

Country Programme (2017-2021) Evaluation – UNDP

Islamic Republic of Iran

United Nations Development Programme

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*Evaluation Team
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Disclaimer: *The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and may not necessarily represent the views of UNDP or its partner agencies in the Islamic Republic of Iran.*

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Abbreviations

CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDC	Centre for Communicable Diseases Control
CEEE	Committee on Energy Efficiency and Environment
CHFP	Caspian Hyrcanian Forest Project (CHFP)
CIWP	Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project
CO	Country Office
CP	Country Programme
CPD	Country Programme Document
DoE	Department of Environment
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DyRR	Deputy Resident Representative
EA	Evaluability Assessment
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operation
EEBP	Energy Efficiency in Buildings Project
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EQ	Evaluation Question
ET	Evaluation Team
EQ	Evaluation Question
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN
FRWO	Forests, Rangeland and Watershed Organisation
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFTAM	Global Fund for Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and Malaria
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GF	Global Fund
GOI	Government of Iran
HCFC	Hydrochlorofluorocarbon
HPMP	Hydrochlorofluorocarbon Phaseout Management Plan
INSO	Iran National Standards Organisation
IP	Implementing Partner
JC	Judgment Criteria
KII	Key Informant Interview
LUB	Lake Urmia Basin
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MJA	Ministry of Jihad Agriculture
MOHME	Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MOH)
MoRUD	Ministry of Roads and Urban Development
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
NDMO	National Disaster Management Organisation
NFM	New Funding Model
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NRM	Natural Resource Environment
NSP	National Strategic Plan
ODP	Ozone Depleting Potential
ODS	Ozone Depleting Substances
PBO	Planning and Budget Organisation

PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
PDNA	Post-Disaster Needs Assessment
POP	Persistent Organic Pollutants
PPE	Personal Protection Equipment
PR	Principal Recipient
Prodoc	Project document
RASER	Rapid Socio-Economic Recovery Initiative
RBAP	Regional Bureau for Asia-Pacific
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCCE	Risk Communication & Community Engagement
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
ROAR	Result-Oriented Annual Report
SATBA	Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SS	Signature Solution
SSC	South-South Cooperation
TAP	Technical Assistance Package
TB	Tuberculosis
TOC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNAIDS	United Nations Agency on HIV/AIDS
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
US\$	United States Dollar
VPST	Vice Presidency for Science and Technology
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association

Executive Summary

Introduction

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Iran works with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in pursuit of the national development priorities defined in the country's sixth Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2021). UNDP's particular support is guided by its Country Programme Document (CPD) for 2017-2021¹ which is based on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and agreed with the Government of Iran (GoI). The UNDP commissioned an independent evaluation of the country programme to assess its contribution and performance in supporting national development. The evaluation was undertaken by a team of two consultants – one international and one national - between January-March 2022. This report brings together the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the various processes of the evaluation.

The country programme of UNDP focused on four outcomes: (a) environmentally sustainable development, (b) health and development, (c) resilient economy: social welfare, poverty eradication and sustainable employment; and (d) natural disaster management. The country programme is implemented mainly through National Implementation Modality (NIM) whereby the GoI is the main implementing agency, with support from UNDP.

Evaluation objectives and methodology

The overall purpose of this evaluation was to assess UNDP's contribution and performance in supporting the national development priorities of the GoI in the four outcome areas. In doing this, the evaluation took stock of progress made with regard to the outputs and results of UNDP interventions and attempted to draw lessons for development of the next round of the country programme which will start in 2023. The criteria used in the evaluation were: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and gender equality. The primary users of the evaluation are the UNDP country office (CO), Regional Bureau for Asia & Pacific (RBAP), GoI, implementing partners (IP) of UNDP programme and key donor agencies supporting the country programme. The evaluation was commissioned by the UNDP Resident Representative (RR) in the IRI and managed by the Head of Programme Support Unit.

The evaluation team used mixed methods involving key informant interviews, desk review of key documents and visits and meetings with communities or users of the services provided through UNDP's support. The key informants included officials from the GoI partner institutions, development partners, UNDP staff and other development agencies selected through purposive sampling. In total, the evaluation team conducted 66 key informant interviews and visited 12 communities where group interviews were conducted with community members and beneficiaries of UNDP-assisted activities.

A major limitation of the evaluation lay in the fact that due to COVID-19, the international consultant on the team carried out all interviews remotely, while the lone national consultant undertook field visits to a number of projects supported by UNDP and met with local authorities and communities in the provinces. Triangulation of data was carried out by comparing information from multiple sources

¹ This was later extended to December 2022 with the approval of the GoI.

(documents, key informants, communities) and methods, and where such triangulation was not possible, the evaluation team has taken care in using such data in presentation of the findings.

Findings of the evaluation

The major findings of the evaluation are summarised below.

Findings on relevance

UNDP's programme demonstrates a strong convergence with the national priorities through its focus on addressing critical gaps in the areas of natural resource management and environment and health (HIV/AIDS and Malaria) in particular. In this, UNDP has attempted to support the capacity needs of a number of government institutions that play crucial role in delivery of targeted outputs, as well as focused on the needs of some of the most vulnerable geographical areas and population groups. UNDP's role on the economic development agenda (outcome 3) was limited for the first three years of the CPD cycle, though in the past two years the country office has been beginning to proactively seek opportunities for engagement on this. The COVID pandemic provided an impetus for reorientation of the country programme to include a major thrust on economic recovery and employment which was missing in the preceding years.

In a clear endorsement of its role and relevance, in a country where funding sources are limited, UNDP has been fairly successful in tapping donor funds as well as ensuring financing by the government. However, UNDP's main weakness in its programming has been its failure to link the environment programme with vulnerability, poverty and resilience in an integrated approach – a gap that is now being addressed. Currently there is a strong push by the management team to diversify the portfolio through the use of an area-based-approach to overcome a working-in-silo culture. This has the potential to open greater space on engagement on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in national development.

Findings on effectiveness

Several crucial results are being achieved nationally on expansion of rangeland and wetland management models developed through UNDP's support, reduced use of ozone depleting substances (ODS) in refrigeration and air-conditioning industry, providing high-risk population groups access to HIV treatment, and use of energy efficiency standards in buildings. It is too early to relate UNDP's interventions on social welfare, poverty and unemployment which have been initiated recently to the broad resilient economy outcomes articulated in the CPD. The small project initiatives (mostly funded through UNDP core funds) have contributed to future programme development in instances where the country office had a clear understanding of how it could anchor the short-term projects in the wider country programme. Partnership is now being developed with the private sector in waste management and value chains for farmers which have the potential to bring about transformative changes in people's livelihoods.

UNDP is credited with facilitating, and often enabling, inter-sectoral coordination, especially in the environment and climate change area which involves multiple agencies of the GoI. However, joint planning and delivery of activities that require cross-departmental collaboration is often missing in the provinces. The approach to capacity building of implementing partners lacks a clear strategy to build on learning and assimilation.

Understanding of the differential impact of development interventions on people with different levels of vulnerability has been often missing in the past, a gap UNDP has been attempting to address in the

past two years. UNDP's distinctive competence is seen and perceived by the implementing partners in procurement and project management. This limits the space for UNDP to engage on emerging health issues like sand and dust storms, pollution, dengue, etc., which UNDP could bring to the table for discussions on health strategies and policies with the government.

Findings on efficiency

UNDP is considered a reliable partner by all agencies it partnered with who rated it highly for its project management capacity to facilitate implementation at scale. All procurements, including procurement of services under the Global Fund grants, are being conducted by UNDP as the Principal Recipient. UNDP also supports other UN agencies on procurement of health supplies, a role that has become vital due to the complicated procurement process arising from the unilateral sanctions imposed on the Government. However, weak communication from UNDP and its "top-down" approach were often cited as its weakness by implementing partners.

UNDP has a long-standing partnership with the Centre for Communicable Disease Control (CDC) of the Ministry of Health, the Prisons Organisation, the Ministry of Jihad Agriculture, Global Fund (supply of PPE), Government of Japan (waste management and COVID recovery) and European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) in partnership with UNICEF, all of which came in handy in developing and launching timely response to the COVID in 2020. In the past one-year, new partnerships have been developed with Planning and Budgeting Organisation (PBO) of the GoI and private sector organisations.

Delays in project implementation have been frequent, requiring no-cost extension of several projects caused by procedural delays within the GoI as well the UNDP. A number of IPs find the current implementation modality (NIM) between UNDP and the GoI often confusing as they are required to follow the procedures of both the GoI and UNDP.

Within UNDP, the practice of periodic reflection and lessons learning is not systematic. The CPD results framework remains vague and does not render itself to be broken down into measurable outcomes and outputs. Most of the project documents articulate a theory of change (TOC). However, these were framed more as description of the logical framework underpinning the project delivery, without clear articulation of the *drivers of change* and identification of *assumptions* that will affect the outputs and outcomes.

Findings on sustainability

UNDP programme over the years has enabled the implementing partners to develop and adopt new ways of working and practices which are already being internalised within the agencies concerned. There are several areas of work within the environment and natural resource management portfolio which were initially supported by UNDP and are now being financed by the GoI, indicating strong ownership of these initiatives. The new partnership being developed with the PBO which represents the nodal ministry for planning and budgeting in the country may open doors for the government's resource allocation for some of the initiatives the UNDP programme has helped develop.

Findings on women and vulnerability

In most of the programme, participation of women as beneficiaries in particular projects is ensured, but addressing gender equality was not attempted in the programme, presumably for the sensitivity this issue carries in a conservative country. In the health programme, gender-disaggregated data is generated systematically. In the COVID response, women-headed households which were severely affected have been targeted through cash transfers and livelihoods programmes. However, beyond the gender disaggregation, there is no clear strategy for addressing gender issues. While the

livelihoods activities have provided women space to participate in their local communities and promoted savings and credit groups, there is no evidence that these have been leveraged to promote women's role in decision making at household and community level. UNDP Iran carried out the UNDP Gender Seal Programme in 2021 and the CO is now finalising a Gender Action Plan that will inform the Gender Equality Strategy to be developed during 2022.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1 - UNDP has uniquely positioned itself as a trusted partner to the GoI in enabling the latter to remain connected with the global development landscape, including accessing knowledge, resources and tools which otherwise it would have had difficulty accessing due to the unilateral sanctions the country is subject to.

Conclusion 2 - While UNDP's support to the GoI has historically had a strong focus on environment, it had failed to help establish the linkage between poverty, vulnerability and environment which the CO is now beginning to engage on.

Conclusion 3 - UNDP has facilitated coordination among different agencies and sectors in the provinces in the environment and climate change area in particular. However, joint planning and delivery of activities that require cross-departmental collaboration is often weak due to the highly centralised functioning within different departments/Ministries.

Conclusion 4 - Internally, UNDP is used to working within vertical structures which blocks interdisciplinary/sectoral linkages, very much mirroring the challenge UNDP aims at addressing within the government institutions.

Conclusion 5 - The programme has been weak in the past in taking into account its impact on social groups and communities with different levels of vulnerability. UNDP is beginning to link its sectoral work (environment, waste management, enterprise promotion) with poverty and vulnerability, but this has been stymied by weak staff capacity in developing a nuanced understanding and analysis of the impact of its interventions on different sections of people depending on vulnerability on the one hand and gender equality and equity issues on the other.

Conclusion 6 - In a country like Iran where UNDP has a limited space to engage on SDGs and policies, a top-down process of project development and design by UNDP contributes to further shrinkage of that limited space. The 'top-down' nature of perceived relationship also includes a host of administrative issues which include confusion over procedures (Government or UNDP) to be followed in financial and procurement matters, frequent and ad hoc demands from UNDP for information and reports from IPs and delays in release of funds.

Conclusion 7 - The ambiguity and obscurity in the CPD results framework made development of an effective M&E and reporting system difficult. While a CPD needs to be broad enough to provide space for adapt the programme in the course of its implementation cycle, the outcome and output indicators currently do not capture UNDP's specific contributions.

Recommendations

R1: While formulating the new CPD, develop an overarching framework which links growing poverty and vulnerability in the country with degradation of the environment and climate change factors as they affect people's livelihoods and health.

- R2: Undertake a participatory review of the capacity building strategy followed so far and identify success factors (driving forces) and inhibiting factors in different partner institutions and inter-institutional processes which need to form the basis of the future strategies.
- R3: To promote a learning culture internally within the country team, continuous reinforcement of self-reflection and analysis of outputs and processes, rather than an exclusive focus on activities and project administration, will be necessary.
- R4: UNDP needs to deepen its understanding of vulnerability and poverty and ensure that targeting and selection of its programme cohorts differentiates on the basis of levels of vulnerability based on gender, disability and socio-economic status.
- R5: While communication around project administration is important, staff who constitute the interface with the implementing partners and government counterparts need to have the skills to facilitate *dialogue* and *knowledge management*, especially with regard to development of project concepts, design and evidence gathering, as well as in monitoring and reporting. This will reinforce the realignment of the organisational structure undertaken in 2020-21.
- R6: While better use of theory of change (R1 and R3 above) by programme staff on a day-to-day basis will strengthen quality of evidence and programme implementation, a M&E system that enables the process and aids in reporting on key output and outcome indicators will need to be put in place.
- R7: Undertake a review of the chain of procurement and funds disbursement procedures involving UNDP at one end and the provincial authorities at the point of delivery on the other, and identify opportunities for simplification, where feasible. In some instance, it may be simply a question of clarifying where UNDP rules apply and where the GoI procedures take precedence.

A. Introducing the evaluation

1. Evaluation purpose, scope and objectives

Introduction: The Country Office (CO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) commissioned an independent evaluation of its Country Programme for the period 2017-2022.² The evaluation was undertaken by a team of two independent consultants³ – one international and one national - between November 2021-January 2022. This report brings together the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the various processes and methods followed in the evaluation.

Purpose: The overall purpose of this evaluation was to assess UNDP's contribution and performance in supporting the national development priorities of the Government of Iran (GoI) in the four outcome areas which constitute the focus of the UNDP country programme for the period 2017-2021. In doing this, the evaluation took stock of the progress made with regard to the outputs and results of UNDP interventions and attempted to draw lessons for development of the next round of the country programme which will start in 2023. The four outcomes envisaged in the country programme were:

- (i) Environmentally sustainable development
- (ii) Health and development
- (iii) Resilient economy: social welfare, poverty eradication and sustainable employment; and
- (iv) Resilient economy: natural disaster management.

Scope: The scope of the evaluation covered the intended outputs (Box 1 below) under the four outcomes. It is to be noted that all these outputs emerge from the country programme theory of change and are aligned with UNDP's strategic plan which is built around six signature solutions.⁴ Of these six signature solutions (SS), except for the SS2 (governance) and SS5 (energy gap) which are not the focus of the country programme, all the remaining 4 SS are directly prioritised. The outputs sought through the CPD are presented below (Box 1).

Box 1: UNDP Iran Country Programme Outputs

OUTCOME 1: Integrated natural resource management, low carbon economy, and effective climate change policies and programmes (UNDAF outcomes 1.1 and 1.2)

Output 1.1: Strategies and measures that promote sustainable and integrated management of natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystem services are developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Output 1.2: Climate change adaptation and mitigation solutions developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Output 1.3: The Islamic Republic of Iran's institutional capacities to meet HCFC and POP phase out commitments are enhanced.

OUTCOME 2: Policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS, other communicable diseases and non-communicable disease (UNDAF Outcomes 2.2 and 2.3)

² The current CP was initially formulated for the period 2017-2021, but in line with the UNDAF was later extended up to 2022, with approval of the Government of Iran.

