



GLOBAL FUND FOR  
**CORAL REEFS**

## **ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT:**

*Gulf of Aqaba Resilient Reefs Programme*

January – December 2025



## Programme Overview

Programme Title & Project Number	Programme Duration
<b>Programme Title:</b> Gulf of Aqaba Resilient Reefs Programme <b>Programme Number:</b> 00140527 <b>Programme webpage:</b> [If applicable]	<b>Start Date:</b> January 2024 <b>End Date:</b> December 2030
Programme Location	Co-recipient Organisation/s and Implementing Partners
<b>Country:</b> Jordan/Aqaba <b>Priority Coral Reef Site/s:</b> [1) Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR); 2) Northern Deep Corals (NDC); and 3) Southern Industrial Site (SIS)]	<b>Implementing Partner/s:</b> IUCN ROWA & Reef World Foundation
Total Approved Budget	
<b>Total GFCR Budget:</b> USD 1,628,754 <b>Convening Agent:</b> UNDP Jordan USD 1,628,754 <b>[Other Co-recipients, if applicable]:</b>	

### Programme Description

The vision for the Gulf of Aqaba Resilient Reefs programme is “Coral reef ecosystems in the Gulf of Aqaba are conserved and restored, conserving biodiversity, supporting sustainable development, and increasing resilience to climate change”. The proposed programme is working towards this vision through a suite of inter-connected interventions to achieve four primary outcomes: 1- Heightened protection of functioning, resilient coral reefs in the Gulf of Aqaba. 2- Integration of Red Sea coral reefs into the growing sustainability-oriented economy of Aqaba. 3- Coral reefs in the region are regenerated and restored through new technologies and adaptive and science-based approaches. 4- Knowledge management to support upscaling and replication of coral reef finance and business solutions. The Gulf of Aqaba Resilient Reefs programme will identify and protect coral reef climate refugia, advance science on reef resilience and restoration, and implement finance mechanisms to ensure the sustainable financing of MPAs and OECMs that harbour critical coral reef ecosystems. The programme will also accelerate the development of reef-positive business models, especially in the ecotourism, aquaculture, and waste management sectors, through a newly established Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation, which will also develop blended finance solutions for businesses and projects in these sectors that support coral reef conservation, community livelihoods, and enhanced community resilience to climate change. Three priority sites within the GoA have been identified for the programme’s implementation: the Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR); the Northern Deep Corals (NDC); and the Southern Industrial Site (SIS).

#### Report submitted by:

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)  
Rana Saleh, Environment Program Analyst  
[rana.saleh@undp.org](mailto:rana.saleh@undp.org)  
Mohammad Al-Tawaha, Programme Coordinator  
[mohammad.al-tawaha@undp.org](mailto:mohammad.al-tawaha@undp.org)



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## I. Executive Summary

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### **1. Programme Progress Update**

#### **Most significant activities and achievements**

- Completion of a full seagrass baseline assessment, including field surveys, data analysis, and reporting, with participation of four scientists (two female).
- Development of the framework for the Blue Economy Center for Innovation (BECI) in partnership with ASEZA advanced significantly during 2025. This included the completion of key foundational components such as a market research and contextual analysis, as well as the refinement of the Center’s vision, mission, and strategic objectives. In addition, a comprehensive business plan and operational plan were developed to guide the Center’s establishment and implementation. Building on this progress, a national consultant was contracted to support the formal establishment and operational rollout of BECI.
- Establishment of a national team to prepare Jordan’s National Blue Economy Strategy and selection of an international consultant to lead the strategy development.
- Contracting of an international consultant to formulate the Gulf of Aqaba Coral Reef Conservation Finance Strategy.
- Certification of 14 Royal Navy divers in the Reef Check EcoDiver methodology, enabling standardized coral reef monitoring and integration into global scientific networks.
- Delivery of specialized marine environmental protection training to the Royal Navy and the Royal Department for Environment Protection, expanding national monitoring and enforcement capacity.
- Organize a multi-stakeholder consultative workshop under the GFCR programme, in coordination with IUCN ROWA, to support the development of coral reef baselines, ecosystem services valuation, and associated financing pathways. The workshop engaged key stakeholders in validating roles, assessing available data, and identifying key pressures and uses impacting reef ecosystems. Through interactive mapping and group exercises, participants contributed to identifying ecosystem services, beneficiaries, and data gaps, providing critical inputs to guide the ecological assessments, economic valuation, and overall methodological framework of the project.
- Completion of a carrying capacity assessment with ASEZA and SHAMS, - as a regional cooperation between Jordan and Saudi Arabia- combining underwater ecological surveys with tourism-use data to define sustainable thresholds for dive sites (the final report will be received in March 2026)
- Rehabilitation and full maintenance of the RAS system received from ASEZA and FAO to support a pioneering marine fish breeding initiative.
- Organization of a workshop on enhancing women’s role in marine conservation and the blue economy, with broad participation from women’s associations and female representatives of relevant institutions.
- Organization of the “Fishing Return Festival” in Aqaba, attracting over 300 participants and strengthening community engagement around sustainable fishing.
- Delivery of introductory training on Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS) to the fishermen association, with 14 participants trained in operation, maintenance, and sustainable aquaculture practices.
- Development and finalization of comprehensive Fishermen Guidelines in coordination with ASEZA and fishermen associations.

- The programme’s Steering Committee and Technical Committee have been established, and their meetings have been convened. The next meeting is scheduled to take place during the first week April of 2026.
- Signing of a cooperation agreement with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to conduct comprehensive ecological surveys along Aqaba’s coastline, strengthening science-based marine management and long-term monitoring (the Baseline Report on the Status of Coral Reefs along the Jordanian Red Sea Coast was submitted in 2025; the Report on the Importance of Coral Reefs as climate refugia and biodiversity habitat, based on review of existing literature, will be completed in 2026).
- Conclusion of an agreement with the Reef-World Foundation to enhance the implementation of Green Fins environmental standards, improving environmental performance within the diving and marine tourism sectors.

**Mitigation of local drivers of coral reef degradation**

- Strengthened enforcement and surveillance capacity through targeted training of marine authorities operating inside and outside the Aqaba Marine Reserve.
- Improved environmental practices in the diving sector through the adoption of Green Fins standards.
- Reduction of fishing pressure on wild stocks through capacity building in sustainable aquaculture and fish breeding systems.
- Improved site management through carrying capacity assessments and evidence-based thresholds for tourism activities.
- Enhanced awareness and compliance among fishermen through guidelines, festivals, and community engagement initiatives.
- Five female officers completed Open Water Diving training in Aqaba, strengthening their capacity to contribute to marine conservation and monitoring activities

**Progress in reef-positive solutions, financial mechanisms, and capacity building**

- Advancement of reef-positive tourism practices through Green Fins implementation.
- Strengthening institutional capacity for marine monitoring, enforcement, and scientific data collection.
- Development of sustainable financing pathways through the initiation of the Coral Reef Conservation Finance Strategy, including the engagement of an international consultant, initial scoping of financing mechanisms (such as user fees, eco-levies, and blended finance instruments), stakeholder consultations, and the development of a preliminary framework to guide long-term sustainable financing for coral reef conservation in the Gulf of Aqaba. The strategy is currently at an advanced stage of development and is expected to be finalized by April 2026.
- Establishment of enabling frameworks for reef-positive enterprise development through the Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation.
- Capacity building of fishermen and marine practitioners to support sustainable livelihoods aligned with reef conservation.

**Measurable outcomes and early impacts**

- 50 new personnel from the Navy and Ranger units were trained in marine environmental protection (including 10 women), strengthening national surveillance and environmental compliance capacity
- 14 Royal Navy divers certified in Reef Check EcoDiver methodology.

- Completion of a comprehensive seagrass baseline assessment to inform future conservation and restoration actions.
- Draft carrying capacity results produced to guide sustainable dive site management and enhance the regional cooperation with Saudi Arabia.
- Supporting enhanced adoption and compliance with Green Fins environmental standards among dive operators.
- Increased institutional readiness to operationalize reef-positive financing and innovation mechanisms.
- Two committees were established, comprising representatives from various partners and key stakeholders, to support programme implementation and strengthen institutional coordination.
- Training of five female security officers in diving to enhance women's participation in marine monitoring.

### **Benefits to local communities**

- Strengthened livelihoods through training in sustainable aquaculture and responsible fishing practices.
- Increased community engagement and stewardship through festivals, consultations, and awareness activities.
- Enhanced participation of women in marine conservation, enforcement, and blue economy discussions.
- Improved access to clear guidance on safety, sustainability, and regulatory compliance for fishermen
- Five female officers completed Open Water Diving training in Aqaba, strengthening their capacity to contribute to marine conservation and monitoring activities

### **2. Milestones and Adaptations**

- Achieved: Signing of strategic agreements with IUCN and the Reef-World Foundation to implement various program activities (see Annex B for details)
- Achieved: Completion of seagrass baseline assessment and delivery of multiple specialized training programs.
- Achieved: Establishment of the national Blue Economy Strategy team and contracting of international consultants.
- Achieved: Development of the framework for the Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation, the launch of the centre will be in January 2026
- Partially achieved: Carrying capacity assessment was finalized, the reports and results will be in February 2026.

### **3. 2026 Outlook**

#### **Programme objectives and priorities for 2026**

- Launch the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI) in Jan 2026.
- Sign an agreement with Queen Rania Centre for Entrepreneurship to manage the training and the grants under the BECI
- Operationalization of the BECI as a functional platform supporting reef-positive enterprises, innovation, and partnerships. Development of the BECI advanced significantly, including the preparation of key foundational components such as market research, contextual analysis, and the development of the Center's vision, mission, business plan, and operational plan. The first call for proposals for reef-positive businesses is planned for early 2026, with an initial grant

window expected to support approximately five enterprises, each receiving up to USD 20,000, alongside incubation and technical assistance support. In parallel, the selection criteria, terms of reference, and related documentation for identifying the incubator to oversee the programme have been finalized.

- Advancement of Jordan’s National Blue Economy Strategy through finalization, validation, and alignment with national development and environmental frameworks.
- Strengthening sustainable financing mechanisms for coral reef conservation through the development and piloting of innovative finance tools, to be identified under the Coral Reef Conservation Finance Strategy currently under development, including user fees, eco-levies, and blended finance instruments, aimed at supporting the long-term financial sustainability of the Aqaba Marine Reserve and enabling investment in reef-positive businesses.
- Further reduction of local drivers of coral reef degradation by ensuring the continued implementation and scaling of sustainable practices already introduced, including the application of Green Fins standards in the diving sector, enforcement of fishermen guidelines, and the expansion of monitoring and enforcement capacity through trained naval and environmental protection personnel.
- Scaling community-based and livelihood-focused interventions that support sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, and reef-aligned economic activities, including continued coordination with ASEZA and ongoing engagement with the Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC) to explore future opportunities for supporting fishermen and local enterprises, further development of the aquaculture (RAS) pilot, exploration of livelihood diversification opportunities linked to reef-positive businesses, and the delivery of targeted training programmes, including regional exchange and capacity-building activities in neighbouring countries.
- Deepening gender equality and social inclusion by increasing women’s participation in marine conservation, enforcement, entrepreneurship, and blue economy leadership.
- Strengthening regional and international partnerships to position Aqaba as a model for reef-positive blue economy development within the Red Sea region, including collaboration with regional initiatives (e.g., SHAMS), exchange of expertise and joint activities with neighbouring countries, engagement with international partners such as IUCN and ICRI, and participation in regional knowledge-sharing platforms and events.

**Key milestones and deliverables planned for the first half of 2026:**

- Completion and validation of Jordan’s National Blue Economy Strategy in close coordination with the national team and key stakeholders.
- Finalization of the Gulf of Aqaba Coral Reef Conservation Finance tools, including a clear roadmap for implementation and resource mobilization.
- Launch and initial operationalization of the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation, including governance arrangements, core services, and pilot activities.
- Continued implementation and expansion of the Green Fins programme, including onboarding of additional dive operators and strengthened compliance mechanisms.
- Strengthening data systems and reporting mechanisms to support adaptive management and evidence-based decision-making under the GFCR programme, including consolidation and validation of ecological monitoring data (coral reefs, seagrass, and fisheries), integration into GFCR platforms (MERMAID and REEF+), standardization of data collection methodologies, and targeted capacity building for national stakeholders on data management and reporting.
- Preparation for scaling reef restoration and investment-ready reef-positive initiatives informed by ecological assessments and financing strategies, including the implementation of a large-scale reef restoration project under another UNDP project, involving the design, construction, and

deployment of artificial reef structures, as well as coral restoration activities such as transplantation, propagation, and relocation.

- Organize the Blue Economy Symposium as a regional platform to advance reef-positive blue economy development, by strengthening regional cooperation, aligning policies, and facilitating dialogue between governments, investors, and private sector actors. The Symposium will support GFCR objectives by promoting sustainable tourism, enabling access to finance for SMEs and reef-positive businesses, showcasing innovative solutions for marine protection, and translating dialogue into practical actions and partnerships across the Red Sea region.

### **GFCR Programme Extension:**

Phase I of the Programme has been extended until 31 December 2026 to ensure the full and effective completion of ongoing technical partnerships, operationalization of the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation and its grants cycle, consolidation and validation of environmental data, and alignment with the revised GFCR replenishment timeline. The extension will safeguard programme continuity between phases, strengthen institutional and technical readiness, and maximise cumulative impact—without altering the approved objectives, theory of change, or expected results framework.

## **II. Programme Progress Overview**

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### **1. Progress Toward Outcomes and Outputs**

*During 2025, the GFCR Gulf of Aqaba Programme made substantive progress in translating foundational outputs—such as ecological assessments, institutional capacity building, strategic partnerships, and community engagement—into early, tangible outcomes that strengthen coral reef protection and integrate reef conservation into Aqaba’s sustainability-oriented economy. Implementation focused on priority marine and coastal sites along Aqaba’s coastline, particularly within and adjacent to the Aqaba Marine Reserve, and followed a theory of change that links science-based decision-making, improved governance, and reef-positive livelihoods to long-term coral reef resilience.*

#### **Outcome 1: Heightened protection of functioning, resilient coral reefs in the Gulf of Aqaba**

Output 1.1: Ecological and socio-economic information related to marine ecosystems effectively gathered and communicated to inform conservation policy, prioritize intervention sites, address drivers of degradation, and assess the impacts of GFCR interventions.

- Activity 1.1.1: Gender-sensitive ecological and social assessments to enhance established baselines for monitoring and support addressing the drivers of coral reef degradation in the Gulf of Aqaba
- Activity 1.1.2: Develop information resources to support policy decision-making, including establishing the business case for investing in coral reefs, and evaluating the potential and realized economic impacts of coral reef associated interventions on local communities, with a specific focus on women
- Activity 1.1.3: Monitoring systems strengthened for coral reef ecosystems in the Gulf of Aqaba with community participation applying citizen science principles to effectively and rapidly assess emerging threats, ecological damage, and positive impacts of investments

Progress under this outcome centered on strengthening the scientific, institutional, and enforcement foundations required for effective coral reef management. Tangible changes include improved national capacity for monitoring and surveillance, enhanced institutional readiness to respond to environmental pressures, and early shifts toward evidence-based management within priority reef sites.

A cooperation agreement with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) enabled the initiation of comprehensive ecological surveys and long-term monitoring frameworks, while completion of a full seagrass baseline assessment established a critical scientific reference point for future conservation and restoration actions. Certification of 14 Royal Navy divers in the Reef Check Eco Diver methodology, alongside specialized training for marine authorities, expanded standardized reef monitoring coverage and strengthened enforcement presence inside and outside the Aqaba Marine Reserve.

In parallel, a carrying capacity assessment conducted with ASEZA and SHAMS—representing a regional Jordan–Saudi Arabia cooperation effort—combined underwater ecological surveys with tourism-use data to define sustainable thresholds for dive sites. This output directly supports outcome-level change by informing site-specific management measures aimed at reducing physical pressure on sensitive reefs. In addition, the agreement between ASEZA and the Reef-World Foundation has supported enhanced adoption and compliance with Green Fins environmental standards among dive operators, addressing behavioural drivers of coral reef degradation within the diving and marine tourism sectors.

Measurable early impacts during the reporting period include training of 50 personnel in marine environmental protection (including 10 women), certification of 14 divers in standardized monitoring methodologies, completion of one comprehensive seagrass baseline assessment, and improved compliance with environmental standards among participating dive operators. Partnerships played a central role in amplifying impact by embedding scientific outputs and training results within national institutions and operational management systems

As part of the cooperation agreement with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), two key technical reports have been developed, providing a strong scientific foundation for coral reef conservation and management in the Gulf of Aqaba.

The first report, **“Coral Reefs as Climate Refugia and Biodiversity Habitats,”** examines the unique ecological characteristics of coral reefs in the northern Red Sea, with a particular focus on their role as climate refugia. It provides an in-depth analysis of oceanographic and environmental conditions, coral diversity and endemism, and scientific evidence supporting the resilience of these reefs to climate change. The report further identifies key natural and anthropogenic threats, including marine heatwaves, coastal development, tourism pressure, pollution, and fisheries impacts, and outlines a set of strategic recommendations related to monitoring, marine protected areas, restoration, and regional collaboration.

The second report, **“Comprehensive Report on Coral Reef Ecosystems Baselines,”** presents a detailed baseline assessment of coral reef ecosystems along the Jordanian Red Sea coast. It includes results from national and site-level monitoring programmes, covering benthic composition, fish communities, indicator invertebrates, and water quality parameters. The report also provides a comprehensive analysis of current reef conditions, identifies key gaps in monitoring systems and data availability, and highlights institutional and methodological constraints. Based on these findings, it proposes a set of



recommendations to strengthen national monitoring frameworks, improve data governance and accessibility, and enhance the integration of scientific data into decision-making processes.

