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United Nations Development Programme

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION IRAQ



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACAI	Anti-Corruption and Arbitration initiatives
CPD	Country Programme Document
DRM	Disaster risk management
EECC	Environment, energy and climate change
EU	European Union
FFS	Funding Facility for Stabilization
FMA	Fiduciary Monitoring Agent
GCAD	Global Coalition Against DAESH
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
ICRRP	Iraq Crisis Response and Resilience Programme
IDP	Internally displaced person
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
LADP	Local Development Programme
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSME	Micro, small and medium enterprise
NDA	National Designated Authority
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ODA	Official development assistance
PMSU	Programme Management and Support Unit
PV	Photovoltaic

PWD	Person with disabilities
RBAS	Regional Bureau of Arab States
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
WHO	World Health Organization

Evaluation Brief: IRAQ

In 2021, with an estimated population of 44.5 million, Iraq was classified by the United Nations as an upper-middle income country. During the period under review, the country was in the process of recovering from geopolitical tension marked by the shift in power and defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2017. The process of defeating ISIL was complex and multifaceted, involving the Government of Iraq, international coalition forces and local militias. In 2022, an Inter-Agency Standing Committee deactivated the cluster system in Iraq and continued the handover of critical cluster functions to government entities.

A confluence of factors contributed to a need to shift from a humanitarian to a development approach, including the successful democratic elections in October 2021, a decrease in security and economic threats and a significant decrease in humanitarian funding, and the return of about 90 percent of the six million displaced people, closure of internally displaced people's camps and the new National Plan on Internal Displacement. These factors contributed to a recognized need by development partners to use development solutions to build resilience and improve the lives of internally displaced people and the Iraqi population in general.

The UNDP 2020-2024 programme in Iraq was aligned with the evolving needs of Iraq from humanitarian assistance, to stabilization, recovery and development, focusing on stabilization, institutional reform and the effective devolution of administrative and fiscal powers. The country programme was structured around four outcomes: Outcome 1 - Strengthened stabilization (the largest); Outcome 2 - Diversified pro-poor economic growth for sustainable livelihoods; Outcome 3 - Improved governance and accountable institutions; and Outcome 4 - Environment, energy, climate change (EECC), and disaster risk management (DRM).

This evaluation found that the UNDP country programme responded to the evolving context of Iraq, the needs of the people and their government. Outcome 1 catalysed the transition by UNDP and other partners from a humanitarian to a development approach in liberated areas. UNDP proactively adapted its programming within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, driven by committed senior management and staff. The shift from stabilization to development was an uncharted frontier for UNDP at country, regional and headquarters levels, and the experience in Iraq offered a unique learning opportunity for the development community.

The focus on stabilization meant that less priority was given to the other three outcomes during the first half of the country programme period. Outcome 4 was mainly inserted into activities within stabilization-related activities, which made contributions to development within the context of recovery. Outcome 3 had mixed results and missed addressing the normative issues usually tackled by UNDP. Outcome 4 gained traction at the mid-point of the four-year cycle, providing an opportunity to bridge the stabilization-development transition.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented opportunities to leverage digitalization to promote digital finance, e-governance and anti-corruption. Considering the need and appetite for good governance in Iraq, the relatively small scale of UNDP anti-corruption programming was suboptimal relative to the size of its overall portfolio. Similarly, climate change and energy are both potential areas of growth within the country office portfolio, which directly resonates with the needs of Iraq.

UNDP was cognizant of the needs of Iraq regarding women's empowerment and social inclusion, both of which were integrated into all country programme outcomes. However, the majority of the results delivered were 'gender-targeted' and 'gender-responsive,' with a limited number of 'gender-transformative' results.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. UNDP should build on the results of its stabilization outcome and continue to anchor its next country programme in strengthening the social contract between the peoples of Iraq and their government, with a particular focus on social cohesion and climate change that, if left unchecked, could fuel extremism and reverse the development gains achieved.

Recommendation 2. Anti-corruption should be a cross-cutting theme that is integrated into all future country programme outcomes and all aspects of the work of UNDP in Iraq.

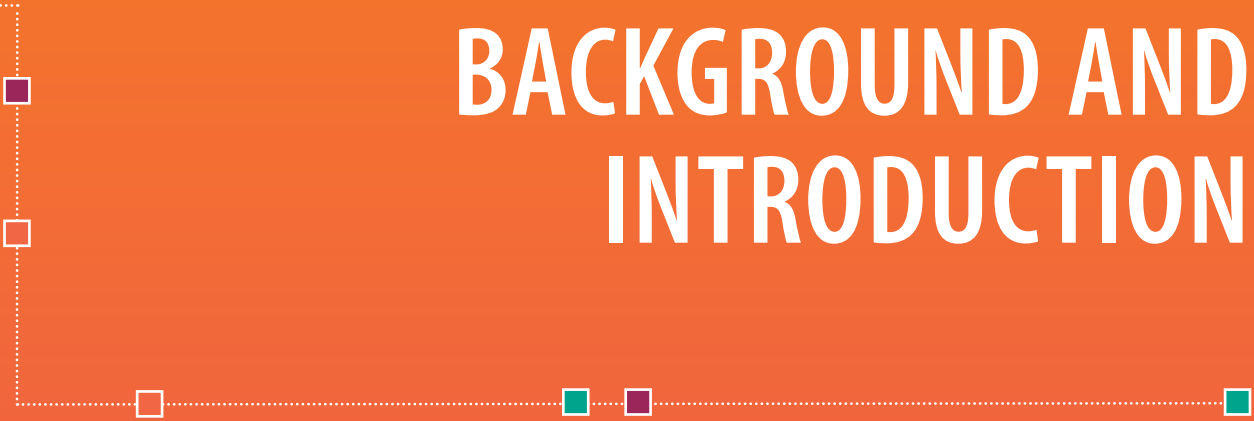
Recommendation 3. In implementing future capacity-development activities, UNDP should target and create synergy across the three dimensions of capacity-development (individual, institution, enabling environment/policy). The UNDP Iraq Country Office and the Regional Bureau of Arab States should document lessons learned from activities that integrate the three capacity-development dimensions and communicate it across the wider UNDP for broader adoption, including facilitating lessons learning and benchmarking with similar countries in the region.

Recommendation 4. UNDP monitoring capacity and evaluation culture need to be strengthened. These include the analysis of monitoring and evaluation data to be used for systems thinking, building coherence across outcomes, decision-making and adaptive management. External coherence should be strengthened by facilitating the ability other development partners to dovetail into achievements under the stabilization outcome.

Recommendation 5. UNDP should continuously work on gender and social inclusion. UNDP could use its comparative advantage as a neutral and honest knowledge broker, and the political economy it was afforded by the Government of Iraq and development partners, to table issues with the Government that might be deemed sensitive for donors, civil society organizations and other development partners, such as gender, marginalized groups and human rights.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION



1.1 Purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP contributions to development results at the country level, as well as the effectiveness of UNDP strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts for achieving development results. ICPEs are independent evaluations carried out within the overall provisions contained in the UNDP Evaluation Policy.¹

This was the third independent country evaluation conducted by IEO in Iraq after the ICPE published in 2019, and an Assessment of Development Results in 2014. This ICPE covers the UNDP Iraq country programme 2020-2024, including all programme activities from January 2020 to September 2023. These included projects and non-project activities in stabilization, economic empowerment, the sustainable use of natural resources, rule of law and governance. This report will inform the preparation of the new UNDP country programme for Iraq, starting in 2024.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

This ICPE was conducted according to the approved IEO process. The evaluation methodology adhered to United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.² The evaluation had five main evaluation questions (see Box 1), which framed the whole exercise. In line with UNDP Gender Mainstreaming Strategy, the evaluation examined the level of gender mainstreaming across the country programme and operations. The detailed methodology of the ICPE is described in Annex 1 (Terms of Reference) and a tabulation of the programme portfolio outcome and output indicator matrix is available in Annex 6.

The evaluation relied on information collected from different sources to triangulate evidence. The main documents consulted by the evaluation team are listed in Annex 5. In-person and online interviews were held with 215 stakeholders (149 female and 66 male), comprising UNDP personnel, project beneficiaries and staff from 128 institutions, including government representatives, United Nations country team representatives, development partners, donors, civil society organizations (CSOs) and academia. The evaluation sampled project sites from three regions in Iraq, with a particular focus on areas under Outcome 1, and field visits were conducted in the Northern Region (Erbil and Mosul); the Central Region (Baghdad, Diyala and Karbala); and the Southern Region (Basra and Thi-Qar). Geographical Information System analysis complemented the data collection.

The draft ICPE report was quality-assured by IEO senior management, internal peer reviewers and two external reviewers. Then, it was submitted to the UNDP Iraq Country Office and Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS) for identification of factual errors and comments. Finally, the report was shared with the Government of Iraq and other national partners for feedback.

BOX 1. Evaluation questions

1. What did the UNDP country programme intend to achieve during the period under review?
 2. To what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives?
 3. To what extent has UNDP been able to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and support the country's preparedness, response and recovery process?
 4. What factors contributed to or hindered UNDP performance and, eventually, to the sustainability of results?
 5. How has UNDP assisted in the transition from Humanitarian to Development? What is the UNDP comparative advantage vis-à-vis the transition? How can UNDP strategically position itself in its next Country Programme Document?
-

¹ See <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.shtml>

² See <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>

1.3 Evaluation limitations

The evaluation faced some limitations, including logistical and timing issues. Due to security issues and the untimely receipt of visas, some movements were restricted, and planned missions to Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah and Najaf were cancelled. Some projects in the portfolio were in the middle of implementation, for which the evaluation added a forward-looking element to the analysis. The final evaluation of the Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS), the largest programme for UNDP Iraq, was planned for June 2023 and expected to be used for the ICPE, but delays meant that it could not be fully used. This was mitigated by expanding the interviews, deeper analysis of FFS monitoring data, and additional field visits. The evaluation also liaised with the FFS evaluators in February and March 2024 to get some of their insights while their draft was being prepared.

1.4 Context

Iraq was classified by the United Nations as an upper-middle income country in 2021. It has an estimated population of 44.5 million. The infographic below highlights some milestones, statistical trends and benchmarks relevant to the evaluation. For detailed context information, refer to Annex 1.

Abridged Timeline

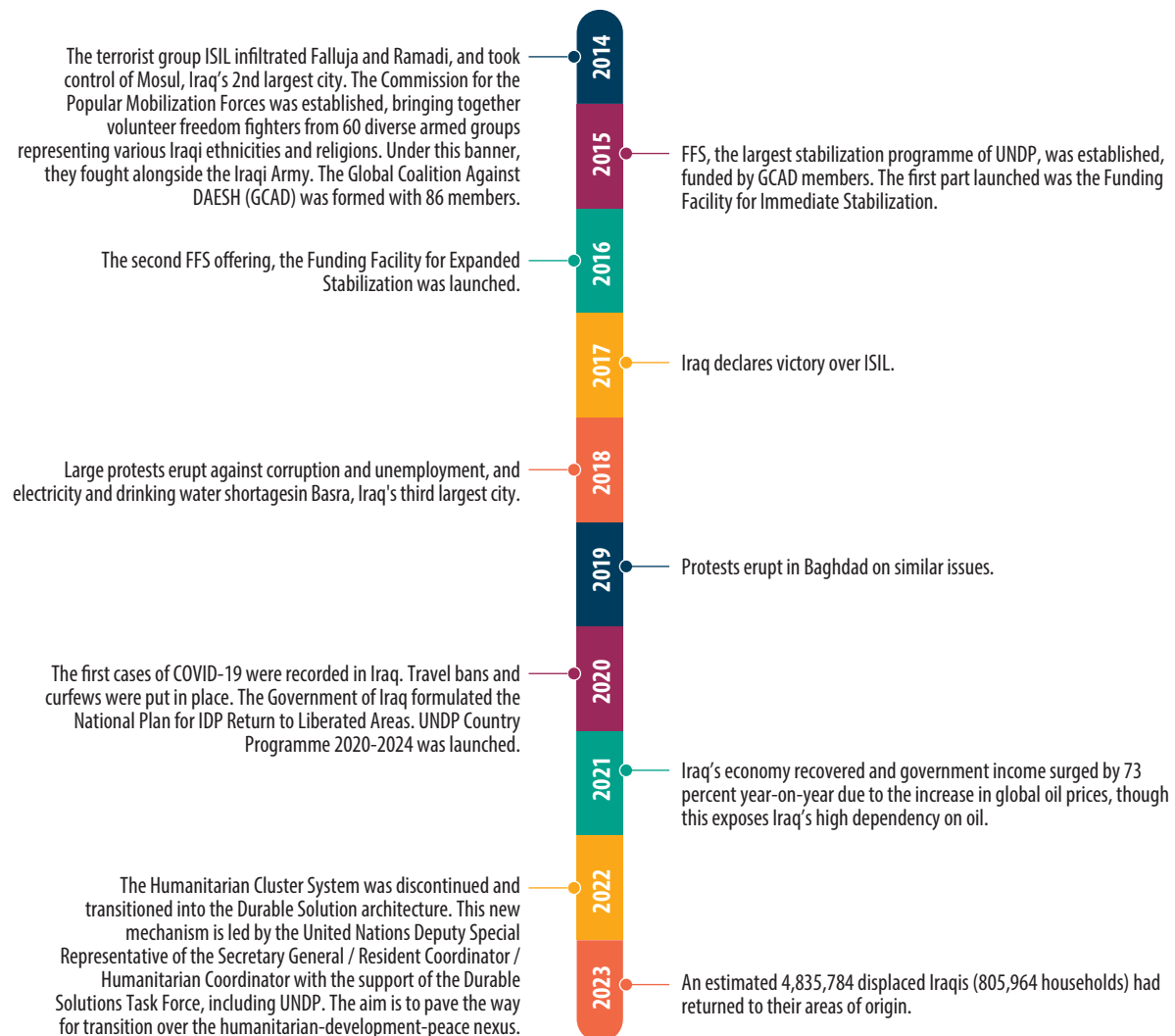
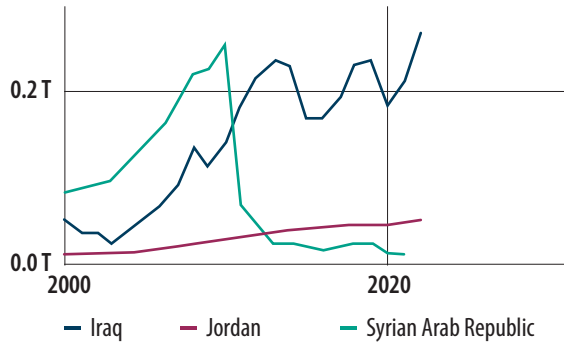
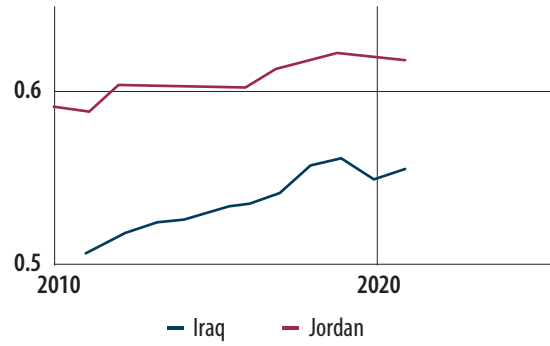


