citizens feel empowered, represented, and have their rights protected. ....and transformations are effectively managed, bind governments and citizens, forging a path to progress. This will achieve:

- Trust as connector for cohesive and peaceful societies
- Empowerment for an inclusive social contract
- Peace for a sustained social contract

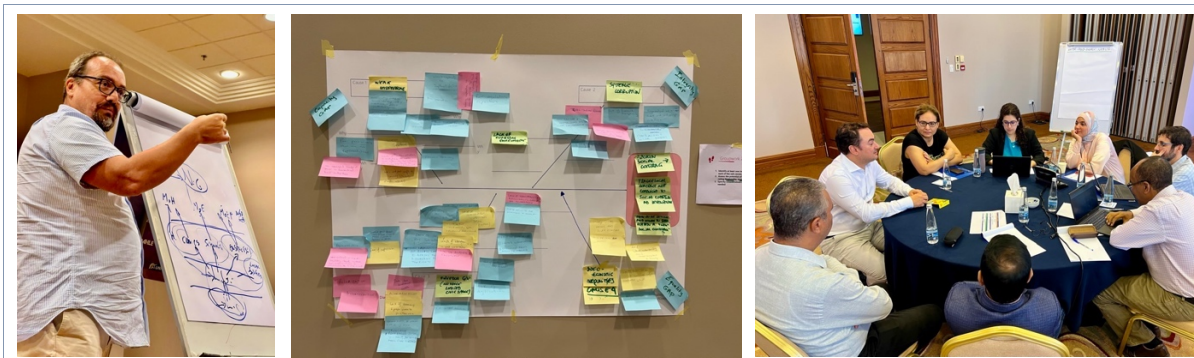
The approach of the RP will be to anchor activities at the regional level, while providing a framework for country-level work. Therefore, some components of this portfolio will only benefit from a light involvement of regional capacities, therefore not requiring dedicated regional projects.

**Arab Region integrated local development portfolio**

The intent of the Arab Region integrated local development portfolio is to promote vibrant and resilient communities (including people on the move) across the Arab States that are empowered to address environmental, social, and economic challenges in a holistic way. Leveraging its position and strategic partnerships and supporting ongoing and future work at country level through the opening of spaces for change at the local level through a coherent framework, UNDP will instigate the following development effects:

- Increased equalities through spatial and service design
- Increased opportunities for socioeconomic and environmental wellbeing
- Stronger social contract (voice, agency and participation)

The portfolio will use a systemic approach to local development, connecting systems at local and regional level (horizontal and vertical) to harness actions in support of SDG achievement at the local level.



## Annex 1: Process Overview (large)





## Annex 2: MTR Analytical Framework

### Purpose

To assess its ability, in terms of focus and resources, to be scaled up to the envisaged ambition and to adjust to the volatile environment to contribute across its four outcomes.

### Midterm objectives

- Assess the Theory of Change (ToC) and recommend adjusting as emerging development challenges or shifted approaches deem to be reflected to facilitate adaptive management.
- Review the fit for purpose of the current regional programme to scale results against the outcomes, including partnership strategies and resource mobilization.
- Assess progress against effectiveness of the results framework, the relevance of output indicators and corresponding baseline, milestone, and target values.

### Guiding analytical questions

Areas	Guiding Questions	Key informants	Sources
<b>Relevance &amp; Coherence</b>			
Vision & strategic adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the RP implementation guided by a clear vision, and to what extent is this vision relevant for the future?</li> <li>• What have been UNDP's contributions, gaps, and missed opportunities to enable progress in advancing the corporate and regional development priorities?</li> <li>• To what extent is the regional programme responsive to the volatile environment in the Arab States region?</li> <li>• Was the vision deliberately adapted to the evolving context, and to what extent is this understood by all involved?</li> </ul>	Counterparts RBAS Leadership RP Coordinator	RBAS Vision 2023 RP Overview PPT Visioning Workshop Survey
Theory of Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent have the theory of change and the underlying assumptions of the regional programme presented an appropriate framework to guide RP interventions (portfolio, projects, and PIPs)?</li> <li>• To what extent have the theory of change and the underlying assumptions integrated gender equality considerations?</li> <li>• To what extent was the ToC articulated into the RP RRF?</li> </ul>	RP Coordination GPN Team Leaders	RPD RP ToC

