UNDP – Gender Impact Evaluation (GIE) of Major Syria CO projects

Syria, December 2023 – September 2024
Crest Point for Consultancy and Development (CPCD) for UNDP Country Office (UNDP CO)

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Acknowledgements:

Evaluation information		
Evaluation type (project/ outcome/thematic/country program, etc.)	Thematic evaluation	
Final/midterm review/ other	Other	
Period under evaluation	**Start**	**End**
	2022	2024
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Evaluation dates	**Start**	**Completion**
	30th of November 2023	15th of September 2024

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BSCI	Basic Services and Community Infrastructure Rehabilitation
CA	Climate Adaptation
CEDAW	Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination
CERF	Against Women
CM	Central Emergency Response Fund
CO	Climate Mitigation
CPD	Country Office
CPCD	Country Program Document
CSOs	Crest Point for Consultancy and Development
DAC	Civil Society Organizations
EQR	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
EU	Earthquake Response
FGDs	European Union
GBV	Focus Group Discussions
GEM	Gender Based Violence
GEWE	Gender Equality Marker
ICCPR	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
IDPs	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IPU-UN Women	Internal Displaced Persons
KII	The Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women
K.Q.	Key Informant Interview
LER	Key Question
LPCR	Livelihoods and Economic Recovery
NGO	Local Peacebuilding and Community Resilience
OECD	Non-Governmental Organization
SC	Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development
SPIC	Social Cohesion
SYR	Social Protection, Inclusion and Protection
TOT	Syria
UN	Total
UNDP	United Nations
UNDP SYR CO / UNDP	United Nation Development Program
CO	UNDP Syria Country Office
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

🗓 1: Executive Summary

INTERVENTION OF THE EVALUATION– PROJECTS EVALUATED:

Local Project title	Thematic Area	Program Pillar	Governorate / Funding Source
Rural development: Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals	CA[1]	3	Daraa/ EU
Rehabilitation of Electricity Network	CM	3	Aleppo/ Italy
Rehabilitation of Irrigation Sector	CM[2]	3	Ar-Raqqa/ Japan
Social Infrastructure Rehabilitation of Two Schools	BSCI	2	Aleppo/ Romania
Debris Removal for Humanitarian Access	BSCI[3]	2	Aleppo/ Japan
Local Governance Initiatives	LPCR[4]	2	Damascus/ Japan
Social Cohesion & Community Based Initiatives	SPIC	1	Deir-Ez-Zor/ EU, Norway
WOAN: the Engagement Earthquake Response	SPIC	1	Lattakia/ UN
Social Cohesion and Community Based Initiatives (We Volunteer)	SPIC	1	Aleppo/ Germany
Gender Justice Initiative	GEWE	1	Homs/ CERF[5]
Provision of Social and Economic Support to Women and People with Disabilities	GEWE[6]	1	Aleppo/ Germany
Barzeh Center Rehabilitation for People with Disabilities	SPIC[7]	1	Damascus/ Finland

PURPOSE, OBJECTIVE AND AUDIENCE OF THE EVALUATION

PURPOSE: There has been a shift within the gender mainstreaming framework towards a more comprehensive understanding of the gendered dimensions of inequality. Objectives aimed at empowering women in local projects has led to increased attention towards intersectional approaches and their potential to enhance the implementation of gender strategies in different sectors. This report examines the extent to which gender has been integrated into **UNDP's projects, has been considered in planning and implementation, and how implementation ultimately affected the results of each project based on the evaluation criteria.** Intersectional categories, such as gender, age, ethnicity and educational levels can provide a more granular lens for considering how different gender identities such as women, men, girls and boys are affected by emergencies including the vulnerabilities they experience and their experiences of resilience.

OBJECTIVES: This evaluation **assesses the gender-dimension of each project's design and activities, scope, implementation modalities and capacity to achieve results through the six signature solutions of UNDP Strategy Plan 2022-2025**: poverty & integrity, governance, resilience, environment, gender equality, and

energy. This evaluation analyzes **performance of the projects/activities against planned results in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment.** It also assesses the potential impact and sustainability of results, including contributions to capacity development and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in relation to human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment.

TARGETED GROUPS AND AUDIENCE: The **target groups and stakeholders engaged in the evaluation** are beneficiary communities and institutions, the funding partners, UNDP, UN agencies and partnering CSOs. The target audience of this report is UNDP, stakeholders and partners, UN agencies and donors.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY:

This report employs a multi-sectoral methodological approach which includes a desk review, qualitative, and quantitative data analysis to examine the gender dynamics in the projects implemented in Syria by the UNDP Country Office (CO). 12 major projects were selected by CPCD and the UNDP Syria CO team from 140 possible projects presented by the CO team, stratified by the three program pillars and six programmatic areas, types of activities, geographic locations, budget size and source of funding.

CPCD conducted **50 KIIs, 24 FGDs, and 770 Surveys** across the 3 pillars and 6 programmatic areas. The evaluation achieved close to 100% of the proposed sample after adjusting to some challenges at the field level. Some data was collected over the phone when necessary and there was a shortfall of two FGDs in the Barzeh Centre for PwDs because the center has not yet opened. It is important to highlight that the guiding questions have been essential in creating the semi-structured interviews and FGD questionnaires.

In the data analysis, the process of triangulation played a crucial role in both validating the findings and ensuring that a diverse range of voices and interpretations were captured and accurately represented. This method was not merely a tool for corroborating data but also served to reflect the complexity and nuance of different perspectives, particularly when multiple viewpoints or interpretations emerged. By integrating various data sources, the analysis was able to provide a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the findings, highlighting areas of consensus as well as acknowledging any differences or contradictions. This approach ensured that the conclusions drawn were well-founded and reflective of the broader context, thus enhancing the credibility and depth of the research.

OECD CRITERIA: For this exercise, and as per the ToR and kick-off meetings, the thematic evaluation has appraised the **Gender Impact** of the selected major UNDP projects using the **OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, and Impact.** Using the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria has allowed CPCD to identify the key factors that either facilitate or impede progress toward achieving the gender-inclusiveness, sensitivity and empowerment outcomes. Specific attention has been given to assess whether UNDP has internal capacity at the local and national level to promote gender equality and to empower women. Finally, the assessment has focused on understanding the overall commitment of UNDP to gender equality by assessing internal power dynamics at the managerial level.

RESEARCH LENS: Since this assessment evaluates how the projects/activities measure up to the anticipated outcomes with respect to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, it is possible to place it in a feminist research perspective . Collecting women's experiences, both through qualitative and quantitative tools, and using them to understand the challenges and results of a project is a recognized method to interpret changes in different geographical and cultural areas. CPCD's tools (KIIs, FGDs and surveys) give voice to women and men involved in promoting gender equality in the twelve local projects and identify the intersectionality between gender equality, vulnerabilities, disability and social inclusion.

1.1: Summary of Key Findings

1.1.1: Summary of Key Findings – OECD Criteria

The summary of key findings highlights overarching themes and observations related to integrating gender-specific needs and inclusivity across various projects. Based on both qualitative and quantitative data, it has been shown that significant efforts have been made to promote gender equality. However, the effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives vary, indicating the need for continuous improvement, adaptation to specific community needs, and a sustained commitment to gender-sensitive approaches. This summary ensures that the key findings are aligned with the OECD Criteria. Below is a comprehensive summary of the significant findings:

Relevance

Commitment to Gender Equality: The majority of projects demonstrate a strong commitment to addressing gender-specific needs and promoting inclusivity by integrating women into field training, decision-making processes, and staffing. This relevance to gender equality goals is evident across multiple sectors.

Effectiveness

Challenges and Barriers: It is crucial to acknowledge the persistent challenges that preclude achieving total inclusivity and effectively addressing gender disparities. Societal norms and contextual constraints, such as limited policy support, mobility issues, safety concerns, and limited job opportunities for women, especially in rural areas, frequently hinder project effectiveness.

Efficiency

Community and Stakeholder Engagement: Effective and efficient projects involve diverse stakeholders, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, in decision-making processes. Active community engagement and participatory planning are crucial for these initiatives' success and sustainability. However, stakeholder engagement and resource allocation gaps must be addressed to enhance efficiency.

Impact

Capacity Building and Partnerships: Investment in capacity-building programs and forming partnerships with various stakeholders is essential for fostering gender equality. Some projects demonstrate significant impacts on women's empowerment and inclusivity, while others face ongoing challenges. The impact of these initiatives highlights the importance of robust stakeholder engagement and rigorous evaluation mechanisms.

Sustainability

Sector-Specific Observations:
- Veterinary Training, Electricity Network Rehabilitation, and Irrigation Sector Rehabilitation: These projects show mixed levels of success in integrating gender considerations, with some achieving notable impacts on women's empowerment and inclusivity, while others continue to face challenges.
- Social Infrastructure Projects (e.g., School Rehabilitation): These projects show limited integration of gender-responsive activities and lack comprehensive gender needs assessments, resulting in minimal impact on gender equality.

[1] In her work on the feminist research practice Hesse-Biber states that women's experiences can indeed be used "to understand society through the lens of women's experiences […] we take the first step toward constructing a feminist standpoint". According to her, "a feminist standpoint is a way of understanding the world, a point of view of social reality, that begins with and is developed directly from, women's experiences".

- Emergency Response Projects: While highlighting the importance of community engagement, these projects struggle with fully integrating gender-responsive approaches due to societal and contextual constraints.
- Governance and Community-Based Initiatives: These initiatives positively impact social inclusion and community participation but require ongoing efforts to address gender inequality and ensure sustainability fully.

Inclusiveness

Inclusivity of Diverse Groups: Efforts to include diverse groups, such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities, in project activities are evident. However, achieving total inclusivity remains challenging due to societal norms and limited policy support.

Alignment with UNDP Mandate and National Priorities

Alignment with Gender Equality Goals: Projects generally align with gender equality goals outlined in national policies and UNDP mandates. However, alignment and integration into broader gender equality objectives can be improved, particularly in social infrastructure and emergency response projects.

Adaptation and Flexibility

Adaptation to Specific Needs: The need for continuous improvement and adaptation to specific community needs is evident. Projects incorporating continuous feedback mechanisms and gender analysis are better positioned to adapt and remain effective.

Gender Sensitivity

Integration of Gender Sensitivity: Comprehensive gender training and integrating gender equality principles into project design and implementation are crucial. Projects with solid gender-sensitive approaches demonstrate better outcomes in promoting women's empowerment and inclusivity.

Barriers to Sustainability

Addressing Sustainability Challenges: Addressing barriers to sustainability, such as societal resistance, funding constraints, and limited policy support, is essential for the long-term success of gender equality initiatives. Horizontal expansion and the development of sustainability plans are recommended to ensure lasting impact.

1.1.2: Summary of Key Findings – Background with Ongoing Achievement and Challenges

Gender-transformative programming is crucial across all UN initiatives. This approach involves identifying the specific needs of women and girls, understanding how gender norms affect them, and ensuring their full participation in peace, stability, and socio-economic recovery efforts. Prioritizing **female-headed households** and other **vulnerable groups**, such as internally displaced persons and persons with disabilities, is essential to address the expanded categories of vulnerable populations post-2011.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities, with women and girls facing increased sexual violence and a widening gender gap in the labor market. To build resilience against future shocks, it is crucial to address the structural obstacles to gender equality by designing interventions with a deliberate focus on gender impact and placing equality at the center of dialogues with partners.

I. BACKGROUND - FOCUS AREAS

Inclusive Participation and Social Cohesion:
UNDP focuses on enhancing women's participation at all levels—local, municipal, and national. By adopting a participatory planning approach and promoting women's access to legal and justice services, UNDP aims to address the root causes of gender-based discrimination. Empowering women to claim their labour market rights and access assets and services is central to these efforts. Addressing gender-based violence is also critical to achieving sustainable peace and security.

Resilient Communities, Livelihoods, and Environment:
Gender equality is central to sustained poverty reduction. UNDP's programming aims to increase women's participation in the formal labor market, to break down gender-based occupational segregation, and to improve access to assets and opportunities. Addressing the overlapping dimensions of discrimination and creating a safe enabling environment are key to overcoming challenges to women's economic participation. This includes addressing care work burdens, work-life balance, access to education, decent work, financial resources, and social protection.

II. BACKGROUND - SUMMARY OF GENDER EQUALITY ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES, RESULTS NOT ACHIEVED

While significant progress has been made in promoting gender equality across various UNDP initiatives, there are still considerable gaps in fully achieving gender equality results in certain areas. Addressing these challenges requires continuous adaptation, targeted strategies, and a sustained commitment to gender-sensitive programming. The variability in success across different sectors underscores the need for more consistent and robust integration of gender equality principles into all aspects of UNDP's work.

Achievements and Challenges

a) Poverty:
Achievements: UNDP programming has successfully integrated women into various economic activities, enhancing their participation in the formal labor market. Some projects have effectively broken-down gender-based occupational segregation, improving women's access to assets and opportunities.

Challenges: Despite these efforts, societal norms, and limited policy support continue to restrict full inclusivity, particularly in rural areas, affecting the overall impact of these initiatives.

b) Integrity:
Achievements: Projects have made strides in involving women in decision-making processes, particularly in governance and community-based initiatives. This has led to positive impacts on social inclusion and community participation.

Challenges: Sustaining these gains requires ongoing efforts to address gender inequality fully, indicating that integrity-related outcomes are not fully realized.

c) Governance:

Achievements: Governance initiatives have seen success in integrating women into decision-making roles, fostering a more inclusive environment that supports gender equality.

Challenges: Persistent societal resistance and limited policy support challenge the sustainability of these governance initiatives, suggesting that more work is needed to ensure long-term gender equality in governance.

d) Resilience:

 Achievements: Gender-sensitive approaches in emergency response and resilience-building projects have been implemented, with a focus on community engagement and the inclusion of women.

Challenges: These projects still struggle with fully integrating gender-responsive approaches due to contextual constraints, limiting their effectiveness in building gender-sensitive resilience.

e) Environment

Achievements: Environmental projects, such as irrigation sector rehabilitation, have made progress in integrating gender considerations, with some achieving notable impacts on women's empowerment.

Challenges: The variability in success across different projects highlights the need for more consistent gender-responsive strategies in environmental initiatives.

f) Gender Equality:

 Achievements: A strong commitment to gender equality is evident across projects, with investments in capacity building and partnerships that have significantly impacted women's empowerment in certain areas.

Challenges: The effectiveness of gender equality initiatives varies, with some sectors still facing challenges in integrating robust gender-sensitive approaches, particularly in social infrastructure and emergency response projects.

g) Energy:

 Achievements: Projects related to energy, such as electricity network rehabilitation, have included gender considerations, contributing to women's empowerment in specific contexts.

Challenges: The integration of gender equality in energy-related projects is inconsistent, and ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that these projects contribute meaningfully to gender equality.

Results not Achieved.

a) Social Infrastructure (e.g., School Rehabilitation):
Results Not Achieved: These projects often show limited integration of gender-responsive activities, resulting in minimal impact on gender equality.

Reasons: A lack of comprehensive gender needs assessments and limited focus on gender-specific outcomes have hindered the effectiveness of these initiatives.

b) Emergency Response:
 Results Not Achieved: Full integration of gender-responsive approaches in emergency response projects has not been achieved.

Reasons: Societal and contextual constraints, including societal norms and policy limitations, have prevented these projects from fully addressing gender equality.

c) Inclusivity:
Results Not Achieved Achieving total inclusivity for women, youth, and persons with disabilities remains challenging.
Reasons: Persistent societal norms, limited policy support, and resource allocation gaps continue to pose significant barriers to inclusivity.

Food for Thought
Summary Reflecting the Overall Analysis
This summary highlights the achievements and gaps in gender equality outcomes across various UNDP initiatives, particularly in relation to poverty, integrity, governance, resilience, environment, gender equality, and energy. The analysis aligns with the OECD criteria, assessing relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, inclusiveness, and adaptation, with a specific focus on the strategic priorities of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-2025, CPD, and UNSF.
Relevance:
Projects demonstrate a strong commitment to gender equality, integrating women into training, decision-making, and staffing. These efforts align with the overarching goals of promoting gender equality, although the depth of integration varies across sectors.
Effectiveness
Despite efforts, achieving full inclusivity remains challenging. Persistent societal norms, policy limitations, mobility issues, safety concerns, and limited job opportunities for women—especially in rural areas—hinder the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives. The gap between intention and impact underscores the need for tailored approaches.
Efficiency:

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Effective projects involve diverse stakeholders, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, in decision-making. However, gaps in stakeholder engagement and resource allocation highlight areas where efficiency can be improved to ensure more inclusive outcomes.

Impact

Investments in capacity building and partnerships have shown significant impacts on women's empowerment in some areas. However, challenges persist in sectors where gender integration is less robust, emphasizing the need for continued focus on stakeholder engagement and rigorous evaluation to sustain impacts.

Sustainability

Sector-Specific Observations:

-Veterinary Training, Electricity Network Rehabilitation, and Irrigation Sector Rehabilitation: These projects demonstrate varied success in integrating gender considerations, with some achieving notable impacts on women's empowerment.

- Social Infrastructure Projects (e.g., School Rehabilitation): These projects often show limited integration of gender-responsive activities, resulting in minimal impact on gender equality.

-Emergency Response Projects: While emphasizing community engagement, these projects struggle to fully integrate gender-responsive approaches due to societal and contextual constraints.

- Governance and Community-Based Initiatives: These initiatives have positively impacted social inclusion and community participation but require ongoing efforts to fully address gender inequality and ensure sustainability.

Inclusiveness

Inclusivity of Diverse Groups:

Efforts to include women, youth, and persons with disabilities are evident across projects, though achieving total inclusivity remains difficult. Societal norms and limited policy support continue to pose challenges, necessitating more deliberate and targeted strategies.

Alignment with UNDP Mandate and National Priorities

Most projects align with national gender equality policies and UNDP mandates. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in social infrastructure and emergency response projects, where integration into broader gender equality objectives needs to be strengthened.

Adaptation and Flexibility

Projects that incorporate continuous feedback and gender analysis are better positioned to adapt and remain effective. The need for such adaptive strategies is clear, particularly in addressing the specific needs of women and girls in various contexts.

Gender Sensitivity

Comprehensive gender training and the integration of gender equality principles into project design and implementation are crucial for success. Projects with strong gender-sensitive approaches show better outcomes in promoting women's empowerment and inclusivity.

Barriers to Sustainability

To ensure the long-term success of gender equality initiatives, barriers such as societal resistance, funding constraints, and limited policy support must be addressed. Developing sustainability plans and expanding successful initiatives horizontally are recommended to secure lasting impacts.

1.2: Executive Conclusions:

- **Relevance:** The projects effectively address gender-specific needs, enhancing women's confidence, job opportunities, and community engagement.
- **Effectiveness:** While generally effective, gaps in practical training and inclusivity were noted. Nonetheless, there is strong potential for long-lasting positive impacts.
- **Efficiency:** Logistical challenges have affected efficiency, but they are seen as manageable with proper attention.
- **Impact:** The projects have generally had a positive, with some disparities due to technical, economic, and cultural barriers.
- **Sustainability:** Sustainability remains challenging, requiring ongoing commitment and community involvement.
- **Inclusiveness:** Projects demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusivity, though physical accessibility challenges persist.
- **Alignment:** The projects align well with UNDP's mandate and national priorities, particularly regarding gender considerations in climate mitigation.
- **Adaptation:** Continuous improvement and adaptation are necessary to sustain and enhance gender equality efforts.
- **Gender Sensitivity:** Gaps in gender-responsive practices exist, necessitating stronger gender analysis and policy influence.
- **Barriers to Sustainability:** Key barriers include insufficient national policies, communal misunderstandings of gender concepts, and funding constraints.

1.3: Executive Recommendations:

- Relevance: Develop specialized training programs for women, particularly in rural areas, and implement awareness campaigns to challenge societal norms.
- Effectiveness: Establish continuous feedback mechanisms, enhance capacity building for gender mainstreaming, broaden outreach, and improve communication channels.
- Efficiency: Focus on practical training and infrastructure improvements to ensure effective learning environments.
- Impact: Expand partnerships and strengthen policy influence to enhance the reach and impact of gender equality initiatives.
- Sustainability: Promote long-term sustainability by building local capacities, fostering community ownership, and developing sustainability measures.
- Inclusiveness: Strengthen stakeholder engagement, particularly for vulnerable groups, to ensure meaningful participation and empowerment.
- Alignment: Ensure project activities align with national gender equality goals and UNDP mandates, including disability inclusion.
- Adaptation: Foster continuous learning, gender analysis, and adaptation to address emerging needs and sustain gender equality efforts.
- Barriers to Sustainability: Address infrastructure deficiencies and prioritize horizontal expansion to overcome sustainability challenges and maximize impact.

1.4: Executive Lessons Learned

- **Continuous Improvement:** Projects must remain adaptable to evolving gender-related needs and challenges.
- **Community Engagement:** Sustained community involvement is crucial for the long-term success of gender equality initiatives.
- **Policy Influence:** Stronger gender-sensitive policies and practices are essential for meaningful impact and sustainability.
- **Practical Training:** Tailored practical training is critical for empowering women, particularly in traditionally male-dominated fields.

