

GEF-8 PROJECT IDENTIFICATION FORM (PIF)

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General Project Information

Project Title

Support and build a more Sustainable Blue Economy in Aqaba through Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and effective management of the first marine reserve in the country.

Region	GEF Project ID
Jordan	11424
Country(ies)	Type of Project
Jordan	MSP
GEF Agency(ies):	GEF Agency ID
UNDP	9706
Executing Partner	Executing Partner Type
TBD	Government
GEF Focal Area (s)	Submission Date
Biodiversity	10/18/2023

Project Sector (CCM Only)

Taxonomy

Ecosystem-based Adaptation, Climate Change Adaptation, Climate Change, Climate resilience, Livelihoods, Community Based Natural Resource Mngt, Protected Areas and Landscapes, Focal Areas, Sea Grasses, Biomes, Biodiversity, Coral Reefs, Demonstrate innovative approach, Influencing models, SMEs, Private Sector, Local Communities, Beneficiaries, Stakeholders, Women groups, Access and control over natural resources, Awareness Raising, Gender results areas, Gender Equality, Integrated Programs, Sea-level rise, Mainstreaming adaptation, Innovation, Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use, Climate Change Mitigation, Mangroves, Productive Seascapes, Fisheries, Mainstreaming, Tourism, Marine Protected Area, Seagrasses, International Waters, Deploy innovative financial instruments, Public Campaigns, Education, Communications, Targeted Research, Capacity, Knowledge and Research, Coastal, Strategic Action Plan Implementation, Learning, Large Marine Ecosystems, Coastal and Marine Protected Areas, Transform policy and regulatory environments, Convene multi-stakeholder alliances, Strengthen institutional capacity and decision-making, Behavior change, Type of Engagement, Consultation, Information Dissemination, Partnership, Participation, Civil Society, Academia, Non-Governmental Organization, Community Based Organization, Individuals/Entrepreneurs, Access to benefits and services, Participation and leadership, Capacity Development, Gender Mainstreaming, Sex-disaggregated indicators, Knowledge Exchange, Theory of change, Adaptive management

Type of Trust Fund	Project Duration (Months)
GET	48
GEF Project Grant: (a)	GEF Project Non-Grant: (b)
1,776,484.00	0.00
Agency Fee(s) Grant: (c)	Agency Fee(s) Non-Grant (d)
168,766.00	0.00

Total GEF Financing: (a+b+c+d)	Total Co-financing
1,945,250.00	20,000,000.00
PPG Amount: (e)	PPG Agency Fee(s): (f)
50,000.00	4,750.00
PPG total amount: (e+f)	Total GEF Resources: (a+b+c+d+e+f)
54,750.00	2,000,000.00

Project Tags

CBIT: No NGI: No SGP: No Innovation: No

Project Summary

Provide a brief summary description of the project, including: (i) what is the problem and issues to be addressed? (ii) what are the project objectives, and if the project is intended to be transformative, how will this be achieved? (iii), how will this be achieved (approach to deliver on objectives), and (iv) what are the GEBs and/or adaptation benefits, and other key expected results. The purpose of the summary is to provide a short, coherent summary for readers. The explanation and justification of the project should be in section B “project description”.(max. 250 words, approximately 1/2 page)

The Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) lacks a strategic framework for adopting Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE), leading to increased pressure on marine resources due to competing activities. The project aims to develop a Marine Spatial Plan that will be officially adopted within the Aqaba Special Economic Zone as a management tool for conservation, restoration and sustainable use and management, to build resilience of Jordan’s marine ecosystem, including the Aqaba Marine Reserve. This shift from the 'business as usual' approach to a more SBE modality will support more sustainable investments, benefit people's well-being, and contribute to the GEF8 Focal Area Biodiversity strategy and GEF CI 3, 6 and 11. It will also enhance management of the coral reef ecosystem for carbon sequestration, generating ecosystem services, protecting marine wildlife, and securing local economies. The project will benefit the 188,160 people living in the Aqaba, about 50% of whom are women by securing the ecosystems on which livelihoods and jobs are based. The project will contribute to the CBD goals and the KM GBF targets 1, 2, 3, 11 indirectly 19 and support achieving SDG 14. It also supports the delivery of GEB for biodiversity and climate change. Expected results include: i) establishing a formally mandated SBE development institutional, policy and legislative framework that will strengthen capacities and private sector engagement ii) improved business and investment community partnerships supported by financially innovative incentive mechanisms to enhance sustainable investments that will reduce pressure on the marine environment iii) improved marine ecosystem resilience to climate change/disasters and iv) create a new research agenda coupled with M&E processes to assess project related performance.

