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Contact Information:

Contact Name: Randa Aboul-Hosn

Position title: Resident Representative

Address: Building no. 16, Majid Al-Adwan Street, Shmeisani, Amman, Jordan.

Postal Code: 941631 Amman 11194

Telephone Number: +962-6-5100420 ext.213

Email Address: randa.aboul-hosn@undp.org

Alternate Email Address: majida.alassaf@undp.org

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Abbreviations And Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ADC	Aqaba Development Corporation
AMR	Aqaba Marine Reserve
ASEZA	Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority
BECI	Blue Economy Center for Innovation
CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GIS	Geographic Information System
GoA-J	Gulf of Aqaba – Jordan
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
ITP	Invitation to Propose
JRF	Jordan River Foundation
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude and Perception
KII	Key Informant Interview
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NBS	Nature-Based Solutions
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
RBG	Royal Botanic Garden
RSCN	Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TOR	Terms of Reference

Acronym	Definition
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

1. Introduction

This report is an integral part of the monitoring and reporting requirements of the project "Protecting Marine Biodiversity in Aqaba (EmBRACE)[1]", funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC). It presents the implementation progress over the reporting period from April 2025 to March 2026, providing a comprehensive account of achievements, challenges, and lessons learned in advancing biodiversity conservation and ecosystem resilience in the Aqaba region of Jordan.

The project is being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Jordan, in close partnership with the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA), and in collaboration with a range of national technical and civil society organizations, including the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), the Royal Botanic Garden (RBG), and the Jordan River Foundation (JRF), among others. This multi-partner approach ensures the integration of scientific expertise, community engagement, and institutional strengthening in delivering project outcomes.

The purpose of this report is to assess progress against the project's results framework, with particular emphasis on the ultimate outcome of enhancing the resilience of ecosystems and communities dependent on coastal and marine biodiversity. The report documents progress across intermediate and immediate outcomes, utilizing both established indicators and proxy measures to capture early results, particularly in areas where long-term ecological impacts are still emerging.

Given the integrated nature of the project, the reporting adopts a ridge-to-reef perspective, reflecting the interconnectedness between terrestrial catchments, coastal zones, and marine ecosystems, particularly coral reefs. It highlights how interventions such as nature-based solutions (NbS), habitat restoration, governance strengthening, and community engagement collectively contribute to reducing pressures on biodiversity and improving ecosystem functionality.

In addition to quantitative progress, the report emphasizes qualitative achievements, including institutional strengthening, policy development, capacity building, and gender-responsive approaches. It also reflects the project's contribution to advancing ecosystem-based management, Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), and sustainable blue economy pathways in Aqaba.

Overall, this report provides a clear, evidence-based overview of progress, demonstrating how the project is laying the foundation for long-term biodiversity conservation while delivering tangible ecological, social, and economic benefits to local communities and stakeholders.

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[1] EmBRACE is the short name suggested for the project "Protecting Marine Biodiversity in Aqaba." It reflects the project's vision of embracing an integrated, inclusive, and science-based approach to conserving Aqaba's coastal and marine ecosystems, while strengthening community ownership and promoting sustainable blue economy pathways.

2. Project Contextual Background

The Aqaba region of Jordan hosts one of the most ecologically significant marine and coastal ecosystems in the Red Sea, characterized by globally important coral reef systems, diverse marine habitats, and unique terrestrial–coastal ecological gradients. These ecosystems provide critical ecosystem services, including coastal protection, fisheries productivity, tourism revenue, and climate regulation, while supporting local livelihoods and national economic development.

Despite their ecological and economic importance, these ecosystems are increasingly under pressure from a combination of climate change, rapid urbanization, tourism expansion, and land-based sources of pollution. In particular, the connectivity between upstream terrestrial catchments and downstream marine environments has intensified environmental risks. Seasonal flash floods originating from surrounding wadis transport significant sediment loads and pollutants into the coastal zone, contributing to coral reef degradation, reduced water quality, and habitat disturbance. At the same time, increasing coastal development and tourism activities place additional stress on already fragile ecosystems.

These challenges are compounded by institutional and governance constraints, including fragmented mandates across sectors, limited integration of ecosystem-based approaches into planning frameworks, and insufficient coordination among stakeholders involved in coastal and marine management. While the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) plays a central role in regulating development and environmental management, there remains a need to strengthen Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) systems to ensure more coordinated, science-based, and gender-responsive decision-making.

In response to these challenges, the project “Protecting Marine Biodiversity in Aqaba” was designed to adopt a comprehensive ridge-to-reef approach, recognizing the interconnectedness between terrestrial, coastal, and marine ecosystems. The project aims to address both the direct and underlying drivers of biodiversity loss, combining ecological restoration, nature-based solutions (NbS), governance strengthening, and community engagement within a unified framework.

At the ecological level, the project focuses on protecting and restoring key habitats, particularly coral reefs and associated coastal ecosystems, while also promoting sustainable land management practices in upstream catchments to reduce sedimentation and environmental pressures on marine systems. Nature-based solutions are positioned as a central intervention, offering cost-effective and sustainable approaches to mitigate flood risks, enhance water retention, and improve ecosystem resilience.

At the governance level, the project supports the strengthening of ICZM frameworks through policy analysis, institutional capacity building, and improved coordination mechanisms, enabling more integrated and adaptive management of coastal resources. This includes enhancing the

availability and use of ecological data, supporting regulatory improvements, and fostering collaboration among national institutions and local stakeholders.

At the community level, the project promotes inclusive and sustainable livelihood opportunities, particularly within the emerging blue economy and ecotourism sectors. By linking biodiversity conservation with economic incentives—such as reef-positive businesses and ecotourism development—the project aims to reduce pressures on natural resources while enhancing local ownership and stewardship. Special emphasis is placed on women and youth, recognizing their critical role in driving sustainable development and ensuring equitable access to opportunities.

Furthermore, the project incorporates a strong gender-responsive approach, informed by dedicated gender assessments that identify barriers and opportunities for women's participation in coastal and marine sectors. This ensures that interventions are not only environmentally sustainable but also socially inclusive.

Overall, the project "Protecting Marine Biodiversity in Aqaba" represents a holistic and integrated model for biodiversity conservation and climate resilience, aligning with national priorities and international commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global biodiversity frameworks. By bridging science, policy, and practice, the project aims to demonstrate scalable solutions that can inform future investments and replication in Jordan and beyond.

3. Progress During the Reporting Period (April 2025 – March 2026)

3.1 Overall Progress

During the reporting period, the project made substantial progress across its ecological, governance, institutional, and community dimensions, despite the complexity of its scope and the multi-layered nature of the ridge-to-reef challenges it seeks to address. The project continued to advance as an integrated biodiversity and resilience initiative linking terrestrial catchments, coastal systems, and marine ecosystems, with particular focus on the coral reef ecosystems of the Aqaba Marine Reserve.

Given the breadth and complexity of the project, significant effort was made during the reporting period to strengthen the project's strategic coherence and results orientation. In this regard, a clear project vision and a set of guiding principles were articulated to frame implementation around core concepts such as nature as the foundation, people as partners, knowledge as power, collaboration as the engine, and sustainability as the goal. In parallel, a set of proxy indicators was identified and refined to enable the project to track early progress toward biodiversity-related outcomes, particularly where long-term ecological change will require more time to fully materialize.

At the ecological level, the project moved from foundational studies into early implementation. Comprehensive baseline assessments of flora, fauna, birds, reptiles, mammals, insects, seagrass,

and coral-related marine habitats were undertaken or completed, generating a strong scientific foundation for restoration planning, species-focused conservation, and long-term monitoring. These assessments were instrumental in identifying habitat conditions, ecological pressures, restoration priorities, and areas requiring active intervention.

For terrestrial ecosystems, the project achieved the restoration of 5 hectares of native vegetation, particularly in areas associated with dams, wadis, and degraded catchment landscapes, while also advancing the establishment of a native plant nursery to provide a sustainable supply of local species for future restoration efforts and nature-based solutions. This contributes directly to habitat rehabilitation, soil stabilization, and improved resilience of upper catchments, which are critical for reducing downstream environmental pressures.

For marine ecosystems, progress was made through a combination of habitat assessment, restoration planning, and direct coral conservation actions. Marine habitats within the Aqaba Marine Reserve were surveyed, and restoration locations were identified. To support coral rehabilitation, marine-friendly substrates were provided across 6 dunums to facilitate coral translocation and future reef restoration interventions. In addition, the project advanced coral translocation interventions from the barge[2], as well as the recovery and relocation of orphan corals collected from waste and disturbed areas, thereby directly supporting reef rehabilitation and the protection of coral colonies at risk. These efforts, together with the preparation of coral nursery systems and the planning of artificial reefs, represent important early steps toward active marine restoration.

A particularly notable intervention during the reporting period was the coral translocation from the barge, a high-risk site where coral colonies were exposed to physical disturbance and degradation. Building on rapid assessments and technical guidance, the project supported the safe relocation of affected coral colonies to more suitable substrates and controlled environments, ensuring their survival and continued growth. This intervention reflects the project's adaptive management approach and its capacity to respond to emerging threats to marine biodiversity.

At the landscape level, the project also addressed upstream drivers of marine degradation. The assessment of catchment areas, flash flood dynamics, and sediment pathways provided a critical evidence base for the design of nature-based solutions (NbS) aimed at reducing runoff velocity, soil erosion, and sediment loading into the marine environment. This is particularly important in Aqaba, where sedimentation from flash floods and urban expansion poses a significant threat to coral reefs and coastal water quality. As such, the project has begun to operationalize a ridge-to-reef model, linking terrestrial restoration and sediment control to downstream marine biodiversity protection.

[2] The "barge" refers to an out-of-service 150-meter marine structure along Aqaba's coastline that evolved into a coral-colonized habitat, from which high-value coral colonies were salvaged and translocated to the Aqaba Marine Reserve.

At the governance level, progress was equally significant. The project supported the development of an Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) regulatory analysis, biodiversity-related regulatory work within ASEZA, and marine contingency planning efforts. These processes contribute to strengthening the enabling environment for biodiversity conservation, improving institutional coordination, and supporting more integrated and gender-responsive coastal governance. The project also supported the development of an Aqaba Ecotourism Development Plan, which strategically links biodiversity conservation with sustainable tourism and blue economy opportunities.

On the social and institutional side, the project continued to build the foundations for inclusive participation and long-term ownership. Stakeholder mapping and capacity needs assessments were completed, providing a clear understanding of key actors and engagement pathways. The project has finalized the technical and administrative arrangements required to launch capacity development activities related to ICZM, nature-based solutions, community participation, and biodiversity-linked livelihoods. This includes formalizing the partnership with the Jordan River Foundation (JRF), establishing transparent and equitable beneficiary selection criteria, and tailoring training curricula to ensure they are relevant to local contexts and stakeholder needs.

Gender equality and inclusion were further embedded during the reporting period. Dedicated gender assessments were completed to identify institutional, social, and economic barriers to women's participation in ecotourism, coastal management, and biodiversity-related livelihoods. These assessments provided a strong evidence base for improving the project's gender responsiveness and for aligning interventions with women's economic empowerment and inclusive biodiversity governance.

Overall, progress during the reporting period demonstrates that the project has successfully established technical evidence, strategic direction, institutional partnerships, and early field interventions required to move toward its intended biodiversity and resilience outcomes. While many of the ecological changes targeted by the project, particularly coral reef recovery, remain long-term, the reporting period was marked by important advances in restoration readiness, governance strengthening, and the operationalization of an integrated ridge-to-reef conservation model.

