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# QUDRA2

Resilience for refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities  
in response to the protracted Syrian and Iraqi crises

LESSONS LEARNT:

# Supporting Local Communities in Fragile Contexts

Implemented by



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## List of abbreviations

<b>AECID</b>	Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation
<b>BMZ</b>	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>CAC</b>	Country Advisory Committees
<b>CBO</b>	Community-based Organisations
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>GDF</b>	Governorate Development Facility
<b>GIZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
<b>HDP</b>	Humanitarian-Development-Peace (Nexus)
<b>HIA</b>	Hungarian Interchurch Aid
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced persons
<b>ISIS</b>	So-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>JCC</b>	Joint Crisis Coordination Centre
<b>JCMC</b>	Joint Coordination and Monitoring Centre
<b>LDP</b>	Local Development Plans
<b>LGU</b>	local governmental units
<b>KRI</b>	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MoLA</b>	Ministry of Local Administration
<b>MSC</b>	Municipality Support Committee
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>QIP</b>	Quick Impact Project
<b>UMT</b>	Union of Municipalities of Türkiye

# 1. Background

The civil war in Syria has produced tragic statistics, with more than a quarter of a million dead and over 13.5 million people forced to flee from their homes in Syria. Most of the displaced have sought refuge in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, Türkiye, and Iraq.

Qudra is an Arabic word meaning “strength”, “ability”, or “resilience”. The Qudra 2 programme seeks to strengthen the resilience of Syrian refugees, internally displaced persons (IDP), returnees, and host communities in response to the protracted Syrian and Iraqi displacement crises.

Qudra 2 is a regional programme co-financed by the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the “Madad Fund”, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID).

Qudra 2 is jointly implemented by AECID, the Belgian Development Agency (Enabel), Expertise France, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA) in the four partner countries Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye. All five agencies coordinate their actions and pool their experience and resources to contribute to a shared European response to the Syrian and Iraqi crises.

## **Qudra 2 works in four components:**

1. Education and protection
2. Employment promotion and income generation
3. Local governmental institutions and civil society organisations
4. Social cohesion/stability as a cross-cutting component.

## **About this publication**

After four years of implementation, this publication documents and shares experiences and knowledge gained in delivering support to local communities under Qudra 2’s third component. The objective of this support is to improve the capacities of local authorities<sup>1</sup> and civil society organisations (CSOs) to deliver transparent and inclusive basic services in the context of a protracted displacement crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> As Qudra 2 works with different subnational state actors in the partner countries, the publication uses the general term “local authorities”. In Türkiye and Jordan local authorities refer mainly to municipalities; in Iraq, they are primarily local directorates of line ministries and governorate authorities, as well as municipalities.

Qudra 2's support to local communities is implemented in three countries by three European partners: Iraq (GIZ and HIA), Jordan (AECID), and Türkiye (GIZ). For this publication, all partners reflected on their individual experiences. The country-specific results were compared and synthesised into lessons learnt. The publication describes what Qudra 2 achieved and also outlines different options and their possible advantages and disadvantages depending on local needs and framework conditions.

We hope future interventions can build on the combined expertise of three European implementing partners and evidence collected in three partner countries to unlock local authorities' and civil society organisations' potential in similar displacement contexts.

## 2. Regional context

The high influx of Syrian refugees into the countries neighbouring Syria has intensified needs for basic services and infrastructure at the local level, as more than 90 % of displaced persons live in host communities. In addition, in the liberated areas of Iraq, large swathes of public infrastructure and facilities were damaged or destroyed during the war against the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and previous conflicts, creating large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The protracted nature of the displacement crisis has burdened host communities and challenged local authorities' already precarious ability to provide basic services and infrastructure. Local authorities lack the resources and capacities to meet an increased population's needs and maintain social cohesion between the host, refugee, and IDP communities. In addition to the efforts of local government actors, CSOs have provided significant support to vulnerable populations.

Adding to the challenges of large-scale displacement, other crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, climate change, and political and economic difficulties in some host countries have exacerbated existing vulnerabilities. As a result, the capacities of local actors are further stretched, and tensions between host community members and displaced persons have increased, negatively impacting community resilience.

## 3. Programme design

### 3.1 Intervention logic: A development-oriented resilience approach

Given the fragile context, Qudra 2's intervention logic can be viewed through the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus lens. The concept of the HDP nexus is based on the insight that boundaries between meeting urgent humanitarian needs and promoting longer-term development objectives can be fluid and that both objectives must be addressed concurrently in fragile contexts. The peace dimension underlines that humanitarian and development actors must "do no harm", "leave no one behind", and contribute to conflict transformation.

Within this conceptual framework, Qudra 2 pursues a development-oriented resilience approach that comprises three interlinked objectives: meeting community needs through transparent and inclusive services, promoting social cohesion, and building local actors' capacities to address future challenges. The approach is dynamic in that it is responsive to crises while seeking more systemic development opportunities.

**Figure 3-1: Development-oriented resilience approach**



Meeting community needs through basic services: A grant scheme to finance the rehabilitation and upgrading of small-scale infrastructure and social services is the strategic entry point for Qudra 2's support in all three countries. Grant funding meets the immediate, priority needs of vulnerable communities. Community participation and a focus on the needs of vulnerable populations among both host communities and displaced persons ensure effectiveness.

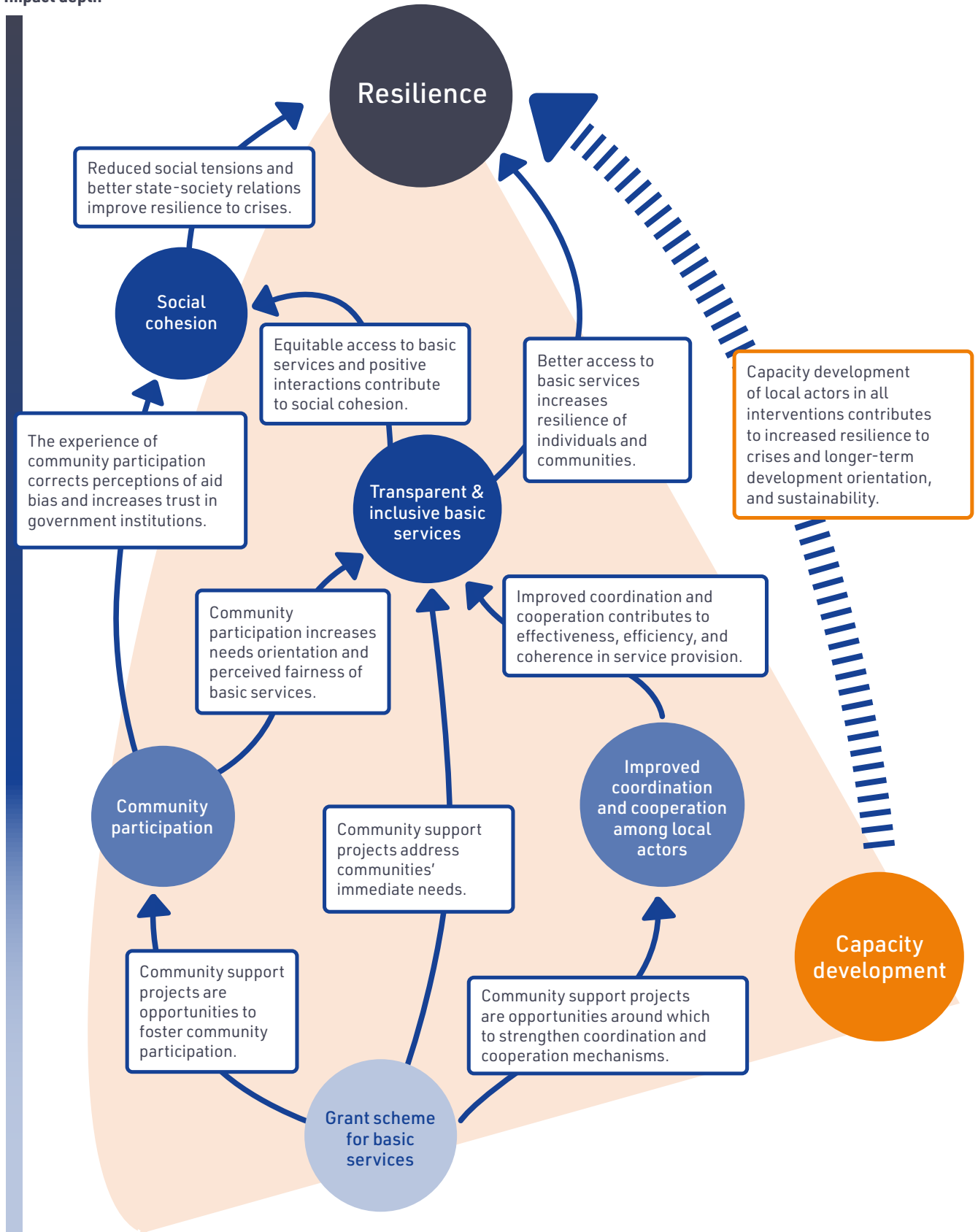
Promoting social cohesion: Support for basic needs reduces real and perceived competition over scarce resources, especially if it is participatory and transparent. It also creates opportunities for positive engagement between the different community groups. In turn, this positively impacts the attitudes and behaviours of individuals and groups, including their sense of belonging, participation in community life, and collective action in support of shared goals ("horizontal social cohesion"). Furthermore, participatory and inclusive service delivery strengthens the trust of individuals and communities in state institutions in line with the guiding principles of "leave no one behind" and "do no harm" ("vertical social cohesion").