Indicative Project Overview

Project Objective

To promote ecosystem-based management of the Gulf of Aqaba marine resources through integration of Marine Spatial Planning as a tool for informing decisions for transitioning towards more sustainable

investments for a more resilient socio-ecological system with the capacity to generate multiple benefits for the local economy and the well-being needs of the people of Aqaba.

Project Components

Component 1: Establishing a gender responsive marine spatial planning framework to support a Sustainable Blue Economy

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
422,100.00	4,500,000.00

Outcome:

Outcome 1.1.:

A gender-responsive institutional, policy, and legislative **Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) framework is** established that promotes implementation of a Sustainable Blue Economy for Aqaba.

Indicators/targets

Number of policies and laws for SBE delivery are produced and approved for implementation in ASEZA

Indicators/targets

At least 100 (50% women) professionals trained on **MSP practices and approaches** (including an increase in women trained) (GEF8 Indicator 11)

Output:

Output 1.1.1:

Sea Use Management Plan is updated to embrace international Marine Spatial Planning related principles and strategies

Output 1.1.2:

A regulatory framework is established to support MSP delivery and SBE implementation.

Output 1.1.3:

SBE Coordination Mechanism (institutional arrangements) created to support strengthening technical capacities, knowledge and skills on MSP and SBE implementation.

Component 2: Enhancing Resilient Ocean Ecosystems and Livelihoods through MSP

Component Type	Trust Fund
Investment	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
268,848.00	5,000,000.00

Outcome:

Outcome 2.1: **Marine ecosystem resilience is improved through targeted NbS interventions.**

Indicators/targets

Defined area of Aqaba Marine Reserve supported through the beneficial impact of NbS interventions (target – 500 ha). (GEF8 Indicator 3.4)

Green House Gas Emissions Mitigated outside AFOLU sector (13,796 Tons CO₂e/ha) GEF Core Indicator 6.1

Number of financing mechanisms adopted by the concerned authorities in Aqaba and implemented.

Output:

Output 2.1.1. Selection and piloting economically and technically viable NbS interventions from the shortlist, with a focus on strengthening local capacities to enhance marine ecosystem resilience against climate change and disasters.

Output 2.1.2: Gender responsive and innovative finance incentives and mechanisms are implemented to enhance sustainable and nature-positive investments to offset pressure on the marine environment

Component 3: Using MSP to enhance research priorities to improve resilient ocean ecosystem health, and livelihood protection

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
802,478.00	9,000,000.00

Outcome:

Outcome 3.1:

Improved research on marine biodiversity to support evidence-based management decisions.

Indicators/targets

Number of MSP recommended research programmes producing plans, technologies, strategies or guidelines to support policy decision making.

Output:

Output 3.1.1: Aqaba Marine Science “Hub” programmes and research plan is established to support improved evidence generation and analytical capacities for integration of science into policy and management decisions.

Output 3.1.2. Citizen partnership pilot programmes are initiated that are designed to strengthen marine ecosystem resilience related research.

M&E

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
200,000.00	500,000.00

Outcome:

Outcome 4.1:

Improved SBE related-knowledge management applied in support of decision-making and raising public awareness.

Outcome 4.2:

Adaptive management of project activities achieved, in line with UNDP and GEF M&E and SES policies.

Indicators/targets

TE delivered on time and according to expected quality (targets: PIRs, TE) independent quality ratings S or better).

Output:

Output 4.1.1: Creation of a knowledge management platform to support gender responsive MSP related decision-making.