FIGURE 1. Highlights and Benchmarks

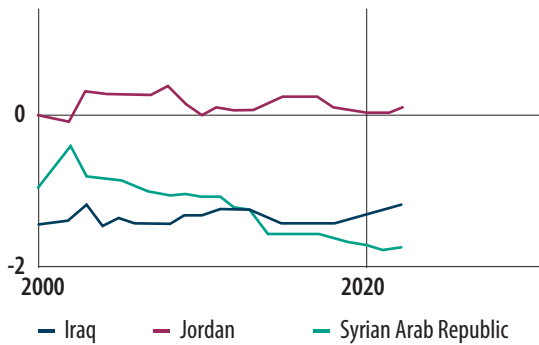
GDP per capita (current US\$)



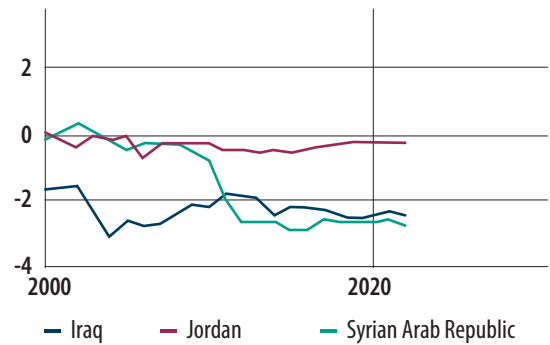
Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index



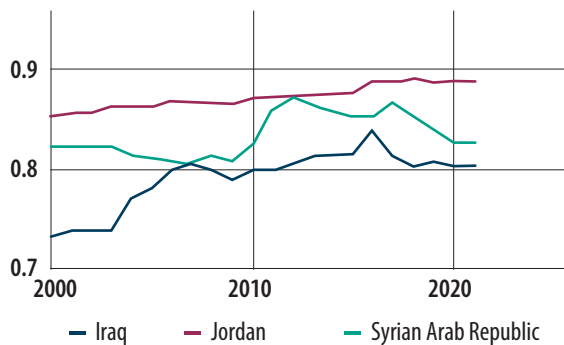
Control of Corruption: Estimate



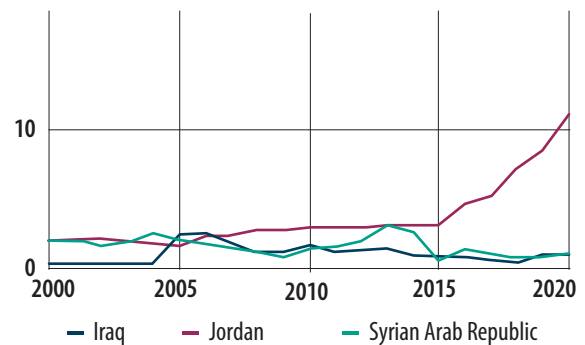
**Political Stability and Absence of Violence/
Terrorism: Estimate**



GDI - Gender Development Index by Year and Country Name



Renewable energy consumption (% of total final energy consumption)



1.5 UNDP country programme under review

The UNDP 2020-2024 country programme was a continuation of the previous programme 2016-2020, which focused on stabilization, public institution reform and the effective devolution of administrative and fiscal powers. Both country programmes were aligned with the evolving needs of the country for humanitarian, stabilization, recovery and development support. The current Country Programme Document (CPD) outlines UNDP strategic priorities, which are organized into four distinct outcomes:

- *Outcome 1 - Strengthened stabilization (Stabilization)*, is the largest, and placed strong emphasis on enhancing stabilization efforts, recognizing their vital role in post-conflict recovery.³ The aim was to create an environment conducive to sustainable development by addressing the aftermath of conflicts and facilitating the return of stability to affected regions.
- *Outcome 2 - Diversified pro-poor economic growth for sustainable livelihoods (Economic empowerment)* committed UNDP to fostering economic growth that benefits marginalized populations. This outcome centred on the promotion of diverse economic opportunities to uplift the less privileged, thereby contributing to long-lasting livelihoods and sustainable development.
- *Outcome 3 - Improved governance and accountable institutions (Governance)* focused on enhancing governance structures and promoting institutions that are transparent, responsible and capable of safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups. This was envisioned to foster trust between citizens and the State, but also pave the way for a robust social contract that ensures equitable treatment and representation.
- *Outcome 4 - Environment, energy, climate change and disaster risk management (EECC-DRM)* recognized the urgency of addressing climate change and was dedicated to mitigating the fragility exacerbated by environmental challenges. This outcome involved implementing measures to increase resilience and adaptability, thereby safeguarding the country's ecological and social wellbeing.

FIGURE 2. Country programme budget, expenditure, and delivery rate (to be adjusted with the 2023 data)

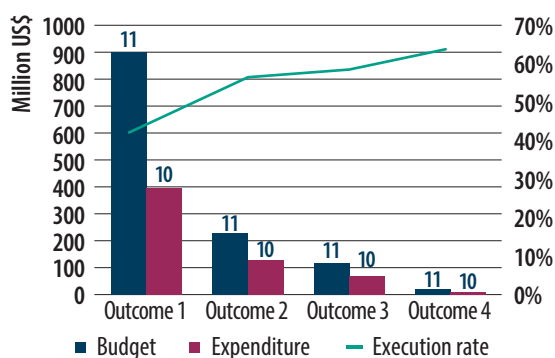
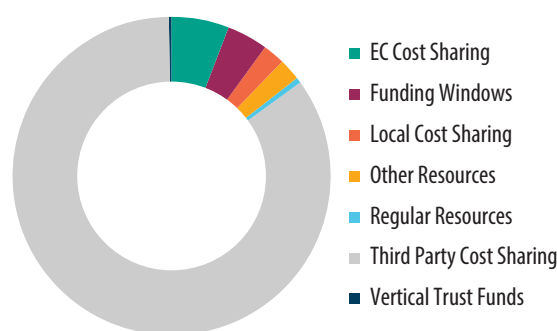


FIGURE 3. Source of country programme funding⁴



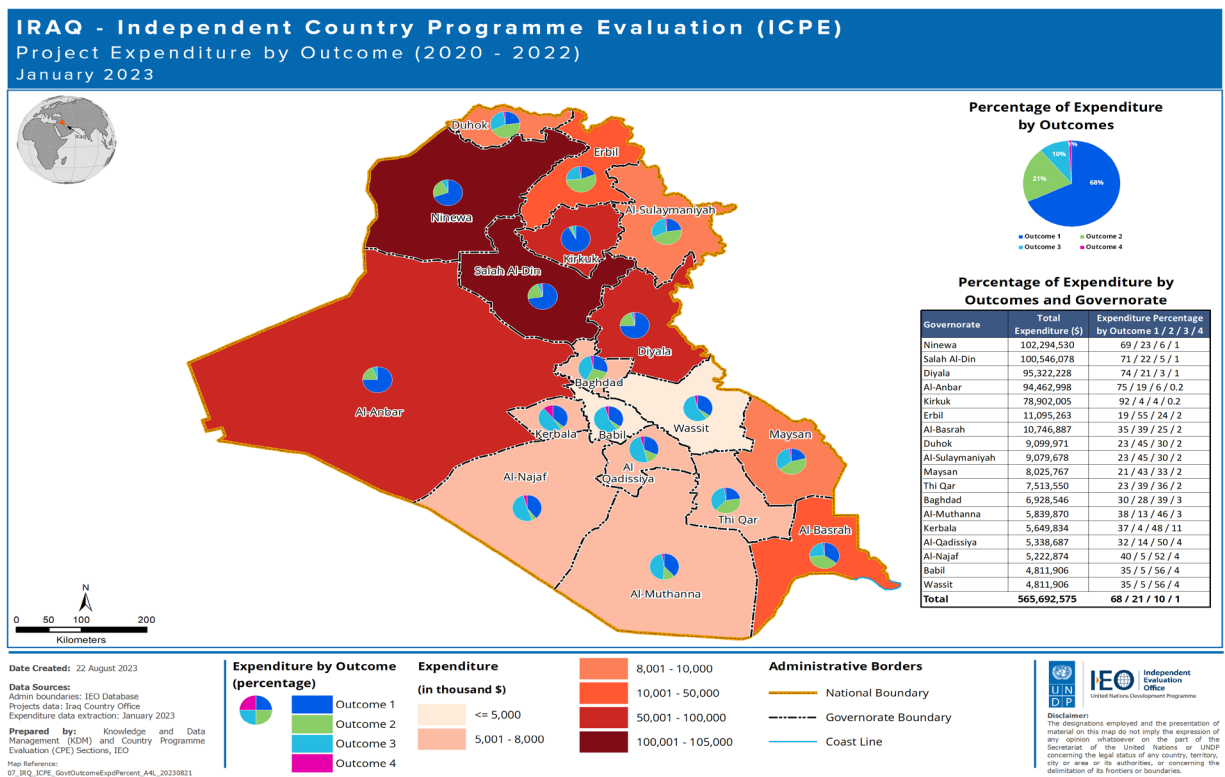
³ Stabilization activities are holistically designed to work on safeguarding against the resurgence of violence and extremism by restoring essential services, facilitating employment opportunities, and building cohesive, peaceful communities. The founding principles of stabilization include speed and scale of delivery, and strengthening the social contract between the authorities and the population. Source: Guidance Note on Stabilization Programming Draft - UNDP ERC. <https://shorturl.at/p1YuR>

⁴ UNDP funding definitions are available here: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-08/UNDP_Funding_Compndium_2021.pdf

Figures 2 and 3 show the size of the outcome budget and expenditure, execution rate, and source of funds. The largest share of funding was for Outcome 1, which accounted for more than 72 percent of the country programme budget. This has been the trend and the main focus of the country office since the previous country programme cycle. UNDP was highly reliant on external funding, with about 85 percent (largely for Outcome 1) of the budget coming from third party cost-sharing with the Iraq Government and other donors. Only about 1 percent came from UNDP regular resources.

Figure 4 shows the implementation of the country programme across the governorates of Iraq by outcome areas and estimated expenditure. The map shows the extent of UNDP expenditure across Iraq, which focuses on the liberated areas of Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah-Ah-Din. Programme expenditure decreases south of Baghdad, with the exception of the port city of Al-Basrah, which hosts the Fiduciary Monitoring Agency project with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency. North of Baghdad, the majority of activities were under Outcomes 1 and 2. South of Baghdad, Outcome 3 was equally represented, but Outcome 4 was not as prominent at the subnational level. For a detailed analysis of the country portfolio, refer to Annexes 1 and 4.

FIGURE 4. Distribution of UNDP work in Iraq by country programme outcomes (2020-2022)



CHAPTER 2 FINDINGS



This chapter presents the results of the outcome analysis and an assessment of cross-cutting issues. The findings of the evaluation are organized into three chapters: (1) Relevance, and how UNDP responded to the evolving context; (2) Programme effectiveness by theme; and (3) Elements contributing to the effectiveness and broader adoption of results.⁵

2.1 Programme relevance and UNDP response to emerging issues

Finding 1. The UNDP country programme was relevant to the context of Iraq following the defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The overall theory of change of the country programme was centred on enhancing the social contract between the citizens of Iraq and their government through four interconnected outcomes. However, stabilization work was prioritized within the first half of the country programme cycle, while the other outcomes only gained momentum in the second half of the country programme period.

All of the CPD outcomes described in 1.5 above share a common foundation - a strategic emphasis on social cohesion, protection and inclusion. These elements were considered integral to the interconnected relationship between humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and development. By fostering a sense of unity, ensuring protection for all, and promoting inclusive practices, UNDP aimed to establish a new social contract in Iraq that upholds the principles of the humanitarian-peace-development nexus, leading to lasting positive change. However, the programmatic and operational focus of the country office was driven by the pressing need to deliver commitments under Outcome 1, which led to the deprioritization of the other outcomes until the second half of the current country programme cycle (discussed further below).

Finding 2. Outcome 1 was largely a continuation of infrastructure rehabilitation from the previous country programme cycle. Stakeholders recognized that UNDP responded to the pressing needs of Iraq, supporting humanitarian assistance for recovery and the move toward the development phase. There were some examples of adapting to the changing context and addressing emerging themes such as climate change and extremism, strengthening social cohesion work, and extending stabilization project-funded activities outside of the liberated areas.

Following the victory against ISIL in 2017, the five newly liberated governorates⁶ witnessed a substantial increase in returns of internally displaced people (IDPs). According to the latest available data, 4.8 million displaced Iraqis (about 0.8 million households) had returned to their areas of origin by the end of April 2023.⁷ This trend of increased return was influenced by various factors, including the desire of families to reunite with their relatives, improved security conditions, enhanced access to services, housing rehabilitation, financial assistance for return, and the closure of IDP camps. However, disparities based on both regional and ethno-religious factors contributed to heightened structural risks and the potential for reignition of conflict and instability. There were stark regional differences in poverty rates and the delivery of services. Areas liberated from ISIL had persistent internal displacement and issues related to social cohesion and trust. The distribution of poverty became more polarized, with the historically poor Shia-South and newly disadvantaged Sunni-North on one side, and the relatively less poor Shia-Centre and Sunni-Kurdish areas on the other.⁸ These were the additional emerging contextual issues under which the country programme operated .