Capacity development for local actors: Capacity development measures support local actors to effectively cope with current stresses and tackle longer-term local development challenges, such as good local governance. The grant scheme offers opportunities for "learning-by-doing" accompanied by coaching, peer-to-peer learning, and specialist support. Dialogues and knowledge sharing between local authorities at the national, regional, or international level, and networking with CSOs, foster partnerships and a more coherent response at both local and national levels.



**Figure 3-2: Intervention logic**

Impact depth



## 3.2 Country-specific approaches

While the intervention logic is the same in Iraq, Jordan, and Türkiye in principle, it is adapted to the local context. The following section briefly describes how the Qudra 2 approach is implemented in each country.

### 3.2.1 Iraq

In Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), Qudra 2 focuses on crisis response mechanisms applied in transitional aid contexts. It aims to support stabilisation in a post-conflict situation while identifying opportunities to promote longer-term resilience. GIZ, one of Qudra 2's implementing partners in Iraq, supports "Quick Impact Projects" (QIPs), which address urgent development needs of vulnerable community members, refugees, IDPs, and returnees through small-scale, low-cost infra-structure, including, for example, water and electricity networks.

Grants are awarded through a "Governorate Development Facility" (GDF) established by the programme in Federal Iraq and KRI, respectively. The GDF is implemented with the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Centre (JCMC) of the Iraqi Government and the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCC) of the Kurdistan Regional Government, which oversee crisis management coordination at national and sub-national levels. The GDF has transparent rules and streamlined procedures so that infra-structure projects are planned and implemented quickly and have immediate tangible effects in the communities. Local authorities (e.g., a local water directorate) submit concept notes to the GDF, which selects projects based on transparent criteria. In this process, local government units (LGU) consider the priority needs of local communities through various means, including complaint mechanisms or community meetings. The programme has placed increasing emphasis on community participation over time.

HIA, Qudra 2's other implementing partner in Iraq, focuses on the capacity development of formal and informal community-based organisations (CBOs) to provide services to their community and strengthen peaceful coexistence in both Federal Iraq and KRI. These small CBOs receive funding in the form of grants or in-kind support for the implementation of small community projects and initiatives. Strengthening CBOs' technical, administrative, and financial capacities is complemented by supporting their cooperation with local state authorities, especially in the agricultural sector<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Part of Qudra 2's support for employment and income opportunities under another component of the programme.

**Table 3-1: Overview of support in Iraq**

<b>Geographic scope</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal Iraq: Governorates of Anbar, Nineveh, and Salah Al-Din</li> <li>KRI: Governorates of Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Halabja</li> </ul>
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JCMC, Government of Iraq</li> <li>JCC, Kurdistan Regional Government</li> <li>Local authorities, including district- and governorate-level directorates of ministries</li> <li>CSOs</li> </ul>
<b>Grant scheme for basic services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>165 Quick Impact Projects in the areas of health, education, water, electricity, and agriculture across 188 governmental units (GIZ)</li> <li>20 community projects by CBOs supported (HIA)</li> <li>1.8 million individuals benefitted from the support</li> </ul>
<b>Community participation</b>	Over 2,400 individuals participated in the planning and implementation of QIPs
<b>Capacity development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 440 governmental staff members are capacitated in assessing, planning, and implementing QIPs</li> <li>Over 125 civil society representatives trained to develop and implement social cohesion projects</li> </ul>
<b>Budget</b>	18.25 million EUR

Status: May 2023

### 3.2.2 Jordan

In Jordan, the Qudra 2 implementing partner AECID supports six municipalities in the Governorate of Mafraq to improve local service delivery and social cohesion. The support aligns with municipalities' longer-term Local Development Plans (LDPs). In line with the LDP objectives, the partner municipalities' Local Development Units (LDUs) develop a needs-based Action Plan with an intensive participatory approach. The Action Plan outlines the planned Community Support Projects (CSPs). CSPs are selected and designed in close consultation with local communities. The programme supports each municipality in

establishing a Municipality Support Committee (MSC), which brings together representatives of the Ministry of Local Administration (MoLA), the municipalities, and the local communities to oversee the planning and implementation in an inclusive and transparent manner. The Action Plans are presented to and approved by the municipal council and the mayor. In addition to the community projects implemented by the municipality, the Action Plans provide the basis for the co-management of services between municipalities, civil society organisations, and private sector actors. For example, a local CBO may take on the management of a football pitch built as part of the Action Plan. Furthermore, CBOs can implement their own small-scale projects within the thematic scope of the Action Plans. Strengthening social cohesion is a cornerstone of all interventions.

Municipalities are supported through capacity development interventions in areas such as project management, needs assessments, and community participation. CBOs receive support to develop and implement their projects. The experiences gained by local authorities and CBOs support the refugee response and Jordan’s longer-term decentralisation agenda.

**Table 3-2: Overview of support in Jordan**

<b>Geographic scope</b>	Governorate of Mafraq
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MoLA</li> <li>• Governorate of Mafraq</li> <li>• Municipalities of Sarhan, Hosha, Basielh, Great Mafraq, Mansieth, Rehab</li> </ul>
<b>Grant scheme for basic services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 CSPs in the sectors such as municipal solid waste treatment services, economic development, or improving public spaces (e.g., sports facilities, libraries) in 6 municipalities</li> <li>• 250,000 community members benefitted from the support</li> </ul>
<b>Community participation</b>	Over 500 individuals participating in the design and implementation of CSPs
<b>Capacity development</b>	Over 1,200 governmental staff and over 600 civil society representatives trained in designing and implementing CSPs and community projects
<b>Budget</b>	5.3 million EUR

Status: May 2023

### 3.2.3 Türkiye

In Türkiye, GIZ supports selected municipalities to implement community support projects (CSPs), which improve basic services and social cohesion. Supported projects include, for example, soup kitchens, community centres, or recycling and waste management projects. Municipal staff design and implement the projects with the participation of local communities. Most CSPs fall under the jurisdiction of district municipalities, the lowest level of municipal government in Türkiye. Other projects are undertaken by larger metropolitan and provincial municipalities. In crisis situations or situations where the capacities of partner municipalities are insufficient, Qudra 2 provides direct procurement support for municipalities.

Through the planning and implementation of CSPs, municipalities' capacities to deliver basic services to vulnerable persons are strengthened. Coaching, peer-to-peer exchanges, and training contribute to capacity development. Dialogues between municipalities and other national, provincial, and local stakeholders contribute to information and knowledge exchange and better overall coordination of the refugee response. Qudra 2 cooperates closely with the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (UMT).

**Table 3-3: Overview of support in Türkiye**

<b>Geographic scope</b>	Municipalities hosting large numbers of refugees in South-East Türkiye (Adana, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Mersin, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Yozgat), as well as large metropolitan areas such as Ankara and İstanbul
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UMT</li> <li>• Selected metropolitan and district municipalities</li> </ul>
<b>Grant scheme for basic services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 48 CSPs and additional in-kind procurement support in 23 municipalities</li> <li>• Over 515,000 individuals benefitted from the support</li> </ul>
<b>Community participation</b>	Over 3,100 individuals participated in the design and implementation of CSPs
<b>Capacity development</b>	Over 650 municipal staff benefitted from capacity development activities such as training and local, provincial, and national dialogue activities
<b>Budget</b>	8.6 million EUR

Status – Qudra 2, May 2023

## 4. Lessons learnt

Qudra 2's lessons learnt are presented according to four categories and functions within the programme: strategy, steering and cooperation, core services, and support services (see Table 4-1):

**Table 4-1: Categories of lessons learnt and programme functions**

Categories	Programme functions
<b>Strategy (3.1.)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategic orientation</li><li>• Scope of interventions</li></ul>
<b>Steering and cooperation (3.2.)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Governance &amp; cooperation with national partners</li><li>• Cooperation with local stakeholders</li></ul>
<b>Core services (3.3.)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grant scheme support</li><li>• Community participation</li><li>• Capacity development</li></ul>
<b>Support services (3.4.)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monitoring &amp; evaluation</li><li>• Communication &amp; visibility</li><li>• Financial &amp; administrative management</li><li>• Resource concept</li></ul>

### 4.1 Strategy

#### 4.1.1 Strategic orientation

Country context shapes the programme's strategic orientation within the HDP nexus. Broadly speaking, in more fragile contexts such as Iraq, the programme emphasises stabilisation and transitional aid, implementing as many infrastructure projects as possible to reach a large number of vulnerable people. In more stable contexts such as Jordan, more emphasis is placed on strengthening the capacity of local actors to provide services independently, i.e. working on the service delivery system.

Direct service provision and systemic capacity development form part of a continuum, and all Qudra 2 interventions have elements of both approaches.

Furthermore, Qudra 2 experience shows that the programme's strategic orientation will likely shift over time in response to developments in fragile contexts. These shifts can occur gradually or rapidly in response to crises or opportunities. In each country, the programme has adapted its approach several times over a four-year implementation period. This flexibility is fundamental to the development-oriented resilience approach.

While a stronger development orientation can be planned over time, the nature of crises is not easily predictable. However, contingency planning is possible and advisable when implementing in a fragile context. This planning encompasses, for example, the partners to cooperate with, the means of support, and the expertise available to the programme. Several examples are provided throughout the report.