2: Introduction

BACKGROUND: The prolonged crisis in Syria, which began in March 2011, has had catastrophic consequences, including widespread destruction, loss of life, and severe weakening of physical infrastructure, economic systems, and social cohesion. The challenges faced by the Syrian people, particularly women and girls, have been further compounded by the devastating February 2023 earthquakes in Northwest Syria. This natural disaster has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, making basic necessities such as shelter, water, electricity, and food security even more scarce, thereby complicating recovery efforts and deepening the needs of the most vulnerable groups.

In response, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has taken a proactive approach through resilience programming, which not only addresses immediate humanitarian needs across Syria but also focuses on long-term recovery and rebuilding. Central to UNDP's strategy is the principle of "Leaving No One Behind," a key tenet of the UNDP-Syria commitment to Agenda 2030. This principle emphasizes empowerment and self-reliance , enabling individuals and communities to rebuild their livelihoods rather than relying solely on humanitarian aid.

Gender Integration in UNDP's Strategy: Given the particularly severe impact of the crisis on women and girls, whose access to essential services like health and education has significantly diminished , UNDP's programming in Syria is designed to tackle gender inequalities head-on. These efforts are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and are embedded within the broader framework of the Country Programme Document (CPD) for Syria (2022-2025), which was formally adopted by the Executive Board in June 2022.

The CPD for Syria is anchored on three key pillars:

1. Local Socioeconomic Recovery and Social Protection, Inclusion, and Cohesion
2. Local Governance and Basic Service Delivery
3. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation, and Natural Resource Management

These pillars are complemented by corporate initiatives such as the UNDP Gender Strategy 2022-2025, the SDGs Impact Accelerator Lab, the Strengthening Context Sensitivity Program, the Gender Equality Seal, and the Greening

[2] https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/21854
[3] https://www.undp.org/syria
[4] https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/15726/file/hno_2022_final_version_210222.pdf.pdf
[5] UNDP SYRIA background document draft Sep 2023

the Blue initiative. Together, these frameworks guide the design and implementation of UNDP's programs and projects all over Syria. This ensures that gender considerations are integral to all aspects of the recovery and development process as well as that the needs of the communities are met as much as possible, focusing on integrating gender and promoting women's empowerment and agency.

UNDP's Twin-Track Strategy for Gender Equality: Within the CPD framework, the UNDP Syria Country Office (UNDP SYR CO) adopts a twin-track strategy for gender equality and women's empowerment:

I. Bridging the Gender Gap: This involves targeted programs focused on gender-specific issues and the empowerment of women, particularly in the most affected areas.

II. Mainstreaming Gender Perspectives: This approach integrates gender considerations into all aspects of UNDP's programming to prevent the persistence of gender inequalities.

Commitment to Gender Equality: The Gender Equality Seal: In 2021, UNDP Syria reinforced its commitment to gender equality by applying for the Gender Equality Seal for the 2021-2023 period. This initiative aims to accelerate transformative efforts, including enhancing women's access to empowerment opportunities, skills training, and protection services. Additionally, it seeks to promote meaningful female participation in critical dialogues at local, regional, and national levels, in line with both the SDGs and national priorities.
A key component of this initiative is the collaboration with 30 UNDP gender champions—both women and men—who are dedicated to breaking gender barriers and challenging stereotypes within their communities . These champions play a pivotal role in advocating for institutional transformation across several dimensions, including management, capacity-building, creating enabling environments, knowledge management, program implementation, partnerships, and the measurement of gender-related outcomes—core pillars of the Gender Equality Seal initiative .

UNDP's commitment to gender equality is further evidenced by its efforts to facilitate initiatives where women's groups transcend conflict boundaries to provide support in the aftermath of the earthquakes. These gender champions have been instrumental in improving UNDP's performance, as reflected in the significant increase in the Gender Equality Seal rating—from an initial 15.79% to 65.52% by meeting 19 out of 29 benchmarks.

Recognition and Future Goals: In recognition of its work to promote women's empowerment, gender equality, and inclusive participation, UNDP Syria has been awarded the Bronze-level Gender Equality Seal. This achievement underscores UNDP Syria's steadfast commitment to inclusivity, the safeguarding of women's rights, and the advancement of gender equality in line with the SDGs and national priorities .

To build on this progress and aim for Silver or Gold-level recognition, the UNDP gender champion team has been tasked with reviewing and updating the action plan to align with the current context within a two-month timeframe. This effort will ensure that UNDP Syria continues to lead in gender-responsive programming, setting a benchmark for gender equality in crisis contexts.
This strategic alignment of UNDP's initiatives with its Gender Strategy, the SDGs, the CPD, and national priorities ensures that gender equality is not only a goal but a driving force in the overall recovery and development process in Syria.

[6] https://www.undp.org/syria/gender-equality-and-women-empowerment
[7] Taha Leena, email. Exchange on March 24th, 2024
[8] https://www.undp.org/syria

Areas requiring improvement based on the feedback of the gender seal:

- A first step is to ensure that gender considerations are thoroughly incorporated into the planning processes.
- Similarly, the establishment of persistent advocacy for gender matters, and the visible and credible presence as a dedicated advocate for gender equality represent areas that can be further improved.
- To demonstrate expertise in further creating and implementing programs that significantly alter gender dynamics across various issues is critical.
- To obtain a higher recognition in the gender equality seal, solid and convincing evidence to back up claims of transformative effects on gender through these programs is absolutely required.
- Finally, it is important to demonstrate significant contributions towards national gender objectives, active involvement in global gender-related agendas, and recognition and respect from governmental bodies for the roles and contributions offered by UNDP CO.

To deepen the understanding of the areas that require further attention, the 2022-2025 UNDP gender strategy document can offer some valuable lessons learnt and areas of improvement to consider:

- At a programmatic level, understanding and addressing gender inequalities from the start of project conceptualization is crucial for integrating gender perspectives effectively throughout all stages of the project cycle, including design, implementation, monitoring, and budgeting. This approach entails conducting rapid gender analyses to understand the specific circumstances and barriers, thereby facilitating more responsive and cost-effective interventions. Projects should focus on this aspect and help address the needs and voices of both men and women in the community, ensuring their active participation and response. Empowering women and other vulnerable groups is essential for achieving recovery and sustainable development, as it levels the playing field for equal opportunities. Projects should focus on enhancing women's access, participation, and capacity to exercise their rights, which in turn contributes to broader gender equality. This necessitates a clear definition of the gender inequalities each intervention seeks to address, advancing not only women's participation in decision-making processes, but also in recognizing their roles as agents of change and facilitating their access to resources, services, and knowledge. Integrated programming that encompasses social cohesion, livelihoods and economic recovery, good governance, and rehabilitation of services is key to making a significant impact. Such programming should prioritize the capacity building of individuals, particularly women, to engage in the market and establish an enabling environment for their effective participation. Localizing efforts and adopting an area-based approach enhances sustainability and responsiveness, helping communities recover more rapidly while addressing economic, social, and psychological concerns.

- At the institutional level, integrating gender equality into programming requires systematic processes, management commitment, and guiding tools. Despite existing policies, there is a need for systematic procedures and tools to ensure gender considerations are embedded in program design, implementation, and budgeting. Accountability mechanisms, such as project review committees, are crucial to prevent gender-neutral programming. The role of management in enforcing gender integration is vital, ensuring that all programs maximize their potential to address gender inequalities. This involves prioritizing gender integration beyond mere formalities and investing in staff competencies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment effectively. Initiatives such as the Gender Champions can facilitate across-the-board integration of gender perspectives. In addition, incorporating a gender equality perspective in all context and conflict analyses is essential, aiming to keep updates manageable while ensuring outcomes are validated with a gender team. Sharing information on gender equality can illuminate good practices, avoid ineffective actions, and highlight synergies among programs to advance gender equality, fostering an environment of learning and knowledge exchange within the institution.

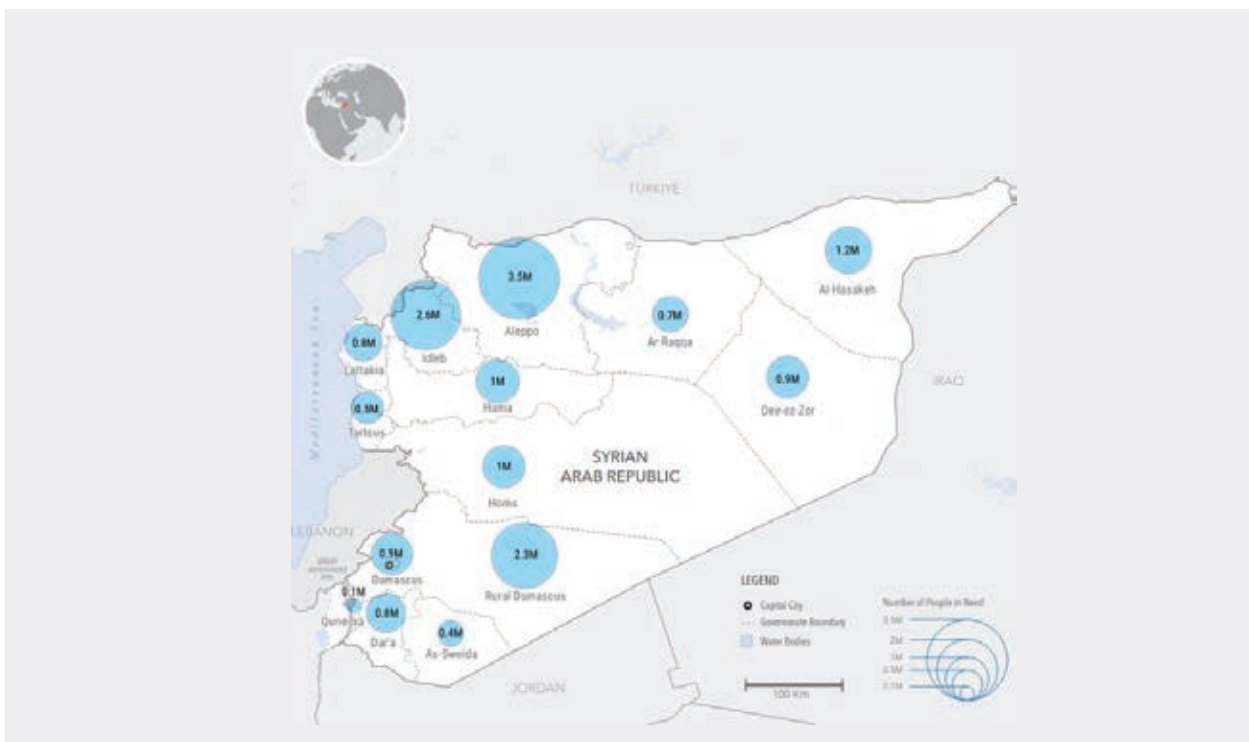# 3: Description of the Intervention - GIE of Major Syria CO Projects
3.1: Assessment of Socio-economic, Environment and Gender Contexts

3.1.1 Socio-economic Assessment

The humanitarian crisis in Syria has, in 2022, created the highest level of unmet needs since the onset of the conflict. The 2023 earthquakes have further impacted the economic vulnerability and the humanitarian emergency already affected by the armed conflicts in combination with climate change and COVID-19 casualties.

According to recent data, more than 15 million people in Syria will have required humanitarian assistance in 2023, an increase of 700,000 from 2022. Among the most vulnerable residents in the different Governorates are internally displaced people (IDPs), as they are the ones struggling most to access basic needs and sustainable, dignified livelihoods. In 2022, there were approximately 6.8 million IDPs across Syria. In this context of displacement and instability, and due to the worsening of the economic conditions, food insecurity and safety issues, the most vulnerable groups are elderly people, women - namely pregnant, lactating and head of households, children - namely unaccompanied and separated children, and people with disabilities. The map below (HNO 2024) shows how the percentage of people in need is generally widespread around the governorates.

Figure 1: Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) 2024, Syria

10 https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/whole-syria-gender-based-violence-area-responsibility-voices-syria-2023-assessment-findings-humanitarian-needs-overview-enar
11 https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/15726/file/hno_2022_final_version_210222.pdf
12 World Food Program (2022). WFP Syria Country Brief. July 2022. Available at: https://www.wfp.org/countries/syrian-arab-republic
13 https://www.unicef.org/syria/reports/cholera-situation-report-10-november-2022#:~:text=Highlights,August%20and%209%20November%202022.
14 DeJong, J., et al. (2017). Water scarcity and its impact on women's health in conflict-affected areas. Journal of Water and Health, 15(2), 225-238. https://doi.org/10.2166/wh.2017.123

The humanitarian crisis is worsened by a lack of access to water and, more importantly, by increasing levels of food insecurity in the country. Safe access to water has been impeded for millions of people in Syria. A cholera outbreak in the country further limits water accessibility and threatens the health and well-being of Syrians. According to 2022 data, more than 35,500 suspected cases of cholera were reported between August 2022 and November 2022.

The UNDP's ongoing and completed projects to support the challenges and needs of Syrians cover the entire territory. Projects belonging to the three pillars have been implemented in the Southern governorates of Damascus, Rural Damascus, Daraa, Quneitra, and As-Sweida, in the West/coastal areas of Lattakia and Tartous, in the central areas in the governorates of Hama and Homs, in the North with projects in the Aleppo and Idleb area, and finally in the Northeast region with projects in the governorates of Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa and Al-Hassakah .

Since March 2011, Syria faces a range of severe environmental challenges that are exacerbated by ongoing conflict, political instability, and economic hardship. These challenges include climate change, resource depletion, deforestation, pollution, and poor waste management .

Here is a description of major environmental challenges the Country is facing.

3.1.2: Environmental Assessment

A. ENVIRONMENT CONTEXT

- **Climate Change and Water Scarcity**
  o <u>Droughts</u>: Syria is highly vulnerable to climate change, with rising temperatures and prolonged droughts being major issues. The drought from 2006 to 2011 was one of the worst in the country's history, leading to widespread crop failure and contributing to the displacement of people from rural to urban areas. This, in turn, played a role in the social unrest that escalated into the Syrian conflict .
  o <u>Water Resources</u>: Syria's water resources have been significantly affected by the conflict. Many water systems have been damaged or destroyed, leading to a scarcity of clean water. The Euphrates River, which is a critical water source, has seen reduced flow due to upstream damming and climate impacts. Additionally, groundwater resources are over-exploited, contributing to further depletion .

- **Land Degradation and Desertification:**
  o <u>Agriculture</u>: Over 60% of Syria's population is dependent on agriculture, but this sector has been severely affected by land degradation, desertification, and the destruction of infrastructure. Soil erosion, loss of arable land, and declining soil fertility due to unsustainable farming practices and war-related damage have reduced agricultural productivity .
  o <u>Desertification</u>: The expansion of deserts is a growing concern, particularly in the eastern regions. Overgrazing, deforestation, and mismanagement of water resources contribute to this issue, further limiting the availability of arable land .

[15] Gleick, P. H. (2014). Water, drought, climate change, and conflict in Syria. Weather, Climate, and Society, 6(3), 331-340. https://doi.org/10.1175/WCAS-D-13-00059.1
[16] UNDP. (2019). Climate change adaptation in the Arab States: Best practices and lessons learned. United Nations Development Programme. https://www.undp.org/publications/climate-change-adaptation-arab-states-best-practices-and-lessons-learned
[17] FAO. (2017). The impact of conflict on Syrian agriculture: A study on the agricultural sector and food security. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. http://www.fao.org/3/i7081e/i7081e.pdf
[18] FAO. (2013). Land degradation assessment in drylands: Syria. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. http://www.fao.org/3/i4760e/i4760e.pdf
[19] FAO. (2018). Forests and conflict: A case study of Syria. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Retrieved from http://www.fao.org/3/i9198en/I9198EN.pdf
[20] FAO. (2019). The impact of armed conflict on forest resources and forest management. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Retrieved from https://www.fao.org/forestry

- **Deforestation:**
  o <u>War and Refugees</u>: The conflict has led to significant deforestation, as people have turned to cutting down trees for firewood due to fuel shortages. Additionally, forested areas have been cleared for agriculture by displaced people seeking to grow their own food .
  o <u>Conservation Challenges</u>: The ability to manage and protect forests has been severely limited by the conflict, leading to illegal logging and a lack of reforestation efforts .

- **Pollution and Waste Management:**
  o <u>Industrial Pollution</u>: The destruction of industrial facilities during the conflict has led to widespread pollution, particularly in urban areas. The lack of functioning infrastructure has resulted in untreated sewage being discharged into water bodies, contaminating drinking water sources .
  o <u>Waste Accumulation</u>: Waste management systems have collapsed in many areas, leading to the accumulation of solid waste in streets and rivers. This has severe health implications, particularly in densely populated areas and refugee camps .

- **Access to Resources:**
  o <u>Energy</u>: The conflict has severely disrupted Syria's energy infrastructure. Frequent power outages and fuel shortages have forced people to rely on unsustainable sources of energy, such as wood and coal, contributing to deforestation and air pollution .
  o <u>Food Security</u>: The destruction of farmland, combined with the disruption of supply chains and markets, has made food security a major concern. Many Syrians are reliant on food aid, and malnutrition rates are high, particularly among children .

B. ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT AND GENDER SPECIFIC CHALLENGES:

Syria's environmental challenges, compounded by the prolonged conflict, have profound and multifaceted impacts on women. Women, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas, bear a disproportionate burden due to their traditional roles in society, limited access to resources, and the heightened vulnerabilities they face in times of crisis.

- **Climate Change and Water Scarcity**
  o <u>Droughts and water collection - the increased burden on Women</u>: In Syria, women are often responsible for household water collection. The severe droughts, particularly from 2006 to 2011, exacerbated water scarcity, forcing women and girls to travel longer distances to find water. This not only increases their physical burden but also exposes them to risks of violence and exploitation in conflict zones   .
  o <u>Impact on Health</u>: The lack of access to clean water has significant health implications, particularly for women. It affects hygiene, maternal health, and increases the risk of waterborne diseases. Women and girls are often the first to suffer from water shortages, as they may prioritize other family members over themselves when resources are limited .

- **Agriculture and Food Security:**
  o <u>Agricultural Labor</u>: Women in Syria are heavily involved in agriculture, but climate change and water

[21] UNEP. (2017). Environmental impacts of the Syrian conflict: Industrial pollution and waste management challenges. United Nations Environment Programme. Retrieved from https://www.unep.org/resources/report/syrian-conflict-environmental-impacts
[22] Syria Environmental Working Group. (2018). The accumulation of waste and its impact on health in Syrian refugee camps. Journal of Conflict & Health, 12(2), 154-168. doi:10.1097/COH.2018.0004
[23] UNDP. (2020). The environmental and health impact of energy shortages in Syria: A focus on deforestation and air pollution. United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved from https://www.undp.org/environmental-impact-energy-syria
[24] WFP. (2021). Syria food security outlook: The impact of conflict on food production and nutrition. World Food Programme. Retrieved from https://www.wfp.org/publications/syria-food-security-report-2021
[25] UN Women. (2020). The impact of climate change on Syrian women. UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/the-impact-of-climate-change-on-syrian-women
[26] UNICEF. (2020). The impact of water scarcity on maternal and child health in conflict-affected regions. United Nations Children's Fund. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/reports/water-scarcity-maternal-child-health-2020

scarcity have drastically reduced agricultural productivity. With men often absent due to conflict, women have taken on greater responsibilities in farming. However, they typically lack access to the necessary resources, such as tools, seeds, and training, to adapt to these changing conditions .

  o Nutritional Impact: Water scarcity and reduced agricultural output directly affect food security, with women often eating last and least. This is particularly critical for pregnant and breastfeeding women, whose nutritional needs are higher .

  • **Land Degradation and Desertification: Impact on Livelihoods:**
  o Loss of Arable Land: As desertification progresses, the availability of arable land diminishes. This disproportionately impacts women who rely on subsistence farming to feed their families. The loss of fertile land reduces crop yields, exacerbating food insecurity and poverty among women, particularly those who are widowed or head of household .

  o Migration and Displacement: Environmental degradation is a significant driver of displacement. Women and children make up a large proportion of the displaced population in Syria. Displacement often leads to loss of livelihoods, increased poverty, and heightened vulnerability to exploitation and violence .

  • **Deforestation: Energy Access and Deforestation:**
  o Reliance on Firewood: Due to fuel shortages caused by the conflict, many families, particularly in rural areas, have turned to firewood as their primary energy source. Women are typically responsible for gathering firewood, a task that has become increasingly dangerous and time-consuming as deforestation progresses. This not only limits their time for other productive activities but also exposes them to risks in conflict-affected areas .

  o Health Impacts: The use of firewood for cooking in poorly ventilated spaces contributes to indoor air pollution, which disproportionately affects women and children. This exposure increases the risk of respiratory diseases, adding to the already heavy health burden women face in Syria .