⁵ Defined as any of the following: mainstreaming, replication, scaling-up, sustaining and affecting market change.

⁶ The 2017 newly liberated governorates were Anbar, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Kirkuk and Ninewa.

⁷ IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix. Available at <http://iraqdtm.iom.int>

⁸ World Bank (2020) Breaking Out of Fragility: A Country Economic Memorandum for Diversification and Growth in Iraq. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iraq/publication/breaking-out-of-fragility-a-country-economic-memorandum-for-diversification-and-growth-in-iraq>

From 2015 to the current country programme cycle (2020-2024), UNDP maintained continued support for stabilization work in Iraq. Three flagship projects comprised Outcome 1, with estimated expenditure of US\$ 1.2 billion: the FFS; the “Iraq Crisis Response and Resilience Programme” (ICRRP); and the “Local Development Programme” (LADP).⁹ Through the continuous implementation of these three stabilization projects, UNDP contributed to the recovery needs of Iraq. There were also stabilization-related project results under the other Outcomes.

Outcome 1 was aligned with several national documents, including the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2022,¹⁰ the Iraq Reconstruction and Development Framework Plan 2018-2027, the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2018-2022),¹¹ and Vision 2030. It was also aligned with the key priorities for Iraq of the World Bank and the European Union (EU).¹² These alignments ensured that UNDP projects were strategically positioned to contribute to the overarching goals of poverty reduction in Iraq. The new phase of LADP was also aligned with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) Regional Strategic Development Vision for 2020, encompassing the main KRI development priorities for the governorates of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Duhok,¹³ and recognized the KRI economic reform roadmap developed in 2016.

ICRRP was launched in 2014, with the primary objective of enhancing social cohesion in Iraq by ensuring equitable support access, considering conflict and gender-sensitive factors in beneficiary selection, and striving for a more unified and harmonious society.¹⁴ In 2021, the project focused more on basic services and economic recovery, while in 2022, nature-based solutions and climate change were added to respond to the changing context. ICRRP implemented short and medium-term activities to support diverse groups, including IDPs, Syrian refugees, returnees, and host communities. It prioritized marginalized groups such as victims of gender-based violence, women-led households, widows, and youth, for example through vocational and business management training and the monitoring of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

FFS started in 2015, addressing immediate stabilization needs through four windows: (1) public works and light infrastructure rehabilitation; (2) immediate livelihood support for returning IDPs; (3) capacity support for local government to enhance their immediate response to challenges during stabilization; and (4) social cohesion. A second channel was established in April 2016 to meet ‘expanded stabilization needs’ through medium- and large-scale infrastructure projects. These were coupled with capacity-development for target communities to resolve existing and mitigate emerging conflicts. The current phase of the FFS initiative prioritizes the maintenance of outcomes achieved in the preceding phases and sustainability, with an exit strategy through capacity-building of national partners. A notable shift in approach is the reintroduction of the fourth window focusing on social cohesion in the implementation process, alongside a more pronounced emphasis on a rights-based approach.

Interviewees agreed that the combination of FFS activities contributed to addressing short- and medium-term barriers for IDP return, a key objective at the time. Beneficiaries appreciated that short-term livelihood opportunities were linked to infrastructure rehabilitation that was critical for meeting basic needs such as health, water, education, electricity, sewage, housing, and transport. Stakeholders mentioned that

⁹ Financial calculation by IEO, from 2015-2022 as of January 2023; FFS, ICRRP and LADP.

¹⁰ Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning (2017) NDP 2018-2022. https://www.iraq-jccme.jp/pdf/archives/nationaldevelopmentplan2018_2022.pdf

¹¹ Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning and World Bank Group (2018) Iraq Reconstruction and Development Framework 2018-2027. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/846201597292562703/pdf/Iraq-Reconstruction-and-Investment.pdf>

¹² The EU Strategy for Iraq and the EU humanitarian-peace-development nexus.

¹³ KRG Ministry of Planning. 2013. A vision for the Future: KRI 2020. https://us.gov.krd/media/1286/krp_2020_last_english.pdf. UNDP Iraq (2023) Final Evaluation Supporting Recovery and Stability through Local Development in Iraq (LADP-III).

¹⁴ UNDP Iraq (2023) ICRRP Annual Report 2022.

FFS provided cash injections to communities, particularly for returning families who were often cash-poor and unable to meet their basic needs. National contracts for reconstruction and rehabilitation, mostly through third-party contractors, also contributed to the injection of funds into Iraq.

The LADP third phase (2019-2023) was launched within the current CPD period to address the fragmented nature of local development in Iraq, which was impacted by the war on ISIL.¹⁵ LADP III aimed to facilitate the decentralization of power from central to local authorities, by enhancing the capacity of governorates to plan and implement effective local development strategies. This involved enhancing institutional capacity, optimizing revenue generation systems, fostering peer-to-peer partnerships with EU local authorities, and empowering civil society to advocate for local development initiatives.

Through Outcome 1, UNDP demonstrated a good understanding of the impact of conflict on poverty. The focus on the needs of displaced populations and returnees demonstrated a targeted approach to addressing vulnerabilities arising from crises. The focus on post-conflict reconstruction and development was directly aligned with the NDP vision for rebuilding and repairing essential infrastructure, restoring public services, and stabilizing liberated areas.¹⁶ UNDP was able to mobilize resources from international development actors, which aligned with the NDP recognition of the need for concerted efforts and external support to effectively address the multifaceted challenges associated with poverty, especially in areas recovering from conflict.

Finding 3. Outcome 2 was mainly composed of short-term livelihood activities, with no overarching strategic framework. Activities under this outcome mainly responded to recovery and were mostly delivered through the stabilization projects. Activities anchored to development, such as developing diverse and sustainable economic opportunities, were limited.

In 2019, Iraq experienced political unrest due to high unemployment, poor services and corruption. Some of the country's economic challenges were structural in nature, such as high oil dependence, corruption, employment issues (low labour force participation, skills mismatch, job insecurity, high entry and exit barriers, private sector informality), financial sector imbalances and lack of credit access, a slow legal and regulatory system with poor service delivery, and security risks. About 39 percent of the labour force in Iraq was employed in the public sector and about 40-50 percent in the private sector, largely individually run, small businesses with suboptimal productivity, creating issues with job-matching in the labour market.¹⁷ Another systemic challenge was that financial access in Iraq was among the lowest in the world, with only about 19 percent of adults owning a bank account. Undercapitalized State-owned banks and weak private commercial banks dominate the banking sector, and digital finance infrastructure is weak.¹⁸ In response to these issues, identified at the country programme design stage, Outcome 2 aimed to support the creation of productive non-oil sector jobs and contribute to creating access to sustainable livelihood and employment.

The majority of UNDP economic-related activities were in the form of cash-for-work for IDPs and, to a lesser extent, host communities. This answered the immediate needs of the population and provided a welcome injection and circulation of money in displaced communities. UNDP projects were appreciated, but limited in number and scale compared to the overall size of its portfolio. Several gaps were identified by stakeholders within UNDP strengths, such as the need to diversify the employment market and the economy, as public

¹⁵ LADP III 2019-2023. The EU funded the programme with \$53.6 million (€47.5 million); The projects stem from the Provincial Development Plans and Sustainable Energy Action Plans, outcomes of LADP II, concluded in mid-2018.

¹⁶ Republic of Iraq (2018): Reconstruction and Development Framework.

¹⁷ ILO (2021). A diagnostic of the informal economy in Iraq.

¹⁸ ReliefWeb (2023) <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-economic-monitor-springsummer-2023-reemerging-pressures-iraqs-recovery-risk-enar>

sector expenditure came close to 50 percent of gross domestic product and about 90 percent of government income was derived from oil. Some stakeholders were mindful that Iraq missed the opportunity during the pandemic to promote and build its digital finance capacity and support digital business.¹⁹

UNDP implemented the “Funding Facility for Economic Reform” project for both the Federal Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The evaluation found that while the aims of the projects were relevant, implementation was suboptimal. Project activities were put on hold pending approval of an Economic Reform Plan, which stakeholders considered required a more robust political economy and a stronger Economic Reform Committee.

Finding 4. Outcome 3 was highly relevant to the context of Iraq, with elements contributing to poverty reduction and economic empowerment and, to a limited extent, private sector engagement. However, fundamental themes within the UNDP normative area of work were lacking, such as access to justice, the rule of law, legal aid, environmental justice, private sector development regulation and human rights. This might indicate a potential gap or oversight in the focus and implementation of the country programme. The opportunity to integrate UNDP anti-corruption efforts, given the large scale of Outcome 1, was not fully maximized in the current cycle.

Outcome 3 was organized around the essential elements of a legal and governance system, engaging with legislative bodies to create laws, executive bodies to execute and enforce them, and the justice system to ensure the fair application and resolution of legal matters. It was aligned with the national Poverty Reduction Strategy for the period 2018-2022. The Government of Iraq made economic reform a top priority, focusing on developing the banking sector with an emphasis on digital innovations, electronic payments, and improved access to finance. To this end, UNDP has introduced a range of projects and initiatives to match this national need.

Despite numerous anti-corruption measures initiated since 2004, such as the creation of the Commission of Integrity and Iraqi Anti-Corruption Academy, and legislative reforms, corruption remains a significant issue and Iraq consistently ranks poorly on global corruption indicators (168 of 180 countries on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index). Iraqi institutions and services faced challenges, including the fight against corruption, security sector reform, the push for e-participation and e-democracy, and arbitration of disputes between investors and local entities. In 2019, the Office of the Inspector General was abolished, adding complexity to the anti-corruption landscape. According to some interviewees, proponents of abolishing this Office argued that it reduced the efficacy of supervisory functions and encroached upon the responsibilities of the Parliamentary Integrity Committee. However, the annual report reveals a significant contrast. For example, in 2018, the Commission of Integrity received a mere 83 corruption reports from within Parliament, while the Inspector General dispatched 384 reports, positioning them second only to external whistleblowing channels in addressing corruption concerns.

Iraq’s security sector reform efforts stem from the need to rebuild and restructure the security sector following the 2003 invasion led by the United States of America (USA), and the subsequent collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime. This period left Iraq with a fragmented and dysfunctional security apparatus, and weaknesses exposed when Mosul was captured by ISIL in June 2014. While a military campaign led by the Government of Iraq and assisted by the Combined Joint Task Force and GCAD (Operation Inherent Resolve) managed to liberate Mosul in July 2017, it revealed several longstanding issues in Iraq’s security and justice

¹⁹ Examples of UNDP work can be seen here: <https://www.undp.org/arab-states/press-releases/digital-finance-lifeline-during-covid-19-crisis-can-deliver-long-term-financing-sustainable-development-goals>

sectors.²⁰ The security sector reform process in Iraq has faced numerous challenges, including political divisions, ongoing conflict and financial hardship, making it difficult to achieve comprehensive reform. Concerns about a powerful Iraqi security sector, stemming from fears of a return to dictatorship, hindered the creation of effective armed forces, leading to recurring security challenges. In the past, the USA and its Iraqi allies played a significant role in destabilizing Iraq, but accountability mechanisms were lacking. Mistakes in Iraq were compounded by questionable decisions and a focus on short-term gains rather than long-term institution-building. Creating a sustainable state in Iraq required prioritizing the voices of the public and establishing accountable institutions, which was not adequately done.²¹

Efforts have been made to reform public services, particularly in the areas of public procurement, to reduce the avenues for corrupt practices, including streamlining bureaucratic processes and increasing transparency in service delivery. Iraq initiated e-government projects to modernize public services, offering citizens online platforms to access government services, gaining momentum in the mid to late 2000s and continually refined and expanded in the following years. E-democracy plays a crucial role in a country's digital evolution, enhancing and revolutionizing governance practices, elevating transparency, responsiveness and governmental accountability. It also provides citizens with an extra avenue to engage in political processes, ultimately leading to improved societal outcomes. In Iraq, there was an absence of legal provision for online-driven transparency mechanisms, and citizen engagement primarily involved users providing feedback or reporting through non-electronic means.²² In 2023, UNDP supported the Digital Landscape Assessment in the Republic of Iraq report, which rated the digital maturity of the public sector as 'basic' in all 14 focus areas of e-governance.²³

UNDP has been assisting the Government of Iraq to draft a new Law on Arbitration, signed in February 2024, and organized workshops to raise awareness and build capacity regarding the New York Convention,²⁴ and international commercial arbitration best practices for legal professionals, judges, students and business representatives. International arbitration and mediation are vital in creating a trusted and efficient environment for resolving disputes between investors and local entities. These mechanisms offer a neutral and efficient system for managing and resolving such disputes, enabling parties to choose specialized arbitrators, conduct proceedings efficiently, and obtain legally binding arbitral awards. Currently, Iraq lacks modern legislation regulating commercial arbitration, as the existing *Civil Procedure Code* from 1969 does not align with international standards and the New York Convention. In April 2024, Iraq signed the Singapore Convention on Mediation, marking a milestone in developing a commercial dispute resolution mechanism in the country. The operational scale of UNDP work in this area is relatively modest.

In implementing Outcome 3, UNDP focused more on the electoral process, social cohesion, and implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. These areas were relevant, but there were deficiencies in the design and implementation of activities related to UNDP anti-corruption and arbitration efforts which were equally relevant. Anti-corruption initiatives were even more relevant considering the widespread acknowledgment that corruption was a serious, if not potentially fatal threat to the Government of Iraq. To this end, while the priority themes within the outcome were closely aligned with the immediate country's needs and donors' preferences, this did not necessarily encompass critical areas that would have addressed

²⁰ UNDP Iraq (2019) Evaluation Of The Security Sector Reform Programme 2015 – 2018.

²¹ Safa al-Sheikh Hussein (2023) Iraq's security sector: Twenty years of dashed hopes. Chatham House.

²² UNDP (2023) Assessment Report of Digital Landscape Assessment of Iraq.

²³ Ibid. at par. Executive Summary. The areas include: Political will and support, Coordination, Financing model, Legal framework, Data, digital databases, Interoperability, secure data exchange, Secure digital identity and digital signature, Digital skills, Access to services, awareness-raising, E-participation, e-democracy, Information security, Telecommunications and digital infrastructure, Emerging technologies, innovation, and International cooperation.