Together, these reports provide critical scientific evidence and practical recommendations to support ecosystem-based management, inform policy and planning, and guide future conservation and restoration efforts in the Gulf of Aqaba

Output 1.2: Regional planning, information sharing, and scientific research collaboration on coral reefs strengthened and contributing to conservation, and enhanced livelihoods for local communities, with a focus on women and youth

- Activity 1.2.1: Gulf of Aqaba Coral Reef Ecosystems Scientific Collaboration Platform

Initial progress under this activity has focused on strengthening national-level scientific collaboration, data consolidation, and knowledge-sharing mechanisms, as foundational steps toward establishing a regional coral reef scientific collaboration platform in the Gulf of Aqaba. At the national level, collaboration has been advanced with regional and international organizations, including the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and PERSGA, through contributions to the upcoming “Status of Coral Reefs of the World: 2025” report. This process involved coordinated data collection and validation efforts led jointly by UNDP, ASEZA, and the Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR), with the report expected to be published in 2026. This engagement contributes to positioning Aqaba within global coral reef monitoring and reporting frameworks.

With previous support from UNDP through complementary projects, a dedicated environmental database system has been developed within the Aqaba Marine Reserve to centralize and manage marine ecosystem data. The system is currently being populated with ecological, monitoring, and operational data, supporting improved access to information for management and decision-making purposes.

Furthermore, progress has been made in consolidating and standardizing coral reef monitoring data through the use of the MERMAID platform, in alignment with GFCR reporting requirements. Data has been collected and integrated from multiple national stakeholders, including the Aqaba Marine Reserve, the Marine Science Station, the Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan, fishermen, and trained divers. This effort has significantly enhanced data availability and interoperability across institutions. In addition, collaboration with Reef Check has supported the generation and sharing of standardized reef monitoring data, including through the training and certification of divers in reef survey methodologies. Data collected by trained divers is being integrated into national and global monitoring systems, further strengthening the scientific basis for coral reef management.

At the regional level, collaboration with regional partners such as SHAMS has been strengthened through the implementation of a carrying capacity assessment, integrating ecological and tourism-use data to support science-based management decisions. This type of regional technical collaboration represents a key step toward linking scientific data with policy and management applications. While the full regional collaboration platform is still under development, these efforts represent critical building blocks toward establishing an integrated, multi-stakeholder scientific collaboration mechanism, linking data, research, and policy to support effective coral reef conservation and management in the Gulf of Aqaba and the wider Red Sea region

- Activity 1.2.2: Gulf of Aqaba Coral Reefs Management & Finance Strategy

There were initial attempts to establish partnerships with Saudi Arabia and Egypt; however, these were postponed due to evolving regional coordination priorities, scheduling constraints, and the need to align with national processes and approvals. At this stage, the programme is focusing on generating the necessary analytical and technical inputs—such as economic valuation, sustainable financing assessments, and technical work with partners (e.g., IUCN and Green Fins)—which will serve as a foundation for informed regional engagement. These efforts are expected to enable more structured regional coordination and contribute to the gradual development of a shared strategy for coral reef conservation and sustainable use in the Gulf of Aqaba

- Activity 1.2.3: Aqaba Science and Technology Hub Business Plan

The Aqaba Science and Technology Hub Business Plan is intended to build on earlier preparatory work supported by UNDP, including the development of detailed engineering and architectural designs for the proposed center. However, in light of the regional context and prevailing conditions at the time, the project was placed on hold, and no further progress has been recorded since. Nevertheless, a smaller-scale facility has been established at the Marine Science Station through a partnership between the Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC) and Voyacy Regen, reflecting continued interest in advancing applied research and innovation in support of marine conservation in Aqaba.

Output 1.3: Financing mechanisms and related management capacities strengthened for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and OECMs

- Activity 1.3.1: Develop and implement financing mechanisms to support the conservation of all coral reefs in Jordan

Progress under this activity is well advanced, with the development of a detailed report analyzing and recommending financing mechanisms for coral reef conservation in Jordan approaching completion (the final report is expected in Q2 2026).

- Activity 1.3.2: Develop and implement an Aqaba Marine Reserve Business Plan and associated financing mechanisms

Progress under this activity is well advanced, with the development of a business plan and financing mechanisms for the AMR approaching completion (the final documents are expected in Q2 2026).

## **Outcome 2: Integration of Red Sea coral reefs into the growing sustainability-oriented economy of Aqaba**

Progress toward this outcome in 2025 focused on establishing the institutional, strategic, and community-based enabling environment required to integrate coral reef conservation into Aqaba's broader economic development pathway. Tangible changes include increased institutional coordination, strengthened community engagement, and improved readiness to support reef-positive enterprises and livelihoods.

Significant progress was also made in establishing the operational and institutional foundations of the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI), including the completion of key preparatory components such as the market research and contextual analysis, and the refinement of the Center's vision, mission,

and strategic objectives. A comprehensive business plan and operational plan were developed, outlining the Center’s governance, operational model, and implementation roadmap. In parallel, a proposed management and governance structure was defined, alongside the development of a structured application, evaluation, and selection process for identifying and supporting reef-positive businesses. This includes a multi-stage selection approach, starting with an initial screening of applications, followed by capacity-building support for shortlisted candidates, and a detailed evaluation based on clearly defined criteria such as team capacity, innovation, business viability, technical feasibility, scalability, financial sustainability, and alignment with marine conservation and blue economy priorities. Furthermore, a partnership agreement is currently under finalization with the Queen Rania Foundation, which is expected to oversee the incubation and capacity-building functions of the Center, including entrepreneurship support, technical assistance, and business development services. While the first call for proposals has not yet been launched, all preparatory requirements have been completed, and the call is expected to be announced in Q2 2026.

Livelihood-focused outputs supported outcome-level change by addressing socio-economic drivers of reef degradation. Rehabilitation and maintenance of the Recirculating Aquaculture System (RAS), combined with introductory training for fishermen associations, supported sustainable aquaculture practices that reduce pressure on wild fish stocks. Development of Fishermen Guidelines and organization of the Fishing Return Festival strengthened awareness, compliance, and stewardship among local fishing communities.

Early measurable impacts include training of 14 fishermen in sustainable aquaculture practices, increased institutional readiness to operationalize reef-positive financing and innovation mechanisms, and strengthened governance through the establishment of a Steering Committee and Technical Committee. Beneficiaries—including fishermen, marine practitioners, and women participants—reported improved access to skills, guidance, and opportunities to engage in marine conservation and blue economy decision-making

### **Outcome 3: Coral reefs in the region are regenerated and restored through new technologies and adaptive and science-based approaches.**

While large-scale restoration activities are planned for subsequent phases, 2025 focused on creating the scientific, financial, and institutional conditions required for effective reef restoration. Contracting an international consultant to formulate the Gulf of Aqaba Coral Reef Conservation Finance Strategy represents a critical output, laying the groundwork for mobilizing sustainable finance for restoration and conservation investments. The strategy is currently under advanced development, with a draft strategic assessment completed, outlining key financing opportunities, investment principles, and a prioritized pipeline of reef-positive projects in the Gulf of Aqaba. The work includes the identification of potential financing mechanisms such as eco-tourism revenues, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture investments, blue economy technologies, philanthropic funding, and economic instruments (e.g. user fees and environmental levies), as well as initial concept notes for selected financing mechanisms to be implemented in the next phase. The final strategy is expected to include a detailed implementation roadmap, investment pathways, and recommendations to support the mobilization of public and private capital, and is anticipated to be finalized in the upcoming period.

Additional enabling outputs—including strengthened data systems, institutional partnerships, and integration of ecological assessments into planning processes—ensure that future restoration interventions will be science-driven, financially viable, and socially inclusive. Together, these actions

position the programme to scale reef restoration and investment-ready reef-positive initiatives in the coming implementation period.

- Activity 3.1.1: Develop partnerships for coral restoration with community participation, including on-the-ground activities and information sharing / lessons learned

As part of initial efforts under this activity, a technical workshop on “Techniques of Marine Ecosystems Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Translocation” was conducted at the end of 2024, bringing together more than 25 participants, including representatives from dive centers, the Aqaba Marine Reserve, environmental associations, and participants of the Reef Check training programme. The workshop was delivered with the support of a regional expert in marine ecosystem restoration, providing technical insights and practical experience from similar contexts. The workshop aimed to introduce and discuss key restoration techniques, assess their applicability in the Gulf of Aqaba context, and explore opportunities for successful implementation of coral restoration interventions. It also contributed to raising awareness on the importance of marine ecosystem restoration, facilitating knowledge exchange, and identifying potential areas of collaboration among stakeholders to support future on-the-ground restoration efforts

Initial progress under this activity has also been supported by a number of complementary national and regional initiatives, which, while not directly implemented under the GFCR programme, contribute to creating an enabling environment for coral restoration partnerships. These include initiatives led by the Aqaba Marine Reserve in collaboration with Swiss partners, focusing on strengthening coral reef monitoring systems through the application of advanced scientific tools, including environmental DNA (eDNA) techniques, as well as supporting knowledge exchange on restoration approaches.

Additional efforts involve the Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC) and private sector actors such as Voyacy Regen, focusing on advancing coral reef monitoring, restoration, and innovation in the Gulf of Aqaba. These initiatives utilize advanced technologies and approaches for coral reef conservation and restoration, including enhanced monitoring systems, coral propagation techniques, and pilot restoration interventions, while strengthening collaboration between public institutions, research entities, and private sector partners.

Such parallel efforts provide important opportunities for knowledge exchange, regional collaboration, and the development of future partnerships under the GFCR programme, particularly in scaling restoration activities and aligning scientific and technical approaches across the region

- Activity 3.1.2: Develop conservation frameworks to ensure the viability of coral restoration initiatives

Progress under this activity has focused on establishing key conservation and management frameworks required to ensure the long-term viability of coral restoration initiatives in Aqaba.

This includes the implementation of a carrying capacity assessment in collaboration with ASEZA and SHAMS, as part of a regional cooperation effort between Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The assessment combined underwater ecological surveys with tourism-use data to define site-specific thresholds for dive activities, providing a science-based foundation for managing visitor pressure and reducing physical impacts on sensitive reef areas. The results are expected to inform adaptive management measures and



support the integration of restoration efforts within sustainable use limits (the report will be submitted in Q2 2026).

In parallel, a large-scale coral restoration intervention is being prepared under a complementary project implemented with UNDP (starting in April 2026), supported by Canadian funding. This intervention will include the design, construction, and deployment of more than 300 artificial reef units, alongside associated restoration activities such as coral transplantation, propagation, and site preparation. The project is expected to contribute to enhancing reef resilience, supporting habitat rehabilitation, and generating practical models for scaling restoration efforts in Aqaba.

Together, these efforts contribute to developing an integrated conservation framework that combines science-based management (through carrying capacity and monitoring), practical restoration interventions, and alignment with broader ecosystem management objectives, ensuring that coral restoration initiatives are both ecologically effective and sustainably managed over the long term.

## **2. Grants, Investment, and Revenue Mobilised**

### **Grants and Investments:**

During the reporting period, the programme continued to mobilize and leverage financial resources from multiple donors and partners to support interventions aligned with the objectives of the GFCR Gulf of Aqaba Programme. More than USD 10 million in grant financing from Canada and the European Union was secured to support complementary interventions that reinforce coral reef protection, sustainable coastal management, and blue economy development in Aqaba.

In addition, the programme secured approximately USD 2 million in co-financing from the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) through the allocation of 5,000 square meters of land for the establishment of the Creative Circular Economy Centre. The detailed engineering design for the Centre has been finalized, the construction tender has been launched, and construction works are scheduled to commence in February. This in-kind contribution represents a significant institutional investment and provides a physical platform for applying sustainable waste management practices, with direct linkages to the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI). Activities and innovations emerging from this Centre are expected to support reef-positive solutions and contribute to coral reef conservation and restoration initiatives under the GFCR framework.

Furthermore, two new donor-funded projects commencing in 2025 directly intersect with and strengthen GFCR objectives:

- Support and strengthen the development of a more sustainable blue economy in Aqaba through the implementation of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and the effective management of Jordan's first Marine Reserve, with USD 2 million in financing from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).
- Support the operation and enhance the effective performance management of the Aqaba Marine Reserve, with USD 700,000 in financing from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

These projects provide substantial complementary financing that strengthens institutional capacity, enhances spatial planning processes, and improves the operational management of marine resources, thereby reinforcing the enabling environment for GFCR-supported investments and outcomes.

The programme continues to engage with private sector actors and development partners to mobilize additional resources and secure investments in priority reef-positive sectors, with a particular focus on sustainable tourism, innovation, and conservation-linked livelihoods

#### **Revenue and Sustainability:**

No revenues were generated during the reporting period, as investments and revenue-generating mechanisms have not yet been realized. However, following the formal establishment and announcement of the Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation, it is anticipated that a number of partnership and service agreements will be concluded, creating pathways for future revenue generation.

In addition, dive centres participating in the Green Fins programme have benefited indirectly through improved environmental performance, enhanced market positioning, and increased attractiveness to environmentally conscious visitors. While these benefits have not yet translated into direct programme revenues, they contribute to the longer-term sustainability of reef-positive practices within the diving and marine tourism sector

#### **Challenges and Next Steps:**

The limited ecosystem for entrepreneurs in Aqaba remains a challenge which the program will try to work with all partners to overcome in the coming few months. The limited maturity of the reef-positive entrepreneurial ecosystem in Aqaba has constrained the pace of investment and revenue generation.

The next steps will focus on accelerating the operationalization of the BECI, formalizing partnership and service agreements, and strengthening engagement with the private sector. These actions will support the delivery of incubation, technical assistance, and blended finance solutions, enabling the programme to advance toward its financial sustainability and investment leverage targets

### **3. Implementation Challenges and Lessons Learned**

#### **Challenges**

The program has faced a number of challenges that have impacted its progress, e.g.:

- The limited area of the coast in Aqaba has been always a challenge to the program particularly to BECI solutions given the relatively limited economic activities that can be trailed in this area. There are also several users of the coastline that have in some cases different and conflicting interests.
- Limited capacities available –local and national
- Limited scientific applied research capacities
- Limited research uptake in policy
- Interface between land and sea- the need to move into more “integrated and ecosystem-based” management
- Politics and conflict in the region/impact on tourism and ecotourism
- Understanding “blended finance’ modalities and operations vs conventional types of financing

#### **Lessons Learned**

During the implementation of the programme over the past months, several key lessons have emerged:

- Strong institutional ownership by national and local authorities is essential to ensure continuity, legitimacy, and effective implementation of reef-positive interventions.
- High-level political support and commitment play a critical role in accelerating approvals, mobilizing resources, and overcoming institutional bottlenecks.
- Early and continuous coordination among stakeholders is necessary to manage competing interests along Aqaba's limited coastline and to promote integrated, ecosystem-based management approaches.
- Bridging science, policy, and implementation remains crucial; generating applied scientific knowledge must be accompanied by mechanisms that ensure its uptake in planning and decision-making.
- Capacity limitations at local and national levels highlight the importance of sustained technical assistance, knowledge transfer, and long-term capacity-building strategies.
- Ongoing dialogue and adaptive management are key tools for addressing uncertainty, responding to external shocks (including regional instability), and maintaining stakeholder engagement.
- Clear understanding and practical application of blended finance mechanisms require dedicated learning, piloting, and hands-on implementation, particularly in emerging blue economy contexts

#### **4. Emerging Risks**

Several emerging risks were identified during the implementation period. Delays in formal project endorsement by the government, which occurred several months after the GFCR award, affected the initial pace of implementation. In addition, limited technical and institutional capacities at both local and national levels continue to pose a risk to timely delivery. Competing institutional priorities—particularly the intensive engagement required for finalizing the UNESCO file for the Aqaba Marine Reserve—alongside recent institutional changes within ASEZA and ADC, also temporarily affected programme momentum. These risks are being partially mitigated through strengthened coordination, high-level engagement, and targeted capacity support, with additional measures planned to accelerate implementation in the upcoming period.

#### **Geopolitical Developments and Operational Implications (March 2026 Update)**

The current regional context, including escalating geopolitical tensions involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, has heightened instability across the region. Given Jordan's geographic position and the proximity of Gulf countries to areas of potential escalation, the wider region is considered sensitive and exposed to indirect impacts of the ongoing conflict. This evolving situation has introduced additional uncertainty and risk to programme implementation. These dynamics have already led to the postponement of several planned field-based activities, while routine site visits have been either cancelled or significantly reduced. In addition, a number of national and regional events and workshops have been delayed, affecting the pace of stakeholder engagement and coordination. Disruptions to air travel and broader logistical constraints have also impacted the mobility of experts and partners, potentially affecting the timely implementation of certain activities

### III. Solutions

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#### 1. Overview of Progress and Composition of Solution Portfolio

Four solutions have been identified for the GoA program:

1. Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation
2. Aquaculture Innovation in Aqaba
3. Generating Sustainable Finance for the Aqaba Marine Reserve
4. Green Fins Expansion

#### Solution 1: Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI)

During 2025, the Blue Economy Center for Innovation (BECI) transitioned from concept design to advanced operational readiness. Developed through partnership between UNDP Jordan and the ASEZA, BECI will function as a blended finance facility aimed at incubating and financing reef-positive enterprises that contribute to the long-term resilience of the Gulf of Aqaba coral reef ecosystem and its associated communities.