3.2 Progress Toward the Ultimate Outcome

To ensure that progress toward the ultimate outcome is systematically tracked, the project adopted from the outset a proxy indicator measuring: (i) readiness and implementation of restoration interventions, (ii) establishment of science-based monitoring systems, and (iii) strengthening of the enabling policy, regulatory, and enforcement environment.

Against this proxy, the project demonstrates clear and evidence-based progress across ecological, institutional, and community dimensions.

At the ecosystem level, the project restored 5 hectares of native vegetation, exceeding the planned target and helping reduce land-based pressures on coastal and marine ecosystems. These interventions were directly informed by terrestrial baseline ecological surveys, which identified priority areas for habitat restoration and guided the selection of native species and restoration approaches.

In the marine environment, a structured coral restoration approach has been operationalized within the Aqaba Marine Reserve. An area of approximately 6 dunums has been prepared for coral translocation, with around 0.5 dunum already restored. This includes the translocation of ecologically important coral species that had colonized an outdated, out-of-service barge, as well as orphan corals growing on marine waste. In parallel with marine clean-up campaigns, the project developed and applied a systematic approach to carefully relocate these coral to suitable habitats before debris removal, thereby ensuring no loss of living coral biomass.

A strong scientific foundation has been established through the completion of comprehensive ecological surveys, both marine and terrestrial, covering coral reefs, seagrass ecosystems, and associated flora and fauna. These assessments provided the basis for identifying priority restoration sites and designing appropriate interventions across ecosystems. They also confirmed the ecological importance of seagrass meadows as biodiversity hotspots and as nature-based solutions that support fisheries, shoreline protection, and carbon sequestration. Building on this, the project has designed and initiated robust ecological monitoring programmes to track ecosystem health, biodiversity trends, and restoration performance over time.

At the enabling environment level, significant progress has been made in strengthening governance and regulatory frameworks. The project supported the update of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) regulatory framework, ensuring a more integrated and science-based approach to coastal planning and management. This is complemented by the update of the zero-discharge policy to the sea, representing a critical regulatory milestone to reduce pollution and protect marine ecosystems from land-based sources.

In parallel, the project strengthened law enforcement and protection capacities through the development of patrol plans, targeted training for rangers, and the provision of equipment to enhance monitoring, compliance, and enforcement within the marine reserve.

Overall, the project has made substantial and measurable progress toward the ultimate outcome, combining on-the-ground restoration achievements with strengthened scientific, institutional, and regulatory foundations.

3.3 Progress Toward Intermediate Outcome 1

The intermediate outcome (1) seeks to strengthen governance, regulatory frameworks, and institutional capacities for integrated coastal and marine ecosystem management in Aqaba

During the reporting period, the project made significant progress in strengthening the enabling environment for marine biodiversity conservation through regulatory reform, operational systems, and enhanced institutional and enforcement capacities.

At the regulatory level, the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) framework has been updated and is currently under endorsement by ASEZA, introducing a more integrated and science-based approach to coastal management. In parallel, the zero-discharge policy to the sea has progressed through stakeholder consultations, with a validated draft currently under review, representing a key step toward reducing pollution and protecting marine ecosystems.

The project also initiated a marine pollution characterization and contingency planning process, in coordination with national entities, particularly NCSCM, laying the foundation for a comprehensive and operational response framework to marine pollution risks.

At the systems level, a biodiversity monitoring programme has been fully established and is operational, covering coral reefs, seagrass ecosystems, and associated biodiversity, enabling continuous tracking of ecosystem health.

In parallel, the project strengthened enforcement and operational capacities through the development and implementation of patrolling plans, delivery of targeted ranger training, and provision of equipment, including surveillance systems and electric patrol units connected to ASEZA's operations room.

3.3.1 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 1.1

Immediate Outcome 1.1: Enhanced ability of national and subnational governments to integrate gender responsive practices in Coastal Zone Management (CZM) policy, legal, administrative, and regulatory framework.

This outcome focuses on strengthening the policy and institutional environment to enable gender-responsive and participatory ICZM governance.

- The ICZM regulatory framework was reviewed and updated through a recommendations report, currently under endorsement by ASEZA, integrating gender inclusion, community engagement, and incentives for ecosystem-positive investments.
- The zero-discharge policy to the sea was developed through multi-stakeholder consultations and is under validation, representing a key regulatory advancement for marine pollution control.
- ICZM principles were mainstreamed into Jordan's updated NBSAP 2050, strengthening alignment between national biodiversity priorities and coastal governance.
- A resilient biodiversity governance framework for Aqaba was established, clarifying institutional roles, coordination mechanisms, and enforcement pathways.

- A capacity needs assessment targeting 46 stakeholders from national and subnational institutions was completed, forming the basis for structured capacity development and institutional strengthening.
- Enforcement capacities were strengthened through training of 20 rangers, alongside the operationalization of patrolling plans and provision of required equipment, including jet skis, surveillance cameras, and monitoring systems linked to ASEZA's control room, enhancing on-the-ground compliance and biodiversity protection.

3.3.2 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 1.2

Immediate Outcome 1.2: Improved capacities of sea users to engage in coastal zone management efforts.

This outcome aims to strengthen the technical, institutional, and social capacities of local communities and sea users to actively participate in ICZM.

- A sectoral gender analysis and community needs assessment was conducted, identifying barriers and opportunities for inclusive engagement of women, youth, and local sea users.
- Based on these findings, tailored training programmes and curricula were developed and rolled out in partnership with the Jordan River Foundation, supported by an equitable beneficiary selection process.
- The project reached approximately 300 beneficiaries, including strong representation of women, through capacity-building activities on ICZM, aquaculture, ecotourism, and blue economy.
- The project contributed to enabling public-private engagement in coastal investments through collaboration with ASEZA on the Blue Economy Center for Innovation (BECI), which serves as a platform to support sustainable enterprises, innovation, and community-linked economic opportunities.

3.3.3 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 1.3

Immediate Outcome 1.3: Improved access of stakeholders to platforms for contributing to biodiversity related decision making.

This outcome focuses on strengthening communication, transparency, and inclusive participation in biodiversity governance.

- A comprehensive biodiversity communication strategy and media plan were developed and endorsed, defining target audiences, communication channels, and measurable objectives to enhance awareness and engagement.
- The strategy adopts a structured pathway (awareness → understanding → involvement → commitment) to promote sustained behavioral change and stakeholder ownership.
- A project branding and visibility approach was launched to strengthen outreach and position biodiversity conservation within local development narratives.

- Inclusive multi-stakeholder workshops and engagement platforms were convened, enabling participation of government, private sector, academia, civil society, and local communities in biodiversity-related decision-making.
- Consultation and engagement sessions were conducted as part of the marine and terrestrial ecological baseline surveys (coral reefs, seagrass, flora and fauna), ensuring that scientific assessments and restoration planning are informed by stakeholder inputs and local knowledge.

3.4 Progress Toward Intermediate Outcome 2

The intermediate outcome (2): improved gender sensitive and data-informed protection of coastal biodiversity ecosystems along the Aqaba Coastline aims to strengthen data-driven, gender-responsive protection of coastal and marine ecosystems, with measurable improvements in biodiversity status, ecosystem management, and institutional capacities. To ensure systematic tracking of progress toward the outcome targets, the project adopted a set of proxy indicators from the outset, focusing on:

- Species and habitat management: number of species-specific monitoring/management approaches and habitats restored or prepared.
- Knowledge generation and monitoring: number of ecological surveys conducted and biodiversity occurrences recorded and mapped.
- Pressure reduction and ecosystem protection: evidence of reduced pressures on key habitats (e.g., improved enforcement, pollution control measures).
- Institutional and field capacities: number of trained personnel supporting monitoring, enforcement, and conservation actions

Progress against these proxy indicators confirms that the project is on track to achieve the intended targets, particularly in strengthening the scientific basis for conservation and translating it into field-level actions.

In relation to biodiversity targets, the project has already contributed to targeting multiple species and habitats for protection and recovery, including:

- Restoration of 5 hectares of native vegetation, improving terrestrial habitat conditions.
- Preparation of approximately 6 donums of marine habitat for coral restoration, with ~0.5 donum already restored through translocation.
- Implementation of coral rescue and translocation interventions (from the barge and orphan corals), directly benefiting sensitive reef-associated species

In addition, the project has conducted extensive ecological surveys across marine and terrestrial systems, including coral reefs, seagrass beds, flora, fauna, and micro-ecosystems, significantly expanding the baseline knowledge and spatial mapping of biodiversity occurrences.

These efforts collectively contribute toward achieving the target of 6–8 threatened species benefiting from improved habitat conditions, while also strengthening long-term monitoring and management systems.

On the social dimension, the project has initiated community-based restoration campaigns, including the native vegetation campaign, with additional neighbourhood-level campaigns planned for April 2026, to raise awareness and enhance the role of women and local communities in biodiversity conservation.

3.4.1 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 2.1

Immediate Outcome 2.1: Enhanced capacities of stakeholders to advocate for the establishment of a 'Aqaba Science Park' research and development program.

This outcome aims to strengthen stakeholder engagement and advocacy for establishing a research and innovation hub in Aqaba, while advancing integrated ecotourism and knowledge-based development.

Progress toward this outcome has been partially achieved and will be continued during 2026 implementation plan:

Work related to the Aqaba Science Park Research and Development Programme has been postponed, pending ASEZA's finalization of the concept and location of the Science Park

In parallel, the project advanced, enabling scientific infrastructure through the design of a coral wet laboratory within the Aqaba Marine Station (AMS), which is expected to serve as a foundational component for future research and innovation systems.

Regarding ecotourism integration:

The Integrated Ecotourism Development Plan (2026–2030) has been updated and endorsed, establishing a framework to enhance connectivity among:

- Aqaba Marine Reserve
- Wadi Rum Protected Area
- Petra Archaeological Park

This represents a significant step toward ecosystem-based tourism and landscape connectivity, aligning conservation with sustainable economic opportunities.

3.4.2 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 2.2

Immediate Outcome 2.2: Enhanced technical and human capacities of responsible administrations and responders for Integrated Marine Contingency Planning.

This outcome focuses on strengthening preparedness, coordination, and response capacities to address marine environmental risks. Progress is well advanced, with foundational work underway:

- The process for developing the Integrated Marine Contingency Plan (IMCP) has been formally initiated
- An international consultant has been mobilized to lead the process, under UNDP and ASEZA leadership
- Coordination arrangements have been established with the National Center for Security and Crisis Management (NCSCM)

The ongoing work includes:

- Marine pollution characterization and profiling, identifying pollution sources, pathways, and high-risk areas.
- Institutional capacity assessments and mapping of roles and coordination mechanisms.
- Development of a risk-based, operational contingency planning framework, aligned with national systems and international best practices

This establishes a strong foundation for achieving the target of implementing priority activities from the revised IMCP.

3.4.3 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 2.3

Immediate Outcome 2.3: Improved capacities of local expert entities for marine conservation with a focus on threatened species along the Aqaba coastline

This outcome aims to strengthen the scientific, technical, and operational capacities of expert institutions to conserve marine biodiversity, particularly threatened species.

Significant progress has been achieved across all outputs:

- Comprehensive marine habitat assessments were completed, including:
  - Coral reef baseline assessments
  - Seagrass ecosystem assessments

These studies confirmed the ecological importance of Aqaba's marine systems and identified spatial variability, pressures, and conservation priorities.