²⁴ The New York Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards, which Iraq ratified in February 2022, provides a robust framework for enforcing arbitral awards across 172 signatory countries.

the issue of the rule of law (including access to justice, legal aid, environmental justice and business and human rights). Nor were the scope, scale and design of some of these initiatives relevant to pressing needs in the area of good governance. It appears that no alterations or adjustments were made to programme implementation from the initial CPD.

Finding 5. Outcome 4 was very relevant, especially to the environmental challenges faced by Iraq, which have implications for economic growth and political stability. Prior to 2021, Outcome 4 activities were mainly ad hoc, small in scope, and not prioritized. Over the last two years there has been increased interest in EECC areas from the Government of Iraq, reciprocated by UNDP. DRM remained on the margins for both the Government and UNDP, except for the crucial and needed results delivered related to the Mosul Dam.

The environmental threat to Iraq is multifaceted, with serious implications for its social and economic development and political stability.²⁵ Iraq was the fifth most vulnerable country to climate breakdown in 2022, affected by recurring droughts and severe water scarcity due to diminishing rainfall, rising temperatures and frequent sand and dust storms.²⁶ Climate scientists predict increasing temperatures with decreasing precipitation over the two river catchment areas in southeastern Anatolia, Syria, northwestern and eastern Iran, and northern Iraq. In recent years, the temperature in Iraq has risen above 50°C on a number of days, and the annual mean temperature is expected to rise by 2.5°C by 2050.²⁷ In addition, annual rates of precipitation are expected to witness a significant and continuous decrease by as much as 30 percent by the year 2100, from 1938-1978 average rates. Models predict that a temperature increase of 1 degree Celsius and a rainfall decline of 10 percent would cause a 20 percent reduction in available freshwater, leaving one-third of currently irrigated land in the country with no water by 2050. Compounding these trends are reduced annual water discharge levels in the two main rivers (Euphrates and Tigris) over the past 50 years due to expanding upstream damming operations by Turkey and Syria. Already, all governorates are considered drought-prone. The consequences of this on the economy and food security for its population will be enormous. A recent report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) noted, “the scale of environmental change was likely to be devastating and may force Iraqis to relocate in order to survive.”

Increasing government commitment to environmental issues was reflected in various policy and vision documents. The NDP 2018–2022 and the National Determined Contribution (NDC) provide the main framework for environment and climate change related actions in the country. In addition, the Iraq Vision for Sustainable Development 2030 outlines the Government’s strategic approach to achieving national SDG targets, including a national priority to ration and reduce the depletion of environmental resources to secure the right of future generations to a clean environment.²⁸ These documents reflect government commitment to transition from heavy dependence on oil to more renewable energy sources and to reduce emissions. Oil supplies 67 percent of Iraq’s energy, followed by gas at 29 percent and hydropower at 4 percent.²⁹ The NDP sets a 33 percent target for the share of clean energy in the power capacity mix by 2030, with solar capacity projected to reach 12 gigawatts.³⁰ The NDC, which was developed with UNDP technical support, formalizes Iraq’s commitment to curb emissions of key energy-consuming sectors (oil and gas, electricity, and transport). Sectors such as the non-oil industry, agriculture, solid waste and the

²⁵ ICRRP Project Document (Project Number: 00085156),

²⁶ IOM Iraq (2022) Migration, Environment and Climate Change in Iraq.

²⁷ World Bank Group (2022), Iraq: Country Climate and Development Report; Nasrat Adamo et al. (2018), The Future of the Tigris and Euphrates Water Resources in view of Climate Change, Journal of Earth Sciences and Geotechnical Engineering, 8.

²⁸ Government of Iraq, Iraq Vision 2030

²⁹ 2022 data from [https://www.enerdata.net/estore/energy-market/iraq/#:~:text=Oil%20accounts%20for%20most%20of,%25\)%%20and%20hydropower%20\(4%25\)](https://www.enerdata.net/estore/energy-market/iraq/#:~:text=Oil%20accounts%20for%20most%20of,%25)%%20and%20hydropower%20(4%25))

³⁰ CBI Initiative (2023) Financing Energy Transition in Iraq: Concept Note (Draft). According to this document, around 7.5 GW PV solar projects were approved to be developed, constructed and operated as independent power producers selling green electricity generated under a power purchase agreement. The implementation schedule and financing structures for said projects have not yet been clarified.

residential sector have been identified as entry points to lower Iraq's greenhouse gas emissions.³¹ UNDP support to promote the adoption of solar energy by farmers, for example, emerged from these national and international commitments, undertaking a technical feasibility study for the Government and Central Bank of Iraq to finance the installations of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems at household level.³²

At the start of the country programme period, UNDP engagement under this outcome was mainly: supporting the Government of Iraq on the development of policies and frameworks, including the NDC; an emergency preparedness project related to the Mosul dam that began in 2016; capacity-building for the Government's status as Nationally Designated Authority (NDA) for the GCF programme; and promoting the use of solar PV through the involvement of the private sector. From 2021 onwards, UNDP tried to consolidate Outcome 4 activities under a climate change portfolio and create synergy with other country programme outcomes, such as the link between extremism and climate change. A few other projects (on organic compost, climate action, and health waste management) were implemented, and a few more were in the pipeline, including one dealing with environmental issues in Iraq's marshlands.

Compared to other outcome areas, the Outcome 4 portfolio was relatively small and *ad hoc* during the start of the country programme period. Total expenditure on this outcome was \$8.75 million, about one percent of total expenditure during the current country programme. This low priority was attributed to the overwhelming focus of both UNDP and the Government on implementation of the stabilization programme. The evaluation noted that while implementing some of the stabilization activities, UNDP attempted to integrate several good practices contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation (i.e., the installation of solar panels for irrigation wells in several areas, and drip irrigation).

2.2 Programme contribution

Finding 6. Stabilization. UNDP executed its stabilization programme with remarkable swiftness and scope to rehabilitate critical infrastructure projects, primarily because these areas were given top priority. Stakeholders recognized that the rehabilitation of infrastructure was a key element facilitating the repatriation of displaced populations, and laid the foundation for the development phase. The results have contributed to strengthening the social contract between the Iraqi people and Government. However, greater achievements could have been realized if adequate attention had been given to Window 4, focusing on Social Cohesion. The formulation of the transition strategy for the UNDP flagship FFS programme could have come earlier, to take advantage of the resources and expertise at its disposal. (related to Outcomes 1, 2, and 4)

UNDP contributed to stabilization through time-bound, localized, integrated civilian programmes to build trust between communities and legitimate authorities and lay the foundations for recovery, peacebuilding and development. The UNDP stabilization portfolio was a continuous stream of activities with phases building on each other. About \$1.9 billion has been mobilized since it started in 2014, and \$1.3 billion delivered as of December 2023. Total budget utilization rates have fluctuated from 44 percent in 2015, to 105 percent in 2019, a decline to 58 percent in 2020 attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, an increase to 81 percent in 2022, and another drop to 41 percent in 2023. Overall, the FFS budget achieved 62 percent utilization between 2015 and 2023. The stabilization portfolio comprised 3,580 approved child-projects under the FFS, ICRRP, LADP programmes.³³

³¹ World Bank Group (2022) Iraq: Country Climate and Development Report.

³² CBI Initiative (2023); The Government of Iraq has committed to finance up to about \$720 million through the CBI to lend to individual households interest-free for the purpose of installing solar panels in houses.

³³ UNDP (2021) Evaluation of the FFS in Iraq 2015-2019

The evaluation has been able to validate some highlights of UNDP stabilization work, including:

- **Vulnerable populations.** Through capacity-building activities, UNDP empowered minority groups such as IDPs and Yazidi women and men, and promoted social cohesion within communities. Minority groups received Kurdish and English language courses and training to prepare them for access to the labour market, specifically in agriculture, sewing, information technology, and managing and sustaining startup businesses. UNDP introduced trainees and groups to members of the private sector to bridge possible broader adoption. As a result of UNDP interventions, women and youth peace groups and Social Cohesion Champions were able to develop and implement community-based initiatives. The activities provided Yazidi women with a safe space to talk about their issues and experiences and helped open dialogue between Yazidi and Muslim people.³⁴
- **Gender.** UNDP adopted a gender-responsive approach, and mainstreamed gender in its stabilization activities. UNDP tried to respond to women's needs, through education, maternity centres, and women's changing facilities, and grants were provided to vulnerable women to start small businesses. High priority was given to hiring women engineers under the construction component, and around 40 percent of cash-for-work target recipients were women.³⁵
- **Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)** were actively consulted in project design, included in project activities with tasks relevant to their abilities, and provided with suitable accommodation.³⁶ Some were assigned supervisory roles, and measures were taken to ensure their safety. PWDs who were project beneficiaries received training and business grants, leading to successful business ownership.³⁷ Inclusive education was promoted through peer-to-peer actions, and advocacy for the rights of PWDs occurred through policy dialogues involving the Government, CSOs and communities. Housing rehabilitation adhered to disability standards, and public spaces were designed for accessibility. Stakeholders mentioned that while the rehabilitation of public facilities adhered to standards set by the Government of Iraq, these lacked guidance on accessibility for PWDs. This resulted in weaknesses in accessibility in the rehabilitation of public infrastructure during the evaluation period, though in some cases UNDP was able to integrate PWD accessibility considerations. In some cases, disability considerations were not initially integrated into the programme design but were addressed during implementation.³⁸ In ICRRP, approximately 0.11 percent of PWDs were among the 2,352,914 beneficiaries which, while relatively low, indicates a commitment to inclusivity.³⁹ Higher rates of PWD beneficiaries in future programmes, and ensuring accessibility of all infrastructures built, would allow a more comprehensive approach to disability inclusion.
- **Youth** was a focus of Outcome 1. UNDP helped to address unemployment and provided avenues for youth engagement. Youth were supported to participate in policy dialogues and discussions on political and social issues, and received training in leadership. Under LADP III, UNDP supported the establishment of youth networks and civic councils to facilitate youth engagement and dialogue with local governments. Positive outcomes were reported by CSOs collaborating with

³⁴ FFS programme and the Strengthening the Long-Term Resilience of Subnational Authorities in countries affected by the Syrian Crisis project (2020-2022).

³⁵ Projects include: FFS, ICIRP and BREP

³⁶ A dedicated focus on PWDs included a comprehensive assessment to identify their specific needs conducted around 2020. Data revealed potential barriers faced by PWDs to access project benefits, including physical, communication and social barriers.

³⁷ UNDP Iraq (2023) Final Project Outputs Evaluation ICRRP. 2016- 2022

³⁸ UNDP Iraq (2023) Final Evaluation LADP-III.

³⁹ UNDP Iraq (2023) Final Project Outputs Evaluation ICRRP. 2016- 2022

youth, who were encouraged to contribute to initiatives and share project ideas. Municipalities and CSOs noted that the UNDP positioned young people at the forefront, emphasizing their role in creating positive societal change and preventing negative involvement in Iraqi society.

- **The support in rebuilding Mosul University** was highly commended. Stakeholders consulted during the evaluation site visit showcased the reconstructed and improved facilities. After reconstruction, there was a dramatic increase in the number of students, estimated at 60,000 (5,000 women), as compared to 37,000 (500 women) before the occupation of ISIL.⁴⁰ Enrolled students came from western, central and southern governorates which contributed to a level of social cohesion.
- **Response to COVID-19.** The pandemic posed unprecedented challenges with immediate health consequences and medium-term socioeconomic effects. In response, UNDP underwent operational and strategic adaptations, repurposing funds for the COVID-19 response. A COVID-19 response package was developed in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry of Health and local authorities. This initiative aimed to assist the Government of Iraq in responding to the pandemic by strengthening readiness, response systems and recovery strategies. Implemented in 17 governorates, the UNDP COVID-19 response leveraged FFS systems, including a vast network of partners and third-party implementors, and procurement agencies.
- **Climate change and energy.** Some activities in the stabilization projects encapsulated elements of climate change and the transition to clean energy, such as introducing green infrastructure and renewable energy. However, these were mostly *ad hoc* and piecemeal, especially in the first half of the CPD period, and not embedded in the design of the stabilization projects.

The evaluation observed that the UNDP stabilization programme was implemented through a progressive series of stabilization activities related to rehabilitation and construction rather than a simultaneous and cohesive package of interventions. For example, the implementation of each FFS window was staggered.⁴¹ In contrast, a simultaneous approach would have allowed for comprehensive impact, by addressing various aspects of instability concurrently, facilitating synergies between different programme components and their beneficiaries, optimizing resource allocation, establishing robust accountability mechanisms from the outset, and enabling proactive strategic planning for sustainability and flexibility. However, social cohesion activities were not sufficiently targeted and implemented at scale. Strategic communication efforts were not pursued from the onset to support the intention of UNDP to expedite IDP returns. This discrepancy in momentum suggests a potential misalignment in prioritization and resource allocation between social cohesion initiatives and other FFS windows.

In several field visits, key informants emphasized a weakness or lack of complaint mechanisms for UNDP infrastructure rehabilitation and cash-for-work activities. There was a lot of confusion on how to log complaints, and third-party contractors were often not answerable for beneficiary complaints. In November 2022, FFS released a Transition Strategy for post-FFS stabilization and development efforts in the liberated areas. This strategic document, having received official approval, is presently in the implementation phase and consists of three components: i) prioritized projects to be implemented as per the 2022-23 annual workplan, ii) capacity-building, and iii) advocacy.⁴² The evaluation finds that this document was not

⁴⁰ <https://uomosul.edu.iq/en/>

⁴¹ (1) Public works and light infrastructure rehabilitation; (2) Immediate livelihood support for returning IDPs; (3) Capacity support for local government to enhance their immediate response to challenges during stabilization; and (4) Community reconciliation, later renamed social cohesion among targeted communities.

⁴² UNDP (2022) FFS Transition Strategy: Second Draft.

reviewed with relevant United Nations agencies to leverage the chances of successful implementation.⁴³ The evaluation notes that the FFS exit strategy was more of a reaction to the Government's announcement of ending the humanitarian phase than a UNDP strategic and proactive objective. This was a missed opportunity to calibrate stabilization programme resources for a gradual, rather than abrupt, exit. For example, broader adoption strategies (mainstreaming, upscaling, replication, sustaining, market influence) could have been prepared for the stabilization results.