Governance Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent is the current governance structure of the regional programme appropriate to foster programmatic coherence, including clarity on accountability, responding to stakeholders' expectations, and promote synergies instead of duplication of efforts within UNDP and with partners.</li> </ul>	RP Coordination GPN Team Leaders	RPD Hub Board Organigrammes SOPs
Contribution to CO programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the regional programme add value through its advisory services and country-level activities to country level development results, creating synergies and opportunities for scaling the work of UNDP country offices?</li> <li>Is the setup of regional projects ensuring meaningful collaboration with COs?</li> </ul>	Country Offices	Project reports Survey
<b>Effectiveness</b>			
Results Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent is the current regional programme on track to achieve the planned targets? Are stakeholders aware of planned results and related achievements? What are the key contributing factors that may determine achieving or not the intended results?</li> <li>Did the programme achieve additional intended or unintended results of relevance, and how – if any – were these integrated into the overall programme strategy?</li> <li>To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women?</li> </ul>	Project Managers M&E Group GPN TLs	Project reports M&E Framework ROAR
Target group reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent has the regional programme been able to target and reach the identified target groups? How to enhance engagement of and responsiveness to the needs of these groups?</li> <li>To what extent have poor, indigenous and physically challenged, women, men and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from the work of UNDP in the country?</li> </ul>	RP Coordination GPN Team Leaders COs M&E Group RP Beneficiaries	Project reports M&E Framework ROAR
Strategic enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent were the three enablers of UNDP's Strategic Plan – innovation, digital transformation, and financing – used in the implementation of regional initiatives? What could be done to leverage their use to further accelerate implementation and scale-up results.</li> <li>To what extent did the RP interventions adopt gender-sensitive, human rights-based and conflict-sensitive approaches?</li> </ul>	RP Coordinator Project Managers M&E Group GPN TLs RP Beneficiaries	Project Documents Project reports

Partnerships and Outreach / COMs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent was the regional programme able to engage, communicate, or coordinate with stakeholders, partners, other United Nations agencies, as well as regional and national counterparts to maximise the contribution to intended results?</li> <li>To what extent were the partnerships established suitable to deliver intended results? How to enlarge these partnerships, especially to key regional actors, and streamline the outreach capacity of the regional programme to a broader global, regional, and national audience?</li> <li>What changes should be considered in the current set of partnerships with donors, regional institutions, CSOs, UN Agencies, private sector, and other development partners to promote long-term sustainability, scale, and durability of results?</li> </ul>	RP Donors Project Managers RP Coordinator RBAS Leadership UN Sister Agencies COMS Group	Project reports Survey ROAR
<b>Efficiency</b>			
Management arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are the management arrangements adequate to ensure efficient RP implementation?</li> <li>Which implementation bottlenecks have occurred in the past 2 years, and how can these be addressed?</li> </ul>	Project Managers GPN TLs RP Coordinator	RP MSU/PSU Review
Capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the regional programme have the necessary capacity to deliver on and scale intended results? If not, what critical capacities should be added?</li> <li>Has the regional programme the right capacities (human resource, business procedures, partnership strategies, etc.) to sustain results at the required scale? What could be done to strengthen current capacities in view of longer-term sustainability and enhanced scale?</li> </ul>	Project Managers RP Coordinator COs	Project Documents RP Staff List RP Capacity Mapping
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent and how has the regional programme mobilized and used its resources (human and financial) to achieve the results planned in the current cycle?</li> <li>To what extent has the regional programme been able to utilize UNDP core resources to leverage external funding to support the achievement of results?</li> <li>Will currently available resources and hard pipelines allow to implement planned priority activities?</li> <li>Are there significant funding gaps between outcome areas, what are reasons and how can these be addressed?</li> </ul>	RP Coordinator RP Finance Officer	Detailed Project Delivery Reports Pipeline Report RP Resources Framework Report RP Financial Reporting
M&E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent does the RPF RRF and established RP M&amp;E systems provide the required data to assess progress achieved against outputs and outcomes?</li> <li>To what extent is programme data received from M&amp;E/progress reports used in decision-making, programme adjustments, communication/visibility, and feeding lessons learned into the programme cycle?</li> <li>Are the RP monitoring and evaluation systems in place helping to ensure that the programme is managed efficiently and effectively?</li> </ul>	RP M&E Group Project Managers	Project reports ROAR M&E Framework
<b>Impact</b>			