³ The international consultant has never worked for the UNDP Iran programme previously, while the national consultant (NC) has worked with the CO on a few occasions as an independent consultant carrying out training and facilitation workshops. None of the consultants had any involvement, whatsoever, during the planning and design of the programmes/projects within the CPD.

⁴ Signature solution 1 - poverty alleviation; signature solution 2 - inclusive and accountable governance; signature solution 3 - resilient societies; signature solution 4 - nature-based solutions for a sustainable planet; signature solution 5 - close the energy gap; and signature solution 6 - strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Output 2.1: Strategies, mechanisms and tools to further strengthen implementation of the National Strategic Plans on HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria and other communicable diseases are developed and considered for adoption by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Output 2.2: Solutions that help address priority NCDs are identified, developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Government.

OUTCOME 3: Social welfare, poverty eradication and sustainable employment policies and programmes (UNDAF Outcomes 3.1 and 3.5)

Output 3.1: Enhanced strategies and measures to achieve inclusive growth and poverty reduction are developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Government.

Output 3.2: Innovative sustainable employment strategies and measures are developed and considered for adoption/implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

OUTCOME 4: Relevant government agencies formulate, implement and monitor natural disaster management policies and programmes more effectively (UNDAF Outcome 3.4)

Output 4.1: Measures and tools that improve the preparation and implementation of multi-sectoral and multi-hazard DRR plans are developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Output 4.2: Options and mechanisms for effectively enhancing community resilience to natural disasters are developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

[Source: UNDP Iran country programme document (CPD, 2017-2021)]

Objectives: The evaluation’s key objectives were to seek evidence-based answers to the following broad questions:

- i. To what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives at the output level, and what contribution has it made at the outcome level?
- ii. What factors contributed to or hindered UNDP’s performance and sustainability of results?
- iii. What lessons can be drawn from the current CPD implementation to offer wider lessons for UNDP support in Islamic Republic of Iran.

2. Evaluation criteria, cross-cutting issues and evaluation questions

Evaluation questions: The above broad questions were sought to be addressed through the lens of five key evaluation criteria, namely: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and gender equality using the following (Box 2) specific evaluation questions (EQ). These evaluation questions were based on a total of 32 EQs which were initially outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR, Annex 1) and later amended during the inception phase in consultation with UNDP after assessing the evaluability of each question. Additionally, the evaluation examined how cross-cutting issues such as Leave-No-One-behind and disability were incorporated in the programme.

Box 2: Evaluation criteria and detailed questions

Relevance

1. To what extent has the current UNDP programme supported the government of Iran in achieving the national development goals, responding to unexpected events, achieving internationally agreed sustainable development goals and delivering UNDAF intended results?
2. To what extent has the UNDP programme responded to the priorities and the needs of target beneficiaries as defined in the programme document?
3. Is UNDP perceived by stakeholders as a strong advocate for improving environment, health, resilient economy and natural disaster management in Iran?
4. Have the efforts made by UNDP and national partners to mobilise resources and knowledge been in line with the current development landscape?
5. To what extent did the UNDP programme promote SSC/Triangular cooperation?

6. Has UNDP been able to effectively re-prioritise and adapt its programme in 2019-2020 to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran and on its programming?
7. To what extent has UNDP been able to adapt existing programmes to respond to the COVID-19 pressures and protect development gains already achieved?
8. To what extent has UNDP been able to adapt existing programmes with the changing landscape and geopolitics re. JCPOA and its associated socio-economic impacts?

Effectiveness

9. By reviewing the programme results and resources framework, is the UNDP programme on track to achieve intended results at the outcome and output levels? What are the key achievements and what factors contributed to the achievements or non-achievement of those results?
10. By examining the small-size initiatives funded by UNDP regular sources, how have these projects fulfilled their objectives? What are the factors (positive and negative) that contribute to their success or shortcomings? Are there recommendations or lessons that can be drawn from this approach?
11. To what extent has UNDP programme contributed towards an improvement in national government capacity, including institutional strengthening? How could UNDP enhance this element in the next UNDP programme?
12. How well has UNDP collaborated with sister UN agencies and other development partners to ensure effectiveness of interventions and greater impact/ scale? To what extent has UNDP been effective in building synergies and leveraging other programmes and stakeholders?
13. Were the disproportional gender impacts of COVID-19, impact on vulnerable groups integrated within UNDP's response? To what extent were results achieved for these groups?
14. What has been the impact of programming (reprioritizing) funds on the existing portfolio? Have changes in priorities been documented? Have TOCs and strategies been adjusted accordingly to reflect the impact of COVID-19 on existing programmes? Has the RRF been adjusted to reflect COVID-19?

Efficiency

15. To what extent has there been an economical use of resources (funds, human resources, time, expertise, etc.)? What are the main administrative constraints/strengths?
16. Is the results-based management system operating effectively and is monitoring data informing management decision making?
17. How well does the workflow between UNDP and national implementing partners perform?
18. When UNDP provides implementation support services (like procurement) to implementing partners, how well has UNDP performed?
19. To what extent were the previous structures of development assistance and partnerships efficient and able to adapt to support the COVID-19 responses? Were these adequate? Where were there weaknesses?

Sustainability

20. What outcomes and outputs have the most likelihood of sustainability and being adopted by partners and why?
21. What could be done to strengthen sustainability? (financial, staff, aspirational, etc.)?
22. To what extent do partnerships exist with other national institutions, NGOs, United Nations agencies, the private sector and development partners to sustain the attained results?
23. What is the potential to "build back better"? How well is UNDP learning while doing and adapting in a context where limited evidence was/ is available to assess direct and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 response?)

Gender equality

24. To what extent have gender equality, the economic empowerment of women, social inclusion and youth been addressed in the programme strategic design, implementation and reporting? Are there key achievements?

Users of the evaluation: The primary users of the evaluation are the UNDP CO, the Regional Bureau for Asia Pacific (RBAP) and UNDP headquarters, besides secondary users namely the government counterparts, development partners, other UN agencies and relevant civil society institutions in the country. The evaluation was commissioned by the UNDP Resident Representative (RR) in the IRI and managed by the Head of Programme Support Unit.

3. Evaluation framework and methodology

3.1 Approach and method

Mixed method approach: During the inception phase, the evaluation team (ET) developed a three-pronged approach combining (a) *theory-based* approach, (b) *data-driven* approach based on the country programme results and resources framework, and (c) *evaluation matrix* with a set of evaluation questions based on evaluation criteria, to build a strong evidence-base. The country programme aims to deliver several complex outputs and outcomes, evaluation of which required methodologies that took into account the complexities of dealing with different types of data, quantitative and qualitative, often with little or no counterfactuals to compare against. The ET used mixed methods, with primary and secondary data gathered from different sources on a representative sample of projects supported through the country programme. A mixed methods approach requires both deductive and inductive analysis to be used to assess performance and processes. Mixed methods combining key informant interviews (KII), desk review of key documents and community interviews/focus groups including transect walks/project visits enabled the evaluation team to triangulate information and perspectives from multiple sources. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions, some of the interviews had to be done remotely, and the national consultant was able to travel within the country to visit specific project locations.

Judgment criteria: To help gather evidence from the country programme interventions, the ET developed a series of judgement criteria for all the 24 evaluation questions; this was done to enable a granular analysis of UNDP-supported work in line with the strategy and results articulated in the country programme document (CPD). The judgment criteria were based on various outputs and outcomes outlined in the CPD, UNDP/UNEG evaluation guidelines, and these were used to develop appropriate methods for data collection and analysis and collated into an evaluation matrix (Annex 2). Several outputs posed challenges in attribution (for example, changes in policy and practices) as: (i) there was very little tangible baseline (counterfactual) to compare against; and (ii) multiple actors were often involved in influencing these changes. Wherever applicable, the evaluation used the process tracing method to ensure that the country programme's distinctive contribution could be traced, as far as possible. This involved tracing the changes *within-case* and then comparing these against alternative cases.⁵

Cross-cutting issues: In order to ensure that gender equality and social inclusion issues were addressed during the evaluation, the judgement criteria against the evaluation questions integrated these issues as can be seen in the evaluation matrix; additionally, where relevant, the interview questions (Annex 3) used as data collection tool explicitly emphasised these issues. The selection of key informants was also informed by the need for the evaluation to ensure that critical insights were obtained from individuals on gender and inclusion issues.

Secondary data collection: The ET mapped out and reviewed all documents related to UNDP's CPD and projects which include project documents, proposals, progress reports, Result-Oriented Annual Reports (ROARs) and project evaluation reports. A full list of key documents consulted is presented in Annex 4. There were at least five evaluation reports of various projects which were undertaken during this CPD implementation. Using the document repository, contents of documents in relation to the judgment criteria in the evaluation matrix were summarised and assessed against each evaluation question by the evaluation team.

⁵ *Process tracing* is a research method for tracing causal mechanisms using detailed, within-case empirical analysis of how a causal process plays out in an actual case. The main purpose of process tracing is to attempt to establish whether, and how, a potential cause or causes influenced a specified change or set of changes. A key feature of process tracing is the development and testing of alternative ideas about how and why change might have happened. Process tracing starts by first measuring change and then working backwards to assess contribution. The method involves five steps: 1) Identify the change or changes to be explained; 2) Establish the evidence for the change; 3) Document the processes leading to the change; 4) Establish alternative causal explanations; 5) Assess the evidence for each causal explanation.

Stakeholder consultations and meetings: Structured and semi-structured interviews were held with key stakeholders identified at the inception stage using the EQs and interview tools based on the judgment criteria. As the evaluation progressed, stakeholder consultations were used increasingly to elicit opinion or explore in more detail specific aspects emerging from the documents review and initial analyses. A total of 66 key informant interviews (KII) and 14 small group discussions with 12 beneficiary communities were conducted - a full list of key informants can be found in Annex 5. The selection of individual interviewees was done based on a stakeholder analysis carried out at the inception stage, ensuring that the evaluation included a large part of the major activities and outputs within the programme. For KIIs, a non-probability sampling (purposive and snowball) was used for data collection covering the following stakeholder



Figure 1: Field visits conducted during the evaluation

groups (Table 1). The national consultant travelled to four provinces (East Azerbaijan, South Khorasan, Lorestan and Tehran – see map presented in Figure 1) and held meetings in 12 villages/locations.

Table 1: Stakeholder groups interviewed for the evaluation

Stakeholder group	Total interviewed	Tehran/HQ	Provinces
Gol & related agencies	37	27	10
Development partners	4	4	-
Others	3	3	-
UNDP	16	16	-
Other UN agencies	2	2	-
CBOs	4	-	4
Community groups	14 groups (each with 2-9 participants)	-	14
Total	66 KI + 14 groups⁶	52 KI	14 KI + 14 groups

3.2 Data analysis and validation

Contribution analysis: Acknowledging that the outputs of various interventions UNDP is involved in are influenced by the support provided by others in some cases, the ET made attempts at every stage to take stock of the *contributions made* by key UNDP interventions, rather than attribute the entire range of outcomes to UNDP or any single project. The evaluation ensured that data gathering was able to identify the unique *contribution(s)* of UNDP in particular. The main steps in such a contribution analysis involved the following:

- Take stock of the theory of change and assumptions underpinning major projects/interventions;

⁶ Groups varied in size in different locations, from 2 to 9 (mostly women in all the groups, with 1-3 men). The groups comprised beneficiaries of various income generating activities supported by UNDP.

- Assess the resulting performance or contribution story for each of the outputs within each major project;
- Gather performance data at output and outcome levels;
- Reassess the contribution story and challenges to it in the light of what the data showed;
- Seek out additional empirical evidence; and
- Revise and strengthen the contribution story – based on what worked and what did not.

Triangulation: The evaluation team recognises that evaluations face potential biases that can pose a serious threat to the reliability of results. Rigorous data triangulation was undertaken to validate data gathered during the course of the evaluation. This was done mainly through comparing information gathered through multiple sources and methods. **Where discrepancies occurred that could not be resolved, the ET was careful in using such data for drawing conclusions or lessons and recommendations.** This evaluation utilised three types of triangulations that served to reconcile any inconsistencies between different data sources. These were:

- *Methods triangulation* - both qualitative and quantitative data was used to elucidate complementary aspects of the same subject;
- *Data source triangulation* - involved examining the consistency and reliability of different data sources within the same methods;
- *Theory triangulation* - which involves using alternative theories to interpret and examine the data obtained.

4. Evaluation ethics and data protection

Personal data: The ET ensured full confidentiality of data provided, accessed and produced during the course of this work, unless information was obtained from sources that were in the public domain. **Any personal data collected has been minimal and anonymised in the report; for community interviews, no name(s) or personal details were collected or recorded at all, except for the gender (M/F) and respondents' place (province) of residence.** For all other stakeholders (individual interviewees), although their names and title (function/role in an organisation) were collected by the ET for analysis of any trend with regard to information/data collected, their names or any details is not presented in the report in a way that information presented can be traced back to an individual interviewee or organisation, unless authorised by the latter in writing, or cited from published documents.

Ethics: The evaluation followed the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) ethical guidelines⁷ throughout the evaluation process. In specific terms, the ET adhered to the following ethical principles at all stages:

- Principle 1: independence and impartiality of the evaluator;*
- Principle 2: Avoiding harm* – evaluator ensured that the right of individuals and groups (to participate or not to participate) as well as their health and safety (risks related to COVID-19) were protected.
- Principle 3: Voluntary participation* - participation in the evaluation process was voluntary and free from external pressure.
- Principle 4: Informed consent* – the evaluator informed participants how information and data obtained was to be used, processed, shared, disposed of, prior to obtaining consent.
- Principle 6: Ensuring confidentiality* – the evaluator respected people's right to provide information in confidence, and has attempted to ensure that information cannot be traced to its source, without authorisation by the latter.

⁷ UN Evaluation Group, *UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation*, 2020.

5. Limitations

Key informant interviews by the international consultant were undertaken remotely as travel wasn't possible due to fallouts from Covid-19. Language barriers, problems with translations during phone interviews and often-not-very-good connectivity challenged the evaluation process, though these shortcomings were overcome to an extent by extensive interviews with UNDP staff (current and former) and development partners, supplemented with data collected by the national consultant of the ET who was able to visit some of the projects supported by UNDP and meet with local authorities and communities in provinces.

Secondary data on outputs and outcomes in M&E reports and progress reports were weak. This has been mitigated to a large extent by key informant interviews at different levels (senior staff, provincial staff and those involved in frontline delivery in the implementing agencies; communities; development partners and UNDP staff).