Finding 7. Capacity Development individuals and institutions. Training was the second-largest UNDP area, and varied in quality and effectiveness. Training topics linked to interventions like infrastructure that had government support had a higher likelihood of being sustained. Other forms of training without ways of operationalizing them, such as business-related training without seed funds, were the least sustainable. The quality, delivery and coherence of these trainings lacked consistency and rigour across all outcomes. This was attributed to a lack of overarching capacity-development expertise to coordinate and ensure quality across all outcomes. (related to Outcomes 1, 2, and 3)

UNDP equipped government officials with the necessary skills to operate and maintain rehabilitated infrastructure related to water, electricity, health and education. The reported participation of 1,358 government employees, including 272 women, in 69 training courses across the liberated governorates, indicates a tangible effort to cultivate and sustain expertise, contributing to the long-term success of stabilization interventions.⁴⁴ However, according to the interviews conducted with national partners, there was a notable lack of clarity on how to sustain these training initiatives in the long term. For example, there was no government-allocated budget for retraining or updating skill sets.

Technical training was provided to youth leaders in design thinking and innovation, such as solving social problems through developing mobile applications. For example, some youths were trained to find solutions for climate change problems by developing mobile applications related to transportation. A female youth trainee was matched with a communications company. She developed her skills, which enabled her to establish a freelancer youth hub, a first of its kind in Baghdad. Youth leaders were supported in networking with donors to fundraise for youth initiatives. One such beneficiary established the Suli Innovation House.⁴⁵ During the height of COVID-19, some youth groups created locally sourced hygiene items, such as door handles and face masks. These items were sold to hospitals. This was very timely when the borders of Iraq were closed and supply chains were limited.

A unique collaboration initiated to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic provided virtual training sessions for 100 Iraqi local police officers, conducted by UNDP and the Ministry of Interior in partnership with the Danish National Police. These training modules aimed to enhance police skills in the areas of crime prevention, data analysis, and community safety. The initiative, enabled by virtual technology, was the first of its kind in the Ministry of Interior and brought together instructors from different regions. Despite the pandemic challenges, the programme was a success, promoting collaboration and experience-sharing. Interviewees confirmed that the online course is now part of the regular curricula, which could be used by potential trainees across the country.

The evaluation observed that UNDP lacked dedicated in-house staff, or a specialized unit with expertise in training, pedagogy and facilitation. This affected the overall consistency and effectiveness of capacity-development activities across all outcomes. Many projects relied on the assumption that technical

⁴³ Annex 7 and 8 lists only donors and national stakeholders.

⁴⁴ UNDP Iraq (2023) FFS – Q2 Report 2023.

⁴⁵ <https://fablabs.io/labs/sulinnovhouse>

experts, whether international consultants or external institutes, possess the requisite skills to deliver high-quality training. For example, the evaluation observed a notable gap in capacity-building related to legislative drafting where no systems were established for quality control and peer review of training and products, leading to concerning results. For instance, a CSO study on money laundering issues in KRG was published in partnership with UNDP, but did not meet basic international standards, and was never subject to a review by the project that provided the grant for its publication.⁴⁶ Therefore, although the distribution of these studies had the potential to empower community members and contribute to positive social change, the format in which they were published raises doubts about their usability. Additionally, since documents published by CSOs bear the UNDP logo, the project must ensure that materials are of sufficient quality. This evaluation considers that UNDP support in capacity-building for CSOs should extend beyond simple grant distribution, and focus on enhancing local capacity for high-quality research on anti-corruption, as the last comprehensive study by UNDP was conducted in 2012.⁴⁷

Two UNDP initiatives, the trial monitoring of anti-corruption cases and collaboration with the Commission of Integrity Anti-Corruption Academy, experienced a lack of national ownership influenced by a weak training component.⁴⁸ The trial monitoring activity was launched considerably later than the numerous training sessions conducted under the 'Improved Legislative and Strategic Framework for Anti-Corruption Reforms' (ACAI) project, meaning that the findings from the process were not available during training, resulting in a disconnect between monitoring data and the design of capacity-building activities. National partners expressed concerns with the training delivered through short workshops, both for the content and expertise provided, and the language in which it was delivered. It was unlikely that the Academy would be able to institutionalize and sustain these trainings. In addition, multiple stakeholders observed that UNDP had disrupted the capacity-development landscape by offering training and study tours outside of Iraq that were deemed upscale compared to those provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and some other United Nations agencies. This led to unintended consequences such as a preference for UNDP-sponsored training and low participation in others.

Finding 8. Capacity-development enabling environment and policies. Some of the most notable transformative results that UNDP contributed to were from support to underperforming Official Development Assistance (ODA) loan implementation, DRM, and emerging policy work on EECC. UNDP gained credibility from these interventions, but would need to institutionalize the knowledge achieved and push for the broader adoption of results.⁴⁹ (related to Outcomes 2, 3, and 4)

Policy influence

Important policies were supported by UNDP through funding for activities such as consultations and the provision of technical expertise. Some highlights include:

- In KRI, UNDP supported the Chamber of Commerce to develop a road map to advance the economic sector. This led to the formation of a committee to award grants to SMSEs of women IDPs and refugees.

⁴⁶ A beginning for Combat. Money Laundering in Kurdistan Region. Prepared by STOP organization; Produced under the ACT grant scheme and carrying the UNDP logo.

⁴⁷ UNDP (2012) Corruption and integrity challenges in the public sector of Iraq. <https://www.undp.org/arab-states/publications/corruption-and-integrity-challenges-public-sector-iraq>

⁴⁸ The Government is expected to own the results of the ACAI project and oversee the monitoring and tracking of important data and statistics on how the justice system implements its national and international commitments to anti-corruption.

⁴⁹ Broader adoption is defined as: mainstreaming, sustaining, replication, upscaling, influencing markets.

- UNDP collaborated with the KRG to review the cooperative law, tax and revenue system and conduct a market survey. These provided data on the main needs of the labour market and for youth to establish MSMEs, and helped KRG to update policies, including drafting new policies on cooperatives.
- UNDP provided support for the development of federal budget laws. The federal Government and KRG were trained in international procurement standards, which raised the awareness of government staff of accountability related to procurement standards.
- UNDP facilitated on- and off-job training across ministries on topics related to project management, procurement management, financial management, and capacity-development for trade banks in Iraq. According to participants, the training improved the performance of governmental staff. There was still a need to train staff on how to digitalize financial and procurement procedures so they could be easily accessed online.
- UNDP provided policy advice for the recently proposed mechanisms on tax exemption, customs duty waiver, and the delegation of authority. Technical advice was given to improve company registration, protection law for Iraqi products, private sector development strategy, and the formulation of ODA loans related to closures of federal budget law.
- UNDP supported the KRG Ministry of Agriculture to conduct surveys related to livestock, olives and fruits. This helped KRG to design project proposals related to these agricultural products to be funded by international donors. In addition, the Ministry was supported to develop a plan to empower women's businesses in dried food and food processing and develop regulations for cooperatives.

Management of non-performing ODA loans

The evaluation found that UNDP was strategic in providing support to accelerate the implementation of the ODA loan project by the Iraqi Government. Through the 'Fiduciary Monitoring Agent' (FMA) project, UNDP delivered cascading development results and multiplier effects, resulting in a large contribution to the country with minimal UNDP footprint in terms of staffing. In total, since its inception, UNDP has directly facilitated \$7 billion in ODA through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The systems, networks and approach put in place by FMA enabled another \$9.2 billion in loans from the Embassy of Japan. UNDP served as a third-party service provider for results-based management. This included monitoring of activities and coordination between JICA and the Government of Iraq. UNDP helped to establish standards, procedures and relationships between both parties, including an ODA Committee to resolve bottlenecks. This third-party role is expected to be taken over by JICA operations in a transition which was pending at the time of the evaluation. UNDP gained credibility through these results, which opened opportunities for other activities related to loan/ ODA management (for non-performing government loans). UNDP recognized the potential of this model and intended to institutionalize the knowledge gained by forming a loans management section, but institutional memory rests with a few individuals. Moving forward with such models, UNDP should find avenues to influence ODA toward a green economy and further alignment with UNDP norms and standards.

Disaster risk reduction

In the background of the ISIL invasion of Mosul, the possible collapse of the Mosul Dam due to limitation of access for maintenance was a looming threat. Models predicted that failure of the dam would have resulted in a 45 metre high wave, and the loss of 500,000 lives if Mosul City was inundated, with 4-6 million people affected across the Tigris River flood plain. Within the 'Mosul Dam Disaster Preparedness' project, UNDP helped to create the Civil Defence Management Committees, intended as the bedrock of risk management from flash floods caused by dam collapse. The Committees helped bring together and engage relevant

departments and entities at governorate, district and sub-district levels to coordinate effectively and make timely decisions to implement Emergency Preparedness Plans during flood emergencies.⁵⁰ UNDP was also successful in establishing a local-level early warning system, referred to as the Early Alert and Communication System (EACS). The system involved an alert communication from the dam management to the Ministry of Water Resources and finally to the Prime Minister's National Operations Center, responsible for activating authorities, volunteers and media at various levels.⁵¹ The system was tested a few times over the past few years through simulation exercises, most recently in 2021. However, the status and sustainability of the Civil Defence Management Committees and the Early Alert and Communication System were unclear at the time of this review.

Environment, Energy and Climate Change

To date, the most significant contribution of UNDP to EECC was sensitizing the Government at various levels to the urgency of addressing critical environmental issues and enabling it to adopt various crucial policies and laws. The highest levels of government have embraced the climate change agenda and developed a strong awareness of EECC issues. Earlier this year, the Prime Minister convened a conference of government agencies and governorates, donors, United Nations agencies, civil society and academia in Basra to discuss environmental issues. This conference played a critical role in sensitizing the Government and galvanizing a nationwide 'call for action' on environmental issues. After the conference, a high-level committee was created to follow up on several topics, chaired by the Minister for Environment. This was considered a culmination of several years of work by UNDP, in particular, through organizing regular seminars, workshops and training across the country.

UNDP supported the development of the NDC, later ratified, which formalized the country's intent to transition from heavy dependence on oil to more renewable energy sources. The NDC identified core adaptation and resilience areas as agriculture, health, water, land use, land use change, marshlands, forestry and tourism.⁵² The NDC document represents the climate change umbrella plan until 2030, anchoring all development activities to addressing climate change.⁵³ For example, UNDP support for the promotion and adoption of solar PV by farmers emerged from the NDC. UNDP assistance to the Ministry of Electricity to develop the roadmap for the National Initiative on Preserving Energy and Reducing Emissions also stemmed from the NDC. This initiative was set up in 2021 with UNDP support, with the federal Government, KRG, the private sector and researchers, and the Government has allocated \$150 million for its implementation. So far, of the 11 goals of the initiative, only six have been translated into action plans, and the Government has encouraged UNDP to help complete action plans for the remaining goals, but UNDP had to slow down due to budgetary constraints. In many of these areas (agriculture, marshlands, forestry), UNDP had initiated several projects in partnership with governorates and local authorities.⁵⁴

To translate the NDC into an actionable framework, UNDP assisted the Government with funds and expertise to facilitate the development of a Green Growth Strategy, to incorporate a roadmap for integrating environmental priorities into the country's economic framework. The Green Growth Strategy focused on four main pillars: low carbon footprint; environmental sustainability; climate change and disaster resilience; and inclusivity. Through this strategy, the Government showed its commitment by investing \$5 billion in

⁵⁰ Nisar Ahmad Khan (2022) Final Evaluation of Mosul Emergency Preparedness Project in Iraq (2019- 2021).

⁵¹ UNDP Iraq (2022) Final report of Mosul Dam Emergency Preparedness in Iraq (ID: 00118833).

⁵² UNDP Iraq (2023) Country Strategy Note (2023 –2025) "Support peace, dignity and prosperity."

⁵³ Results-Oriented Annual Report 2021, 2022.

⁵⁴ Project Nos. 01000541, 00129243, 00118162

mainstreaming climate change issues. At the time of this review, engagement was mainly at the federal government level, involving all ministries. Once a roadmap for implementation is developed, this will be rolled out to the regions and governorates.

UNDP successfully built capacity within the Ministry of the Environment to perform the role and functions of a GCF NDA and put in place a focal point to effectively coordinate GCF financing in the country. This has enabled Iraq to receive funding from GCF. So far, only four GCF grants have been approved for Iraq, all under the 'readiness' grant window. UNDP was the implementing institution for two of these, and the others were implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).⁵⁵

UNDP was instrumental in developing three critical national strategies through the provision of technical support. These were: the National Strategy and Action Plan on Pollution Control in Iraq, with the engagement of 12 related sectors in the Government of Iraq and KRG; the draft National Organic Waste Composting Strategy, with the aim to divert organic waste from open dumping (landfill) sites to composting, which has been submitted to the Ministry of Environment; and the draft Renewable Energy Law, awaiting approval from the Iraqi Parliament.⁵⁶ UNDP and UNEP helped the Ministry of Environment to draft the Second National Communication for the Convention on Biodiversity, which the Government is expected to submit every four years.

UNDP supported Iraq to participate in international fora, including support to prepare Iraqi delegates for the 2023 Council of Parties (COP28) in Dubai, where critical discussions on negotiations for the mitigation and loss and damage due to climate change were held. UNDP supported crucial negotiations on water sharing along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, crucial for Iraq as farming systems in southern and central parts of the country depend on water from these two rivers. This international water management issue involves a complex range of geopolitical elements, and UNDP rightly focused on helping the Government of Iraq develop the negotiation skills of senior officials and enable them to develop a negotiating position backed by data and hard evidence.