  • **Pollution and Waste Management: Health and Sanitation**
  o Waste Accumulation: The collapse of waste management systems has led to the accumulation of solid waste in many areas, creating unsanitary living conditions. Women, who are often responsible for maintaining household hygiene, face increased challenges in ensuring a clean environment for their families. The exposure to polluted water and waste increases the risk of diseases, further burdening women who are primary caregivers .

  o Impact on Women's Health: Pollution, particularly in urban and industrial areas, has serious health implications. The stress of living in polluted environments, combined with inadequate healthcare access, can exacerbate chronic health issues among women, including complications during pregnancy.

The environmental challenges in Syria, including climate change, water scarcity, land degradation, deforestation, and pollution, have severe and disproportionate impacts on women. These challenges not only affect their physical health and well-being but also their economic stability and social status. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions that consider the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women, particularly in the context of ongoing conflict and displacement. International aid and local initiatives must prioritize gender-sensitive approaches to environmental management and resource allocation to mitigate the profound impacts on women in Syria .

[27] UN Women. (2020). The Impact of Climate Change on Syrian Women's Agricultural Work. UN Women Reports. Retrieved from https://www.unwomen.org/reports/impact-of-climate-change-on-women-agriculture-syria-2020
[28] UNICEF. (2020). Impact of Water Scarcity on Nutrition and Food Security in Syria. UNICEF Reports. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/syria/reports/impact-of-water-scarcity-2020
[29] UNDP. (2019). Women and Land Degradation: Addressing the Challenges in Conflict Zones. UNDP Syria Publications. Retrieved from https://www.undp.org/syria/publications/women-and-land-degradation
[30] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). (2019). Women and Children in Conflict-Induced Displacement in Syria: A Focus on Environmental Factors. IDMC Reports. Retrieved from https://www.internal-displacement.org/syria/reports/2019
[31] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2019). The Role of Firewood Collection in Deforestation and Energy Access in Rural Syria. UNDP Environmental Studies. Retrieved from https://www.undp.org/syria/firewood-collection-2019
[32] World Health Organization (WHO). (2016). Household Air Pollution and Health: Indoor Air Quality and Its Impact on Women and Children in Conflict Zones. WHO Environmental Health Series. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/indoor-air-quality/2016-report
[33] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (2017). Sanitation and Waste Management Challenges in Syria: Impact on Women and Children. ICRC Health in Conflict Series. Retrieved from https://www.icrc.org/en/document/sanitation-waste-syria-2017

3.1.3 Gender Assessment

Up until 2011, Syria had made significant strides in advancing gender equality. Unfortunately, these achievements have regressed, and a gender gap has widened across various outcomes and development measures. This decline has left young women and girls in a particularly precarious situation, with documented increases in harmful practices such as child marriage. Women and girls in Syria face multi-dimensional gender equality challenges, which are exacerbated by high levels of inequality and unemployment. While in theory citizens are equal before the law, the Constitution does not specifically prohibit gender discrimination, and on the ground, female representation and leadership still fall short in meeting global and regional standards.

LEGAL CHALLENGES

Syria has signed and ratified several International Conventions foundational to women's rights, including the UN Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Under CEDAW, however, Syria made reservations on the following Articles:

1. Article 9(2): Syria reserves the right to grant or refuse permission for women to pass their nationality to their children.
2. Article 16(1)(c): Syria reserves the right to adopt laws that regulate polygamy.
3. Article 16(1)(f): Syria reserves the right to adopt laws related to child custody and guardianship.
4. Article 29(1): Syria reserves the right not to consider itself bound by the provisions of the article concerning dispute settlement between states and individuals.

These reservations are part of the challenges that women face. Yet women have further challenges associated with rooted negative social norms that make traditions and norms stronger than legislation in certain contexts. Accordingly, cumulative factors affect women's participation and influence in different spheres of life, which in turn negatively impact their lives.

BARRIERS IN ACCESSING SERVICES (HEALTHCARE – EDUCATION)

Access to services is also a challenge women face, and the conflict has significantly deteriorated the access to and availability of quality healthcare services, with nearly half of the healthcare facilities damaged or non-functional. The exodus of approximately 70% of healthcare personnel, coupled with high transportation and medication costs and a lack of suitable facilities, has made it especially difficult for civilians, particularly women, to obtain medical care. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported in 2022 that around 7.3 million women and girls require urgent sexual and reproductive health services, including maternal care. Mental health and psychosocial support are also insufficient, with the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs), especially women and young girls who shoulder the care of children, the elderly, and disabled individuals in challenging living conditions, not being adequately met.

Primary school enrollment stands at an estimated 88% yet reports indicate that two million children are out of school. Secondary school attendance shows disparities between genders and varies across governorates, with notable dropouts, particularly in Al Hasaka, Ar Raqqa, Deir ez Zor, Aleppo, and Idleb. Economic hardship

[34] World Bank. (2021). The Impact of Environmental Degradation on Women's Livelihoods in Conflict-Affected Areas: The Case of Syria. World Bank Group. Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/reports/environmental-degradation-women-syria-2021
[35] Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. The First National Report on Sustainable Development Goals SDGs ,2019, accessed in: https://syria.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/UNSF%202022-2024%20English%20Final%20Signed.pdf
[36] Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. The First National Report on Sustainable Development Goals SDGs ,2019, accessed in: https://syria.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/UNSF%202022-2024%20English%20Final%20Signed.pdf
[37] For a full list of the ratifications, please consult: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=170&Lang=EN accessed in https://syria.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/UNSF%202022-2024%20English%20Final%20Signed.pdf

and safety concerns, including the risk of harassment and violence, contribute to the higher dropout rates in secondary education. IDP children face greater challenges in attending school, with limited access for those with disabilities. Early marriage and child labor further exacerbate school dropout rates, especially among more vulnerable communities and women-headed households. The quality of education suffers due to insufficient professional development opportunities for teachers, inadequate learning environments, and irregular, inadequate payment of wages, compounded by the challenges of a weakened and expensive transportation system.

ECONOMIC LIMITATIONS

The socio-economic situation in Syria is characterized by high unemployment rates, economic inequality, falling currency value, loss of jobs, political marginalization of youth and women, and a mismatch between educational attainment and the skills sought after by the labour market. Families across Syria are facing difficulties in covering their basic needs, such as food. It is estimated that about 90% of Syrians are living below the poverty line, with 70% of the population (equivalent to 15.3 million people) requiring humanitarian aid.

The sharp decline in household purchasing power, exacerbated by currency depreciation and rising prices, has left 97% of people in Northwest Syria subsisting on less than $2 per day in 2022. Agricultural challenges, heightened by drought, climate change, and ongoing conflict, have notably impacted food production, particularly in the Northeast, leading to decreased food availability. The World Food Program highlights that out of 12 million food-insecure individuals, 2.7 million are facing severe food insecurity, with another 2.9 million on the brink of becoming food insecure. As poverty deepens, families are compelled to cut down on food consumption and are reconsidering their healthcare and educational expenditures. Government subsidies, despite being distributed via smart cards, are proving inadequate as the cost of food baskets rises. Women and girls find themselves especially vulnerable due to their socio-economic positions, with approximately 3.7 million children (2.2 million girls and 1.55 million boys) and 2.1 million women in need of nutritional support. Reports indicate increasing levels of anemia among women and children, alongside rising incidents of chronic and acute malnutrition.

The socioeconomic challenges described limit women's engagement in the full cycle of the supply chain particularly in male-dominated sectors. Evidence shows that the transition between skills development and engagement in economic spheres towards long sustained participation is mostly overlooked. A feminist perspective on female's empowerment recommends filling this job market gap and proposes changes in "discriminatory structures, such as patriarchal norms at the societal, economic, and household levels."

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women (IPU-UN Women) map of Women in Politics 2023 reports that Syrian women's political participation in parliaments is meager compared to other countries worldwide, ranking 162 out of 186 Countries. Syrian women's participation in the Lower (Single) House is only 10.8%, and 27 seats out of 250 are reserved for women. The 2020 Global Gender Gap report developed by the World Economic Forum, which benchmarks countries on indicators of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment, ranked Syria 152 out of 156 countries.

The establishment of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board (WAB) in 2016, in partnership with UN Women and

[38] UNDP SYRIA background document draft Sep 2023
[39] UNDP SYRIA background document draft Sep 2023

with the support of the UN Department of Political Affairs, marks a significant milestone. This Board, a result of years of tireless efforts and advocacy by Syrian women's rights activists, is a beacon of hope for a direct and meaningful role for women in the peace talks.

The core idea behind the WAB is to ensure diverse women's perspectives and the gender equality agenda are considered throughout the political process and at critical junctures, including when peace talks are convened in Geneva. This is in line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), other Women, Peace, and Security-related resolutions, and Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which "encourages the meaningful participation of women in the UN-facilitated political process for Syria."

The 17 women of the WAB, hailing from diverse backgrounds and affiliations, are united by a strong commitment. They are dedicated to engaging in dialogue with all sides, upholding and championing women's rights, and supporting efforts to bring about a fair, just and sustainable political settlement that responds to the aspirations of all Syrians, men and women. Their commitment to a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process facilitated by the UN is unwavering.

3.2: Gender Dimension of the Strategic Priorities of UNDP Strategic Plan 2022- 2025 CPD and UNSF

The categories of vulnerable people have expanded since 2011, to include new demographics, such as internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, vulnerable boys and girls, unaccompanied and separated children, orphans, and women-headed households. Palestinian refugees hosted by Syria pre-crisis, as well as other refugees legally residing in Syria, have also been impacted.

As previously described, development indicators show that women are among the most vulnerable groups of citizens. Hence women and girls should be proposed as a key priority of United Nations organizations in promoting gender equality and in changing discriminatory practices that emerged from the conflict.

Gender transformative programming is going to be applied across UN programs to tackle the causes of gender inequality, improving the conditions of women and girls in their daily lives, and improving their social position thereby paving a path towards gender equality. This will include, without being limited to, identifying the specific needs of women and girls, and understanding how gender norms affect both children growing up as well as women and girls in their lives under the current context; girls' education and empowerment; supporting men and boys to embrace behaviors and attitudes that promote gender equality; ensuring women's and girls' full participation and contribution to peace, stability, resilience and socio-economic recovery. Prioritization of women-headed households will also be needed.

The COVID-19 pandemic and 2023 earthquakes have revealed the fragility of global, national and local progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The gender gap in the labor market is likely to rise and women and girls have suffered increased sexual violence, particularly in crisis contexts. To strengthen progress enough to withstand future shocks, it is essential to tackle the persistent, structural obstacles to gender equality. This means designing all interventions for deliberate impact on gender equality and putting equality at the center of dialogues with partners.

3.2.1: Inclusive participation and social cohesion

UNDP prioritizes advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through a multifaceted approach deeply rooted in promoting social cohesion. This entails enhancing women's participation across various levels of society, from local to national, through initiatives such as participatory planning and holistic

[40] https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/women-syria-s-economy-feminist-review-women-s-economic-empowerment
[41] https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Women-in-politics-2023-en.pdf
[42] https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf
[43] https://specialenvoysyria.unmissions.org/women's-advisory-board

strategies aimed at addressing the root causes of gender-based discrimination. These efforts are characterized by measurable impacts and community engagement, bolstered by capacity-building endeavors like leadership training and educational opportunities. Collaborative partnerships enable the implementation of innovative strategies, with a commitment to learning from encountered challenges. Additionally, UNDP facilitates access to legal and justice services, empowering women and girls to assert their rights in labor markets and gain control over assets and services.

Addressing gender-based violence (GBV) is crucial for fostering sustainable peace and security, as its ramifications extend beyond survivors to affect families, communities, and societal participation. A recent example of transformative projects fostering inclusive participation is the sports day organized by UNDP's Women's empowerment Centre, which saw over 90 women and girls engaging in various sports activities. Such events serve to strengthen social relationships, promote well-being, and raise awareness about and advocate against gender-based violence. Support for initiatives like the Women's Basketball League in Hama further advances gender equality by promoting self-care and community involvement. Networking events tailored for women provide opportunities for connection, exchange of insights, and mutual support in both professional and personal capacities.

The Gender Champion Camp, comprising mixed-gender participation, emphasizes knowledge and skill enhancement while incorporating gender perspectives into practical scenarios. Evening activities reinforce teamwork and core values related to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE). Support for the Peer 2 Peer network involves a collaborative effort aimed at fostering development, with an action plan shared with management and the regional office. All activities are scheduled and executed based on specific timelines and emerging needs.

3.2.2: Resilient communities, livelihoods, and environment

Gender equality is at the core of sustained poverty reduction. UNDP therefore aims to increase women's access to participation in the informal and formal labor market, to break down gender-based occupational segregation, to improve access to and control over assets and opportunities, and to improve diversity of gender and age groups in business supply-chains. UNDP also aims to increase women's rights (and their awareness of these), and to eliminate gender-based violence. Under this focus area, programming can address the various challenges to women's formal economic participation. These include creating a safe and enabling environment, reducing the burden of care work, ensuring work-life balance, and improving transportation and childcare access. Additionally, it can focus on providing access to education, decent work, financial resources, and social protection. Basic infrastructure improvements, such as clean and affordable energy, can be considered, along with measures to combat gender-based violence, and eliminate discriminatory laws, policies, attitudes, practices, and stereotypes. This approach can thereby address the overlapping dimensions of discrimination that women face.

[44] The Power of Sports_Women's league_Hama – UNDP Syria https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lz02_fj7HBw

4. Evaluation Objectives, Scope, and Purposes

4.1: Evaluation objective:

This evaluation aims to comprehensively and wholistically assess the integration of gender dimensions within the design, scope, and implementation modalities of each project under review. Specifically, it examines how these projects align with and contribute to the six signature solutions outlined in the UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-2025: poverty reduction & integrity, governance, resilience, environment, gender equality, and energy. The evaluation not only focuses on the achievement of planned results but also critically analyzes the extent to which gender equality and women's empowerment have been addressed throughout the project cycle. In addition, this evaluation considers the effectiveness of the projects in fostering sustainable outcomes that contribute to capacity development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment. By evaluating the potential long-term impacts and the sustainability of the results, the evaluation seeks to provide insights into how well the projects have contributed to systemic change and the empowerment of women within the broader context of development.The evaluation also examines the strategies and mechanisms employed to integrate gender considerations into project activities, assessing their effectiveness in ensuring that gender equality objectives are not only met but also sustained beyond the project's lifespan. This includes an analysis of the contributions to capacity building, the institutionalization of gender-responsive practices, and the alignment with international human rights frameworks and SDGs.

4.2: Evaluation purpose:

The evaluation aims to **assess the integration of gender considerations in project planning, implementation, and their subsequent impact on project outcomes,** as viewed through specific evaluation criteria. This assessment, conducted **within the framework of UNDP's current Country Program Document (CPD 2022-2025), seeks to identify key factors that either facilitate or impede progress toward achieving intended results regarding gender equality and sensitivity issues by the end of the cycle.**

LIMITATIONS: As this project collects data across twelve selected projects/activities, this evaluation is not a traditional endline assessment, but will **exclusively observe the theme of gender across these projects.** For this reason, data collection will not focus on tracking or measuring endline indicators assessing the extent to which the planned targets are met. Instead, data collection and analysis will **observe only broad themes** across the twelve projects and produce recommendations.

The evaluation **assesses the projects'/activities' design, scope, implementation modalities and capacity to achieve the gender expected results** through **the six UNDP strategy proposed solutions** (poverty & integrity, governance, resilience, environment, gender equality, and energy). It will collate and analyze, through the evaluation criteria, lessons learned, challenges faced, and best practices identified during implementation to inform the next projects and interventions to understand better what worked/did not work as a guide for future planning.

As per the UNDP TOR, the evaluation will assist UNDP Syria in gaining a better understanding of the following aspects of its interventions with consideration to **the six UNDP strategy proposed solutions** (poverty & integrity, governance, resilience, environment, gender equality, and energy):

1. The extent **to which the planned interventions have been achieved,** are being achieved, or are likely to be achieved by end of local gender strategy that is associated with the global UNDP strategy, local CPD and Project documents of three outcomes.
2. **The causal linkage** by which outputs contribute to the achievement of the specified outcome.
3. The **evidence-base data demonstrating UNDP's contribution to the outcome;** including case studies as a tool to explain results.
4. **The strategic values and comparative advantage of UNDP in contributing to the outcome, including strategic partnerships and linkages.**
5. The factors that facilitate and/or hinder the progress in achieving outcomes, including external/internal portfolio contexts such as weaknesses in design, modus-operandi, human/financial resources, etc.
6. **Gaps and lessons learned** and main areas of focus to be added or strengthened for the new programme cycle.
7. **Mapping and identifying potential partners** including public, private, civil society institutions, and informal local networks.

4.3 Evaluation criteria and key guiding questions:

The thematic evaluation assesses the Gender Impact of major UNDP's projects/activities against the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, and Impact and identifies major factors that facilitate and/or hinder the progress in achieving the intended results, both in terms of the external environment and those internal to the program interventions including: weaknesses in design, management, implementation (including implementation modalities), human resource skills, and resources. (See section 5.1 Evaluation Matrix for further details.). The key guiding questions have been essential to create the semi structured interviews and for the questions in the focus group discussions.

Evaluation scope:

The evaluation covers twelve Programs/Projects under the current Country Program Document (CPD) for the period 2022-2025 up until the time of the evaluation. In particular, the evaluation covers the projects registered under one of the three main pillars. The themes cover:
1. Social Protection, Diversity Inclusion and Cohesion (Pillar 1- Socioeconomic Recovery)
2. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (Pillar 1 – Socioeconomic Recovery)
3. Local Peacebuilding and Community Resilience (Pillar 2 – Local Governance and Basic Services)
4. Basic Services (Pillar 2 – Local Governance and Basic Services)
5. Climate Adaptation (Pillar 3 – Climate Change)
6. Climate Mitigation (Pillar 3 – Climate Change)

More specifically, the evaluation covers the following twelve projects:

Project title	Thematic group	Pillar	Location/ Donations
Rural development: Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals	CA	3	Daraa/ EU
Rehabilitation of Electricity Network	CM	3	Kadi Askar/ Italy
Rehabilitation of Irrigation Sector	CM	3	Raqqa/ Japan
Social Infrastructure-Rehabilitation of Two Schools	BS	2	Aleppo/ Romania
Debris Removal for Humanitarian Access	BS	2	Aleppo/ Japan
Local Governance Initiatives	LPCR	2	Damascus/ Japan
Social Cohesion & Community Based Initiatives	SC	1	Deir ez-Zor/ EU, Norway
WOAN: the Engagement Earthquake Response	SC	1	Latakia/ UN
Social Cohesion and Community Based Initiatives (We Volunteer)	SC	1	Aleppo/ Germany
Gender Justice Initiative	GEWE	1	Homs/ CERF
Provision of Social and Economic Support to Women and People with Disabilities	GEWE	1	Aleppo/ Germany
Barzeh Center Rehabilitation for People with Disabilities	SC	1	Damascus/ Finland

As this evaluation aims to assess the gender sensitivity of each project, it is important to summarize the gender equality marker (GEM) for each project. UNDP has, in fact, implemented a mandatory marker for gender equality since 2009, pioneering its use among UN entities to track the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. It serves as a tool to encourage progress in gender equality across the organization. Utilizing a four-point scale, the gender equality marker assesses contributions to gender equality within UNDP's entire budget, regardless of whether projects were initially aimed at such advancements. Ratings range from 0 (no contribution to gender equality) to 3 (gender equality as the primary objective), with scoring based on the nature of the output rather than the allocated resources.

UNDP emphasizes collective involvement in assigning marker codes, promoting staff and institutional capacity building in gender mainstreaming. Gender analyses play a crucial role in informing marker scores, ensuring systematic integration of gender considerations in project design and planning, aligned with UNDP's programming principles. The primary responsibility for tracking Project GEM Markers lies with the project manager, ideally begun during the design phase and consistently upheld throughout the project's lifecycle. The gender team's role is to furnish technical reviews, guidance, and support across the project's duration, serving as advisors and mentors by assessing marker accuracy and suggesting improvements. It's important to note that GEM3 not only aligns with the project's overarching objectives but also significantly influences the budget allocated for achieving Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) objectives.

Operationalized through UNDP's enterprise resource planning system, the gender equality marker tracks expenditures and allows for monitoring during project implementation. In the UNDP Gender Strategy (2022 -2025), UNDP sets a goal to allocate 70% of resources to advancing gender equality and empowering women, encompassing both core and non-core funding. Additionally, the strategy mandates allocating 15% of resources to gender equality in crisis response contexts. This represents a significant increase from previous targets, reflecting a heightened commitment to gender equality within UNDP's programming. New initiatives are required to include a gender-specific component and allocate at least 15% of total resources to it during the design stage to ensure adequate funding for gender equality efforts.

In the table below, concise feedback on project markers has been provided. As a general guideline, activities falling under general projects are overseen by the gender team concerning the overall project and Annual Work Plan (AWP), while those categorized under specific projects are within the project manager's purview.