B. The country context and UNDP programme

6. Key elements of the country context

The past few decades brought about an impressive reduction in absolute poverty in the country; only 0.02 per cent of the population were estimated to be living below the \$1.25 per day poverty line in 2016.⁸ However, following the unilateral sanctions, poverty increased by 1 percentage point between 2017/18 and 2018/19, reaching 14% before the pandemic, according to the World Bank data. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been estimated at US\$628 billion for the Iranian calendar year 2020-21. In 2019, Iran had the lowest rate of economic growth (-9.5%) and highest rate of inflation (35.7%) recorded in the country for the past 20 years. The COVID-19 exacerbated the situation; with more than 2.7 million cases of infections and 76 thousand deaths as of May 15, 2021, Iran experienced the deadliest outbreak in the Middle East and North Africa region.⁹ Output loss from COVID-19 was less pronounced than in other countries, as Iran's economy had already contracted by 12% over the previous two years following unilateral sanctions imposed by the US government and low oil revenues.¹⁰ A gradual recovery in global demand and limited COVID-19 lockdowns contributed to stronger growth in the oil sector and in manufacturing which led GDP to grow by 3.4% in 2020/21. However, the spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19 in August 2021 led to a decline in economic activities.¹¹ It is estimated that loss in household incomes through the pandemic and the rising cost of living, due to inflation, will push poverty up by 20 percentage points.¹²

Iran is among the countries most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, compounding the adverse effects of the unilateral sanctions and the collapse of the oil market. Altogether the effects of this 'triple shock' could result in a decline of as much as 15% of GDP, affecting 50% of Iran's workforce. The country's capacity to respond to the virus is substantially impeded by unilateral economic sanctions re-imposed after the US Administration withdrew from the nuclear deal in May 2018, and further US sanctions imposed in March 2020. In addition to the health and education challenges, the economic slowdown brought about by COVID-

⁸ UNDP, 2016. Country Programme Document (2017-2021) for Iran

⁹ The World Bank Group, 2021. Iran Economic Monitor – The Economy at a Crossroads, Spring 2021

¹⁰ World Bank, *Ibid.*

¹¹ Source: World Bank, 7 October, 2021. Iran's Economic Update – October 2021

(<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/publication/economic-update-october-2021> (accessed 2 February 2022))

¹² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview#1> (accessed 12 February 2022)

19 has made life even more difficult for already-vulnerable families, especially those relying on daily work. Even before COVID-19, Iran's health system was feeling the effect of the sanctions. Their impact is now severe because they restrict the government's ability to raise funds or to import essential goods. Unemployment is estimated to stand at 6 to 7 million (22% to 24%). Official reports also indicate a subsequent possible total fall in economic participation of at least 2 million persons.¹³ These recent economic trends have added stress to low-income households and stalled poverty reduction. A range of social protection measures have been introduced in the response but, while they partially compensate for the lost incomes, their real value is affected by continued high inflation.¹⁴ The country has witnessed a very high rate of inflation (36.4 percent in 2020/21) which hit the lower income deciles hardest as it eroded the real value of their savings and government cash transfers.¹⁵ High inflation for food and housing disproportionately affects the poor, as these items constitute more than 75 percent of the consumption basket of the bottom 40 percent of the population.

Unemployment has been rising as job creation has fallen short of meeting labour supply, and despite a persistent low labour market participation rate (42 percent average), the rate of unemployment has been in the double digits. Unemployment has been especially high among the youth, female, and the highly educated (23.7, 15.6, and 14.2, respectively in 2020/21). Despite some progress towards economic diversification, high public sector presence continues to inhibit job creation and capital formation by the private sector.¹⁶ In terms of employment, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) play a major role in job creation in the country, employing almost 80% of the workforce,¹⁷ and these were severely impacted by the COVID pandemic.

Communicable diseases continue to be one of the most important public health problems in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Some infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), viral hepatitis, and pneumonia, still take lives today, and others, such as diarrhoeal diseases, leishmaniasis, and other zoonoses, continue to affect poor and socially marginalised populations. Decades ago, infectious diseases used to be at the forefront of all diseases in terms of incidence and mortality. Today, due to good case finding, care, treatment and surveillance system, these diseases have given way to other diseases and causes.¹⁸ On HIV, people who inject drugs have been the key epidemic contributor in the country and still account for the greatest share of new infections in the country. Recent studies show that the people-who-inject-drugs (PWID) population size is 186,686 and the HIV prevalence has decreased from 15% in 2010 to 3.1% in 2019. One of the current challenges is the large gap between the number of people diagnosed with HIV and the estimated number of HIV/AIDS cases not detected in the country. The reasons for this can be the presence of stigma and fear caused by the disease, lack of access to major at-risk populations (such as people who do not have access to or do not visit harm-reduction centres).

Gender gap between men and women is a major issue facing the country. The World Economic Forum's gender gap report¹⁹ for 2021 ranks Iran among the bottom seven countries (out of 156 countries) in terms of gender gaps in health, education, economy and political empowerment. According to a report by the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),²⁰ gender discrimination permeates major areas of law and practice. While finding some progress, such as in education and citizenship rights, Iran is one of only a few states not to have signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The problems of child marriage and domestic violence are also common, though some progress in these regards have been noted in the OHCHR report, particularly with regard to law against acid attacks.

¹³ UNDP, 2021. Results-Oriented Annual Report 2020

¹⁴ The World Bank Group, 2021. Iran Economic Monitor – The Economy at a Crossroads, Spring 2021

¹⁵ The World Bank Group, 2021. *Ibid*

¹⁶ The World Bank Group, 2021. *Ibid*

¹⁷ UNDP, 2021. Umbrella initiation plan - Socio-economic recovery and digital empowering of targeted MSMEs, women-headed households and local farmers impacted by COVID pandemic.

¹⁸ It should be noted that in Iran, like other parts of the world, Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including heart diseases, cancer, diabetes, chronic lung diseases and mental health conditions are the leading causes of death. The major risk factors for NCDs are tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, and air pollution.

¹⁹ World Economic Forum, 2021. Global Gender Gap Report 2021, March 2021.

²⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26862&LangID=E>

Climate change, land and natural resource degradation, along with rapid urbanisation and high fossil-fuel dependent economy continue to seriously undermine the country's future development trajectory.²¹ Iran's biggest environmental concern used to be air pollution. More recently, however, water shortages and rising temperatures, as well as mismanagement and a lack of enforcement of existing environmental regulations, have greatly contributed to Iran's environmental crisis. Iran is confronting the drying up of rivers and wetlands, severe groundwater depletion, desertification, biodiversity reduction, air and soil pollution, poor waste management, soil erosion, destruction of pastures and forests, and dust storms. These difficulties are the result of several decades of policies and cannot be effectively tackled without a significant shift in both local and national approaches. In the summer of 2021, environmental mismanagement led to protests in southwestern parts of the country, which later spread to several other provinces.²²

Iran is the seventh largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. With energy prices artificially set very low, energy use efficiency in all sectors is low. Iran's energy consumption for space heating and home appliances are 2.5 and 1.8 times the global average respectively. Total energy use in the building sector is much higher in Iran than the European average, although electricity consumption per square meter is lower. Iran's economy consumed an estimated 11.7 quadrillion British thermal units of primary energy in 2019, making it the largest energy consumer in the Middle East. In 2019, Iran was the world's fourth-largest consumer of natural gas after the United States, Russia, and China. Most of Iran's natural gas production is consumed domestically. In 2019, the residential and commercial sectors consumed the most natural gas (35%), followed by the industrial (including petrochemicals) sector (27%), and the electric power sector (26%).²³ Natural gas consumption in the residential and commercial sector and the industrial sector has increased significantly in the past decade as natural gas replaced some liquid fuels, Iran's natural gas pipeline system expanded, and the industrial sector expanded.

7. UNDP country programme in Iran (2017-2021)

As mentioned previously, the country programme is designed around four outcomes which are delivered through project and non-project activities. The non-project activities comprise a number of thematic working groups within the UN Country Team (UNCT), specifically (a) the co-chairmanship of the resilient economy working group through which UNDP jointly with UNICEF played a leading role in development and implementation of the Technical Assistance Package (TAP); and (b) the UN Iran's Socio-Economic Recovery Programme Against the Impact of COVID-19. This type of support which does not fall under the purview of a single grant or project is an important frame of reference under the overall chapeau of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework²⁴ (UNDAF) to guide UNDP's contributions to the broader economic and social agenda of the country. Project activities implemented during this programming cycle are presented in Annex 6 of this report.

UNDP's work under outcome 1 (natural resource management and climate change) focuses on three main areas, namely:

- (i) Integrated natural resource management and biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation through making more efficient and effective use of water in the agriculture sector, while at the same time protecting the livelihoods of small-scale farmers;
- (ii) Reduce the economy's carbon footprint through promoting energy efficiency in buildings, diversifying energy sources and increasing the share of renewable energies. UNDP continued to assist the Government in preparing its national communication on the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and

²¹ UNDP, 2016. Country Programme Document (2017-2021) for Iran

²² Atlantic Council, 16 September 2021. Iran's environmental woes could be Razi's Achilles heel

²³ Source: US Energy Information System (<https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/irn>), Accessed 05 February 2022

²⁴ Now renamed United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF)

- (iii) Implementation of Montreal Protocol and associated Kigali Amendment to phase out the use of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs).

UNDP’s work under outcome 2 (Health) focused on two main areas:

- (i) Communicable disease: UNDP continues its support to the Government to strengthen implementation of the National Strategic Plans on HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria and other communicable diseases;
- (ii) Management of health waste arising from the COVID pandemic.

UNDP’s work under outcome 3 (social welfare, poverty eradication and sustainable employment) has been relatively small and is being scaled up since the beginning of the COVID pandemic. This also builds on the work

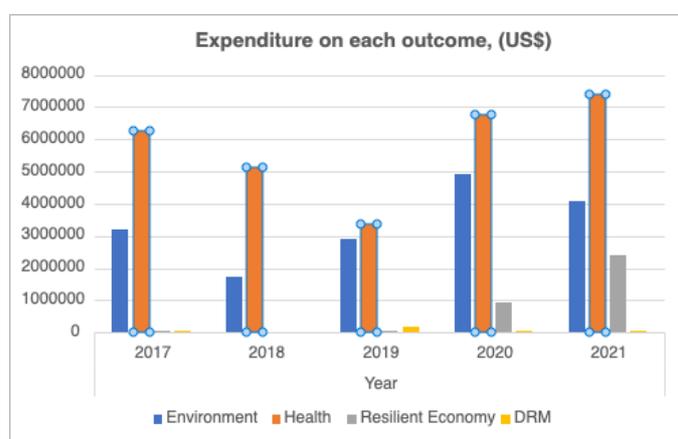


Figure 2: Year-wise expenditure on outcomes

on the national social protection model which was developed in the previous programme cycle. Progress with regard to outcome 4 (natural disaster management) has so far been limited to the support on post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) following a major flood in the country in 2019. The following Table (Table 2) provides a summary of expenditure incurred on the various outcomes during the current CPD period. As can be seen, health has accounted for almost 60 percent of the country programme expenditure, followed by the natural resource environment portfolio (36 percent). Year-wise breakdown of expenditure (Figure 2) shows that the health portfolio has

consistently accounted for the largest expenditure every single year.

Table 2: UNDP Iran country programme expenditure (US\$ million), 2017-2021

Country programme outcome & outputs	Expenditure (US\$)
Outcome 1: Integrated natural resource management, low carbon economy, and climate change policies and programmes more effectively	
Output 1.1: Strategies and measures that promote sustainable and integrated management of natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystem services are developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran.	12,803,724
Output 1.2: Climate change adaptation and mitigation solutions developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran.	
OUTCOME 2: Policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS, other communicable diseases and non-communicable disease	
Output 2.1: Strategies, mechanisms and tools to further strengthen implementation of the National Strategic Plans on HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria and other communicable diseases are developed and considered for adoption by the Islamic Republic of Iran.	21,527,161
Output 2.2: Solutions that help address priority NCDs are identified, developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Government.	
OUTCOME 3: Social welfare, poverty eradication and sustainable employment policies and programmes	
Output 3.1: Enhanced strategies and measures to achieve inclusive growth and poverty reduction are developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Government	981,077
Output 3.2: Innovative sustainable employment strategies and measures are developed and considered for adoption/implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran.	

OUTCOME 4: Relevant government agencies formulate, implement and monitor natural disaster management policies and programmes more effectively	
Output 4.1: Measures and tools that improve the preparation and implementation of multi-sectoral and multi-hazard DRR plans are developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran.	
Output 4.2: Options and mechanisms for effectively enhancing community resilience to natural disasters are developed and considered for adoption / implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran.	214,169
TOTAL	35,526,131

(Source: UNDP IRI)

C. Findings of the evaluation on CPD outputs and outcomes

8. Outcome 1: Integrated natural resource management, low carbon economy and climate change

Findings

1. UNDP's technical and coordination support in the restoration and rehabilitation of fragile ecosystems (wetlands and rangelands) through a multi-stakeholder platform contributed to more efficient management of natural resources and to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 15 (SDG 15) and Outcome 1 of the UNDP Strategic Plan.
2. UNDP has enabled government agencies used to top-down approach to planning and delivery to engage with and mobilise communities in natural resource management (NRM), as well as integrate livelihood needs of communities in protection and conservation activities.
3. Some of the assumptions underpinning the project designs were not borne out by evidence, such as the assumptions that through increased income and alternative livelihoods, farmers would be weaned away from livestock rearing which will aid in protection of forests and rangelands.
4. Several laws and bylaws have been developed to support wetlands development in the country, though the wetlands still do not benefit from these fully as their implementation continues to be weak.
5. Progress on implementation of the energy efficiency project has picked up in the last two years; however, the energy market component of the project faces challenges in view of the generous energy subsidy which acts as a disincentive for investment in energy efficiency measures.
6. UNDP's support to the GoI on implementation of Montreal Protocols and associated amendments has progressively reduced ODP in the country's refrigeration and air-conditioning industry and ensured that Iran consistently met its national targets.
7. There are a number of activities /projects which continue to be supported with the same approach for over 10-15 years, with unclear time-bound objectives.

8.1 Sustainable and integrated management of natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystem services and climate change adaptation and mitigation (Outputs 1.1 & 1.2)

8.1.1 Forests and rangeland management

The programme has enabled introduction of several measures at farmers' level which, while ensuring better natural resource management practices, and has attempted to enhance livelihoods of people dependent on natural resources. UNDP has continued to support the Gol in developing, testing and implementing forest and rangeland conservation measures during this CPD cycle through support on management of wetlands and drylands, as well as biodiversity and conservation mainstreaming in different types of ecosystems, including forests. Through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded Caspian Hyrcanian Forest Project (CHFP, May 2013-April 2018), UNDP enabled the government to initiate participatory planning and management approaches and promote new livelihood opportunities, including for disadvantaged and female-headed households. The project brought about a significant change in the way forests were managed in the country by introducing a multi-sectoral and multi-purpose approach which engaged communities in protection and conservation activities. Key informants, including those from the government counterparts, confirmed that this brought about a paradigm shift in the way conventional forest management was viewed in the area previously.²⁵ The introduction of alternative crops (saffron, verbana, borage) replacing wheat increased the income of farmers as well as enabled improving the soil conditions due to the perennial nature of these crops. Prior to this project, the regional project (Middle East and North Africa Regional Development for Integrated Sustainable Development, MENARID), also funded by GEF, which began in 2010 (ended in December 2017) provided important lessons that laid the groundwork for this project as well as subsequent work on forest and rangeland management.²⁶ The MENARID project focused on establishing and strengthening institutional mechanisms for natural resource management.

“The project enabled us to engage with communities and on socio-economic issues. Previously, we used to think of forest as all about trees and bio-mass, and not people.”
- One key informant

The work on conservation and protection of rangelands is strengthening community engagement and participation; however, some of the assumptions underpinning the project designs were not borne out by evidence. The CHFP helped develop guidelines for social forestry which has enabled the Forests, Rangeland and Watershed Organisation (FRWO) – the nodal official agency responsible for forest management in the country - to develop its own capacity to mobilise communities. The FRWO now has a number of community mobilisers who work closely with the communities. One of the assumptions was that through increased income and alternative livelihoods, farmers would be weaned away from livestock rearing which will aid in protection of forests and rangelands. Evidence from KIIs indicated that this may have happened only to a very limited extent in so far as some of the larger farmers were either able to switch from livestock rearing to saffron, other high value crops, or began to buy fodder for their livestock. Some large herders who had large piece of land were persuaded to participate in ecotourism, instead of using the land for livestock grazing. Overall reduction in herding has been insignificant – ‘probably about 1 percent’, according to one key informant who had a senior level responsibility in the project implementation. Only those large farmers who switched their land to ecotourism were protecting their land from grazing but common land remained open for uncontrolled grazing. This evidence is very much in line with what is generally experienced in similar situations elsewhere – getting resource-poor farmers to switch from herding of small animals (goats and sheep) is much harder than getting richer farmers to reduce their herd size.