One of the most important choices is which institutions the programme supports. At the local level, the broad remit of many local authorities is one reason flexibility is required and why collaborating with local authorities makes sense in fragile contexts. Local authorities are directly responsible for providing a wide range of basic services and are accountable to their local communities. Local officers often have significant local knowledge and are generally pragmatic "problem-solvers" which helps to adapt quickly in crisis situations. For example, the programme was able to implement additional measures related to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war in Ukraine within its existing programme logic and procedures. Response measures included rehabilitating healthcare infrastructure, or economic infrastructure, especially in the agricultural sector, as a direct response to food insecurity.

Civil society organisations have their own strengths and promoting cooperation between local authorities and civil society is an important objective, as outlined below.

A gradual shift towards longer-term development objectives can develop over time if the programme seeks out opportunities. This mindset and readiness to shift towards more systemic solutions are at the heart of the "development-oriented resilience approach". In Iraq, for example, Qudra 2 developed a "climate-proofing" methodology for all infrastructure measures built through QIPs, thereby supporting the longer-term sustainability of investments. In Türkiye, Community Support Projects (CSPs) provided the stimulus for municipal partners to improve internal coordination mechanisms, for example, by setting up project management units.

Table 4-2 provides a consolidated, schematic overview of the strategic core elements of the development-oriented resilience approach framed within the HDP nexus.

**Table 4-2: Characteristics of the development-oriented resilience approach within the HDP nexus**

<b>More transitional aid-oriented</b>		<b>More development-oriented</b>		
<b>Stability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on stabilisation measures to help local authorities and communities to cope with existing crises</li> </ul>	<b>Overall objective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enabling local authorities and communities to adapt to and prepare for future crises</li> </ul>	<b>Resilience</b>
<b>Breadth of support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain the ability of local authorities and, where appropriate, other local actors to meet the immediate basic needs of the community through investments in infrastructure and improving the delivery of basic social services</li> <li>Quick-wins by reaching many beneficiaries across different locations</li> <li>Streamlined funding procedures, reduced complexity and lower unit costs to enable rapid implementation and economies of scale</li> <li>Repeated cycles to adapt approach and ensure effective targeting</li> </ul>	<b>Community needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on the capacity of the system to deliver services independently, using direct support for service delivery as a steppingstone</li> <li>Projects with more complex objectives and longer implementation periods, more resources invested in in-depth planning of interventions</li> <li>Longer-term, tailored support for each partner</li> <li>Promote subsidiarity and ownership of local authorities, aligned to national development objectives and policies</li> <li>Promote autonomy of CSOs and effective cooperation with local authorities in service provision</li> </ul>	<b>Depth of support</b>
<b>Do-no-harm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transparent criteria for rapid support measures that justify the selection of intervention areas and beneficiaries</li> <li>Rapid needs assessment with a lower level of broad participation in planning and implementation</li> <li>Participatory and inclusive processes strengthened whenever possible</li> </ul>	<b>Community participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local needs are assessed through systematic and participatory planning and implementation processes</li> <li>Higher level of local ownership, accountability, and community-led development</li> <li>Changing relationship between local government and community focused on inclusion, transparency, and accountability</li> </ul>	<b>Community-led development</b>
<b>Trust building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflict prevention</li> <li>Specific peaceful coexistence measures integrated in cooperation with local authorities and CSOs to increase trust and positive local interaction with and among the communities</li> <li>Increasing trust in and legitimacy of local authorities</li> </ul>	<b>Social cohesion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflict transformation, addressing the root causes of conflicts</li> <li>Encouraging equitable and inclusive policies among local authorities</li> <li>Creating longer-term opportunities for positive interactions and a sense of belonging in the community</li> <li>Increasing trust in and legitimacy of local authorities</li> </ul>	<b>Inclusion</b>
<b>Problem solving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation through local authorities or intermediary organisations in close coordination with local authorities</li> <li>Priority given to development of technical skills of individuals and key organisational processes with a focus on immediate problem solving</li> </ul>	<b>Capacity development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased responsibility of local partners for implementation</li> <li>Comprehensive and systemic approach at three levels of capacity development (individuals, organisations, partnerships and enabling frameworks) of local authorities and civil society actors</li> <li>Improve coordination and cooperation between different system actors, including national and local authorities, as well as civil society actors</li> </ul>	<b>Systemic solutions</b>



## Lessons learnt in brief

- Prepare yourself and your partners for shifts in priorities within the HDP nexus in fragile contexts in response to both crises and opportunities. Choose your partners accordingly.
- Consider whether the context requires more direct support for service provision or working on “the system” of service provision.
- Be prepared for unforeseen crises through contingency planning and look for opportunities to pursue longer-term development objectives.

### 4.1.2 Scope of interventions

The strategic orientation within the HDP nexus and the scope of interventions are closely intertwined. Qudra 2's programme documents allow for the flexibility required to respond to crises and pursue development opportunities. Within the general orientation to address community needs and build partner capacities in the refugee response, they do not detail what services can or cannot be supported specifically. Qudra 2 activities range from rehabilitating water networks, electricity lines, or hospital wings to setting up community libraries, soup kitchens, and supporting language courses, in line with its partners' mandates.

Furthermore, Qudra 2 can adjust how it provides support. While grant funding is the primary means of support, the programme has occasionally shifted to more direct procurement support, for example, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye.

A broad thematic scope and multiple means of support require a wide array of technical and process expertise to plan and accompany implementation. While this is essential to create the flexibility that ensures relevance and responsiveness, it can create trade-offs with respect to quality or efficiency that come from specialisation. With fixed resources, a very wide range scope of interventions can stretch a project team's technical capacities and resources to support partners and lead to less sustainable interventions.

Potential trade-offs must be acknowledged and managed carefully, for example by specialising in certain competencies that are most relevant for the context. In Iraq, the programme specialises in infrastructure, and in Türkiye, the focus was on social services. In Jordan, the programme focused primarily on construction and procurement. While this still covers a wide range of possible interventions, it allows the teams to specialise in specific approaches (e.g., construction), contributing to efficiency.

If an extensive scope of services is to be offered, working in partnerships is another way to ensure the availability of sufficient resources and expertise to ensure quality, especially when shifting towards more development-oriented approaches. The Qudra 2 team often relied on partners' technical expertise to complement their methodological and procedural expertise in areas such as construction or community participation. It also engaged with other, more specialized projects implemented by the implementing partners, for procedural (e.g., community participation) or technical expertise (e.g., solid waste management). Contracting external expertise is another possible solution for a highly diverse service portfolio. However, this can create process delays, especially in crisis situations.

Finding the appropriate balance between flexibility and specialisation is a continuous adaptation process in changing framework conditions.

## Lessons learnt in brief

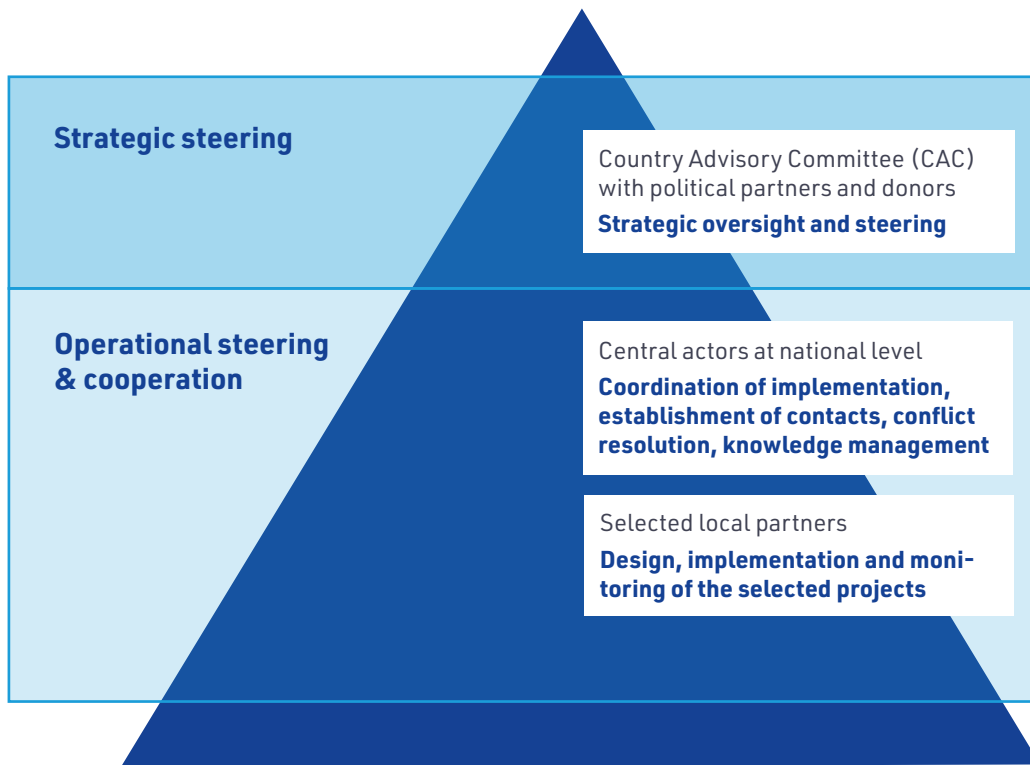
- Design the overall programme strategy flexibly to support a wide range of relevant and responsive services and infrastructure.
- Stay flexible regarding your available means of support for local partners (e.g., financial or in-kind support).
- Consider how supporting a wide range of services may lead to trade-offs concerning quality and efficiency.
- Consider specialising in specific sectors, methodologies, or processes to help manage trade-offs between flexibility, efficiency, and sustainability.
- Ensure that you have access to expertise that mirrors the scope of services supported, drawing on programme staff, partners, and external experts.