Higher-level results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there already at this stage any indication for higher-level results / change at the impact level? To what extent can this be attributed to UNDP RP interventions?</li> </ul>	RP Coordinator COs GPN TLs	Project reports Regional Data Sources Beneficiary Reports CP ROARs
Risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the RP pro-actively managing risks?</li> <li>Have risks that may jeopardize the sustainability been identified properly? What could be done to strengthen risk management?</li> </ul>	RP Coordinator RBAS Leadership	ROAR RP Risk Log
<b>Sustainability</b>			
Longer-term, lasting change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Was the RP implementation strategy – and those of its projects – designed to promote the sustainability of results?</li> <li>Is there already at this stage any indication that the RP has contributed to longer-term change in the RBAS region?</li> </ul>	RP Coordinator COs GPN TLs Project Managers Beneficiaries	Workplans Project Documents Project Board reports Structured Interviews

### Guiding questions for the MTR outlook section

<b>Outlook</b>	
Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the key lessons learned from RP implementation 2022-2022 in each of the four analytical areas (relevance &amp; coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact &amp; sustainability)?</li> </ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How should the RP vision evolve?</li> <li>How can the regional programme be efficiently scaled up?</li> <li>What should be programmatic priority areas, given the evolving context and limited funding?</li> <li>Which capacity adjustments are recommended?</li> <li>How should governance systems and management systems be adjusted?</li> <li>What are priority actions with regards to further develop technical, financial and strategic partnerships?</li> <li>How can M&amp;E systems and modalities be further developed?</li> <li>How can communications be used to further strengthen strategic RP positioning?</li> </ul>

## Annex 3: Outline for the structured Interviews

Each interview will be planned for 45 minutes and will be composed of 6 key questions and related follow-up. 3 of the questions will be chosen among those of the main area of interest for the interview (based on the interviewee category, see below table), and three additional questions will cover the additional areas.

For example, the main area of interest for the interview with project managers is “Impact & Sustainability” (3 questions) and additional areas are Effectiveness and Efficiency (additional 3 questions from these areas. Accordingly, a sample interview structure with project managers could be:

- To what extent is your project on track to achieve the planned targets? What are the key contributing factors that may determine achieving or not the intended results?
- To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women?
- Was the project implementation strategy designed to promote the sustainability of results?
- How are you managing risks?
- Will currently available resources and hard pipelines allow to implement planned priority activities?
- Which implementation bottlenecks have occurred in the past 2 years, and how can these be addressed?
- How did your project benefit from collaboration with other teams and how ready are you to move towards more collaborative and cross-sectional ways of working?

### Focus Areas by interviewee category

Category	Relevance / Coherence	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Impact / Sustainability
RBAS Leadership	X			
GPN Teams	X		X	
Country Offices	X	X	X	X
Coordination	X	X	X	X
Project Managers		X	X	X
Project Donors	X	X		
Beneficiaries		X		X
Counterparts	X			
UN Agencies		X	X	

## Annex 4: Concept and agenda of the Visioning & Future-Scaping Workshop

### Overview

#### Workshop purpose

The purpose of the workshop is to review and align, based on current trends and emerging issues in the Arab region, priorities for the Regional Programme 2022-2025 for the second part of its implementation period and to inform the development of programme and project-level action plans.

#### Objectives

- Confirm a common vision for the regional programme and identify relevant emerging issues
- Identify priority portfolios and explore entry-points for the development of system-based portfolio strategies
- Initiate the alignment of existing projects to priority portfolios and identify gap areas

#### Approach

The workshop builds on existing analysis and recent visioning events, the RP theory of change and the current RP programming initiatives. Using modified elements of the highly interactive “Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)” methodology of the Harvard Center for International Development in addition to UNDP’s methodology guiding the portfolio approach, it aims to channel existing collective knowledge into reality-oriented strategy adaptation. It will use a set of interactive sessions and facilitated groupwork to assess the key external factors that influence UNDP’s environment, to delineate substantive priority clusters and to identify entry-points for portfolio strategies.