Coral reefs remain ecologically viable, with higher live coral cover within protected areas

Seagrass ecosystems were mapped across multiple sites, identifying species composition and areas of degradation.

- A soft coral assessment is planned for 2026, further strengthening ecosystem coverage
- Mapping of coral reefs along the Aqaba coastline has been completed, providing critical spatial data for management and conservation planning

- Assessment of micro-ecosystems around rockfill dams was conducted, confirming their ecological role in supporting avian species and terrestrial biodiversity

The project has also advanced collaboration with the Blue Economy Center, which will support:

- Development of incentive mechanisms for conservation initiatives
- Promotion of early reporting of environmental threats by sea users

3.4.4 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 2.4

Immediate Outcome 2.4: Improved capacities of academic research facilities to contribute to 'State of the Coast' reporting.

This outcome focuses on strengthening scientific research, academic collaboration, and knowledge systems to support long-term coastal monitoring and reporting.

Progress is currently in the preparatory and partnership-building phase, with implementation planned under the 2026 workplan:

Initial strategic collaborations have been initiated with international research institutions in , including:

- The Institute of Marine Research (IMR), Norway, on marine monitoring and research
- The Transnational Red Sea Center (TRSC), particularly on AI-based coral monitoring systems

These partnerships are expected to support:

- Development of advanced monitoring tools.
- Strengthening data systems and scientific capacity.
- Contributing to future State of the Coast reporting

Preparatory discussions are also ongoing for:

- Academic collaboration programmes between Jordanian and international institutions.
- Development of structured research and training programmes.

Full implementation of the outputs, including the provision of research equipment and academic programmes, is scheduled for the next reporting period.

3.5 Progress Toward Intermediate Outcome 3

Intermediate Outcome 3: Increased implementation of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) in designated terrestrial and marine sites of Aqaba by diverse groups of women and youth.

This intermediate outcome aims to advance the practical application of NbS interventions to strengthen ecosystem functions and resilience in Aqaba, while enabling the engagement of women, youth, and key stakeholders in implementation processes.

Progress towards this outcome has been tracked through a set of proxy indicators focusing on:

- Implementation of NbS demonstration and pilot interventions across priority sites.
- Development and readiness of a structured NbS capacity-building programme, including training materials and tools.
- Mainstreaming of NbS approaches within institutional planning and implementation frameworks

During the reporting period, progress reflected a transition from technical design to early-stage implementation. A comprehensive NbS assessment and design study was completed, identifying priority interventions to address flood-induced sedimentation and pollution impacting the Aqaba Marine Reserve, particularly within critical sub-catchments linked to runoff and landfill-related pressures . Building on this, a collaborative framework with INWRDAM has been established to initiate implementation in selected locations.

At the field level, NbS demonstration activities were initiated across terrestrial and marine environments, including native vegetation restoration, establishment of plant nurseries, and marine habitat rehabilitation through artificial reefs and coral nurseries, providing practical entry points for scaling NbS interventions.

In parallel, a structured NbS capacity-building programme was developed and tailored, including training materials, technical guidelines, and toolkits targeting women, youth, government entities, and the private sector. Implementation of the training programme is planned for 2026.

At the institutional level, a series of focus group discussions and technical consultations were conducted with ASEZA and the Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC) to support the mainstreaming of NbS approaches into planning and implementation processes, particularly in relation to sub-catchment interventions addressing flood risks and sediment management.

3.5.1 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 3.1

Immediate Outcome 3.1: Improved capacities of women-led CBOs/NGOs to actively engage in coastal biodiversity resilience and in applying NBS.

This outcome focuses on strengthening the role of women-led organizations in designing and implementing NbS interventions.

- A mapping and needs assessment of CBOs working on coastal biodiversity and resilience in Aqaba was completed, identifying priority capacity gaps and opportunities for engagement.
- Based on this, a structured NbS capacity-building programme was developed and tailored, including training modules, materials, and implementation approaches targeting women-led CBOs. Training delivery is scheduled for 2026.

- A collaborative platform is being operationalized through the Blue Economy Center, serving as a hub to support partnerships, knowledge exchange, and incubation of NbS-related initiatives.
- A native plants nursery was established and equipped with smart, water-efficient irrigation systems for propagation native local species. The nursery is currently managed by ASEZA, with arrangements in place to transition its management to a women-led CBO following completion of the training programme.

3.5.2 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 3.2

Immediate Outcome 3.2: Increased access of women and youth to resources for accelerating use of NBS practices in Aqaba.

This outcome focuses on enabling access to physical and ecological resources required for NbS implementation.

- NbS demonstration activities were implemented across terrestrial and marine sites, including restoration campaigns introducing approximately 16,000 native plants representing 20 native flora species, with broad participation from women, youth, and local communities.
- Additional restoration activities are planned in check dam areas (2026–2027) and at the household level (2026) to further scale NbS adoption.
- In marine ecosystems, approximately 315 artificial reef units (substrates) were constructed using eco-friendly materials, supporting restoration of around 0.6 hectares of marine habitat. Coral translocation is ongoing through temporary nurseries.
- Three coral nurseries were established, with continuous translocation of orphan corals to support reef recovery.
- Clean-up campaigns were conducted with participation of volunteers, students, and Royal Rangers, alongside ongoing clean-up and coral rescue operations led by AMR teams.

3.5.3 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 3.3

Immediate Outcome 3.3: Enhanced access of women and youth to alternative livelihoods opportunities in ecotourism and sustainable tourism sectors are provided to people living in Aqaba.

This outcome focuses on linking NbS implementation with sustainable livelihood opportunities.

- A gender-responsive investment approach has been incorporated within the Aqaba ecotourism development plan, aligned with the Tourism Golden Triangle (Aqaba–Petra–Wadi Rum), and integrated into the 2026 programming of the Blue Economy Center.
- A capacity-building programme for sea users (divers, fishers, glass-bottom boat operators) was designed in partnership with the Jordan River Foundation, focusing on entrepreneurship and reef-positive business models.

- On-the-job training and summer employment opportunities in environmental conservation and monitoring were structured in coordination with local universities, with implementation planned to ensure equal participation of young women and men.

3.6 Progress Toward Intermediate Outcome 4

Intermediate Outcome 4: Increased conservation of biodiversity resources by local communities in Aqaba.

This intermediate outcome focuses on strengthening community ownership and behavioral change toward biodiversity conservation, moving beyond awareness into active engagement, participation, and stewardship. Recognizing that such transformation is gradual and extends beyond the project lifecycle, progress has been tracked through a set of proxy indicators capturing:

- level of community participation and volunteering in conservation activities,
- Degree of interaction between sea users and the Aqaba Marine Reserve (e.g., reporting threats or species observations), and
- Expansion of community-led awareness and engagement mechanisms.

Progress during the reporting period demonstrates a clear shift from awareness to engagement, with increasing involvement of diverse community groups, including youth, women, and sea users, in conservation-related actions and platforms. These efforts are closely linked to other project interventions under the other outcomes, particularly those strengthening ICZM governance and biodiversity management, ensuring that communities are not only informed but also positioned to contribute to conservation outcomes.

3.6.1 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 4.1

This outcome aims to establish structured and sustained community engagement in biodiversity conservation through awareness, participation, and the gradual introduction of citizen science practices. Targets focus on mobilizing communities through campaigns, outreach programmes, volunteerism, and participatory monitoring.

During the reporting period, the project made tangible progress in moving from ad hoc awareness activities toward a more systematic and inclusive community engagement approach:

- The design of a comprehensive community engagement strategy has been advanced, targeting key stakeholder groups including divers, fishers, students, women's groups, and tourism operators. This strategy is expected to be finalized and endorsed by ASEZA in 2026, providing a structured framework for long-term engagement.
- A series of awareness and behavior-change campaigns were implemented, contributing to increased public interaction with biodiversity conservation themes. These included campaigns addressing plastic pollution, youth engagement through volunteerism, and

highlighting the role of women in environmental stewardship, all of which supported shifts in daily practices and perceptions.

- The project contributed to national and international biodiversity-related events, most notably International Biodiversity Day, which served as an entry point to engage communities in conservation dialogue. Through the "Jordan's Biodiversity in Focus" photography competition, local divers were mobilized to document marine ecosystems, with a winning photograph from Aqaba demonstrating both the richness of local biodiversity and the growing role of sea users in documenting and appreciating it.
- A large-scale native vegetation restoration campaign was implemented, introducing approximately 16,000 native plants across multiple species. The campaign brought together a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including youth, women, volunteers, and people with disabilities, linking awareness with hands-on restoration and reinforcing community ownership of natural resources.
- Clean-up campaigns and field-based activities were conducted with strong community participation, particularly from students and volunteers. These activities not only focused on waste removal but also helped foster a sense of responsibility toward marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Efforts to institutionalize community engagement are progressing, including:
  - planned annual celebration of World Coral Reef Day within ASEZA's calendar,
  - design of an interactive learning venue at the Aqaba Marine Reserve, and
  - development of school-based engagement programmes and nature clubs to sustain youth involvement.

3.6.2 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 4.2

Immediate Outcome 4.2: Increased access to timely knowledge on conservation & NBS activities and projects for local community members living in Aqaba.

This outcome aims to improve access of local communities to reliable, timely, and actionable knowledge on biodiversity conservation and nature-based solutions, enabling informed participation and application of sustainable practices. Progress under this outcome focuses on establishing the systems, platforms, and content through which such knowledge can be accessed and utilized.

During the reporting period:

- The project initiated the development of a dedicated digital knowledge platform in collaboration with ASEZA, through the establishment of a webpage within ASEZA's official website. This platform is designed to serve as a centralized hub providing information on coastal zone management, biodiversity conservation, and ongoing projects, enhancing transparency and accessibility for all stakeholders.
- Foundational work has been undertaken to ensure that knowledge dissemination is linked to practical application through the design of the community-based capacity-building

programme, which integrates modules on biodiversity monitoring, conservation practices, and nature-based solutions.

- Communication and outreach activities implemented under the project contributed to improving public awareness and understanding of key environmental challenges, including marine pollution, ecosystem degradation, and the role of individuals in conservation, thereby strengthening the demand for accessible knowledge and information.

The development of this outcome is closely linked with other project components, particularly those related to community engagement and capacity building, ensuring that knowledge platforms are not standalone tools but are embedded within broader participation and learning processes.

3.6.3 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 4.3

Immediate Outcome 4.3 Increased skills among CBOs (mainly women-led) to advocate for inclusive coastal biodiversity conservation and resilience.

This outcome aims to strengthen the ability of CBOs, particularly women-led organizations, to engage in structured advocacy, dialogue, and influence on coastal biodiversity conservation and nature-based solutions. Targets focus on enabling CBOs to design and lead advocacy initiatives grounded in local priorities. During the reporting period:

- The project established the foundational framework for CBO capacity development, building on the earlier mapping and needs assessment to identify priority organizations, with a focus on women-led CBOs and their role in local governance and community engagement.
- A structured training approach has been developed, including Training-of-Trainers (ToT) methodologies and tailored modules on advocacy, negotiation, communication, and biodiversity-related topics. These modules are aligned with ICZM principles and local conservation priorities, and are scheduled for implementation in the upcoming phase.
- Preparatory work has advanced to support CBOs in designing advocacy agendas, including:
  - identifying key biodiversity and NBS-related challenges,
  - aligning advocacy priorities with national and local frameworks, and
  - preparing for engagement with decision-makers and relevant authorities.
- The project has also initiated the design of technical assistance mechanisms, through which specialized experts will support selected CBOs in developing advocacy proposals and defining priority actions for biodiversity conservation and NBS implementation.