## 4.2 Steering at multiple levels

### 4.2.1 Steering and cooperation with national-level partners

Creating an effective steering structure is crucial for legitimate and effective decision-making with partners and other programme stakeholders such as donors. The quality of the steering structure is all the more critical in fragile settings, where flexibility and responsiveness are essential.

**Figure 4-1: Programme steering structure**



At the strategic level, the Qudra 2 programme set up Country Advisory Committees (CACs) to inform key stakeholders on programme progress and create ownership among the political partners at the national level in each country. CACs allow implementing partners, political partners, line ministries and donors to provide coherent strategic orientation to the programme.

At the operational level, Qudra 2 works with a central national-level actor in all three countries to coordinate implementation. While the main objective is to deliver support to local actors, this level of operational coordination is crucial to the programme's success. In some cases, it is mandatory because partners have a legal obligation to oversee local authorities' activities, for example, Jordan's Ministry of Local Administration.

A strong partnership with a national-level actor contributes to effective steering beyond legal requirements. Firstly, it creates legitimacy in the eyes of higher-level political partners, who are relieved of the need to "micro-manage". Secondly, strong national partners can establish new relationships with local authorities and support conflict resolution. They can also support networking with other national government agencies. In Türkiye and Jordan, for example, UMT and MoLA played an essential role by encouraging local partners to engage with the programme and helping to resolve misunderstandings. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, these partners even took on a more hands-

on role by procuring protective equipment for distribution to the municipalities. National partners can also preserve and disseminate the knowledge gained during the programme which supports sustainability.

Given their important role, establishing a good working relationship with national-level partners should be a priority. However, for all its benefits, bottlenecks in cooperation with national partners can significantly slow down implementation. Therefore, it is important to critically reflect on potential partners' capacities, priorities, and their role in the country's political and governance system. Their specific role in programme governance should be negotiated accordingly within the legal framework, for example, by clearly specifying the scope of their decision-making powers in the overall steering structure.

Given their importance for the programme, Qudra 2 invested in capacity development to strengthen national partners' roles in the programme (e.g. mediators in cases of conflict, decision-makers, and knowledge-carriers for sustainability) and beyond. In Türkiye, for example, the programme supported its partner UMT to develop a best practice database for displacement projects to strengthen its role as a knowledge-carrier. The database will strengthen UMT's coordination function and contribute to more coherence in Türkiye's refugee response beyond the scope of Qudra 2. This kind of support also makes it more attractive for national-level partners to engage with the programme.

## Lessons learnt in brief

- Create a programme steering structure - strategic and operational level - that allows for fast decision-making.
- Identify a national-level partner that can support operational steering, especially in establishing and maintaining relationships with local authorities.
- Critically reflect on national partners' strengths and weaknesses and negotiate their specific role in steering accordingly.
- Support capacity development for national partners to strengthen them in their functions in the programme and beyond as part of your approach to sustainability.

## ■ 4.2.2 Cooperation at the local level

The number of local partners Qudra 2 cooperates with ranges from six in Jordan to 23 in Türkiye and over 160 in Iraq (where each QIP is implemented with a different partner). The programme established various coordination mechanisms to manage the cooperation with its local partners. In Iraq, Qudra 2 and its partners launched a “Governorate Development Facility” at the (sub-)national and governorate level to create transparent mechanisms for setting priorities and selecting QIPs. In Jordan, “Municipality Support Committees” (MSCs) in each municipality gather representatives of the MoLA, municipalities, and local communities/CSOs. The MSCs oversee all activities supported by Qudra 2. Furthermore, each municipality received comprehensive guidelines for implementation. In Türkiye, partnership guidelines were initially developed with the municipalities to formalise the main cornerstones of cooperation “at eye level”.

A programme must clearly understand its local partners’ mandates, priorities, capacities, and position in broader administrative and (formal and informal) decision-making processes to design effective cooperation mechanisms. Qudra 2 experience shows that local authorities’ autonomy in decision-making can sometimes be quite limited, and even minor process steps must be approved by a superior level. This is why, for example, MoLA is involved in MSCs at the local level to speed up information sharing and decision-making. Partners’ internal decision-making is often also highly centralised and relies on a few very busy decision-makers.

There is a risk that the technical capacities and resources of local authorities and their staff are overestimated, especially when engaging in unfamiliar ways of working. Furthermore, local authorities may be reluctant to establish new cooperation mechanisms with the programme or other stakeholders, such as local civil society actors, due to concerns over their legal mandate or simple capacity constraints. Partners should agree on the specific forms of cooperation early on and document them clearly, including the consent of the local authorities’ leadership.

Irrespective of the formal cooperation mechanisms, the Qudra 2 experiences in all three countries show that intensive and continuous communication with partners is required almost daily throughout implementation to support implementation progress, which must be reflected in how programme teams are designed (cf. 4.4.4 resource concept). Programme staff and partners must develop trustful relationships to implement the approach effectively. Frequent visits to partners are an important part of developing this relationship.

## Lessons learnt in brief

- Carefully analyse your partners' mandates, priorities, and capacities when designing cooperation mechanisms.
- Set up a clear and transparent cooperation structure for local partners. Document the most important rules for cooperation and partners' approval as soon as cooperation starts.
- Plan enough staff resources to maintain continuous communication and trust with partners throughout implementation.

## Cooperation with local CBOs

Qudra 2 delivers its support to local communities through both local authorities and civil society organisations. CSOs include professionalised, formal non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and CBOs, which are less formal, smaller, and often run by local community volunteers (e.g., farmers' organisations, women's groups, youth groups).

Qudra 2 has cooperated with CSOs in a wide range of ways to support local communities, including as:

- Professional service providers
- Direct grant recipients
- Sub-grant recipients from local authorities
- Programme stakeholders with different scopes of participation and roles in decision-making

Especially in crisis contexts, CBOs may have better access to target groups and communities. Compared to local authorities, which are subject to state regulations and public policies about channelling funds, CBOs can (theoretically) flexibly adapt to external requirements. They can thus absorb external funds more efficiently. This makes them an attractive partner to reach the local level and create an immediate impact. Along with the communities' trust, CBOs might have more specialised expertise in topics such as social cohesion or conflict transformation than local authorities.

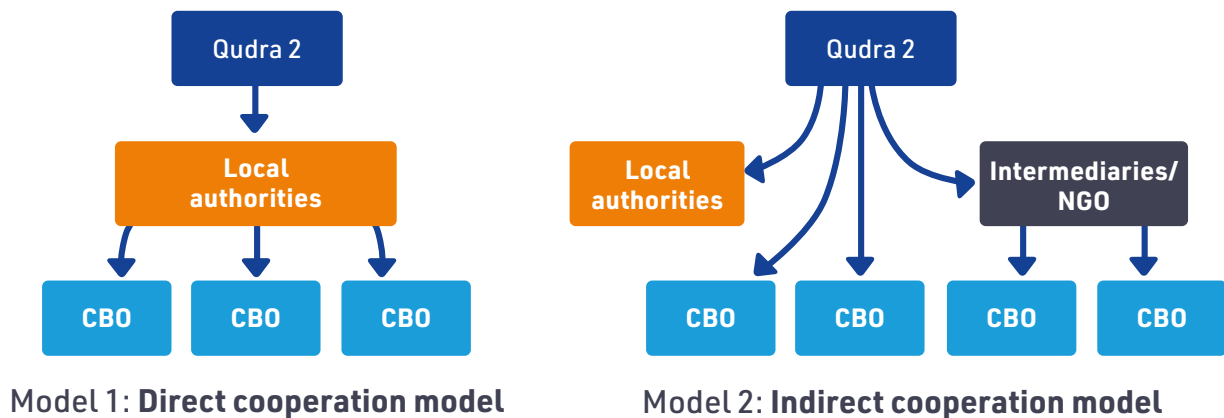
Despite their strengths in reaching vulnerable community members and promoting social cohesion, implementing partners must realistically assess the capacities of CSOs and develop appropriate forms of cooperation that do not overburden them. Informal CBOs, in particular, may require capacity development support before developing and implementing their own projects. Support needs may include administrative, financial, and managerial competencies,

and networking, as well as selected technical topics and methodologies (e.g., how to provide training). Capacity building is time- and resource-intensive, and one-off projects are unlikely to lead to sustained capacity development. Supporting CSOs to develop a degree of financial and administrative autonomy from local authorities is an essential objective within a more development-oriented approach.

Cooperation and coordination between local authorities and CSOs presents a distinct set of challenges depending on the country context. There is sometimes a deep-seated mistrust between them. Without effective cooperation mechanisms, trust cannot develop. Additionally, the national legal and administrative framework may limit the participation of CBOs in the provision of public services. External support is an opportunity to break this cycle of mistrust and lack of engagement, and support partners to create framework conditions that are conducive to cooperation.

Qudra 2 developed direct and indirect cooperation models with CBOs and local authorities, sometimes including intermediaries, as illustrated in Figure 4-2.