Output 4.2.1: Project M&E plan implemented and results reported through Project Board, quarterly and annual reports (PIRs)

Output 4.2.2: TE conducted and reports shared with UNDP and GEF IEOs

Component Balances

Project Components	GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
Component 1: Establishing a gender responsive marine spatial planning framework to support a Sustainable Blue Economy	422,100.00	4,500,000.00
Component 2: Enhancing Resilient Ocean Ecosystems and Livelihoods through MSP	268,848.00	5,000,000.00
Component 3: Using MSP to enhance research priorities to improve resilient ocean ecosystem health, and livelihood protection	802,478.00	9,000,000.00
M&E	200,000.00	500,000.00
Subtotal	1,693,426.00	19,000,000.00
Project Management Cost	83,058.00	1,000,000.00
Total Project Cost (\$)	1,776,484.00	20,000,000.00

Please provide justification

PROJECT OUTLINE

A. PROJECT RATIONALE

Briefly describe the current situation: the global environmental problems and/or climate vulnerabilities that the project will address, the key elements of the system, and underlying drivers of environmental change in the project context, such as population growth, economic development, climate change, sociocultural and political factors, including conflicts, or technological changes. Describe the objective of the project, and the justification for it. (Approximately 3-5 pages) see guidance here

In Aqaba, whilst efforts since 2014 have taken place to plan for sectoral activities in the marine space, such as fisheries, marine transportation and tourism, no strategic framework exists to formally adopt a marine spatial planning (MSP) process which, in turn, can be used to help design, formulate and implement a Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE^[11]) within the administrative boundary of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA). This is needed in Aqaba as competing activities along the 26km of Jordanian coastal area are putting increased pressure on marine resources. This includes the need to manage tourist attractions and public beaches, port operations, industrial complexes, as well as the Aqaba Marine Reserve (AMR) in order to protect valuable marine ecosystems which currently remain under constant direct and indirect pressures all year round.

The main objective of the project is to ensure that a more formalised MSP process is adopted within ASEZA to conserve, restore and build resilience into Jordan's marine ecosystem, supporting SBE-related investments and providing benefits to the people's livelihoods and well-being in the process. It aims to reduce the risks that poor marine management presents to the marine biodiversity of Aqaba by formulating a new MSP governance and regulatory framework that supports sustainable investments and strengthens capacities to management natural resources. The project will contribute to the GEF-8 Focal Area strategies for Biodiversity and GEF Core Indicators 3, 6 and 11. The project is transformative in nature, updating the current Sea Use Management Plan (2014) in an attempt to shift away from the "business as usual" approach towards managing the use of the marine area

(including the preservation of marine biodiversity) to one that is more sustainable and transparent in its approach that will benefit current and future generations alike.

The project will benefit the 188,160 people living in Aqaba, about 50% of whom are women. The project will contribute to the goals of the CBD and the Kunming-Montreal GBF - targets 1, 2, 3 and 11 whilst supporting achievement of SDG 14. Expected results include a gender-responsive institutional, policy, and legislative framework for marine spatial planning established to promote implementation of a SBE for Aqaba; marine ecosystem resilience improved through targeted NbS interventions such as coral restoration, mangrove planting and seagrass bed restoration and research (and knowledge management) on marine biodiversity improved to support evidence-based decision-making on coastal management.

The current situation

Internationally, Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) emerged in 2006 as a solution for implementing ecosystem-based management and developing integrated, multi-objective marine plans that were comprehensive, participatory, and changed the status quo of governance structures or frameworks that were failing to address the complexity of decisions confronting governments. MSP commonly represents a planning tool (or process) that is used to develop a blueprint for area-based management that accounts for multiple management objectives. It is used to help to simultaneously address ecological, economic, social, and cultural objectives, and to develop marine plans to safeguard long-term ecosystem health and the well-being of human communities.

MSP is effective at identifying long-term issues related to coordination and integration in ocean governance and, if necessary, can spur the development of new governance arrangements and integrated management plans for multiple sectors, such as fisheries, tourism, renewable energy, and non-renewable energy. Best practices in MSP use evidence-based approaches to plan and design participatory and transparent approaches with stakeholders, thereby developing buy-in for implementation – balancing the needs of nature and people.