#### Participants

Senior management (Regional Director, Hub Management), Regional Programme staff, Hub Team Leaders+1 from all teams (BPPS and CB teams and the SRF), 2 representatives from the partnership unit (comms and donors relations).

**DAY ONE**

Time	Session	Details
<b>8.30 – 9.00</b>	Arrival & Coffee	
<b>9.00 - 9.30</b>	<b>Opening &amp; Objectives</b>	
<b>SESSION 1: Exploring the Future   Confirm common vision for RBAS region and identify entry-points for priority portfolios</b>		
<b>9.30 – 10.30</b>	<b>The Region We Want</b>	Objective: Synthesizing a common vision for the mid-term future Inputs: Participants' vision for change, PESTEL template Lead: RBAS Regional Director or External Expert
<b>10.30 – 11.30</b>	<b>Signals of Change</b>	Objective: Exploration of concrete entry-points for system change Inputs: Participants' evidence-based one trend and one emerging issue, PESTEL IMPACT template Lead: Facilitator
<b>11.30 – 12.30</b>	<b>Priority Challenges</b>	Objective: Identifying issue-based high-level portfolios Inputs: Portfolio Map template, project 1-pagers Lead: Regional Programme Coordinator
<b>12.30 – 13.30</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	
<b>SESSION 2: Future Scaping   Assemble priority portfolios and design their intervention strategies</b>		
<b>13.30 – 15.00</b>	<b>Mapping the system</b>	Objective: Mapping the issue system Inputs: "5 why" template, Ishikawa diagram template Lead: Facilitator
<b>15.00 – 15.30</b>	<b>Coffee / tea</b>	
<b>15.30 – 17.00</b>	<b>Designing the strategy</b>	Objective: Exploring entry-points for an intervention strategy for each portfolio Inputs: ESC framework template, portfolio narrative template Lead: Regional Programme Coordinator
<b>17.00-17.15</b>	<b>End of the day</b>	
<b>19.00</b>	Common dinner	Details TBD

**DAY TWO**

Time	Session	Details
8.15 - 8.30	<b>Opening, Goals for Day 2</b>	<b>Hub Management</b>
<b>SESSION 3: Project alignment</b>   Establishing focus areas for existing projects and identifying gap areas		
8.30-9.30	<b>Strategy iteration</b>	<b>Objective:</b> Initial testing of emerging high-level strategy <b>Inputs:</b> Initial portfolio narratives <b>Lead:</b> Regional Programme Manager
9.30-10.30	<b>Potential for resources mobilization</b>	<b>Objective:</b> Assessing feasibility from a funding perspective <b>Inputs:</b> BERA presentation & feedback on emerging priority portfolios <b>Lead:</b> Partnership team
10.30-11.00	<b>Coffee / Tea</b>	
11.00-13.00	<b>Project alignment &amp; Strategy calibration</b>	<b>Objective:</b> Finalising high-level portfolio strategies and establishing / confirming focus for all RP projects <b>Inputs:</b> RP project workplans, portfolio narratives <b>Lead:</b> Facilitator
13.00 - 14.30	<b>Lunch</b>	
<b>SESSION 4: Stress-testing</b>   Gaging the potential of proposed strategies		
14.30 - 16.30	<b>Strategy Defense</b>	<b>Objective:</b> Stress-test emerging strategies and agree on next steps. <b>Inputs:</b> Portfolio strategy presentations <b>Lead:</b> Regional Programme Coordinator
16.30 - 17.00	<b>Closing</b>	<b>Regional Director</b>



## Annex 5: Concept and Agenda of the Portfolio Consolidation Workshop

### Overview

#### Workshop purpose

The purpose of this series of sessions is to finalize the strategic reorientation of the RBAS regional programme.

#### Objectives

- Consider emerging findings of the Midterm Review.
- Finalize the new portfolio concepts based on lessons learned, identified priorities, and senior management guidance.
- Discuss the possibility to establish an R&D renewal engine to support the portfolio development.