IMRP Grant Code	Project Name	GEM Marker
DI-PS-09-2023	Provision of Social and Economic support to Women and PWDs	GEM2 (initial Phase)
DI-SC-16-22-SC	Social Cohesion and Community Based Initiatives by KFW 7 [DIM] in Aleppo (We Volunteer)	GEM 2 (design, initial phases) GEM 3 (implementation and Evaluation phases)
EQR-DR-Aleppo-1	EQR Debris removal for humanitarian access in Aleppo by Japan EGA	GEM1 (initial Phase)
DIM-CM-01-23/0	Rehabilitation of Electricity Network in Kadi Askar	GEM1 (initial Phase)
DI-P2-LP-2-23	Local Governance initiatives by JSB 2022 in Damascus [DIM] (Damascus Early Recovery Plan & Community Support Center) PLRP	GEM2 (design, initial and evaluation) GEM 3 (implementation)
UNDP-Outcome 1- DIM-SC001	Social Cohesion & Community Based Initiatives By EU/Norway [DIM] in Deir ez Zor Shabab 2030	GEM2 (design, initial and implementation phases)
DI-SC-21-22-GJ - EX	Gender Justice initiative (Justice Cheerers)	GEM3 (design, initial and implementation phases) (not closed yet)

Geographical coverage, Target groups, Target Audience
Geographical coverage: this evaluation covers the areas in which UNDP is implementing the above-mentioned projects.
Target Audience: UNDP, projects' beneficiaries and stakeholders, other UN agencies, donors, and other relevant users of the report.
Target groups and stakeholders: The evaluation engages all stakeholders - benefitting communities/institutions, Ministries, funding partners, UNDP, UN agencies and partnering CSOs.

5: Methodology
5.1: Evaluation Matrix

The evaluation matrix offers the possibility to focus on the guiding questions that have been brought to the drafting of a wholistic assessment which will be provided to support the country office in enhancing future programming. Questions from the TOR were revised as some were not pertinent with the projects selected by the CPCD team and the CO team. This change was agreed with UNDP and the stakeholders in the inception report.

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Key Questions
Relevance	- How were results and outputs for gender-responsive activities identified and tailored to address diverse gender and age group needs?
	- How did UNDP invest in capacity-building and partnerships with various gender and age groups to foster social cohesion/peace?
	- To what extent were UNDP's national level priorities supported by UNDP's gender related activities' results and outputs?
Effectiveness	- To what extent were gender equality and women's empowerment goals achieved/ positive change promoted?
	- Influence of UNDP practices, policies, processes, and decision-making on gender equality and women's empowerment?
	- How effective were the gender-sensitive, human rights-based, social cohesion, and context-sensitive approaches adopted?
	- Extent of UNDP's contribution to capacity development of local partners and civil society organizations for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment?
Efficiency	- Contribution of partnership modalities to the delivery of country program outputs?
	- Extent to which projects had adequate resources including human resources, access to appropriate materials and expertise, and adequate funding?
	- Monitoring systems' provision of gender-disaggregated data for informed decision-making and at the project formulation level?
Sustainability	-Extent to which project results and benefits of the activities will continue to promote gender equality after the implementation of project activities have ended via women's empowerment, new resources availability, and as a result of trainings? Were mechanisms in place to support this?
	- Contribution of UNDP to human and institutional capacity building of partners for gender equality and women's empowerment including ensuring that gender is properly integrated and mapping any gender capacity gaps?
	- Identification of risks hindering social cohesion, sustainability and recommendations to strengthen implementation and ensure that social risks are minimized?
Impact	- Assessment of higher-level effects generated by the intervention, both positive and negative?
Evaluation Cross-cutting Issues	
Human Rights	- UNDP's support for enhancing social protection policies and local social networks for gender equality and inclusion?
	- Addressing issues of gender equality and inclusion in the design, implementation, and monitoring of interventions?
Conflict Prevention	- Integration of gender analysis into conflict/context analysis for understanding power?

📖 5.2: Data Collection & Sampling

CPCD adopted a participatory and consultative methodology for this evaluation assignment with 37 KIIs, 22 FGDs, and 770 Surveys across the 3 pillars/6 project areas. the monitoring data was used. The CPD logframe was used to monitor data.

This mixed methodology chosen for the evaluation has been based on the following data sources: desk review, key informant interviews (KII), focus group discussions (FGD), and surveys.

A: Desk Review:

The CPCD team began by conducting a desk review of project proposals, log-frames, progress reports, and other project outputs including tools and guidance materials, and monitoring data. The team has mostly focused on related guidelines and standards, and existing research/literature. This process has contributed to the tool design as a start and to the data analysis process. Documents have included:
- Projects design, Theory of Change and results framework
- Reports documenting projects revisions and adaptations
- Results-oriented Analysis report (ROAR).
- Gender seal self-assessment report and final assessment report.
- Gender indicators, target and results
- Annual Workplans
- Technical/financial monitoring reports.
- Gender responsive procurement plan
- Donor progress reports
- Baseline and various assessments, M&E reports
- Beneficiary identification strategy and selection criteria
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)
- UNDP Syria Country Program Document (CPD) (2022-2025)
- The country office final assessment report for 2021 – 2023 submitted on June 29th, 2023
- CO's Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
- UN Strategic Framework (UNSF 2022-2025)
- UNDP Strategic Plan (UNDP SP 2022-2025)
- The IPU-UN Women map of Women in Politics 2023
- The 2020 Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum
- UNDP Syria CO twin-track strategy for Gender equality and women's empowerment
- UNDP Gender Strategy (2022-2025)
- UNDP Syria Gender Strategy (2024-2026)

B: Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):

QUALITATIVE APPROACH: Key Informant Interviews are a valuable tool for qualitative research, enabling researchers to access rich and contextual information from **individuals with the knowledge and experience to inform decision-making,** policy development, and program implementation. Key informants are selected based on their **in-depth understanding of the subject matter** or their close involvement in the community or situation being studied. These types of interviews serve several purposes in research and evaluation such as gathering specialized information, in-depth exploration, expert opinions, community or cultural insights, complementing

quantitative data, identifying trends and challenges, needs assessments, evaluation and policy development. These interviews usually include a set of 5 to 20 open-ended or semi-structured questions and last between 30 minutes to 2 hours in length. The exact duration depends on the nature of the interview and the willingness of the key informant to engage in the conversation. Our teams are trained to strike a balance between gathering comprehensive information and respecting the informant's time. KIIs are audio-recorded with a participant's verbal informed consent. **CPCD was able to conduct 37 KIIs for this evaluation with:**

- UNDP project staff (CO and Field teams)
- Community and stakeholder's representatives (community leaders, local authorities, governmental authorities, civil society actors)
- Partnering CSOs
- Donor community members
- UN implementing partners.

CPCD ensured a gender balance in the selection of informants. All interviews with men and women have been undertaken in full confidence and anonymity. An informed consent form has been presented together with the KIIs tool. For all the KIIs the process of selecting the sample has been purposive.

C: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

QUALITATIVE APPROACH: CPCD typically uses Focus Group Discussions as a qualitative research method to gather insights and opinions from a group of participants on a specific topic or set of topics. FGDs are usually conducted with a homogeneous group of participants who share common characteristics or experiences related to the research topic. This homogeneity helps facilitate discussion and allows participants to relate to each other's perspectives. While FGDs are often homogeneous, it's essential to consider diversity within the group. Participants have been selected based on varied backgrounds, perspectives, or experiences related to the research topics to capture a range of viewpoints.

CPCD's FGDs typically involve a small group of participants ranging from 5 to 10 individuals. This number is large enough to encourage discussion but small enough to ensure everyone has a chance to participate. FGDs tend to last between 1.5 to 2 hours. This duration allows for in-depth discussion without overwhelming participants. Longer sessions may lead to fatigue, and safety concerns in certain areas, while shorter ones may not yield sufficient data.

CPCD made sure that the location of the FGD was:

- **Neutral and Comfortable:** FGDs should be conducted in a neutral, comfortable, and quiet location where participants feel at ease. It's often best to use a meeting room or space free from distractions.
- **Accessible:** The location should be easily accessible to participants, ensuring that they can attend the session without significant inconvenience.
- **Arrangement:** Arrange seating in a circular or semi-circular fashion to encourage interaction among participants. Ensure that everyone can see and hear each other.
- **Recording:** FGDs should be audio-recorded (with participants' consent) to capture the discussion accurately. Detailed notes should also be taken during the session by one CPCD's experienced Field Researcher while another one is leading the session.

CPCD conducted 22 FGDs with male and female beneficiaries, divided equally across the different project locations. Full confidence and anonymity were assured and informed consent was presented together with the FGDs tool.

D: Surveys:

CPCD typically uses surveys as a research method that involves collecting data from individuals, groups, or organizations to gather information about their opinions, experiences, behaviors, or characteristics. Surveys are widely used in the development sector for various purposes due to their effectiveness in collecting systematic and quantifiable data. CPCD relies on surveys for needs assessments, monitoring and evaluation exercises, impact assessments, policy formulation, program design, accountability, research and analysis, and advocacy. Surveys play a crucial role in evidence-based decision-making, enabling development practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to better understand the needs and circumstances of the populations they serve and to design and implement effective development interventions. CPCD's surveys adopt different types of questions depending on the survey's purpose, target population, and the information needed. Some of the common types of questions include:

- **Demographic Questions:** These questions collect basic information about the respondent, such as age, gender, education, income, marital status, and household size. Demographic data provide context for understanding survey responses.
- **Multiple-Choice Questions:** Multiple-choice questions present respondents with a list of predefined answer choices, and they are asked to select the one that best represents their response. These questions are used when there are specific answer options to choose from.
- **Likert Scale Questions:** Likert scale questions ask respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement using a scale, often ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." These questions measure attitudes, opinions, or perceptions.
- **Open-Ended Questions:** Open-ended questions allow respondents to provide detailed, narrative responses in their own words. They are used when researchers want to gather qualitative data or when there is no predefined answer format.
- **Yes/No Questions:** These questions require respondents to answer with a simple "Yes" or "No." They are useful for collecting binary data or for asking straightforward questions.
- **Ranking Questions:** Ranking questions ask respondents to rank a list of items or options in order of preference or importance. They are used to prioritize choices or preferences.

The length of a survey varies significantly depending on factors such as the complexity of the topic, the number of questions, and the willingness of respondents to participate. CPCD's researchers understand the importance of balancing the need for information with the respondent's time and attention. Longer surveys may lead to respondent fatigue and lower response rates.

All surveys were administered using **Kobo Collect**, a survey platform that CPCD has effectively utilized for more than five years in various countries, including Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and others. Kobo Collect is essentially a counterpart of Open Data Kit (ODK) but comes with an improved Graphical User Interface (GUI). One of its key advantages is its capability to function both online and offline, enabling surveys to be conducted at any time and then uploaded once an internet connection becomes accessible. Additionally, Kobo Collect offers features such as GPS tagging and timestamps, enhancing the data verification process.

Given that UNDP did not share beneficiary figures, the calculation of the sample size relied on a 95% level of confidence, and 5% margin of error of an infinite sample size. The disaggregated number of participants can be found in the Annexes. CPCD considered quantitative surveys for each of the targeted projects individually:

Tool Type	Achieved Total	Planned Sampling
Beneficiary Survey	**770**	64-65 with beneficiaries across the 12 project locations
Key Informant Interviews with UNDP HQ, Regional, and Country Office Staff in Damascus (UNDP KIIs)	7	8 interviews with UNDP staff at the HQ, Regional and Country Office Level.
Key Informant Interviews with Implementing Partner, Implementation Management Staff and local stakeholders (Stakeholder KIIs)	30	3-4 with project planning staff both within implementing partner organizations and other stakeholders such as CSO's, community leaders, and other stakeholders across the 12 projects
Focus Group Discussions with Beneficiaries	22	Focus groups discussions with female and male beneficiaries across the 12 projects

It is important to highlight that the sample was purposive. There will be no comparison vs treatment groups. For Beneficiaries, selection was based off beneficiary lists which we were provided with or within target communities via random selection.

The ultimate sampling was determined in collaboration with UNDP and was mutually approved. It's important to note that the table above does not represent the final sample with regards to project-specific stratification. The reason is that CPCD recommended allocating a larger proportion of the sample size to projects with a greater number of beneficiaries. This determination relied on the beneficiary data provided by UNDP.

5.3: Challenges

Challenges for questionnaires:

Governorate	Challenge
Damascus	There are no clear challenges, except for the frequent phone calls to the respondents for setting an appointment to come to the agreed location, which was the Anbar Office, for meeting with them.
Homs	A hall was rented to conduct questionnaires in because it was accessible for all respondents, but most of the difficulties were focused on the bad weather in the collection period and the lack of transportation from areas such as the areas of (Al-Sankari and Mukharram). Most male beneficiaries did not agree to participate in data collection because of their work schedules.
Latakia	There are no questionnaires
Daraa	Most challenges in Daraa were due to the far distance of the areas of residence of the respondents from Daraa al-Balad, and as a result of the lack of a financial allowance for transportation. These factors made the majority apologize for not coming to participate in the evaluation process.
Deir ez-Zor	There were no challenges. Coordination was very good, and a location was secured quickly and communication with the respondents was fast and an excellent responsiveness from the UNDP team.
Aleppo	Difficulties are limited to respondents reaching data collection locations.
Ar-Raqqa	The planned data collection areas in Raqqa governorate were in the remote countryside, and the respondents are mostly farmers. The means of communication with them was through the agricultural associations in which we were provided with the numbers and places of the heads of the agricultural associations, but there were significant difficulties in communicating with the farmers to come, especially since they are in a season of the agricultural work, and this led to delays in the data collection process.

The data collection team in the questionnaires was composed of males and females distributed by regions.

Challenges for KIIs:

For UNDP staff, it was as follows:

Governorate	Title	Cause of delay
Aleppo	Technical Manager	We started to conduct the interview and in the middle of it, she asked to postpone the KII as she had no time left, and it was ultimately never possible to arrange a new appointment.
Damascus	Area Manger	He asked to cancel the interview as he had an urgent medical case.
Damascus	Technical Manager	We contacted him several times and no fixed date was set.

Challenges on the distribution of male and female researchers in the data collection process:

We took into account the ability of the researchers to conduct the direct collection process and the way of dealing with the KII tool within the regions - to be free to conduct it within the specified time. There was no gender sensitivity in terms of the availability of male researchers to conduct KIIs with males or female researchers to conduct with females (there was no previous notice or agreement on the subject, whether during the training process from UNDP or from the project manager responsible for follow-up with the data collection team).

Challenges for FGDs:

Governorate	Answering submitted questions
Homs	There are 3 researchers in the team within this task, male interviewer and the rest are assistants within the sessions and the name of the interviewer was mentioned within the session
Latakia	The need for diversity in researchers (male researchers to conduct FGDs with males or female researchers to conduct with females) was not mentioned
Daraa	The need for diversity in researchers (male researchers to conduct FGDs with males or female researchers to conduct with females) was not mentioned

Challenges on the distribution of male and female researchers in the data collection process:

We took into account the ability of the researchers to conduct the direct collection process and the way of dealing with the FGD tool within the regions - to be free to conduct it within the specified time. There was no gender sensitivity in terms of the availability of male researchers to conduct FGDs with males or female researchers to conduct with females (there was no previous notice or agreement on the subject, whether during the training process from UNDP or from the project manager responsible for follow-up with the data collection team).

Food for Thought

Methodological Approach – Synthesis:

As mentioned, the evaluation employed a mixed methodological approach, integrating desk reviews with qualitative and quantitative data analysis to assess the gender dynamics within the UNDP projects in Syria.

The evaluation was guided by the theory of change from the UNDP Country Programme, which was used to formulate the evaluation questions and design the methodological framework. This ensured that the evaluation was closely aligned with the intended outcomes of the programme.

CPCD, together with UNDP SYR CO, selected 12 significant projects from a pool of 140, considering factors such as the three program pillars, geographic diversity, budget size, and funding sources. This selection process was strategic to ensure a comprehensive evaluation across various contexts and programmatic areas.

Data collection involved 37 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), 22 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and 770 surveys across the three pillars and six programmatic areas. Despite some field challenges, including the delayed opening of the Barzeh Centre for PwDs, which resulted in a shortfall of two FGDs, the evaluation achieved nearly 100% of the proposed sample size. In cases where in-person data collection was not feasible, data was gathered via phone interviews.

Gender-Responsive Evaluation: To ensure a gender-responsive evaluation, the methodology was designed to collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data, ensuring that the unique experiences and perspectives of both women and men were captured. The evaluation tools, including KIIs, FGDs, and surveys, were specifically tailored to identify and understand gender-specific challenges, opportunities, and outcomes. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of intersectionality, considering how various identities and vulnerabilities, including gender, disability, and social inclusion, intersect and influence project outcomes.

The evaluation also focused on assessing UNDP's internal capacity at both the local and national levels to promote gender equality and empower women. Additionally, it examined the internal power dynamics within UNDP's management to gauge the organization's overall commitment to gender equality.

Evaluation Framework: The evaluation was structured around the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, and Impact. This framework enabled the identification of key factors that either supported or hindered progress towards achieving gender inclusiveness and empowerment outcomes. The use of these criteria provided a systematic approach to evaluating the gender impact of the selected UNDP projects, ensuring that the evaluation was comprehensive and aligned with international best practices.

By integrating a gender-responsive approach and grounding the evaluation in the theory of change, this methodological framework ensured that the evaluation was not only rigorous but also sensitive to the complexities of gender dynamics in the Syrian context.

6. Findings (based on OECD Criteria)

The findings are aligned with OECD criteria and are presented as factual statements based on thorough data analysis. They are organized according to the evaluation questions, allowing report users to clearly link the questions posed with the corresponding outcomes. Additionally, elements influencing the achievement of intended objectives are highlighted. The analysis also addresses assumptions or risks inherent in the project or program design that later impacted implementation. Overall, the findings consider aspects such as gender equality, women's empowerment, disability, and other cross-cutting issues, along with any unforeseen effects. These findings are framed within the broader frameworks of the **UNDP Syria Country Programme Document (CPD) (2022–2025), United Nations Strategic Framework (UNSF) (2022–2025), UNDP Strategic Plan (SP) (2022–2025), UNDP Gender Strategy (2022–2025), and UNDP Syria Gender Strategy (2024–2026).**

6.1: Relevance

The first part of the findings analysis delves into the **significance** of gender-specific activities, capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with broader development goals across the 12 projects. It not only highlights success areas and identifies improvement opportunities but also underscores the crucial role of these factors in promoting gender equality and inclusivity. The findings emphasize the need for continuous investment in gender-sensitive practices, effective stakeholder engagement, and explicit alignment with national priorities to ensure development projects' sustained impact and relevance. This aligns closely with **UNDP's CPD (2022–2025), UNSF (2022–2025),** and the **UNDP Strategic Plan (2022–2025),** which emphasize gender equality and inclusivity as core components of development strategies.

Synthesis: The relevance of gender-specific activities, capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with broader development goals was evident across the 12 projects. However, specific thematic areas, such as the relevance of gender and climate adaptation, were sometimes overlooked. There is a continuous need for investment in gender-sensitive practices and alignment with national priorities, including environmental sustainability, to sustain the impact and relevance of development projects. This is in line with the **UNDP Gender Strategy (2022–2025)** and **UNDP Syria Gender Strategy (2024–2026),** which both call for integrated approaches to gender equality across all sectors, including environmental sustainability.

Identification of Gender-Responsive Activities: <u>Identification and Tailoring</u> of gender-responsive activities
K.Q.- How were gender responsive activities identified and tailored to address diverse gender and age group needs?

     I. <u>Commitment to Gender Inclusivity:</u>

There was a solid commitment to integrating **gender-responsive activities** across the projects. Efforts included **tailoring activities** to include vulnerable groups, namely women and PwDs. Integrating these groups into field training, ensuring equal representation, and promoting gender balance was essential. For example, the Rural Development and Rehabilitation project in Daraa exhibited strong efforts to promote gender inclusivity. The project exhibited a real commitment to addressing gender-specific needs by making efforts to integrate women into field training and ensuring equal representation in staffing. This commitment was evident in the project's engagement with local stakeholders, prioritizing **gender inclusivity.** These efforts align with the objectives outlined in th**e UNDP Syria Gender Strategy (2024–202**6), which emphasizes the

integration of gender equality into all areas of programming and national priorities. Despite these efforts, total inclusivity has yet to be achieved, according to several respondents. For instance, a male agricultural engineer and technical supervisor emphasized empowering women through training and participation in activities such as surgeries. He highlighted promoting gender equality while acknowledging the importance of preserving traditional gender roles. This indicates a deliberate effort to **identify and prioritize** gender-responsive activities within the project. He said: *"We should empower women by training and ensuring their participation … also in activities such surgeries within the training and promoting the concept of gender and empowering them with livelihood courses that are not contradictory with being housewives,"* (KII – MALE – Daraa). Similarly, in the interviews for the earthquake debris removal project in Aleppo, the project manager, a KII respondent, emphasized UNDP's commitment to gender inclusivity and community engagement in the project design and implementation of this project.

Highlights:

Outputs: There is a commitment in all the projects to integrate gender-responsive activities, focusing on vulnerable groups such as women and PWDs. Tailored training and efforts to ensure equal representation were central to these initiatives.