Finding 9. Digitalization. Iraq's digital transformation and the UNDP digitalization portfolio were at early stages at the time of this evaluation. There were some good examples of UNDP contributions, including smart solutions for e-governance and tailored corruption case monitoring under the ACAI project. However, the digitalization of the pension system in Kurdistan showed a lack of preparation in designing a project with broader adoption in mind. Poor policy grounding and coordination with focal ministries reduced the effectiveness of results. Specifically, without adequate laws protecting data privacy in Iraq, the personal data collected could be used by a third party without proper consent. (Related to Outcomes 2 and 3)

Recognizing that digitalization is a transformative tool against corruption, UNDP promoted the modernization of public services in collaboration with the Central Bank of Iraq, introducing new frameworks for microfinance, reviewing the electronic payment law and establishing development banks.⁵⁷ UNDP started to create an environment for representatives from key stakeholders, including the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Finance, public and private banks, e-payment companies and international

⁵⁵ The following GCF projects were implemented in Iraq: (1) West Asia regional readiness programme on private sector engagement: Islamic Development Bank, \$2.26 million for two years from December 2021; (2) NDA strengthening for climate finance: UNDP, \$863,000 for two years from January 2021; (3) Adaptation Planning support readiness project: UNEP, \$2.63 million over 36 months from January 2020; (4) Strategic framework support, UNIDO and Climate Technology Centre and Network, \$373,000 over 18 months from January 2020; and (5) NDA strengthening, UNDP, \$668,000 over two years from September 2019.

⁵⁶ UNEP (2022) Final Report of Sustainable Solutions of Compost Production from Organic Wastes, Karbala Governorate. Alatoon, M. (2020) Terminal Evaluation of "Catalyzing the Use of Solar Photovoltaic Energy" Project

⁵⁷ Project Funding Facility for Economic Reform funded by United States Agency for International Development.

organizations, to explore opportunities to bolster Iraq's digital ecosystem by enhancing e-payment solutions. The Government started preparing for digital public services, for example by creating online tax forms, and launching an online portal with links to 89 governmental services, *Ur portal*, in September 2021, with the aim to decrease bureaucracy and improve government efficiency.⁵⁸ Such services were commendable, but the Government still has a long way to go in providing proper platforms for Iraqis, for example, to enable online payment services for public services and utilities (i.e., tax, documents, public water and electricity, etc.).⁵⁹

At subnational level, some emerging pilots with digitalization in mind had potential, but were at too early stages to assess. For example, UNDP and the Governorate of Karbala had launched innovative activities focusing on environmental sustainability, youth employment and digitalization of the public sector, with funding from the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund. The activities included job matching for Karbala youth, GIS mapping of the area, and a local composting pilot, which aimed to create green jobs and contribute to local sustainable development.

The 'Smart City' and 'Digitalization of the pension system' initiatives demonstrated relevance and potential: the former to foster government collaboration, transparency and accountability; and the latter to expedite processes and harmonize transactions. However, there was a critical gap in alignment with digital protection laws or policies, leaving platforms collecting personal data vulnerable to breaches of data protection rights, with no discernible mitigation strategies in place to address these risks. Furthermore, the existence of digital solutions in isolated siloes led to the duplication of efforts and inefficient resource utilization. For instance, in KRG, the pension system lacked proper coordination with the KRG Ministry of Information. The data platform that was developed by UNDP and a private company was not designed to link with other existing and planned systems in KRG, making it an isolated platform. Further, since the project ended, no more funds were available for the private servers holding the data. The data needed to be migrated to the Ministry of Information, which will incur additional costs. These could have been avoided if UNDP had initially partnered with the Ministry of Information and capitalized on the Ministry's resources to implement the pension system. Therefore, it will be imperative for UNDP to enhance the strategic, systematic and coordinated implementation of digital solutions, moving away from an *ad hoc*, reactive and fragmented approach.

Finding 10. Gender.⁶⁰ The majority of the results documented by the evaluation were 'gender-targeted' and aimed to ensure gender parity, such as studies and capacity-development. Some results were 'gender-responsive', especially those that differentiated the needs of women and girls, and aimed to remove barriers to accessing social services and opportunities. Only a few results were deemed to have the potential to be 'gender transformative', such as advocacy for women's participation in politics. (related to Outcomes 1, 2, 3)

Gender targeted

UNDP provided technical support for studies on women's economic empowerment and the impact of gender-based violence on livelihood programmes. For example, the 2021 gender assessment of police stations, and three studies in 2022: the gender audit of the Ministry of Interior, the gender analysis for local areas in South Iraq, and the Gender Equality Policy on Subnational Levels in Iraq (under the 'Rule of Law' project). These research studies offered insights that could contribute to advancing gender

⁵⁸ <https://ur.gov.iq/>

⁵⁹ <https://www.kapita.iq/content/issue/report-summary-digital-transformation-iraq>

⁶⁰ Using IEO's GRES methodology. https://erc.undp.org/pdf/GRES_English.pdf

equality and women's empowerment. However, there was a lack of evidence on the uptake of lessons and recommendations derived from these studies and how they were used in policy and decision-making by UNDP, the Government and other stakeholders. In Outcome 3, while UNDP conducted gender assessments for government institutions, there was a lack of capacity-building initiatives for these institutions to ensure that gender concepts were integrated into their areas of services (i.e., law enforcement, anti-corruption bodies, or justice institutions).

One study concluded that addressing and preventing women's roles in violent extremism requires a comprehensive and gender-sensitive approach, to understand the motivations behind women's adoption of extremism, avoid stereotypes, and promote awareness and empowerment. It stressed the importance of acknowledging the diversity of factors influencing women's paths toward extremism, including socioeconomic vulnerabilities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. By recognizing women's ability to take action and their potential as proactive contributors to preventing violent extremism within their families and communities, efforts can be more effective in ensuring a safer and more inclusive society.⁶¹

At the community level, UNDP built civil society expertise in gender equality and civil peace. For example, UNDP provided some NGOs with training on needs assessment, dialogue and civil peace. These skills enabled NGO members to implement a joint initiative with the Council of Ministries to enhance civil peace in the Diyala Governorate. Dialogue committees were composed of 40 members, including Sunni, Shia and Kurdish members, to engage in social cohesion and community reconciliation. The mix of government and civil society actors ensured diversity within these platforms. Another initiative to support former volunteers who fought against ISIS targeted both men and women within the host communities, and provided safe spaces for women.⁶²

The UNDP police training course marked a significant milestone as a pioneering initiative that encouraged equal representation of both men and women, setting a precedent for gender-inclusive participation in such programmes. According to one female participant, the UNDP police training course was the first mixed course she had attended, as national police academies train women and men separately.⁶³ UNDP made proactive efforts to promote gender inclusivity by requesting national police counterparts to invite at least one female participant to each police training course. Despite these efforts, the absence of female attendees on the courses highlighted a persistent challenge, showing that enabling women to attend these trainings was only one aspect of the larger issue. Achieving true gender equality in the Iraqi police force would require not only inclusion, but also ensuring that female participants are respected and can actively contribute. Addressing this perennial challenge requires sustained and impactful strategies to bring about lasting change.

Gender-responsive

UNDP considered gender-sensitive issues and social norms to encourage women's participation in capacity-development activities. For example, to navigate cultural sensitivities in sensitive communities, when conducting training for women in business, UNDP also invited the husbands of women to participate to encourage them to allow their wives to attend. Childcare allowances were also provided and kindergarten fees covered, to allow mothers of young children to attend the training.

⁶¹ Between Perpetration and Prevention of Violent Extremism Accounting For Gender. UNDP 2022.

⁶² CSIP project.

⁶³ Evaluation of the Security Sector Reform Programme - UNDP Iraq Programme Period: August 2015 – December 2018.

In Outcome 1, UNDP considered gender issues when rehabilitating houses. For example, many women requested to separate the toilet from the kitchen to protect their privacy. Some houses did not have private rooms, with one space used as bedroom and kitchen, so UNDP built walls to create private bedrooms for daughters. Also, as part of the Cash-for-Work programme, a safe environment was created for women to work in the gardens. Under Outcome 3, UNDP organized open-day events where women and female students were invited to have conversations with police officers about their problems. UNDP enhanced the capacity of women's departments in each governorate and promoted gender-sensitive planning at the governorate level. These departments received gender-related tools from UNDP (i.e., gender checklist, gender markers, gender seal for public institutions and gender mainstreaming tools).

Gender transformative

UNDP promoted women's empowerment and leadership and supported the Government to strengthen frameworks for gender equality. UNDP provided support to the Government of Iraq to prepare the recently approved National Women's Policy 2023, and to develop the National Action Plan 1325 Initiative, adopted by both the federal Government and KRG. There were three pillars to this action plan: 1) Including women's participation in politics and the security sector; 2) protection of women from violence; and 3) prevention of violence against women. The effective implementation of these policies will depend on strong political commitment and leadership to prioritize and drive the implementation across government departments and agencies. Moreover, sufficient financial and human resources must be allocated to support implementation of the policy, including funding for programmes, services and capacity-building initiatives.

Dovetailing on the shift in women's political participation in Iraq, with 29 percent of parliamentary seats won by women for the first time in the 2021 elections,⁶⁴ UNDP Iraq established community-based peace groups for women and youth in conflict-affected regions through its social cohesion programme. These groups were trained in gender, conflict analysis, prevention of violent extremism and project management, and they received grants to implement their own peacebuilding and social development initiatives.

2.3 Elements facilitating UNDP performance

Finding 11. Comparative advantage and political economy. UNDP has maintained strong positioning in the development community in Iraq, notable in the trust it has been afforded by the Government and other stakeholders. This stemmed from its long-term and continuous engagement with Government of Iraq, operational strength and speed, and the results of Outcome 1 - Stabilization. Certain outcomes which required significant political backing and national ownership experienced delays beyond the control of the UNDP. The fragmentation of responsibilities within the Government, between the federal level, KRG and the governorates, adds another layer of complexity to deliver and sustain results.

The strong relationship between UNDP and the Government of Iraq was recognized by development partners as a comparative advantage for UNDP. This access to the Government allowed UNDP to serve as an impartial broker to facilitate processes and advocate for donors, civil society, academia and the private sector. Owing to the size of its operation during the height of Stabilization implementation, UNDP gained a wide network, experience in post-conflict areas and expertise in various elements of implementation. UNDP ability to work in conflict zones in Iraq was also recognized as a comparative advantage (i.e., preference of JICA for the FMA project). In addition, UNDP adhered to donor reporting requirements. These factors had compounding effects

⁶⁴ UNDP (2023) Global Policy Network Brief: We are the first spark: The quest of women peacebuilders in Iraq for a more peaceful and equal society.

as donors preferred UNDP, which signalled to other development partners that UNDP was the preferred and strongest collaborator. The federal Government, KRG and governorates recognized this and recommended UNDP as the preferred implementing agency for development funds made available for Iraq.

UNDP experienced delays in delivering results that were associated with factors beyond its control. For example, the target results of the ACAI project were delayed because of heavy dependence on the political will of national stakeholders (in this case, the Parliament of Iraq). Equally, the planned establishment of a Joint Anti-Corruption High-Level Dialogue Forum between the federal Government and KRG in 2022 did not transpire, due to the absence of a functioning Parliament and an established Government meaning that some activities were put on hold.⁶⁵ The collective commitment and political leadership of all three powers will be needed to convene and jointly devise a reform roadmap.

UNDP engagements on EECC-DRM were predominantly with the federal Government, which could pose challenges for implementing policies and frameworks at the subnational level. While governorates or regions may want to focus on particular issues of their own interest – such as drought or biodiversity – the federal Government may decide on a different issue as a key focus. Several interviewees expressed frustration at perceived unfair treatment by the federal Government when it comes to crucial support for their EECC-DRM needs. This poses a limitation that needs to be acknowledged, as the theory of change of Outcome 4 assumes a healthy and seamless interface between the governance structures at federal and governorate levels.

Finding 12. Coherence. The country programme showed continuity of implementation where projects had multiple phases and responded to the evolving nature of development issues and the country context. At the start of the current country programme cycle, internal coherence was limited. The most evident gap was the lack of integration of anti-corruption measures across all outcomes. However, at the mid-point of the country programme, a new sense of synergy between outcomes started emerging through the EECC thematic area. External coherence was more intentional and targeted, but missed opportunities to link the results of stabilization work with a wider set of development actors.

The historical coherence of UNDP projects spanning different phases demonstrated a commitment to long-term development objectives (such as FFS, ACAI and ICRRP). This continuity of work underscored UNDP adaptability to evolving global and regional challenges while remaining rooted in its strategic goals.

Internal coherence across the country programme outcomes was generally weak and *ad hoc*. There were isolated attempts to have integrated country programme outcomes. For example, across the UNDP outcome on stabilization ‘build back better’ agenda and the EECC-DRM drive for renewable energy, solar energy was introduced in agriculture value chain activities through the ICRRP project, to help farmers and processors decrease their cost of production and increase their resilience. Such evidence of cross-outcome interaction and synergy was limited, as these initiatives were not underpinned by a holistic analysis or strategy for systematically addressing EECC-DRM issues at scale. Recently, there have been some shifts in thinking within the country team. For example, the EECC-DRM team was working closely with the gender team to develop a Marshland project, and the Accelerator Lab had worked on various innovations to integrate climate change and environmental issues across the country programme outcomes. There were also linked activities between stabilization and governance, as police station buildings were rehabilitated through Outcome 1, while the staff of these stations were trained as part of Outcome 3 under the ‘Crime Scene Management and Investigative Interviewing’ project.

⁶⁵ Over 50 members of the KRG Parliament in Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdish region submitted their resignations in July 2023 to protest a court decision that had deemed the legislature’s postponement of elections by a year unconstitutional.

The evaluation noted a scarcity of synergistic collaborations within outcomes. Within Outcome 1 there was limited interaction even among the four FFS windows. Notably, the pillar focusing on social cohesion lacked sufficient targeting and scale and experienced a delayed launch compared to other FFS activities.⁶⁶ Synergy between good governance and the rule of law within Outcome 3 was suboptimal. The lack of coherence is evident in the missed opportunities to integrate anti-corruption sensitization across all UNDP activities, considering the gravity of the issue and the extensive scope of the UNDP portfolio. Specifically, UNDP operated in a highly fragmented manner in the realm of access to justice, with no unified platform to consolidate outcomes and deliver a cohesive, collective message. For instance, in the process of enhancing the capacity of local governorates, both FFS and LADP projects could have leveraged initiatives developed under Outcome 3 such as Transparent Cities and investigations into corruption in the water sector. Additionally, considering the well-known vulnerability of the education, construction and health sectors to corruption, UNDP Iraq could have introduced best practices in transparency within public procurement and project management through the ACAI and security sector reform projects.