**Figure 4-2: Two cooperation models with CSOs**



### Model 1: Direct cooperation between local authorities and CSOs

In model one, CBOs collaborate directly with a local authority to deliver services. In Jordan, for example, municipalities provide CBOs with small grants to conduct their own projects, while larger NGOs (and private sector actors) can apply to co-manage certain municipal services. All activities align with the municipalities' Action Plans for the grant funding from Qudra 2. Qudra 2 and the municipalities jointly select CBO partners based on clear criteria. Furthermore, CSOs – NGOs and CBOs – are invited to participate in programme steering through the MSC.

The advantage of this model is that NGOs/CBOs are directly integrated into and contribute to local authorities' planning, decision-making, and funding processes. Close integration prevents the development of parallel systems that breed mistrust and inefficiencies. A transparent and sustainable selection, contracting, and funding mechanism for local civil society actors can ideally be sustained beyond the programme.

This direct interaction empowers civil society actors to articulate and prioritise local development needs in a dialogue with local authorities. It also contributes to better-informed decision-making by local authorities. Better allocation of support, in turn, reduces the perception of exclusion and aid-bias among vulnerable target groups.

Challenges depend on the context and priorities. In Jordan, the legal framework initially did not allow municipalities to channel grant funds to CBOs. Qudra 2, MoLA, and the municipalities developed an entirely new process before the implementation could start, which took significant time. If it involves legal and policy changes the efforts of setting up a successful cooperation model needs to be seen as a "project within a project" which is unlikely to generate "quick wins". Other challenges may arise in ensuring transparent decision-making, given possible political affiliations of CSOs.

## **Model 2: Indirect cooperation between local authorities and CSOs**

In model two, both local authorities and CBOs have direct (contractual) relationships with the programme rather than each other. This model's advantage is its simplicity compared to model one, since the programme or one of its intermediaries directly selects and contracts the CBOs. In both cases, cooperation with the CBOs can build on the grant provider's existing quality standards and experience.

While this form of engagement is more efficient in the short-run, it may not result in sustainable cooperation. CBOs are empowered to implement projects, but systemic links with local authorities are not developed. In the worst case, the programme creates a parallel system. Local authorities may resist this system because they lack oversight over how funds are distributed and used and fear that funds will be disproportionately allocated to CSOs, thereby further undermining trust.

Furthermore, while CBOs are financially accountable to their contractor (the programme or an intermediary), they depend on permissions and cooperation with local authorities for implementation. Some degree of cooperation is therefore inevitable. Such risks can be mitigated by developing an effective steering mechanism which brings together local authorities and CSOs, and by informing or consulting local authorities while selecting CSOs. However, this process can become overly complex if many organisations are involved.



Irrespective of the cooperation mechanism, programmes supporting local actors should seek opportunities to promote coordination and dialogue between local authorities and civil society. Especially in fragile settings, building relations across sectoral and organisational divides can contribute to resilience while effectively mobilising all available resources.

## Lessons learnt in brief

- Consider what value complementary cooperation with local civil society may add through unique expertise or access to the most vulnerable target groups.
- Plan sufficient time and resources for a sustained development process for CBOs that goes beyond one-off projects.
- Consult local authorities and civil society on possible cooperation modalities before designing a cooperation model.
- Carefully assess possible legal and administrative obstacles to more formal cooperation between local authorities and civil society.
- Always look for opportunities to promote cooperation and coordination between local authorities and civil society at the local level.

## 4.3 Core services

Qudra 2's support for local communities comprises three core services to its partners: grant scheme support for basic service delivery and infrastructure, support to strengthen community participation and capacity development support.

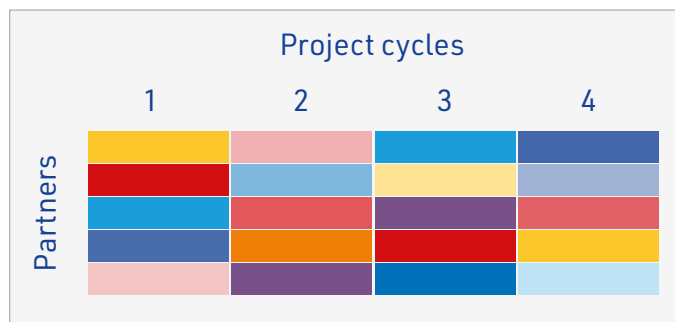
### 4.3.1 Grant scheme

A grant scheme is at the heart of Qudra 2's interventions in all three countries, but each is based on different forms of cooperation with local authorities.

In Iraq, the Governorate Development Facility is based on a series of open calls for proposals. Local authorities submit concept notes from which a committee selects projects which receive support in a transparent process.

### Figure 4-3: Grant scheme design in Iraq

In each grant cycle, the programme works with different partners



The approach has a high legitimacy through repeated, transparent selection processes, and “quick wins”, i.e. tangible and visible development results in accessing improved infrastructure and basic services for a large number of vulnerable persons. Standard processes and measurable successes are the basis for scaling up the scheme to cover more projects or geographic areas.

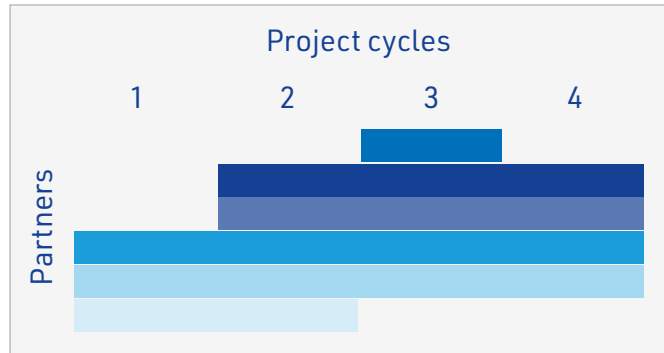
The public call and selection method also creates a cyclical approach that allows high flexibility and adaptability in the selection for each grant cycle, for example, by defining new priority topics such as the COVID-19 response.

The cooperation with each local authority is limited by the span of the selected project, limiting the depth of support that can be delivered, especially concerning capacity development. Non-performance of individual partners will not have a significant influence on the programme’s overall success.

The QIP implementation model has evolved over time. Initially, the programme collaborated directly with local authorities to implement individual construction projects, with the programme staff providing engineering oversight. Two intermediary service providers were later involved when the programme received additional funding to scale up the scheme. These intermediaries were engineering organisations that could undertake construction, supervision, and project management. However, partners and programme staff remained actively involved in the overall monitoring and quality assurance, especially for construction measures. Clear and transparent procedures for the grant scheme and the continued involvement of programme staff made it easy to introduce intermediary organisations into the process.

#### Figure 4-4: Grant scheme design in Türkiye

Municipalities are pre-selected based on criteria and implement a series of discrete projects across cycles. Municipalities can be on- and off-boarded over time.



In Türkiye, Qudra 2 supports municipalities across multiple project cycles. However, there is no initial call for proposals. Municipalities were selected using a six-month analysis process according to defined criteria in cooperation with the UMT (national-level partner) and approved by the CAC.

Municipalities are directly responsible for the implementation of the grant scheme. Separate contracts are concluded with the municipalities for each project across the grant cycles.

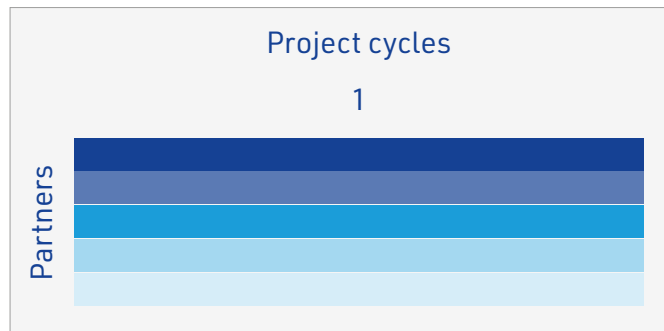
Theoretically, new partners can be on- or off-boarded with each cycle as no formal commitments are made beyond support for a specific project. The possibility of discontinuing cooperation reduces the risk posed by non-performance of partners.

In practice, a large majority of municipalities received funding across all cycles, allowing them to deepen and expand the scope of their projects in their priority sectors and develop more systemic approaches as their capacities improved.

The grant scheme implementation (CSPs) in Jordan follows another systemic approach with an intensive focus on the capacity development of the local actors.

#### Figure 4-5: Grant scheme design in Jordan

Municipalities are pre-selected and receive grant funding for a series of projects. No repeated cycles are foreseen.



A fixed and smaller number of partners was selected in the design phase. As in Türkiye, municipalities receive funding directly. However, only one contract is concluded with each municipality, covering the full support. All CSPs are identified in one (living) document, following intensive needs-assessment and planning phases. While changes are made to Action Plans, the grant support has no inherent cyclical logic.

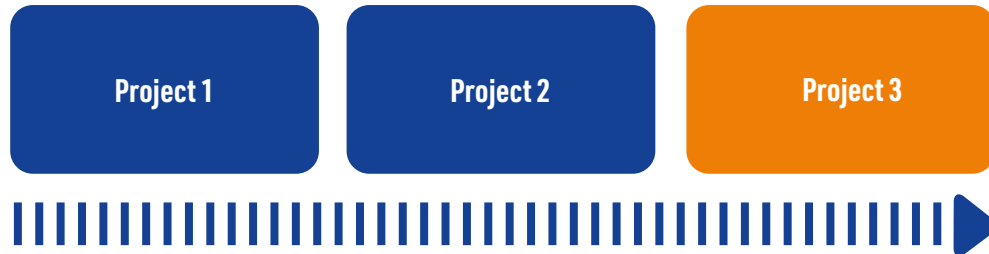
Intensive support to the same municipal partners and CSOs creates opportunities for systems change within Jordan's decentralisation framework. More complex CSPs can be implemented with longer-term and higher volume support. Furthermore, municipalities invest more resources into in-depth preparatory activities such as multi-sector needs assessments and context analyses, including mapping local civil society groups and community participation. The emphasis placed on participatory oversight mechanisms established through the MCSs underlines the more systemic development orientation of the approach. Given the smaller number and geographic concentration of partners, it is less costly to establish and maintain relationships with the local actors. However, because support is concentrated on fewer partners, delays tend to have a more significant overall effect on implementation progress.