Following institutional consultations and structural adjustments linked to the new Aqaba Master Plan, it was agreed to incubate BECI within ASEZA. This positioning enhances regulatory alignment, strengthens policy integration, and ensures institutional sustainability.

BECI is designed to:

- Support commercialization of reef-positive technologies
- Provide incubation and advisory services to MSMEs, with emphasis on women- and youth-led enterprises
- Deploy blended finance instruments including catalytic grants, technical assistance, and concessional financing

During 2025, substantial progress was made in building the initial investment pipeline:

- Alignment with the EU-funded Creative Circular Economy Center (USD 3M EU financing + USD 2M ASEZA co-financing) to generate solid-waste solutions based on the 9Rs principle and reduce marine pollution pressures.
- Advancement of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) supported by USD 2M Canadian financing, targeting watershed restoration to reduce sedimentation impacts and piloting coral nursery models for reef rehabilitation. These interventions are structured to generate green jobs, particularly for women and youth.
- Operationalization of a cold storage facility at the fish market to enhance fisheries value chains and reduce fishing pressure.
- Preparatory integration of sustainable dive operations improvements through linkage with Green Fins expansion.
- Strengthened collaboration with the Green Growth and Jobs Accelerator Project (GGJAP) to expand outreach and pipeline development in Aqaba in view of the challenges posed by Aqaba's limited coastline and a relatively nascent entrepreneurial ecosystem compared to Amman.
- The official announcement and launch of BECI took place in January 2026. A public call for MSME proposals and the signing of an incubation partner agreement are scheduled for February 2026 to oversee enterprise selection, training, and grant management.

- BECI directly addresses key local drivers of reef degradation, including marine pollution, overfishing, sedimentation, and unsustainable tourism practices. With foundational structures now in place, 2026 will mark the first full year of implementation and disbursement under the Centre's blended finance mechanism

### **Solution 2: Aquaculture Innovation in Aqaba – 2025 Update**

The Aquaculture Innovation in Aqaba solution progressed during 2025 from system rehabilitation toward operational readiness and capacity development, within a phased approach aligned with the original programme design. Building on earlier FAO and ASEZA investments in inland aquaculture infrastructure at the Marine Science Station (MSS), the Gulf of Aqaba Resilient Reefs Programme focused on strengthening technical capacity, system functionality, and stakeholder preparedness to support the future development of a land-based aquaculture sector.

During 2025, the programme supported the rehabilitation and preparation of the pilot aquaculture system at MSS, following a period of inactivity. The facility functions as a demonstration, research, and training platform to test aquaculture technologies, strengthen technical oversight, and build local capacity. Environmental compliance measures and monitoring protocols were reinforced to ensure alignment with national regulations and to mitigate potential environmental risks.

In line with the original solution design, the MSS pilot is intended as a transitional platform. The primary pathway for scaling aquaculture livelihoods is linked to the planned inland aquaculture development, for which land has been allocated north of Aqaba. However, the seawater conveyance pipeline required to operationalize this larger-scale facility has not yet been constructed by the Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC), and therefore commercial-scale aquaculture activities have not yet commenced.

Within this context, the programme delivered targeted training to members of the Fishermen's Association, focusing on aquaculture operations, system maintenance, and sustainable production practices. These activities aimed to build foundational technical capacity and prepare potential beneficiaries for future employment or investment opportunities in aquaculture, once the enabling infrastructure is in place.

Complementary interventions were also implemented to strengthen community engagement and support a broader transition toward sustainable marine resource use. This included awareness-raising activities and the development of guidance materials, contributing to improved understanding of sustainable practices and reducing pressure on wild fish stocks.

At the regional level, the programme aligns with broader cooperative frameworks. In 2025, a regional protocol on cooperation in fisheries management and aquaculture in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden was adopted under the framework of PERSGA. This protocol aims to strengthen regional cooperation, promote sustainable management of marine living resources, and support marine biodiversity conservation. It provides a comprehensive framework for improving fisheries governance, enhancing data collection and sharing, supporting scientific research and capacity building, and promoting ecosystem-based approaches and responsible aquaculture practices. It also addresses key regional challenges such as overfishing, habitat degradation, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, while contributing to sustainable livelihoods and alignment with international environmental commitments.

Complementary sustainability-focused interventions were also supported, including the organization of the Tuna Fishing Tournament and the Fishing Return Festival. These events were strategically leveraged to promote responsible fishing practices, community engagement, and awareness of the importance of reducing fishing pressure on coral reef ecosystems. The earlier-established cold storage facility at the fish market continued to support improved post-harvest handling and value retention, contributing to reduced economic pressure on fish stocks.

Overall, the solution contributes to addressing overfishing as a key local driver of reef degradation by supporting the transition toward alternative livelihood pathways, strengthening technical readiness for aquaculture development, and aligning national efforts with regional frameworks for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.

### **Solution 3: Generating Sustainable Finance for the Aqaba Marine Reserve**

During 2025, the Generating Sustainable Finance for the Aqaba Marine Reserve solution focused on advancing the development of a structured approach to sustainable financing, in line with the programme's emphasis on business planning and financial mechanism design.

Work is currently underway to develop a comprehensive financing framework for the Aqaba Marine Reserve, including the preparation of a broader financial strategy and associated analytical components. As part of this process, several technical deliverables have been produced to support the identification and structuring of potential financing pathways. This includes a Financial Options Feasibility Assessment, which reviewed a range of potential financing mechanisms at both regional and domestic levels, including bilateral and multilateral funding, philanthropic contributions, blue bonds, direct lending, and other long-term revenue-generating instruments. The assessment highlights the need for a blended finance approach and provides an initial basis for prioritizing feasible mechanisms in the Aqaba context

In parallel, targeted consultations and capacity-building activities have been initiated to support the development of sustainable finance approaches, including engagement with key stakeholders and the design of dialogue processes to explore innovative financing tools and their applicability within the Gulf of Aqaba. These efforts are contributing to the development of a structured roadmap for sustainable finance, including the identification of priority mechanisms, potential funding sources, and sequencing of implementation steps

The work remains ongoing, with continued efforts to refine the financing framework, validate options with stakeholders, and align proposed mechanisms with institutional, regulatory, and market conditions. This process will inform the development of a comprehensive and operational financing strategy to support the long-term sustainability of the Aqaba Marine Reserve.

During 2025, progress under this solution focused on advancing the enabling conditions required for the development of sustainable financing mechanisms for the Aqaba Marine Reserve, alongside targeted steps to support financial planning and stakeholder engagement:

- Progress in management effectiveness processes, including the application of internationally recognized tools and performance benchmarking approaches, to inform future financial planning and resource allocation.
- Development and strengthening of data systems, including the establishment and upgrading of a centralized database, to support improved financial planning, reporting, and evidence-based decision-making.

- Targeted support to enhance monitoring and operational capacity, contributing to the broader conditions necessary for the implementation of sustainable financing mechanisms.
- Improvements in visitor awareness and compliance measures, supporting the potential future introduction of revenue-generating mechanisms linked to tourism and site management.
- Facilitation of stakeholder consultations to explore and validate potential financing mechanisms, while strengthening engagement with private sector actors relevant to the Reserve’s long-term financial sustainability.
- Following coordination with national authorities and international technical partners, the sustainable finance strategy is being positioned within the broader AMR business planning framework. This integrated approach ensures that proposed revenue mechanisms are aligned with conservation objectives, regulatory mandates, and long-term governance arrangements.

The sustainable financing strategy is expected to be finalized before June 2026, marking a transition from preparatory strengthening toward operationalization of diversified revenue instruments.

#### **Solution 4: Green Fins Expansion**

During 2025, the Green Fins Expansion solution focused on strengthening the national implementation framework and preparing the conditions required to scale the programme toward full sector-wide adoption in Aqaba.

Building on the initial engagement of 14 dive centers under the Green Fins programme, 11 centers have successfully achieved Green Fins certification to date, reflecting tangible progress in improving environmental practices and compliance within the diving sector. Efforts during this period focused on reinforcing national capacity and institutional ownership as a prerequisite for expanding participation across the remaining dive operators. This included the delivery of refresher training for assessors from the Aqaba Marine Reserve, increasing the number of qualified national assessors to six and strengthening the country’s ability to independently conduct assessments and support programme expansion

In parallel, implementation focused on advancing the institutionalization of Green Fins as a national standard for marine tourism. This included the development of a case study assessing the role of Green Fins in supporting national policy frameworks, including the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), the Aqaba Marine Reserve Management Plan, and the ongoing update of the Aqaba Ecotourism Plan. The analysis highlights the potential for integrating Green Fins as a formal compliance and monitoring mechanism within national and local regulatory frameworks

Progress has also been made toward the development of a Green Fins National Implementation Strategy for Jordan, which is currently under preparation and is expected to be finalized by the end of 2026. This strategy will define the pathway for scaling the programme to cover all dive centers and snorkeling operators in Aqaba, while also identifying opportunities for long-term financial sustainability, including private sector contributions, integration within tourism policy frameworks, and potential cost-recovery mechanisms.

While expansion to additional dive centers was initiated, the pace of onboarding new operators was affected by external factors, including a significant decline in tourism activity during late 2024 and throughout 2025 due to the regional context. This resulted in reduced operational capacity and limited incentives for dive centers to engage in new certification processes during this period.

Despite these challenges, the programme continues to demonstrate measurable environmental impact among participating operators. Data from Green Fins assessments indicate a 51% reduction in environmental threats and a 69% reduction in diver contact with reefs among engaged dive centers, demonstrating the effectiveness of the approach and providing a strong evidence base for scaling the programme across the sector

Overall, 2025 has focused on consolidating the institutional, technical, and strategic foundations required to expand Green Fins from a pilot phase toward a fully institutionalized national programme, with clear pathways for scaling, policy integration, and sustainable financing in the coming phase

### **Key Achievements of the Green Fins Programme in Aqaba**

- Achieved a 51% reduction in overall environmental threats and a 69% reduction in diver contact with coral reefs, demonstrating measurable improvements in marine tourism practices and reduced pressure on reef ecosystems.
- Successfully engaged 14 dive centers, with 11 centers achieving Green Fins certification, and broader sector engagement reaching a significant portion of dive operators in Aqaba.
- Strengthened national implementation capacity through the training and qualification of six national Green Fins assessors, supporting the transition toward long-term country ownership and independent programme delivery.
- Positioned Green Fins as a practical implementation tool for national and international environmental commitments, including alignment with the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), Aqaba Marine Reserve Management Plan, and the Ecotourism Plan.
- Contributed to enhancing Aqaba's international profile as a sustainable tourism destination, including achieving the Green Destinations Bronze Award and recognition within Top 100 Sustainable Destinations globally.
- Ongoing efforts are underway to support the integration of Green Fins within national policy and regulatory frameworks, including its consideration within the update of the Aqaba Ecotourism Plan and alignment with national biodiversity priorities.
- Work is currently in progress to explore the role of Green Fins in supporting Blue Economy and sustainable finance approaches, including its potential use as an environmental performance standard for reef-positive investments and tourism sector financing mechanisms
- A comprehensive Status Report on the current implementation of the Green Fins programme in Jordan was completed and submitted, providing an updated baseline and identifying priority areas for expansion.
- Completion of the Green Fins Jordan Case Study Report, including a comprehensive policy review assessing how Green Fins contributes to Jordan's national strategies and marine conservation action plans.
- Multiple coordination meetings were conducted with ASEZA and key national stakeholders to ensure alignment on roles, regulatory integration, and implementation planning.

## **2. Support and Financing**

During the reporting period, the programme continued to provide targeted technical assistance to key institutions, including support for marine monitoring systems, database management, and protected area performance tools. Partnerships were strengthened with national and international institutions, including collaboration with international consultant on sustainable finance mechanisms for the Aqaba Marine Reserve and technical cooperation supporting enhanced marine monitoring capacity.

The programme also mobilized and aligned complementary financing to reinforce GFCR objectives. Cumulatively, more than USD 10 million from Canada and the European Union has been secured to support Nature-based Solutions, circular economy interventions, and ecosystem resilience initiatives in Aqaba. These resources significantly expand the investment envelope aligned with reef-positive outcomes.

GFCR support focused on catalytic and de-risking functions, including institutional embedding of solutions within ASEZA frameworks, safeguards integration, technical validation prior to financial deployment, and capacity-building for beneficiaries such as fishermen, reserve staff, and dive operators. These measures reduced operational and environmental risks while strengthening implementation readiness.

The programme continues to explore additional financing opportunities, including private sector engagement and blended finance mechanisms under the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI), with scaling of investments anticipated in 2026 across priority sectors

### **3. Challenges and lessons learned**

A key challenge remains the pioneering nature of several solutions in Aqaba. Initiatives such as the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI) and the aquaculture pilot represent first-of-their-kind models in the local context. The absence of prior technical experience, operational benchmarks, and a mature entrepreneurial ecosystem in Aqaba required extended preparation, institutional coordination, and capacity-building before financial deployment could proceed.

Securing highly specialized technical expertise also posed challenges, particularly for niche areas such as sustainable finance mechanisms, aquaculture optimization, and reef-sensitive tourism standards. This contributed to delays in implementation timelines and required adaptive planning and phased sequencing of activities.

Additionally, the relatively small scale of Aqaba's coastal economy and limited private sector depth constrained the immediate pipeline of investment-ready enterprises. Unlike larger urban centres, Aqaba's entrepreneurial ecosystem is still emerging, necessitating stronger outreach, incubation support, and risk mitigation prior to scaling.

Several lessons have emerged from these challenges. First, investment readiness in frontier coastal markets requires extended institutional embedding and phased de-risking rather than rapid capital deployment. Second, strong partnerships with regional and international technical institutions are essential to compensate for local capacity gaps. Third, livelihood diversification interventions—such as aquaculture and fisheries value enhancement—must be paired with awareness and governance measures to effectively reduce pressure on coral reefs

### **4. Objectives and Milestones for 2026**

Building on the institutional groundwork and portfolio preparation achieved in 2025, 2026 will focus on transitioning from structuring and de-risking to active implementation and scaling of reef-positive solutions.

A primary objective for 2026 is the operational deployment of the Blue Economy Center for Innovation (BECI), including the launch of the MSME grant window, formalization of the incubation partnership, and selection of the first cohort of reef-positive enterprises. This will mark the first phase of blended finance disbursement under the programme.

For the Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR), 2026 will prioritize the operationalization of sustainable financing mechanisms identified under the Business Plan, including revenue optimization measures and strengthened visitor management systems. Continued alignment with Green List standards and advancement of UNESCO-related processes will further enhance international positioning and financing readiness.

In parallel, 2026 will focus on completing and advancing implementation of the agreement with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This includes finalization of the marine ecological baseline assessment, development of a comprehensive environmental status report, and undertaking an economic valuation of coral reef ecosystem services in Aqaba. These outputs will provide the scientific and economic evidence base required to inform sustainable finance mechanisms, policy decisions, and investment prioritization under the programme.

For Green Fins, 2026 objectives include strengthening compliance monitoring and advancing discussions on sustainable financing contributions from the tourism sector to ensure long-term programme continuity.

Cross-cutting milestones for 2026 include:

- Expanding the investment pipeline across priority sectors (sustainable ocean production, circular economy, sustainable tourism, and finance mechanisms)
- Mobilizing additional public and private co-financing
- Strengthening safeguards integration and impact monitoring
- Enhancing gender and youth participation within enterprise and reserve-related interventions

## IV. Facilities and Conservation Trust Funds

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### 1. Design Overview

Under the GFCR Programme in Aqaba, the primary programme-level mechanism facilitating financing and capacity development is the Blue Economy Center for Innovation (BECI), which functions as a Technical Assistance Facility (TAF) within the programme structure. While not established as a stand-alone financial vehicle or Conservation Trust Fund, BECI operates as a structured platform designed to identify, prepare, and support reef-positive solutions toward investment readiness.

BECI is embedded within the broader GFCR implementation framework and operates in close coordination with the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA), UNDP, technical partners, and national institutions. Its design integrates technical assistance, incubation services, grant financing, and pipeline development functions. The Center aims to bridge early-stage business development gaps by providing both financial and non-financial support. This includes business model refinement, feasibility assessment, capacity building, and investor matchmaking, alongside an initial grant facility expected to



support a first cohort of approximately five reef-positive enterprises, with grants of up to USD 20,000 per enterprise

The facility is strategically linked to other programme components, including marine spatial planning, marine reserve management strengthening, sustainable fisheries engagement, and coral restoration initiatives. This interconnected design ensures that reef-positive enterprises emerging from conservation and management efforts can transition into viable, revenue-generating models.

Inclusive design principles are embedded within BECI's operational approach. The facility prioritizes access for women-led enterprises, youth entrepreneurs, and community-based initiatives, particularly within the fisheries and sustainable tourism sectors. Targeted outreach, capacity-building support, and equitable grant selection criteria are applied to enhance participation of marginalized groups and strengthen local ownership of blue economy solutions.

Key partners include UNDP (as implementing agency), ASEZA (as regulatory and strategic partner), technical institutions supporting incubation and training, and international partners contributing expertise and knowledge exchange. Through this collaborative model, BECI contributes directly to the development of reef-positive solutions that align economic incentives with coral reef conservation outcomes

## **2. Progress and Challenges**

During the reporting period, the Blue Economy Innovation Centre (BECI) remained under final institutional preparation, with its official launch scheduled for early 2026. Preparatory efforts focused on governance arrangements, operational framework development, identification of priority sectors, and coordination with a specialized institution to oversee training delivery and the grants cycle.