UNDP has been supporting the Gol in forest and rangeland development through another project (Carbon sequestration project)²⁷ for nearly two decades, raising question about nature of continuing support and value addition by UNDP. The work on the ground is enabling rehabilitation of degraded rangelands and combating desertification, with active participation of communities in afforestation and growing of alternative crops. The project is now implemented in four²⁸ provinces, according to key informants. The FRWO is promoting diversification of tree species in new afforested areas so as to increase the biomass and windbreaks on farmers’

²⁵ Brent Tegler, Seyed Abolfazl Mirghasemi, 2019. Terminal Evaluation of the Caspian Hyrcanian Forest Project (CHFP) - Building a Multiple-use Forest Management Framework to Conserve Biodiversity in the Caspian Hyrcanian Forest Landscape.

²⁶ Arun Rijal, Mr. Hamid Farahani Rad, 2017. Report of the Terminal Evaluation Mission - Institutional Strengthening and Coherence for Integrated Natural Resources Management (GEF ID: 2732), December 2017

²⁷ Carbon sequestration project ends in June 2022. This is a NIM project, funded by the Gol.

²⁸ Previously, it was being implemented in 20 provinces.

field. Key informants reported a reduction in frequent forest fires due to increased greening in the dry areas of various wetlands. While these are all significant benefits for communities, the extent the project contributes to carbon sequestration is unclear as there is no system in place to measure this. UNDP's contribution in the early phase of this work in facilitating inter-sectoral/Ministerial collaboration, helping develop models and introducing community perspectives, were immense, but the question arises over the value it continues to add after nearly two decades of support.

UNDP helped set up savings and lending associations (SLA) which were new for FRWO. UNDP's assistance was in the form of seed capital for the community associations and technical support in functioning of these. Now these associations are functioning independently without any external assistance. FRWO was also supported in developing monitoring and assessment mechanisms which they are now able to use for continuous monitoring of the carbon sequestration project, particularly the social component. There are 30 SLAs which have their own rules and regulations, and some of these are developing into cooperatives. Already there are 8 co-operatives in the project area, according to key informants.

One of the limitations local officials face in engaging with communities lies in the outdated Forest Law in the country which requires any plan for joint management of forests involving communities to be first approved by the High Council of Forests, followed by a process of vetting by a scrutiny committee. The entire process is cumbersome and often take 2-3 years during which communities have to form cooperatives and demonstrate their viability. This is often frustrating as there is no incentive during this protracted formative period for communities to seriously engage in conservation.

8.1.2 Wetland development

The wetland projects have created awareness among communities about conservation practices in land, water and crop management, and these are now attracting government funding. UNDP has been supporting the government on protection and restoration of wetlands in the country for over 15 years; it has helped the GOI develop a strategy to address vulnerability of the communities living in the area and develop models that regenerate the wetlands through conservation measures like the management of catchment areas and on-farm water and land management. UNDP's technical assistance supported development of these integrated management plans in a participatory manner.²⁹ The final evaluation of the wetlands project undertaken in 2021 noted a substantial improvement in awareness and practices among farmers on cropping, soil and water conservation. This was also confirmed in KIIs. Now in its seventh phase, UNDP has been assisting the Department of Environment (DOE) in the restoration of the Lake Urmia Basin (LUB) since 2014, with funds made available by the Government of Japan. This is part of the wider wetland development programme in the country which the GOI began in 2005 with support from GEF; UNDP complements the GOI's own programme (Lake Urmia Restoration Programme) which focuses predominantly on the hardware side – creating water structures, bridges, canals, building etc – with assistance on interagency coordination, people's participation and livelihoods development. LUB is one of the largest salt water lakes in the world which has undergone severe degradation over the decades. The lake began retreating in the mid-2000s and by 2014 had shrunk to a fraction of its former size due to persistent general drought in Iran, but also the damming of the local rivers that flow into it, and the pumping of groundwater from the surrounding area. Apart from the LUB and Hamoun wetlands projects for which substantial funding has been obtained from the donor agencies, four integrated management plans for wetland ecosystems were approved by Provincial Planning and Development Councils (PPDCs) in four provinces. This enabled the provincial authorities to secure government financial resources needed for implementation of the management plans.

Drawing lessons from the previous work on wetlands, the work on wetlands rehabilitation is being scaled up in some of the most vulnerable and poorest provinces in the country. The EU-funded Hamoun wetlands

²⁹ UNDP, 2021. Results Oriented Annual Report, 2020, Islamic Republic of Iran

project (Feb 2020-Jan 2025) incorporates alternative livelihoods as part of the strategy to enable farmers to change their farming and natural resource utilisation practices. The Sistan-Baluchistan is one of the poorest provinces in the country and was severely affected by drought about two decades ago. At present only about 40,000 ha of arable land is under cultivation compared to nearly 150,000 ha some two decades ago.³⁰ The region is very dry and recent climate change has been causing episodic events of intense rainfall over a very short period of time leading to severe floods. Sand and dust-storms are also common in the region which includes Lorestan province as well. Livelihoods in the area is closely linked with the Hamoun wetlands ecosystem. Through the project, UNDP facilitated a baseline study and developed a strategy for water and soil conservation and alternative livelihoods for farmers. The area has potential for solar and wind energy development. An innovative aspect of the project has been the provision of small grants to cooperatives, community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-government organisations (NGOs) working at local level – almost 30% of the total budget of \$11.2 million is earmarked for this. Detailed guidelines have been drawn up for these grants and call for proposals was made last year for grants up to US\$25,000 on an average. The grants are now in the process of being rolled out with the support of a grants award committee comprising the Ministry of Jihad Agriculture (MJA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Trade, University of Zabol, UNDP and the project manager.

Evidence points to an increase in water utilisation at farmers’ field level, though this by itself is insufficient to lead to restoration of degraded wetlands without creating alternative livelihoods not dependent on natural resources. KIIs with local authorities in the provinces which participated in wetlands development indicated that groundwater recharging in farmers’ fields and wells are now happening and, in some areas, people have water throughout the year, while in the past the wells used to remain dry for at least six months a year. While the objective of enabling farmers to conserve water is laudable, this does not automatically lead to restoration of the lake. Due to dry weather conditions, farmers end up drawing more water from the underground and sub-surface reservoirs than the replenishment in the catchment area. New practices like drip irrigation and cultivation of low water-intensive crops will need to be introduced in the area in order to get farmers to participate in concrete measures for conservation of wetlands. This needs a comprehensive development model which weans away a large proportion of current population solely dependent on land and water resources for their livelihoods by developing industries and tourism.

Several laws and bylaws have been developed to support wetlands development in the country. Despite all the existing comprehensive regulatory framework, it is reported³¹ that the wetlands still do not benefit from these fully as the ecosystem to ensure their implementation continues to be weak, as the following factors continue to undermine their efficacy:

- The inability to provide alternative sources of livelihood in the rural areas forces the Government to turn a blind eye to the existing law
- Wetlands are usually located far downstream from dams and reservoirs; water users along the river course often illegally take water from the river before it reaches the wetland
- In the case of wetlands that are recharged mainly from ground water resources, over-exploitation of aquifers through water wells (almost entirely for irrigation and mostly illegal) usually severely affects the wetland.

Several agencies are often involved in infrastructure development and maintenance in the LUB or other wetland areas; this makes coordination a challenge, and management practices of the governmental organisations have not changed as desired. The DOE is responsible for final clearance of the environmental impact assessment (EIA) before work on any infrastructure can commence. In evaluating the EIA documents of the requesting organisations, the DOE is primarily concerned about the obligations that the organisation must accept in the EIA as remedial measures. In many instances, remedial obligations are accepted on paper

³⁰ UNDP, 2020. Project Document – Enhancing Natural Resource Management for the restoration of wetlands ecosystem and support to alternative livelihoods development of local communities. 8 January 2020

³¹ UNDP, 2020. Project Document, Islamic Republic of Iran. Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project Phase 3, May 2020

but are not respected in the field and even not followed-up by DOE.³² Hence, except for a few wetlands, many are still far from the desired level of conservation and continue to suffer from different threats.³³ Also, local communities traditionally use the wetlands for livestock (particularly cattle) husbandry, as a natural source of fodder for animals, food for the households and for their livelihood. While these are the values the local communities attribute to the wetlands, since these are government-owned lands the individual farmers rarely recognise any responsibility to conserve these.

8.1.3 Energy efficiency in buildings

Progress on implementation of the energy efficiency project was slow initially, and picked up in the last two years. The GEF-funded energy efficiency in building project (EEBP) which came to an end at the end of February 2022 had a very ambitious set of objectives, including: (i) development of legislative and regulatory framework to promote energy efficiency in buildings; (ii) developing and promoting energy efficient technologies in 400 public buildings (new and old); and (iii) creating a tradeable energy saving market in the country whereby energy saving certificates can be traded just like the global carbon trading market. The legislative and regulatory framework did not made much headway. The second component of the project got off to a slow start initially and its implementation picked up after the first two years. One reason for the tardy progress in the initial phase was a lack of clarity on the appropriate selection criteria for the buildings to be targeted for retrofitting. The Ministry initially targeted public buildings which were upwards of 10,000 sq. metres size; this made the process difficult as such large buildings usually required a complicated chain of approvals. Subsequently the size threshold was lowered which helped speed up the implementation. With residential and commercial buildings, owners had to contribute 70% of the cost and the project subsidised 30%. Public meetings and awareness campaigns helped sensitise people about energy conservation. Generally, people are aware of the need for energy conservation and realise that the current subsidy regime will not last for ever. By the end of 2021, a total of 541 buildings have been covered as against the initial target of 400,³⁴ according to key informants from several agencies.

The project assisted the Urban Development Ministry in developing standards for energy efficient building and these were incorporated into the building code 19. Although the building code is not mandatory, it does have provisions for certain concessions for new buildings that follow the code. Training is being provided to 200 engineers in five provinces. Nationwide, some 5,000 engineers will need to be trained in the coming years. The original building code was developed some three decades ago, according to at least 3 knowledgeable key informants. The Government rolled out the Code for implementation only last year for use in public buildings; however, there is no strong commitment to follow through on this mandate as the building code is not mandatory.

The energy market component of the project faces challenges in view of generous energy subsidy which acts as a disincentive against investment in efficient energy measures. Iran is not involved in global carbon market as the Government has not signed the Paris Agreement. However, attempts are being made within the country to promote a domestic carbon trading market. Buildings are being fitted with smart energy meters which can be monitored. UNDP has worked with the construction industry to promote energy efficient technology. Energy market as envisaged in the project document is still not in operation as systems are not yet ready for issuing energy efficiency certificates or trading these in the market. Measurement and verification system for energy efficiency is still being developed. One challenge Iran faces in this effort is that incentives for energy conservation are low as the government heavily subsidises the energy sector. Iran is the seventh largest emitter of CO₂ and the country spends about 20% of its government's budget on energy subsidy. This works as a

³² UNDP, 2020 *ibid*

³³ UNDP, 2020 *ibid*

³⁴ Devaluation of currency meant that the project had more resources to undertake additional buildings

disincentive for investment in deployment of energy-efficient measures by private and public builders, according to key informants.

The energy efficiency project involves multiple agencies as responsibilities for different functions are scattered across several departments and ministries. Stakeholders credited UNDP for facilitating a highly collaborative Steering Committee. The Vice Presidency for Science and Technology (VPST), Iranian National Standards Organisation (INSO), Iranian Fuel Conservation Organisation (IFCO), SATBA and Ministry of Roads, Housing and Urban Development are all involved in delivery of the EEB project. According to external key informants, coordination among these agencies is complicated by the multiplicity of the agencies; however, the project steering committee has been able to foster a peer-relationship among all these agencies. The Roads, Housing and Urban Development Research Centre of the Urban Development Ministry is involved in ongoing research on energy efficiency in all infrastructure development, with core funding from the Gol. The project provided specific funding to support the Centre to conduct a study on regulations related to energy efficiency in buildings in 10 other countries. This helped develop guidance tailored to Iran's needs. The INSO is responsible for monitoring of energy consumption standards. There are two standards for residential and non-residential buildings. The project made it possible for INSO to start implementing the standards. The Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organisation (SATBA) is responsible for providing training and guidance on energy efficiency to all government agencies and the private sector. It runs regular training courses at its centre which is partly funded by Japan. The Government's Supreme Energy Council has approved bylaws on energy efficiency; this now needs to be translated into guidelines and manuals so that the building code 19 can be implemented.

8.2 Control of organic pollutants and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (output 1.3)

Work on persistent organic pollutants (POP) envisaged in the CPD could not be initiated as there was no funding available for this.

Through a multi-agency project involving UNEP and UNIDO, UNDP is supporting the Gol (National Ozone Office of the DOE) in development and implementation of standards in the air conditioning, insulation and refrigeration industry to bring the practices in line with the Montreal Protocol on Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) and Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC) Phaseout Management Plan (HPMP).³⁵ The German technical agency, GiZ, works closely with UNDP in providing technical support where necessary to the Ministry of Industry and Iran's customs department on monitoring of all domestic production and import of refrigeration/air-conditioning equipment. UNDP is the lead agency in the HPMP project, while UNEP supports the government in developing rules and regulations as well as training of officials, and GiZ provides support in monitoring and implementation, working closely with the manufacturers in the foam and refrigeration sector. Iran has not yet ratified the Kigali amendment³⁶ to the Montreal Protocol, but the process has been initiated. UNDP is working with the National Ozone Unit to develop a roadmap for the Parliament to ratify the Kigali amendment. UNDP reports show that during 2019 and 2020, the country exceeded its agreed target in reducing HCFC importation by significant amount - during 2020 the total HCFC import into the country was only 124.5 ODP tons which was 49% less than the target of 247.3 tons.³⁷

³⁵ The 19th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol in September 2007, through its Decision XIX/6, adopted an accelerated phase-out schedule for HCFCs.

³⁶ The 1989 Montreal Protocol was aimed at protecting the earth from ozone-depleting chemicals like the chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) that were earlier used in air-conditioning and refrigerant industry. The widespread use of CFCs had caused a hole in the Ozone layer on the earth's atmosphere, which allowed harmful radiations to reach the earth. The Montreal Protocol led to replacement of CFCs with HFCs which do not destroy the Oxone layer. However, HFCs were later found to be extremely potent in causing global warming, while they solved the problem of CFCs. The Kigali amendment enabled the Montreal Protocol to mandate the elimination of HFCs as well. The aim of Kigali Amendment is to phase out by 2045 at least 80% of all HFCs globally. Several alternatives to HCFCs are readily available, but some of them are known to have high global warming potentials (GWP). Under the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, a direct switch to natural refrigerants, which have zero ozone depleting potential (ODP) and low global warming potential, is encouraged.

³⁷ UNDP, 2021. Result-Oriented Annual Report, 2022

The support provided by UNDP on the ODS project has been going on for nearly 15 years and therefore it raises the question of sustainability and UNDP's continuing role. KIIs indicated that as technology in this field is constantly evolving in the manufacture of refrigeration and air-conditioning industry globally, Iranian officials often lack the exposure to new technologies, largely due to the sanctions. There is also need for procurement of certain equipment used in monitoring of ODS which UNDP facilitates as these come within the purview of sanctions. These factors justify the rationale for continuing support on the implementation of Montreal Protocol and associated agreements.