These efforts are embedded within the broader livelihood and capacity-building programme implemented with partners, ensuring that advocacy is linked to practical interventions, community engagement, and economic opportunities, rather than being a standalone activity.

3.7 Progress Toward Intermediate Outcome 5

Intermediate Outcome 5: Strengthened women's participation in entrepreneurial opportunities related to coastal biodiversity conservation and resilience in Aqaba.

This outcome aims to enhance women's economic participation in biodiversity-linked sectors by strengthening business skills, improving access to finance, and enabling institutional support systems. Progress is tracked through proxy indicators reflecting: (i) development of women-led business capacities and concepts, (ii) access to financial and digital tools, and (iii) integration of gender-responsive approaches within institutional frameworks.

Progress during the reporting period has focused on establishing the enabling foundations required for implementation. A comprehensive gender analysis was conducted, identifying structural barriers that limit women's participation, including restricted access to finance, limited market linkages, and social constraints affecting mobility and participation. Building on this, a structured gender capacity-building programme and institutional action plan were developed, defining priority interventions, training pathways, and monitoring mechanisms.

In parallel, the project finalized the design of a women-focused livelihood and entrepreneurship programme in partnership with the Jordan River Foundation, including outreach mechanisms, transparent selection criteria, tailored training modules, and business incubation approaches. While implementation of training and business support is scheduled for 2026, preparatory work has ensured readiness for delivery at scale.

A key enabling milestone is ASEZA's establishment and operationalization of the Blue Economy Center for Innovation (BECI), which provides an institutional platform for entrepreneurship development, innovation support, and biodiversity-linked investment. The Center is expected to play a central role in supporting women-led enterprises, linking them to technical assistance, market opportunities, and financing mechanisms, and ensuring the sustainability of interventions beyond the project lifecycle.

3.7.1 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 5.1

Immediate Outcome 5.1: Improved women's business skills to establish entrepreneurial opportunities associated with coastal biodiversity and resilience.

This outcome focuses on building the entrepreneurial and technical capacities of women to engage in biodiversity-linked economic activities.

- A comprehensive outreach and programme design was completed in collaboration with the Jordan River Foundation, including identification of target groups, development of transparent selection criteria, and structuring of the training and incubation programme.
- Tailored training modules were developed covering business planning, financial management, marketing, and development of biodiversity-positive business models, particularly in eco-tourism, marine services, and nature-based products.

- A pipeline of potential women beneficiaries and business ideas was identified through initial engagement and coordination with local stakeholders, CBOs, and sea-user groups.
- Preparations for market linkage activities, including business incubation and product showcasing (e.g., market fairs), were completed, with implementation scheduled for 2026.

3.7.2 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 5.2

Immediate Outcome 5.2: Increased women's access to financial & fintech services and products for biodiversity conservation initiatives.

This outcome aims to address barriers to financial inclusion and enhance women's ability to access and use financial tools.

- A gender-responsive analysis of financial and digital inclusion barriers was conducted, identifying key constraints related to financial literacy, access to formal banking systems, and use of digital financial services.
- A structured financial literacy and fintech training programme was designed to support women in budgeting, accessing financial services, and using digital platforms.
- Coordination mechanisms are being established through the Blue Economy Center for Innovation (BECI) to facilitate women's access to appropriate financial and fintech services, positioning the Center as a key platform to connect beneficiaries with financial service providers and support access to tailored financial products during the implementation phase.
- The programme design ensures that women beneficiaries will be supported to access and utilize financial tools as part of the entrepreneurship support package starting in 2026.

3.7.3 Progress Toward Immediate Outcome 5.3

Immediate Outcome 5.3: Enhanced ability of concerned government entities to promote women's economic empowerment in coastal biodiversity initiatives.

This outcome focuses on strengthening institutional capacities to mainstream gender within coastal biodiversity and economic development frameworks.

- A comprehensive institutional capacity assessment was conducted targeting ASEZA and relevant stakeholders, identifying gaps in governance, operational systems, and gender-responsive planning.
- A gender capacity-building and technical assistance action plan was developed, including governance recommendations, training frameworks, and monitoring systems to support institutional mainstreaming of gender.

- Structured consultations and engagement processes were carried out with relevant entities to support integration of gender considerations into coastal management and economic development planning.
- Preparations were completed for targeted capacity-building activities for government staff, focusing on gender mainstreaming, inclusive planning, and support to women's economic participation.

4. Progress Towards the Biodiversity Targets

Progress toward biodiversity targets under the project is evidenced through measurable advances in habitat restoration, strengthened governance frameworks, improved ecosystem monitoring, and expanded community engagement. The project has relied on baseline assessments, ecological surveys, and proxy indicators to track progress and ensure alignment with its biodiversity objectives.

Restoration, Conservation, and Protection of Ecosystems (Target: 4.0 ha)

The project has made significant progress in restoring and protecting coastal and marine ecosystems. Marine interventions include the rehabilitation of approximately 6 dunums (0.6 ha) through artificial reef substrates, in addition to ~0.5 dunum restored through coral translocation, including rescue of corals from an out-of-service barge and marine waste.

On land, approximately 5 hectares of native vegetation and habitats have been restored through nature-based solutions and ecological rehabilitation. These combined efforts indicate that the project has already exceeded the 4.0 ha target, while enhancing ecosystem functionality and resilience.

Outcome 1: Biodiversity Integration into Governance (Target: 8 institutions)

Progress has been achieved through the integration of biodiversity considerations into national and local frameworks, including:

- Integration of ICZM into the NBSAP 2050
- Development of ICZM regulatory framework and zero-discharge policy

These efforts are advancing institutional uptake and contributing toward the target of 8 institutions integrating biodiversity in a gender-responsive manner.

Outcome 2: Protection of Threatened Species (Target: 6–8 species)

The project has established the scientific and operational basis for species protection through:

- Coral and seagrass baseline assessments
- Coral translocation and habitat rehabilitation interventions
- Marine and terrestrial ecological surveys, which documented species across coral, seagrass, avian, and terrestrial ecosystems

In addition, nature-based solutions (NbS) interventions have directly contributed to improving habitat conditions through restoration campaigns that introduced approximately 16,000 native plants representing 20 native flora species, enhancing terrestrial habitats that support biodiversity and ecosystem connectivity.

Outcome 3: Knowledge on Nature-Based Solutions (Target: 250 individuals)

Progress has focused on preparing for large-scale capacity development:

- NbS training programmes designed and structured
- Training materials and selection criteria finalized
- NbS interventions designed at the sub-catchment level

Implementation is scheduled for 2026, with systems in place to reach 250 beneficiaries.

Outcome 4: Access to Information (Target: 500 individuals)

The project has expanded outreach and awareness through:

- Awareness campaigns and biodiversity events
- Community engagement and clean-up activities
- Communication strategy implementation

These efforts are contributing toward reaching 500 individuals with improved access to biodiversity-related knowledge.

5. Progress Towards the Project Outputs

During the reporting period, the project made satisfactory progress across its outputs, reflecting a balanced advancement between foundational (institutional, analytical, and planning) activities and on-the-ground implementation interventions. Significant achievements were realized in areas such as biodiversity assessments, restoration actions, communication and awareness, and institutional strengthening, while several capacity-building, investment, and livelihood-related outputs are progressing as planned and will be further advanced in the upcoming phase.

The tables below provide a detailed overview of progress for each output, including a narrative of key accomplishments and an estimated percentage of completion relative to planned targets.

Outputs of Intermediate Outcome 1

Output	Strategic progress summary	%
Output 1.1.1: Workshops conducted for revision and development (as needed) of existing Integrated Coastal Zone Management regulations for Aqaba.	The project advanced the review of ICZM regulations through structured consultations and technical discussions with ASEZA and relevant stakeholders, creating the basis for regulatory revision and endorsement.	**80%**
Output 1.1.2: Recommendations report for revision and update of Integrated Coastal Zone Management regulations supporting community engagement, gender inclusion and incentives for conservation initiatives and ecosystem positive investment prepared.	The recommendations report was prepared and informed the updated ICZM framework, integrating community participation, gender inclusion, and enabling conditions for conservation-oriented and ecosystem-positive investment.	**90%**
Output 1.1.3: Resilient biodiversity governance framework established in Aqaba.	A biodiversity governance framework was advanced through clarification of institutional roles, coordination mechanisms, and enforcement pathways, strengthening the enabling environment for integrated coastal and marine biodiversity management.	**75%**
Output 1.1.4: Coastal Zone Management capacity needs assessment of national and subnational government partners conducted in Aqaba.	The capacity needs assessment was completed for **46 stakeholders**, generating a clear evidence base for institutional strengthening and subsequent training and support.	**100%**
Output 1.2.1: Sectoral gender analysis and community needs assessment for effective gender responsive engagement in Integrated Coastal Zone Management conducted.	A comprehensive gender analysis and community needs assessment was completed, identifying barriers and opportunities for engaging women, youth, and sea users in coastal zone management.	**100%**
Output 1.2.2: Public-private sector joint investment initiatives in coastal zone management formally launched in Aqaba.	Progress was made through the establishment of the Blue Economy Center for Innovation, which provides the institutional basis for promoting biodiversity-linked and coastal management-related public-private investment pathways.	**70%**
Output 1.2.3: Training provided to local community, including women's and youth on integrated coastal zone management and other related fields.	Technical and administrative arrangements for the training programme were completed, including curriculum tailoring, equitable selection criteria, and finalization of beneficiary targeting, positioning implementation for rollout in 2026.	**50%**
Output 1.3.1: Biodiversity status communication strategy & media plan prepared for Aqaba.	A comprehensive communication strategy and media plan were developed and endorsed, providing	**90%**

Output	Strategic progress summary	%
	the framework for awareness, stakeholder engagement, and behavior-change efforts.	
Output 1.3.2: Unique branding initiative launched to advocate for biodiversity conservation in Aqaba.	A dedicated branding and visibility approach was launched and applied across campaigns, events, and materials, helping position biodiversity conservation within Aqaba's development discourse.	**70%**
Output 1.3.3: Open-source database of projects activities and outcomes established.	Initial development of the digital knowledge and visibility platform was initiated with ASEZA, including preparatory work for a webpage that will provide accessible project and coastal management information.	**30%**
Output 1.3.4: Inclusive multi-stakeholder workshops for decisionmakers to mainstream biodiversity conservation in local governance convened.	Multi-stakeholder coordination and engagement platforms were convened, involving government, private sector, academia, and community actors to mainstream biodiversity into local governance and decision-making.	**65%**
Output 1.3.5: Inclusive consultation and engagement sessions for local community on anthropogenic stressors, habitat loss, and resource management convened.	Consultation and engagement sessions were carried out through ecological surveys, awareness campaigns, and community outreach, ensuring that local knowledge and concerns informed project design and implementation.	**75%**

Outputs of Intermediate Outcome 2

Output	Strategic progress summary	%
Output 2.1.1: Advocacy campaign promoting Aqaba Science Park Research and Development Programme is developed and launched.	Work on the Aqaba Science Park was postponed pending ASEZA's finalization of the concept and location; however, the project advanced the concept of a coral wet laboratory as enabling scientific infrastructure for future research and innovation.	20%
Output 2.1.2: Integrated Ecotourism Program enhancing connectivity among Aqaba Marine Reserve, Wadi Rum Reserves and Petra Archaeological Park launched.	The Integrated Ecotourism Development Plan (2026–2030) was updated and endorsed, establishing a strategic framework to link biodiversity conservation with sustainable tourism across the Golden Triangle.	80%
Output 2.2.1: Integrated Marine Contingency Plan "IMCP" developed.	Development of the IMCP was formally initiated through mobilization of an international consultant, establishment of	45%