#### Approach

The sessions build on the results of the strategic adaptation workshop held in October 2023, namely the decision on the adaptation of the results structure and theory of change and the establishment of four new portfolios – and the subsequently developed portfolio concept notes developed by RP and GPN colleagues. Bringing together the new conceptual work, lessons learned from the ongoing MTR and strategic guidance from the RBAS Senior Management Team, the sessions will lead to adjustments and finalization of the concept notes and agreement of priorities for resources allocation and / or mobilization for 2024. Professional external facilitation will ensure impartiality and objectivity.

#### Participants

Senior management (Regional Director, Hub Management), select Regional Programme staff, Hub Team Leaders (BPPS and CB teams, and the SRF).

#### Tuesday December 12, 2023

Time	Session	Details
9.00 – 9.30	Arrival & Coffee	Participants enjoy a first coffee / tea and snacks
<b>SESSION 1: PREPARATIONS - Portfolio Consolidation &amp; Prioritization</b>		
→ Finalize the portfolio concepts		
09.30 – 10.00	<b>Synthesis of MTR Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of emerging findings of the Midterm Review, relevant for the finalization of portfolio concepts</li> </ul>

Time	Session	Details
10.00 – 11.00	<b>Portfolio Consolidation: ToC, Priorities &amp; Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small working groups of 3 (Concept leads +2) will fine-tune the concept notes, adding / refining the theory of change, priority interventions, the role of existing projects and initial resource needs (financial, other).</li> </ul>
11.00 – 12.00	<b>Concept review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concept leads present the concise and priority-driven portfolio concept.</li> <li>Discussion and exchange.</li> </ul>
12.00 – 14.30	<b>Lunch</b>	Time at own discretion
<b>SESSION 2: LESSONS LEARNED – Emerging findings from the Midterm Review</b> → Understand, discuss, and vet lessons and recommendations from the MTR		
14.30 – 15.00	<b>Emerging MTR Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation of emerging findings and recommendations of the Midterm Review, following the conduct of stakeholder interviews, team discussions and detailed document analysis.</li> </ul>
15.00 – 15.30	<b>Clarifications discussion &amp;</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Q&amp;A to clarify MTR findings and recommendations</li> <li>Exchange on which of the findings are relevant for the new portfolio concepts</li> </ul>
<b>SESSION 3: RP REORIENTATION - The new regional Portfolios</b> → Presentation and vetting of the finalized portfolio concepts		
15.30 – 16.30	<b>Portfolio Presentations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The four concept leads present their portfolios of interventions for 2024/25 [10 minutes each], including ToC, priority interventions and initial resources needs.</li> <li>Clarifications and comments after each presentation [5 minutes]</li> </ul>
16.30 – 16.45	<b>Coffee &amp; Tea</b>	
16.45 – 17.30	<b>Strategic Learning &amp; Renewal Engine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RP Coordinator and GPN Innovation Lead jointly explain and visually demonstrate the 4Ps “the patterns, the proven, the possible, &amp; the promising” of the proposed strategic learning and renewal engine and how they can inform the proposed portfolio development.</li> <li>Clarifications and discussion</li> </ul>
17.30	<b>End of sessions</b>	RD & Hub Manager conclude and close working sessions