9. Outcome 2: Policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS, other communicable and non-communicable diseases

Findings:

8. UNDP continued to provide technical, financial and procurement support to the Government to implement the National Strategic Plan to combat HIV/AIDS and TB and successfully negotiated with the GOI the inclusion of sensitive population groups (transgender, high-risk-behaviour-men) in the ambit of the HIV work in the country.
9. During the COVID pandemic, UNDP started supporting the Ministry of Health on waste management by providing equipment and medical waste handling and training of health workers. This subsequently led to UNDP getting involved in supporting the municipal authorities on solid waste management.
10. The waste management support to the Tehran Municipality which started less than two years ago is showing good potential for scaling up.
11. There are emerging health issues linked to climate change and environment which do not receive adequate attention from agencies. For example, dengue, sand and dust storm, pollution, etc.

9.1 Strategies, mechanisms and tools for implementation of the National Strategic Plans on HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria and other communicable diseases (Output 2.1)

UNDP continued to support effective control of communicable diseases i.e., HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis (TB) through provision of support to the Centre for Communicable Diseases Control (CDC), State Welfare Organisation, Prisons Organisation (subrecipients of the Global Fund Programme) as well as 63 Universities of Medical Sciences (sub-sub-recipients of the Global Fund Programme). As a result, all the 63 Universities of Medical Sciences have integrated HIV control programmes into their annual action plans. Moreover 11 universities have also integrated TB diagnosis, care and treatment services for Afghan refugees and migrants into their TB programmes.³⁸ The support to the Prisons Organisation now covers all the 31 provinces where the former undertakes screening, testing and treatment procedures through its clinics. During the peak of the COVID-19, the clinics were able to undertake rapid tests, PCR tests and vaccination. UNDP conducted a number training for prison officials and vulnerable groups of inmates on sexually transmitted infections, women and infections, stigmatisation and discrimination, COVID-appropriate behaviour, according to key informants.

UNDP as the principal recipient of the Global Fund continued to provide technical, financial and procurement support to the Government to implement the National Strategic Plan to combat HIV/AIDS and TB. The Global Fund's support contributes to the achievement of the overall strategic goals of the 5th National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2020-2024 related to scale up of differentiated HIV testing services, improving the coverage and quality of treatment, care and support and expansion of HIV prevention services.³⁹ UNDP supported the development of the 5th NSP, including development of the monitoring and evaluation framework for this plan. Under the 5th NSP, High-Risk-Behaviour-women and men are covered in HIV related programmes

³⁸ UNDP, 2021. Result-Oriented Annual Report, 2020

³⁹ UNDP, 2021. Project document: Enhancement of National HIV Response with Focus on Target Beneficiary Groups in line with fifth National Strategic Plan 2020-2024, 08 March 2021

and UNDP is supporting the provision of services to these key population groups. The Management Information System (MIS) for NSP has been expanded and gender disaggregated data is available for all the care, treatment and harm reduction services.⁴⁰ The evaluation⁴¹ of the New Funding Mechanism 2 (NFM 2) found that standard operational guidelines and protocols developed for service provision were being used by all stakeholders involved in NSP implementation, and self-assessment and M&E templates were used for evaluating the services and identifying the gaps.

Since 2020, UNDP supported the health system's response to COVID-19. UNDP supported upgrading of vaccine software of CDC to strengthen vaccine distribution and vaccine data management capacities for preparedness to potential future health crises. In addition, to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of HIV services to key populations, UNDP supported the establishment of 59 mobile centres which were also used for COVID-19 response interventions. To support the Government in provisioning personal protection equipment (PPEs) when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Iran, UNDP (using partly the Global Fund grant as well as funds from the DG-ECHO), mobilised its available global network to procure required PPEs, especially for service provision centres to key populations. UNDP's extended support to the health sector in response to COVID-19 resulted in the development and implementation of a joint project with UNICEF and UNFPA funded by the European Union (EU) under ECHO-HIP 2021.⁴² The DG ECHO-funded COVID-19 Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) enabled UNDP to work with a network of NGOs and CBOs with access to remote areas in provinces where the pandemic had hit hard. Through the RCCE grant, projects communications materials (brochures, posters, short educational clips, podcast, booklets, animations etc.) were developed and awareness campaigns were launched in communities.

On TB, UNDP's work is focused on enhancing access of Afghan migrants/refugees and host communities in targeted provinces to TB screening and treatment services. UNDP supported this national priority of TB control under the framework of multi-Country TB project – a regional initiative covering Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.⁴³ The work has expanded from 6 Universities of Medical Science (UMSs) in 2019 to 11 UMSs in 2020 and then to 16 UMSs in 2021. To date, 336,165 Afghan migrants in 10 targeted provinces have been screened and they know their TB status. This resulted in detection of 484 (175% of the target) TB patients and their linkage to the treatment system. Out of 484 identified cases in 2021, 416 (86%) people were successfully treated.⁴⁴ In Sistan and Balochistan, the bordering province which is used largely for illegal crossings, access to diagnostic, care and treatment services for COVID 19 and TB as well as mobile Primary Health Care services was provided. Afghan migrants (documented and undocumented) are a difficult group to track and trace as many of them have no legal status in the country. According to key informants, there is need for a dialogue among the authorities in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan who are part of this multi-country project, something the government officials have been expecting UNDP and UNAIDS to facilitate.

A significant achievement of UNDP has been successful negotiation with the GOI to include sensitive population groups (transgender, high-risk-behaviour-men) in the ambit of the HIV work in the country. UNDP carried out a review of the legal framework in the country affecting HIV/AIDS victims and examined their rights vis-à-vis stigmatisation and discrimination in various spheres. This helped foster dialogue with GOI at senior levels and led to subsequent changes in policy to ensure that victims' rights are strengthened and upheld.

During the COVID pandemic, UNDP started supporting the Ministry of Health (MoH) on health waste management by providing equipment and medical waste handling and training of health workers. This subsequently led to UNDP getting involved in supporting the municipal authorities on solid waste management. During 2020-2021, the GF provided \$1 million as part of its COVID-19 response for waste management in hospitals. UNDP also supported the Tehran municipality in management of solid waste, with

⁴⁰ UNDP, 2022. Results-Oriented Annual Report 2021.

⁴¹ APMG Health, 2020. FOCUSED COUNTRY EVALUATIONS, IRAN HIV EVALUATION - REMOTE EVALUATION REPORT, September 2020

⁴² UNDP, 2022. Results-Oriented Annual Report 2021.

⁴³ UNDP, 2022 *ibid.*

⁴⁴ UNDP, 2022 *ibid.*

funding from both Japan and the municipal authorities. UNDP focused on public awareness on the one hand and provision of waste handling equipment which the Government could not import due to sanctions, on the other. Through this support, the municipality is now able to sort organic waste that goes for composting and solid waste. Currently discussions are ongoing to develop public-private partnership (PPP) so as to attract businesses interested in processing the wastes for composting and recycling. Building on the experience of the waste management work with the Tehran municipality, UNDP is now developing project initiation plan for similar work in three northern provinces at the request of the government.

There are emerging health issues linked to climate change and environment which do not receive adequate attention from agencies. For example, dengue, sand and dust storm, pollution, etc. The above work on waste management is a good initiative towards this end. Historically, UNDP's health programme has been centred around the Global Fund project, with some support on the COVID-19 response (PPE supplies and management of health waste). By and large, the expertise within the team is on project management and procurement. This works well in tandem with the specialised health expertise that comes from UNAIDS and WHO, the two UN organisations with expertise on health-related policies and strategies. However, not having any health expertise within the team limits UNDP's ability to engage on these emerging issues which it could have otherwise brought to the table for discussions on health strategies and policies with the government.

All procurements, including procurement of services under the Global Fund grants, are being conducted by UNDP. Besides the Global Fund project procurement, UNDP supports other UN agencies on procurement of health supplies. During 2020, UNDP undertook procurement for the DG-ECHO supported Consortium involving UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO and Relief International in their response to the COVID-19 crisis. On the whole, the procurement of health supplies works efficiently, though there may be occasional delays due to complicated procedures that needs to be followed to comply with the sanctions regime, besides the fact that UNDP is not allowed to procure health supplies locally for quality assurance issues. At times, delays take place at the Gol's end as well, as agreement on specifications often involve several departments which takes time.

9.2 Solutions that help address priority non-communicable diseases (Output 2.2)

During the CPD period, there has not been any progress on this output as the health focus continued to remain on the Global Fund project, and to a limited extent, COVID-19 response.

10. Outcome 3: Social welfare, poverty eradication and sustainable employment policies and programme

Findings:

11. UNDP's engagement on poverty and economic growth is at an early stage of conceptualisation and there were no completed CPD outputs during the current programme cycle.
12. Responding to COVID, UNDP began engaging on social protection programme targeting the most vulnerable through conditional cash support which has provided timely assistance to over 5,000 vulnerable households.
13. The job generation and employment programmes started as response to the COVID has had mixed results in terms of reaching out to the most-vulnerable and ensuring market access for the producers.

10.1 Enhanced strategies and measures to achieve inclusive growth and poverty reduction (Output 3.1)

Work on this output is at a very early stage. In 2021, UNDP started dialogue with Planning and Budget Organisation (PBO) for the design of Multi-Poverty Index and National Human Development Report (HDR).

UNDP worked closely with the Vice-Presidency on Rural and Deprived Areas for scaling up poverty reduction and job generation models in rural and deprived areas.⁴⁵ Until the onset of the COVID pandemic in early 2020, very little was done by UNDP on this outcome, ostensibly due to resource constraints. Subsequently, as a co-chair of UNDAF Environment and Resilient Economy Working Group, UNDP played a critical role in design and implementation of Technical Assistance Package to minimise the impact of sanctions on the most vulnerable and has co-led (with UNICEF) the design of Socio-Economic Response Plan against COVID-19.⁴⁶

10.2 Innovative sustainable employment strategies and measures (Output 3.2)

In response to COVID-19, the Rapid Socio-Economic Recovery Initiative of UNDP (RASER) has reached out to over 5,000 people (including 50% women) in the form of conditional cash transfers in the most impacted provinces of Tehran, Lorestan and Hormozgan (pilot). The RASER initiative started with TRAC funds and then was supplemented with funds from the Government of Japan, implemented by the Ministry of Jihad Agriculture (MJA). In close collaboration with the Government, UNDP designed and rolled out social protection packages including in-kind support to the target groups with soft conditionalities such as distributing PPEs, participation in health and psychosocial trainings, covering all individuals with COVID-19 insurance. The conditional cash transfer (a one-year programme) has so far reached about 5,000 households in 3 provinces and included cash vouchers to meet the basic needs for goods (meat, rice, etc for better nutrition). Detailed standard operating procedures (SOPs) for administration of the cash transfer intervention have been formulated and government officials trained in this. UNDP facilitated access of 1,100 women and 250 men to psycho-social support services during 2020. In 2021, UNDP's work covered three provinces where 3,000 individuals including 115 MSMEs were supported,⁴⁷ covering 2,450 MSMEs through supply-side (productive-asset centred) interventions (human, physical and financial capital). UNDP also supported re-orienting some of the MSMEs production lines towards production of PPEs which were in short supply and on high demand in the local markets. The focus has been primarily on women-headed-households and women cooperatives/enterprises.

The selection of households is done based on vulnerability criteria targeting mostly rural population. Field visits to 14 micro-enterprises/workshops supported by UNDP in four provinces and discussions with beneficiaries revealed that this process has been fraught with challenges in that bulk of the benefits are going to relatively better-off or not-so-poor households. The owners of the enterprise supported are those who have had prior experience of running a selected economic enterprise (tailoring shop, weaving, dairy, fruit and vegetable drying, etc) and these are invariably people who are relatively well off, some with one or more family members in full time employment as well. They receive the equipment and financial assistance to provide training to 'vulnerable' households who generally did not have any prior experience or alternative sources of income. The latter group of cohorts did not receive any financial support except for free training, and they are supposed to either find employment with existing businesses on completion of their training or start their own businesses. This does raise question of equity as large proportion of the direct assistance goes to the better-off. The beneficiary selection process was vitiated by two other factors which contribute to high inclusion error:

- a) Initial selection of beneficiaries was done on the recommendations of MJA staff, without adequate vetting process
- b) The project implementation team had to get the beneficiary selection process completed within a very short period of time as the implementation period was compressed.

Selection of enterprises/economic activities were not informed by a systematic study of their viability in terms of market access and the type of skills and technology that is appropriate in the local context. Those involved in fruit drying, for example, find it hard to sell their products in the local area, and do not have the

⁴⁵ UNDP, 2022. Results-Oriented Annual Report 2021.

⁴⁶ UNDP, 2022 *ibid*.

⁴⁷ UNDP, 2022. Results-Oriented Annual Report 2021.

wherewithal to access markets in far-off places like Tehran or other big cities. UNDP is now initiating a project to support MSMEs, especially those involving women, in marketing through the use of digital platforms.⁴⁸ Further, the equipment (sewing machine, weaving equipment) that were procured were not appropriate and over half of the households who received these reported not to have used these, including some who never even opened the boxes. The reason is that women in these areas are used to one type of equipment, and what was provided to them was entirely different.

Besides the COVID-responsive job generation project, through the several environment projects, UNDP has continued to improve the livelihoods of farmers and herders. Under EU Sistan Project, a small grants mechanism was developed and 36 priority quick win project proposals were approved to support agriculture and husbandry, women economic empowerment, tourism, fisheries, trade and commerce and entrepreneurship. The proposals are intended to benefit 180 households (40% of them are women).⁴⁹ Over the years, various development interventions in the country created small micro-credit funds and village savings and loans associations (VSLA) as tools for poverty eradication and job generation. UNDP, in close collaboration with the Government, connected these funds with provincial cooperatives. To date, UNDP activated more than 60 micro-credit funds in 6 counties. UNDP in close collaboration with the Resident Coordinator' Office (RCO) has started a workstream with the Office of the Vice President on Rural and Deprived areas based on the good experience that Iran has on micro-credit funds and microfinance.⁵⁰

11. Outcome 4: Natural disaster management policies and programmes

Finding:

14. UNDP programme is yet to engage in a substantive manner on disaster management, though some work on disaster preparedness and risk reduction was evidenced.

Iran has a strong disaster response system – its rapid response capacity is generally well known. However, according to key informants, when it comes to recovery, risk reduction and risk-informed planning, the situation is less positive. The CPD targeted two outputs under this outcome: (i) disaster risk reduction (DRR), and (ii) resilience at community level. UNDP envisaged supporting the Government in the generation, analysis and use of up-to-date data on multi-hazard disaster risks, as well as in vulnerability analysis of specific population groups. The evaluation found some evidence work in these areas, though without a coherent strategy and plan: (a) an ad hoc support on a post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) carried out after floods in 2019; (b) design of temporary shelter models and preparedness training packages developed for disaster affected areas; and (c) a series of workshops in disaster prone cities of Lorestan province conducted for CBOs, local authorities, fire brigades, National Disaster Management Organisation (NDMO) officials, and Red Crescent Society, RCS.⁵¹ Additionally, some of the work on environment related to adoption of good practices in natural resource management may be said to contribute indirectly to DRR and resilience, though there is no clear strategy on these.

⁴⁸ UNDP, 2021. Umbrella initiation plan - Socio-economic recovery and digital empowering of targeted MSMEs, women-headed households and local farmers impacted by COVID pandemic.

⁴⁹ UNDP, 2022. Results-Oriented Annual Report 2021.