The extension of the Programme until 31 December 2026 will be instrumental in ensuring the effective operationalization of BECI. The additional time will enable the full implementation of the incubation cycle, structured pipeline aggregation, technical assistance delivery, and grants deployment in alignment with GFCR objectives. It will also allow for consolidation of partnerships and integration of reef-positive solutions emerging from marine reserve management, sustainable fisheries engagement, and blue economy policy development.

While no formal Financial Facility or Conservation Trust Fund has yet been established, preparatory steps are being taken to explore future blended finance opportunities in subsequent phases. Initial pipeline mapping and stakeholder consultations have been conducted to identify potential investable enterprises aligned with coral reef resilience outcomes.

Implementation challenges during the reporting period primarily related to institutional setup timelines and coordination requirements across multiple partners. These are being addressed through phased operational planning and strengthened inter-institutional alignment.

Overall, the forthcoming launch of BECI and the proposed programme extension will create a structured pathway for investment readiness, capital mobilisation, and long-term sustainability of reef-positive solutions in Aqaba.

## V. Enabling Environment

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### 1. Policies at National and Sub-National Levels

During the reporting period, GFCR programme in Jordan supported policy and regulatory processes aimed at strengthening the governance of marine and coastal ecosystems in the Gulf of Aqaba. These efforts focused on enhancing institutional coordination, improving legal clarity, and aligning national and sub-national frameworks with Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) principles and reef-positive development pathways.

At the national level, GFCR contributed to aligning marine biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of marine resources with Jordan's broader environmental, climate resilience, and blue economy policy agenda. Through technical engagement and strategic partnerships, the programme supported evidence-based dialogue related to national commitments on biodiversity conservation, sustainable fisheries, and marine ecosystem resilience. In this context, GFCR is overseeing the development of Jordan's National Blue Economy Strategy in close collaboration with a national task force representing relevant ministries and institutions.

At the sub-national level in Aqaba, GFCR placed strong emphasis on strengthening the regulatory and institutional framework within the Aqaba Special Economic Zone. The programme supported the review of existing coastal and marine regulations, clarification of institutional mandates, and identification of legal and enforcement gaps affecting effective ICZM implementation. GFCR also participated, as a member of relevant technical committees, in the review and development of diving regulations in Aqaba, contributing to the promotion of sustainable diving practices and enhanced protection of coral reef ecosystems. In addition, the programme supported the review and development of the ICZM strategy for Aqaba, with a focus on improving legal coherence and institutional coordination among coastal and marine authorities. In addition to supporting the review of coastal and marine regulations and participating, as a member of relevant technical committees, in the review and development of diving regulations in Aqaba, the GFCR programme team also contributed to the review and enhancement of ASEZA's Environmental Protection Regulation, with a focus on ensuring the integration of blue economy principles and the promotion of environmentally responsible and reef-positive development pathways. This contribution aimed to support regulatory coherence, sustainable investment, and effective environmental governance within the Aqaba Special Economic Zone.

As part of its policy-support approach, GFCR facilitated the formalization of strategic cooperation agreements with specialized partners to strengthen policy implementation and regulatory alignment. This included an agreement with the Reef-World Foundation (Green Fins) to integrate environmental standards and best practices for the diving and marine tourism sector into sub-national regulatory and operational frameworks, as well as an agreement with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to provide technical support on marine biodiversity governance, nature-based solutions, and policy coherence.

Furthermore, GFCR supported the continuation and policy integration of a pilot marine aquaculture initiative, building on an existing agreement between ASEZA and FAO. This support contributed to evidence generation on environmentally responsible aquaculture practices and informed discussions on sustainable fisheries management, food security, and future regulatory frameworks for marine aquaculture development in Aqaba.

In addition, GFCR contributed to the marine and coastal environment component of Jordan's State of the Environment Report and provided technical inputs to the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), supporting alignment with priorities for marine and coastal ecosystem conservation, climate resilience, and sustainable resource use.

## **2. Other Enabling Environment Factors:**

During the reporting period, a number of enabling environment factors beyond formal policy frameworks influenced the progress of the GFCR programme in Jordan, particularly in the Gulf of Aqaba. Among the most significant positive factors was the strong level of institutional engagement and willingness to collaborate among key stakeholders, including sub-national authorities, technical institutions, and sectoral actors. This cooperative environment facilitated coordination, access to technical inputs, and constructive dialogue essential for advancing governance, conservation, and reef-positive economic initiatives.

Another important enabling factor was the availability of existing technical capacity and institutional experience in marine conservation, coastal management, and environmental monitoring. This foundation supported GFCR interventions related to regulatory reviews, strategic planning, and the piloting of innovative approaches, such as sustainable aquaculture and environmentally responsible marine tourism practices.

At the same time, several constraints within the enabling environment affected programme implementation. These included fragmented data ownership, limited availability of consolidated marine and coastal datasets, and capacity gaps related to enforcement and compliance. In addition, overlapping institutional mandates occasionally slowed decision-making and required additional coordination efforts. GFCR supported the enabling environment by facilitating institutional coordination, strengthening technical dialogue, supporting capacity-building activities, and leveraging partnerships with specialized international organizations. Remaining gaps include the need for improved data-sharing mechanisms, sustained capacity development for enforcement, and clearer operational coordination among relevant entities. Moving forward, GFCR can further strengthen the enabling environment by supporting integrated data systems, targeted institutional capacity building, and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms that link policy, finance, and implementation for coral reef protection and sustainable blue economy development in Aqaba

## **3. Complementary Initiatives**

During the reporting period, the GFCR programme in Jordan actively coordinated with a range of complementary initiatives operating at national and sub-national levels to enhance coherence, avoid duplication, and maximize collective impact in the Gulf of Aqaba. These collaborations focused on aligning technical work, sharing knowledge and data, and reinforcing institutional processes related to coral reef protection, marine biodiversity governance, and sustainable blue economy development.

Coordination with complementary initiatives was undertaken through joint technical discussions, participation in shared working groups and committees, and alignment of programme activities with ongoing national and regional efforts. These collaborations supported GFCR activities by providing access to existing technical expertise, baseline data, and institutional platforms, thereby strengthening evidence-based decision-making and supporting the development of integrated regulatory, strategic, and



operational frameworks. In particular, collaboration with international organizations, national authorities, and sector-focused initiatives helped reinforce reef-positive approaches across marine conservation, sustainable tourism, fisheries, and aquaculture-related activities.

Looking ahead, the programme aims to further strengthen and formalize collaboration with complementary initiatives through structured coordination mechanisms, clearer division of roles, and enhanced information-sharing arrangements. Future plans include deepening technical collaboration with ongoing marine conservation and blue economy initiatives, leveraging complementary financing and expertise, and initiating new partnerships that support scalable and sustainable reef-positive investments. Continued coordination will be critical to ensuring long-term impact, institutional sustainability, and effective implementation of integrated coastal and marine governance frameworks in the Gulf of Aqaba.

Examples of the most relevant projects include:

- Catalyzing a transformative model for circularity through 9R's in Aqaba
- ASEZA/UNDP Project "Support Developing and Implementing Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) in Aqaba"
- Canada UNDP Project: Enhancing Coastal Ecosystem Biodiversity and Resilience in the Gulf of Aqaba-Jordan
- Improving Marine Monitoring along the Aqaba Coastline Project
- ASEZA/PERSGA/UNEP GEF regional project "Inclusive Approach for Harnessing Marine Ecosystem Services and Transforming to Sustainable Blue Economy in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden"
- Sustainable Fishery Development in Red Sea and Gulf of Aden

## VI. Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI)

### **1. Gender Roles and Risks:**

Within the priority sites in Aqaba, women and men play differentiated roles across marine and coastal sectors. Men are predominantly engaged in fisheries, maritime operations, and enforcement-related roles, while women are more actively involved in community-based initiatives, awareness activities, education, tourism-related services, and emerging blue economy opportunities. Participation of other vulnerable groups, including youth and individuals with limited access to formal decision-making platforms, remains constrained by sectoral norms and institutional structures.

Key social risks identified included unequal access to technical training and decision-making processes, limited representation of women in marine governance forums, and capacity gaps affecting meaningful participation of underrepresented groups. These risks were addressed through inclusive stakeholder engagement approaches, targeted invitations to workshops and consultations, and deliberate efforts to ensure balanced participation in programme-supported activities.

### **2. Programme Actions and Outcomes:**

During the reporting period, GFCR implemented several actions to promote gender equity and social inclusion. These included integrating GESI considerations into stakeholder consultations, workshops, and technical meetings; encouraging the participation of women and underrepresented groups in



capacity-building activities; and promoting inclusive dialogue within governance and planning processes related to marine conservation, ICZM, and blue economy development.

The programme supported increased participation of women in consultations and training activities related to marine conservation, sustainable tourism, and blue economy initiatives. Measurable outcomes included improved gender balance in selected workshops and consultations, enhanced access to technical knowledge for women participants, and increased visibility of gender considerations in strategic and policy-oriented discussions supported by the programme. While progress was incremental, these outcomes reflect a positive trajectory toward more inclusive participation and benefit-sharing.

To operationalize gender mainstreaming within the GFCR programme, a dedicated workshop was conducted to strengthen the capacity of national stakeholders on integrating gender considerations into marine conservation and blue economy activities. The workshop brought together representatives from key institutions and focused on introducing practical tools and approaches for embedding gender-responsive practices within programme planning, implementation, and stakeholder engagement. It also facilitated discussions to identify concrete entry points for enhancing women's participation across GFCR interventions, particularly in areas such as marine monitoring, enforcement, and blue economy opportunities. This activity contributed to translating gender commitments into practical actions by supporting stakeholders in systematically integrating gender equality and inclusiveness across programme implementation.

### **3. Lessons Learned & Future Direction:**

Key lessons learned include the importance of early and intentional GESI integration during activity design, the value of working through trusted local institutions to reach women and underrepresented groups, and the need for flexible engagement approaches that account for social and cultural contexts. The programme also recognized that achieving meaningful inclusion requires sustained effort beyond one-off activities.

Remaining vulnerabilities include limited representation of women in formal decision-making bodies, structural barriers within marine and maritime sectors, and the need for more systematic tracking of GESI-related indicators. Moving forward, GFCR will strengthen its GESI approach by enhancing gender-disaggregated data collection, expanding targeted capacity-building opportunities, supporting women's leadership and entrepreneurship within the blue economy, and reinforcing institutional awareness of GESI principles across partner organizations. These efforts will further support inclusive, equitable, and sustainable outcomes for coral reef protection and blue economy development in Aqaba

## **VII. Partnerships**

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### **1. Partner Contributions**

The contributions of partners in the programme are categorized into two levels: implementing partners and general partners:

#### **Key Implementing Partners:**



IUCN West Asia Office: Provided key support for enhancing management effectiveness. Additionally, IUCN delivered training programs for the Aqaba Marine Reserve's staff and stakeholders, including gender mainstreaming in protected area management and enhancing their role in marine conservation.

Marine Science Station – University of Jordan: Hosts the pilot marine aquaculture project, working alongside the program and ASEZA to achieve its objectives. The station also plays a crucial role in the National Monitoring Programme for seawater quality and marine ecosystems.

Reef - World Foundation: Several meetings were held with the organization, leading to an agreement to enhance and expand the Green Fins program in Jordan in cooperation with ASEZA.

Fishermen's Associations: Supported the programme and its intersecting activities with other projects by providing data on fish catches, environmental observations, and collaborating with the Aqaba Marine Reserve. Fishermen also contributed valuable insights for developing the publicity strategy.

### **Other key Partners:**

Regional and International Level: The program team engaged with several regional initiatives, including ICRI, contributing to the preparation of the Global Coral Status Report.

The programme also collaborated with the General Organization for the Protection of Coral Reefs and Sea Turtles (SHAMS), which played a key technical role in supporting the carrying capacity assessment of diving sites in Aqaba. This collaboration contributed to generating science-based recommendations to inform sustainable dive site management, reduce pressure on coral reef ecosystems, and support the integration of carrying capacity considerations into diving regulations and marine spatial planning efforts in the Gulf of Aqaba.

Local Organizations and Civil Society: The Aqaba Diving Association, the Royal Jordanian Marine Sports Federation, the Environmental Sports Fishing Association, and the Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan actively participated in citizen science monitoring, sustainable fishing, sustainable diving operations, and other programme activities. These organizations also took part in all workshops organized by the programme and co-organized an underwater cleanup campaign.

Scientific and Research Support: Ibn Hayyan Laboratories continued to conduct necessary seawater quality tests and assess the eligibility of the Aqaba Marine Reserve's visitor beach for Blue Flag certification. The program has collaborated with them to provide relevant data.

Women, Youth, and Media Initiatives: Various women's and youth associations, as well as media initiatives, actively participated in programme activities and in intersecting projects.

Private Sector Engagement: The private sector played a significant role, with Ayla Oasis and Aqaba Container Terminal contributing to sustainability initiatives at their respective sites. The meetings particularly with Ayla Oasis have focused on reef balls and restoration efforts to enhance marine biodiversity in order to learn from their experience.

## **2. Fostering Collaboration Among Partners**



The GFCR programme in Jordan operates through a coalition-based approach that brings together implementing, government, scientific, civil society, and private sector partners to advance coral reef protection and sustainable blue economy development in the Gulf of Aqaba. Within this framework, the Convening Agent played a central role during the reporting period in fostering collaboration, ensuring strategic alignment, and facilitating effective coordination among diverse partners.

The Convening Agent acted as the primary facilitator and integrator across partner groups, supporting alignment between policy, science, and implementation. This included convening partners around shared objectives, ensuring coherence between programme activities and national and sub-national priorities, and mediating coordination among institutions with overlapping mandates. Through continuous engagement and structured dialogue, the Convening Agent helped translate strategic goals into coordinated actions across sectors.

Several coordination mechanisms were used to facilitate collaboration, including regular coordination meetings, participation in joint technical committees and working groups, stakeholder consultations, and bilateral technical exchanges. Existing institutional platforms were leveraged where possible to reduce duplication and enhance ownership, while programme-led workshops and consultations provided additional spaces for cross-sectoral dialogue and joint problem-solving.

Shared goals and values—particularly a commitment to coral reef protection, sustainability, and evidence-based decision-making—underpinned collaboration among partners. Common adherence to reef-positive principles and long-term resilience objectives helped maintain trust and alignment, even in complex institutional environments. Partners also shared a practical focus on integrating conservation outcomes with economic and community benefits, reinforcing collective ownership of programme objectives.

A key example of successful collaboration was the integration of scientific inputs from research partners into regulatory and planning processes led by government institutions. Through facilitation by the Convening Agent, scientific data and technical assessments informed policy discussions on diving management, marine protection, and ICZM implementation, strengthening the credibility and effectiveness of governance-related outputs. In instances where coordination challenges arose, proactive facilitation, clarification of roles, and adaptive planning approaches supported timely resolution and sustained collaboration.

Effective strategies for overcoming challenges included early engagement of partners in planning processes, transparent communication, flexibility in implementation arrangements, and continuous alignment of expectations. These approaches enhanced coordination, reduced institutional fragmentation, and enabled partners to collectively deliver integrated and mutually reinforcing outcomes. Moving forward, the programme will continue to strengthen collaborative mechanisms and deepen cross-sectoral partnerships to support durable, scalable impact for coral reef protection and sustainable blue economy development in the Gulf of Aqaba.

## VIII. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

### **1. Overview of M&E Activities**

Key M&E efforts during the reporting period included the consolidation of baseline information for selected ecological, governance, and programme performance indicators, alongside the gradual establishment of targets where data availability allowed. Progress tracking was undertaken through a



combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, drawing on field monitoring, partner reporting, technical assessments, and stakeholder consultations.

The programme utilized a range of systems and tools, including MERMAID for coral reef and marine monitoring data, partner management information systems, technical reports, surveys, and field observations. During this period, improvements were made in data consistency and use, particularly through clearer guidance on indicator definitions and reporting formats. Quantitative data were complemented by qualitative insights from interviews, workshops, and field observations, enabling a more comprehensive assessment of outcomes and implementation progress.

Data quality assurance measures included cross-verification of partner-reported data, spot checks, technical reviews, triangulation across data sources, and validation through consultations and technical discussions with relevant institutions

## **2. Entities Responsible for M&E**

Overall M&E coordination is led by the Convening Agent, with implementing and scientific partners responsible for primary data collection and government counterparts supporting data validation. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) will support the entry of selected M&E datasets, particularly those related to biodiversity governance and technical indicators.

University of Jordan, Aqaba Branch & Marine Science Station: These partners will play the leading role in monitoring of the marine environment, based on their several decades of experience and technical expertise. Other partners for ecological monitoring: Local inhabitants will participate through citizen science monitoring programs. A number of private sector actors manage ongoing water quality programs.

## **3. Key Achievements and Insights**

Key achievements included improved consistency in reporting, expanded use of MERMAID for ecological monitoring, and clearer indicator definitions, while target-setting remains dependent on ongoing baseline consolidation and will be finalized in the next reporting cycle.

## **4. Challenges and Lessons Learned**

M&E implementation faced challenges related to fragmented data ownership, uneven data quality, and reporting delays, highlighting the importance of early indicator alignment, continuous partner support, and combining quantitative and qualitative data.

## **5. Next Steps and Timeline**

Next steps include finalizing baselines and targets, strengthening data governance and quality assurance procedures, and continuing the entry and follow-up of biological data related to coral reefs and fish biodiversity through MERMAID and partner monitoring systems.