## Annex 6: Review of RPD Indicators and Targets

Outputs & Indicators	Indicators	Targets	Rating	Comment
<b>Structural transformation accelerated, particularly green, inclusive, and digital transitions</b>				
The 2030 Agenda and other inter-governmentally agreed frameworks integrated in national and local development plans, measures to accelerate progress put in place, and budgets and progress assessed using data-driven solutions	Number of Arab countries with data collection and/or analysis mechanisms providing disaggregated data to monitor progress towards the Goals	4	0	Disconnect Output – Indicator Disconnect Target - Result
Capacities developed for progressive expansion of inclusive regional economic integration (regional specific)	Number of policies and measures expanding access to regional and global markets including for SMEs (region specific)	3	1	Disconnect Target - Result
Social protection services and systems strengthened across sectors with increased investment	Number of countries with policy measures and institutional capacities in place to increase access to social protection schemes	3	1	Disconnect Target - Result
Public and private financing for the achievement of the Goals expanded at regional, and national levels	Number of multi-stakeholder mechanisms to strengthen public sector agility, collaboration, and the co-design, public and private financing and delivery of solutions for sustainable development at (Strategic Plan 2.1.3)	Tbd	0	Disconnect Output – Indicator Missing target
Access to basic services and financial and non-financial assets and services improved to support productive capacities for sustainable livelihoods and jobs to achieve prosperity	Number of people accessing financial services: (Strategic Plan 1.3.2)	Tbd	0	Disconnect Output – Indicator Missing target
Innovation capabilities built to promote knowledge-based economies and expand policy options at regional, national, and sub-national levels	Number of innovative solutions adopted by programme partners, which expanded policy and development options, including on economic growth and development: (Strategic Plan E.2.2)	18	2	Reasonable match, even though spread across region matters
<b>Governance accountability increased to foster more resilient communities</b>				
Open, agile, accountable, and future-ready governance systems in place to co-create and deliver solutions to accelerate Sustainable Development Goals achievement	Number of measures to strengthen accountability, prevent and mitigate corruption risks, and integrate anti-corruption in the management of public funds, service delivery and other sectors (Strategic Plan 2.1.1)	40	2	Reasonable match
Capacities for conflict prevention, resilience and peacebuilding strengthened at regional, national, and subnational levels and across borders	Number of cross-border, regional, national, and subnational platforms, policies, strategies, and plans for conflict prevention, peace and resilience building: (Strategic Plan 3.2.1)	37	2	Good match
	Number of institutions, systems, or stakeholders with capacities to support fulfilment of nationally and internationally ratified human rights obligations	15	2	Reasonable match, even though spread across region matters
Democratic institutions and processes strengthened for an inclusive and open public sphere with expanded public engagement	Number of countries with electoral management bodies with special measures to enhance the participation of vulnerable groups (i.e., women, youth and the disabled)	5	2	Good match

	Number of regional, national, and subnational initiatives, policies, and strategies to protect and promote: (Strategic Plan 2.4.5)	15	1	Disconnect Target - Result
Institutions equipped with strengthened digital capabilities to contribute to and benefit from inclusive digital societies	Number of policies, strategies and laws that promote enabling and regulated digital ecosystems that are affordable, accessible, trusted and secure (Strategic Plan E.1.1)	8	1	Reasonable match but spread across region matters
	Number of public and private institutions that leverage digital technologies in ways that improves people's lives at: (Strategic Plan E.1.2)	9	1	Reasonable match but spread across region matters
Integrated development solutions implemented to address the drivers of irregular and forced migration, enhance the resilience of migrants, forcibly displaced and host communities, and expand the benefits of human mobility	Number of institutions that have measures to address drivers of human mobility: (adapted from Strategic Plan 3.4.1)	tbd	0	Disconnect Output – Indicator Missing target
<b>Impact of climate change reduced, sound water management promoted, and access to sustainable energy improved</b>				
Public and private investment mechanisms mobilized for biodiversity, water, oceans, and climate solutions	Number of people directly benefitting from mechanisms for biodiversity, water, oceans, and climate solutions funded by public and/or private sector resources: (Strategic Plan 4.2.1)	6500	0	Disconnect Output – Indicator Disconnect Target - Result
Energy gap reduced	Number of people, who benefitted from services from clean, affordable, and sustainable energy (in million): (Strategic Plan 5.1.2)	2,500,000	2	Good match
Transition to renewable energy accelerated capitalizing on technological gains, clean energy innovations and new financing mechanisms to support green recovery	Volume of investment leveraged to support green recovery (in millions of United States dollars) (Strategic Plan 5.2.3)	55,000,000	0	Disconnect Output – Indicator Disconnect Target - Result
<b>Women and youth empowered for a more inclusive and sustainable future</b>				
Women's leadership and participation advanced through strengthening institutions and civil society and addressing structural barriers, to advance gender equality, including in crisis contexts	Number of regional partnerships with women-led civil society organizations and other bodies and networks to advance women's leadership and participation and gender equality (Strategic Plan 6.2.2)	3	0	Disconnect Output – Indicator Disconnect Target - Result
Regional and national capacities and policies strengthened to advance women's economic empowerment	Number of measures implemented to eliminate gender-based discrimination and segregation in labour market, promote adoption of care policies, increase women's access to and use of digital technologies, digital finance, e-commerce and digital value chains, and ensure women's economic security and empowerment, including through economic recovery plans in crisis contexts (inspired by Strategic Plan 6.1.1)	7	2	Good match
Access to financial and non- financial assets and services improved to support productive capacities for sustainable livelihoods and jobs for youth	Number of youth benefiting from livelihood and entrepreneurial support including upskilling: (regional specific contributing to Strategic Plan 1.3.3)	200,000	2	Good match
	Number of youth/women-led MSMEs with enhanced capacities	1235	1	Reasonable match but spread across region matters