Output	Strategic progress summary	%
	coordination with NCSCM, and commencement of marine pollution characterization and institutional response mapping.	
Output 2.3.1: Assessment of the marine habitat in the GoA-J completed.	Marine habitat assessments were completed for coral reefs and seagrass ecosystems, providing a robust scientific baseline for conservation planning, restoration, and long-term monitoring. Assessment of soft coral will take place in 2026	80%
Output 2.3.2: Research paper with recommendations to establish a genetic reservoir published.	Preparatory scientific work has begun through marine assessments and research coordination, but the dedicated research paper and recommendations on a genetic reservoir have not yet been finalized.	10%
Output 2.3.3: Incentives Program for Ecosystem Conservation Initiatives and early reporting of threats by regular users of the Coastal and Marine Resources launched.	The project advanced the conceptual basis for this output through collaboration with the Blue Economy Center, which is expected to support incentive mechanisms and promote early reporting of environmental threats by sea users.	25%
Output 2.3.4: Mapping of existing coral reefs in Aqaba Coastal Zone completed.	Coral reef mapping was completed through the baseline surveys, generating spatial data to guide restoration, conservation planning, and future monitoring.	80%
Output 2.3.5: Assessment of Microecosystems supporting Avian Species and Terrestrial Biodiversity around rockfill Dams in the GOA-J completed.	The assessment was completed through terrestrial ecological surveys, confirming the ecological role of rockfill dam areas in supporting avian species and terrestrial biodiversity.	90%
Output 2.4.1: Cutting-edge research equipment, and financial support for Biodiversity Conservation at local universities and research institutes in Aqaba provided.	Implementation of this output is scheduled for the 2026 workplan; during the reporting period, preparatory coordination and partnership discussions were initiated.	10%
Output 2.4.2: Programme supporting collaboration between Jordanian and relevant Canadian Universities and Research Institutes implemented.	Initial strategic discussions were initiated to support future collaboration with international research institutions, but formal implementation of the programme remains planned for the next phase.	15%
Output 2.4.3: Modular Advanced Degree Program within framework of partnership between Canadian and Jordanian University developed and launched.	The output remains at a preliminary stage, with implementation expected in the upcoming period as part of the broader academic collaboration agenda.	5%

Outputs of Intermediate Outcome 3

Output	Strategic progress summary	%
Output 3.1.1: Mapping and needs assessment of existing CBOs working in coastal biodiversity, resilience and NBS in Aqaba.	The mapping and needs assessment were completed, identifying priority women-led and relevant CBOs and clarifying operational and capacity gaps for subsequent support.	90%
Output 3.1.2: Training provided to relevant entities, particularly women led CBOs to plan and implement NBS in Aqaba.	A structured NbS capacity-building programme was developed and tailored, including training modules, technical materials, and implementation approaches; delivery is scheduled for 2026.	40%
Output 3.1.3: Establish a collaborative hub.	The Blue Economy Center is being operationalized as the collaborative hub to support partnerships, knowledge exchange, and incubation of biodiversity- and NbS-related initiatives.	70%
Output 3.1.4: Native plants nursery managed by women led CBOs established/upgraded in Aqaba.	A native plant nursery was established and equipped with smart, water-efficient irrigation systems; it is currently managed by ASEZA pending transition to a women-led CBO following capacity-building rollout.	75%
Output 3.2.1 Dedicated locations for housing and growing native plants established and equipped in Aqaba Coastal Zone.	Restoration sites and nursery functions were activated through a large-scale native vegetation campaign introducing 16,000 native plants across 20 species, with additional sites identified for future expansion.	70%
Output 3.2.2 Artificial reef units constructed in Aqaba Coastal zone.	Approximately 315 eco-friendly artificial reef units were constructed and prepared for deployment to support rehabilitation of around 0.6 ha of marine habitat.	65%
Output 3.2.3 Clean-up dives completed in Aqaba coastal zone.	Clean-up dives and related marine stewardship activities were implemented through dedicated campaigns and ongoing operations, contributing to waste removal and coral rescue efforts.	60%
Output 3.2.4: Orphan Corals Nursery established in Aqaba coastal Zone.	Three coral nurseries were established, and continuous translocation of orphan corals is ongoing to support reef rehabilitation and improve survival prior to final deployment.	80%
Output 3.3.1: Gender responsive joint investment programme in conservation, cultural heritage and natural capital sustainability supported within the Golden Triangle of Aqaba.	This output progressed through integration of the investment concept into the ecotourism development plan, the women- and youth-focused livelihood programme, and the 2026 programming of the Blue Economy Center.	55%

Output	Strategic progress summary	%
Output 3.3.2: Different sea users trained on soft skills to design and market innovative reef positive initiatives.	The training programme for sea users was designed in partnership with JRF, with focus on entrepreneurship and reef-positive business models; implementation is planned for the next phase.	35%
Output 3.3.3: Summer jobs and on the job specific training opportunities for university students in environmental conservation and monitoring created within the golden triangle of Aqaba.	The programme was structured in coordination with local universities, including design of pathways for summer jobs and on-the-job training, with implementation planned to begin in 2026.	25%

Outputs of Intermediate Outcome 4

Output	Strategic progress summary	%
Output 4.1.1: Public awareness and local ownership enhancement campaigns on biodiversity conservation conducted in Aqaba.	A series of awareness, behavior-change, and volunteerism campaigns were implemented, including plastic reduction, International Volunteer Day, 16 Days of Activism, clean-up activities, and the native vegetation restoration campaign.	70%
Output 4.1.2: A women and youth champions network to support conservation efforts is established in Aqaba.	Preparatory work has been initiated through broader community engagement and programme design, but formal establishment and training of the network are scheduled for the upcoming phase.	25%
Output 4.2.1: Aqaba Marine Reserve Administration supported in the establishment of a dedicated interactive website for coastal and marine projects in Aqaba to support projects' visibility and implementation transparency.	Work has been initiated with ASEZA's IT department to establish a dedicated webpage within the ASEZA website to provide accessible information on coastal management and related projects.	30%
Output 4.3.1: Training conducted on advocacy, coalition building, public speaking, and lobbying techniques for the targeted CBOs.	A structured advocacy training approach, including ToT methodologies and tailored modules, was developed, but delivery of the training is planned for the next implementation phase.	25%
Output 4.3.2 Technical assistance provided to CBOs on preparing a priority list for advocacy on NBS in Aqaba.	Preparatory work was initiated to define technical assistance mechanisms, identify priority advocacy themes, and support selected CBOs in shaping biodiversity- and NbS-related advocacy agendas.	20%

Outputs of Intermediate Outcome 5

Output	Strategic progress summary	%
Output 5.1.1: Training provided to women on business skills, marketing, pricing and project management.	The women-focused entrepreneurship programme was designed with JRF, including outreach mechanisms, transparent selection criteria, and training modules; delivery is planned for 2026.	35%
Output 5.1.2: Technical assistance provided to women entrepreneurs to design income generating ideas related to coastal biodiversity conservation and resilience.	Preparatory work was completed to structure technical assistance for women entrepreneurs, including group-based business development, incubation pathways, and concept refinement support.	30%
Output 5.1.3: Workshops held to encourage women to innovate and propose income generating ideas.	Market linkage and innovation support activities, including workshops and market fairs, were designed as part of the women's entrepreneurship package, with implementation scheduled for 2026.	20%
Output 5.2.1: Gender analysis report identifying specific needs and constraints in women's access to fintech literacy and use of available tools and products is produced.	A gender-responsive analysis of barriers to financial and digital inclusion was undertaken, identifying constraints related to literacy, access to formal finance, and use of digital financial tools.	70%
Output 5.2.2: Training on financial and digital literacy provided to women entrepreneurs on digital skill, financial inclusion and literacy.	The structured financial and digital literacy training package was designed, but implementation is planned for the next phase of the programme.	15%
Output 5.2.3: Technical assistance provided to women to establish accounts in financial institutions.	Coordination mechanisms are being developed through the Blue Economy Center to facilitate women's future access to financial service providers and tailored financial products.	10%
Output 5.3.1: Targeted gap analysis report of institutional and personal level knowledge and capacities on women's economic empowerment and gender equality prepared.	A comprehensive institutional capacity assessment was completed, identifying governance, operational, and planning gaps related to women's economic empowerment and gender equality.	85%
Output 5.3.2: Technical assistance provided to concerned governmental entities on women's rights, women's economic empowerment, and gender mainstreaming in coastal biodiversity and resilience.	A gender capacity-building and technical assistance action plan was developed, and structured consultations were carried out to support integration of gender into coastal management and economic planning.	50%
Output 5.3.3: Trainings provided to relevant staff on advancing women's rights, women's economic empowerment, and gender mainstreaming in coastal biodiversity and resilience.	Preparations for targeted government staff training were completed, including identification of themes, training framework, and institutional entry points; implementation remains planned for the next phase.	20%

Output	Strategic progress summary	%
Output 5.3.4: Women are provided with tools to mitigate and handle GBV that results from their economic participation.	This output remains at an early preparatory stage, with activities planned to build on the gender analysis and future community and institutional engagement.	10%

6. Story of Impact

As part of preparations for a major coastal development, environmental assessments identified an abandoned 150-meter barge that had evolved into a biologically significant coral habitat, hosting rare and ecologically valuable species. With construction activities imminent, this habitat faced a high risk of irreversible loss.

Through the EmBRACE project, implemented by UNDP in partnership with ASEZA and funded by Global Affairs Canada, a rapid response intervention was designed and operationalized in coordination with the Aqaba Marine Reserve. The project provided technical guidance, coordination support, and resources to enable the safe relocation of vulnerable coral colonies.

A key feature of the intervention was the engagement of local stakeholders, including divers and fishermen, whose knowledge of marine conditions complemented scientific expertise. This collaborative approach enabled the successful relocation of approximately 80 square meters of high-value coral habitat to suitable sites within the Marine Reserve, ensuring improved conditions for survival and regeneration.

The intervention illustrates the project's contribution to:

- Operationalizing nature-based solutions in real development contexts
- Strengthening institutional coordination between ASEZA, UNDP, and marine reserve management
- Enhancing local capacity and stewardship, by actively involving community members in conservation practices

In addition to preventing biodiversity loss, the activity contributed to embedding environmental considerations into development decision-making processes. It demonstrated that timely, project-supported interventions can mitigate environmental risks while maintaining development objectives.

Follow-up monitoring mechanisms have been initiated to assess coral survival and ecosystem recovery, ensuring that the intervention generates sustained ecological benefits and informs future replication.

Overall, this experience highlights the project's role as a key driver in aligning economic development with biodiversity conservation and advancing practical, scalable solutions to protect marine ecosystems in Aqaba.

7. Challenges and Constraints

The Protecting Marine Biodiversity in Aqaba Project is characterized by a uniquely broad and integrated scope, addressing both terrestrial and marine components of the coastal ecosystem to ensure a comprehensive approach to safeguarding Aqaba's natural and socio-ecological resilience. The project is structured around five intermediate outcomes, supported by sixteen immediate outcomes, fifty-four outputs, and one hundred seventy-three activities. This reflects a high level of ambition, spanning policy and governance reform, biodiversity conservation, nature-based solutions, and inclusive livelihood development, including women's economic empowerment.