## IX. Programme Management

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### 1. Decisions and Resolutions by Governance Body:

During the reporting period, the Programme Steering Committee (PSC) and the Technical Committee (TC) of the Gulf of Aqaba Resilient Reefs Programme convened their first formal meetings in September 2025, marking a key milestone in strengthening programme governance and oversight

The Steering Committee, chaired by the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) with UNDP serving as Secretary, is the programme's main strategic and decision-making body. Its mandate includes providing policy guidance, ensuring alignment with national priorities, endorsing key outputs, and facilitating coordination across government entities, the private sector, and local communities. The Committee agreed to meet at least twice per year, with the flexibility to convene additional meetings as needed

The Technical Committee operates as an advisory and quality assurance body, supporting the programme through technical review, scientific validation, and methodological guidance. It was established to ensure compliance with international standards (e.g., Reef Check, MERMAID) and to strengthen the integration of scientific evidence into planning and policy processes. The Committee meets on a quarterly or ad hoc basis, depending on implementation needs.

Both governance bodies were designed to ensure inclusive and balanced representation. Membership of the Steering Committee includes ASEZA, UNDP, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, representatives of the private sector (e.g., Chamber of Commerce), and local community stakeholders such as the fishermen sector. Several members participated virtually, enabling broader national-level engagement beyond Aqaba. The Technical Committee further promotes inclusivity by bringing together government entities, academic institutions, and technical experts, ensuring that diverse scientific and sectoral perspectives inform programme decisions.

During the first Steering Committee meeting, several critical resolutions were discussed and endorsed:

Agreement on governance arrangements and meeting frequency, confirming the Steering Committee's strategic oversight role and the Technical Committee's advisory function.

- Implication: This clarified decision-making pathways and strengthened accountability and coordination across programme components.

Affirmation of alignment with national and regional priorities, including Aqaba Marine Reserve's nomination for the UNESCO World Heritage List and integration with broader environmental and Blue Economy initiatives.

- Implication: Ensured that programme interventions reinforce existing national commitments and increase policy relevance and sustainability.

Recognition of pressures on marine resources, including the suspension of new diving licenses to manage carrying capacity at dive sites.

- Implication: Provided an enabling policy environment for GFCR-supported activities on sustainable tourism, reef protection, and site management.

Acknowledgement of implementation delays related to late agreement signing, regional political circumstances, and challenges in securing international expertise. The Committee confirmed that these delays did not undermine programme relevance and supported adaptive sequencing of activities.

- Implication: Enabled flexible implementation and justified subsequent adjustments to work planning without compromising programme objectives.

An approach was proposed to support the aquaculture component by building on existing infrastructure and exploring practical options suited to the local context. This includes the rehabilitation and use of the existing aquaculture system at the Marine Science Station as a pilot and demonstration facility, alongside strengthening the capacity of fishermen associations in preparation for potential future engagement in aquaculture activities. The approach also considers exploring locally suitable species, including native fish such as *Siganus* spp. (rabbitfish), as well as the potential production of live bait species (e.g. small pelagic fish), which are currently collected from sensitive or restricted areas such as ports and parts of the Marine Reserve. This would help reduce pressure on these areas while supporting more sustainable fishing practices

- Implication: Improved alignment with local ecological and operational conditions, enhanced readiness for future aquaculture opportunities, and reduced pressure on sensitive marine areas through exploration of alternative practices.

## 2. Work Plan & Budgetary Adjustments:

During the reporting period, no changes were made to the programme’s overall objectives or expected outputs. However, minor adjustments to the implementation work plan were introduced through re-phasing and sequencing of activities. These adjustments were driven by delays in programme start-up and agreement formalization, challenges in contracting specialized international expertise, and the need for additional time to access and validate environmental and technical data held by multiple institutions. Regional political and logistical circumstances also affected timelines without altering the scope or relevance of planned interventions. The Steering Committee acknowledged these constraints and endorsed adaptive planning to safeguard implementation quality.

The re-phasing required careful management of interdependencies across programme components, particularly between technical assessments, policy support, field-based interventions, and capacity-building activities. To mitigate delays, the programme adopted a parallel and coordinated implementation approach, allowing preparatory and enabling activities—such as stakeholder consultations, technical reviews, and safeguards alignment—to proceed while prerequisite steps were finalized. Coordination was maintained through structured engagement of the Technical Committee, continuous communication between Aqaba-based technical teams and Amman-based coordination functions, and alignment of revised timelines with key national partners.

From a financial perspective, no major budget reallocations across outputs were required. Only limited and targeted adjustments were made to align expenditures with revised sequencing and ensure adequate resourcing for priority technical, coordination, and safeguards functions, without negatively affecting programme outputs

## 3. Operational Adjustments:

During the reporting period, the PMU maintained its structure, with a **leadership transition** following the resignation of the Programme Manager mid-year. The Deputy Programme Manager, an existing team

member, assumed the role, ensuring continuity and implementation stability. Coordination between Aqaba-based technical teams and Amman-based management functions was strengthened. Toward year-end, a Blue Economy expert and a Communications Officer joined the team to address capacity gaps, strengthen strategic focus, and ensure effective stakeholder engagement and visibility, with no major changes to overall staffing levels.

#### **4. Operational Challenges & Mitigation:**

During the reporting period, the main operational challenge related to consultant availability under the partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), particularly in identifying specialized experts. As a result, selected activities were re-scheduled and re-phased, and the contract period will be extended within the programme’s allowable timeframe to enable completion of the remaining activities in the next reporting period.

#### **5. Replenishment**

The programme is expected to undergo replenishment in 2026, pending a formal decision by the relevant stakeholders. Preparatory actions are underway, including consolidation of progress, documentation of governance decisions.

## **X. 2026 Objectives**

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### **1. 2026 Objectives**

- To ensure that the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI) is established and operational, with an office and staff in place, by Feb 2026. In addition, to quickly develop incubation and technical assistance services to support reef-positive entrepreneurs and businesses as well as blended finance opportunities. The program will identify and support businesses through the BECI in partnership with e.g., the Ministry of Investment.
- In line with the sequencing outlined in the Project Document for coral restoration, Phase 1 activities will focus primarily on enabling and preparatory actions under Activities 3.1.1–3.1.3. These include strengthening technical capacities, conducting targeted training for scientists and divers, and developing context-specific protocols and guidelines for coral restoration in the Gulf of Aqaba. Building on these foundations, and in coordination with a complementary UNDP-supported project, initial pilot actions—such as the establishment of small-scale coral nurseries and limited restoration trials—may be initiated during 2026. These efforts are not intended as full implementation of Activity 3.1.4, but rather as an opportunity to test approaches under local conditions, strengthen institutional and technical readiness, and generate practical lessons learned. The insights gained from these pilot efforts will directly inform the design and scaling of coral restoration interventions in Phase 2, ensuring alignment with international best practices while adapting to the specific ecological and operational context of Aqaba. This coordinated approach also allows for maximizing synergies across UNDP initiatives, accelerating preparedness, and enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of future restoration activities under Outcome 3 and the BECI solution
- Provide support to the selected businesses to implement coral positive solutions as part of the BECI solution and operation.
- Regional collaboration in areas such as coral reef restoration, scientific research, and marine protected area (MPA) management remains a strategic priority for the programme, particularly

in the subsequent phase of implementation. During the current inception phase, efforts are focused on laying the necessary foundations to enable such collaboration. This includes initiating coordination and engagement with relevant regional and international partners, identifying key institutions, and facilitating dialogue and knowledge exchange to explore potential areas of cooperation. These early efforts aim to build a shared understanding, align priorities, and identify opportunities for joint action in the future. In this context, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) plays an important role as a technical and regional partner, contributing to the development of scientific baselines, strengthening monitoring and assessment approaches, and supporting the design of future collaborative initiatives. Through its regional presence and technical expertise, IUCN is well positioned to help bridge national and regional efforts and promote the exchange of best practices. These preparatory steps are expected to inform and support the development of more structured and operational regional collaboration mechanisms in the next phase, including joint programmes, capacity-building initiatives, and coordinated approaches to coral reef conservation and MPA management. This phased approach ensures alignment with the programme design while maximizing synergies and enhancing long-term impact

- The completion of data collection and the preparation of reports are being ensured in a sound and systematic manner under the agreement with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

#### **Strategies for Achieving These Objectives**

- **Policy Advocacy and Institutional Collaboration:** Engaging with national authorities, regional organizations, and local stakeholders to integrate conservation measures into legislative and governance frameworks.
- **Financial Resource Mobilization:** Partnering with international donors, private investors, and sustainability funds to develop diverse financing streams that ensure continued conservation efforts.
- **Community Involvement and Capacity Building:** Conducting workshops, technical training, and awareness campaigns to enhance sustainable fishing practices, marine tourism, and local conservation efforts.

#### **Contribution to Programme Outcomes**

These objectives directly support the program’s overarching goals by:

- **Enhancing Marine Ecosystem Resilience:** Strengthening policy enforcement and governance structures to protect biodiversity.
- **Ensuring Financial Sustainability:** Securing long-term investments to maintain conservation initiatives beyond the program’s duration.
- **Fostering Inclusive Participation:** Encouraging active involvement from local communities, private-sector actors, and enforcement agencies to ensure effective and long-lasting impact.

## **XI. Communication, Visibility and Knowledge Management**

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In 2025, the programme placed strong emphasis on enhancing communication, visibility, and knowledge management to support awareness, stakeholder engagement, and the dissemination of key achievements and lessons learned.

A range of communication products were developed and disseminated through multiple platforms, including social media channels, the GFCR newsletter, and knowledge-sharing platforms such as REEF+. The programme team ensured consistent and proactive dissemination of all major updates and achievements through a wide range of outreach channels, including social media platforms, official local newspapers, online media outlets, and television interviews, among others. This approach contributed to broadening outreach, increasing public awareness, and strengthening stakeholder engagement at both national and regional levels. Overall, many of communication pieces were produced and published throughout the year, covering key thematic areas such as marine conservation, sustainable fisheries, blue economy innovation, regional collaboration, and gender inclusion.

**Key stories and communication highlights included:**

- Empowering Women in Marine Conservation – Aqaba, Jordan
- Aqaba Prepares to Launch the Blue Economy Center for Innovation
- The Blue Economy Centre for Launched in Aqaba
- Aquaculture Training in Aqaba: A Step Toward a Sustainable Blue Economy
- Royal Navy Divers Complete Specialized Coral Reef Monitoring Training in Aqaba
- Jordan Signs Coral Reef Protection Agreement
- Back to Fishing Festival: Reviving Tradition, Sustaining the Sea
- Beneath the Surface: Aqaba’s Seagrasses Take Centre Stage in Blue Economy and Climate Action
- Jordanian–Saudi Regional Initiative to Strengthen Sustainable Management of Dive Sites in Aqaba
- Enhancing Women’s Role in Marine Conservation and the Blue Economy

In addition to storytelling, the programme contributed to strengthening knowledge management systems by supporting data sharing, documentation of lessons learned, and integration of scientific outputs into platforms such as REEF+ and MERMAID. These efforts contribute to building a robust knowledge base that informs decision-making, supports adaptive management, and facilitates replication and scaling of successful interventions

**1. Strategic Role of communications:**

During the reporting period, programme communications contributed to the effective implementation of the GFCR-supported programme in the Gulf of Aqaba by strengthening visibility, accountability, stakeholder engagement, and uptake of results. Communications activities were focused on programme-level outputs and Solutions and excluded broader institutional communications (e.g., fundraising, corporate branding, or general public relations), unless directly linked to GFCR-supported interventions and outcomes.

Communications supported programme delivery by:

- Increasing awareness of GFCR-supported Solutions and implementation progress;
- Facilitating coordination and information exchange among government counterparts, implementing partners, and technical stakeholders;
- Disseminating evidence, emerging results, and lessons learned to inform decision-making and adaptive management;
- Supporting the promotion of good practices and behavioural change among relevant user groups;

- Enhancing visibility of the Solution pipeline and partnerships linked to implementation and scale-up.

## **2. Alignment with programme goals:**

Communications were targeted and tailored to the following audiences:

Government counterparts, Communities and practitioners, Private sector actors, technical partners and academia, Donors and international partners, and the local communities including the women sector & youth.

Key programme activities amplified during the reporting period included sustainable dive site management, fisheries support, nature-based solutions for coral reef resilience, capacity-building initiatives, and blue economy innovation.

Communication products delivered included programme stories, press releases, photo and video documentation, social media content packages disseminated through partner channels, technical briefs and presentations, and stakeholder workshops and review meetings (in-person and hybrid).

## **3. Effectiveness and Future Planning:**

Programme communications demonstrated effectiveness in supporting stakeholder engagement and implementation. Evidence of results included strong attendance and participation in workshops and consultations, positive feedback from stakeholders regarding clarity and relevance of information shared, and increased visibility of GFCR-supported activities through partner platforms and earned media.

In-person and hybrid engagement formats were the most effective channels for dialogue, validation, and feedback, complemented by targeted digital dissemination and visual assets. Communication materials were also used to support partnership development and discussions related to the Solution pipeline.

Key challenges included approval timelines, constraints in data availability for evidence-based communications, safeguarding and consent requirements, and limited capacity for continuous content production during intensive implementation periods. These challenges were mitigated through early planning, prioritisation of high-impact outputs, use of aggregated data, and alignment of communications with key programme events.

## **4. Knowledge Sharing:**

Communications activities supported programme knowledge management by facilitating learning, capacity-building, and exchange across partners and Solutions. Tools and approaches included training materials, guidance notes, technical presentations, and learning events. Lessons learned were documented and shared through stakeholder workshops, coordination meetings, and technical exchanges.

Planned improvements for the next cycle include the development of a structured content plan and publication schedule, establishment of a centralised asset platform in coordination with ASEZA, use of standardised communication templates, and stronger integration of monitoring data and MERMAID-linked evidence into communications products and case studies.



## Annex A – Co-financing Table

#	Co-financing partner / source	Source type	Instrument	Status	Amount (since programme start)	Amount (in 2025)	Notes (FX rate, valuation method, assumptions)
		(public / private / philanthropic / multilateral / other)	(grant / loan/ equity / guarantee / other)	(committed/ contracted/ received)			
1	Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA)	public	Other	Committed	40,190	25,000	Green Fins Initiative
2	Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA)	public	Monetary	Secured	15,000,000	2,000,000	Allocated budget for construction of the ASTH (remaining costs to be mobilized by the Royal court and other entities). (ADC signed a ground-breaking Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the global company Voyacy Regen to initiate a pioneering coral restoration and 3D printing project in Marine Science Station using advanced technology.)
3	Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA)	public	Monetary	Secured	1,000,000	0	Cost of land donated by ASEZA to the National Centre for Crisis Management to establish a DRR facility in Aqaba to support disaster preparedness, response and recovery, particularly disasters that might impact the marine environment (e.g. chemical and oil spills)
4	ASEZA	public	Monetary	Secured	1,800,000	900,000	Budget for management of the Aqaba Marine Reserve (900,000/year for 7 years)
5	ASEZA	public	Monetary	Secured	200,000	100,000	Budget for national monitoring program (100,000/year for 7 years)



6	ASEZA	public	Monetary	Ambition	1,000,000	0	
7	Global Environment Facility	other	Monetary	Anticipated	700,000	0	Will start in 2026
8	Global Environment Facility	other	Monetary	Anticipated	2,000,000	0	Will start in 2026
9	Global Environment Facility	Multilateral	Monetary	Anticipated	7,350,000	0	GEF-UNEP-PERSGA project "An Inclusive Approach for Harnessing Marine Ecosystem Services and Transforming to Sustainable Blue Economy in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (HESBERSGA Project)
10	Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC*)	public	In-kind	Anticipated	600,000	0	ADC will co-invest in the Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation through both financial and in-kind support. ADC has stated its interest in hosting the CSBEI at the Aqaba Marine Park, and is willing to contribute support staff, office space, and oversight through their Board of Directors to support the launch and first few years of CSBEI operation
11	Private Tourism Operators**	private	Monetary	Anticipated	720,000	120,000	Private water quality monitoring programs per the requirements of the blue flag certificate (120,000/year)
12	Private Industrial Operators***	private	Monetary	Anticipated	400,000	200,000	Private water quality monitoring programs (200,000/year) (see Annex IV for details)
13	ASEZA / European Union	other	Monetary	Secured	5,500,000	1,000,000	Ongoing EU-ASEZA-UNDP project "Enhance the Conservation of the Aqaba Marine Reserve by Improving Capacity for Effective Management"



14	Govt. of Canada	other	Monetary	Ambition	1,000,000	1,000,000	Project “Conserving the unique marine and coastal ecosystem and biodiversity in Aqaba” (a potential project; UNDP has initial approval to develop a concept note with a focus on marine biodiversity, including restoration of coral reefs and seagrass beds)
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\* Additional co-financing is expected from ADC in the form of concessional investments in CSBEI companies and from other partners such as the Cities & Villages Development Bank and ultimately commercial banks that seek to invest in the enterprises being incubated and supported by the Centre.