The Sea Use Master Plan of the Gulf of Aqaba in Jordan (2015) provides an overarching policy framework to guide marine development and activity in the territorial waters of Jordan. It is based on using authoritative, spatial data on the marine environment, its various uses, and assets, as well as of the adjacent coastal area. The Plan was founded on a sound evidence base, as of 2015 and as far as information was made available. However, as the Plan was developed during a period of fast evolving marine policy at national and international levels, it clearly states that it should be considered as part of an on-going process. To that end, significant updates and revisions to this plan are now required to better embrace current baseline situations plus how such a plan should be enhanced to better embrace MSP principles and best practices to support the development of a SBE for Jordan.

In addition to the Sea Use Master Plan (2015), ASEZA has been effectively involved in the production of a number of associated plans of relevance that will offer support for moving forward with an SBE, including plans such as the ICZM Country Report (2014)^[2], the Jordan National Green Growth Plan (2017), Jordan's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP 2015-2020)^[3], Jordan's National Climate Change Policy (2022-2050) and most recently, the Jordan Green Growth Strategic Roadmap (2022-2033)^[4]. However, without updating this Sea Use Master Plan, efforts to identify new regulatory processes that are needed to sustain, develop, and operate an effective SBE, will continue to be lacking especially considering the absence of any formal mandate for developing a SBE in Jordan. This will not only help to manage marine resources and uses in a more sustainable manner, but it shall also target required marine biodiversity conservation efforts plus promote climate resiliency related investments and management interventions along both the coastal and nearshore areas.

ASEZA is currently responsible for delivering economic development for Aqaba, although most conventions and legislation for environmental protection are implemented through different government agencies. Through Law No. 32 (2000), ASEZA was mandated to transform Aqaba into a world-class Red Sea business hub and leisure destination. In addition, it aims at enhancing the quality of life and prosperity of the Aqaba community through sustainable development. Through this Law, ASEZA was endowed with regulatory, administrative, fiscal, and economic responsibilities; part of this included the legal framework to support the necessary policy for an effective coastal management system. Such a system is critical for Aqaba, as the Jordanian coastline is very short (26km), of which about 12 km is occupied by industrial establishments, ports, resorts, and hotels. Importantly, it is home to unique coral reef communities (amongst the northern-most tropical reef systems worldwide), has a high diversity of marine taxa, and provides habitat for endemic and rare marine species. The coral reefs it contains (as part of the wider Gulf of Aqaba) provide critically important ecosystem services that underpin the socio-economic development of Jordanian coastal

communities. Tourism is a main engine of the economies in both the Jordanian and Egyptian areas, and coral-reef visitation is the driver of the tourism sector in the region. Coral reefs in the region are also an important source of food and fishing economic activity.

It is therefore recognized that in order to adopt the concept (and approach) of a workable MSP process, it is important to inculcate a number of key factors, such as embracing both the promotion of economic growth with social inclusivity plus the need to preserve or improve the livelihoods of local communities whilst ensuring environmental sustainability of the oceans and coastal areas. Several different instruments will need to be adopted, of which MSP represents one of these required tools. With regards to marine data collection and supporting SBE-related research, no formalized and consistent programme exists to hold ocean-related data or to collect information that may support the development of a SBE. For example, no formal Information Management System is in place to support the production of a “State of the Marine Environment” report that could facilitate informed decision-making about the sustainable use and conservation of Jordan’s marine resources.

Despite this, outreach on coastal and marine matters has significantly improved in Aqaba over recent years, with several national governmental and non-governmental organizations having implemented environmental protection public awareness programs that focus, for example, on pollution prevention, nature conservation and wildlife conservation, among others. These activities, including awareness and training programmes, have been carried out through different means and media, by targeting students at different education stages, as well as the general public. What has not taken place is targeted communication on the potential for SBE, what this means for the private sector (if developed in a sustainable manner) and how local communities may benefit from a working SBE.

Global environmental problems and/or climate vulnerabilities that the project will address

With such a short shoreline, all coastal activities are subjected to considerable and conflicting marine resource use practices and ecosystem degradation and climate change-related pressures, all of which need to be considered when transitioning to a SBE. A series of global environmental “problems” that face the area are raised as follows (adapted from the Aqaba Marine Reserve Management Plan, AMRMP (2021-2026)).