With a total financing of approximately CAD 12 million, the Protecting Marine Biodiversity in Aqaba Project represents the largest biodiversity-focused project currently implemented in Jordan. The scale and complexity of the project required a deliberate and time-bound inception phase to establish the necessary technical, institutional, and operational foundations. During the reporting period, significant efforts were dedicated to building partnerships, conducting comprehensive baseline assessments, and developing the systems and frameworks required for implementation. While this approach ensured a strong and evidence-based foundation, it also meant that visible, on-the-ground results are expected to accelerate in the subsequent implementation phase during 2026–2027.

To address the complexity of coordination across multiple sectors and stakeholders, the project prioritized the development of a shared vision and a set of guiding principles to align all partners. This resulted in a unified results chain that begins with inclusive governance and science-based planning, advances through ecosystem restoration and innovation using nature-based solutions, and culminates in equitable livelihood opportunities and community empowerment. This alignment was critical to ensure coherence across the wide range of interventions and implementing partners. In parallel, a set of proxy indicators was collectively defined and adopted to track progress across outcomes, enabling continuous monitoring and ensuring that implementation remains on track toward achieving the intended results.

In parallel, the project established a collaborative framework with key national institutions to support technical delivery:

- The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) plays a central role in habitat restoration and biodiversity management, particularly in ecologically sensitive areas such as the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

- The Royal Botanic Garden (RBG) contributes scientific expertise on native ecosystems, restoration approaches, and biodiversity monitoring, supporting the terrestrial components of the project.
- The Jordan River Foundation (JRF) leads on community engagement and women's economic empowerment, including the design and delivery of livelihood and entrepreneurship programmes.

While these partnerships significantly strengthened implementation capacity, coordinating across multiple institutions with different mandates and operational procedures required sustained effort and adaptive management.

Another key challenge encountered during the reporting period was the transition in project management. The Project Manager's resignation required interim arrangements to ensure continuity of implementation. UNDP addressed this by assigning the Projects Coordination Specialist to oversee project management functions until a new Project Manager was recruited. During this period, both experts remained actively engaged daily and maintained direct communication with the focal point at the Canadian Embassy. This arrangement ensured continuity in decision-making, maintained donor confidence, and provided an effective interim governance mechanism, serving as a practical lesson learned for risk mitigation in complex projects.

In addition to the above, the project also faced broader operational and contextual challenges, including:

- The need to navigate complex institutional coordination frameworks across national and subnational entities, particularly in areas related to regulatory reform and integrated coastal zone management.
- Social and economic barriers affecting the participation of women and local communities, requiring additional efforts in outreach, trust-building, and tailored programme design.
- The emerging and relatively nascent nature of the blue economy ecosystem in Aqaba, which necessitated significant upfront investment in capacity building, market development, and institutional strengthening before scaling interventions.

Despite these challenges, the project has not only established a strong foundation but also driven implementation across key components, contributing to steady delivery and paving the way for more tangible and measurable results in the upcoming phase.

8. Risks and Mitigation Measures

The Protecting Marine Biodiversity in Aqaba Project is implemented within a dynamic and complex socio-ecological, institutional, and regional context. Given its wide scope and integrated

nature—spanning governance reform, ecosystem restoration, and livelihood development—the project is exposed to a range of operational, environmental, and external risks. Recognizing this, risk management has been embedded as a core component of project implementation, ensuring that potential challenges are proactively identified, monitored, and addressed.

Throughout the reporting period, the project adopted an adaptive management approach, combining continuous stakeholder engagement, evidence-based planning, and the use of proxy indicators to track progress and detect emerging risks. Mitigation measures have been systematically integrated across all components, including strengthening institutional coordination, adjusting implementation modalities, and enhancing local capacities. As a result, risks are being actively managed, with most remaining within acceptable and controllable levels.

Risk levels are assessed based on two dimensions: Impact and Likelihood, using a scale from 1 to 4, as defined below:

Impact: The potential effect of the risk on project objectives, implementation, or outcomes.

Likelihood: The probability of risk occurring during the project lifecycle.

Scale Definition:

- Low: Minimal effect or unlikely to occur
- Moderate: Manageable effect or possible occurrence
- High: Significant effect or likely occurrence
- Very High: Critical effect or highly likely occurrence

The table below presents the project's Risk Log, outlining key risks, mitigation measures, and the current risk rating based on impact and likelihood.

#	Risk	Risk Response	Risk Rating (1–4)
1	Institutional and regulatory adoption delays (ICZM, zero-discharge policy, contingency planning)	Extensive consultations conducted with ASEZA and stakeholders; technical drafts finalized and under validation; ICZM integrated into the updated National Biodiversity Strategy to strengthen policy anchoring.	Impact: 2 Likelihood: 2
2	Institutional coordination complexity across multiple national and subnational entities	Shared vision and guiding principles established; structured coordination mechanisms operationalized; continuous technical engagement with ASEZA, RSCN, RBG, and JRF.	Impact:3 Likelihood: 2
3	Capacity constraints at the institutional and local levels	Capacity needs completed; tailored capacity building programmes designed; ranger training conducted and equipment provided; monitoring systems operationalized.	Impact: 2 Likelihood: 2
4	Social and Gender inclusion barriers	Gender analysis and capacity-building strategy developed; inclusive programme design with JRF; tailored outreach and	Impact: 2

#	Risk	Risk Response	Risk Rating (1–4)
		selection criteria to ensure participation of women and vulnerable groups.	Likelihood: 2
5	Market and blue economy ecosystem maturity	Blue Economy Center for Innovation (BECI) established by ASEZA as a platform for entrepreneurship, finance, and innovation; business incubation and market linkage mechanisms designed.	Impact: 2 Likelihood: 2
6	Environmental and climate risks (pollution, floods, ecosystem degradation)	Nature-based solutions designed at sub-catchment level; marine monitoring programmes established; coral translocation, artificial reefs, and restoration interventions underway.	Impact:3 Likelihood: 3
7	Operational and management continuity risks	Interim management arrangements ensured continuity; strengthened coordination and direct communication with donor; team-based management approach adopted.	Impact: 2 Likelihood: 1
8	Regional political and economic instability affecting procurement and supply chains	Procurement strategies adapted to prioritize local suppliers; specifications adjusted for cost-efficiency; early procurement planning adopted; coordination with UNDP operations enhanced.	Impact: 3 Likelihood: 3

9. Lessons Learned

Implementation of the Protecting Marine Biodiversity in Aqaba Project has generated several strategic lessons that are critical for advancing integrated coastal biodiversity conservation and informing future programming in Jordan and similar contexts.

1. Integrated approaches require strong upfront investment in systems and knowledge.
Addressing terrestrial and marine ecosystems under a ridge-to-reef approach necessitates a solid foundation of baseline data, institutional alignment, and technical planning. Early investment in ecological surveys, governance frameworks, and stakeholder engagement proved essential to ensure that subsequent interventions are targeted, evidence-based, and scalable.

2. Policy and regulatory reform are a prerequisite for sustainable impact.
Progress in ecosystem restoration and conservation is closely linked to the existence of enabling regulatory frameworks. The development of ICZM regulations, the zero-discharge policy, and their integration into national strategies demonstrated that institutional anchoring is key to sustaining results beyond project timelines.

3. Partnerships are central to delivery in complex, multi-sectoral projects.
Effective collaboration with specialized national institutions such as RSCN, RBG, and JRF enabled the project to leverage complementary expertise across biodiversity conservation,

scientific research, and community engagement. Structured partnerships enhanced efficiency, ownership, and quality of implementation.

4. Linking conservation with livelihoods increases community ownership.
Community engagement is most effective when conservation efforts are directly connected to tangible socio-economic opportunities. The design of livelihood programmes, particularly those targeting women and youth, highlighted the importance of aligning biodiversity objectives with income-generating activities to ensure long-term sustainability.

5. Effective gender-responsive approaches depend on intentional, evidence-based design and targeted implementation.
Promoting inclusive participation requires targeted interventions informed by gender analysis. Tailored outreach, adapted training programmes, and equitable selection criteria are necessary to overcome barriers and ensure meaningful engagement of women and vulnerable groups.

6. Building the blue economy ecosystem is a gradual process.
The establishment of the Blue Economy Center demonstrated that fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and private sector engagement requires time, institutional support, and coordinated efforts. Early-stage investments in capacity building and market development are critical before scaling business-oriented interventions.

7. Adaptive management is essential in dynamic contexts.
The project's ability to respond to operational challenges, including management transitions and external factors such as regional instability, highlighted the importance of flexible implementation arrangements, continuous monitoring, and strong communication with partners and donors.

10. Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement

Partnerships and stakeholder engagement have been central to the implementation of the Protecting Marine Biodiversity in Aqaba Project, reflecting its integrated and multi-sectoral nature. The project adopted a collaborative approach that brings together government institutions, national technical organizations, civil society, academia, and emerging private sector actors to ensure coordinated and sustainable delivery of results.

At the institutional level, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) serves as the lead national counterpart, playing a critical role in advancing regulatory reforms, facilitating coordination, and ensuring alignment with local development priorities. Close engagement with ASEZA has enabled progress on key frameworks, including Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), the zero-discharge policy, and marine conservation planning.

Strategic partnerships with specialized national institutions have significantly strengthened technical implementation. The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) has contributed to habitat restoration and biodiversity management, particularly in ecologically

sensitive sites such as the Aqaba Bird Observatory. The Royal Botanic Garden (RBG) has provided scientific expertise on native ecosystems, restoration techniques, and ecological monitoring, supporting terrestrial interventions. The Jordan River Foundation (JRF) has been a key partner in designing and preparing community engagement and livelihood programmes, with a strong focus on women's economic empowerment and inclusive participation.

The project has also engaged a broad range of local stakeholders, including community-based organizations (CBOs), local communities, divers, and volunteers. These actors have been actively involved in awareness campaigns, clean-up activities, and restoration efforts, contributing to building local ownership and fostering a culture of environmental stewardship.

In parallel, the project has strengthened engagement with academia and research institutions to support science-based decision-making and long-term monitoring. Baseline ecological assessments and ongoing collaboration with research partners are contributing to improved understanding of ecosystem dynamics and informing conservation strategies.

A key milestone during the reporting period was the establishment of the Blue Economy Center for Innovation (BECI) under ASEZA, which serves as a platform for coordination, knowledge exchange, and private sector engagement in biodiversity-linked economic activities. The Center is expected to play a central role in connecting stakeholders, supporting entrepreneurship, and facilitating access to finance, thereby enhancing the sustainability and scalability of project interventions.

11. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

A comprehensive gender analysis and capacity-building assessment was conducted to identify barriers, opportunities, and entry points for enhancing women's participation in coastal and marine resource management. The findings informed the design of targeted interventions, including tailored training programmes, inclusive selection criteria, and community engagement approaches that address socio-cultural constraints and promote equitable access to opportunities.

The project has prioritized the economic empowerment of women by integrating gender-responsive approaches into livelihood and capacity development programmes. In collaboration with the Jordan River Foundation (JRF), structured training programmes have been developed targeting women and youth in areas such as ecotourism, aquaculture, and blue economy-related activities. These programmes are designed not only to build technical skills but also to enhance access to income-generating opportunities linked to biodiversity conservation.

At the institutional level, gender considerations have been incorporated into key governance frameworks, including Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and broader policy processes, contributing to the mainstreaming of gender-responsive practices in environmental management. In addition, capacity needs assessments targeting relevant institutions have helped identify gaps and inform future training and institutional strengthening efforts.