\*\* Mövenpick resort & Residences Aqaba; Mövenpick resort & spa Tala Bay; Intercontinental Aqaba resort; B12 beach club; Hyatt Regency Aqaba Ayla resort; Marina Ayla; AMR Visitor Centre, Kempinski Hotel

\*\*\* ACT, Thermal power station, Ayla lagoons, Industrial Complex, Royal Yacht Club, Saraya project, Phosphate industrial complex, Kemapco, Jordan Industrial Ports Company



## Annex B – Programme Milestones by Activities

Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
<b>Outcome 1 – Heightened protection of functioning, resilient coral reefs in the Gulf of Aqaba</b>			
<b>Output 1.1 – Ecological and socio-economic information related to marine ecosystems effectively gathered and communicated to inform conservation policy, prioritize intervention sites, address drivers of degradation, and assess the impacts of GFCR interventions</b>			
<b>Activity 1.1.1 – Gender-sensitive ecological and social assessments to enhance established baselines for monitoring and support for addressing the drivers of coral reef degradation in the Gulf of Aqaba</b>			
Detailed information and data on coral reef ecosystems conditions and trends in the Gulf of Aqaba, refining information on key drivers of coral reef resilience and degradation, maps, etc., and an updated assessment of the importance of the GoA’s coral reefs as climate refugia and biodiversity habitat	January 2025	Delayed Submitted March 2026	Following the signing of the agreement with IUCN, several activities have been initiated and partially completed to support this component. These include the compilation and review of existing ecological and socio-economic data, identification of key data gaps, and the design of standardized data collection methodologies aligned with international best practices. In addition, initial field coordination and stakeholder engagement have been conducted in collaboration with ASEZA and relevant partners, alongside preparatory work for ecological surveys and baseline assessments. The data and information generated to date have already contributed to strengthening the evidence base required for the UNESCO World Heritage Site nomination and the IUCN Green List application, particularly in relation to ecological significance, site management effectiveness, and conservation value. While IUCN maintains a strong pool of expertise, additional time was required at the outset to ensure the selection and mobilization of experts with context-specific experience relevant to the Red Sea and alignment with national priorities. Following this, implementation proceeded as planned.
<b>Activity 1.1.2 – Develop information resources to support policy decision-making, including establishing the business case for investing in coral reefs, and evaluating the potential and realized economic impacts of coral reef associated interventions on local communities, with a specific focus on women</b>			
Targeted information resources (reports; primers; etc.) on the economic value of coral reef ecosystems to support better decision-making and	July, 2025	Delayed June 2026	This economic valuation represents the first comprehensive assessment of coral reef ecosystem services in Aqaba at this level of detail and methodological rigor. Following the signing of the agreement with IUCN, a review of available literature and previous studies related to marine ecosystem services in Aqaba was initiated and is largely completed. In parallel, the ToR for the development of targeted information resources has been prepared (an earlier attempt to engage individual



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
inform the design of sustainable business ventures			experts for this assessment did not progress as planned, and so a specialized consulting firm was contracted recently to undertake the full economic valuation study). To date, the firm has completed a compilation of available datasets, literature review, and initial analytical scoping. The next phase will include structured stakeholder consultations and interviews with key groups (e.g., ASEZA, fishers, tourism operators, and other relevant stakeholders) to support primary data collection. The full economic valuation report is currently under development and will be delivered in line with the updated implementation timeline.
<b>Activity 1.1.3 – Monitoring systems strengthened for coral reef ecosystems in the Gulf of Aqaba with community participation applying citizen science principles to effectively and rapidly assess emerging threats, ecological damage, and positive impacts of investments</b>			
Technical guidelines and data provided to existing marine monitoring programs in order to improve monitoring of coral reef conditions and impacts of key drivers of degradation	June, 2025	Delayed April 2026	<p>Progress has been made in reviewing and evaluating the existing coral reef monitoring programme, including an assessment of current methodologies and data collection protocols. Based on this review, a set of practical recommendations has been developed to enhance data quality, improve consistency, and strengthen the overall monitoring framework. A partnership with a Norwegian marine research institute is planned for 2026 to provide technical support in further developing the monitoring programme and strengthening the capacity of the national team, particularly in survey design, data management, and quality assurance. Capacity-building efforts have already been initiated through technical training delivered in collaboration with Swiss partners, focusing on the application of environmental DNA (eDNA) techniques in coordination with the Aqaba Marine Reserve. This represents an important step toward introducing advanced monitoring tools to complement existing approaches. Parallel efforts are ongoing to promote community engagement and citizen science approaches, including the introduction of Reef Check methodologies to support standardized data collection.</p> <p>As part of efforts to strengthen gender inclusion within the programme, targeted capacity-building activities were implemented to enhance the role of women in marine conservation. Five female officers from the Royal Navy and the Environmental Police successfully completed certified training in open water diving and marine monitoring. The training focused on building practical skills in</p>



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
			underwater survey techniques, data collection, and reef monitoring, enabling participants to actively contribute to national marine monitoring efforts.
Output 1.2 – Regional planning, information sharing, and scientific research collaboration on coral reefs strengthened and contributing to conservation, and enhanced livelihoods for local communities, with a focus on women and youth			
Activity 1.2.1 – Gulf of Aqaba Coral Reef Ecosystems Scientific Collaboration Platform			
Suite of options and strategy for the scope and functions of the Gulf of Aqaba Coral Reef Ecosystems Scientific Collaboration Platform	Nov. 2025	Delay Until Nov 2026	<p>Coordination had previously taken place with the organizers of the International Red Sea Biosphere Conference, which was originally scheduled to be held in the first half of 2026. However, the conference has been postponed indefinitely. Preparations are now underway to convene a regional Blue Economy Forum, tentatively scheduled for June 2026 (depending on the regional security situation). The programme will work to integrate selected topics into the forum’s agenda, such as regional scientific cooperation, blended finance, and coral reef restoration.</p> <p>The establishment of a Gulf of Aqaba (GoA) scientific collaboration platform remains under consideration. At this stage, the programme is adopting a gradual approach, focusing on strengthening regional cooperation through ongoing analytical work and existing partnerships. In this context, it is expected that the outcomes of the economic valuation and sustainable financing assessments, along with the technical outputs developed and to be further advanced in collaboration with IUCN and Green Fins, will help identify priority areas and practical entry points for enhanced scientific collaboration in the Gulf of Aqaba.</p> <p>In parallel, initial engagement with regional initiatives, including SHAMS and the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), has provided opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration at the regional level. This approach allows for informed decision-making on the most appropriate and sustainable mechanism for collaboration, while avoiding duplication and building on existing efforts.</p>
Activity 1.2.2 – Gulf of Aqaba Coral Reefs Management & Finance Strategy			
Completed Gulf of Aqaba Coral Reefs Management & Finance Strategy	July., 2025	Delayed Until Nov 2026	There were initial attempts to establish partnerships with Saudi Arabia and Egypt; however, these were postponed due to evolving regional coordination priorities, scheduling constraints, and the need to align with national processes and approvals. At this stage, the programme is focusing on generating the necessary



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
			analytical and technical inputs—such as economic valuation, sustainable financing assessments, and technical work with partners (e.g., IUCN and Green Fins)—which will serve as a foundation for informed regional engagement. These efforts are expected to enable more structured regional coordination and contribute to the gradual development of a shared strategy for coral reef conservation and sustainable use in the Gulf of Aqaba
<b>Activity 1.2.3 – Aqaba Science and Technology Hub Business Plan</b>			
Business Plan for the Aqaba Science and Technology Hub	TBD	Not started, awaiting creation of the ASTH	The engineering and architectural design of the Aqaba Science Hub has been completed. However, the commencement of construction has been placed on hold, and there is no confirmed timeline at this stage regarding whether or when construction will proceed. As a result, further steps related to the operationalization of the Hub, including the development of the business plan, remain pending until greater clarity is obtained on the way forward
<b>Output 1.3- Financing mechanisms and related management capacities strengthened for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and OECMs</b>			
<b>Activity 1.3.1: Develop and implement financing mechanisms to support the conservation of all coral reefs in Jordan</b>			
Report with detailed assessments of the viability of various finance options for the conservation of all coral reefs in the Gulf of Aqaba, based on desk reviews, interviews, workshops and technical analyses	Sep 2025	Delay May 2026	Progress has been made towards the development of the report, including the initiation of desk reviews of existing literature and relevant studies related to coral reef conservation financing in the Gulf of Aqaba. In parallel, preparatory work has been undertaken to structure the assessment framework and identify key stakeholders for engagement. Initial coordination has also been carried out to support upcoming interviews and consultations. Further steps, including stakeholder interviews, workshops, and detailed technical analyses, are currently being planned and will be implemented in the next phase to complete the assessment.
<b>Activity 1.3.2: Develop and implement an Aqaba Marine Reserve Business Plan and associated financing mechanisms</b>			
Completed Aqaba Marine Reserve Business Plan, including information on options for new financing mechanisms	June, 2025	Delay June 2026	The development of the Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR) Business Plan is at an early stage. Initial scoping has been undertaken to outline the key components of the plan and identify potential areas for further analysis, including sustainable financing mechanisms. Further work, including detailed assessments, stakeholder consultations, and financial analysis, is planned for the upcoming phase.
<b>Outcome 2 – Integration of Red Sea coral reefs into the growing sustainability-oriented economy of Aqaba</b>			
<b>Output 2.1 – Reef-positive investment opportunities identified and supported through a Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation</b>			



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
Activity 2.1.1 –Identify initial pipeline of reef-positive investment opportunities that are inclusive and gender-sensitive			
Overall pipeline of investable projects identified, based on assessment of drivers of degradation; market assessments; consultations with fisheries, tourism and waste management associations and businesses; review of relevant policy documents, etc.	Apr 2026	Delayed	<p>Initial steps have been taken towards identifying a pipeline of investable projects, building on a combination of analytical work, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement. This includes the completion of a financial options assessment, which identifies a range of potential financing mechanisms and priority investment areas to support coral reef conservation and blue economy development in the Gulf of Aqaba. In parallel, a draft National Blue Economy Strategy (2026–2035) has been developed and submitted, providing a comprehensive national framework and identifying key sectors and investment opportunities across multiple pillars, including sustainable tourism, fisheries and aquaculture, marine innovation, renewable energy, and environmental protection. The Strategy further outlines an integrated approach through eight strategic pillars that collectively define priority intervention areas and guide future investments, thereby directly contributing to shaping a pipeline of reef-positive and economically viable projects.</p> <p>Through the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI), the program has identified priority sectors and types of projects to be developed. An outreach session was conducted targeting entrepreneurs and startups, during which funding opportunities (up to USD 25,000 per project) and support mechanisms were presented, contributing to the identification and early development of potential investable project ideas. While a fully consolidated pipeline has not been finalized, these combined efforts have resulted in the identification of initial project concepts, priority sectors, and enabling frameworks, which will be further refined and structured into a comprehensive investment pipeline in the next phase.</p>
	Nov 2025	Achieved	
Activity 2.1.2 –Establish and operate a Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation, including a reef-positive blue economy business incubator			
Establishment of the Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation (CSBEI) (engagement of Centre Director and Assistant; establishment of	April 2025	Jan 2026 Achieved	A decision was issued at the end of 2025 to adopt the Blue Economy concept, and approval was granted to host the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation. It was agreed to adopt the name “Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI)” instead of the previously proposed “Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation (CSBEI)”. In addition, the Centre’s vision, mission, and financing plan have been



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
partnerships – law firms, universities, key local enterprises; development of Operational and Business Plans)			developed. The governance framework, operational roadmap, and business models were also prepared
First round of call for proposals and incubation of first concepts/ companies under the CSBEI	May, 2025	Delay, On-track April 2026	A call for applications will be launched in February 2026 through one of the accredited incubators.
Monitoring and evaluation process established to assess impact of ventures in the CSBEI portfolio	2025	on track	A Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) process will be established to assess the performance and impact of ventures supported under the BECI portfolio, in alignment with the GFCR results framework. Monitoring will be conducted through milestone-based tracking, regular progress reporting, and periodic reviews, under UNDP oversight. Detailed M&E procedures, indicators, and reporting requirements are outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR) and will be operationalized through the agreements to be signed with the Queen Rania Centre for Entrepreneurship
Development of the Communication and Outreach Plan	Aug 2025	on track	Initial steps have been undertaken towards the development of a Communication and Outreach Plan for BECI, including the establishment of the Centre’s branding and visual identity as a key foundation for its communication efforts. This included the development of core visual identity elements such as the logo, colour palette, typography, and style guidelines. Early outreach and visibility actions have also been implemented through the broader GFCR programme communication channels, including stakeholder engagement events and the official launch of BECI
<b>Output 2.2 –Reef-positive investment opportunities scaled through finance from the Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation</b>			
<b>Activity 2.2.1 –Work through the Centre for Sustainable Blue Economy Innovation to generate a range of blended finance offerings to support reef-positive businesses that are inclusive and gender-sensitive</b>			
Assessing and developing finance mechanisms (grants; concessional loans;	2025	On track May 2026	Initial progress has been made in assessing potential blended finance mechanisms for BECI, including grants and other financing instruments. The financial



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
reimbursable grants; equity; etc.) that could be provided through the BECI			mechanisms strategy, along with the Blue Economy Strategy, will be finalized and submitted in the coming period.
Activity 2.2.2 –Identify and collaborate with regional and international partners on finance for innovative reef-positive businesses			
Mapping and engagement of regional / international partners to support reef-positive businesses.	2025	on track June 2026	An international consultant has been contracted and is currently working on the development of financing mechanisms, including the mapping and engagement of regional and international partners to support reef-positive businesses. This is complemented by ongoing technical inputs and reports prepared by IUCN. A draft output is under preparation, with final deliverables expected in the coming period.
Output 2.3 – Sector-specific regulations, management mechanisms and information systems in place to reduce negative impacts on coral reefs and facilitate investments in and operation of reef-friendly businesses			
Activity 2.3.1: Regulations, management mechanisms and information systems to support investments in sustainable fisheries			
Not applicable	NA	NA	No activities to commence until Phase 2 of the program
Activity 2.3.2 – Regulations, management mechanisms and information systems to support investments in sustainable tourism			
Feasibility study to explore options for new revenue generation mechanisms for Green Fins and its partners	June 2025	Delay Dec 2026	Following the agreement signed with the Reef-World Foundation in September 2025, initial progress has been achieved across the three expected results. This includes delivery of key outputs such as assessor training and a case study to support the institutionalisation of Green Fins in Jordan. Capacity for Green Fins assessments has been strengthened, with additional assessors trained and active engagement by the Aqaba Marine Reserve, supporting the expansion of assessments and reduction of tourism-related impacts on coral reefs. In parallel, analysis and policy review have been undertaken to align Green Fins with national strategies (e.g. NBSAP and ecotourism planning), while environmental performance data is increasingly positioned to support national reporting and future blue finance mechanisms. The feasibility study on new revenue generation mechanisms will build on these initial outputs and is planned to be initiated in the next phase of implementation
Enhance the implementation of the program in Jordan		Delay Dec 2026	
Regional Blue Economy Symposium	May 2024	Achieved	The programme supported the organisation of a Blue Economy Symposium in Aqaba, which brought together a wide range of national, regional, and international stakeholders to advance dialogue on sustainable blue economy development in Jordan. The symposium provided a platform to exchange



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
			knowledge, showcase best practices, and explore opportunities for innovation and investment across key sectors, including fisheries, aquaculture, coastal and maritime tourism, maritime transport, ports, and circular economy. It also supported the development of a shared vision for the blue economy in Jordan, including inputs towards the national Blue Economy Strategy and future investment opportunities.
Activity 2.3.3 – Regulations, management mechanisms and information systems to support investments in reef-friendly operations / businesses in industry, ports and shipping sectors			
Not applicable	NA	NA	No activities to commence until Phase 2 of the program
Output 2.4 – Aquaculture Innovation in Aqaba			
Activity 2.4.1 – Develop and support aquaculture enterprises, including participation of fisherman’s association			
The information below is good, thank you. But please also provide an update on any progress (or reasons for the lack of progress) related to the larger, inland aquaculture facility that was supposed to be the main aquaculture activity of the program.			
Install RAS in the Marine Science Station	Oct 2025	achieved	A pilot marine aquaculture initiative was successfully implemented in Aqaba in partnership with local fishers, including the training of a group of fishers on sustainable aquaculture practices, contributing to improved livelihoods and reduced pressure on coral reef ecosystems. A larger inland aquaculture facility (RAS) was expected to be developed in areas north of Aqaba designated for aquaculture activities, where a seawater supply line was to be established by the Aqaba Development Company; however, this infrastructure has not yet been implemented. In response, the programme has focused on alternative, scalable interventions, including strengthening the capacity of local fishermen and supporting small-scale aquaculture initiatives, while continuing to explore options to advance the larger facility in the next phase.
Design and printing of Fishermen Guidelines	Dec 2025	achieved	Guidelines designed, reviewed with ASEZA and fishermen associations, and finalized for printing
Training of fishermen on RAS operation and maintenance.	2025	achieved	The training targeted 14 fishermen to enhance their technical capacity in operating and maintaining RAS systems and to support sustainable aquaculture practices.