Problem 1: Population Growth, and the Associated Recreational and Tourism Growth

The total population of Aqaba has grown significantly in recent decades and is now approximately 188,160 persons and produced 150 ton per day of solid waste in Aqaba. Solid waste is currently disposed of 12km south-southeast of Aqaba City, in an unlined landfill at the base of the Aqaba Mountains. This increased demographic pressure will inevitably translate into biodiversity impacts unless well-managed (and associated impacts) are addressed. These impacts will most likely translate into reduced open areas and sandy beaches as they transform for construction and development purposes. In tandem with this, increased residential and commercial developments lead to increased solid waste disposal needs which, unless appropriately managed, will result in higher pressure on the coastal and marine resources.

Problem 2: Port Development

The development of new port facilities and expansion of existing ports are expected to extensively damage coral reef integrity within the vicinity. The estimated area of hard corals affected by direct impact, based on ports relocation to the southern beach of Aqaba near the Saudi border, is 32,509 m². Two ports are still located close to the proposed AMR boundaries, namely the passenger port, which is located at the northern edges of the proposed AMR, and the Aqaba Container Terminal (ACT), which is situated north of it. These collectively may create negative environmental effects, especially the impacts of any waste created and disposed of within Gulf of Aqaba receiving waters.

Problem 3: Sea Level Rise and Flood Risks

The Gulf of Aqaba (GoA) is expected to witness a sea level rise which will have several consequences, including infrastructure loss and other serious economic and social losses. The consequences of sea level rise will have serious effects on the limited shorelines that naturally occur, plus the impact that unplanned infrastructure development can have on shoreline extent. In 2019, strong tidal currents (and storm surges) led to major infrastructural impacts on the submerged artificial diving sites. Several *wadis* (ravines) flow east-west, though water flow remains seasonal, flowing in a seaward direction. Despite low annual average rainfalls, flash flooding is becoming a more frequent problem, especially along the more vulnerable northern parts of Aqaba. These areas contain all the town's residential expansion areas, the Aqaba International Industrial Estate, the King Hussein International Airport, and all the northern light industries and logistics areas. A significant sediment load is also carried by runoff from this catchment, where a key source of pollutants occurs. Runoff with extreme flooding is caused when rainfall occurs in adjacent regions of Aqaba, which will negatively affect marine life. The northern parts of Aqaba are the most vulnerable regions for flash flood hazards since they

are located downstream from areas of major *wadis*. To mitigate the adverse effects of flash flooding on Aqaba generally, and the AMR specifically, ASEZA has established 40 dams at the eastern *wadis* flowing to Aqaba.

Problem 4: Water Quality Issues

The GoA is highly vulnerable to pollution, where both water stratification and intense dust storms are the major contributing factors to the observed seawater chemistry. Generally, the mean value of pH at Aqaba is 8.26, with no clear trend due to the calcium carbonate buffering capacity of water. In addition, the lack of input of freshwater into the coastal water contributes to high salinity water, and the negligible supply of sediments into the water results in clear water conditions with high transparency. The coastal waters of Aqaba are extremely oligotrophic, with very limited nutrients supplied to the Gulf's water through terrestrial runoff. Any high NH_4^+ levels could be associated with leaks from sewer systems and/or because of water discharged from fish farms which are enriched with enhanced nitrogen or possibly from fertilizer plume events.

Problem 5: Oil and Chemical Spills

Jordan imports oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) from adjacent countries, which pose threats of oil or liquid spills, this, consequently, will have detrimental effects on its coastal waters and its associated ecosystems (the impacts of which are exacerbated, noting the small width and semi-enclosed nature of the GoA). Several steps have been taken by ASEZA, such as the zero-discharge policy, cooperation at the regional level through the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA), and the improvements made by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Although few incidents of oil spills have been recorded in Aqaba, careful monitoring, preparedness, and regulation enforcement shall all be required and formalized. On top of the spill (pollution) risks associated with marine transport and of hydrocarbons in particular, special mention needs to be made of the importance of phosphate and potash exports (worth over 1 billion USD per year) from Jordan through Aqaba. The negative impacts of phosphate (which also adds radionuclides to the system, reaching health risk levels close to the terminal) and potash dust on marine ecosystems are all key issues to address.