Results: Some projects registered a consistent effort to integrate women into field training and staffing, yet full inclusivity remains a challenge (see Rural Development and Rehabilitation project in Daraa). Feedback highlighted the need for a balance between gender empowerment and traditional roles (KII – MALE – Daraa). However, in terms of gender and climate adaptation, there was no specific focus, missing an opportunity to align gender equality with climate resilience strategies.

II. Varied Perspectives and Gaps of identification of gender-related needs:

While some projects demonstrated **robust gender-responsive initiatives, others** revealed **gaps** in addressing gender-specific needs. Participants in projects like the Rehabilitation of Irrigation Sector in Raqqa noted both efforts and gaps in considering gender needs, indicating a need for more consistent application of gender-responsive planning. Similarly, participants in the electricity network rehabilitation in Kadi Askar expressed different perspectives on gender-responsive activities. While some emphasized the consideration of gender-specific needs, others highlighted gaps in addressing these needs. For instance, if a female teacher volunteering in the project acknowledged **efforts to identify gender-specific needs** by considering the presence of women breadwinners, widows, and other vulnerable beneficiaries in the community, a male Neighborhood Council Member expressed concerns about the project's **limited focus on gender disparities, particularly in the project design.** This participant stated: *"The project did not take into account any consideration and specificity of the special needs or even the needs of the population in the region, whether men or women and did not take into account the principle of gender equality."* (KII -MALE – ALEPPO, QADI ASKAR).

Highlights:

Outputs: The strategies employed for gender-responsive planning exhibited a range of effectiveness. Some projects showcased strong and effective gender-responsive initiatives, while others highlighted noticeable shortcomings and inconsistencies in addressing gender needs.

Results: In the Rehabilitation of the Irrigation Sector in Raqqa, for example, although there were attempts to

incorporate gender considerations, inconsistencies in planning were evident. The project fell short of explicitly integrating gender-specific activities with climate adaptation strategies, which could have enhanced its overall impact and relevance. Similarly, in Aleppo's rehabilitation of the electricity network, the approach to addressing gender disparities was insufficient. A male member of the Neighborhood Council in Qadi Askar, Aleppo, observed that these gender disparities were not adequately considered (KII - MALE – ALEPPO, QADI ASKAR).

Food for Thought

Thematic Analysis: *There was limited consideration of the intersection between gender and climate adaptation, especially in areas where environmental changes significantly impact livelihoods. The projects would have benefited overall from a stronger focus on how gender equality contributes to climate resilience, particularly among different gender age groups, which was not adequately addressed*

Investment in Capacity-Building and Partnerships: investing with various gender and age groups to foster social cohesion/peace

K.Q. - How did UNDP invest in capacity-building and partnerships with various gender and age groups to foster social cohesion/peace?

I. Empowerment through Training:

Many projects focused on empowering women through training and participation in capacity-building initiatives, which aligns with the **UNDP Gender Strategy (2022–2025) and UNDP Syria Gender Strategy (2024–2026).** This investment was evident in projects like the rehabilitation of the irrigation sector in Raqqa. According to participants, significant progress, ranging from 20-30%, has been made in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment goals thanks to this project. Examples included training women in food manufacturing and establishing women's groups, leading to increased empowerment and changes in family power dynamics. Several FGD respondents confirmed that **training in managing irrigation and agriculture has strongly empowered women.** Here is how some of the participants have described the influence of the project activities in terms of gender equality: *"The security of the benefits mentioned support food security by empowering women in the management of irrigation and agriculture and improving the food security of their families, which in turn has positively affected their health and well-being, in addition to empowering women through leadership, an experience that is not widely present within society. Workshops, training, and dialogue sessions with women have played a major role in hearing women's opinions and discussing their ideas and challenges,"* (FGDs – MIXED – RAQQA). Empowering women through an active participation in the job market supports social cohesion and promotes peace.

Highlights

Outputs: Initiatives such as the Veterinary Training Program in Daraa aimed at empowering women by facilitating their entry and active participation in traditionally male-dominated sectors supporting the **UNDP Strategic Plan (2022–2025)** focus on inclusivity.

Results: Women who participated in these training sessions reported significant improvements in self-confidence and a higher level of engagement in their communities. However, challenges such as limited mobility, particularly in rural areas, hindered the full realization of these benefits as mentioned by several FGDs male participants in Daraa. In sectors like agriculture, which heavily depend on climate conditions,

integrating gender equality efforts with climate adaptation strategies could have significantly amplified the project's overall impact. Similarly, as presented by a female respondent to the KII in Kadi Askar, the Rehabilitation of the Electricity Network in Kadi Askar produced mixed outcomes, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach to integrating gender equality objectives.

II. Effective Stakeholder Engagement:

Successful projects demonstrated effective stakeholder engagement, prioritizing participatory planning processes. Projects such as the Gender Equality and Community Engagement in Homs emphasized detailed examples of partner involvement and training initiatives, highlighting the importance of community engagement. Other projects, such as the training and rehabilitation project for veterinary professionals in Daraa, showed a strong commitment to addressing gender-specific needs, with efforts to integrate women into field training and ensure equal representation in staffing. The project's **engagement with local stakeholders** prioritized gender inclusivity, and adaptability to changing circumstances such as military escalations and COVID-19 was evident. Similarly, the project aiming to rehabilitate the irrigation sector in Raqqa was considered by KIIs and FGDs respondents to be an excellent example of effective stakeholder engagement. Participants thought that UNDP invests much in **capacity-building programs for stakeholders,** including individuals with disabilities and women, to support gender inclusivity and equality. A KII respondent described the capacity-building efforts: *"We always start learning through work. Stakeholders are generally involved in identifying needs, designing implementation, and measuring impact. There are special programs dedicated to individuals with disabilities to build their technical and personal skills and special programs for women. A significant investment in made in these programs,"* (KII – MALE – RAQQA). Implementing partners are trained to ensure adherence to gender-sensitive practices, focusing on equitable wages for men and women. That being said, full stakeholder engagement and inclusivity are still to be reached, according to several respondents who thought there were still several challenges in capacity building.

Highlights
Outputs:
Projects that demonstrated effective stakeholder engagement emphasized participatory planning and strong community involvement essential to achieving the goals of **UNDP's CPD (2022–2025) and UNSF (2022–2025).** For instance, initiatives such as the Gender Equality and Community Engagement project in Homs highlighted the importance of detailed partner participation and training. Similarly, the training and rehabilitation project for veterinary professionals in Daraa showcased a commitment to gender-specific needs by integrating women into field training and ensuring equitable representation in staffing. These projects also adapted well to evolving challenges like military escalations and the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the irrigation sector rehabilitation project in Raqqa was cited by many as an excellent example of stakeholder engagement, particularly for its investment in capacity-building programs aimed at individuals with disabilities and women. This approach was described as involving stakeholders in all aspects of the process, from identifying needs to designing and implementing solutions, and even in measuring impact.
Results:
Despite the successes, full stakeholder engagement and inclusivity remain elusive. While many respondents acknowledged the significant investments made in these programs, they also noted persistent challenges in achieving comprehensive engagement, especially in terms of capacity building. For example, although stakeholders are generally involved in project design and implementation, there is still room for improvement in ensuring that these practices are consistently applied across all projects.

III. Challenges in Capacity Building:

Some projects faced capacity-building challenges, such as the need for improved stakeholder engagement and more comprehensive approaches. The same project, the rehabilitation of the irrigation sector in Raqqa, for example, was considered by some as a good example of stakeholders' engagement and, by others, as a project lacking clarity on capacity-building efforts, suggesting room for improvement in these areas. These unsatisfied participants reported lacking capacity development because specific needs have been disregarded. The majority of the FGD answers reported that there are **gender-related needs that have not been integrated into the project,** namely "the presence of some women who are breadwinners or disabled and who work in agriculture even after the arrival of water to their land, they were unable to begin in agriculture because it is difficult for them financially," (FGDs – MIXED – RAQQA).

The female project officer supervising the local Governance Initiatives program in Damascus recommended keeping consistency in the involvement of stakeholders in program planning to limit the challenges and enhance the effectiveness of the project itself. She said: *"Stakeholders have significantly and effectively been involved in this project…by involving partners from the beginning and part of developing a plan and involving them in the initial stages of developing an activity or project plan has positive effects on all activities. It is not always the case…it is important to engage the stakeholders consistently. Their presence and involvement are significant, especially at the beginning in the design stages of the program."* (KII– FEMALE – DAMASCUS).

Highlights
Outputs:
Some projects faced challenges related to capacity building, particularly in terms of stakeholder engagement and the comprehensiveness of their approaches. The irrigation sector rehabilitation project in Raqqa, while praised by some for effective stakeholder engagement, was criticized by others for lacking clarity in its capacity-building efforts. This highlighted the need for more consistent and thorough approaches to capacity development, particularly in addressing specific gender-related needs.
Results:
Participants in focus group discussions expressed concerns that certain needs, particularly those of women who are breadwinners or have disabilities, were overlooked. These women, despite the arrival of water to their lands, struggled to begin agricultural activities due to financial difficulties. This suggests that while stakeholder engagement was strong in some respects, the capacity-building efforts fell short in addressing the practical challenges faced by these vulnerable groups. Furthermore, a female project officer in Damascus emphasized the importance of consistent stakeholder involvement throughout the planning stages to enhance project effectiveness and mitigate such challenges.

4. Community and Power Dynamics:

Effective gender-responsive activities involved understanding community power dynamics and promoting gender balance. For instance, the Social Cohesion and Community-Based Initiatives emphasized assessing the development of a community spirit and the **power dynamics** to inform project design, promoting effective gender equality and women's empowerment. In particular, the KII, with a female team leader in the Provision of Social-Economic Support to Women and PWDs, described a comprehensive approach involving field studies, focus groups, and stakeholder consultations to identify gender-specific needs and power dynamics. She said: *"At the beginning of the gender projects, we conducted a field study in all of Syria to*

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determine the needs of women through 10 focus group discussions and meetings with key people. The questions comprehensively covered all aspects of women's legal, social, heritage protection, **power dynamics,** access to resources, etc. Accordingly, the projects were detailed," (KII – FEMALE – HOMS). She also elaborated on how this project was initiated with a continuous needs assessment process, akin to other UNDP initiatives. Its core objective was to empower women and enhance their awareness levels. To better explain, she added: *"The project's approach remains dynamic and responsive to evolving circumstances. Moreover, the study underscored a profound* **recognition of this dynamic,** *where we conducted thorough gender analyses within focus groups. An essential aspect of this analysis was understanding* **power dynamics, which we prioritize in our training sessions,**" (KII – FEMALE – HOMS).

Highlights
Outputs:
Projects that were successful in promoting gender-responsive activities often involved a deep understanding of community power dynamics. For example, the Social Cohesion and Community-Based Initiatives project focused on assessing community spirit and power relations to inform project design. This was particularly evident in the Provision of Social-Economic Support to Women and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), where a comprehensive approach was taken to identify gender-specific needs and power dynamics through field studies, focus groups, and stakeholder consultations.

Results:
The thorough understanding of power dynamics was seen as crucial in these projects. A female team leader in Homs described how ongoing gender analyses and needs assessments were integral to the project's design and implementation. This dynamic approach allowed the project to remain responsive to evolving circumstances and ensure that gender considerations were adequately addressed. The recognition of power dynamics not only informed the training sessions but also empowered women and increased their awareness, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the project.

Food for Thought
Thematic Analysis: The various UNDP projects highlighted critical intersections between gender, community dynamics, and capacity-building, but also revealed gaps in addressing these intersections comprehensively. Empowerment through training was a key focus, with many projects effectively empowering women and promoting gender equality. However, challenges like limited mobility and the absence of integrated climate adaptation strategies hindered the full realization of these empowerment efforts, particularly in rural and agriculturally dependent sectors. Stakeholder engagement was another area of strength, with projects demonstrating effective participatory planning and community involvement. Yet, the consistency of this engagement varied, and there were notable challenges in ensuring comprehensive and inclusive capacity-building efforts. Capacity-building efforts themselves often faced criticism for lacking clarity and failing to address specific gender-related needs, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women breadwinners and individuals with disabilities. Finally, community and power dynamics were effectively considered in some projects, with a strong emphasis on understanding and addressing these dynamics to promote gender equality. However, the full potential of these efforts was not always realized due to the need for more consistent and dynamic approaches to community engagement and power analysis. Overall, while the projects made significant strides in integrating gender-sensitive approaches, there remains a need for more comprehensive strategies that consistently address the intersections of gender, community power dynamics, and capacity-building across all project phases.

Alignment with UNDP's National Priorities: the extent to which UNDP's gender-related activities support UNDP's national-level priorities

K.Q.- To what extent do UNDP's gender related activities support UNDP's national level priorities?

I. Alignment with UN Sustainable and Development Goals (SDGs):

Many projects aligned with broader UN SDGs, contributing to economic empowerment, the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems or societal shifts. Among the 12 projects examined in this study, several activities proved to align with national priorities in areas such as climate change mitigation and social cohesion. The Early Recovery and Reconstruction project in Aleppo demonstrated adaptability and alignment with UNDP's mandate, particularly in response to emergencies like earthquakes. Another project aligned with UNDP's mandate is the Barzeh Center rehabilitation project in Damascus, which supports disability inclusion and capacity development for inclusive policies and programs. Still, it lacked a specific focus on gender equality. The project manager described the alignment: *"Yeah, we are aligned with the UN SDGs. In particular, this is a disability inclusion project. In general, though, this project has worked on three focus areas. One is providing physical rehabilitation support to persons with disabilities through assistive products, physiotherapy, psychosocial support, and case management. The second area of work revolves around the livelihood support, which focuses on creating jobs and access to the labor market. The third area of work is working with the government to develop the institutional or human capacity for more policy-inclusive policy making,"* (KII – MALE BARZEH). He confirmed that the project enhanced the physical infrastructure and amenities for children with disabilities, supporting the national agenda for disability inclusion.

Highlights:

Outputs: Several projects aligned with broader UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on areas such as economic empowerment, sustainable ecosystems, and societal shifts. Notable examples include the Early Recovery and Reconstruction project in Aleppo, which demonstrated alignment with UNDP's mandate, particularly in disaster response, and the Barzeh Center rehabilitation project in Damascus, which focused on disability inclusion and capacity development for inclusive policies.

Results: These projects successfully enhanced physical infrastructure and amenities for vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities, supporting the national agenda for disability inclusion. However, some projects, like the Barzeh Center, lacked a specific focus on gender equality despite their alignment with broader SDGs.

II. Adaptability and Flexibility:

Projects showed adaptability to changing needs, such as those arising from natural disasters and conflict. This adaptability is crucial for maintaining relevance and impact over time. The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Initiatives in Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor highlighted the importance of flexibility in project implementation. The female team leader of the project Provisions of Social and Economic Support to Women and PWDs in Aleppo, in her KII, elaborated on the adaptability and flexibility of the project. She explained how, akin to other UNDP initiatives, the project was initiated with a continuous needs assessment process. Its core objective was to empower women and enhance their awareness levels. Each demographic group underwent a tailored needs assessment, considering various social factors and the diversity among women **themselves. She explained:** *"This adaptability allows us to effectively address the distinct needs of different*

areas within the region, each characterized by its unique nature and requirements. Consequently, the project's approach remains dynamic and responsive to evolving circumstances. Moreover, the study underscored a profound recognition of this dynamic, where we conducted thorough gender analyses within focus groups. An essential aspect of this analysis was understanding power dynamics, which we prioritize in our training sessions," (KII – FEMALE – ALEPPO).

Highlights:
Outputs: The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Initiatives in Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor showcased adaptability to changing needs, with a focus on continuous needs assessment and tailored support for women and persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Results: These adaptive approaches allowed the projects to remain relevant and impactful, particularly in addressing the distinct needs of various demographic groups. The dynamic and responsive nature of these projects was underscored by thorough gender analyses and a deep understanding of power dynamics, which enhanced the overall effectiveness of the initiatives.

III. Need for Explicit Connection:

Further efforts are needed to connect project activities with national development priorities explicitly. While projects like the Rural Development and Rehabilitation for Veterinary Professionals in Daraa showed commitment to gender equality, a more explicit connection to national priorities would enhance relevance. Some KII participants in Daraa's project confirmed they noticed a general alignment with UNDP's national priorities; nevertheless, this conformity needs further assessment as they needed clarification. The participants confirmed this project's focus on empowering women and promoting gender equality aligns with broader development goals, but they could not explain why or how. In other words, KII and FGD respondents asked for a more explicit connection to national priorities as this would clarify its relevance within the larger development agenda.

Highlights:
Outputs: Some projects, like the Rural Development and Rehabilitation for Veterinary Professionals in Daraa, showed a commitment to gender equality but lacked an explicit connection to national development priorities.

Results: Although these projects aligned with broader development goals, participants noted a need for clearer articulation of how these activities connected to national priorities. This would have enhanced the perceived relevance and impact of the projects within the larger development agenda.


Food for Thought
Thematic Analysis: Overall, while many projects demonstrated alignment with UN SDGs and adaptability to changing needs, there was a recurring gap in explicitly connecting project activities to national development priorities. This gap often left participants unclear about the broader relevance of the projects, particularly in relation to national goals. The projects would have benefited from a stronger emphasis on making these connections explicit, which would have enhanced their overall relevance and impact. Additionally, while adaptability and flexibility were strengths, ensuring that these qualities were consistently applied across all projects would have further improved their alignment with national priorities and long-term sustainability.

QUANTITATIVE DATA RELEVANCE

I. Perception of Benefits:

Visual analysis of survey responses indicated varying levels of perceived benefit from project activities among genders. In the Rural Development and Rehabilitation project in Daraa, for example, 67% of females and 76% of males reported benefiting from the activities, reflecting the overall positive impact of gender-responsive initiatives (73%).

Figure 2: Perceived benefit from project activities, Rural Development and Rehabilitation project in Daraa
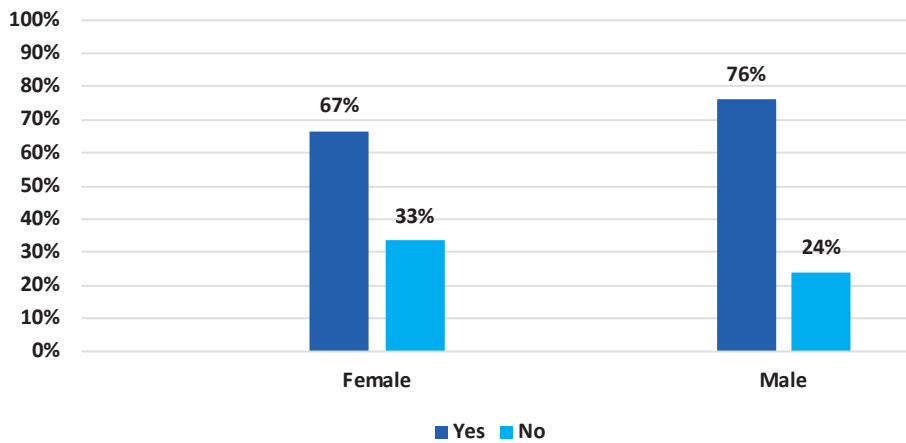
Rural development: Training and Rehabilitation project for veterinary professionals in Daraa
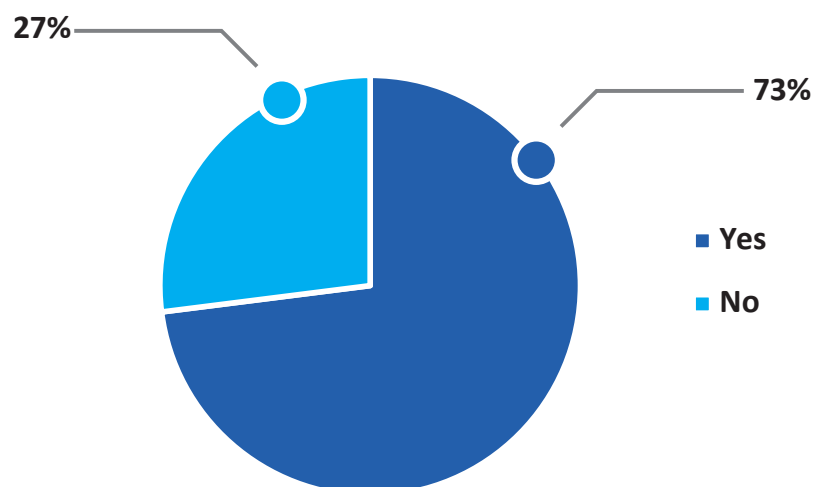
II. Prioritization of Gender Activities:

The perception of the prioritization of gender-related activities varied between men and women. For instance, women generally considered gender activities to be a higher priority than men, as shown in the projects across Raqqa and Aleppo. Here is how men and women answered in Raqqa:

Similarly, in Aleppo, regarding the EQR Earthquake Response - Debris removal project, men and women perceived the importance of gender activities differently. This project-specific insight underscores the need for a more nuanced approach to gender activities within the program, as 65% of the respondents did not consider gender-related activities a high priority. This highlights the importance of understanding and addressing gender disparities more comprehensively, which will enable the program to better cater to the varying needs of different genders.

