



UN-HABITAT EVALUATION BRIEF

Evaluation of the UN-Habitat Urban Programme in Iraq 2004-2012

Evaluation Report 3/2012

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The United Nations Security Resolution 1483 of May 2003 called for continuing United Nations support to needy Iraqi's and assigned crucial roles to the United Nations in the country's post—conflict reconstruction, including coordination of humanitarian aid. In accordance with the resolution, the United Nations Development Group and the World Bank jointly undertook a needs assessment to inform the International Donors Conference on the Reconstruction in Iraq of October 2003. Following the donor conference, the United Nations Multi Donor Trust Fund (MDTF)—Iraq was established in 2004, to provide donors with a single channel for funding post war programmes in Iraq. Since 2004, UN-Habitat's country operations in Iraq account for 22 projects implemented as joint programmes with a number of UN and other partners. The UN-Habitat cumulative project portfolio reached about USD 89.8 million of the USD 1.37 billion budget for Iraq. Most of the projects were funded through the Iraq Trust Fund, while a small number of projects were funded through bilateral channels.

The UN-Habitat Iraq programme operated under four main areas: (i) Urbanization, Urban planning and Local Governance, (ii) Urban services and infrastructure, (iii) Land policy and management, and (iv) Housing. The programme has operated within a challenging developmental context, cross border management constraints and a constantly evolving security and political scenario. The purpose of the evaluation of UN-Habitat Iraq programme was to provide UN-Habitat, its governing bodies, donors and other key stakeholders with a forward looking independent assessment of the agency's operational experience, achievements, and challenges, within the context of joint programming and to draw

lessons and recommendations towards improving UN-Habitat's contributions in the future. The evaluation focused on the relevance of programme, the appropriateness of its institutional arrangements and partnerships, efficiency and effectiveness of the programme in responding to Iraq's developmental needs and priorities and the added value of UN-Habitat in joint programmes

2. EVALUATION PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was conducted by two independent consultants: Mr. Mohammed Siraj Sait and Mr. Johnson Nkuuhe between December 2011 and September 2012. It was managed by the Evaluation Unit with support from UN-Habitat's Iraq Programme and Regional Office for Africa and Arab States (ROASS). The evaluation used a range of methods, including review of Iraq programme documents; interviews with UN-Habitat staff in Nairobi and Amman, Iraqi officials, staff of collaborating UN agencies and other stakeholders; and a field mission to Erbil, Iraq, that enabled the evaluation team to visit some projects, meet stakeholders and hold focus group discussions.

The evaluation was limited by time, resources and access to the country owing to logistical and security considerations. Access to civil society and other beneficiaries was also restricted.

3. OVERALL FINDINGS

Based on Iraq Reconstruction Plan for Shelter and Urban Development (2003) and subsequent Habitat Country Programme Documents (HCPDs), UN-Habitat made significant contributions in four main focus areas—pro-poor housing, land governance, urban planning

and economy, and urban infrastructure and basic services. Out of the ITF 21 projects implemented by UN-Habitat since 2004, 13 were ongoing as of May 2012.

Achievements

- UN-Habitat's work on pro-poor housing demonstrated both innovation and adaptability to Iraqi needs and priorities. The Pioneering house market survey was used by the Government to attract funding.
- The National Housing Policy was developed in close partnership with the Government of Iraq and funded by ITF Trust Fund. The strategy is under implementation through the federal budget.
- The catalytic role that UN-Habitat played in improving access to land and security of tenure has also contributed to pro-poor housing policies being implemented in Erbil by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The Baghdad Informal Settlements Initiative and the sustainable housing finance are some of the pioneering areas in improving access to land and security of tenure.
- UN-Habitat is supporting public-private partnerships in managing and administering land as well as the continuum of land rights which recognize a range of tenures. UN-Habitat has also contributed to the process of developing a draft law on public land management.
- The agency has been at the forefront with advocacy that sustainable development needs good governance and proper management in cities and towns. It has supported the shift towards decentralization. In addition to pilot settlement upgrading projects affecting 2,500 households, the agency has augmented participative planning and capacity on environmental management in housing sector.