⁵⁰ UNDP, 2022. *Ibid*

⁵¹ UNDP, 2022. *Ibid*

D. Assessment against evaluation criteria

12. Relevance

Findings:

15. A NIM modality which drives the CPD ensures strong convergence between national priorities and UNDP's support.
16. Besides targeting the capacity needs of a number of institutions that play crucial role in delivery of targeted outputs, UNDP has attempted to focus on the needs of some of the most vulnerable geographical areas and population groups.
17. UNDP's SDG integrator role in the country has been constrained by the limited space for engagement on this in national development policy.
18. UNDP has failed to leverage its strengths to the full potential for linking its environment programme with vulnerability, poverty and resilience.
19. In a country where funding opportunities remain limited, UNDP has been fairly successful in tapping donor funds as well as financing by the government.
20. The challenges posed by the COVID pandemic provided an impetus for reorientation of the country programme to include a major thrust on economic recovery and employment which was missing in the preceding years.

12.1 Alignment with national policies and international priorities

A National Implementation Modality (NIM) modality which drives the CPD ensures strong convergence between national priorities and the support provided by UNDP. The CPD was drafted taking into account the sixth Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2021) of the Government of Iran which prioritises three areas, namely: (a) promoting a resilient economy; (b) progress in science and technology; and (c) promotion of cultural excellence. In section C, evidence has been presented of UNDP's support on various outputs which directly contributed to the government priorities. The country programme's primary emphasis was on the first of the three national development priorities (resilient economy) through programming in four key areas: environmentally sustainable development; health and development; social welfare, poverty eradication and sustainable employment; and disaster risk reduction and management. Within this, UNDP's work concentrated on the areas of environment and health, with initiatives on social welfare and sustainable employment starting after the COVID-19 pandemic. The work on the environment which focused mostly on natural resource management has always had links to rural poverty alleviation and promotion of alternative livelihoods, as was discussed in sub-section 8. The disaster management and risk reduction area has not directly received much attention – except for a one-off intervention after the 2019 floods. In relation to the UNDAF outcomes, as the CPD priorities were derived from the UNDAF, there is a close alignment with the latter. UNDP's outcome 1 mirrors UNDAF outcomes 1.1 and 1.2, and health outcomes contribute to UNDAF Outcomes 2.2 and 2.3. Likewise, social welfare and disaster management outcomes in the CPD mirror the outcomes 3.1, 3.5 and 3.4 in the UNDAF.

Following the unilateral sanctions by the US Government, in 2019, the UN and the Government of Iran agreed on a re-prioritisation of the UNDAF and the CPDs through the framework is the Technical Assistance Package (TAP). The TAP enabled reprioritisation of the social welfare and employment agenda which was further reinforced since early 2020 with the eruption of COVID-19. As mentioned earlier, as co-chair of the resilient economy working group UNDP played a leading role in development and implementation of the TAP and the UN response to the Impact of COVID-19.

12.2 Addressing the needs of the priority groups

The CPD laid emphasis on improving technical and administrative capacity of key GoI institutions on green economy and environment sector and on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and communicable disease control.

In this regard, UNDP has worked with several key institutions of the Government (Department of Environment, FRWO, VPST and the Ministry of Health) in disadvantaged and environmentally-stressed areas. KIIs with all relevant stakeholders showed that in several key areas, capacity of the institutions has been enhanced through targeted project support from UNDP:

- Inter-departmental /sectoral coordination within provinces on forest protection, wetlands development, environment, and among different entities involved in energy efficiency project at the national level
- Sensitisation and training of FRWO and DOE officials in engaging with communities and their livelihoods needs in planning natural resource management, forest protection and rural development programmes
- Capacity of the CDC to monitor and report on the Global Fund HIV/AIDS programme, as well as engage on the issue of stigma
- Capacity of the Tehran Municipal Authority to engage with communities on waste management on raising awareness about recycling at household level.

The CPD identified the needs of several highly vulnerable population groups through continuing engagement with people living with HIV/AIDS, those at high risk of contracting tuberculosis and malaria and those most vulnerable to non-communicable diseases. In this, particular attention was paid to the Afghan migrants and refugees and prison inmates, who otherwise run the risk of being left out of the mainstream health system. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, UNDP programme attempted to support the government in addressing the needs of the urban and rural poor for employment, particularly the female-headed households hit hard by the pandemic. Another major initiative during the CPD has been the targeting of Sistan-Balochistan and Lorestan provinces which are the two poorest provinces in the country under the Hamoun wetlands project.

12.3 UNDP's advocacy and positioning

UNDP's long involvement in the environment and climate change programming on the one hand and its role as the Principal Recipient of the Global Fund on the other have come to be associated with UNDP's distinct identity in the country. As discussed in sub-section section 8, UNDP's role in Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project (CIWP) for nearly two decades, energy efficiency in buildings initiative, and rangeland and forest protection are areas where the external stakeholders, particularly the government counterparts, see UNDP's core competence in the country. Additionally, UNDP's capacity to deal with international procurement of medicines, equipment and supplies for various development programmes in the country is considered another distinctive competence of UNDP by the government and other UN agencies. This is particularly vital in the context of the sanctions regime the country is under.

UNDP has not been very active in its role as SDG integrator in the country or on the economic development agenda. As the GoI has not accepted to integrate the SDGs into the national planning and budgeting process, there was very limited scope for UNDP to play its SDG integrator role. UNDP therefore confined itself to working with other UN agencies in integrating the key SDGs in joint UN programmes developed during the period. On the socio-economic recovery agenda, only since the COVID pandemic has UNDP taken an active lead on behalf of the UN. The predominant trend during the CPD period has been of UNDP's engagement with the GoI on delivery of projects on environment and the Global Fund. By and large, the engagement has been at technical level, with some evidence of UNDP's support on policy development, for example: (a) law on people's participation in NRM/forest management; (b) development of national strategic plans for HIV-AIDS and tuberculosis. With focus on projects, as UNDP engaged with government counterparts at a technical level, it

may have missed opportunities to create the space to support the government in its policy development by bringing evidence and strategic analysis to the table.

UNDP has failed to leverage its strengths to the full potential for linking its environment programme with vulnerability, poverty and resilience. With over two decades of involvement in environment climate change programming in the country, UNDP has often attempted to address people’s livelihoods in some of the marginal areas. However, it has failed to articulate the links between environment and climate change on the one hand, and disaster risk reduction, vulnerability, poverty and resilience on the other. Within the environment portfolio, the livelihoods activities have been seen to be discrete ‘projects’ in themselves. While the donor appetite for funding anti-poverty or resilience programmes in a country like Iran may be limited, a deeper analytical framework demonstrating the organic links between poverty, vulnerability and environmental factors could build a stronger case for support.

12.4 Resource mobilisation

In a country where funding opportunities remain limited, UNDP has been fairly successful in tapping donor funds as well as financing by the government. As a country under sanctions, Iran presents limited opportunity for tapping external development assistance. However, as an upper-middle income country, Iran is not starved of financial resources. In all the projects UNDP has been involved in, a substantial amount of funds is allocated by the government: the wetlands project and the carbon sequestration projects are currently wholly funded by the GoI, while in all other projects the government share of resources is substantial. For the first three years of the country programme, the external resources were mostly for the environment (GEF, European Union, Montreal Protocol, Japan) and the Global Fund (GF) programme. During 2020, the CO mobilised nearly \$15 million (Table 3) which was 120% of its annual target, and during 2021, it raised little short of \$20 million, taking the five-year total resource mobilisation to \$56.5 million. During the last 2020 and 2021, the CO diversified its resources: (a) through UNICEF, UNDP received funds from DG-ECHO (\$2.49 million) to respond to COVID-19 pandemic; (b) the CO secured over \$11 million from DG-DEVCO to be spent on a five-year project (2019-2023) on integrated natural resource management and livelihoods in Hamoun region.

Table 3: Resource mobilisation by the CO, 2017-2021⁵² (US\$)

Source of Funds	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
DG-ECHO	795,794	1,696,394	-	-	-
EU Funding	124,673	230,013	1,107,329	-	-
Funding Windows	10,908	165,470	35,951	-	-
Government of Iran	293,482	481,239	83,612	1,351,975	368,911
Government of Japan	2,921,193	2,980,284	892,857	1,000,000	1,000,000
UN-HABITAT	61,947	-	-	-	-
UN-OCHA	-	-	-	31,600	-
GEF	1,131,873	1,580,253	899,306	495,549	-
GFATM	13,043,507	5,561,603	2,856,963	4,625,627	4,606,383
Montreal Protocol	1,444,864	2,244,088	1,300,686	1,454,952	-
Total	19,828,240	14,939,345	7,176,702	8,959,704	5,975,294

(Source: UNDP Iran, 16-02-2022)

⁵² The resources mobilised by the end of 2021 also cover some of the programme costs that will be incurred during 2022 as the CPD was extended to December 2022.

UNDP's ability to raise resources from the vertical funds is acknowledged by the GoI and donors. Of the total funds mobilised, nearly 54 percent came from the Global Fund, followed by Japan (15.5 percent), Montreal Protocol (11.3 percent) and the GEF (7.22 percent). Thus, the three vertical funds (Global fund, Montreal Protocol and GEF) accounted for nearly 72.5 percent of all funds mobilised. External stakeholders interviewed during this evaluation particularly appreciated UNDP's ability to engage with the government stakeholders on an ongoing basis on the one hand and facilitate delivery of projects on the other, that too through a national implementation modality (NIM). Within the UN system in Iran, UNDP has the largest operational presence and capacity which gives it an edge.

12.5 South-South cooperation (SSC)

On several projects, there have been exchanges at technical level between Iran and neighbouring countries; however no ongoing south-south cooperation initiative has emerged. A group of health experts from Azerbaijan and Pakistan visited Iran to see the work related to HIV/AIDS stigma and inclusion of high-risk-behaviour-women in the programme; staff from the carbon sequestration project visited India to learn from that country's experience; an exchange programme on job generation with participants from Nepal, Bangladesh, Singapore and Iran was organised in 2020 following the outbreak of COVID-19. Iran also hosted a sand and dust storm meeting with participation of 40 countries. Though these were useful at project level, there was no initiative undertaken at a strategic level to foster SSC between the Government of Iran and other countries on major development issues. While the government may not have clearly articulated its specific strategic interest in SSC, there was a need to facilitate dialogue at a regional level with countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey on transboundary issues like the Helmand River basin (which feeds the Hamoun wetlands), Afghan migrants and refugees, sand and dust storms, etc., which UNDP could have initiated.

12.6 Adapting and responding to the COVID pandemic and fallouts of unilateral sanctions

The COVID pandemic has presented challenges as well as opportunities for better programming. One of the first responses from UNDP was to provide PPEs and training to medical staff in hospitals in handling post-COVID medical waste. As discussed in section 10.2, through the RASER project initiated in 2020, economic needs of highly vulnerable households arising from the COVID pandemic were sought to be addressed. Apart from the projects in environment cluster which often integrated livelihoods opportunities for rural households, this was the first such attempt by UNDP during this CPD cycle to address economic recovery issues. Involvement in the medical waste management also led UNDP to work on solid waste management mentioned earlier.

The CPD did not require any major amendment following the COVID, though the timeline for implementation of some of the projects was extended. The GoI extended the timeframe for its five-year plan (2017-2021) by a year due to COVID and the effect of sanctions. This led to similar extension of the UNDAF and UNDP CPD by another year, with the end date now being December 2022. By and large, the GoI offices remained open throughout the pandemic, though in a restricted manner, as the government did not impose general lockdown; this meant that project implementation through the NIM modality could continue uninterrupted. However, following the UN COVID protocols and Government-imposed restrictions, UNDP staff stopped traveling to the field and worked remotely most of the time. This contributed to some delays in the implementation of a few projects, leading to their extension: for example, the energy efficiency project had to be extended twice by 18 months and the Hamoun project was delayed by about 6 months.

13. Effectiveness

Findings:

21. UNDP is generally credited with facilitating, and often enabling, inter-sectoral coordination, especially in the environment and climate change area which involves multiple agencies of the GOI. However, joint planning and delivery of activities that require cross-departmental collaboration is often missing in the provinces.
22. Several crucial results are being achieved nationally on expansion of rangeland and wetland management models developed through UNDP's support, reduced use of ODS, providing high-risk population groups access to HIV treatment and use of energy efficiency standards in buildings.
23. UNDP's distinctive competence is seen and perceived by the implementing partners in procurement and project management. This limits the space for UNDP to engage on emerging health issues like sand and dust storms, pollution, dengue, etc., which it could have otherwise brought to the table for discussions on health strategies and policies with the government.
24. It is too early to relate UNDP's interventions on social welfare, poverty and unemployment which have been initiated recently to the broad national goals articulated in the CPD.
25. The small project initiatives have contributed to future programme development in instances where the CO had a clear understanding of how it could anchor the short-term project in the wider country programme.
26. The approach to capacity building of implementing partners (IPs) lacks a clear strategy to build on learning and assimilation.
27. Partnership being developed with private sector in waste management and value chains for farmers have potential to bring about transformative changes.
28. Gender issue manifested in participation of women as beneficiaries in particular projects, but there is no indication that gender equality issues are attempted to be looked into in the programmes as the space for this may be limited in the country due to political sensitivities.
29. Understanding of the differential impact of development interventions on people with different levels of vulnerability has been often missing in the past, a gap UNDP has been attempting to address in the past two years.

13.1 Key achievements on outputs and outcomes

13.1.1 Environment and climate change

A number of key outputs have been achieved in the areas of environment and climate change (outcome 1). Through UNDP's support on several projects (see section 8) on wetlands development, forests and rangeland management, and natural resource management, UNDP has enabled introduction of several new natural resource management practices at farmers' and community level, as well as enhanced the livelihoods of people dependent on natural resources. As discussed earlier, one of the most significant contributions UNDP has made is in bringing about a change in the attitude and approach of the officials involved in natural resource management and forest protection who now see their task more holistically integrating people's need, rather than undertaking mere management of land, water and forests. Community participation in forest protection and conservation is getting stronger; however, some of the assumptions underpinning the project designs in that farmers could be weaned away from livestock rearing through alternative crops and livelihoods provisioning so that pressure on rangeland and forest for grazing is reduced were not borne out by evidence as the scale of these interventions have been limited.

The work on the wetlands which is now being scaled up in some of the poorest provinces in the country has improved water utilisation at farmers' field level, though this by itself has been insufficient to contribute to restoration of the degraded wetlands in any significant way. Besides challenges in implementation of the

many laws and bylaws discussed earlier (section 8.1.2), coordination continues to be a challenge, and management practices of the governmental organisations have not changed to the desired extent as several agencies are often involved in infrastructure development and maintenance in the LUB or other wetland areas. Likewise, the Forest Law makes the rigmarole of agreeing any benefit sharing with communities a frustrating process for all involved, with communities often losing interest in joint management/conservation of forests.

After a slow start, the implementation of the energy efficiency in buildings project has started to show results by way of agreement on standards for energy efficient building which were incorporated in the building code. Though not yet mandatory, the promotion of the Code through training and orientation of engineers and provincial officials which are taking place now is likely to have a positive impact, at least in the design of public buildings, albeit through a slow and gradual process. The energy market component of the project faces challenges in view of the generous energy subsidy in the country.

UNDP's continuing support in implementation of the Montreal Protocol has enabled over the years to progressively achieve significant reduction in use of ODS in the country. The multi-agency project involving UNEP and UNIDO, through which UNDP is supporting the GoI (National Ozone Office of the DOE) in development and implementation of standards in the air conditioning, insulation and refrigeration industry has enabled the country to exceed its Montreal Protocol target – the National Ozone Office data show progressive reduction in ODP from 224 tons in 2017 to 87 tons in 2021 which far exceeds its target as per the Montreal Convention.