Social inclusion has also been advanced through the active engagement of diverse groups, including youth, local communities, volunteers, and people with disabilities, in project activities such as restoration campaigns, clean-up initiatives, and awareness programmes. Nature-based solutions interventions and community activities have been designed to encourage broad participation and strengthen local ownership of conservation efforts.

Furthermore, communication and outreach efforts have emphasized the role of women and local communities in biodiversity conservation, including through awareness campaigns and visibility initiatives that highlight their contributions and leadership.

12. Communication and Visibility

During the reporting period, a series of targeted campaigns and outreach activities were implemented, reaching diverse audiences and reinforcing the project's positioning as a flagship biodiversity initiative in Aqaba. Key highlights include:

- **Behavioral Change Campaigns:**
  The #ImpactFreeBag campaign promoted alternatives to single-use plastics, directly supporting ASEZA's policy direction to eliminate plastic bags by 2026 and raising awareness on marine pollution risks.
- **Community and Youth Engagement:**
  Participation in International Volunteer Day and youth-led activities strengthened the role of young people in conservation efforts, positioning volunteerism as a pathway for environmental stewardship.
- **Gender-Responsive Communication:**
  The project contributed to the global 16 Days of Activism, highlighting women's roles in biodiversity conservation and ensuring their visibility as active agents, not only beneficiaries.
- **Flagship Restoration Campaign Visibility:**
  The Aqaba Native Plant Restoration Campaign received high-level national attention, launched under royal patronage, and widely covered across national media outlets. The campaign communicated tangible results, including the restoration of 16,000 native plants across 20 species, reinforcing the link between science-based solutions and on-the-ground impact.
- **Media and Digital Outreach:**
  Communication outputs included social media campaigns, visual storytelling, and media engagement, generating coverage across multiple national platforms (e.g., Petra, Al Rai, Addustour) and increasing visibility of biodiversity issues. Digital platforms such as Instagram were actively used to amplify outreach and engagement.

In line with donor requirements, the project consistently adhered to visibility and communication guidelines, ensuring the Government of Canada's contribution was clearly acknowledged across all communication products. This included:

- Applying tri-branding (GAC, UNDP, ASEZA) on all materials and campaigns
- Referencing the donor in press releases, media coverage, and official statements
- Ensuring visibility during workshops, field activities, and public events
- Integrating donor recognition across digital content, publications, and outreach materials

These efforts were supported by a comprehensive communication framework that emphasized:

- Multi-channel outreach (social media, events, media coverage, community engagement)
- Evidence-based messaging linking biodiversity to livelihoods and national priorities
- Inclusive representation, ensuring gender balance and community voices
- Strategic partnerships, particularly with ASEZA, media actors, and civil society

links to selected coverage of these activities across UNDP Jordan social media platforms and Jordanian news outlets.

- **Paper Bag campaign:**
- https://www.instagram.com/p/DMrkl7_KNoA/
- https://www.instagram.com/p/DM4cfdcKTI-/
- https://www.instagram.com/p/DNSxHcoqaiu/
- **International Volunteers Day**
- https://www.instagram.com/p/DRy4I2yClWK/
- **International Volunteer Day & #16daysofactivism campaign**
- https://www.instagram.com/p/DR-VC6nijzY
- **Aqaba Native Plant Restoration Campaign**
- https://www.instagram.com/p/DUoPaaqil9t/
- https://www.instagram.com/p/DU0pApQCjh8/
-

News Outlet	Link
Addustour	تجارة العقبة تستضيف الاجتماع التنسيقي لحملة نحو عقبة خالية من البلاستيك
Petra	اجتماعات تنسيقية لإطلاق مبادرة زراعة الأشجار الأصيلة في العقبة
Saraha News	العقبة تطلق حملة لاستعادة الغطاء النباتي بدعم أممي وكندي
Petra	حملة لاستعادة النباتات المحلية الأصيلة في العقبة
alrai	حملة لاستعادة الغطاء النباتي وزراعة 16 ألف نبتة مهددة بالانقراض بالعقبة
Deeretna News	العقبة..مبادرة اترك اثر تشارك في حملة استعادة الغطاء النباتي الطبيعي في منطقة وادي اليتم
ASEZA Facebook	حملة لاستعادة النباتات المحلية الأصيلة في العقبة

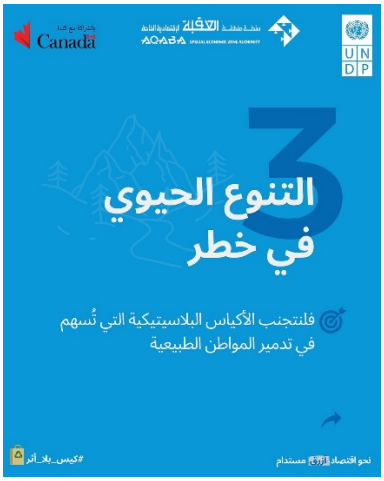
RBG Instagram	انطلاق حملة استعادة النباتات المحلية الأصيلة في العقبة
RBG Facebook	انطلاق حملة استعادة النباتات المحلية الأصيلة في العقبة
Ghadi News	الأردن: انطلاق حملة لاستعادة النباتات المحلية الأصيلة في العقبة
Aldar News	حملة لاستعادة النباتات المحلية الأصيلة في العقبة

>> Launching #ImpactFreeBag to Reduce Plastic Use in Aqaba | August 2025











>> Winning Photo of a Hawksbill Sea Turtle at Rainbow Reef Highlighting Marine Conservation under EmBRACE | August 2025



>> Beach Clean-Up Activities under EmBRACE Supporting Marine Conservation in Aqaba | November 2025





>> Youth-Led Volunteerism Activities under EmBRACE Mark International Volunteer Day in Aqaba | December 2025







>> Launch of Aqaba Native Plant Restoration Campaign under EmBRACE | February 2026

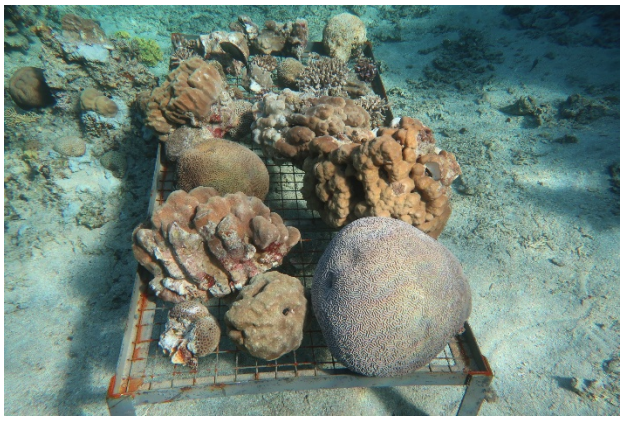





>> Coral Translocation under EmBRACE Supporting Reef Conservation in Aqaba | March 2026





Protecting Marine Biodiversity in Aqaba

Jordan, Aqaba

GAC Funded Project

Annual Progress Report

Comments and Responses

14 April 2026

- We would appreciate it if future reports could include page numbers for easier reference when providing comments.

Thank you for this helpful suggestion. We will ensure that page numbers are included in all future reports to facilitate easier reference and review.

- The report mentions dams and wadis. Could you please specify how many dams and/or wadi systems have been affected by the restoration activities so far?

The baseline surveys targeted 35 rockfill and check dams, covering their surrounding ecological systems. To date, restoration activities have been implemented around one dam as a pilot site. In addition, two priority sub-catchment areas (including sites linked to check dams) have been identified for the application of nature-based solutions, with further expansion planned to include restoration around two rockfill dams in the next phase.

- The report mentions the establishment of a native plant nursery. Could you please indicate the location of this nursery and clarify whether it is a new facility or part of an existing ASEZA nursery?

The nursery is located within an existing ASEZA facility. Under the project, a native plant nursery unit was established and equipped within this facility, including smart, water-efficient irrigation systems specifically designed for the propagation of native plant species. This upgraded nursery will support the continued implementation of ASEZA's native vegetation restoration programmes and ensure a sustainable supply of locally adapted plant species. It will support the continued implementation of ASEZA's native vegetation restoration programmes and ensure a sustainable supply of locally adapted plant species.

- Please provide the locations of the six dams referred to in the report.

The report refers to dams in a general context and does not specifically identify six dams. The terrestrial ecological baseline surveys targeted 35 rockfill and check dams across the project area. However, a map indicating the locations of these dams has been prepared and is attached.

- The report refers to "a high-risk site where coral colonies were exposed to physical disturbance and degradation." Our understanding is that this coral community was previously healthy and thriving, and that the proposed barge removal may disturb or damage the corals. Is this correct?

The coral community had indeed developed into a thriving micro-ecosystem on the barge; however, the site became high-risk due to planned construction activities that would have led to its destruction. The intervention focused on safely translocating the corals to suitable habitats to ensure their long-term survival and protection.

- You mentioned formalizing the partnership with the Jordan River Foundation (JRF). Could this partnership be further built upon after the project ends to help sustain the benefits?

The partnership with the Jordan River Foundation is designed to be sustained beyond the project through its institutionalization within the Blue Economy Center for Innovation, which will serve as a platform for continuing capacity-building, entrepreneurship, and livelihood support programmes. In addition, the collaboration is embedded within broader programme frameworks (e.g., ecotourism and livelihoods initiatives), ensuring continuity through ASEZA-led structures and future partnerships.

- The report states that inclusive multi-stakeholder workshops and engagement platforms were convened, enabling participation from government, the private sector, academia, civil society, and local communities in biodiversity-related decision-making. It also mentions that consultation and engagement sessions were conducted as part of the marine and terrestrial ecological baseline surveys (coral reefs, seagrass, flora, and fauna), ensuring that scientific assessments and restoration planning are informed by stakeholder inputs and local knowledge. These are valuable platforms for stakeholder engagement in biodiversity governance, but will they continue to be used to generate feedback for future planning and biodiversity-related decision-making after the project ends?

These engagement platforms are expected to continue beyond the project, as participatory approaches are already embedded within the practices of ASEZA and the Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR). Stakeholder engagement remains a core element of biodiversity planning and decision-making, complementing scientific assessments with citizen science and local knowledge to strengthen the evidence base. This approach is further reinforced

through the updated Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) regulatory framework, which defines clear mechanisms for coordination, consultation, and inclusive participation. In addition, the Aqaba Marine Reserve Management Committee, which includes a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including local community representatives ensures sustained dialogue and engagement in marine governance. The establishment of the Blue Economy Center will further institutionalize and expand these mechanisms, supporting continuous feedback and adaptive management in biodiversity conservation.

- The report mentions 6–8 threatened species. Could you please specify these species if they have already been identified?

Threatened coral species:

- *Lobophyllia corymbosa*
- *Pocillopora damicornis*
- *Pocillopora verrucosa*
- *Acropora sp.* (4 species)

Threatened flora species (according Jordanian plant red list):

- *Acacia gerrardii*
- *Acacia tortilis*
- *Balanites aeygyptiacus*
- *Calligonum comosum*
- *Lavandula dentata*
- *Moringa peregrina*

- The report notes that comprehensive marine habitat assessments were completed, including coral reef baseline assessments and seagrass ecosystem assessments. Could you please clarify how conducting these assessments contributes to improving the capacity of local entities in marine conservation?