Problem 6: Marine Debris

Most litter reported in GoA coastal waters results from recreational and shipping activities. Many items come from the Aqaba passengers' port just north of the Marine Science Station (MSS) beach, whilst it is estimated that 19 million items enter the marine environment from ferryboat each year. Shipping and port activities contribute 30% of marine litter, whilst the fishing industry represents only 3%. The most significant accumulated debris in Aqaba's seas is plastic whilst micro plastics are another supporting factor that seriously threatens the status of scleractinian (reef-building) corals. It is also observed that the AMR area receives litter from several *wadis* and small valleys. Lost or abandoned fishing gear also contributes to the marine debris and litter challenge (also known as 'ghost fishing', which significantly affects coral health and abundance). Ballast water on container ships, bulk carriers, and tankers visiting the ports in Jordan and the neighbouring countries in the GoA, remains a potential source of pollution that can carry and seriously pollute the marine environment of the GoA with invasive species.

Problem 7: Living Marine Resource Extraction

The marine fishing industry is insignificant in meeting Jordan's current fisheries requirements (protein), the vast majority of which is imported. Because of the small size of the marine fishing industry in Jordan, fisheries management is not undertaken to a scale that meets national needs. Fishing activities (commercial and recreational) are also poorly regulated in the region as a whole. There are few regulations, and less enforcement, regarding fishing areas, catch levels, seasons, gear types, size restrictions, licensing, etc. Living marine extraction is also happening as corals are collected and dried as part of the ornamental trade business for souvenirs and jewellery at Aqaba and even as far as the Jordan capital city, Amman. In addition, substantial harvesting of live corals and fish specimens occurs directly from the sea for exhibition purposes at the marine aquarium.

Problem 8: Education and R&D challenges that impede evidence-based decision making to inform SBE Sector

Numerous research initiatives related to the SBE have been conducted or are currently in progress in Aqaba. This research predominantly emphasizes sustainability, aiming to bolster marine conservation and restoration efforts. Additionally, it provides insights to guide private sector-led growth and development in the region. Both governmental bodies and donor agencies have been instrumental in backing these research endeavours. While these studies have laid a foundational understanding, there's a recognized need for further research to solidify the evidence base for marine conservation, restoration, and to harness the potential for sustainable growth in maritime sectors. It's essential that future research initiatives commence with a comprehensive review of existing studies to pinpoint key areas of focus and address gaps pertinent to the blue economy. Although a detailed assessment tailored to the blue economy, especially concerning emerging sectors like the bio-pharmaceutical industry, hasn't been conducted, the forthcoming project framework will strategically incorporate and build upon existing research insights to shape the SBE framework, sectoral planning, and implementation of management interventions.

Current issues and problems associated with blue economy-related education include low participation rates of women in some blue economy-related courses and retention of human capital in Jordan. Likewise, no organisations in Jordan currently offer any specific blue economy course, and existing courses insufficiently incorporate awareness of what the blue economy is. Ensuring that Aqaba human capacity providers possess a better understanding of the blue economy and the frameworks within which it operates is important. In addition, no assessment has been made to map the educational gaps between what national academic and vocational training organisations are providing and what is required for a sustainable blue economy. Such an assessment (to be developed during the PPG stage) would need to focus not just on operational/technical issues, but also on the managerial and executive skills required by government staff and private sector employees.

The key barriers that are manifesting the above set of problems being experienced, which shall be addressed through this project, include the following:

- Barrier 1: Lack of policy and institutional coherence to support an effective SBE;
- Barrier 2: Institutional and sectoral silos that do not support the delivery of MSP;
- Barrier 3: Decision-making based on poor quality or outdated data to support MSP;
- Barrier 4: Weak governance capacity to implement and enforce regulations linked to the marine space;
- Barrier 5: Limited use of marine spatial planning instruments;
- Barrier 6: Limited use of partnerships to promote innovation, skills, and new technology on MSP related research. Innovation is further undermined by the low utilization of specialized business services that have the potential to impact positively on issues such as productivity and market access. Skills levels are relatively low across the sector.