The CPD had four key indicators (Box 3) on natural resource management and climate change. **The baseline for the first indicator (CO₂) was set on the basis of Iran's (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, INDC) target, according to which Iran was to reduce its GHG emission by 4 percent in a business-as-usual (BAU) scenario by 2030. The indicator was technically wrong as data from all sources show that at the time of the CPD formulation in 2016 the total CO₂ emission was already far less⁵³ than the target set by the GoI for 2030.** The last indicator (POP) is not relevant as the CO has had no role in this area during the current CPD.⁵⁴ The Government of Iran is committed under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to increase the area of protected ecosystems to 17% by 2020. However, there is no annual breakdown of milestones under this commitment. The source of data for annual actual figures is the official portal of the Department of Environment. It shows that against a baseline of 10% in 2017, the percentage of land area under conservation has been 11% during the plan period at the end of 2021. In other words, very small change has taken place in protected areas.

Box 3: CPD indicators on environment and climate change outcome

- Annual CO₂ emissions to reduce by 8% to 787 million tons by 2030.
- Share of protected forests, rangelands and their conservation to increase from 10.4% in 2015 to 17% by 2020.
- Use of Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) to reduce from 309 tons of Ozone Depleting Potential (ODP) in 2015 to 260 tons by 2020.
- Reduction in Persistent Organic Pollutants (POP) from 11,000 tons in 2015 to 2,000 tons in 2020.

⁵³ According to *Worldometers*, Iran CO₂ emission in 2016 was 642.56 million tons. According to World Bank data, in 2020, CO₂ emissions for Iran was 690.2 million tonnes. World Data Atlas (<https://knoema.com/atlas/Iran/CO2-emissions> accessed 12 February 2022) shows that between 1971 and 2020, CO₂ emissions of Iran grew substantially from 85.3 to 690.2 million tonnes rising at an increasing annual rate that reached a maximum of 22.39% in 1982 and then decreased to 0.63% in 2020. World Bank data also shows that Iran's per capita CO₂ emission has increased from 7.613 tons in 2016 to 8.26 tons in 2020. (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC?locations=IR>)

⁵⁴ UNDP could not mobilise resources for this component as GEF resources were limited

13.1.2 Health

In the health programme, the outreach activities (Global Fund programme) have enabled expansion of coverage with the help of mobile centres which has made inclusion of high-risk-behaviour population groups possible. UNDP has contributed to development of monitoring and reporting capacity of the MoH in line with the Global Fund's requirements. Besides this, UNDP's main role in supporting the health programme of the GOI is seen as in assisting in international procurement of medicines and equipment. As discussed in section 9.1, during the COVID, UNDP procured PPEs and medical supplies under the C19 RM initiative of the Global Fund and DG ECHO health response.

Work on health waste management in response to the pandemic by providing equipment and training of health workers subsequently led to working with the Tehran municipality on solid waste management. This work on waste management is evolving and has the potential to grow into a multi-sectoral work integrating public hygiene and environmental issues, as well as opening up opportunities for private sector engagement in environmental management and create jobs in the urban areas.

UNDP's main role (and expertise) in the health sector is seen and perceived by the implementing partners as one of procurement and project management. This works well in tandem with the specialised health expertise that comes from UNAIDS and WHO, the two UN organisations with expertise on health-related policies and strategies. Not having any health expertise within the team limits UNDP's ability to engage on emerging health issues like sand and dust storms, pollution, dengue, etc., which it could have otherwise brought to the table for discussions on health strategies and policies with the government. The above work on waste management is a good beginning.

The CPD set a number of indicators (Box 4) for the health outcome. From programmatic point of view, UNDP has been successful in achieving its target on outcome 2 with regard to the indicator for HIV/AIDS in the CPD. In 2020, 90.57% of people living with HIV continued being under treatment for 12 months after it started against the target of 88.98. Regarding indicators on malaria in the CPD, considering the completion of malaria-related projects in 2016 (2017 as a transitional year for closing), no projects was defined for the period 2017 to 2021, therefore indicators are not applicable. Indicator related to NCD is not applicable as no initiative was undertaken.

Box 4: CPD indicators on health outcome

- Percentage of adults and children with HIV, disaggregated by sex and age, known to be on treatment 12 months after initiation of antiretroviral therapy (no target set)
- Number of laboratory-confirmed autochthonous malaria cases (263 in 2015) in target districts, disaggregated by age and sex reduced to 26 by 2021.
- Number of foci with local malaria transmissions) reduced from 304 in 2015 to 76 in 2021.
- 25% reduction in deaths due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in both sexes and in the age groups of 30 to 75 years old.

13.1.3 Economic growth, poverty eradication and job creation

UNDP's interventions on social welfare, poverty and unemployment are just starting and trying to find their moorings. It is too early to relate the results of UNDP interventions to the broad national goals articulated in the CPD. The CPD indicators on this outcome were as follows: (i) Multidimensional Poverty reduced from 20% in 2015 to less than 10% by 2021; (ii) Unemployment rate, disaggregated by age, sex and province reduced from 12% in 2015 to 7%; and (iii) Number of measures adopted by Government that ensure most vulnerable groups are covered under the new multi-layer social insurance systems through a Comprehensive national plan. Nationwide poverty increased by 1 percentage point from 2017/18 to 2018/19, reaching 14% before the pandemic, and the World Bank estimates that loss in household incomes through the pandemic and the rising

cost of living, due to inflation, will push poverty up by 20 percentage points by the end of 2021.⁵⁵ As discussed in section 6, unemployment has been especially high among the youth, female, and the highly educated (23.7, 15.6, and 14.2, respectively in 2020/21). The country already had a variety of social protection measures for different social groups; these were further enhanced in response to the COVID-19, but while they partially compensate for the lost incomes, their real value will erode with continued high inflation (World Bank).

13.1.4 Across the programme

As the findings in section C show, UNDP interventions in the environment outcome area have interface with the issue of people’s livelihoods and job creation. The current CPD and the results framework however do not provide the parameters for establishing the cross-programme linkage that could provide a holistic strategy for addressing the economic growth and employment issues.

UNDP is generally credited with facilitating, and often enabling, inter-sectoral coordination, especially in the environment and climate change area (including Montreal Protocol) which involves multiple agencies of the GOI. However, joint planning and delivery of activities that require cross-departmental collaboration is often missing in the provinces. Conventional tools for coordination are unlikely to change the situation, unless creative tools and mechanisms to bring forth a culture change in the working relationships are deployed.

13.2 Contribution of small projects to CPD outcome

The small project initiatives may absorb a disproportionate amount of unplanned staff resources from time to time and their contribution to the CPD outcomes is often uncertain; these have contributed to future programme development in instances where the CO had a clear understanding of how it could anchor the short-term project in the wider country programme. The CO has implemented a number of small short-term projects from time to time: Climate Promise, COVID response through Rapid Response Fund, flood response 2019, and the more recent digitalisation initiative, and PDNA support, to name a few. These are usually funded through UNDP’s TRAC funds and/or regional and global initiatives. Often these help explore new initiatives or lay the groundwork for future programmes. The Climate Promise which was a UNDP global initiative to support countries in implementation of the Paris Agreement helped the CO to support the GOI to get the system ready should the country decide to become a signatory to the Agreement in future. The COVID response project paved the way for subsequent involvement in the waste management project. The PDNA project however was a one-off support without any follow up, and interviews during this evaluation indicated that very little use of the training and tools provided were used, and the knowledge may have been lost. The recently launched digitalisation initiative aims at linking mostly-women microenterprises supported through the RASER and LUB projects with markets through digital marketing platforms in the country.

13.3 Capacity building and institutional strengthening

UNDP’s role in strengthening the national implementation has been in provision of project implementation support. There are several examples of UNDP’s contribution in development of capacity of departments at the central and provincial level in technical and administrative aspects of delivery of results: ongoing support on implementation of Montreal Protocol, HIV/AIDS & TB, NRM, etc., discussed earlier. As mentioned earlier, enabling the provincial technical departments in integrating community and people’s perspectives in natural resource management has been one of the key areas of capacity building acknowledged by the participating agencies. Introducing the process of inter-ministerial/departmental coordination at the point of delivery of multi-sectoral projects is another contribution, though coordination still remains far from satisfactory among most agencies. Almost 80% of the interviewees in the regions expressed a need to strengthen this, and some

⁵⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview#1>

acknowledged the contributions of the UNDP projects in this regard. However, the tools and processes employed to achieve this are not working effectively and new tools are required to bring about change. The interventions have been more at a technical level of capacity building of officials rather than strengthening institutions. This may be attributed to the fact that the space for engaging at a wider system level of governance remains limited in the country.

The approach to capacity building lacks a clear strategy to build on learning and assimilation. There are several wetland and NRM projects in the country which UNDP has supported from time to time, but there has been no attempt to bring the stakeholders together to engage in cross-programme learning and exchange. The CHFP developed model for alternative crops like saffron, verbena and other perennial crops which helped in soil and water conservation, but these were not utilised across other programmes/projects. According to at least six (6) external key informants, while UNDP has shared with them occasional evaluation reports of different projects it supports, there was no opportunity for discussions and sharing of ideas.

13.4 Collaboration and synergy with others

UNDP has developed several collaborative relationships with other agencies to draw on different expertise and resources of organisations: WHO and UNAIDS on HIV/AIDS, GiZ and UNEP on Montreal Protocol, being the most prominent. Besides the co-leadership of the socio-economic response/resilience group, UNDP is also leading on the environment pillar which was previously led by the FAO. FAO has been active in several areas (thematic as well as geographic) where UNDP is also involved and working with the same implementing partners: for example, the FRWO in wetlands development project. However, there has been no interaction between the two agencies, although FAO, like UNDP, is also a recipient of EU and Japan funds. Though FAO is reportedly smaller in terms of its scale of operation, it does have specialised technical expertise in agriculture, forestry and rangeland development. It has been supporting land and forest management, and climate-smart agriculture in four provinces (Golestan, Khouzestan, Lorestan, and Sistan-Balochistan) through promoting climate-resilient irrigation, flood risk management and soil protection among farmers.⁵⁶ FAO has been now working with the DoE on a Green Climate Fund (GCF) Readiness programme where UNDP may find complementarities with its engagement on climate change with the DoE. However, there has been no interaction between the two organisations. Likewise, KIIs indicate that there are a number of large international and national NGOs active in Sistan-Balochistan working on environment and livelihoods issues, but there is no contact between these and UNDP.

During 2021, new partnership has been developed with the Planning and Budgeting Organisation (PBO) for waste management in Northern provinces, with funds being available by the latter and UNDP providing the technical expertise. Partnership is also being explored with the private sector (Nestle, Tetra-Pack) on waste recycling and with Hyperstar on farmers' access to markets. The purpose of the partnership with Hyperstar is to link the producers (local farmers) to consumers (end users) through selling the processed local products (e.g., dried fruits) in Hyperstar's selected branches. This should further help in building the capacity of local farmers in value chain development (sorting, processing, packaging, branding) to ensure that the products meet the quality and packaging requirements and are competitive in the national market.

13.5 Addressing gender and vulnerability

In most of the programme, gender equality is manifest in participation of women as beneficiaries in particular projects, but there is no indication that gender equality issues were attempted to be addressed in the programmes, presumably for the sensitivity these carry in an ultra-conservative country. In the health programme, gender-disaggregated data is generated systematically. However, beyond the gender

⁵⁶ FAO (undated). Partnering for Food and Nutrition Security and Safeguarding Natural Resources (<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CB2935EN.pdf>)

disaggregation, there is no clear strategy for addressing gender issues; for example, the IEC materials on HIV or COVID produced do not differentiate the audience or the messages for different gender groups. Progress regarding generating and using gender-disaggregated data on needs and targeting in the environment portfolio has been slow as staff capacity within the CO to integrate gender dimensions in programme analysis and planning has been weak. In the COVID response, women-headed households which were severely affected have been targeted. The RASER project promotes women's livelihoods opportunities through training, skills development and promoting MSME owned by women with the aim of enhancing the business practices and improved entrepreneurs' skills and marketing network directly benefiting women, among others. Progress reports, key informant interviews and beneficiary interviews showed that the project has been providing a number of skills training in multiple trades (tailoring, weaving, handicrafts, dairy, food processing). These interventions could provide a good entry point to begin a dialogue on gender issues, women's rights, nutrition education and awareness on rights. While the livelihoods activities have provided women space to participate in their local communities and promoted savings and credit groups, there is no evidence that these have been leveraged to promote women's role in decision making at community level. UNDP Iran carried out UNDP Gender Seal Programme in 2021 and the CO is developing a Gender Action Plan that will inform the Gender Equality Strategy to be developed during 2022.

Understanding of the differential impact of development interventions on people with different levels of vulnerability has been often missing in the past, and in the past two years, UNDP has been attempting to address this gap. As discussed in section C, while UNDP has been working on wetlands development, NRM and livelihoods in several provinces for over 10-15 years, it had previously missed out some of the poorest regions (Sistan and Balochistan, for instance). The rangeland development project (section 8.1.1) did not differentiate between prosperous farmers and small herders. These gaps are now being addressed with more systematic focus on vulnerability. However, the evaluation did not find evidence of focus on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the programme.

13.6 Reprioritisation and adjustments in response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic which while delaying the implementation of several activities and projects provided impetus for a number of major changes in the programme thrust areas. Two important developments in the programme were: (a) UNDP's renewed emphasis on socio-economic recovery agenda through engagement on social protection programme discussed earlier; and (b) involvement in waste recovery initiative which subsequently developed into a full-fledged project. Initially aimed at reducing the exposure of municipal workers to COVID-19 transmission risks, the waste management project integrated recycling which has the potential to develop into a model for a circular economy through linking with job creation. UNDP's extended support to the health sector in response to COVID-19 resulted in the development and implementation of a joint project with UNICEF and UNFPA funded by the EU under ECHO-HIP 2021. As discussed in section 10.2, it is only since the outbreak of COVID-19 which led to severe impact on household economy and vulnerability that UNDP country programme began to address these issues. The integration of these new initiatives did not require any change in the theory of change (TOC) or the results framework since the CPD already incorporated poverty reduction and employment generation as part of outcome 3.

14. Efficiency

Findings:

30. Delays in project implementation have been common, requiring no-cost extension of several projects.
31. The CPD results framework remains vague and does not render itself to be broken down into measurable outcomes and outputs for UNDP.
32. Most of the project documents articulate a TOC. However, these are framed more as description of the logical framework underpinning the project delivery, without clear articulation of the *drivers of change* and identification of *assumptions* that will affect the outputs and outcomes.
33. Within UNDP, the practice of periodic reflection and lessons learning is not systematic.
34. Communication with implementing partners is generally top-down, a one-way process, with little dialogue.
35. A number of IPs find the current implementation modality (NIM) between UNDP and the GoI often confusing as they have to follow the procedures of both the GoI and UNDP.

14.1 Economical use of resources

Delays in project implementation have been quite common, requiring no-cost extension of several projects.

Slow procedures and change in staff at the implementing agencies' end, cumbersome funds disbursement and procurement by UNDP, and the effects of sanctions and COVID (including global supply chain challenges) were cited as the main reasons for the delay. Funds transfers from UNDP often took time, according to implementing partners. In some instances, the transfers involved a long channel from UNDP to the partner headquarters in Tehran and then onwards to provinces, delaying project activities. Community interviews, site visit and key informant interviews showed several instances of UNDP procuring equipment for income generating activities (weaving/tailoring) which were not appropriate in the local context as the beneficiaries who were used to the equipment in vogue in the area did not know how to use the new equipmentsupplied. In multiple instances, the equipment still lay unopened after several months of being delivered. This raises question of cost-effectiveness.

All procurements, including procurement of services under the Global Fund grants, are being conducted by UNDP as the principal recipient. Besides the GF project procurement, UNDP supports other UN agencies on procurement of health supplies.