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
Support the Tuna Fishing tournament	Oct 2025	achieved	To promote sustainable fishing practices, strengthen stakeholder engagement with the local fishing community, and raise awareness of marine conservation within the blue economy framework.
Cold Storage Installation at Aqaba Fish Market (2024)	2024	achieved	As part of strengthening sustainable ocean production, the programme supported the installation of a cold storage room at the Aqaba Fish Market. This intervention aims to 1) enhance income stability for small-scale fishers; and 2) reduce pressure on reefs by discouraging overfishing driven by economic loss
Support Fishing Return Festival	2025	achieved	Festival successfully held with participation of fishermen community, awareness activities on sustainable fishing promoted (how is this related to coral reef restoration?)
<b>Outcome 3- Coral reefs in the region are regenerated and restored through new technologies and adaptive and science-based approaches</b>			
<b>Output 3.1 – Develop and up-scale investment opportunities and financing mechanisms to support coral restoration</b>			
<b>Activity 3.1.1 – Develop partnerships for coral restoration with community participation, including on-the-ground activities and information sharing / lessons learned</b>			
Community participation protocols established for coral restoration efforts	June, 2025	Achieved	<p>An introductory course on restoration was delivered in Dec. 2025 for a selected group from different local stakeholders.</p> <p>Progress has been made towards establishing community participation protocols for coral restoration through a targeted technical workshop delivered to more than 25 participants, including representatives from dive centres, environmental NGOs, and the Aqaba Marine Reserve team. The workshop, conducted following the Reef Check training, focused on practical approaches to coral restoration, roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, and the application of restoration techniques, contributing to the development of a shared understanding and initial framework for community engagement in restoration efforts. Building on these efforts, the Aqaba Marine Reserve team, in coordination with relevant stakeholders, will oversee the implementation of coral restoration initiatives and community engagement activities under the upcoming project to be implemented by UNDP</p>



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
EIAs rapid assessment completed for selected reef restoration sites through the Aqaba Marine Reserve	Nov 2025	Achieved	Rapid environmental considerations have been integrated into the site selection process for coral restoration activities (this activity was implemented through one of the projects executed by UNDP in cooperation with ASEZA). Where proposals are made for the establishment of artificial reefs or coral nurseries, the Aqaba Marine Reserve team supports the identification of suitable locations based on ecological conditions, reef health, and site-specific characteristics. In cases where proposed sites fall within privately managed areas, site selection is undertaken in coordination with relevant companies or technical experts.
Comprehensive seagrass habitats in Aqaba	June 2025	Achieved	Seagrass Assessment (baseline data collection), the training report and final report with all findings and assessment results.
Capacity Building of Royal Navy Personnel	Aug 2025	Achieved	Enhancing the capabilities of personnel of the Royal Navy in marine environment protection, including their participation in the Reef Check training programme, where they were trained as part of the broader cohort on coral reef monitoring and assessment methodologies, directly supporting coral restoration planning and implementation efforts.
<b>Activity 3.1.2 – Develop conservation frameworks to ensure the viability of coral restoration initiatives</b>			
Scientific partnerships established on coral restoration approaches, including the carrying capacity assessment of the diving sites in regional cooperation with SHAMS	June 2025	on track April 2026	Scientific partnerships have been established between GFCR, ASEZA, and SHAMS to conduct a carrying capacity assessment of key diving sites in Aqaba. The assessment has been completed through field surveys and technical analysis, and the final report is currently being finalized and will be submitted in the coming period. In addition, capacity-building activities were delivered as part of this collaboration, including training for the Aqaba Marine Reserve team, as well as a dedicated workshop for dive centres and divers in Aqaba to support the application of carrying capacity and sustainable diving practices
Local drivers of coral degradation that may impact selected restoration efforts identified and plans developed to mitigate	June 2025	on track April 2026	Scientific collaboration between GFCR, ASEZA, and SHAMS has supported the assessment of carrying capacity for key diving sites in Aqaba, including the identification of local drivers of coral degradation that may affect restoration efforts. These include tourism-related pressures and site-specific environmental



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
those drivers at restoration sites			stressors, with corresponding mitigation measures being developed. The final report is currently being finalized and will be submitted in the coming period.
Ecological surveys on live hard coral cover, macroalgae/ other benthic groups, and reef fish biomass at the 3 programme priority sites	May 2025	Initiated/ ongoing	IUCN has conducted baseline ecological data collection through the consolidation and analysis of existing datasets from key national institutions, including the Aqaba Marine Reserve, the Marine Science Station, and the Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan. This process resulted in the delivery of two key reports: “Report on Coral Reefs as Climate Refugia and Biodiversity Habitats” and “Baseline Report for Coral Reefs Status along the Jordanian Red Sea Coast”, which provide comprehensive assessments of live hard coral cover, benthic composition, and reef fish communities across priority sites. In addition, all relevant ecological data have been uploaded to the MERMAID platform to support standardized monitoring, reporting, and future analysis. The work is therefore considered completed, with ongoing efforts focusing on data utilization and integration into management and decision-making processes
Reef-Check Training and data collection	May 2025	Achieved	Training of Royal Navy divers on Reef Check EcoDiver methodology: 14 divers were successfully certified and integrated into the Reef Check network, contributing to standardized data collection on coral reef condition, including coral cover, reef health indicators, and fish populations. This data directly supports coral restoration efforts by informing site selection, identifying priority areas for intervention, and enabling ongoing monitoring of restoration outcomes
<b>Activity 3.1.3 – Enhance finance / investment opportunities to support coral restoration</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Implement regulatory-based financing mechanisms to support coral restoration</li> <li>● Provide initial grants and investments (through the BECI) to develop the capacities of businesses to adopt and implement</li> </ul>	2025	On track	Progress has been made towards establishing enabling conditions for financing coral restoration through regulatory and institutional measures. This includes the review and update of existing regulations, with increased compensation requirements for activities causing damage to coral reef ecosystems. In addition, contributions from tourism developers benefiting from marine and coastal development—particularly within the Aqaba Marine Reserve—are being considered as part of sustainable financing approaches. Institutional arrangements have also been strengthened through the establishment of a management committee for the Aqaba Marine Reserve in 2025, alongside engagement of key



Deliverable or Milestone	Target Date of Completion	Status	Supporting Text
<p>cost effective and ecologically beneficial practices for coral reef restoration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek out public-private partnerships for coral restoration who can provide technical assistance, material inputs, and/or financing support</li> </ul>			<p>user groups, including dive centres, boat operators, and research institutions. This committee plays a key role in overseeing and monitoring activities within the Marine Reserve, supporting improved compliance, coordination, and sustainable management of marine resources. In parallel, capacity-building efforts have been implemented through a specialized coral restoration workshop targeting scientists, professional divers, monitoring technicians, and representatives from local stakeholders, building on earlier monitoring and Reef Check training activities. Furthermore, coral nursery infrastructure has been established under a complementary UNDP-supported project, providing a foundation for piloting coral propagation and transplantation techniques using resilient species, as well as for ongoing maintenance and monitoring of restoration sites. These efforts collectively contribute to strengthening both the financial and technical foundations required to scale up coral restoration initiatives in Aqaba</p>
<b>Activity 3.1.4 – Implement pilot coral restoration activities at the Northern Deep Corals site and the Southern Industrial Site</b>			
NA	NA	NA	<p>While this is planned for phase 2 of the program, initial relevant work has been made including reaching out to Coral Vita and other companies who offer restoration services in addition to announce a ToR to identify priority sites for restoration as well as developing initial design for on land coral nurseries</p>
<b>Outcome 4- Knowledge management to support upscaling and replication of coral reef finance and business solutions</b>			
<b>Output 4.1 – Engagement with the regional and global coral reef finance community for impact, scaling and replication</b>			
<b>Activity 4.1.1 – Collaboration and exchange of data and lessons learned with the GFCR Egyptian Red Sea Initiative programme</b>			
Not applicable	NA	NA	No activities to commence until Phase 2 of the program
<b>Activity 4.1.2 Engage with GFCR REEF+ Knowledge Management &amp; Finance Platform and other global coral reef learning mechanisms to facilitate connectivity among investors, entrepreneurs, and practitioners and share bankable reef-friendly solutions incubated by the programme</b>			
Not applicable	NA	NA	No activities to commence until Phase 2 of the program
<b>Activity 4.1.3 – Facilitate knowledge sharing of lessons learned, strategies, financing solutions, etc. already existing in the Gulf of Aqaba</b>			
Not applicable	NA	NA	No activities to commence until Phase 2 of the program

## Annex C – Solution Case Study

This case study has been developed based on consultants’ reports and the agreed action plan for the establishment and launch of the Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI). Part of the information presented reflects activities that have already been implemented, while the remaining elements are aligned with the planned roadmap and will be executed in accordance with the approved implementation framework.

<b>Solution Title</b>	<i>Blue Economy Centre for Innovation (BECI)</i>
<b>Context</b>	<p><i>The Gulf of Aqaba hosts globally significant coral reef ecosystems that are increasingly exposed to pressures from coastal development, tourism, and unsustainable marine resource use. At the same time, reef-positive enterprises in Jordan face limited access to early-stage capital, technical assistance, and incubation services.</i></p> <p><i>If this challenge is not addressed, coral reef degradation may continue due to unsustainable economic practices, while local communities may miss opportunities to transition toward sustainable blue economy livelihoods</i></p>
<b>Website or other links</b>	NA
<b>Image</b>	
<p><b>FINANCE SOLUTION</b></p> <p><b><i>**This is the most important part of the case study!! This section should aim to demonstrate whether blended finance is working to support coral reef ecosystems and communities.</i></b></p>	
<b>Finance Solution Diagram</b>	



<p><b>GFCR Fund usage</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>GFCR funds (USD 100,000) will be allocated as catalytic grants distributed as follows:</i></li> <li>● <i>5 reef-positive enterprises</i></li> <li>● <i>USD 20,000 per enterprise</i></li> <li>● <b><i>The funds will support:</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ <i>Business model validation</i></li> <li>□ <i>Equipment and operational start-up costs</i></li> <li>□ <i>Pilot implementation of reef-positive solutions</i></li> <li>□ <i>Technical advisory and incubation services</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>● <i>The objective of this catalytic capital is to de-risk early-stage ventures and create proof-of-concept models capable of attracting additional public and private investment</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Company Overview (Reef-positive business only)</b></p>	<p><i>The enterprises to be selected in the coming months will operate in sectors such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Sustainable marine tourism</i></li> <li>● <i>Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture</i></li> <li>● <i>Marine environmental services</i></li> <li>● <i>Citizen science and monitoring technologies</i></li> <li>● <i>Reef-friendly marine product innovation</i></li> <li>● <i>Each business will demonstrate measurable environmental benefits linked to coral reef protection and sustainable resource use</i></li> <li>● <i>Solid Waste Management</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Finance Solution Overview</b></p>	<p><i>Finance Solution Overview</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>The BECI solution functions as a blended finance platform combining:</i></li> <li>● <i>Catalytic grants (GFCR)</i></li> <li>● <i>Co-financing (USD 100,000 from a complementary project)</i></li> <li>● <i>Potential integration of additional funding windows from partner institutions</i></li> <li>● <i>The Centre is hosted within ASEZA, ensuring institutional anchoring and policy alignment.</i></li> </ul>



	<p><i>Structure and Financing Flows:</i></p> <p><i>GFCR → UNDP → BECI (incubation mechanism) → Selected enterprises → Revenue generation → Future leverage</i></p> <p><i>Technical Assistance Provided</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Business development support</i></li> <li>● <i>Financial planning and investment readiness coaching</i></li> <li>● <i>Environmental compliance guidance</i></li> <li>● <i>Market linkage facilitation</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Types of Financing Provided:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Catalytic grants (initial phase)</i></li> <li>● <i>Potential crowding-in of private capital</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The choice of grant financing at this stage is catalytic and appropriate, as the market for reef-positive enterprises in Jordan is still emerging and requires de-risking mechanisms.</i></p> <p><i>Financial Sustainability and Leverage:</i></p> <p><i>The enterprises are expected to generate sustainable revenue streams, while the Centre pools funding sources to maximize efficiency and leverage.</i></p> <p><i>An additional USD 100,000 from another project strengthens the blended structure, and another institution is considering deploying future grants through BECI, increasing capital aggregation and financial sustainability</i></p>
<b>IMPACT</b>	
<p><b>Impact Ambition</b></p>	<p><b><i>The solution aims to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Reduce economic drivers of coral reef degradation</i></li> <li>● <i>Diversify livelihoods toward sustainable blue economy sectors</i></li> <li>● <i>Increase private-sector participation in reef conservation</i></li> <li>● <i>Support inclusive economic growth</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The solution contributes indirectly to coral reef conservation by shifting business practices toward sustainability</i></p>



<p><b>Fund Indicators</b></p>	<p><i>If you disaggregate data collection by solution, please provide information on any of the following indicators:</i></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="562 240 961 354"> <p><b>% Local coral cover</b></p> </td> <td data-bbox="961 240 1877 354"> <p><i>Baseline: Existing national reef monitoring data Target: Indirect stabilisation through pressure reduction Current status:</i></p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="562 354 961 459"> <p><b>Local Fish biomass</b></p> </td> <td data-bbox="961 354 1877 459"> <p><i>Baseline: Existing monitoring datasets Target: Indirect improvement through sustainable fishing solutions Current status: Implementation phase to begin in coming months</i></p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="562 459 961 881"> <p><b>Area of coral reefs under conservation and sustainable management</b></p> </td> <td data-bbox="961 459 1877 881"> <p><b>MPAs and OECMs:</b> <i>Baseline: Aqaba Marine Reserve and existing managed sites (Northern Deep Corals and Southern Industrial Site) Target: Strengthened sustainable management practices via supported enterprises Current status: Ongoing</i></p> <p><b>LMMAS and fisheries management:</b> <i>Baseline: Existing fisheries regulations Target: Integration of sustainable business practices Current status: Ongoing</i></p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="562 881 961 959"> <p><b># Local jobs maintained and new jobs to be created</b></p> </td> <td data-bbox="961 881 1877 959"> <p><i>Target: At least 5 enterprises supported Current status: Ongoing</i></p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><b>% Local coral cover</b></p>	<p><i>Baseline: Existing national reef monitoring data Target: Indirect stabilisation through pressure reduction Current status:</i></p>	<p><b>Local Fish biomass</b></p>	<p><i>Baseline: Existing monitoring datasets Target: Indirect improvement through sustainable fishing solutions Current status: Implementation phase to begin in coming months</i></p>	<p><b>Area of coral reefs under conservation and sustainable management</b></p>	<p><b>MPAs and OECMs:</b> <i>Baseline: Aqaba Marine Reserve and existing managed sites (Northern Deep Corals and Southern Industrial Site) Target: Strengthened sustainable management practices via supported enterprises Current status: Ongoing</i></p> <p><b>LMMAS and fisheries management:</b> <i>Baseline: Existing fisheries regulations Target: Integration of sustainable business practices Current status: Ongoing</i></p>	<p><b># Local jobs maintained and new jobs to be created</b></p>	<p><i>Target: At least 5 enterprises supported Current status: Ongoing</i></p>
<p><b>% Local coral cover</b></p>	<p><i>Baseline: Existing national reef monitoring data Target: Indirect stabilisation through pressure reduction Current status:</i></p>								
<p><b>Local Fish biomass</b></p>	<p><i>Baseline: Existing monitoring datasets Target: Indirect improvement through sustainable fishing solutions Current status: Implementation phase to begin in coming months</i></p>								
<p><b>Area of coral reefs under conservation and sustainable management</b></p>	<p><b>MPAs and OECMs:</b> <i>Baseline: Aqaba Marine Reserve and existing managed sites (Northern Deep Corals and Southern Industrial Site) Target: Strengthened sustainable management practices via supported enterprises Current status: Ongoing</i></p> <p><b>LMMAS and fisheries management:</b> <i>Baseline: Existing fisheries regulations Target: Integration of sustainable business practices Current status: Ongoing</i></p>								
<p><b># Local jobs maintained and new jobs to be created</b></p>	<p><i>Target: At least 5 enterprises supported Current status: Ongoing</i></p>								
<p><b>Project Indicators</b></p>	<p><i>Number of reef-positive enterprises supported Amount of co-financing leveraged Revenue generated by supported enterprises Number of women- and youth-led businesses supported</i></p>								
<p><b>Community and Stakeholder Engagement</b></p>	<p><i>The Centre is hosted by ASEZA and was launched following stakeholder consultations. The incubation process will include transparent selection criteria and open calls.</i></p> <p><i>Local communities, entrepreneurs, and sector representatives will participate in the selection and implementation process.</i></p>								



	<i>Their engagement ensures local ownership and long-term sustainability</i>
<b>TAKEAWAYS</b>	
<b>Process and Challenges</b>	<p><i>The solution was developed in response to limited financing mechanisms for reef-positive enterprises. Key considerations included institutional sustainability, financial leverage, and scalability.</i></p> <p><b>Challenges include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Early-stage market development</i></li> <li>● <i>Limited investment readiness among SMEs</i></li> <li>● <i>Need for blended financing innovation</i></li> </ul> <p><i>These are being addressed through incubation, technical assistance, and pooled funding mechanisms</i></p>
<b>Key Takeaways</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Catalytic capital is essential to unlock reef-positive markets</i></li> <li>● <i>Institutional hosting enhances sustainability</i></li> <li>● <i>Blended finance mechanisms increase efficiency</i></li> <li>● <i>Early-stage ecosystem building is critical before commercial capital can scale</i></li> </ul>



## Annex D – GESI Action Report

Linked Programme Outcome	Objective	Action	Indicator	Milestone – 2024 Milestone - 2025	Remarks
Outcome 1: Heightened protection of functioning, resilient coral reefs in the Gulf of Aqaba	Strengthen women's participation in MPA management and ensure that all resource users' needs, ideas and priorities are reflected in plans.	<p>Sectoral gender analysis and community needs assessment for effective gender responsive engagement in Integrated Coastal Zone Management conducted.</p> <p>Review existing laws and regulations in order to address gender disparities and create an enabling environment for women's economic empowerment.</p> <p>Conducting awareness campaigns on gender-sensitive conservation strategies, with a focus on reducing barriers to participation.</p> <p>Establishing of inclusive training programmes for women and vulnerable groups in marine conservation.</p>	Improved participation rates of women and other local groups in marine conservation and management in general and in the programme activities in particular.	<p>Conducting the gender analysis and gender mainstreaming along with implementing a set of relevant activities.</p> <p>IUCN organized a GFCR stakeholder consultation workshop to enhance the role of citizen science in coral reef monitoring and marine conservation, promoting broader community involvement and knowledge sharing.</p>	<p>A gender analysis conducted mid 2024 that aimed to identify existing gender gaps in marine and coastal management and conservation and has pointed out that previous marine and coastal zone management programs, which focused on the physical, socio-economic, institutional, and legal aspects of Aqaba coastal zone, did not adequately address differences in gender roles and power relations. The gender analysis confirmed the influence of socio-cultural norms on gender roles in Aqaba coastal communities and their subsequent impact on the management and sustainability of coastal resources.</p> <p>The programme ensured inclusive participation of women and local stakeholders in consultations and citizen science activities, including reef monitoring initiatives. Findings from the gender analysis conducted in 2024 informed engagement approaches,</p>



Linked Programme Outcome	Objective	Action	Indicator	Milestone – 2024 Milestone - 2025	Remarks
					highlighting socio-cultural barriers and guiding more inclusive participation in coastal and marine management processes.
Outcome 2: Integration of Red Sea coral reefs into the growing sustainability-oriented economy of Aqaba	To identify and support -under CSBEI- solution-local entrepreneurs and business actors in Jordan with an emphasis on women and youth where possible. Encourage participation in the incubation programs and other capacity development efforts by women and youth business leaders and entrepreneurs.  Provide women with access to financial	Training sessions specifically providing technical skills, business development support, and access to alternative livelihood opportunities.	Greater access to financial and technical resources, and enhanced influence in decision-making processes related to marine conservation and fisheries management.  Number of gender responsive enterprises supported.	Conducting inclusive training on ecotourism.  Identifying a set of alternative livelihood opportunities for women that are linked to coral reef preservation e.g. handicraft production  Conducted a workshop titled “Strengthening Women’s Role in Marine Environmental Conservation and the Blue Economy under the Gulf of Aqaba Resilient Reefs Programme”, aimed at enhancing women’s participation and leadership in marine conservation and blue economy initiatives.  Five female officers from the Royal Navy and the Environmental Police were successfully trained in Open Water Diving and Marine Monitoring, strengthening women’s technical capacity and operational role in marine environmental protection.	The programme promoted inclusive participation in blue economy opportunities, with targeted efforts to engage women and youth through capacity-building, entrepreneurship support, and awareness activities. Gender-responsive approaches were applied in training and outreach, including dedicated workshops to strengthen women’s leadership in marine conservation and economic activities.