## Annex 7: MTR Action Plan

Recommendation	Implementation steps	Timing
1. Gradually introduce the new vision and portfolios and adjust the existing RP project structure to the new portfolios  <b>[Relevance / Coherence, Effectiveness]</b>	Adapt the RP vision and Theory of change to make it more specific, focusing on priorities and aligning the results framework	May 2024
	Review 2024 project workplans to enhance their contribution to the new portfolios and their intends	May 2024
	Ensure focus on, or at least ensure systematic follow-up on achievement in those intervention areas with the greatest potential for lasting impact in the region	May 2024
	Review the Shababeek project / portfolio structure	June 2024
2. Strengthen RP capacities and management arrangements  <b>[Efficiency]</b>	Address and resolve project-level capacity gaps without delay.	April 2024
	Adjust MSU/PSU capacities and structures as per the recommendations of the separate report on RP implementation capacities.	April 2024
	Systematize and structure substantive quality assurance and support through GPN teams.	May 2024
	Strengthen RP knowledge management, data & information management, partnerships management, communications, and resources mobilization capacities.	June 2024
	Continuously review and clarify local (hub-level) business processes to enhance efficiency.	December 2024
3. Introduce dynamic portfolio management  <b>[Effectiveness]</b>	Establish a process facilitating continuous learning-informed prioritization and adaptation.	March 2024
	Invest in experimentation, M&E and learning capacities, including through on-the-job training to portfolio facilitators and support staff	April 2024
	Introduce and interlink strategic risk management and dynamic (adaptive) portfolio management.	June 2024
	Create a dedicated analytical "engine"	June 2024
4. Systematize the use of programming principles across RP projects to support results sustainability	Systematically use results sustainability as a key criterion guiding choices on project implementation.	April 2024

<b>[Impact, Sustainability]</b>	Increase the emphasis across all projects on conflict sensitivity and conflict analysis guiding and strengthening programme and project implementation.	May 2024
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Recommendation	Implementation steps	Timing
5. Enhance communications and strategic partner engagement at project and programme level <b>[Effectiveness, Impact and Sustainability]</b>	Strengthen real-time, up-to-date internal and external communication (website, social media)	April 2024
	Develop a targeted communication and resources mobilization strategy that is guided by newly defined and well-focused RP priorities.	April 2024
	Explore possibilities with donors to adopt longer-term programming and funding frameworks.	December 2024
	Organize regular follow-up exchanges between RP coordination, RP projects and country offices	April 2024
	Strengthen strategic engagement with relevant regional institutions beyond project-level collaboration.	April 2024
	Ensure continuous engagement with current and potential donors.	June 2024
	Proactively involve partners in regular strategic reflection exercises	June 2024

## Annex 8: List of people interviewed as part of the MTR

41 interviews were conducted, in addition to 6 focus group discussions and 2 strategic workshops. In total, over 100 stakeholders were consulted as part of the MTR.