#### Benefits of cyclical grant schemes

A cyclical design contributes to the flexibility and adaptability of grant schemes to adjust their scope and rules in response to changes in local needs and framework conditions, such as external shocks. This flexibility allowed the programme to address challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic or food insecurity and inflationary pressures resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Adaptations were made in three ways:

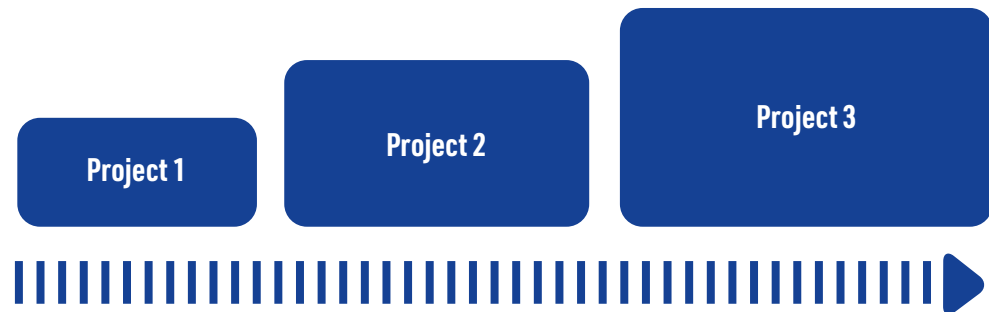
1. The focus of projects was changed in response to crises or unforeseen events.

**Figure 4 6: Shifting focus in response to unforeseen events**



2. Projects grew in size and budget over time as partner capacities developed further and experience was gained. In Türkiye, in most cases, successive projects built upon each other and grew in volume as partners capacities increased through learning-by-doing (Figure 4-7).

**Figure 4-7: Scaling-up of project scope over time**



3. The scope of the intervention was increased over time by layering new services, which promote more systemic approaches. For example, projects in Iraq gradually introduced new forms of community participation or measures to “climate-proof” infrastructure investments.

**Figure 4-8: Layering of new topics onto existing processes**



By scaling up projects and layering projects, a potential trade-off between “quick wins” and more systemic capacity development can be resolved over time, especially when accompanied by increasingly sophisticated capacity development measures that complement the “learning by doing” approach.

While grant funding makes up most of Qudra 2’s support for local communities, crisis response situations often require the substantial procurement of goods. Budgeting for these goods and having the capacity to steer procurement processes is one way to ensure responsiveness to crises. In all countries, grant support was complemented by procurement support, especially in urgent cases (e.g. responses to COVID-19 or the earthquake of 2023) or as a steppingstone when working with partners with minimal capacities but urgent needs. The procurement is either conducted by partners, or the programme itself. In any case, partners remain in the lead in identifying the scope of support they require.

### Lessons learnt in brief

- When working with public calls for proposals or pre-selecting partners, set clear selection and transparent eligibility criteria for grant scheme projects.
- Giving partners direct responsibility for implementing projects and managing funds creates opportunities for learning-by-doing. If you work with intermediaries, ensure partner institutions are closely involved in all process steps.
- Flexibly adapt grant scheme rules to respond to unforeseen events and crises.
- Start with a simple project to generate quick wins, build relationships, trust and procedural knowledge.
- Adapt the scope of grants over time by increasing budgets or layering on more complex interventions such as community participation or climate-proofing.
- Complement your grant scheme with direct support in case of emergencies, for example, through procurement.

### 4.3.2 Community participation

Involving community members in designing and implementing support to local communities ensures that it addresses the community’s most pressing needs. It also fosters trust and legitimacy. However, the method must reflect the general orientation within the HDP nexus. In crisis response contexts, the approach can be based on rapid participatory needs assessment tools when speed, reaching as many people as possible, and comprehensive geographical coverage are the

priority. At a minimum, this should ensure adherence to “do-no-harm” principles by avoiding, for example, providing support that communities do not need or providing it in an exclusionary manner.

In a more systemic, development-oriented approach, community participation should not be seen as “one of many” requirements of a grant scheme but rather as a core process. If local communities and CBOs can define and prioritise local needs, participation leads to more effective intervention design and better-informed decision-making. The experience of inclusion matters too. Engaging in decision-making reduces the perception of exclusion among vulnerable target groups. It builds trust in local government institutions, thereby contributing to social cohesion and peace-building within the HDP nexus approach. Community participation initiates a more fundamental reorientation of the relationship between local authorities and communities towards more transparency, accountability, trust, and inclusion.

The specific approaches to participation vary by context. If a stronger development orientation is envisaged, it must go beyond one directional consultation (e.g., through household surveys) and foster a genuine dialogue through, for example, community meetings that involve CBOs. The process of community participation must begin at the very early stages of the partners’ projects.

Putting partners in the driving seat is critical for effective and sustainable community participation. This is a challenge for many local authority partners who are either hesitant or insufficiently experienced in designing effective engagement processes. Local authorities frequently consider themselves representatives of local communities who “know what local communities need”. While this is generally true, the Qudra 2 experience shows that direct consultation with communities creates significant added value. It does not undermine but strengthens the institutionalised decision-making processes of local authorities. Since many partners may have a narrower view of community participation, developing a shared understanding early in cooperation is essential.

At the same time, development actors must support local community members and CBOs to engage in participation processes effectively. Several challenges have to be addressed: Firstly, community members – particularly refugees – may be reluctant to raise critical issues vis-à-vis local authorities. Secondly, local communities may require support to identify their own priorities. In this process, community members must develop a realistic understanding of the support that local authorities can provide within their mandate and the resources available. In this way, community participation also reduces frustrations resulting from unmet expectations.

The grant scheme can be a catalyst that builds relationships and capacities for future community engagement. The principles of participation should be integrated into partners’ structures and processes in support of good local

governance. The time and resources required to build capacities and initiate successful engagement mechanisms should not be underestimated. The challenges, including personal and organisational inertia, lack of capacity, unclear mandates, and distrust between local authorities and CBOs, must be considered when defining expected results and timelines.

## Lessons learnt in brief

- Use rapid needs assessments for basic needs and immediate problem-solving in crisis settings.
- Invest in community participation to change the relationship between local authorities and communities, starting at the early design stage.
- Prepare for time and resource-intensive processes for effective community participation.
- Build capacities of both local authorities and communities to participate in decision-making processes.
- Put local authorities in the driver's seat for community participation. Though direct support will be required initially, over time, it has to be done by them, not for them.
- Measure whether participation improves satisfaction with and trust in local authorities.

### 4.3.3 Capacity development

Building the capacity of local authorities and CSOs to address future challenges is an integral part of Qudra 2's development-oriented resilience approach. Capacity development is a complex process across multiple dimensions, including individual and organisational competencies and the wider societal framework and networks.

The context and orientation in the HDP nexus will shape capacity development priorities. In stabilisation contexts, there may be a stronger focus on (technical) individual competencies such as project management and simple organisational processes (e.g., community meetings to discuss a potential project) that help partners solve concrete problems. With a stronger development-orientation, the scope of capacity development expands to more profound organisational changes, as well as changes to policy frameworks and cooperation in networks.

However, Qudra 2 experience shows that all dimensions of capacity development are relevant, irrespective of the context. In Iraq, for example, capacity de-



velopment measures accompanying QIPs consisted primarily of basic training on skills such as project management. However, establishing the Governorate Development Facility represents a fairly sophisticated intervention to promote transparent, rule-based cooperation and decision-making involving several layers of governance.

Conversely, while Qudra 2 in Jordan aims to promote sustainable cooperation among system actors that affect core processes, such as municipalities' strategic planning, it must be complemented by basic training for municipal staff on project planning, needs assessments, or community participation. The level of sophistication may vary within each dimension, but none should be wholly disregarded.

In each country, implementing the grant scheme provided an opportunity for a very practice-oriented approach to capacity building, where partners "learn by doing". With support from the programme, partners went through the entire process of planning, implementing, and monitoring the grant scheme. This approach has proven to be an efficient and effective tool for building the capacity of local authorities at the individual level, with knock-on effects for organisations.

To maximise the benefits of "learning by doing", the programme should support local authority staff to reflect on their experiences. Peer-to-peer exchanges are a very effective tool that promotes individual learning and creates networks among staff and institutions.

Coaching local partners in daily interactions with programme staff is essential to the overall capacity development strategy. It allows programme staff to identify partner needs, introduce innovations, and encourage a positive attitude towards topics including social cohesion or community participation.

External specialist expertise complements learning by doing, peer exchange, and coaching. In Qudra 2, specialist training is often the start of a peer reflection process. Furthermore, specific projects require highly specialised support (e.g., civil engineering).