School children at a primary school in Missan rehabilitated by UN-Habitat as part of the Rehabilitation of community facilities and infrastructure project, 2009 © **UN-Habitat**

- Since 2004, UN-Habitat has contributed to Iraq's recovery process by rehabilitating run-down and damaged community infrastructure including schools, water supply systems, sewerage networks, youth centers, public green parks and health facilities.
- Between 2009 and 2011, 2,400 young girls and boys benefited from 12 new child-friendly modern primary school buildings that replaced existing structures. Through the Public Sector Modernization Programme UN-Habitat and UNICEF have supported the Government of Iraq efforts at modernizing and reforming its public sector with focus on water and sanitation, and delivered key outputs such as a road map on water and sanitation.

Strategic Focus

- The strategic focus of the Iraq Programme was derived from UN-Habitat's comparative advantage, harmonization within the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) framework and joint programmes, relevance in the context of Iraqi priorities, national ownership and prospects for sustainability.
- The Iraq Programme is well aligned with the focus areas of UN-Habitat's Medium-Term Strategic and Institutional Plan (MTSIP) and with the MTSIP's Enhanced Normative and Operational Framework (ENOF) which guides field activities.
- The development of UN-Habitat Iraq Programme can also be traced through its own priorities as well as United Nations wide programme

development in Iraq.

- UN-Habitat's expertise has been recognized in the current United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), where UN-Habitat's potential contribution was listed in four out of the five programmatic priority areas.

Institutional Arrangements

- The UN-Habitat Iraq Urban Programme based in Amman, Jordan is led by the Chief Technical Adviser. By the time of evaluation, a team of 17, comprising four international and 13 national staff were in charge of implementing the programme, supported by national coordinators in Baghdad and Erbil and a representative in Hilla.
- The UN-Habitat Iraq Programme is also guided by a high level Iraq National Habitat Committee, comprising of high ranking officials and civil society, which has an advisory role and also contributes to the development of the agency's blueprint for Iraq.
- UN-Habitat's main funders under the multi-donor trust fund in Iraq have been the European Commission, Japan, and Spain. GOI and KRG are also key contributors as well as other finance institutions and governments including the Republic of Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Joint Programmes

- Joint programmes have been a key feature of UN-Habitat's work in Iraq. Of the 21 projects implemented by UN-Habitat in Iraq only nine projects were carried out on its own; the other 12 have been implemented with one

or more UN agency partners, including UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO, among others. UN-Habitat's niche is well recognized within the UN Country Team in Iraq and its competence respected.

- Iraq was the first country where UN agencies adopted the 'cluster approach', a joint planning, funding, coordinated implementation and reporting arrangement for large scale operations. It was followed by and improved through Sector Outcome Teams in 2008, and the current structure for coordination being UNDAF Priority Working Groups (PWG) and Sub-PWGs. UN-Habitat has been and is currently a member of several groups and chair to the Housing sub-PWG and the co-chair to the Water and Sanitation sub-PWG.
- The United Nations joint programmes have generally resulted in a coordinated and coherent response to Iraq's recovery, reconstruction and development priorities without competition for funds.

Partnerships

- UN-Habitat partnerships have increased its profile, opportunities and potential for impact. The Agency enjoys mutual respect with other UN partners. However, UNDG is not always a level playing field and UN-Habitat is often at risk of losing out to bigger players owing to several factors ranging from inadequate field presence to lack of starter or bridge funds.
- UN-Habitat in Iraq works closely with a number of national partners, notably the governments of Iraq and the Regional Government of

Kurdistan. It has a reasonable base of professionals, experts and academics guiding its activities, as seen from the membership of its National Habitat Committee.