Stakeholders assessed that external coherence was inadequate, though they unanimously agreed that UNDP paved the way for other United Nations agencies and development partners to work in areas of Iraq liberated from ISIL. However, similar to the observation made by the 2019 ICPE, there was weak synergy between the stabilization projects of UNDP and other United Nations agencies. It was recommended in the 2019 ICPE that UNDP facilitate coherence with sister United Nations agencies to usher in development work and capacity-development anchored in the rehabilitated infrastructure. There was a lack of documented evidence on the extent to which UNDP followed up on these recommendations, maximized synergy and minimized duplication between partners. As the Humanitarian Cluster System was discontinued and the Durable Solution architecture was instituted, for which UNDP was part of the core task force, an opportunity has emerged to build further external coherence with other development actors.⁶⁷ Some highlights of external coherence include:

- UN-Habitat and UNDP worked to rehabilitate some houses located in liberated areas for IDPs. UNDP served as the operational arm for UN-Habitat and other United Nations agencies, providing services such as procurement and finance.
- In collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, trial monitoring of corruption in over 100 cases was conducted for the first time, yielding valuable insights, generating statistics and identifying barriers and gaps.
- Social protection and poverty reduction programmes were developed in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Several initiatives for drinking water rehabilitation were coordinated to avoid overlap and, in some cases, were jointly implemented.
- Coordination was observed between shelter clusters, cash-for-work clusters and the United Nations Mine Action Service.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) provided UNDP with best practices for integrating labour rights, decent job conditions, community outreach, community engagement and public partnership with local authorities, which was applied to the UNDP cash-for-work programme. Also, ILO cooperated with UNDP in conducting an analysis of informality in the Iraqi labour market. This study sought to gain a better understanding of the informal economy and build a baseline for monitoring progress towards formalization.

⁶⁶ UNDP (2021) Evaluation of the FFS in Iraq 2015-2019.

⁶⁷ <https://iraqdurablesolutions.net/>

- UN Women and UNDP women's empowerment department were supported through cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund. Activities included developing a training manual on gender mainstreaming and developing gender sensitivity policies at the local level.
- UNEP and UNDP were both involved in supporting the Government of Iraq to develop the NDC implementation roadmap. UNEP helped to develop a comprehensive greenhouse gas inventory, to provide a baseline for Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. This will also help the Government of Iraq in preparing their second National Communication with support from UNEP and UNDP. A new joint project on biodiversity involving UNDP and UNEP was approved with support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) 7th round, and another project was being prepared for submission to GEF8.

As noted in relation to internal coherence, there were also missed opportunities to create external coherence with other development partners around good governance and anti-corruption. A case in point was the collaboration between the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Government of Iraq, where they had jointly executed initiatives like the automation and modernization of Iraqi customs, funded entirely by the Government. Given that customs were among the most corruption-prone sectors in the country, it was evident that UNDP could have provided valuable technical assistance, such as enhancing the normative framework and devising Standard Operating Procedures, to benefit this endeavour. There was also very weak synergy with the UNODC-implemented project, 'Strengthening the capabilities of the private sector in the field of combating corruption and enhancing integrity in Arab countries', which aimed to support six Arab countries.

Finding 13. Sustainability. The economic risks to the sustainability of results were high, especially for infrastructure and equipment without budgetary commitment from the Government. Both economic and social risks to the sustainability of results were significantly reduced by developing substantive partnerships with the private sector, increasing national and subnational ownership and empowering CSOs to sustain results. Environmental risks to the sustainability of results were also high in Iraq, although the Government and UNDP recognised that there is growing momentum to meet this challenge.

The complex political dynamics and worsening economic conditions in Iraq resulted in insufficient funds or a lack of national budget allocations for operations, maintenance and equipment investment, jeopardizing sustained results. While service provision was expected to persist post-ISIL, challenges arose in achieving adequacy compared to pre-ISIL levels and ensuring the functionality of rehabilitated infrastructure. Moreover, locating qualified staff was hindered by low return levels in specific areas, an issue also identified in the 2019 ICPE.⁶⁸ For example, Tikrit General Hospital, the largest project site under FFS with a budget of \$30 million, faced inadequate staffing and equipment. A similar observation was made for Baharka Hospital, which was inaugurated in October 2022. Despite individual returnees expressing intentions to stay and signalling potential sustainability, the risk of secondary displacement for the economically vulnerable posed a significant threat to the enduring impact of these outcomes.

Stakeholders and studies agreed that the private sector could help mitigate the looming economic crisis brought about by political, security and environmental issues. However, the evaluation found a limited number of private-sector partnerships initiated by UNDP, indicating a gap in work with the private sector to diversify non-oil sector jobs. The EECC portfolio showcased how investing in early adapters could benefit the private sector. For example, the Baghdad Renewable Energy and Sustainability Centre⁶⁹ and Al Taraib Company,

⁶⁸ UNDP Iraq (2021) Evaluation of the FFS in Iraq 2015-2019.

⁶⁹ A corporate social responsibility initiative to raise awareness and facilitate innovation in the renewable energy sector.

which focused on promoting solar energy were assisted through exposure visits to other countries, which contributed to advancing solar technology dissemination in Iraq. UNDP played a crucial role in linking these private initiatives with the Ministry of Electricity, to drive a competitive renewable energy market.

In some cases, local initiatives were handed over to Iraqi municipalities based on agreements between UNDP and the governates.⁷⁰ UNDP facilitated peer learning between “sister municipalities” through several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with European municipalities.⁷¹ These MOUs inspired commitment to the sustainability of activities funded through sister municipalities, though third-party monitoring might still be needed. Another example was the municipal waste management project implemented in Karbala, aimed at recycling urban waste to produce compost for farmers (some 7-10 tonnes of waste were processed daily). This was a limited pilot intervention to demonstrate the feasibility of using organic waste for composting. Since the project ended last year, the municipality has continued the activity independently. UNDP also promoted the localization of development activities to CSOs in Iraq, providing technical and financial support for local CSOs and involving them in project design and implementation. For example, UNDP supported CSOs for training on dialogue and civil peace. This built the capacity of the CSOs to enter a joint initiative with the Council of Ministries to enhance civil peace in the Diyala Governorate.

The sustainability of results faced environmental risks. Returnees may face additional challenges due to the threats posed by climate change, the expanding areas of land affected by drought and high energy costs. In addition to the global commitments and new EECC-related policies being launched by the Government of Iraq, the Iraqi Parliament approved \$700 million for an energy transition scheme intended to finance households and private businesses to invest in energy generation through solar PV.⁷² Besides solar power generation, UNDP also assisted the Government to promote energy efficiency in buildings.⁷³ 546 public buildings in Baghdad will be initially targeted, for which the Government of Iraq has committed \$68 million. These government initiatives presented opportunities for the UNDP to anchor its new country programme.

Finding 14. Programme support. UNDP was adaptive in responding to the additional operational challenges on its procurement practices caused by COVID-19. Similar to the findings in the 2019 ICPE, there were gaps in monitoring and evaluation (M&E), knowledge management and analysis of project/ programme data. UNDP had chronic issues in programme design and results reporting at the outcome level. These signified a need for a more effective results-oriented monitoring system and practices that could be used in decision-making and creating coherence across all country programme outcomes. In addition, the evaluation culture needs strengthening as recommendations were not being fully implemented and utilized.

UNDP faced challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused supply disruptions. To address this, procurement processes were expedited where possible without compromising quality review and due diligence. However, concerns from bidders and contractors regarding the increased global market prices of commodities affected contractual implementation timelines. Some contractors even threatened complete withdrawal from their contracts due to these challenges. In response, UNDP implemented mitigation measures, including the use of bid and performance securities, the inclusion of damage clauses

⁷⁰ LADP, Phase 3; They were responsible for the maintenance of parks, a corniche in Missan, and street lights in Sulaimnia.

⁷¹ For example, the Municipality of Missan had an MoU with a municipality in Albania, the Municipality of Duhok with a Municipality in Sweden and the Municipality of Basra and Anbar with a Municipality in Slovenia.

⁷² The scheme is intended to be administered by the Central Bank of Iraq through Iraqi commercial banks advancing interest-free loans to bank customers to finance the purchase and installation of solar energy generation equipment including PV panels and related equipment, batteries, stand-alone solar operated systems (such as solar lighting systems and solar air conditioners) and solar water heaters.

⁷³ Through the GEF project, Project ID 00125384.

to safeguard against delays and the flexibility to accept lower-priced materials if they met the minimum specifications and were considered equivalent. These measures have proven successful in navigating the complexities arising from the pandemic and supply disruptions in the procurement process.⁷⁴

The UNDP Programme Management and Support Unit (PMSU) aimed to reinforce M&E capabilities, ensure programme quality assurance and enhance management oversight, serving as a dedicated resource to utilize project and outcome evaluations for managing and adjusting initiatives, capturing lessons learned and facilitating knowledge-sharing. However, the evaluation did not find evidence that each outcome area substantially collaborated with the PMSU at an adequate level to pinpoint data limitations and ensure the availability of reliable data, evidence and analysis for project management adaptations. Its role was more to collect data for corporate reporting. This was reflected in the poor coherence across country programme outcomes.

Despite managing various multi-year and large-budget projects, the UNDP results-oriented monitoring process was not fit for purpose (i.e., adopting appropriate M&E tools at the onset of a project, using M&E and evaluation information to drive decisions and build coherence, assessing outcome-level results at the CPD and project level). For instance, FFS transitioned from Excel-based data collection to a more sophisticated digital solution (PRISM) only in the latter part of 2023 after seven years of implementation. The evaluation noted that projects with larger budgets underwent evaluations and, in some instances, were subject to donor-commissioned third-party monitoring. It was unclear to the evaluation why these reports of monitored activities were not shared by the donor (EU), which limited the use of M&E for learning and making necessary adjustments. The evaluation also found that some recommendations from project evaluations and the 2019 ICPE, though accepted, were not fully implemented.

The evaluation identified some weaknesses in the project results framework, with indicators which were not sufficiently diversified to capture outcome-level results. For example, in the FFS, key indicators such as the percentage of rehabilitated infrastructures with accessibility for people with disabilities, the number of individuals experiencing improved access to buildings (disaggregated by sex), the percentage of infrastructures innovated with digital solutions and the incorporation of a diversified source of green energy, were notably absent. Additionally, indicators related to gender inclusivity were lacking, for example, the number of female professionals empowered in the fields of local governance, engineering and construction, stabilization and procurement processes. In addition, UNDP was not able to systematically track the outcome-level results of capacity-development activities.

⁷⁴ UNDP (2022) FFS 2021 Annual Report

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE



3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. The UNDP country programme responded to the evolving context of Iraq, the needs of the people and their government. The implementation and results of Outcome 1 (Stabilization) catalysed the transition by UNDP and other partners from humanitarian to development assistance in liberated areas. UNDP proactively adapted its programming within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, driven by committed senior management and staff. The shift from stabilization to development was an uncharted frontier for UNDP at the country, regional and headquarters levels. The UNDP experience in Iraq offers a unique learning opportunity for the development community.

UNDP managed to implement and deliver its most extensive stabilization programme to date. This signified not only a commitment to addressing the urgent issues arising in the aftermath of conflict but also a demonstration of the organization's readiness and adaptability to take up new challenges to meet the unique and evolving circumstances on the ground. The notable results achieved under Outcome 1 further emphasized the effectiveness of the evolving UNDP model of implementing stabilization work, which needs further research and testing. Whether it be in restoring essential services, fostering peace and security, or supporting the overall recovery process, the outcomes of the programme stand as a testament to the organization's dedication and ability to make a tangible impact in complex post-conflict scenarios.

UNDP showcased the critical importance of flexibility in its programming strategies, especially when navigating the ever-changing landscape of immediate post-conflict settings. The speed and scale of the stabilization work and results facilitated IDPs to return and restart their lives, alleviating pressure on host communities. It also contributed to the renewal and strengthening of the social contract between citizens and the Government, which was critical in a State with a high likelihood of remission to insecurity due to multiple ethnic and political interests and infighting. The success of Outcome 1 highlighted the organization's commitment to its mission and its evolving nature. It also served as a valuable case study for future endeavours in similar environments.

In the current country programme cycle, UNDP has extended its stabilization efforts in response to donor requests to finalize and sustain the results and develop an exit strategy. Thus, stabilization remains a key focus of the country programme. Social cohesion and reconciliation, anti-corruption measures, digitalization and environmental initiatives were incorporated into the transition from humanitarian to development support. However, their implementation did not meet the scale and scope required for a comprehensive transition.

Conclusion 2. The focus on stabilization, Outcome 1, led to a trade-off, where lower priority was given to the other three country programme outcomes during the first half of the current country programme period. Most of the work on EECC-DRM (Outcome 4) was inserted into stabilization-related activities. Outcome 1 did not have a strong overarching conceptual theory of its own, and was mainly humanitarian in nature, with contributions to development within the context of recovery in Iraq. Outcome 3 had mixed results and missed addressing normative issues usually tackled by UNDP. Outcome 4 gained traction at the midpoint of the four-year country programme cycle, providing an opportunity to bridge the stabilization-development transition.

Under Outcome 2, UNDP was not able to substantially contribute to diversifying work opportunities, including the private sector, to reduce the high reliance on public sector employment. The FMA project provided a good model for UNDP to help fast-track the implementation of non-performing ODA loans and build government capacity for similar tasks. Under Outcome 3, UNDP activities in anti-corruption and arbitration were limited, as was some of its normative work relevant to Iraq, such as access to justice, rule

of law, legal aid, environmental justice and business and human rights. Outcome 4 - EECC-DRM was at a formative stage and substantial systems thinking was employed to determine its future direction. UNDP created a niche in the renewable energy sector for which the Government was seeking its technical support to roll out a nationwide solar energy programme, assuming that some of the existing policy barriers could be addressed. UNDP gained ground in its strategic policy-level work, for example, matching the momentum of the Government for green growth.

Conclusion 3. The COVID-19 pandemic presented opportunities for capitalizing on digitalization to promote digital finance, e-governance and anti-corruption measures. Considering Iraq's need and appetite for good governance, the relatively small scale of UNDP anti-corruption programming was suboptimal relative to the size of its overall portfolio. Similarly, climate change and energy are both areas of potential growth within the country office portfolio, which directly resonate with the needs of Iraq.