Creating a new project that defines clear interventions to address the above problems and barriers is now needed. To address the key barriers identified above, the following MSP related strategic interventions need to be targeted as part of a SBE Development Policy Framework:

1. Promoting Sustainable Fisheries Practices: One of the strategies that MSP can support a SBE policy framework needs to pursue in Aqaba relates to the promotion of sustainable fishery practices and how to effectively discard fishing gear in a sustainable manner.
2. Promoting Marine Ecotourism using Nature based Solutions (NbS): Sustainable tourism practices amongst glass bottom boat operators, for example, coupled with education to private boat users collectively needs to be improved upon to encourage and deliver responsible waste management amongst all boat users. Eco-friendly and price-competitive alternatives for plastics (that constitute significantly to marine litter) need to be developed as a solution and made available at scale. Knowledge exchange on innovations for alternative materials (such as seaweed and other natural raw materials) can also facilitate replication of best practices and new investments, create livelihood opportunities for local communities from the tourism sector and this needs to be upscaled.
3. Marine Transportation and Trade: MSP shall support targeted interventions to better ensure *efficient* promotion of the adoption of sustainable practices within the maritime industry.
4. Education and Awareness-Raising Initiatives: The collection and dissemination of insightful scientific data and facts, public awareness, stakeholder engagement programmes remain pivotal to enable actions to take place to promote MSP. The excellent ongoing work of the AMR shall be supported here, complimenting activities that are already proposed within the GEF 7 “Support to the AMR” IUCN project (yet to start at the time of writing).
5. Developing standard methodologies and digital tools may prove to be essential innovative tools to support the AMR in tracking impacts to the marine environment of Aqaba. Best practices to develop and demonstrate digital solutions to track, monitor, and report leakages (or marine plastic waste etc.), synthesized into guidance documents and standard operating procedures (SOPs) may prove crucial in strengthening capacities for implementation.
6. Innovative Research. There is an urgent need for more scientific research and policy measures to address the severe threats of inappropriate sea use management on global marine ecosystems and human health. This is needed as there remains a research challenge to achieve a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors influencing the sorption and bioaccumulation behaviors. Progressive and objective research coupled with improved management (as part of a phased SBE framework) could determine the future direction of marine research in the GoA.

The project, using MSP as a key tool in the SBE delivery process, will need to consider (i) how to ensure that an SBE Development Policy Framework is established and promoted in Aqaba, (ii) how best to introduce and implement innovative incentive mechanisms to enhance sustainable and positive investments that are aimed at offsetting pressure on the marine environment, and finally, (iii)

what is needed to improve marine ecosystem resilience through the use (where possible) of nature-based solutions and interventions that can deliver integrated environmental and social benefits.

Implications of No Action

The baseline scenario regarding SBE-related matters would see a further increase in pressures from tourism and other land and sea-based activities, including uncontrolled pollution, unregulated fishing, and physical harm to the coral reef from diving and snorkelling operations (amongst others). On top of its global impacts, a 'no action' scenario would negatively affect the product itself with loss of biodiversity (the attractor) and loss of investments (through climate change factors such as sea level rise), creating great uncertainty for the ecological and socio-economic future of the GoA. Current trends of population growth and unregulated activities and development within the marine space of Aqaba clearly indicate that actions to make a concerted change are now required with immediate effect.

Therefore, to achieve an effective transition to a working SBE, there lies an inherent requirement to produce a clear road map or a strategic framework (with supporting structures and "systems" already in place to sustain momentum) that sets the direction for the promotion and adoption of a SBE in Jordan. Environmental challenges (climate or human induced) will continue to enhance societal and ecosystem related vulnerabilities and thus impact significantly on the resilience of the marine environment to adapt to the pressures it is being exposed to. In parallel with the requirement for a clear and implementable SBE policy framework to be in place to help improved resilience, ensuring that such an approach is financially sustainable remains critical. For Aqaba in particular, the need for new sources of financing to support (amongst others) marine ecosystem conservation and management (coral reefs in particular) is now widely recognized, involving public-private partnerships where possible. The inherent opportunities that pursuing an SBE in Aqaba could bring, that support investments for enhancing future development in a climate-resilient and sustainable manner, now need to be realized and acted upon so that all efforts expended will provide benefits and improved livelihoods for the well-being of all Aqaba people into the future.