Figure 3: Perceived importance of gender activities, EQR Earthquake Response Debris Removal in Aleppo

**EQR Debris removal for humanitarian access in Aleppo**
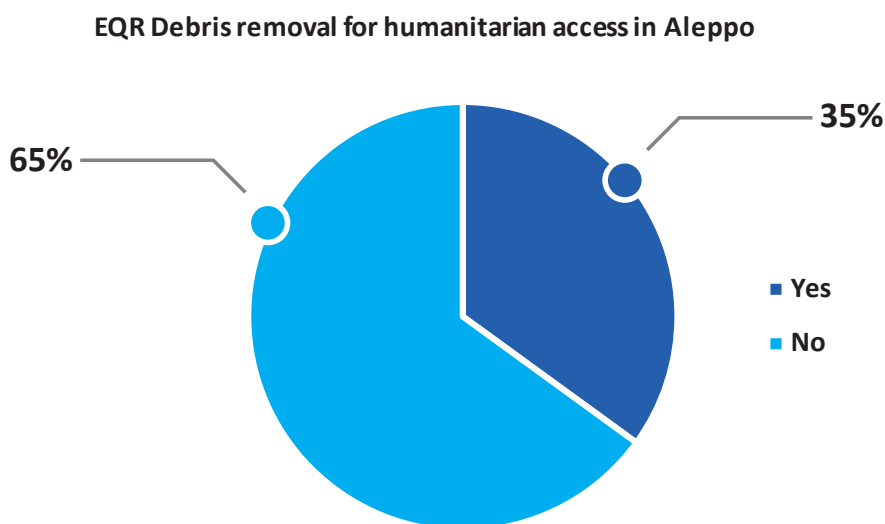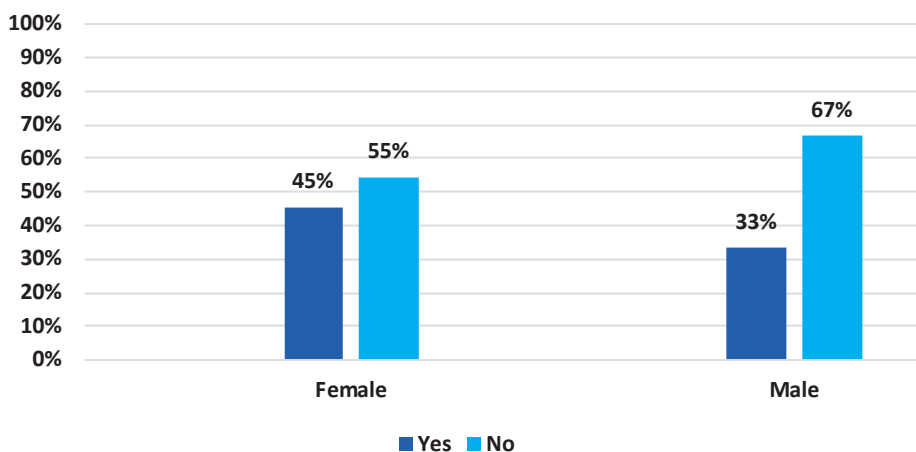
Financial constraints have undoubtedly limited the comprehensive addressing of all identified needs, underscoring ongoing challenges in resource allocation. However, to ensure a more meaningful impact on the ground, it is crucial to recommend continuous improvement and investment in gender analysis and community engagement. This includes the urgent need for better communication and implementation strategies, which are essential to ensuring that all beneficiaries clearly understand and effectively integrate gender priorities into project activities. This emphasis on continuous improvement and investment underscores the urgency and necessity of these actions, as they will lead to a more impactful and sustainable project implementation.

III. High Importance of Gender Equality:

In projects like those in Deir ez-Zor and Homs, respondents confirmed the high importance of gender-equality activities. In Deir ez-Zor, male and female FGD participants emphasized the project's relevance in addressing gender-related issues and promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and inclusion, particularly in skill development and community initiatives.

The charts below indicate how the survey respondents perceived the **importance** of the activities to empower women (high priority (yes) or not high priority (no)), which is part of the UNDP National Priorities.

Figure 4: Perceived importance of activities' empowerment of women, Social Cohesion and CBIs in Deir ez-Zor Shabab 2030

Social Cohesion & Community Based Initiatives inDeir ez Zor Shabab 2030
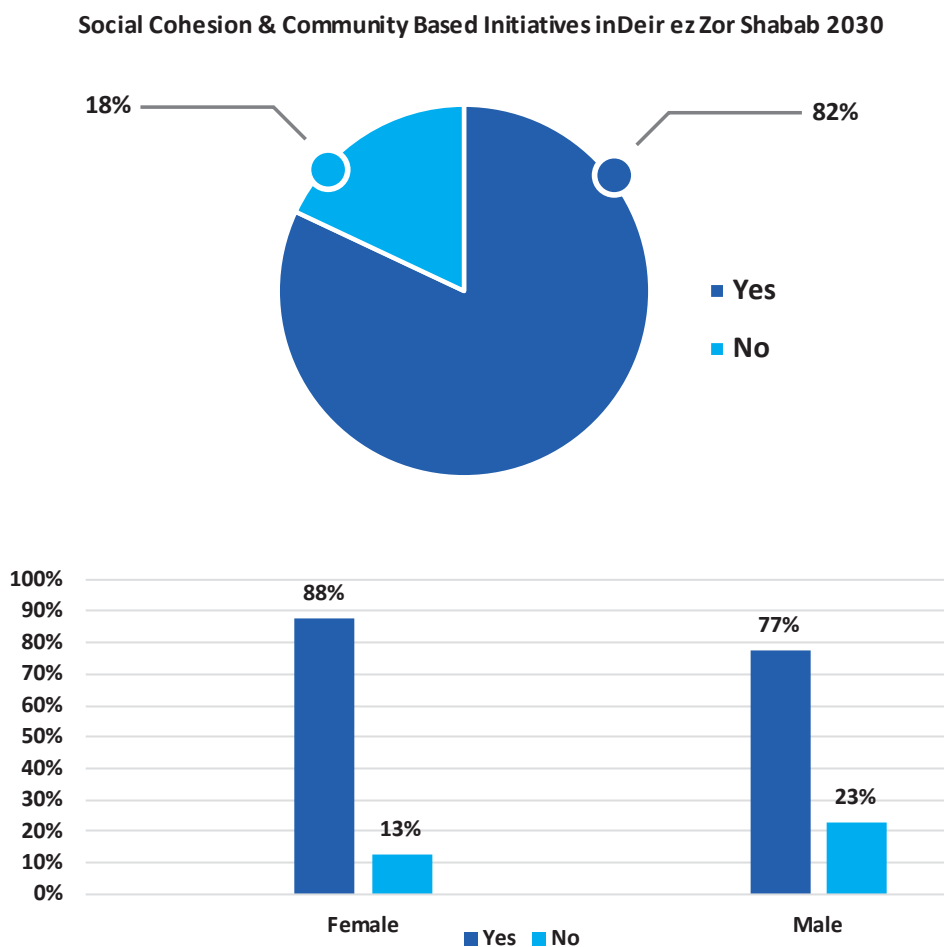
6.2: Effectiveness

K.Q.- How effective were the gender-sensitive, human rights-based, social cohesion, and context-sensitive approaches adopted?

This part of the study, in line with the relevance analysis, shows the significant strides made in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across almost all 12 UNDP projects. This progress, while commendable, has its challenges. The practical implementation of gender-sensitive approaches and robust capacity development initiatives have yielded positive outcomes. To further enhance the effectiveness of gender-sensitive activities, it is crucial to address persistent barriers and ensure the sustainability of gender equality through continued efforts and strategic planning. The value of the UNDP SYR CO's involvement and contribution cannot be overstated. Integrating comprehensive gender analyses and fostering inclusive community engagement, where every voice matters, will be vital for future success.

Synthesis: The evaluation of 12 UNDP projects reveals significant strides in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, although persistent challenges remain. Across the board, projects demonstrated the positive impacts of gender-sensitive approaches, particularly in enhancing women's self-confidence, community engagement, and leadership roles. However, these successes were often tempered by challenges such as mobility issues, inconsistent integration of gender objectives, and barriers related to societal norms and geographical constraints.

To maximize the effectiveness of these initiatives, ongoing efforts are needed to address these barriers and ensure the sustainability of gender equality outcomes. The inclusion of thorough gender analyses, continuous stakeholder engagement, and context-specific adaptations were identified as crucial components for future success. The synthesis underscores the value of UNDP's involvement in fostering inclusive practices and highlights the need for strategic planning to sustain and build upon the positive outcomes achieved so far. Addressing the remaining gaps and enhancing the visibility and impact of gender equality initiatives will be key to ensuring that these efforts lead to long-lasting, transformative change across diverse communities.

Effectiveness of UNDP Practices on Gender Equality: the extent to which gender equality and women's empowerment goals were achieved and positive changes promoted

K.Q.- To what extent were gender equality and women's empowerment goals achieved/positive change promoted?

I. Positive Impacts and Challenges to Positive Changes:

Across various projects, positive impacts on women's empowerment and gender equality were observed. For example, in the Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals in Daraa, female participation significantly enhanced self-confidence, indicating the positive influence of UNDP practices on gender equality. This was evident in the increased number of female participants and their active involvement in the project. However, some challenges still need to be addressed, such as mobility issues for male and female participants in rural areas. Several participants confirmed: "The only challenge is mobility because the fieldwork is active only in the countryside where the farms are located," (FGD – Male Participants – Daraa). The result is that participants had mixed views on the effectiveness of achieving gender equality goals. Their feedback, such as in the Rehabilitation of the Electricity Network in Kadi Askar, highlighting successes and

challenges, is not just valuable, but integral in shaping future project plans. In this project, some respondents felt that gender equality objectives were not fully integrated into project plans. A participant said: "The objectives of the project and its plan were limited to the installation of generators, and nobody told us about increasing gender participation to empower women," (KII – Female – Kadi Askar). This feedback underscores the importance of stakeholder engagement and the need to incorporate diverse perspectives in gender equality initiatives.

Highlights:

Outputs: The Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals in Daraa significantly improved female participants' self-confidence, underscoring the positive role of UNDP practices in advancing gender equality. The project facilitated the active involvement of women, which increased their participation levels. However, challenges such as mobility issues in rural areas were identified, which affected the full realization of these benefits.

Results: The impact was mixed, as while the project did enhance women's participation and self-confidence, some participants expressed concerns about the effectiveness of achieving gender equality goals. In Kadi Askar, participants reported that gender objectives were not fully integrated into the project, highlighting the need for better stakeholder engagement and the inclusion of diverse perspectives to achieve gender equality.

<u>II. Examples of Successes and Challenges in closing gender gaps:</u>

In some projects, the success in closing gender gaps was a reality. In the Women Safe Space Project in Aleppo, a male UNDP team member shared, "We have successfully closed the gender gap, evidenced by the tangible impact and changes observed among beneficiaries," (KII – Male – Aleppo). This success story is essential to demonstrate the potential of UNDP practices in achieving gender equality.

Similarly, 97% of beneficiaries reported no barriers in the Veterinary Training in Daraa, indicating effective gender equality practices.

However, it's crucial to address the challenges that still exist. In the Rehabilitation of Electricity Network (Kadi Askar), some participants did not perceive the gender equality goals within the project. This clearly indicates that there is room for improvement in the practices. As one female respondent from Kadi Askar expressed, "There were no dedicated activities, and I have no idea if gender activities were imagined in this project," (KII Female – Kadi Askar). Similarly, respondents from the Barzeh project confirmed they had seen no specific activities dedicated to gender equality goals. This feedback is a valuable reminder to do better in making gender equality initiatives more visible and impactful.

Highlights:

Outputs: The Women Safe Space Project in Aleppo was a notable success, with participants reporting that the gender gap had been effectively closed, demonstrating the potential of UNDP practices in fostering gender equality. Similarly, the Veterinary Training in Daraa had a 97% success rate in ensuring there were no barriers to women's participation.

Results: While these projects showed strong outcomes in closing gender gaps, challenges persisted in other areas. For example, in the Rehabilitation of the Electricity Network in Kadi Askar, participants did not

perceive gender equality as a priority, indicating that more work is needed to ensure that gender activities are visible and impactful across all projects.

III. Sustainability Concerns:

Concerns about the sustainability of gender equality impacts were noted, especially in projects with short-term initiatives and limited geographical coverage.

Recommendations from the participants and the KII respondents included conducting thorough gender analyses before project initiation and involving stakeholders in program planning to enhance effectiveness in the long run.

Highlights

Outputs: Projects highlighted concerns regarding the sustainability of gender equality impacts, particularly in initiatives with limited duration and geographical reach. The lack of long-term planning and comprehensive gender analysis before project initiation was noted as a critical gap.

Results: Participants recommended that future projects include thorough gender analyses and consistent stakeholder involvement from the planning stages to ensure that gender equality impacts are sustained beyond the project's life cycle.

Food for Thought

Thematic analysis: The evaluation of UNDP projects highlights significant strides in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly through initiatives like the Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals in Daraa, which boosted female self-confidence and participation. However, challenges such as mobility issues in rural areas and the inconsistent integration of gender objectives, as seen in Kadi Askar, reveal that these positive changes were not uniformly achieved across all projects. Notably, the Women Safe Space Project in Aleppo demonstrated the potential for UNDP practices to effectively close gender gaps, though other projects like the Rehabilitation of the Electricity Network in Kadi Askar struggled to prioritize gender equality visibly. Furthermore, sustainability remains a concern, with participants stressing the need for comprehensive gender analyses and robust stakeholder engagement to ensure long-term impacts. These findings underscore the importance of consistent and inclusive planning to fully realize and sustain gender equality goals.

Effectiveness of Gender-Sensitive Approaches on Partnerships and Capacity Development: - the extent of UNDP's contribution to capacity development of local partners and civil society organizations – the efficacy of the gender-sensitive, human rights-based, social cohesion, and context-sensitive approaches adopted.

K.Q.- Influence of UNDP practices, policies, processes, and decision-making on gender equality and women's empowerment?

K.Q.- Extent of UNDP's contribution to capacity development of local partners and civil society organizations for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment?

IV. Inclusive Partnerships: Contribution to Capacity Development and Stakeholder Engagement

The 12 projects demonstrated gender inclusivity by engaging with diverse stakeholders. For example, the Veterinary Training Project in Daraa engaged the Directorate of Agriculture, Veterinarians Syndicate, and

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, strongly encouraging the appointment of female technical members. The Local Governance Initiatives in Damascus are also excellent examples of implementing significant dialogue and participation and enhancing community involvement.

Empowerment and skills development were intrinsic goals in most of the 12 projects. Women's capacity development by providing training and promoting leadership roles were approaches carried out in many projects. As mentioned before, the Rehabilitation of Irrigation Sector in Raqqa empowered women through training in food manufacturing and agricultural management, improving food security and health outcomes: "Training in management of irrigation and agriculture has strongly empowered women," (FGDs – Mixed – Raqqa).

Highlights:
Outputs:
Across the 12 projects, there was a concerted effort to foster gender inclusivity through partnerships with a wide array of stakeholders. The Veterinary Training Project in Daraa, for example, engaged key entities like the Directorate of Agriculture, the Veterinarians Syndicate, and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, leading to the inclusion of female technical members. In Damascus, the Local Governance Initiatives highlighted effective dialogue and participation, significantly enhancing community involvement. The overarching goal of these projects was to develop women's capacities through leadership training and skill development, with notable success in sectors like food manufacturing and agricultural management in Raqqa.

Results:
These partnerships and capacity-building efforts proved largely effective, as demonstrated by the empowerment of women in various communities. For instance, the training initiatives in Raqqa not only improved food security but also boosted women's confidence and leadership roles. However, the depth of stakeholder engagement varied, and in some cases, there was a need for more consistent involvement across all projects to ensure the sustained impact of these initiatives.

V. Context-Specific Implementation:
While gender-sensitive approaches were generally appropriate for the local context, some projects lacked specific gender and stakeholder considerations. For instance, in the Rehabilitation of Schools Project in Aleppo, which focused on physical improvements, participants often noted a lack of integrating gender-sensitive approaches. Some gender-related needs were not fully addressed. For example, in Raqqa, women breadwinners and those with disabilities faced financial difficulties: *"Women who are breadwinners or disabled and work in agriculture were unable to begin in agriculture because it is difficult for them financially,"* (FGDs – Mixed – Raqqa). Opposite examples include the project implemented in Deir ez Zor and Latakia, where respondents believed practical applications of gender-sensitive approaches were demonstrated.

Highlights:
Outputs:
While many projects appropriately tailored their approaches to local contexts, some fell short in addressing specific gender and stakeholder needs. The Rehabilitation of Schools Project in Aleppo, which prioritized physical improvements, did not fully integrate gender-sensitive approaches, leaving some gender-related

needs unmet. Conversely, projects in Deir ez-Zor and Latakia were more successful in applying gender-sensitive strategies, reflecting a more nuanced understanding of the local context.

Results:

The effectiveness of context-specific implementation was mixed. In Raqqa, the failure to address the financial challenges faced by women breadwinners and those with disabilities highlighted gaps in the planning process. On the other hand, successful projects in Deir ez-Zor and Latakia demonstrated that when gender-sensitive approaches are fully integrated, they can effectively meet the needs of the local population, particularly in empowering women and vulnerable groups.

Enhanced Participation and Barriers to this Participation:

Projects focusing on community engagement and inclusivity reported positive participation. For example, the Local Governance Initiatives in Damascus, which fostered dialogue and enhanced community participation, significantly changed the participants' attitudes about gender equality. One of the FGD respondents, a woman, reported, "At first, men did not leave a role for the women, but during the training days, women were given a larger role," (FGDs – Female – Damascus). This shows how, if properly guided, participants of UNDP projects can change their perception of women and gender relations and become changemakers within their communities. Despite efforts, there are still barriers to gender equality in most of the country. Limitations due to societal norms and limited mobility in rural areas hindered full participation. Addressing these barriers remains a key area for improvement.

Highlights:

Outputs:

Projects that emphasized community engagement and inclusivity reported positive outcomes in terms of participation. The Local Governance Initiatives in Damascus, for instance, played a pivotal role in altering participants' perceptions of gender roles, as women began to take on more significant roles during training sessions. However, persistent barriers such as societal norms and limited mobility in rural areas continued to hinder full participation, particularly among women.

Results:

The success in enhancing participation varied. In Damascus, there was a noticeable shift in gender dynamics, demonstrating the potential of well-structured engagement strategies. Yet, challenges remained, as seen in the Daraa Project, where mobility issues limited the ability of participants to fully engage in project activities. These ongoing barriers underscore the need for more targeted interventions to ensure that all participants can benefit equally from the projects.

VI. Participants' feedback about barriers:

Daraa Project: 97% of beneficiaries did not feel barriers, indicating high effectiveness in ensuring access to project activities. But, however, small challenges persist in fully addressing diverse participant needs. For instance, in male focus group discussions, mobility emerged as a significant challenge, particularly in accessing fieldwork locations in rural areas. One of the respondents said, "the only challenge is mobility because the fieldwork is active only in the countryside where the farms are located," (FGD – MALE – DARAA). This comment highlights the need for UNDP to address barriers to participation and ensure equal access to project activities for all genders.

Figure 5: Beneficiaries report experiencing barriers in accessing project activities; Training and Rehabilitation Project in Daraa

Rural development: Training and Rehabilitation project for veterinary professionals in Daraa

- ■ Yes
- ■ No
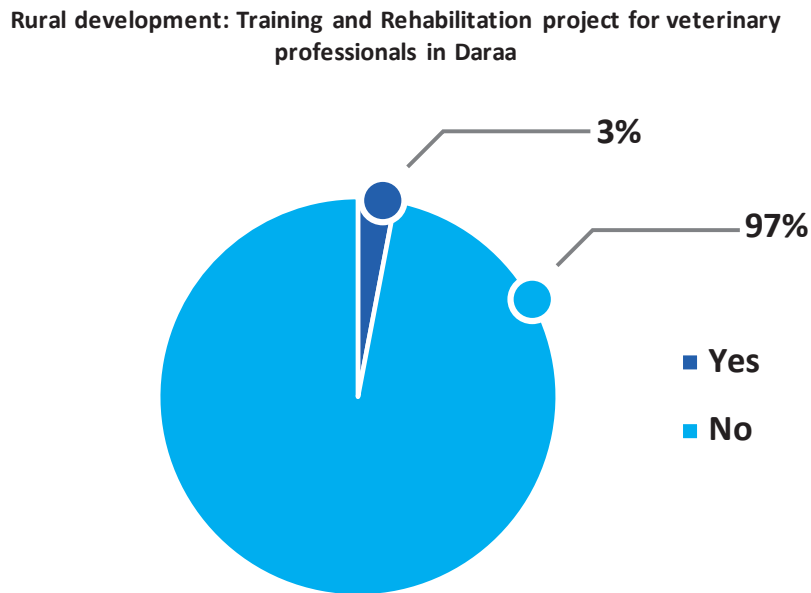
Food for Thought:

Thematic Analysis: The analysis reveals that while UNDP's efforts in gender inclusivity and stakeholder engagement have led to positive outcomes, the effectiveness of these initiatives is uneven across different contexts. Inclusive partnerships have empowered women in several communities, particularly through capacity-building and leadership training. However, the success of context-specific implementation varied, with some projects failing to adequately address the unique needs of women and vulnerable groups. Furthermore, despite the progress in enhancing participation, barriers such as mobility and societal norms continue to limit the full realization of gender equality goals. To achieve sustainable impact, future projects must ensure more consistent stakeholder involvement, tailor gender-sensitive approaches to local contexts

6.3: Efficiency

Synthesis: The efficiency of the projects under review was notably influenced by the effectiveness of partnerships and resource management strategies. Strong collaboration with stakeholders was instrumental in the successful delivery of project outputs, such as in the Veterinary Professionals training in Daraa. However, these partnerships often lacked comprehensive strategies to ensure gender inclusivity, as highlighted by gaps in accommodating specialties suitable for women. Resource allocation and monitoring systems were generally proactive, contributing to effective stakeholder engagement and project success, particularly in Damascus and Deir ez-Zor. Despite these strengths, certain projects, like the Rehabilitation of Schools in Aleppo, revealed deficiencies in gender sensitivity, especially concerning the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Overall, while the efficiency of many projects was enhanced by well-managed resources and partnerships, there is a clear need for more consistent gender-sensitive practices across all initiatives.