During 2020, UNDP undertook procurement for the DG-ECHO supported Consortium involving UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO and Relief International in their response to the COVID-19 crisis. On the whole, the procurement of health supplies works efficiently, though there may have been occasional delays due to the complicated procedures that needs to be followed to comply with the sanctions regime, besides the fact that UNDP is not allowed to procure health supplies as most of the times the quality standards are not met. At times, delays take place at the GoI's end as well, as agreement on specifications involve several departments which takes time.

14.2 Results-based Management

The CPD results framework remains vague and does not render itself to be broken down into measurable outcomes and outputs for UNDP. As seen in section 13.1, the outcome *indicators* are those of the national government and their links with output indicators are often missing or uncertain. Moreover, the output indicators are a mixture of what can qualify as outputs and some which are focused on activities: for example, number of sectoral guidelines developed, number of universities that have malaria action plans. This has the cascading effect in that it is difficult to track and measure UNDP's contribution to the national outcome indicators (for example, national emission target) as the reporting on outputs veer more towards activity

reporting. This is evidenced in the Results-Oriented Annual Report (ROAR) of the CO. Except for the Global Fund project (which has an elaborate outputs and results reporting framework), it is only when project evaluations are carried out mid-course or at the end of the projects that one gets clearer *evidence* of what is being achieved. While there is significant evidence of outcomes in the programmes, the annual reports and ROARs do not capture the **contributions and changes** the programme is bringing about. Instead, the reporting is heavily tilted towards activities and at best, short-term outputs.

Most of the project documents articulate a theory of change (TOC). However, the TOCs are framed more as a description of the logical framework underpinning the project delivery, without clear articulation of the drivers of change and identification of assumptions that will affect the outputs and outcomes. For instance, the assumption that regeneration of the rangeland and provision of alternative livelihoods will be accompanied by a reduction in the density of livestock population as farmers will be able to stall-feed the animals turned out to be not a valid assumption, something that could have been foreseen with an understanding of livelihood patterns of differently-resourced farmers (prosperous and the poor households). Similarly, the energy market appears at a first glance to be a very attractive proposition, but an analysis of drivers of change would have shown that highly subsidised energy prices will militate against realisation of this objective. Likewise, in wetlands projects, increased water availability in the first instance led to increased use of water in farmers' fields, leaving little or none for recharging the wetlands. An analysis of the assumption would have shown that unless farmers were introduced to high value crops with lower water-intensity, water consumption at farmers' level will increase.

Within UNDP, the practice of periodic reflection and lessons learning is not systematic, according to at least six internal key informants. Within the programme, cross-team interactions and opportunities for sharing are also limited as the thematic functional teams remain focused on the tasks in their domains, with little time and space to explore cross-programme linkages and synergy. This is partly structural within UNDP as each programme is a business unit in itself. The recent addition of a Deputy Resident Representative (DyRR) to the country team⁵⁷ may be of help here in bringing about integration within the different functional teams.

Proactive communication with partners appears to be a weak point in the CO. Interviews with development partners (DPs) suggest that UNDP does not engage in discussions with them on development issues which some of the other UN agencies do better on. UNDP's communication is limited to fulfilling the contractual obligation of submitting reports, but there is usually no communication or dialogue in between. Communication with implementing partners is also generally a top-down, one-way process, mostly limited to administrative and contractual details of project delivery, and a process of dialogue whereby concepts and project designs are discussed and debated is missing from the interactions.

“The more UNDP engages with us the better as we can then understand the ground situation, and can probably facilitate accessing funding better.”

- One key informant

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14.3 Workflow and implementations support services

A number of implementing partners (IP) find the current implementation modality (NIM) between UNDP and the GoI often confusing as they have to follow procedures of both the GoI and UNDP. There is a lack of clarity on where UNDP or GoI procedures apply. In the absence of clear SOPs, they have to straddle between the two different systems and this makes dealing with tendering and bidding processes cumbersome. This is also complicated by frequent changes in UNDP staff focal points interacting with the IPs so much so that sometimes the latter does not know who to get in touch with for any clarification. This has sometimes caused delays and slowed down delivery, particularly in the wetlands project. However, the GoI's bureaucratic procurement

⁵⁷ Previously there was the position of an Assistant Resident Representative – this position is now abolished after a re-structuring.

process was also said to have been responsible for some of the delays. In at least four meetings with officials in the provinces, the issue of delays with regard to release of funds as well as frequent changes in annual report format and time-consuming reporting requirements were highlighted. Additionally, UNDP tends to ask for information and data of different types frequently from the provinces at very short notice which takes up substantial time of the IP staff.

14.4 Pre-existing partnership in responding to the COVID pandemic

UNDP has a long-standing partnership with the CDC of the Ministry of Health, the Prisons Organisation, DOE, Global Fund (supply of PPE), Government of Japan (waste management and COVID recovery) and DG ECHO (through UNICEF), all of which came in handy in developing and launching timely response to the COVID in 2020. In the last one year, new partnerships have been developed with PBO and private sector organisations. KIIs indicate that UNDP is considered a reliable partner by all these agencies who rated the latter highly for its project management capacity to facilitate implementation at scale, though weak communication from UNDP and its “top-down” approach were often cited as its weakness.

15. Sustainability

Findings:

36. UNDP programme over the years has enabled the IPs to develop and adopt new ways of working and practices which are already being internalised within the agencies concerned.
37. There are a number of areas (NRM/carbon sequestration, Montreal Protocol) where UNDP has been working for some 15-20 years; it raises the question of sustainability and UNDP’s continuing role.
38. New partnership being developed with the PBO which represents the nodal ministry for planning and budgeting in the country may open doors for the government’s resource allocation for some of the initiatives the UNDP programme has helped develop.

15.1 Likelihood of sustainability and adoption

UNDP programme over the years has enabled the IPs to develop and adopt new ways of working and practices which are already being internalised within the agencies concerned. The Global Fund M&E framework and data collection protocols are beginning to be used in the national HIV programme. The wetland projects in different provinces are already being funded by the GoI and are using some of the good practices developed (community participation, soil and water conservation work) through UNDP’s support. On the Montreal Protocol targets, the country is continually improving and adopting evolving international standards, and this trend is likely to continue as the GoI is committing resources to this. The urban waste management initiative since the outbreak of COVID has already prompted the GoI to scale up some of the measures used in the Tehran municipality in three Northern provinces with its own resources. These are significant and demonstrate that the innovative methods introduced by UNDP are being widely adopted.

There are a number of areas (NRM/carbon sequestration, Montreal Protocol) where UNDP has been working for some 15-20 years; it raises the question of sustainability and UNDP’s continuing role. It needs to be noted that UNDP’s continued involvement in projects like Montreal Protocol may be justified by the fact that UNDP enables the country to access new technology and equipment, but the continuation of support on the wetlands project underscores the need for an exit strategy which is missing at this moment.

New partnerships being developed with the PBO and the private sector are likely to enhance sustainability, especially because the engagement of the PBO which represents the nodal ministry for planning and

budgeting in the country may open doors for the government’s resource allocation for some of the initiatives the UNDP programme has helped develop. Although its economy has taken a hit in the past several years, Iran is a resource-rich country and the GoI is generally not short of funds. However, the sanctions regime impairs the country’s access to latest developments in technology and equipment, and this is where UNDP’s continued assistance will strengthen the country’s efforts to sustain some of the outcomes.

15.2 Build back better

Several interventions made in response to the COVID pandemic should stand the country in good stead to deal with similar crises in future: the upgradation of the vaccine software, mobile clinics to increase access for the hard-to-access population groups, unconditional cash transfer mechanism targeting the most-vulnerable. All these will have provided the concerned agencies with tools and knowledge to roll out appropriate response, when necessary, in future. Moreover, the spin-off from the health waste management in the area of solid waste recycling has the potential to create green jobs while ensuring a greener urban environment.

E. Conclusions, lessons and recommendations

16. Conclusions

16.1 Overall conclusions

Conclusion 1 - UNDP’s positioning: **UNDP has uniquely positioned itself as a trusted partner to the GoI in enabling the latter to remain connected with the global development landscape, including accessing knowledge, resources and tools which otherwise it would have had difficulty accessing due to the unilateral sanctions the country is subject to.** UNDP’s country programme has attempted to support the GoI in addressing some of the core challenges in dealing with climate change, communicable diseases like HIV AIDS, TB and Malaria, and since the start of the COVID crisis in 2020, UNDP has scaled up its work on social protection, job creation and alternative livelihoods. UNDP has built several key partnerships with various Ministries, Vice Presidencies and departments.

Conclusion 2 - Poverty-environment nexus: **While UNDP’s support to the GoI has historically had a strong focus on environment, it had failed to help establish linkage between poverty, vulnerability and environment which the CO is now beginning to engage on.** As an upper middle-income country, Iran is not a country with endemic poverty. However, the decades-long environmental challenges combined with lack of diversification in a fossil fuel-dependent economy have been dampening the high economic growth the country witnessed for over a decade until a few years ago. This has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, the adverse effects of the unilateral sanctions imposed on the country and the collapse of the oil market since 2018. UNDP’s interventions on social welfare, poverty and unemployment are just starting and trying to find its moorings. It is too early to relate the results of UNDP interventions to the broad national goals articulated in the CPD.

16.2 Specific conclusions

Conclusion 3 - Challenges in coordination and capacity building: **UNDP has facilitated coordination among different agencies and sectors in the provinces in the environment and climate change area in particular. However, joint planning and delivery of activities that require cross-departmental collaboration is often weak**

due to the highly centralised functioning within different departments/Ministries. Through the various projects implemented under the national implementation modality, UNDP has invested in technical support and capacity building of several implementing partners. However, lack of a coherent analysis of the capacity needs and understanding of restraining forces and drivers of change meant that the interventions produced less-than-optimum results, or if any result was produced these did not sustain.

Conclusion 4 - Economic growth and employment: Internally, UNDP is used to working within vertical structures which blocks inter-disciplinary/sectoral linkages, very much mirroring the challenge UNDP aims at addressing within the government institutions. The environment portfolio for instance always had the potential to link up with job creation and disaster risk reduction, but this was not attempted until the COVID pandemic prompted UNDP to engage proactively on the social protection and employment issue. In the past 1-2 years, UNDP has been taking steps to move towards a more connected/joined up programming and configure its team towards that. The appointment of an economist and a DyRR Programme are steps in this direction. UNDP has started dialogue with the PBO for the design of Multi-Poverty Index and National HDR. This partnership (with PBO) may be critical to engaging on the economic growth and welfare agenda in the coming years. UNDP recognises the need to generate evidence-based analysis and innovative solutions to stay relevant and create meaningful political space to be able to engage with the government on the poverty, employment and environment nexus. This does apply to public health issues like sand and dust storms, pollution, dengue, etc., which UNDP could bring to the table for discussions on health strategies and policies with the government.

Conclusion 5 - Differential impact of development interventions: The programme has been weak in the past in taking into account its impact on social groups and communities with different levels of vulnerability. UNDP is beginning to link its sectoral work (environment, waste management, enterprise promotion) with poverty and vulnerability, but this has been stymied by weak staff capacity in developing a nuanced understanding and analysis of the impact of its interventions on different sections of people depending on vulnerability on the one hand and gender equality and equity issues on the other.

Conclusion 6 - 'Top-down', one way communication: In a country like Iran where UNDP has a limited space to engage on SDGs and policies, a top-down process of project development and design contributes to further shrinkage of that limited space. The 'top-down' nature of perceived relationship also includes a host of administrative issues which include confusion over procedures (Government or UNDP) to be followed in financial and procurement matters, frequent and ad hoc demands from UNDP for information and reports from IPs and delays in release of funds. A culture of open communication, dialogue and joint development of concepts and design of interventions is required to open the doors for engagement on policies.

Conclusion 7 - Use of results framework: The ambiguity and obscurity in the CPD results framework made development of an effective M&E and reporting system difficult. While a CPD needs to be broad enough to provide space to adapt the programme in the course of its implementation cycle, the outcome and output indicators currently do not capture UNDP's specific contributions. The CO has made use of TOCs for development of projects, but as these mirror a simple logical framework without clear articulation of the *drivers and inhibitors of change* and identification of *assumptions* that affect the outputs and outcomes, tracking of evidence of change, instead of progress on activities, become difficult during monitoring and reporting. This limits the capacity to make periodic review of change factors and assumptions in understanding the process of change and *contributions* being made.

17. Lessons

1. The small project initiatives have contributed to future programme development in instances where the CO had a clear understanding of how it could anchor the short-term projects in the wider country programme.

2. The COVID response showed that whilst continuing to work on chronic issues of poverty, environmental degradation, climate change and health, UNDP country programme needs to have the flexibility and preparedness to respond to acute or episodic vulnerability and poverty caused by disasters and pandemic.

18. Recommendations

- R1: **While formulating the new CPD, develop an overarching framework which links growing poverty and vulnerability in the country with the degradation of the environment and climate change factors** as they affect people’s livelihoods and health. This poverty-environment nexus should provide the reference point for developing theories of change for projects and non-project interventions during the CPD cycle.
- R2: **Undertake a participatory review of the capacity building strategy followed so far and identify success factors (driving forces) and inhibiting factors** in different partner institutions and inter-institutional processes which need to form the basis of the future strategies.
- R3: **To promote a learning culture internally within the country team, continuous reinforcement of self-reflection and analysis of outputs and processes, rather than an exclusive focus on activities and project administration, will be necessary.** This calls for a culture change. All interactions on development projects/interventions need to be framed around monitoring the *change and contributions to change*, and periodic review of assumptions and driving and inhibiting forces as these act on development processes. These may require further training and development of core staff skills in knowledge management and evidence analysis of development interventions.
- R4: **UNDP needs to deepen its understanding of vulnerability and poverty and ensure that targeting and selection of its programme cohorts differentiates on the basis of levels of vulnerability based on gender, disability and socio-economic status.** This is particularly important where benefits from interventions accrue at the level of individuals and households. In this regard, particular attention will be needed in strengthening the capacity of the CO in gender analysis of the programme (and projects) and in the design of social welfare and job creation programme.
- R5: **While communication around project administration is important, staff who constitute the interface with the IPs and government counterparts need to have the skills to facilitate *dialogue and knowledge management*,** especially with regard to development of project concepts, design and evidence gathering, as well as in monitoring and reporting. (This is also linked to R3 on learning culture R4 on analytical framework on poverty, vulnerability and environment).
- R6: **While better use of TOC (R1 and R3 above) by programme staff on a day-to-day basis will strengthen quality of evidence and programme implementation, a M&E system that enables the process and aids in reporting on key output and outcome indicators will need to be put in place.** At the programme level, a limited number of indicators which produce deeper evidence (*‘less-is-more’*) of *change and contribution* need to be identified, while at the individual project level there may be a higher concentration of activity and output indicators. There are several tools which are increasingly being used in development programmes to track outcomes. While conventional impact assessment and randomised control trial-based studies are popular, but these have major drawbacks in that the costs of undertaking such exercises are high, as well as the fact that these are *ex-post* tools and require sufficient time to elapse before these can be undertaken, making course-correction for the ongoing programmes impossible. Instead, tools like most-significant-change (MSC) stories, process tracing and contribution analysis can be cost-effectively deployed in tracing outcomes related to qualitative

changes in systems. These can easily be done internally by staff trained in the use of these tools. A rigorous use of theory of change in periodic reviews of programmes also complements these tools.

- R7: **Undertake a review of the chain of procurement and funds disbursement procedures involving UNDP at one end and the provincial authorities at the point of delivery on the other, and identify opportunities for simplification, where feasible.** In some instances, it may be simply a question of clarifying where UNDP rules apply and where the GoI procedures take precedence.

*****ENDS*****