- The Agency that has a strong record of working with the private sector, including contractors, is now strengthening its liaison with the banking sector. UN-Habitat provides organizational support to the Iraq Local Government Association (ILGA).
- In Erbil, the setting up of Housing Facilitation Units of professionals/technical experts and Local Facilitation Units has been effective. Civil society is relatively weak in Iraq. UN-Habitat works with NGOs through other agencies such as UNCHR or networks such as the Norwegian Refugee Council on UN-Habitat's Technical Working Group on IDPs, but needs to do more on engaging proactively with civil society.

Challenges

- With closure of the Iraq trust Fund, the country enters a new development phase with the Government of Iraq as dominant partner with reduced resources available for UN-Habitat projects, the agency will have to consider how best to re-position itself in the new Iraq. This may require UN-Habitat to concentrate in areas of demand.



Women learning how to use computer software courtesy of the Housing Facilitation Unit at the Erbil Technical Institute. 2012 © UN-Habitat

- UN-Habitat must step up the dissemination of its tools and outputs to ensure replication and scaling up. The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Iraq has also recognised that the planned phase-out of the Iraq Trust Fund and the situational transition in Iraq warrants 'a more strategic, coherent and cohesive response to Iraq's development priorities and challenges'.
- UN-Habitat institutional arrangements for implementing its Iraq programme are being dictated by drastically reduced funds. Staff numbers have fallen from 26 in 2008 to 17 by 2012, and likely to be cut further. The implementation of the current United Nations country programme will require resources of about USD 1.9 billion through the end of 2014. UN-Habitat requires USD 77.2 million through the end of 2014 for its full programme of which it has so far secured only USD 9.3million in funding. UN-Habitat will have to review its resource mobilization strategy if it is to continue its substantial portfolio in Iraq.
- With donor money drying up UN-Habitat will have to look to Iraq itself as a source for future funding. To raise funds within Iraq, UN-Habitat will have to redirect itself to strategic areas where it has strong political support, funding, partners and prospects of high impact.
- Another key challenge for UN-Habitat Iraq Urban Programme is the pressure from the Government of Iraq to move back to Baghdad, Iraq, as most United Nations agencies have or are in the process of doing. So far, UN-Habitat has agreed that staff of new projects will be located in Baghdad.
- Despite its emphasis on pro-poor, inclusive, good-governance and protection issues, UN-Habitat Iraq Urban Programme has not adopted rights based approach. Even though its projects do encourage participation of (and often target) women, children and youth as beneficiaries, the programme needs to develop clearer gender and youth frameworks and align with relevant UN-Habitat strategic documents.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- UN-Habitat's Iraq Urban Programme on shelter and urban development which focuses on housing policy and land management, urban planning and governance and water and sanitation and infrastructure best captures UN-Habitat's comparative advantages in relation to Iraq's sustainable urbanization and developmental challenges.
- The institutional arrangements for the UN-Habitat Iraq Programme's country office have been structured to achieve the planned results and used project funds efficiently.
- In terms of timely project delivery. All projects were given no-cost extensions ranging from one to five extensions. The Amman office attributed some of the delays to Headquarters and bureaucracy of United Nations Office at Nairobi, while others interviewees attribute the delays to operational, inter-agency coordination and government liaison.
- UN-Habitat has achieved most of its planned project outputs. Technical and strategic contributions of UN-Habitat are a vital part of its role, beyond project delivery.
- UN-Habitat's focus on inclusive urban planning, management and governance alongside UNDP, have introduced new decentralization and participative approaches, for example, through projects on Iraq Public Sector Modernization and Local Area Development Plans.
- Review of internal progress reports and visits to the MDTF office/UNAMI demonstrate evidence of regular and satisfactory monitoring and reporting on UN-Habitat projects. However, UN-Habitat in joint programmes had to deal with additional layers including the Trust Fund Office, donors, members of thematic groups, and several periodical reports to the Headquarters including progress reports on the implementation of the MTSIP, 2008-2013.
- Despite the fact that the impact of UN-Habitat projects is difficult to ascertain given the security context and limited access to beneficiaries as well as the limitations of this evaluation, through partnerships with UN and government counterparts, UN-Habitat has contributed

significantly to the sustainable urbanization agenda, improved understanding of bottlenecks and developed tools and responses.