While the assessments generate critical scientific data, they also directly contribute to strengthening the capacity of local entities by defining the conservation status of key species, including flagship, endemic, and vulnerable species, and identifying degraded habitats and the underlying drivers of degradation. This enables local institutions to design targeted restoration interventions, prioritize conservation actions, and establish evidence-based monitoring programmes. In parallel, the active involvement of local experts and partner institutions throughout the assessment process has strengthened technical capacities in marine monitoring, data analysis, and adaptive ecosystem management.

- The report states: “Coral reefs remain ecologically viable, with higher live coral cover within protected areas.” Is there something missing in this sentence? Is the intended point that protected areas support healthier coral ecosystems?

The sentence is intended to complement the preceding paragraph by highlighting a key finding from the assessments. It indeed reflects the role of protected areas in supporting healthier coral ecosystems and conserving biodiversity values. However, this can be rephrased as:
“Coral reefs remain ecologically viable, with higher live coral cover observed within protected areas, highlighting the effectiveness of protection measures in maintaining healthier reef ecosystems.”

- The report mentions that coral translocation is ongoing through temporary nurseries. Could you please elaborate briefly on this process?

Corals are first translocated to temporary nurseries within the Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR) where they are stabilized, monitored, and allowed to recover from handling stress under controlled conditions. This step is critical to improve coral resilience and survival before relocation to permanent restoration sites, ensuring higher success rates and long-term establishment of restored reef habitats.

- The report refers to the level of community participation and volunteering in conservation activities. Can this be measured, and if so, how?

Yes, the level of community participation can be measured using quantitative indicators, such as the number of individuals and local entities engaged in conservation activities. This includes participation in initiatives such as beach and marine clean-up campaigns, native vegetation restoration efforts, and other community-based environmental actions.

- The report mentions the degree of interaction between sea users and the Aqaba Marine Reserve (e.g., reporting threats or species observations). Is this interaction one-way, with sea users only reporting to AMR, or does it involve two-way engagement?

The interaction is two-way. While the Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR) receives information from sea users—such as reporting threats or species observations, it also actively engages with them through multiple channels. This includes representation of sea users within the AMR Management Committee, communication through social media platforms and Aqaba Voice Radio, and regular stakeholder engagement workshops held at AMR facilities.

- A key enabling milestone mentioned is ASEZA’s establishment and operationalization of the (BECI), which serves as an institutional platform for entrepreneurship development, innovation support, and biodiversity-linked investment. The Center is expected to play a central role in supporting women-led enterprises by linking them to technical assistance,

market opportunities, and financing mechanisms, thereby ensuring sustainability beyond the project lifecycle. Could you briefly elaborate on how the project contributed to establishing BECI?

While the establishment of the Blue Economy Center for Innovation (BECI) was led under another UNDP–ASEZA initiative, EmBRACE project contributed by actively engaging in the consultation process, helping shape the Center's vision and core objectives, and aligning its entrepreneurship and coral-positive livelihood programmes within BECI's thematic areas. In addition, the project allocated USD 40,000 to support the upcoming 2nd International Symposium (June 2026), positioning BECI as a platform linking conservation, research, and blue economy investments.

- The report notes that marine interventions include the rehabilitation of approximately 6 dunums (0.6 ha) through artificial reef substrates. Please indicate whether this activity was completed within the reporting period.

The artificial reef substrates have been designed and procured, and the target areas have been surveyed and defined. To date, approximately 0.5 dunum has been restored, while the deployment of substrates and associated rehabilitation activities are ongoing as part of a phased implementation approach.

- The report states that "the project has established the scientific and operational basis for species protection The surveys would focus on baseline conditions rather than operational requirements, right?

While the surveys primarily focused on establishing baseline ecological conditions, they also included recommendations that inform operational requirements. These recommendations form the basis for developing targeted conservation and management plans, including restoration priorities, monitoring frameworks, and intervention strategies, thereby bridging baseline assessments with operational implementation.

Gender:

- It would be helpful to provide more detailed information regarding gender equality throughout the report. For example, there is a reference to the regulatory framework (outcome 1.1) concerning "gender inclusion," but it is not clear how this has been achieved. Including just one example in the narrative would be beneficial. The same applies to the references to gender responsiveness of their interventions across the report.

Gender equality has been operationalized through inclusive processes and evidence-based design. Under Outcome 1.1, women's participation in consultations informed the ICZM recommendations, and the updated framework promotes inclusive coordination mechanisms engaging all stakeholders, particularly women and youth. A key example is the gender analysis and community needs assessment, which engaged women, youth,

and sea users, for the first time, in coastal governance discussions, helping identify barriers and shape targeted interventions. In addition, approximately 150 women (out of 300 targeted beneficiaries) have been selected for ICZM training and livelihoods programmes to be implemented in 2026.

- In the narrative, there is minimal reflection on women's participation as active participants. Even when women's organisations are mentioned, it is unclear who they are and why they were selected. This also applies to other community organisations. The language is quite general; while I understand the need to avoid excessive detail, providing examples and mentioning a few local partners (rather than only national-level royal NGOs) would be useful.

During 2025, the project focused on surveys, analysis, and stakeholder mapping to identify and target relevant beneficiaries. The capacity needs assessment and gender analysis engaged a wide spectrum of local actors directly linked to natural resource use in Aqaba, including the glass-bottom boats association, fishermen associations, and diving centers, as well as women-led CBOs such as Al Disi Women Cooperative and House of Roses Women Association, in addition to the Jordanian National Forum for Women/Aqaba Branch, which participated—along with 35 other women—in vocational training on native plant propagation and plantation. These processes enabled women and local groups to actively contribute by sharing local knowledge, identifying barriers, and shaping priorities. The findings now form the foundation for targeted gender-responsive and community-based interventions to be implemented in 2026–2027.

- Are there any figures to reflect women's participation and representation in project activities?

Yes, women's participation has been tracked across several project activities. For example:

- In restoration campaigns, 82 out of 180 participants were women (~45%).
- 150 women have been selected for the ICZM training and livelihood enhancement programme.
- Approximately 35 women participated in training on native plant propagation and plantation.
- During the youth volunteering and 16 Days of Activism, around 60% of 130 participants were women.
- In three clean-up campaigns, 30% of 126 participants were women.
- In consultation workshops, 45% of 383 participants were women.

- It is unclear whether the project is considering other intersectional factors in targeting women and youth. This should be noted as part of your approach.

The project does apply an intersectional approach in targeting women and youth, and we acknowledge that this was not sufficiently reflected in the narrative. In addition to gender,

the targeting approach considers factors such as age, socio-economic status, type of livelihood, and geographic location. For example, the assessments specifically captured the needs of women in informal ecotourism activities, young women entering the marine sector, and female-headed households with limited access to income opportunities. These intersectional considerations are informing the design of targeted interventions for the 2026–2027 phase

Outcome 1:

- Provide an example of gender inclusion in the regulatory framework.

An example of gender inclusion in the regulatory framework is the requirement to ensure inclusive and equitable stakeholder participation in environmental governance processes, including consultations, decision-making, and access to information. The framework explicitly calls for mechanisms that enable the participation of all groups, particularly women, in environmental decision-making and coastal governance processes, and highlights the need to remove barriers to women's engagement and ensure equal access to grievance and reporting systems

- State what activities the gender analysis informed and how this information was disseminated to others, if applicable.

The gender analysis directly informed several key project activities, particularly the design of targeted livelihood programmes, ICZM training, and institutional capacity-building interventions, as well as the identification of priority actions such as women-focused training, safer work environments, and improved access to finance and markets.
The findings were disseminated through validation workshops, stakeholder consultations, and technical engagement sessions with ASEZA, the Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR), civil society

Outcome 3:

- Elaborate on the gaps identified from the CBO needs assessments and how these informed the design of training programmes, especially from a gender perspective.

The CBO needs assessment identified key gaps in ICZM knowledge, environmental communication, access to finance, and integration of gender considerations, alongside barriers limiting women's participation, such as limited access to training and underrepresentation in marine and tourism sectors.
These findings informed the training programme design, which includes targeted modules on gender and social inclusion, sustainable tourism, marketing, and project development, tailored to CBOs, women groups, and eco-entrepreneurs, using a practical and participatory approach.

- How will women's organisations be selected to take over the plant nursery, and why were women's organisations not involved from the outset?

The establishment of the nursery was prioritized early to support time-sensitive native vegetation restoration activities, and was therefore initially set up and managed within ASEZA's existing nursery facilities. In parallel, the project initiated capacity needs assessments and gender analysis to identify suitable local CBOs, particularly women-led organizations, and assess their readiness and needs.

The transition to a women-led CBO is planned as a second phase, following targeted capacity-building. The selected CBO will be identified through a competitive and transparent process, in line with ASEZA procedures, ensuring that the organization has the technical and managerial capacity to sustainably operate the nursery. This phased approach ensures both timely project implementation and longterm sustainability of the intervention.

- More elaboration is needed on how the investment approach is gender responsive.

The investment approach is gender-responsive and informed by the gender analysis, which identified key structural barriers limiting women's participation in Aqaba's ecotourism sector, including restricted mobility, safety concerns, and limited access to finance and leadership opportunities. In response, the ecotourism development plan integrates targeted measures to support women's participation in value chains, promote women-safe working environments, and expand access to training and entrepreneurship opportunities. In addition, this approach is aligned with the programming of the Blue Economy Center, and will guide the project's support, including through the partnership with the Jordan River Foundation (JRF), to empower 100 women, of whom 10 women-led enterprises will be supported and funded in areas such as circular economy, ecotourism, and nature-based solutions.

Outcome 4:
Provide more detail on the public awareness campaign: what was women's role, how were the messages sensitized? What was the 16-day campaign about, and how were women involved in designing it?

Women actively participated in the awareness and volunteer campaigns, including clean-up and restoration activities, where they were directly involved in field work and community outreach. They contributed to raising awareness on issues such as plastic reduction and environmental protection within their communities. The messaging was designed to be inclusive by linking environmental actions with social responsibility and ensuring meaningful participation of women and youth.
Regarding the 16 Days of Activism, the project aligned with this global campaign on gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence by integrating it into the International Volunteer Day event at the Aqaba Marine Reserve. The activity included interactive awareness sessions, mural art, and engagement with AMR rangers, targeting youth and local communities. Women participated as active attendees and contributors in discussions and awareness

activities, helping to connect gender equality messages with community engagement and environmental action.

Outcome 5:

- There is a reference to a pipeline of beneficiaries. Is there a figure associated with this, and from which area? What type of business is involved? It would be useful to note this at this stage.

The pipeline refers to an initial pool of approximately 100 women from Aqaba Governorate, identified through outreach and engagement with local CBOs, sea-user groups, and community stakeholders. These beneficiaries were selected based on transparent and structured criteria jointly developed by UNDP, ASEZA, and the Jordan River Foundation (JRF), ensuring relevance to coastal and marine activities, geographic representation across Aqaba, and strong motivation and commitment to participate and apply the acquired skills .

The pipeline includes business ideas in eco-tourism, marine-related services, nature-based products, and circular economy activities, with a focus on biodiversity-positive enterprises. From this pool, 10 women-led enterprises will be selected for incubation and financial support during the 2026 implementation phase.

- It would be helpful to give an example of which government organisations were involved in the gender equality assessment and who will be involved in the capacity-building exercise.

The gender equality assessment targeted key government entities, including the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) as the main entry point, alongside the Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR) and the Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC). Data was collected through staff surveys and interviews with technical staff, operational teams, and senior management, ensuring representation across relevant functions .

These same institutions will be engaged in the capacity-building programme, with staff from ASEZA, AMR, and ADC participating directly in targeted training and technical support activities, ensuring continuity between assessment and implementation