Linked Programme Outcome	Objective	Action	Indicator	Milestone – 2024 Milestone - 2025	Remarks
	services and credit facilities to support their involvement in coral reef preservation			Developed a Communication and Outreach Plan to ensure inclusive engagement and meaningful participation of all local communities in programme activities and decision-making processes.	
Outcome 3: Coral reefs in the region are regenerated and restored through new technologies and adaptive and science-based approaches	Improving capacities of women and youth led CBOs/NGOs, entrepreneurs and other relevant entities to actively engage in coastal biodiversity resilience	Engaging of different sea users and local stakeholders in local governance through accelerating and upscaling gender mainstreaming in community-led conservation practices	Number of women and youth participating in trainings on coral reef conservation, monitoring, management, generation (in situ and ex situ-at nurseries) and restoration.	<p>Number of new / scaled up / replicated inclusive and gender-responsive capacity-building programmes to support local economic development, entrepreneurship and investments in green businesses</p> <p>Capacity Building of Royal Navy Personnel to Enhancing the capabilities of Personnel of the Royal Navy in the marine environment Protection including female officers</p> <p>A community festival was successfully held with strong participation from the fishermen’s community. Awareness activities on sustainable fishing practices were promoted, with high engagement from women and youth groups.</p> <p>The programme ensured strong engagement with the media sector to enhance visibility, transparency, and</p>	Efforts were made to ensure inclusive participation in technical capacity-building activities related to coral reef monitoring and restoration, including the involvement of women and youth in training programmes. Community engagement activities, including outreach with fishermen and local stakeholders, contributed to more inclusive and participatory conservation practices.



Linked Programme Outcome	Objective	Action	Indicator	Milestone – 2024 Milestone - 2025	Remarks
				<p>public awareness of marine conservation and blue economy initiatives.</p> <p>Capacity Building of the Royal Department of Environmental Protection (Rangers – Environmental Police) Navy Personnel to Enhancing the capabilities of Personnel of the Rangers in the marine environment Protection including female officers.</p>	
<p>Outcome 4: Knowledge management to support upscaling and replication of coral reef finance and business solutions</p>				<p>The programme ensured strong engagement with the media sector to enhance visibility, transparency, and public awareness of marine conservation and blue economy initiatives.</p> <p>The programme also ensures the engagement and employment of young women and youth in the management and implementation of activities, whether as part of the core team or as consultants. It further seeks to provide equal and inclusive opportunities, to the greatest extent possible, to ensure the participation of diverse social groups across all programme interventions.</p>	<p>This outcome and its relevant outputs and activities are planned for Phases 2 &amp;3.</p> <p>The programme promotes inclusive knowledge sharing and communication by ensuring accessibility of information and engagement of diverse stakeholders, including women and youth. Efforts are ongoing to strengthen the integration of GESI considerations into knowledge management and communication platforms.</p>



## Annex E – Safeguards

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Part 1: The Social and Environmental Risks Checklist has been provided as a guide to re-screen programme risks as programmes operate in a dynamic environment. For responses with a “Yes” expand on the mitigation measure.

Part 2: Has any grievances been registered through the Convening Agent or implementing partner grievance mechanism in relation to the GFCR programme? Yes/No. If Yes, explain the situation and how it has been addressed.

- No

Part 3: How are you promoting your organisation’s grievance mechanisms when engaging with communities and partners? Does the programme incorporate safeguard screening during sourcing, investment appraisal, and monitoring?

- The country office has prioritized the set-up of a stakeholder response mechanism (SRM) that will be used by all projects as a GRM. This effort is being closely supported by the Regional Bureau to ensure compliance and uptake. Once established in Q1 of 2026, the contact information for this system will be made publicly available for use by all participants of UNDP Jordan programmes and projects.

Part 4: Describe the management structure within the implementation team and procedures followed (or planned) for handling grievances related to programme implementation.

- Stakeholders can raise concerns, complaints, or feedback through communicating with designated project focal points (phone or in person). In the absence of a formal GRM, a concern or complaint is received by the project focal point through phone or in-person communication. The issue is documented and shared with the responsible programme team for review. The programme team assesses the nature of the concern and determines required follow-up, including consultation with management or partners where relevant. Actions to address or clarify the issue are implemented. The complainant is informed of the outcome, where contact information is available. The case is considered closed once follow-up actions



<b>CHECKLIST POTENTIAL SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS</b>		
<b>Principles 1: Human Rights</b>		<b>Answer (Yes/No)</b>
1.	Could the Project lead to adverse impacts on enjoyment of the human rights (civil, political, economic, social or cultural) of the affected population and particularly of vulnerable/marginalized groups?	No
2.	Is there a likelihood that the Project would have inequitable or discriminatory adverse impacts on affected populations, particularly people living in poverty or marginalized or excluded individuals or groups? <sup>1</sup>	No
3.	Could the Project potentially restrict availability, quality of and access to resources or basic services, in particular to marginalized individuals or groups?	No
4.	Is there a likelihood that the Project would exclude any potentially affected stakeholders, in particular marginalized groups, from fully participating in decisions that may affect them?	No
5.	Is there a risk that duty-bearers do not have the capacity to meet their obligations in the Project?	No
6.	Is there a risk that rights-holders do not have the capacity to claim their rights?	No
7.	Have local communities or individuals (including local opinion leaders), given the opportunity, raised human rights concerns regarding the Project during the stakeholder engagement process?	Yes
8.	Is there a risk that the Project would exacerbate conflicts among and/or the risk of violence to project-affected communities and/or individuals?	No
<b>Principle 2: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment</b>		
1.	Is there a likelihood that the proposed Project would have adverse impacts on gender equality and/or the situation of women and girls?	No
2.	Would the Project potentially reproduce discriminations against women based on gender, especially regarding participation in design and implementation or access to opportunities and benefits?	No
3.	Have women's groups/leaders raised gender equality concerns regarding the Project during the stakeholder engagement process and has this been included in the overall Project proposal and in the risk assessment?	No
4.	<p>Would the Project potentially limit women's ability to use, develop and protect natural resources, taking into account different roles and positions of women and men in accessing environmental goods and services?</p> <p><i>For example, activities that could lead to natural resources degradation or depletion in communities who depend on these resources for their livelihoods and well being</i></p> <p>While a potential risk exists related to limiting women's ability to access and benefit from natural resources, the programme includes mitigation measures through inclusive design and stakeholder engagement. In addition, an accessible grievance redress mechanism (GRM) is being developed to ensure that all stakeholders, including women and marginalized groups, can raise concerns, provide feedback, and report any unintended negative impacts. The GRM will be designed to be</p>	Yes

<sup>1</sup> Prohibited grounds of discrimination include race, ethnicity, gender, age, language, disability, sexual orientation, religion, political or other opinion, national or social or geographical origin, property, birth or other status including as an indigenous person or as a member of a minority. References to "women and men" or similar is understood to include women and men, boys and girls, and other groups discriminated against based on their gender identities, such as transgender people and transsexuals.



gender-sensitive, ensuring that women can safely and effectively access grievance channels, including through community consultations, direct communication platforms, and awareness-raising activities. This will enhance accountability, transparency, and responsiveness, and ensure that any risks related to exclusion or unequal access to natural resources are identified and addressed in a timely manner		
<b>Principle 3: Environmental Sustainability:</b> Screening questions regarding environmental risks are encompassed by the specific Standard-related questions below		
<b>Standard 1: Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Natural Resource Management</b>		
1.1	Would the Project potentially cause adverse impacts to habitats (e.g. modified, natural, and critical habitats) and/or ecosystems and ecosystem services?  <i>For example, through habitat loss, conversion or degradation, fragmentation, hydrological changes</i>	No
1.2	Are any Project activities proposed within or adjacent to critical habitats and/or environmentally sensitive areas, including legally protected areas (e.g. nature reserve, national park), areas proposed for protection, or recognized as such by authoritative sources and/or indigenous peoples or local communities?	No
1.3	Does the Project involve changes to the use of lands and resources that may have adverse impacts on habitats, ecosystems, and/or livelihoods? (Note: if restrictions and/or limitations of access to lands would apply, refer to Standard 5)	No
1.4	Would Project activities pose risks to endangered species?	No
1.5	Would the Project pose a risk of introducing invasive alien species?	No
1.6	Does the Project involve harvesting of natural forests, plantation development, or reforestation?	No
1.7	Does the Project involve the production and/or harvesting of fish populations or other aquatic species?	No
1.8	Does the Project involve significant extraction, diversion or containment of surface or ground water?  <i>For example, construction of dams, reservoirs, river basin developments, groundwater extraction</i>	No
1.9	Does the Project involve utilization of genetic resources? (e.g. collection and/or harvesting, commercial development)	No
1.10	Would the Project generate potential adverse transboundary or global environmental concerns?	No
1.11	Would the Project result in secondary or consequential development activities which could lead to adverse social and environmental effects, or would it generate cumulative impacts with other known existing or planned activities in the area?  <i>For example, a new road through forested lands will generate direct environmental and social impacts (e.g. felling of trees, earthworks, potential relocation of inhabitants). The new road may also facilitate encroachment on lands by illegal settlers or generate unplanned commercial development along the route, potentially in sensitive areas. These are indirect, secondary, or induced impacts that need to be considered. Also, if similar developments in the same forested area are planned, then cumulative impacts of multiple activities (even if not part of the same Project) need to be considered.</i>	No
<b>Standard 2: Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation</b>		



2.1	Will the proposed Project result in significant <sup>2</sup> greenhouse gas emissions or may exacerbate climate change?	No
2.2	Would the potential outcomes of the Project be sensitive or vulnerable to potential impacts of climate change?	Yes
2.3	Is the proposed Project likely to directly or indirectly increase social and environmental vulnerability to climate change now or in the future (also known as maladaptive practices)? <i>For example, changes to land use planning may encourage further development of floodplains, potentially increasing the population's vulnerability to climate change, specifically flooding</i>	No
<b>Standard 3: Community Health, Safety and Working Conditions</b>		
3.1	Would elements of Project construction, operation, or decommissioning pose potential safety risks to local communities?	No
3.2	Would the Project pose potential risks to community health and safety due to the transport, storage, and use and/or disposal of hazardous or dangerous materials (e.g. explosives, fuel and other chemicals during construction and operation)?	No
3.3	Does the Project involve large-scale infrastructure development (e.g. dams, roads, buildings)?	No
3.4	Would failure of structural elements of the Project pose risks to communities? (e.g. collapse of buildings or infrastructure)	No
3.5	Would the proposed Project be susceptible to or lead to increased vulnerability to earthquakes, subsidence, landslides, erosion, flooding or extreme climatic conditions?	No
3.6	Would the Project result in potential increased health risks (e.g. from water-borne or other vector-borne diseases or communicable infections such as HIV/AIDS)?	No
3.7	Does the Project pose potential risks and vulnerabilities related to occupational health and safety due to physical, chemical, biological, and radiological hazards during Project construction, operation, or decommissioning?	No
3.8	Does the Project involve support for employment or livelihoods that may fail to comply with national and international labor standards (i.e. principles and standards of ILO fundamental conventions)?	No
3.9	Does the Project engage security personnel that may pose a potential risk to health and safety of communities and/or individuals (e.g. due to a lack of adequate training or accountability)?	No
<b>Standard 4: Cultural Heritage</b>		
4.1	Will the proposed Project result in interventions that would potentially adversely impact sites, structures, or objects with historical, cultural, artistic, traditional or religious values or intangible forms of culture (e.g. knowledge, innovations, practices)? (Note: Projects intended to protect and conserve Cultural Heritage may also have inadvertent adverse impacts)	No
4.2	Does the Project propose utilizing tangible and/or intangible forms of cultural heritage for commercial or other purposes?	No

<sup>2</sup> In regards to CO<sub>2</sub>, 'significant emissions' corresponds generally to more than 25,000 tons per year (from both direct and indirect sources). [The Guidance Note on Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation provides additional information on GHG emissions.]



<b>Standard 5: Displacement and Resettlement</b>		
5.1	Would the Project potentially involve temporary or permanent and full or partial physical displacement?	No
5.2	Would the Project possibly result in economic displacement (e.g. loss of assets or access to resources due to land acquisition or access restrictions – even in the absence of physical relocation)?	No
5.3	Is there a risk that the Project would lead to forced evictions? <sup>3</sup>	No
5.4	Would the proposed Project possibly affect land tenure arrangements and/or community based property rights/customary rights to land, territories and/or resources?	No
<b>Standard 6: Indigenous Peoples</b>		
6.1	Are indigenous peoples present in the Project area (including Project area of influence)?	No
6.2	Is it likely that the Project or portions of the Project will be located on lands and territories claimed by indigenous peoples?	No
6.3	Would the proposed Project potentially affect the human rights, lands, natural resources, territories, and traditional livelihoods of indigenous peoples (regardless of whether indigenous peoples possess the legal titles to such areas, whether the Project is located within or outside of the lands and territories inhabited by the affected peoples, or whether the indigenous peoples are recognized as indigenous peoples by the country in question)? <i>If the answer to the screening question 6.3 is “yes” the potential risk impacts are considered potentially severe and/or critical and the Project would be categorized as either Moderate or High Risk.</i>	No
6.4	Has there been an absence of culturally appropriate consultations carried out with the objective of achieving FPIC on matters that may affect the rights and interests, lands, resources, territories and traditional livelihoods of the indigenous peoples concerned?	No
6.5	Does the proposed Project involve the utilization and/or commercial development of natural resources on lands and territories claimed by indigenous peoples?	No
6.6	Is there a potential for forced eviction or the whole or partial physical or economic displacement of indigenous peoples, including through access restrictions to lands, territories, and resources?	No
6.7	Would the Project adversely affect the development priorities of indigenous peoples as defined by them?	No
6.8	Would the Project potentially affect the physical and cultural survival of indigenous peoples?	No
6.9	Would the Project potentially affect the Cultural Heritage of indigenous peoples, including through the commercialization or use of their traditional knowledge and practices?	No

<sup>3</sup> Forced evictions include acts and/or omissions involving the coerced or involuntary displacement of individuals, groups, or communities from homes and/or lands and common property resources that were occupied or depended upon, thus eliminating the ability of an individual, group, or community to reside or work in a particular dwelling, residence, or location without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protections.



Standard 7: Pollution Prevention and Resource Efficiency		
7.1	Would the Project potentially result in the release of pollutants to the environment due to routine or non-routine circumstances with the potential for adverse local, regional, and/or transboundary impacts?	No
7.2	Would the proposed Project potentially result in the generation of waste (both hazardous and non-hazardous)?	No
7.3	Will the proposed Project potentially involve the manufacture, trade, release, and/or use of hazardous chemicals and/or materials? Does the Project propose use of chemicals or materials subject to international bans or phase-outs? <i>For example, DDT, PCBs and other chemicals listed in international conventions such as the Stockholm Conventions on Persistent Organic Pollutants or the Montreal Protocol</i>	No
7.4	Will the proposed Project involve the application of pesticides that may have a negative effect on the environment or human health?	No
7.5	Does the Project include activities that require significant consumption of raw materials, energy, and/or water?	No