Contribution of Partnership Modalities to the delivery of country program outputs

K.Q – Was there contribution of partnership modalities to the delivery of the country program outputs?

Partnerships played a crucial role in the successful delivery of project outputs. For example, the Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals in Daraa benefited from effective collaboration with various stakeholders, ensuring resource availability and support. However, there is a recognized need for more comprehensive strategies to ensure efficient involvement of all genders. One of the participants reported: *"Veterinary medicine has a variety of specialties that have not been taken into account, especially those that are appropriate for women 'physically',"* (FGD – Female – Daraa). In Aleppo's Rehabilitation of Electricity Network project, while partnerships contributed to the delivery of outputs, their specific impact on promoting gender equality remains unclear: *"The project should be implemented on a large scale and take into account the changes caused by war and disaster,"* (KII/FGD – Female – Kadi Askar).

Highlights:

Outputs: Collaborative efforts were crucial in the successful execution of project outcomes. In the case of the Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals in Daraa, partnerships with various stakeholders ensured that resources were available and supported the project's goals. However, it was noted that more thorough strategies are required to effectively engage all genders. A participant highlighted that certain veterinary specializations, particularly those suitable for women, were overlooked. In Aleppo's Rehabilitation of the Electricity Network project, although partnerships helped deliver project outputs, their role in advancing gender equality remained uncertain, with some suggesting the need for broader project implementation and adaptability to challenges like conflict and disaster.

Results: The partnerships were instrumental in delivering the intended outputs, as seen in the Daraa project. However, the specific influence of these partnerships on gender equality was less clear, especially in projects like Aleppo's electricity rehabilitation, where the project's broader gender-related impact was questioned. Participants indicated that the project's design should have been more comprehensive to address gender equality alongside other challenges.

Resource Allocation and Monitoring Systems: Extent to which projects had adequate resources including human resources, access to appropriate materials and expertise, and adequate fundings

K.Q. - Extent to which projects had adequate resources including human resources, access to appropriate materials and expertise, and adequate funding?
K.Q. - Monitoring systems' provision of gender-disaggregated data for informed decision-making and at the project formulation level?

Projects demonstrated a proactive approach to resource management and stakeholder engagement. For instance, the Local Governance Initiatives in Damascus emphasized the importance of ensuring physical accessibility and expanding funding for training topics to promote inclusivity. One of the KII respondents confirmed: *"Stakeholders were involved significantly and effectively from the beginning,"* (KII – Female – Damascus). Similarly, in Deir ez Zor's Social Cohesion & Community Based Initiatives, resource allocation and monitoring systems contributed to effective engagement. One of the key figures in the project development confirmed: *"There were significant savings of resources, for example, the employees of the project were limited and able to accomplish tasks,"* (KII – Male – Deir ez-Zor).

However, some projects, like the Rehabilitation of Schools in Aleppo, lacked sensitivity in resource allocation and monitoring systems towards vulnerable groups. One of the project's participants said: "No action has been taken to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities," (FGD – Mixed – Aleppo).

Highlights:

Outputs: Resource management and stakeholder engagement were handled proactively in several projects, such as the Local Governance Initiatives in Damascus, which prioritized accessibility and secured additional funding for inclusive training. Effective stakeholder involvement was a key feature from the project's inception. Similarly, in Deir ez-Zor's Social Cohesion & Community-Based Initiatives, efficient resource allocation and robust monitoring systems were critical to the project's success, enabling cost savings and effective task execution.

Results: These proactive approaches led to successful outcomes, particularly in terms of stakeholder engagement and resource utilization. However, gaps in gender sensitivity were noted in some projects, like the Rehabilitation of Schools in Aleppo, where the resource allocation did not adequately consider the needs of persons with disabilities, highlighting the need for more inclusive planning and resource distribution.

Food for Thought

Thematic Analysis: Overall, the efficiency of the UNDP projects was significantly enhanced through strong partnerships and proactive resource management. The collaboration between stakeholders played a pivotal role in ensuring the availability and effective use of resources, leading to the successful delivery of project outcomes. However, the efficiency could be further improved by adopting more inclusive strategies that consider gender-specific needs, particularly in areas such as resource allocation and project monitoring. The need for comprehensive planning that includes gender-sensitive approaches was highlighted across several projects, indicating that while partnerships and resource management were effective, the full integration of gender equality objectives remains a work in progress. This underscores the importance of designing and implementing strategies that not only deliver outputs efficiently but also promote gender equality in a meaningful and sustained manner.

6.4: Impact

K. Q. – Assessment of higher-level effects generated by the intervention, both positive and negative

Synthesis: The impact of the 12 UNDP projects revealed both positive outcomes and areas needing improvement, particularly concerning gender equality and human rights integration. Gender-inclusive activities effectively enabled women's participation in traditionally male-dominated roles, with significant individual success stories, such as in the Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals in Daraa. However, the sustainability of these impacts is contingent on continued support, as seen in Raqqa's Rehabilitation of Irrigation Sector, where the lasting benefits are linked to ongoing access to resources like water for irrigation.

The effectiveness of the projects was further supported by UNDP's monitoring systems, which integrated gender-based objectives to assess the impact on beneficiaries' lives, leading to improved personal and family dynamics in some cases. However, limitations in practical training, as noted in Kadi Askar's Rehabilitation of the Electricity Network, highlight the need for more robust implementation to achieve significant impact.

Human rights-focused projects also showed a mixed impact. While initiatives like the WOAN - Active Ladies Group in Latakia successfully addressed gender-related challenges by enhancing social protection policies, other projects, such as those in Aleppo, faced challenges due to community resistance, funding constraints, and limited stakeholder engagement. This indicates that while progress has been made in integrating human rights and promoting gender equality, sustained and comprehensive efforts are necessary to overcome persistent barriers and ensure long-term impact.

I. Continuation of Project Activities: Assessment of higher-level effects generated by the intervention, whether positive or negative

Gender-inclusive activities within the 12 projects facilitated women's participation in traditionally male-dominated roles. One of the participants in the Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals said: *"I have a short-sightedness. I have not been subjected to any kind of harassment. On the contrary, all the trainees provided me with the opportunity to progress and be able to do practical training,"* (FGD – Female – Daraa). In Raqqa's Rehabilitation of Irrigation Sector, participants believed that the project's impact will be lasting if irrigation water continues to reach agricultural land: *"The impact of the project, including gender, will be permanent provided that irrigation water continues to reach agricultural land,"* (FGDs – Mixed – Raqqa).

Highlights:

Outputs: Gender-inclusive activities across the 12 projects were designed to increase women's involvement in traditionally male-dominated sectors. For instance, the Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals in Daraa provided a supportive environment for women, enabling them to participate actively in practical training, which was a significant step forward in breaking gender barriers.

Results: The results of these activities were generally positive, with participants reporting increased opportunities and confidence in their roles. However, the long-term success of these initiatives, such as in Raqqa's Rehabilitation of Irrigation Sector, hinges on continued resource availability, like consistent access to irrigation water, to sustain the project's benefits over time.

II. Impact Assessment

UNDP's monitoring incorporated gender-based objectives, facilitating the measurement of gender-specific outcomes. For example, in the Homs' Gender Justice Initiative project, impact assessments highlighted positive changes in beneficiaries' lives, including improved emotional regulation, decision-making, and communication within families. However, in the Rehabilitation of the Electricity Network in Kadi Askar, the brevity of practical training hours markedly reduced the project's impact. One of the participants remarked: *"Limited practical training hours hindered significant impact,"* (FGD – Female – Kadi Askar).

Highlights:

Outputs: UNDP projects incorporated gender-specific objectives into their monitoring frameworks to measure their influence on beneficiaries. For example, the Homs' Gender Justice Initiative was structured to assess changes in emotional well-being, decision-making processes, and family communication as a direct result of the intervention.

Results: The impact of these monitoring efforts revealed significant improvements in personal and social

dynamics within the targeted communities. Conversely, the effectiveness of some projects, such as the Rehabilitation of the Electricity Network in Kadi Askar, was less pronounced due to the limited duration of practical training, which curtailed the potential long-term impact.

III. HUMAN RIGHTS: Integration of Human Rights for enhancing social protection policies and local social networks for gender equality and inclusion

Projects which integrated human rights principles managed to address gender-related challenges while enhancing social protection policies, thus promoting inclusivity and equality within communities. The WOAN - Active Ladies Group – EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE in Latakia, for example, emphasized the project's focus on human rights, addressing gender-related issues through community-based initiatives. In some cases, the impact at a local level to enhance protection policies and local social networks did not work as expected. In the Provision of Social and Economic Support to Women and PWDs in Aleppo, for example, challenges to developing longer term local policies regarding gender equality and inclusion included community resistance, funding constraints, and limited engagement with certain groups.

Highlights:

Outputs: Several projects integrated human rights principles to tackle gender-related issues and enhance social protection policies. The WOAN - Active Ladies Group in Latakia focused on embedding these principles within community-based initiatives, aiming to foster equality and inclusivity.

Results: The success of these human rights-driven projects varied. While some, like the Latakia initiative, made significant strides in addressing local gender challenges, others, such as the Support to Women and PWDs in Aleppo, struggled due to external challenges such as community resistance, funding limitations, and insufficient stakeholder engagement. These issues hindered the broader adoption of inclusive policies and the sustainability of project outcomes.

Food for Thought

Thematic Analysis: The impact of the UNDP's gender-inclusive and human rights-focused projects demonstrates a mix of positive outcomes and ongoing challenges. While the initiatives successfully promoted women's participation in non-traditional roles and improved gender dynamics within communities, the sustainability of these results is often dependent on external factors, such as continued access to resources and stronger community support. The integration of gender-specific monitoring has yielded valuable insights into the projects' effectiveness, yet some initiatives suffered from limited impact due to insufficient training durations and lack of comprehensive engagement strategies. Human rights-based approaches, while generally effective, faced significant barriers in certain regions, highlighting the need for more robust and adaptable frameworks to ensure the long-term success and scalability of gender equality efforts.

6.5: Sustainability

Synthesis: The sustainability of project activities in promoting gender equality post-implementation was varied across the projects. Initiatives like the Women's Empowerment and Support Center showcased potential for long-term impact, fostering shifts in traditional gender roles, despite the persistence of cultural barriers. The Local Governance Initiatives in Damascus similarly evidenced a cultural change, with women taking on more significant roles during training sessions, reflecting a gradual acceptance of gender equality. However, challenges persisted in other projects. For instance, the Barzeh Center Rehabilitation Project faced significant sustainability issues due to delays in operationalization and a lack of resources, which limited its long-term impact on women's empowerment.

In terms of risks to sustainability, several factors were identified. These included inadequate national policies, an overemphasis by NGOs on in-kind assistance, and communal resistance to gender equality concepts. For example, the Rehabilitation of Schools in Aleppo was criticized for not involving vulnerable groups such as women, PWDs, youth, or the elderly, which heightened the risk of these initiatives not being sustainable. Additionally, the failure to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities was a recurring concern, underlining the importance of inclusive approaches to ensure the long-term success of gender equality initiatives.

Sustainability of Project Activities: Extent to which project activities will continue to promote gender equality after the implementation of project activities have ended via women's empowerment, new resources availability, and as a result of trainings.

K.Q. - Extent to which project activities will continue to promote gender equality after the implementation of project activities have ended via women's empowerment, new resources availability, and as a result of trainings? Were mechanisms in place to support this?

Projects like the Women's Empowerment and Support Center demonstrated sustainability through transformative impacts, although barriers such as traditional gender norms persist. The Local Governance Initiatives in Damascus fostered a real cultural shift towards gender equality. One of the participants reported: *"At first, men did not leave a role for the women, but during the training days, they were given a larger role,"* (FGD – Female – Damascus). However, in the Barzeh Center Rehabilitation Project, sustainability was affected by political, logistical, and capacity-related barriers. Overall, according to the person in charge of the project, the program did not create new resources that could have a lasting impact on women's empowerment in the long run. He confirmed that, *"Despite completing the rehabilitation of the Barzeh Center, delays in its operationalization have affected the project's sustainability,"* (KII – Male – Barzeh).

Highlights:

Outputs: The Women's Empowerment and Support Center showcased ongoing potential for sustaining gender equality impacts post-implementation, particularly by challenging traditional gender norms. The Local Governance Initiatives in Damascus achieved notable cultural shifts, enabling women to take on more significant roles. However, the Barzeh Center Rehabilitation Project faced obstacles to sustainability due to political, logistical, and capacity-related issues, which hindered the creation of new resources to support long-term empowerment outcomes.

Results: While some projects demonstrated the potential for lasting gender equality impacts, others were hindered by operational delays and a lack of resource development, limiting their sustainability. For example,

despite the successful completion of the Barzeh Center, delays in its operationalization significantly affected its long-term sustainability and impact on gender equality.

Identification of Risks

K.Q. - Identification of risks hindering social cohesion, sustainability and recommendations to strengthen implementation and ensure that social risks are minimized?

Participants identified potential barriers to gender-specific goals, such as inadequate national policies, NGO focus on in-kind assistance, and communal resistance to gender concepts. One of the KII respondents in Aleppo pointed to: *"Lack of impactful national policies. NGOs concentrating on the in-kind aspects of assistance. A communal gap exists in comprehending and embracing principles of gender concepts,"* (KII – Male – Aleppo). In the Rehabilitation of Schools in Aleppo, minimal efforts were made to involve different populations, such as women, PWDs, youth, or the elderly, in project activities. Hence one of the risks to sustainability is also the lack of inclusion of vulnerable groups. Several FGD respondents aligned on the idea that, *"No action has been taken to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities,"* (FGDs – Mixed – Aleppo).

Highlights:

Outputs: Several potential risks to the sustainability of gender-specific goals were identified, including inadequate national policies, a focus by NGOs on in-kind assistance, and communal resistance to gender concepts. For instance, the Rehabilitation of Schools in Aleppo highlighted a significant risk due to the minimal inclusion of diverse populations, such as women, PWDs, youth, and the elderly, in project activities.

Results: The risks identified underscored the challenges in achieving and sustaining gender equality goals. The lack of inclusion of vulnerable groups in certain projects, like the Rehabilitation of Schools in Aleppo, poses a significant threat to the sustainability of these initiatives. Additionally, the reliance on in-kind assistance and the lack of strong national policies further exacerbate these risks, suggesting that without addressing these barriers, long-term sustainability remains at risk.

Food for Thought

Thematic Analysis: The sustainability of gender equality impacts across the various projects is highly contingent on overcoming both operational barriers and societal resistance. While some projects like the Women's Empowerment and Support Center and Local Governance Initiatives demonstrated significant potential for long-term impact, others, such as the Barzeh Center Rehabilitation Project, were less successful due to delays and logistical issues. The identification of risks, particularly those related to the exclusion of vulnerable groups and inadequate national policies, further highlights the challenges in ensuring that gender equality initiatives have lasting effects. To enhance sustainability, it is crucial to address these risks through more inclusive planning and robust policy support.

🎖 7. Lessons Learned (based on OECD Criteria)

The analysis of the lessons learned from the 12 UNDP projects, in alignment with the UNDP Syria Country Programme Document (CPD) (2022 – 2025), the United Nations Strategic Framework (UNSF) (2022 – 2025), the UNDP Strategic Plan (SP) (2022 – 2025), the UNDP Gender Strategy (2022 - 2025), and the UNDP Syria Gender Strategy (2024 - 2026), reveals significant efforts in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. However, challenges remain. Implementing gender-sensitive approaches and robust capacity development initiatives have led to positive outcomes. Still, addressing persistent barriers and ensuring sustainability of gender equality impacts require continuous efforts and more strategic planning. Integrating follow-ups of comprehensive gender analyses, fostering inclusive community engagement, and improving resource allocation and monitoring systems will be vital for future success. Here is the result of what qualitative and quantitative data have highlighted according to the OECD Criteria:

RELEVANCE

- **Customization for Local Contexts: Understanding and accommodating local customs and traditions is crucial for the access, success, and sustainability of development projects, particularly regarding gender inclusivity.** In projects such as the Training and Rehabilitation Project for Veterinary Professionals in Daraa, for example, several participants highlighted the importance of tailoring initiatives to each community's specific needs and cultural nuances. As one female participant said, "Taking into account the diversity of specialties such as pet laboratories and other specializations appropriate to the physical ability of girls would be very important and much appreciated," (FGD – Female – Daraa).

- **Recognition of Diverse Needs: Addressing varied participant needs is essential, especially in rural settings. In Daraa, mobility and safety concerns were significant barriers.** One of the participants said, *"As girls, we do not have the ability to travel in the countryside because of the difficulty of transportation,"* (FGD – Female – Daraa).

- **Inclusive Design: Projects like the Rehabilitation of Irrigation Sector in Raqqa emphasized the need for incorporating gender considerations from the project's inception.** Several participants confirmed during the FGDs that "The impact of the project, including gender, will be permanent provided that irrigation water continues to reach agricultural land," (FGDs – Mixed – Raqqa).

Synthesis lessons (tot. 10) presenting new knowledge applicable in other similar situations/ context:
a. **Customization for Local Contexts:** Projects that tailor their design and implementation to accommodate local customs, traditions, and gender norms are more likely to succeed. This approach ensures that interventions are culturally sensitive and resonate with the target communities, increasing accessibility and sustainability.
b. **Recognition of Diverse Needs:** Addressing the varied and specific needs of different participant groups, especially in rural areas, is critical. For example, mobility and safety concerns for women need to be addressed from the outset to ensure effective participation and project relevance.

EFFECTIVENESS

- **Encouraging Women's Participation in traditionally male-dominated fields: Encouraging women's engagement in traditionally male-dominated fields is crucial.** The Veterinary Training in Daraa, for example, underscored this necessity.

- **Gender-Specific Needs Identification:** The Rehabilitation of the Electricity Network in Kadi Askar highlighted **the importance of considering gender-specific needs in project design and understanding power dynamics within the community.**

- **Community Engagement: Active engagement of key stakeholders and local community members, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, fosters ownership and ensures project activities meet diverse needs.** This was evident in projects like the Social Cohesion & Community-Based Initiatives in Deir ez Zor. One of the KII respondents noted, *"In this project, there were significant savings of resources, but the project still had positive outcomes thanks to the community engagement,"* (KII – Male – Deir ez-Zor).

- **Adaptation to Changing Needs: Remaining flexible and adaptable to evolving gender-related needs, such as those arising from external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, contributed to the projects' relevance and impact over time.**

Synthesis lessons (tot.10) presenting new knowledge applicable in other similar situations/ context:

a. **Encouraging Women's Participation in Male-Dominated Fields:** Actively promoting and supporting women's involvement in traditionally male-dominated sectors can lead to significant empowerment outcomes. This approach helps challenge and change existing gender norms, fostering long-term socio-economic benefits.

b. **Community Engagement:** Meaningful engagement with all community members, including marginalized groups like women, youth, and persons with disabilities, enhances the effectiveness of projects. This inclusive approach ensures that projects meet diverse needs and foster a sense of ownership among beneficiaries.

EFFICIENCY

- **Resource Allocation and Monitoring Systems: Effective resource allocation and stakeholder engagement are critical.** The Local Governance Initiatives in Damascus were excellent examples of ensuring physical accessibility and expanding funding for training topics. One of the participants said, "Stakeholders were involved significantly and effectively from the beginning, and this was part of the project's success," (KII – Female – Damascus).

- **Comprehensive Gender Analysis:** Projects like the EQR Earthquake Response in Aleppo demonstrated the **need for comprehensive gender analysis at national and regional levels.** One of the project's leaders said, *"We have yet to establish a robust and useful network of partnerships in the context of gender analysis,"* (KII – Male – Aleppo).