Name	Business Unit
<b>RBAS Leadership</b>	
Abdallah Al Dardari	RBAS Senior Management
Khaled Abdel Shafi	RBAS Senior Management
Susanne Dam-Hansen	RBAS Senior Management
<b>GPN Teams</b>	
Abdallah Al-Laham	GPN Sub-Regional Response Facility for the Syria Crisis
Giordano Segneri	GPN Governance, Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding
Gonzalo Pizarro	GPN SDG Integration
Jennifer Colville	GPN Innovation
Joanna Nassar	GPN Conflict Prevention
Kishan Khoday	GPN Nature, Climate and Energy
Lana Stade	GPN Sub-Regional Response Facility for the Syria Crisis
Mohammed Al-Qussari	PVE in Africa and Arab States (2022-2025)
Rania Tarazi	GPN Gender
Vito Intini	GPN Inclusive Growth, Economics and Sustainable Finance
<b>Country Offices</b>	
Chafika Affaq	UNDP Morocco
Edward Christow	UNDP Morocco
Jana Slim	UNDP Lebanon
Tawfeek Saeed	UNDP Yemen
<b>RP Project Managers &amp; Experts</b>	
Aylin Schulz van Endert	Shababeek project
Arkan El-Seblani	Anti-Corruption and Integrity in the Arab Countries
Dany Wazen	Regional Digital Offer
Hany Torky	Knowledge Project
Martina Salini	Insider Mediation
Nora Isayan	SDG-Climate Facility Project: Climate Action for Human Security
<b>RP Coordination</b>	
Ali Shrain	Regional Programme Financial Management
Azzurra Olmetti	Regional Programme Management Support
Lujain Ramadan	Regional Programme Management Support
Paola Pagliani	Regional Programme Management & Coordination
<b>RBAS Strategic Support</b>	
Aurelie Boukobza	North Africa sub-regional programming
Fatma Yassin	RBAS Communications
Manal Fouani	RBAS Chief of Country Support
Muni Ahlawat	Partnerships
<b>RP Project Partners &amp; Beneficiaries</b>	
Carmen Lopez-Clavero	SIDA
Dong Sung	KOICA
Dr. Sally Mabrouk	Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Frans Schapendonk	CGIAR
Heba Asaad	Smart WTI company
Ja Yoh	KOICA
Judge Claude Karam	National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) Lebanon
Samar Dani	Injaz
<b>UN Sister Agencies</b>	
Marleen Renders	UNICEF
Omar Farook	WFP

## **Annex 9: List of additional, separate annexes**

- Regional Programme Document
- Regional Programme Theory of Change
- Terms of reference of the Mid-term Review



## Annex 9: Pledge of Ethical Conduct



By signing this pledge, I hereby commit to discussing and applying the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and to adopting the associated ethical behaviours.



### INTEGRITY

I will actively adhere to the moral values and professional standards of evaluation practice as outlined in the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and following the values of the United Nations. Specifically, I will be:

- **Honest and truthful** in my communication and actions.
- **Professional**, engaging in credible and trustworthy behaviour, alongside competence, commitment and ongoing reflective practice.
- **Independent, impartial and incorruptible**.



### ACCOUNTABILITY

I will be answerable for all decisions made and actions taken and responsible for honouring commitments, without qualification or exception; I will report potential or actual harms observed. Specifically, I will be:

- **Transparent regarding evaluation** purpose and actions taken, establishing trust and increasing accountability for performance to the public, particularly those populations affected by the evaluation.
- **Responsive** as questions or events arise, adapting plans as required and referring to appropriate channels where corruption, fraud, sexual exploitation or abuse or other misconduct or waste of resources is identified.
- **Responsible** for meeting the evaluation purpose and for actions taken and for ensuring redress and recognition as needed.



### RESPECT

I will engage with all stakeholders of an evaluation in a way that honours their dignity, well-being, personal agency and characteristics. Specifically, I will ensure:

- **Access to** the evaluation process and products by all relevant stakeholders – whether powerless or powerful – with due attention to factors that could impede access such as sex, gender, race, language, country of origin, LGBTQ status, age, background, religion, ethnicity and ability.
- **Meaningful participation and equitable treatment** of all relevant stakeholders in the evaluation processes, from design to dissemination. This includes engaging various stakeholders, particularly affected people, so they can actively inform the evaluation approach and products rather than being solely a subject of data collection.
- **Fair representation** of different voices and perspectives in evaluation products (reports, webinars, etc.).



### BENEFICENCE

I will strive to do good for people and planet while minimizing harm arising from evaluation as an intervention. Specifically, I will ensure:

- **Explicit and ongoing consideration of risks and benefits** from evaluation processes.
- **Maximum benefits** at systemic (including environmental), organizational and programmatic levels.
- **No harm**. I will not proceed where harm cannot be mitigated.
- **Evaluation makes an overall positive contribution** to human and natural systems and the mission of the United Nations.

I commit to playing my part in ensuring that evaluations are conducted according to the Charter of the United Nations and the ethical requirements laid down above and contained within the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. When this is not possible, I will report the situation to my supervisor, designated focal points or channels and will actively seek an appropriate response.

Joerg Kuehnel

5 March 2024

(Signature and Date)