The UNDP digitalization portfolio was *ad hoc* and did not have an overarching framework to connect the different sectors and activities. The evaluation found substantial potential for enhanced effectiveness and synergy by integrating anti-corruption initiatives within the stabilization portfolio (i.e., FFS, ICRRP and LADP), particularly Transparent Cities and corruption investigations in the water sector. Integrating anti-corruption measures as a cross-cutting issue could have enabled UNDP to mainstream good governance initiatives across sectors such as education, construction and health, thereby applying an anti-corruption lens to a broader spectrum of sectors.

Conclusion 4. UNDP was cognizant of Iraq's needs regarding women's empowerment and social inclusion. Both were integrated into all country programme outcomes. However, the majority of the results delivered were 'gender-targeted' and 'gender-responsive,' and a limited number were 'gender-transformative.'

The Stabilization and the Economic Empowerment outcomes delivered results that were gender-targeted and gender-responsive. The UNDP approach and results responded to the practical needs of women in terms of stabilization and livelihoods. Activities under the EECC-DRM outcome were mainly gender-blind. The results from the Governance outcome were more gender-responsive and gender-transformative, especially those that dealt with policy and the political participation of women.

3.2 Recommendations and management response

RECOMMENDATION 1.



UNDP should build on the results of its stabilization outcome and continue to anchor its next country programme in strengthening the social contract between the peoples of Iraq and their government, with a particular focus on social cohesion and climate change that, if left unchecked, could fuel extremism and reverse the development gains achieved.

In formulating the new country programme, UNDP needs to anchor its outcomes to several caveats:

- a long-term vision of how to elevate the development goals of Iraq, given its high middle-income status;
- themes that strengthen the social contract with the citizenry and the Government and prevent slippage back to extremism and insecurity;
- addressing conflict sensitivity;
- thematic areas that help transition the country from stabilization to development;
- developing the portfolio around systemic themes that need whole-of-government/ whole-of-society approaches such as digitalization and the environment, green growth, EECC, DRM and the reintegration of former volunteer fighters;
- identifying and planning to address risks to sustainability (economic, social and environmental) at the onset;
- diversifying the country office resource mobilization and business models, and engaging more with other forms of financing such as capitalizing on underperforming loans, innovative financing (blended, Islamic, green/ climate), financing through the private sector and other funding facilities from the Government of Iraq;
- if funds allow, broadening the geographical scope of the country programme taking into consideration potential flexion points for extremism, i.e., polarization poverty in the North and South.

During the ongoing transition of FFS, it is imperative to re-engage United Nations partner agencies and facilitate their takeover of capacity-development initiatives in the five governorates in the sectors of health, education, TVET, etc. A comprehensive study of FFS Iraq should be conducted (to complement the FFS terminal evaluation) and lessons learned documented and benchmarked with other UNDP stabilization programmes. This will enable future replication of similar modalities/ formats elsewhere with minimized risks and enhanced effectiveness.

Iraq remains a largely cash-based economy, driven both by a weak enabling environment and a lack of trust among the general public for more innovative payment solutions. UNDP should take stock of how it could contribute to enhancing the capacity of Iraq's Federal Government in the areas of digital finance, online payment and electronic banking. UNDP should continue to support the Government in digitalizing its procedures related to the investment sector and public services. Another potential area of support is to ensure that digital solutions align with national data protection laws and policies and international standards. This would involve conducting thorough assessments to verify compliance and implementing mitigation strategies to protect personal data. Keeping in mind that activities that create digital siloes must be avoided to ensure interconnected solutions and eliminate the duplication of effort.

The intricate link between climate change and security concerns was relatively missing across all current country programme outcomes. Considering the impact of climate change on Iraq, the scale of conflict related to access to land and water resources may escalate, which could fuel extremism and insecurity.

The Government has put in place a number of key instruments and frameworks for moving towards a green and diversified economy. There appears to be strong leadership at the federal level to take climate change issues seriously. However, the voices of fossil fuel lobbyists are also powerful in the country. The critical capacity of the Government to address climate change and environmental issues across the economy needs to be bolstered, and champions for these issues need to be identified and strengthened. The Green Economy Framework provides the platform that can bring all the crucial ministries of the Government of Iraq together. It has the potential to integrate core elements of green growth into each ministry's business goals. It could also usher in a collaborative work culture crucial for a whole-of-government approach to addressing EECC issues. In addition, UNDP should encourage Iraq's Government to develop regulations that promote a green economy, such as central bank policies for motivating commercial banks in Iraq to increase their lending for green investments and reviewing criteria for identifying and facilitating foreign and national investment projects.

UNDP support to EECC-DRM was concentrated largely at the federal level, which was crucial to getting some of the key legislations and policies in place. Moving forward, UNDP needs to bear in mind that, given Iraq's fledgling federal structure and fraught centre-governorate relations, this may pose challenges in the implementation of policies and frameworks at the governorate level. The next CPD should include effective risk mitigation strategies.

The disaster management system in the country is weak and relies on ad hoc measures led by the federal Government. Building on the results and experience of the Mosul Dam project, UNDP should assist the Government of Iraq to strengthen its disaster management system. This would require a complex range of issues to be addressed and resources to be mobilized and would require a whole-of-government approach, which could help fortify coherence between federal and governorate relations.

Management response: Fully Agree.

The new country programme builds on the successes of the previous programme, largely driven by the stabilization outcomes. UNDP supports the country in achieving green, inclusive growth.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 The new country programme will promote green economic recovery with a dedicated climate change portfolio integrated and implemented across all three programme priority areas. In addition, the country office will seek to achieve positive climate change outcomes through a dedicated climate change programme priority/outcome area.	December 2025	Resident Representative and Deputy Resident Representative- Programmes		
1.2 The new country programme deepens social cohesion programming, focusing on peaceful coexistence among returnees and host communities, reintegration of displaced persons and prevention of violent extremism, especially among the youth.	December 2025	Deputy Resident Representative- Programmes, Social Cohesion Programme Manager		

RECOMMENDATION 2.



Anti-corruption should be a cross-cutting theme that is integrated into all future country programme outcomes and all aspects of the work of UNDP in Iraq.

The evaluation strongly recommends that UNDP systematically integrate anti-corruption strategies across all future outcomes. UNDP should take a proactive approach aimed at minimizing corruption risks, enhancing accountability and ensuring the transparent and ethical implementation of initiatives. Incorporating anti-corruption measures should encompass robust monitoring mechanisms, capacity-building initiatives and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. There are umbrella themes such as digitalization and decentralization that have been known to contribute to decreasing corruption. For this to occur, effective internal controls are essential at both the national and subnational levels to facilitate decentralization. UNDP should take advantage of its global knowledge network to pilot and mainstream anti-corruption measures that suit the context of Iraq.

The decentralization process requires sustained efforts to address existing challenges and build effective and transparent local governance structures. This underscores the long-term commitment needed to overcome obstacles and establish a functional decentralized system. Leveraging its role as a neutral mediator and advisor rooted in a human development philosophy, UNDP Iraq is strategically positioned to play a significant role in decentralized governance and development. UNDP strengths lie in lessons learned from implementing decentralization projects, creating conducive environments, enhancing capacities, fostering citizen participation, facilitating partnerships and innovating in decentralized governance and development. UNDP could capitalize on the experiences of other development partners, such as the United Nations Capital Development Fund, in local planning and resource management, emphasizing fiscal decentralization reform with a focus on long-term capacity-building. Moreover, UNDP Iraq can intertwine its anti-corruption efforts and develop interventions to support more transparent decentralization processes.

Management response: Fully Agree.



Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
2.1 The new country programme will integrate anti-corruption across all programme priority/ outcomes areas.	June 2025	Resident Representative, Deputy Resident Representative- Programmes		
2.2 To assess the extent and results of integrating anti-corruption across the country programme, a midterm anti-corruption thematic evaluation will be conducted by December 2026. The results will guide programming and provide opportunities for course correction.	December 2026	Deputy Resident Representative- Programmes, Anti-corruption programme team, PMSU		

RECOMMENDATION 3.



In implementing future capacity-development activities, UNDP should target and create synergy across the three dimensions of capacity-development (individual, institution, enabling environment/policy). The UNDP Iraq country office and RBAS should document lessons learned from activities that integrate the three capacity-development dimensions and communicate these across the wider UNDP for broader adoption, including facilitating lessons learning and benchmarking with similar countries in the region.

UNDP should strengthen its capacity in training, pedagogy and facilitation. Such skills can provide expertise and guidance in designing, implementing and evaluating training programmes, ensuring consistent quality across capacity-development activities. UNDP should implement a systematic approach to quality control and assurance for capacity-development initiatives. Peer reviews, expert evaluations and standardized evaluation frameworks should be used to assess the quality and effectiveness of training content and delivery.

UNDP should stock take and document lessons from its successful activities that made use of the three capacity-development dimensions, such as the FMA project. FMA was able to facilitate the implementation of non-performing ODA (about \$16.2 billion) by strengthening individual and institutional capacity and working to promote a positive enabling environment.

Management response: Fully Agree.



Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
3.1 The country office will establish a Knowledge Management Committee headed by the DRR/Head of Programme and composed of heads of programme units, M&E, gender and youth focal points. With support from RBAS, the Committee will develop a knowledge management action plan to guide the country office's knowledge creation, dissemination and utilization across all programme outcomes.	June 2025	Resident Representative, DRR-P, country office Knowledge Management Committee		
3.2 To assess the extent and results of integrating anti-corruption across the country programme, a midterm anti-corruption thematic evaluation will be conducted by December 2026. The results will guide programming and provide opportunities for course correction.	December 2026	Resident Representative, Deputy Resident Representative-Programmes, PMSU, Partnership, Advocacy and Communications		

RECOMMENDATION 4.



UNDP monitoring capacity and evaluation culture need to be strengthened. This includes the analysis of monitoring and evaluation data to be used for systems thinking, building coherence across outcomes, decision-making and adaptive management. External coherence should be strengthened by facilitating the ability other development partners to dovetail into achievements under the stabilization outcome.

The evaluation resounds the 2019 ICPE recommendation. Currently, the role of M&E and knowledge management rests within the PMSU and various project-level M&E functions, but there is poor coordination and organization-wide learning. This hinders the identification of data limitations and the availability of reliable data, impacting the quality of analysis and hindering adaptive management. There is a need for a function that coordinates, conducts research, analyses and communicates lessons across programme managers in UNDP as much as providing oversight.

Also recommended in the 2019 evaluation, UNDP needs to further facilitate the entry of other development agencies into results brought about by Outcome 1 - Stabilization. This might include UNICEF and UNESCO for education-related rehabilitated infrastructure, the Food and Agriculture Organization, UNIDO and UNSDCF for economic empowerment-related and WHO for health-related ones. The Durable Solutions architecture is a clear entry point for building external coherence

Management response: Fully Agree.



Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
4.1 The capacity of the PMSU, which leads the country programme M&E function, was bolstered by recruiting a new Head of the PMSU, who also doubles as Head of the Erbil Office. Through ongoing capacity-building and reflection sessions, the PMSU will enhance programme-wide capacities and practice in systems thinking, M&E, reporting and adaptive management.	December 2025	Deputy Resident Representative-Programmes, Learning Committee and PMSU		
4.2 The country office will develop a programme/CPD-level monitoring plan to guide M&E for the country programme. Project-level M&E resources will be clustered to form an M&E cluster led by PMSU. Clustering the M&E resources will ensure the country office has comprehensive, consistent and synergistic M&E efforts and improved coherence across programme outcomes.	December 2025	Deputy Resident Representative-Programmes and PMSU		
4.3 Stabilization programme knowledge products will be developed to document and share key achievements, best practices and lessons with a broader audience. This will enable development actors, including those in Iraq, to dovetail their programming into the achievements made from the stabilization outcome	December 2025	Resident Representative, DRR-P, Partnership, Advocacy and Communications Team and PMSU		

RECOMMENDATION 5.



UNDP should continuously work on gender and social inclusion. UNDP could use its comparative advantage as a neutral and honest knowledge broker, and the political economy it was afforded by the Government of Iraq and development partners, to table issues with the Government that might be deemed sensitive for donors, civil society organizations and other development partners, such as gender, marginalized groups, and human rights.

The evaluation noted that among marginalized or disadvantaged groups, Yazidi women and their children are experiencing a high risk of being left behind. This highlights a specific area of concern and underscores the need for targeted assistance and support for this vulnerable population. The 2021 Yazidi Survivors' Law acknowledges the pivotal role of reparations in aiding survivors in their journey to rebuild their lives. It emphasizes the imperative of swift and obstacle-free implementation of this law, extending its coverage to encompass victims from all communities, including women forced into marriage by ISIL and children born of rape. An additional concern raised is the absence of a domestic violence law, which poses a risk not only to women but also to children, the elderly and other family members. The call for legal protection, in alignment with Iraqi traditions, religious and cultural values, underscores the necessity for comprehensive legislation to safeguard these vulnerable populations from domestic violence.

Another significant category of people who have been marginalized is those suffering from the consequences of the unlawful use of environmental resources by public and private entities. Currently, there are no initiatives in place that promote justice and accountability in environmental matters, with a focus on respecting, protecting and fulfilling environmental rights, particularly the right to a healthy environment, and advancing the environmental rule of law. In a country facing the challenges of climate change, UNDP Iraq has not made substantial progress in developing and implementing innovative initiatives related to environmental justice. This delay is particularly noteworthy, especially given that the Guidance Note: Promoting Environmental Justice Through UNDP Programming was created in 2021 to provide guidance to UNDP country offices, offering resources and concrete examples of programming initiatives and best practices in the field of environmental justice. However, these guidelines have yet to be effectively implemented.

Management response: Partially Agree.



Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Iraq is a conservative society and discussions around gender and social inclusion are sensitive even for UNDP in most parts of the country. UNDP will pursue gender outcomes through ongoing programmes like the Security Sector Reform and Social Cohesion.	December 2025	Deputy Resident Representative- Programmes, and PMSU Portfolios		

* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC)

ANNEXES

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Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the Independent Evaluation Office at:
<https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/23879>

Annex 1. Terms of Reference

Annex 2. Country at a Glance

Annex 3. Country Office at a Glance

Annex 4. Project Under Review

Annex 5. Documents Consulted

Annex 6. Status of Country Programme Outcome & Output Indicators

Annex 7. Performance Rating



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