- **Inclusive Approaches:** In some projects, such as the Rehabilitation of Schools in Aleppo, **minimal efforts were made to involve vulnerable actors.** Several participants in the focus group discussions highlighted, *"No action has been taken to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities,"* (FGDs – Mixed – Aleppo).

Synthesis lessons (tot. 10) presenting new knowledge applicable in other, similar situations/ context:
a. **Resource Allocation and Monitoring Systems:** Efficient resource allocation, coupled with robust monitoring systems and active stakeholder engagement, is vital for project success. This ensures that resources are used effectively and that the project remains on track to meet its objectives.
b. **Comprehensive Gender Analysis:** Conducting thorough gender analysis at both national and regional levels is essential for designing responsive and inclusive projects. This analysis helps identify the specific needs of different gender groups, ensuring that interventions are appropriately targeted.

IMPACT
- **Positive Outcomes:** Projects like the Women's Empowerment and Support Center demonstrated **sustainability through transformative impacts, although barriers such as traditional gender norms persist.**
- **Capacity Building: Capacity-building initiatives promoted gender inclusivity and equality.** In projects such as the Homs' Gender Justice Initiative, it has been apparent that capacity-building efforts empowered women and fostered sustainable development.
- **Integration of Human Rights:** It is important that projects **integrate human rights principles, address gender-related challenges, and promote inclusivity by "Leaving No One Behind."** This UN pledge embodies a strong commitment to eliminate poverty, discrimination, and exclusion, as well as to diminish the inequalities that limit the potential of individuals and humanity collectively. The WOAN - Active Ladies Group – EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE, in Latakia, for example, emphasized this focus and showed how gender equality can be better supported through the integration of human rights in the design and implementation of a project.

Synthesis lessons (tot.10) presenting new knowledge applicable in other similar situations/ context:
a. **Capacity Building:** Investing in capacity-building initiatives that focus on gender inclusivity strengthens the impact of projects. Empowering local stakeholders through training and development leads to more sustainable and far-reaching outcomes.
b. **Integration of Human Rights:** Projects that integrate human rights principles into their design and implementation are more likely to promote gender equality effectively. This holistic approach ensures that interventions address the root causes of gender inequality and promote broader social justice.

SUSTAINABILITY
- **Continuation of Project Activities: Sustainability was a key focus, but challenges such as political, logistical, and capacity-related barriers persisted.** The Barzeh Center Rehabilitation Project faced issues in operationalizing activities due to such barriers. The project leader recognized that *"Despite completing the rehabilitation of the Barzeh Center, delays in its operationalization have affected the project's sustainability,"* (KII – Male – Barzeh).

- **Investment in Capacity Building:** Sustainability is enhanced through investing in capacity-building programs for stakeholders and implementing partners, focusing on gender-sensitive practices.

- **Addressing Gender-Specific Needs:** Ensuring that gender-specific needs are considered beyond primary accessibility considerations is crucial for inclusivity that in turn leads to and strengthens sustainability.

Synthesis lessons (tot.10) presenting new knowledge applicable in other similar situations/ context:

a. **Investment in Capacity Building for Sustainability:** Sustained impact is more likely when projects invest in the ongoing capacity development of stakeholders and implementing partners. This includes a focus on gender-sensitive practices that ensure the long-term sustainability of project outcomes.

b. **Addressing Gender-Specific Needs for Inclusivity:** Ensuring that gender-specific needs are consistently addressed throughout the project lifecycle is crucial for maintaining inclusivity. This involves going beyond basic accessibility considerations to fully integrate gender perspectives into all aspects of project planning and execution.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

- **Integration of Human Rights Principles:** As mentioned in the Impact section, projects that comprehensively integrate human rights considerations into design and implementation have better-promoted gender equality outcomes.

- **Conflict Prevention:** Efforts to promote social cohesion and inclusivity, such as disability inclusion and capacity development, have indirectly contributed to conflict prevention goals.

8. Comprehensive Conclusion

This evaluation of various UNDP projects has revealed a multifaceted impact on gender equality and community development. While these projects have made significant strides in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, there are areas requiring continuous improvement, strategic adaptation, and robust community engagement. Our overarching conclusions, in line with the OECD-DAC criteria, are as follows:

1. Relevance:

The gender-inclusive activities within the projects have demonstrated significant relevance to the needs of women and the broader community. These activities have increased women's confidence, improved job opportunities, and enhanced community engagement, underlining the importance of addressing gender-specific needs in community development.

Synthesis: The relevance of gender-inclusive activities within the evaluated UNDP projects is strongly affirmed by their alignment with the needs of women and broader community objectives. These initiatives have successfully boosted women's confidence, provided improved job opportunities, and enhanced community engagement, thus underscoring the critical importance of addressing gender-specific needs in the context of community development. However, the evolving nature of these needs requires that projects

continuously reassess and adapt to ensure ongoing relevance. This highlights the need for a dynamic approach to project design that is responsive to the changing socio-economic landscape of Syria, particularly in the aftermath of crises like the 2023 earthquakes.

Link to UNDP Syria Country Programme: The relevance of these activities is directly tied to the UNDP Syria's Country Programme (2022 – 2025), which emphasizes local socioeconomic recovery and social cohesion. Gender-specific initiatives are critical to these goals, as they directly contribute to rebuilding livelihoods and fostering inclusive community growth.

2. Effectiveness:

The projects have varied in effectiveness, with participants noting the suitability of activities while highlighting gaps in practical training and inclusivity. Despite these gaps, community engagement has generally been supportive, and there is a strong potential for lasting impacts on individuals and families. The effectiveness of gender equality initiatives is evident in the positive changes observed, including individual empowerment and community development.

Synthesis: While the projects have generally been effective, there are significant variations in outcomes. The effectiveness of these initiatives is most apparent in the observed improvements in individual empowerment and community development. However, gaps in practical training and inclusivity remain, which can limit the broader effectiveness of these programs. These issues suggest that while the current strategies are on the right path, there is a need for more focused and inclusive training modules that cater specifically to the diverse needs of women across different regions.

Link to UNDP Syria Country Programme: Effectiveness is a cornerstone of the UNDP's strategy for Syria, particularly within the pillars of local governance and service delivery. Ensuring that gender-specific programs are effectively implemented supports the overall effectiveness of the UNDP's broader objectives in promoting governance that is inclusive and responsive to all citizens.

3. Efficiency:

While the projects have made notable progress, efficiency has been impacted by logistical challenges and varying individual perspectives. However, KII and FGD respondents believed that these challenges were manageable. Addressing these logistical barriers is crucial for enhancing the efficiency of gender-inclusive initiatives and ensuring that resources are utilized optimally to achieve project goals.

Synthesis: The efficiency of project implementation has been impacted by logistical challenges and varying perspectives among stakeholders. Although these challenges are considered manageable by respondents, they underscore the need for a streamlined approach to project execution. By addressing these logistical barriers—such as improving communication, enhancing coordination among stakeholders, and ensuring timely resource allocation—the efficiency of gender-inclusive initiatives can be significantly improved.

Link to Syria UNDP Country Programme: Efficiency in implementing gender-focused initiatives aligns with the UNDP's aim of enhancing governance and resilience. Efficient use of resources and effective project management are essential to ensure that the strategic goals outlined in the Country Programme are met within the expected timeframes and resource constraints.

4. Impact:

The projects have positively impacted gender equality and women's empowerment, with successes including training women in various skills, empowering them economically, and influencing policies. However, the impact has been mixed across projects, with disparities in technical capabilities among youth, economic constraints, and traditional gender roles posing barriers to the full achievement of gender equality goals.

Synthesis: The projects have had a positive impact on gender equality and women's empowerment, especially in terms of economic empowerment and influencing policy. However, the impact is uneven across different projects, largely due to disparities in technical capabilities, economic constraints, and entrenched traditional gender roles. This calls for a more targeted approach that considers the specific barriers faced by different groups of women, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas.

Link to UNDP Syria Country Programme: The positive impact of these projects contributes to the overarching goal of promoting gender equality, which is essential for the socioeconomic recovery pillar of the Country Programme. By fostering economic empowerment, these projects also support broader objectives related to poverty reduction and social cohesion.

5. Sustainability:

Ensuring the sustainability of gender equality efforts remains challenging due to societal expectations and logistical issues. Continuous commitment and strategic efforts are essential to sustain positive changes and foster long-term gender equality. Community involvement and recognition of women's contributions are critical to project outcomes.

Synthesis: Sustainability of gender equality efforts remains a significant challenge. Societal expectations and logistical hurdles often hinder the long-term success of these initiatives. Continuous commitment from both local communities and implementing agencies is crucial to sustaining positive changes. Strategic efforts must be made to ensure that gender equality becomes a lasting part of community norms and practices, rather than a temporary project outcome.

Link to UNDP Syria Country Programme: Sustainability is a critical factor in the UNDP's approach to long-term development in Syria. The integration of sustainable gender practices into community life aligns with the Country Programme's focus on building resilient communities that can withstand and recover from future crises.

6. Inclusiveness:

Projects have shown a commendable commitment to identifying and addressing gender-specific needs, integrating gender considerations from the design phase, and ensuring inclusivity in recruitment and task assignment. Engaging diverse populations, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, has been critical, although challenges such as physical accessibility limitations remain.

Synthesis: The projects have demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusiveness by integrating gender considerations from the outset and ensuring diverse participation. However, physical accessibility challenges remain a barrier to full inclusivity. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts to design projects that are not only gender-sensitive but also accessible to all, including persons with disabilities.

Link to UNDP Syria Country Programme: Inclusiveness is a key principle of the UNDP's Country Programme

for Syria. Ensuring that all groups, especially the most marginalized, are included in development processes is vital for achieving the program's goals of social protection, inclusion, and cohesion

7. Alignment with UNDP Mandate and National Priorities:

The projects align well with UNDP's mandate and national priorities, particularly concerning climate change and its social and environmental implications. By integrating gender considerations into climate mitigation efforts, these projects contribute directly to achieving goals outlined in the Country Programme Document (2022-2025).

Synthesis: The projects align well with UNDP's mandate and national priorities, particularly in addressing the social and environmental impacts of climate change. By integrating gender considerations into these efforts, the projects not only contribute to gender equality but also enhance the overall effectiveness of national strategies for sustainable development.

Link to UNDP Syria Country Programme: This alignment ensures that gender-focused initiatives are not operating in isolation but are instead contributing to the broader national objectives outlined in the Country Programme. This strategic coherence is essential for maximizing the impact of UNDP's interventions in Syria.

8. Adaptation and Flexibility:

Continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving gender-related needs and challenges is crucial. Broader integration of gender aspects into project design and implementation, increased dissemination of gender concepts to stakeholders, and enhanced communication and responsiveness to feedback are necessary for sustaining efforts and addressing gender-related barriers.

Synthesis: The ability to adapt and respond to evolving gender-related needs is crucial for the success of these projects. Broader integration of gender aspects into project design and enhanced communication with stakeholders are necessary to sustain efforts and address barriers to gender equality.

Link to UNDP Syria Country Programme: Adaptability and flexibility are central to the UNDP's approach in Syria, particularly given the unpredictable and rapidly changing context of the country. The ability to pivot and adjust strategies in response to emerging challenges is key to the long-term success of the Country Programme.

9. Gender Sensitivity and Policy Influence:

Despite efforts to incorporate gender-sensitive approaches, challenges persist in fully integrating a gender-responsive approach. Gaps in gender-sensitive practices, particularly regarding women's integration in project activities, indicate the need for more robust gender analysis, community engagement, and policy influence to ensure meaningful impacts.

Synthesis: Despite progress, challenges persist in fully integrating a gender-responsive approach across all project activities. There is a need for more robust gender analysis and community engagement to ensure that gender sensitivity is not just a project component but a driving force in policy influence and decision-making processes.

Link to UNDP Syria Country Programme: The integration of gender-sensitive approaches is critical for

influencing policy at both local and national levels. By embedding gender considerations into the fabric of its projects, the UNDP can drive broader policy changes that support the Country Programme's objectives of governance, resilience, and inclusive development.

10. Barriers to Sustainability:
Barriers to sustainability include a lack of impactful national policies, gaps in communities' understanding of gender concepts, and funding constraints. Addressing these barriers is essential for the long-term success and sustainability of gender equality initiatives.

Synthesis: Key barriers to sustainability include the lack of impactful national policies, gaps in communal understanding of gender concepts, and funding constraints. Addressing these barriers is essential for the long-term success and sustainability of gender equality initiatives.
Link to UNDP Syria Country Programme: Overcoming these barriers is vital for the sustainability of the UNDP's efforts in Syria. Ensuring that gender equality initiatives are supported by strong policies and adequate funding will contribute to the resilience and long-term stability envisioned in the Country Programme.

9. Actionable Recommendations
Our actionable recommendations, comprehensive and aligned with the OECD Criteria, are designed to enhance the overall relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, inclusiveness, alignment with UNDP mandates and national priorities, adaptability, and gender sensitivity of the provided projects. These recommendations are not just practical steps for improvement, but also a testament to the potential for even greater success in the future.

1. Relevance
-Training programs: for the 'Relevance' aspect, we propose the development of specialized training programs that directly address the specific needs and spatial competencies of participants, with a particular focus on women in rural areas. These programs should align with the professional requirements, women's skills and their interests, ensuring the projects' relevance and inclusivity.

-Community Awareness Campaigns: Implement campaigns to promote gender equality and empower women, focusing on traditionally male-dominated fields. These should address societal expectations and highlight the value of women's participation in professional endeavors.

Synthesis: To develop and implement specialized training programs that are tailored to the specific needs and competencies of women, particularly in rural areas is essential. These programs should align with professional requirements and the interests of participants to ensure relevance and inclusivity. This will help bridge the skills gap and ensure that the projects are directly addressing the needs of the target population. Also, launch targeted community awareness campaigns that promote the specialized training programs focusing on breaking societal norms that limit women's participation in traditionally male-dominated fields. These campaigns should highlight the value of women's contributions to various sectors and encourage broader community support for gender-inclusive initiatives.

2. Effectiveness

-Continuous Feedback Mechanisms: Establish mechanisms to gather insights from project participants and stakeholders, especially on gender-related activities. This feedback will help in ongoing adjustments and improvements, ensuring the effectiveness of the projects.

-Capacity Building for Gender Mainstreaming: Provide opportunities for project staff and partners to learn gender mainstreaming strategies and best practices. This will enhance their ability to integrate gender perspectives into project design, implementation, and evaluation.

- Broader Outreach: Expanding the reach of projects and ensuring better access for all beneficiaries, including those in remote areas, have been highly recommended by most of the KII and FGD respondents.

- Enhanced Communication: Improving communication channels and involving beneficiaries more effectively have been highlighted as crucial steps for future projects.

- Sustainability Focus: Emphasizing long-term sustainability and integrating gender considerations into all aspects of project design and implementation are essential for achieving lasting gender equality impacts.

Synthesis: To establish robust mechanisms for collecting and analysing feedback from project participants and stakeholders, particularly regarding gender-related activities is paramount. This will allow for real-time adjustments and improvements, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the projects. Once the feedback is received, based on these indications, invest in comprehensive capacity-building initiatives for project staff and partners to strengthen their ability to integrate gender perspectives into project design, implementation, and evaluation. This will ensure that gender considerations are consistently applied across all project stages and consequently you will receive more positive feedback.

3. Efficiency

- **Enhanced Practical Training:** Prioritize practical training sessions aligned with work requirements to enhance participants' skills and employability, particularly for women. Address infrastructure deficiencies to ensure effective learning environments.

- **Practical Experience and Expertise:** Expand practical training opportunities to foster expertise, especially for women entering male-dominated fields. This will enhance their skills and confidence in their professional roles.

Synthesis: To prioritize practical training sessions that are closely aligned with the actual work requirements of participants, particularly women is fundamental. Address existing infrastructure deficiencies to create conducive learning environments, thereby improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the training programs. Expand opportunities for practical experience and skill development, especially for women entering male-dominated fields. This will enhance their confidence.

4. Impact

- **Partnership Expansion:** Collaborate with local organizations and stakeholders to enhance the reach and impact of gender equality initiatives. Leverage collective resources and expertise to promote women's empowerment and create a broader impact.

- **Strengthen Policy Influence:** Advocate for policy amendments to promote gender equality nationally, leveraging partnerships and community engagement to drive systemic change.

Synthesis: To strengthen collaborations with local organizations and stakeholders to enhance the reach and impact of gender equality initiatives. Leveraging collective resources and expertise will help create broader and more sustainable impacts on women's empowerment.

Advocating for policy changes at the national level that support gender equality and women's empowerment could help creating synergies with more local organizations. Use these partnerships locally and globally to drive systemic changes that will have a lasting impact on gender equality.

Sustainability

- **Promote Long-Term Sustainability:** Focus on building local capacity, fostering community ownership, and better establishing partnerships for sustained support beyond project completion. Ensure lasting impact on gender equality and women's empowerment.

- **Sustainability Planning:** Develop explicit sustainability measures and conduct impact assessments to ensure lasting change and support for gender equality initiatives.
- **Invest in the multi-use facilities:** Create multi-use facilities and prioritize sports equipment to enhance student engagement and well-being in school rehabilitation projects. This will create positive changes in communities on a long run.

Synthesis: To develop and implement explicit sustainability plans that focus on building local capacity and fostering community ownership is very important. Regular impact assessments should be conducted to ensure that gender equality initiatives continue to have a positive and lasting impact. In the optic of long-lasting effects of the projects, creating and prioritizing the development of multi-use facilities, such as community centres and sports facilities, can serve as hubs for ongoing gender-focused activities. This investment will help sustain engagement and promote gender equality in the long term.

5. Inclusiveness

- **Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement:** Strengthen engagement processes to ensure meaningful participation of diverse groups, including women and individuals with disabilities. Incorporate feedback mechanisms to foster accountability and continuous improvement.

- **Targeted Interventions for Vulnerable Groups:** Develop interventions addressing the needs of vulnerable groups to ensure their meaningful participation and empowerment within the projects.

Synthesis: Strengthen engagement processes to ensure meaningful participation from a diverse range of stakeholders, including women, youth, and individuals with disabilities. Incorporate feedback mechanisms to foster accountability and continuous improvement in project implementation. It is recommended to specifically design and implement the targeted interventions that address the specific needs of vulnerable groups according to experimented on the field protocols, ensuring the meaningful participation and empowerment in project activities of these vulnerable beneficiaries. This approach will help reduce disparities and promote inclusiveness in all project outcomes.

6. Alignment with UNDP Mandate and National Priorities

- **Align with Gender Equality Goals:** Ensure project activities align with gender equality goals outlined in national policies and UNDP mandates, fostering long-term sustainability and impact.

- **Comprehensive Alignment:** Ensure projects align with broader gender equality objectives alongside specific mandates, such as disability inclusion, to better support national priorities and promote inclusivity.

7. Adaptation and Flexibility

- **Continuous Learning and Improvement:** Foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement by incorporating lessons learned from project experiences. Provide opportunities for capacity building and knowledge exchange inside and outside UNDP SYR CO.

- **Continuous Gender Analysis:** Keep conducting ongoing gender analysis to identify emerging needs and adapt strategies accordingly. Ensure inclusivity and effectiveness in addressing gender-related challenges.

Synthesis: To foster a culture of continuous learning within UNDP Syria CO by incorporating lessons learned from past project experiences. Provide regular opportunities for capacity building and knowledge exchange both within and outside the organization to adapt to emerging challenges and improve project outcomes. Conducting regular gender analyses to identify emerging needs and adapt strategies accordingly can also support the process of improvement. This continuous assessment will help ensure that projects remain inclusive and responsive to the changing context and challenges in Syria.

Barriers to Sustainability

- **Address Infrastructure Deficiencies:** Address infrastructure deficiencies to create conducive learning environments and promote project effectiveness while overcoming sustainability barriers.

- **Horizontal Expansion for Sustainability:** Prioritize horizontal expansion within projects to ensure sustainability and maximize impact, particularly in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Synthesis: To invest in overcoming infrastructure deficiencies that currently hinder project effectiveness. Ensuring that learning and work environments are well-equipped will promote greater sustainability and success in project outcomes. Moreover, prioritizing the horizontal expansion of successful gender-focused projects, benefitting from good infrastructure to other regions or communities could support. This strategy will help maximize the impact of these initiatives and promote broader gender equality and empowerment across Syria.

ANNEXES

- Data Collection Tools/questions

UNDP CPCD
Tools_ Revised_06Feb

Survey gender
disaggregation_ANNEX

- Guiding Key Questions Removed Since the Technical Proposal

Consolidated Audit
trail Grender evaluation

- Country programme theory of change

Attachment 111_TOC
v3.0_ANNEX_UNDP

- List of documents reviewed.

List of documents
reviewed.

- List of people interviewed (positions, disaggregation, but no names)

List of people
interviewed

UNDP – GENDER IMPACT EVALUATION (GIE) OF MAJOR SYRIA CO PROJECTS

Syria, December 2023 – September 2024
Crest Point for Consultancy and Development
(CPCD) for UNDP Country Office (UNDP CO)