- The achievements of the Iraq programme were directed towards disadvantaged urban poor, including IDPs and returnees. However, it needs to address the cross cutting issues more directly. It has done well in promoting environmentally friendly housing and responsible water and sanitation projects.
- Through the implementation of successful projects as seen from the Erbil and LADP case studies, UN-Habitat Iraq programme has contributed to better monitoring, capacity development, new partnerships (including civil society and private sector), and legal and institutional reforms.
- A range of high quality UN-Habitat outputs from legislation and master plans, to training manuals and tools are widely used in parts of Iraq. However, the sustainability of the developmental results from UN-Habitat depends on the GOI capacity to provide an enabling policy environment including incentives for meeting the demands of urban development.
- Through its various projects, UN-Habitat has contributed to Iraqi capacity development to formulate, implement and review vital policies, strategies, laws and programmes. However, training has not reached all stakeholder groups and has not been at scale, as the mode of delivery has been conventional.

5. MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

- Using Habitat Country Programme Documents (HCPDs) effectively: While the UN-Habitat Iraq programme developed its HCPD in a fluid and complex context, the process could have been more systematic and strategic.
- Managing multiple transitions: The Iraq programme would need to be strategized on how to manage the multiple transitions and its mandate adapted to the evolving scenarios in Iraq.
- Sharing multi-donor trust fund (MDTF) experiences: With the experience

of the Iraq programme, UN-Habitat senior management needs to reflect on how best to anticipate and prepare for opportunities with other MDTFs in the future in other country assistance scenarios.

- Beyond financial resources: It is necessary for UN-Habitat to invest in its Iraq office and help promote cost-effective, niche initiatives, which are visible, scalable and correlate to Iraq's priorities with strong partnerships.
- Timely project delivery: UN agencies, including UN-Habitat, have not performed well in keeping to project deadlines. All projects were given up to five no-cost extensions. UN-Habitat would have to consider how these delays could be avoided by better and more realistic project design.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Sharpen strategic focus: UN-Habitat Iraq Programme should revise its HCPD to reflect its current strategic focus in line with the new realities after the winding up of the multi-donor trust fund.

Develop a resource mobilization strategy: The UN-Habitat Iraq Urban Programme, UN-Habitat Headquarters and the Arab Regional office in Cairo should develop a resource mobilization strategy building on its track record, so as to widen the donor base to include non-conventional funding sources, the private sector, regional sources, as funding/cost sharing from the Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government.

Design programmes with impact assessments: UN-Habitat should put in place a project/programme development process, which incorporates targets and results based management into the project design and enables effective monitoring and evaluation of impact.

Address gender, age and human rights: UN-Habitat Iraq should review the extent to which its projects have addressed cross-cutting issues, with recommendations on how this can be improved.

Improve national ownership: UN-Habitat Iraq programme and the UN-Habitat Headquarters should regularly discuss and respond to the changes in political context and reflect this in strategic programme documents.

Promote and engage with civil society: UN-Habitat Iraq programme should be proactive and develop stronger relations with existing and potential civil society partners within its own projects and those with other UN partners in joint programmes.

Strengthen communications: UN-Habitat Iraq Programme should allocate responsibilities—or appoint a part-time staff—as a communications officer as part of a communications strategy.

Innovate with capacity development methods: UN-Habitat Iraq Programme should review its capacity building methodologies, training resources, participation dynamics and impact to inform a holistic capacity building approach.

Plan for relocation to Iraq: In response to growing pressure from the Iraqi government and the United Nations for the Iraq Programme's return to Baghdad, UN-Habitat headquarters should urgently review strategic options together with the Regional Office for Arab States in Cairo and the Iraq programme, recommending timelines for the possible relocation of the Iraq Programme's main office in an appropriate form.

Consolidate liaison between Iraq programme, regional office and Headquarters: UN-Habitat should set up a mechanism for strategic dialogue between the Iraq Programme and other similar country programmes, Regional Offices and the Thematic Branches located at Headquarters which is more regular, structured and targets based.