While most capacity development interventions focus on the individual and organisational level, the programme also promoted systemic capacity through coordination among different actors. The GDF at governorate-level in Iraq and MSCs at municipal-level in Jordan are mentioned above. In Türkiye, dialogue activities contributed significantly to building systemic capabilities, including more coordination and harmonisation, at the level of cooperation systems and policy frameworks.

The programme developed a systematic dialogue approach across three dimensions: Regular reflection and dialogue meetings among representatives of

different municipalities created space for peer learning and exchange of ideas. These frequently resulted in municipalities supporting each other in their projects. Dialogues with national government actors improved the flow of information and coordination between the central government and local authorities or established institutionalised exchanges between municipalities and provincial authorities (Provincial Social Cohesion Dialogues). Finally, local “migration coordination dialogues” which include all relevant stakeholders operating within a municipality (governmental institutions, NGOs, universities, or donor organisations) depending on the subject, proved especially useful in fostering cooperation and coordination within a municipality.

Maintaining close cooperation with partners is critical to pursue development opportunities through capacity development. Over time, the scope and breadth of the support measures can be adapted to partners’ evolving capacities. In the Qudra 2 experience, grant projects and accompanying capacity development measures such as training are entry points to catalyse more systemically-oriented capacity development processes, such as reviewing organisational procedures or improving coordination and cooperation among different actors.

## Lessons learnt in brief

- Consider all dimensions of capacity development, irrespective of the context, and develop a concept for capacity development that adapts the ambition level to the context.
- Design grant schemes as an opportunity for “learning by doing” by including reflection, feedback, and coaching elements in the implementation of the projects.
- Complement learning by doing with targeted technical training and external support.
- Foster peer-to-peer learning in all capacity development approaches.
- Consider dialogue forums a means for building systemic capacity, including improved coordination between system actors at different levels.
- Use grant scheme projects as an entry point for more systems-oriented capacity development measures, targeting, for example, organisational processes.

#### ■ 4.3.4 Social cohesion

Promoting social cohesion is a core objective of Qudra 2's support to local communities and addresses the "peace" dimension of the HDP nexus. The fragile context in which the programme works makes it essential to place the social, relational dimension of the context into focus.

Social cohesion is a complex phenomenon that is shaped by the relationships between different social groups ("horizontal social cohesion") as well as relations between communities and state institutions ("vertical social cohesion"). It spans objective aspects, such as networks of relationships within communities or government policies, and subjective elements, such as attitudes, values, and beliefs of the different community groups towards the state and the other groups.

Relieving competition over scarce resources and providing space for positive interactions and trust-building can contribute to horizontal social cohesion. In contrast, vertical social cohesion is reflected in the ability of governments to ensure effective service delivery, promote inclusive decision-making processes and public policies, and the trust of local communities in local authorities.

While horizontal social cohesion is often better understood (though still challenging in practice), Qudra 2's support and the associated capacity building have a particular effect on the vertical dimension by improving the relationship between government and local communities. Key lessons learnt regarding the impact on vertical social cohesion can be summarised as follows:

- Qudra 2 beneficiaries confirmed the programme's results hypotheses: better access to basic services, opportunities for interaction, and the experience of participation contribute to social cohesion.
- Implementing partners and local partners must carefully analyse their context to develop a thorough understanding of tensions and the pressures put on public services.
- The experience of participation itself is valuable for building trust in local government. However, the trust strengthened by participatory decision-making and planning processes is lost if concrete improvements are not achieved quickly.
- Especially in communities with a high proportion of displaced or vulnerable people, needs are never fully met. The more effectively the activities address basic needs, for example, through participatory design, the greater the satisfaction with and trust in the local authorities.

- Both host communities and displaced persons perceive that external support is biased towards the “other group”. These perceptions of “aid-bias” should be counteracted by clear communication on who benefits from the support and why it is provided. There must be an equitable targeting of displaced persons and host communities based on vulnerability.
- Improved public services should be complemented by measures promoting direct positive interactions between different groups, such as, for example, joint planning meetings as part of community projects or joint cultural and sporting events to improve the subjective perceptions of social cohesion in the community. Ideally, steps are taken to sustain these interactions beyond one-off events.
- Structural factors, most notably the general economic situation, and media narratives play a significant (mostly negative) role in shaping perceptions of social cohesion. This context must be monitored carefully to interpret data on the programme’s direct contributions to social cohesion.

However, the link between improved basic services and social cohesion is not automatic. The effects of basic services on social cohesion are closely intertwined with community participation, as outlined above. Furthermore, community members must experience a welcoming environment in activities or planning processes, and complaints must be addressed quickly. It is also advisable for local authorities to communicate clearly about what kind of support falls under the partners’ mandate to temper beneficiaries’ often high expectations.

Local authorities are often hesitant to promote social cohesion between the host community population and refugees explicitly, not least for fear of backlash from the electorate or influential individuals. Working with CBOs and other influential community stakeholders is one way to mitigate possible tensions. Furthermore, the programme and its partners should reflect actively on how the objectives of the support concerning social cohesion are communicated publicly.

As noted, social cohesion is a complex phenomenon. Development organisations and local partners should develop a shared understanding of social cohesion that is not based on academic rigour but serves as a shared language to effectively design interventions and assess their impact. For example, local government staff are conceptually less familiar with the vertical dimension of social cohesion, even if it is at the core of their daily work, and they intuitively see its importance. Collaborating with external experts and specialised CSOs with the relevant technical background related to social cohesion can be beneficial.

## Lessons learnt in brief

- Take a “social cohesion” perspective on all forms of support, particularly in communities with high social tensions.
- Develop a mutual understanding of social cohesion with partners to plan and assess your contributions across its horizontal and vertical dimensions.
- Ensure participation, inclusion, responsiveness to complaints, and clear communication in your support.
- Work with a range of relevant stakeholders who influence social cohesion in the community.
- Reflect on how the objective to support social cohesion is communicated to beneficiaries.

## 4.4 Support services

Support services strengthen and enable the core processes. They include monitoring and evaluation (M&E), communication & visibility (C&V), and financial management and administration. Since support processes are closely linked to how tasks are distributed, and teams are managed, this chapter will close with a brief overview of how the Qudra 2 implementing partners mobilise expertise.

### 4.4.1 Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

The possible trade-offs between breadth and depth, or quality, flexibility, speed, and costs that affect programme design and strategy also affect its M&E system.

As noted above, broad objectives create flexibility in the scope of programme interventions. The Qudra 2 programme uses catch-all indicators to measure its results, such as “the number of beneficiaries benefitting from improved basic services”, or “number of staff applying knowledge gained to their work” for quantitative reporting. These cover a wide range of interventions and can be easily aggregated. However, donors’ and partners’ legitimate interest in accountability often goes beyond these headline figures (e.g., “what does ‘improved’ mean?”).

Identifying, measuring and synthesising more in-depth qualitative outcomes across diverse services (in Türkiye, these ranged from language classes to organic composting, for example) is challenging. Further outcome indicators need to be tailored to each activity and country context and data collected, which requires significant investments of resources in M&E. The trade-offs

between in-depth outcome monitoring and resource requirements should be discussed with donors in the design phase of a programme.

One way to address this tension is to empower partners to conduct more sophisticated monitoring. In Türkiye, for example, the team defined “essential indicators” that partners must include in their project proposals and reporting. M&E guidelines and specific training for partners help deepen the understanding of the indicators and improve their M&E capacities. While this aligns well with the programme’s “learning by doing” approach, large-scale or specialist data collection requires external support, especially if collaborating with many partners in multiple languages and on complex topics such as social cohesion. As noted, it is easy to overestimate partners’ capacities and overburden their staff.

In addition to tailored indicators, the programme’s flexible and opportunity-driven strategic orientation should be reflected in monitoring methodologies that can capture unforeseen developments (e.g., “outcome harvesting”).

A further challenge, specific to infrastructure support, is creating realistic estimates of beneficiaries of infrastructure projects such as roads or public parks (“public goods”). The infrastructure potentially benefits whole communities, leading to high numbers of beneficiaries. A transparent methodology for identifying the number of individuals benefitting from such measures should be developed at the beginning of a programme and agreed upon with the programme’s donors. The methodology should include agreements on counting beneficiaries over the life-cycle of an infrastructure investment (e.g., a renovated hospital wing will serve different community members over several years).

## Lessons learnt in brief

- Be aware that a broad thematic scope creates challenges for outcome monitoring, and allocate resources accordingly.
- Make contractually agreed indicators broad to support flexible and adaptive implementation.
- Create additional qualitative indicators for different sectors and mechanisms to capture unforeseen outcomes.
- Plan sufficient resources for data collection and processing on various diverse topics.
- Empower partners to contribute to M&E through regular training and guidance.
- Develop mechanisms to capture unforeseen results of the programme.
- Define a clear methodology for measuring the impact of infrastructure measures.

## 4.4.2 Communication and visibility

Key messages that break down the programme's strategic objectives into easy-to-understand (and communicate) statements should be devised early to ensure effective external communication. It is imperative to include programme staff in this process so that they have a deep understanding of what the programme is trying to communicate. This will make it easier for non-specialist staff, who have the best insights into implementation, to collect valuable inputs for communication products, such as beneficiary success stories. Forward-looking planning of external communication (e.g. per quarter) allows staff and partners to contribute effectively to the programme's communication efforts. The programme and its partners (who are, as political actors, often very interested in public relations) can create "win-wins" through effective communication planning.

External communication and programme visibility should be addressed with partners at the start of a cooperation project. Formalities such as logo arrangements should also be clarified with partners in advance, and the requirements should be documented. As the rules can be relatively complex, it may be advisable to commission a designer to support the creation of communication and visibility outputs (banners, roll-ups, flyers) for all partners. This is ultimately more efficient than letting all partners attempt to interpret the rules themselves.

Concerning communication outputs, the principle "quality over quantity" is a good guide: A few high-quality expressive images or videos taken by professional photographers are more valuable to convey the programme's messages than many lesser-quality visuals collected by non-professionals. It may therefore be advisable to include funds for communication and visibility into grant agreements with partners, for example, to document activities through a professional photographer or videographer.

If communication is expected to be a priority for donors, a dedicated communication and visibility officer is essential to the team.

### Lessons learnt in brief

- Formulate your key messages early and with the involvement of the whole team.
- Create a communication plan to give orientation for partners and non-specialised staff.
- Clarify communication-related issues with partners early to create "win-wins."
- Consider including professional photography/videography in partner contracts.

- Focus on quality instead of quantity when it comes to communication outputs.
- Plan for a dedicated communication officer if high demand is expected.

### 4.4.3 Finance and administration

Partners' financial management capacities are important in designing the overall intervention approach. As noted in section 3.2., local authorities in Jordan and Türkiye were directly responsible for the CSP implementation and the financial management of the grant funds, while in Iraq, the bulk of QIPs was handled through intermediaries responsible for financial management.

In Jordan and Türkiye, the leading role of partners in the direct implementation (including financial management) was essential to the capacity development strategy of the programme (“learning by doing”) in both countries<sup>1</sup>. In both cases, this direct responsibility for financial management contributes significantly to the capacity development of the partner organisations. If partners are given responsibility for financial management, they require significant support to prevent accounting mistakes. In Jordan and Türkiye, all partners received manuals, toolkits, and training throughout the cooperation to clarify the rules and procedures for accounting and financial reporting.

As government agencies, local authorities are often bound by strict national rules, for example, in the field of accounting or procurement, with little flexibility. Any inconsistencies between these rules and the rules of the grant scheme should be identified as early as possible in the contracting phase to avoid friction and ineligible costs. It is therefore advisable to directly involve the finance and accounting departments in discussions on grant scheme implementation at an early stage, in addition to technical or project management units. They are often brought into the conversation too late, creating issues regarding the financial settlement. Partners (and their leadership) should provide clear commitments that all units will prioritise the financial settlement of the grant.

Working with intermediary institutions which oversee the financial settlement will free up capacities on the side of the partner institutions and the programme, which is especially helpful in crisis response situations. However, it may not align with the desired ownership, sustainability, and capacity development through learning by doing.

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<sup>1</sup> The use of “local subsidies” is a special case in the programme context. The contract format allows for direct implementation of the grants by local partners (i.e. municipalities), but overall financial oversight and responsibility for financial management remains with the programme. This contract format was used in Iraq and Türkiye with new and less experienced partners in the first project cycles to build capacities while managing financial risks. It is, however, relatively more costly due to the oversight requirements and limits the scaling-up of the grants due to financial ceilings per project.



#### 4.4.4 Resource concept

All Qudra 2 implementing partners had broadly similar staffing models. However, the mix of internal staff, external service providers, and partner staff varied.

Strengthening local partners is the core of Qudra 2's approach. Local authority staff play a central role in implementing Qudra 2 support. They are either directly responsible for implementation (as in Jordan and Türkiye) or very closely involved in planning and oversight (as in Iraq). CBO staff and volunteers in Iraq and Jordan are also directly responsible for implementation.

However, their resources have to be assessed carefully. Local authorities are staffed by civil servants and their workload increases with the programme interventions, which may undermine motivation and ownership. Depending on partners' rules and regulations, it may or may not be possible for local government partners to hire temporary, project-based staff to support permanent staff. While it prevents overburdening core staff, such temporary support may undermine the intended effects on personal and organisational capacity development. Whether temporary staff can be hired should therefore be clarified before entering a cooperation and their role should be clearly specified.

Given the strong partner orientation, partner focal points form the core of each implementing partners' internal staffing model in all three countries. The most critical function of programme staff is maintaining close relationships with local government partners and coordinating the support provided. This includes: i) overseeing the support to partners such as the grant scheme and capacity development, ii) following up on the administrative management (such as clarifying contractual obligations) and iii) facilitating support processes such as M&E, communication and visibility, visits which all require a high amount of coordination with partners. Overall, it is essential to constantly communicate with the partners and provide them with a focal point for questions, support, and feedback.

In Iraq and Türkiye, GIZ works primarily with its own staff to perform these functions. Using internal staff rather than external experts for this core function built better relationships and ownership, improved communication, and allowed more flexibility to react to challenges and explore opportunities to address broader development challenges. This can be supplemented by external service providers supporting the delivery of services, but this does not replace the need for a separate coordination function. In Jordan, AECID recruited more internal staff over time to meet the higher-than-expected need for coordination and technical support of partners, which sped up implementation.

The partner focal points are supported by staff specialising in particular functions or technical areas. In Iraq, for example, an architect supported the focal

points in the quality assurance of construction measures. In Türkiye, a capacity development advisor was added to the team to respond to local authorities' needs and interest in capacity development. In Jordan, the programme hired sector experts to support the municipalities in the technical execution of the CSPs in the most relevant sectors (e.g., solid waste management). Furthermore, team members took on additional roles as focal points for cross-cutting topics such as social cohesion, gender, or communication.

While in Jordan and Türkiye, the staff is primarily based in Amman and Ankara, technical advisors in Iraq were allocated across the Governorates in which the programme is active. This decentralised model supported agile movement in the fragile Iraqi context and facilitated the frequent site visits required by the focus on construction and engineering interventions.

External expertise or service providers can be helpful to quickly scale up the support, as was the case in Iraq, where two intermediary organisations were brought in to oversee the implementation of QIPs. In Jordan, external service providers played a significant role in capacity development interventions early in the programme, especially in reviewing LDPs and supporting municipalities to conduct needs assessments.

Analysing the potential for longer-term external support for priority objectives such as capacity development (e.g., project management training, event moderation, M&E, community participation) at the beginning of the programme can lead to efficiency gains over time. For M&E and communication, longer-term engagement with external service providers allowed for learning from experience and increased efficiency overall, particularly in more complex settings with many partners and high coordination needs. Tender documents should emphasise the need for service provider flexibility. However, sufficient budget should be earmarked to react flexibly to unforeseen demands for specialist services.

Overall, the challenge is to align the staffing model with the programme's strategic orientation, which can shift quickly. There are trade-offs between specialisation, which contributes to efficiency, and flexibility in support. For example, in Iraq, where construction support measures were predominant, the partner focal points comprised engineers who were less familiar with community participation processes or social cohesion. As a result, cooperation with other programmes and contracting external expertise was necessary. Conversely, in Jordan and Türkiye, more technical expertise was required over time which was contracted externally or added to the team. New programmes should reflect early on mobilising the relevant expertise for the integrated support outlined here, covering basic service delivery, community participation, social cohesion, and capacity development. A certain degree of surplus capacity will support the programme in responding to crises and opportunities.

## Lessons learnt in brief

- Ensure your resource concept – including internal staff, external service providers and partner staff – is aligned with your strategic orientation, anticipating shifts over time.
- Assess how the additional projects will affect the partners' workload and how bottlenecks can be prevented.
- Each partner should have a clear focal point in the team for all implementation questions. Significant in-house staff will be required to accompany partners in the dynamic approach.
- Staff members who act as focal points for partners should be supported by more specialised staff operating "in the background" or external experts.
- Consider longer-term engagement with external service providers for core topics to be flexible and learn together.
- If possible, plan diverse and surplus staff capacity to address crises and pursue opportunities.

## 5. Final remarks

Local communities play a crucial role in fragile contexts of displacement crises. Local authorities and civil society actors are at the forefront when providing the necessary basic services to refugees, IDPs and host communities. Demands are high, as are opportunities to address basic needs, social cohesion, and build organisational and individual capacities to meet future challenges in a development-oriented resilience approach.

Based on lessons learnt by Qudra 2's three European partners, this report provides analytical viewpoints for and against different options for the design of support programmes for local. At the same time, it provides the reader with practical tips to consider during implementation.

**Qudra 2's experience and learning can be summed up in a few "rules of thumb":**

- Support to local actors will be differently designed, depending on where on the spectrum of the HDP nexus we move, and there will be trade-offs between flexibility, speed, reach, quality, and sustainability.
- In fragile settings, the strategic priorities will likely shift over time, including responding to additional crises and exploiting opportunities. This requires contingency planning, a high degree of flexibility, and, most importantly, a focus on seeing and using opportunities for more development-oriented interventions.
- Any support at the local level requires a thorough analysis of existing capacities and gaps to be filled before starting. Programmes should be wary of overestimating local capacities, especially in new ways of working.
- A grant scheme provides an excellent chance for hands-on learning as long as sufficient resources and competences are available to accompany implementation and supporting capacity development.
- A grant scheme also provides the opportunity to promote cooperation and coordination between local authorities and civil society at the local level, but also needed national actors to increase resilience and coherence.
- Community participation is essential for effective support at the local level and it contributes to social cohesion, but it is a challenging, time-consuming process.
- A well-balanced team of internal staff, partners, and external experts is vital to mobilise the right expertise quickly and build the trust that makes flexible implementation possible. While moving along the HDP nexus scale increasingly pay attention to avoiding substitution of partner services.

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