The project will contribute to the GEF-8 Focal Area strategies for Biodiversity and GEF Core Indicators **3, 6 and 11. Climate adaptation benefits include enhancing NbS to minimize the impact of natural disasters (e.g. flash floods).** Additionally, the coral reefs resilience will be enhanced and a healthier and functioning coral reef ecosystem will be able to generate direct and indirect ecosystem services for people, marine wildlife and local economies.

The project design is structured in a manner that enables approaches and solutions that help Jordan to address multilateral environmental agreement (MEA) targets and commitments such as compliance to the Paris Agreement, SDG 14, the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (through UNCBD), National Action Programs (through UNCCD), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets 1, 2, 3 and 11, and National Capacity Self Assessments (through UNCBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD) in an integrated and innovative way with co-benefits.

Stakeholder Engagement

For the project to be successful, stakeholder engagement will be critical as SBE requires the involvement of public and private sectors along with civil society and non-governmental organisations, all of which are critical to help deliver the project's intended outcomes and all adaptation benefits. The same range of stakeholders proposed within this GEF8 project is already well versed on ongoing/pending donor funding projects that will be used to add value. For example, the GEF7 IUCN project shall be providing the structural operational management requirements of specific reference to the **AMR (project start by Q3 of 2023).** Likewise, this project shall be supported by a longer term proposed Global Coral Reef Fund (GCRF) project and the existing EU funded project (managed by UNDP) which is designed to support relevant blue economy initiatives in Jordan. Stakeholder groups, their influence, impact and importance in the project is presented below, and detailed information provided in the Annex.

Government Agencies: The AMR Administration serves as the key authority for environmental management within the Reserve boundaries, overseeing activities ranging from fishing to the collection of marine life. Their influence extends to shaping the future performance of the AMR making their participation crucial for the project's success. ASEZA is another major stakeholder, responsible for policy, regulation, and budgeting for the Marine Reserve Administration. With representation from key ministries, ASEZA wields significant power in planning and executing projects, and its Board of Commissioners includes six full-time minister-level members, further emphasizing its influence. The Jordan Maritime Authority (JMA) plays a supporting role, focusing on maritime enforcement and regulation in the Gulf of Aqaba. While their mandate and authority is limited compared to AMR and ASEZA, they hold the important responsibility of enhancing maritime safety and environmental protection. Lastly, the Royal Department for Environmental Protection, or Environment Police, provides essential security cover for ASEZA staff during monitoring visits and conducts regular surveillance checks within the Reserve. Despite limited expertise in environmental monitoring and enforcement, their presence is vital for the project's security aspects. Collectively, these stakeholders bring leadership, regulatory power, and enforcement capabilities that are essential for the project's success in achieving effective marine sustainability.

Local Stakeholders: Royal Jordanian Navy, Fisherman Cooperative Al Thagher, and various women's groups, play specialized roles that complement the project's main objectives. The Navy's focus on policing marine vessels adds an enforcement layer, particularly in preventing pollution. The Fisherman Cooperative, with its large membership, serves as a crucial watchdog for illegal practices and promotes responsible use of marine resources. Women's groups, including businesswomen and local CSOs, bring a unique perspective to the project, ensuring that targets are pragmatic and inclusive.

Civil Society: CSOs will play a vital role in the project, offering specialized expertise and support to amplify the project's impact. These organizations engage in a range of activities, from conducting research and public awareness campaigns to advocating for environmental laws and standards. Their contributions are important for the project's overall success. For instance, they will assist in raising awareness about marine conservation, support ongoing research, and offer technical services to national companies. Their involvement enriches the project by adding layers of community engagement, scientific research, and policy advocacy, thereby complementing the efforts of the government stakeholders.

Private Sector: The private sector plays a supporting yet significant role in the project, each contributing to their own specialized areas. Aqaba Water Company (AWC) is crucial for advising on potential sources of seawater contamination, given their expertise in water management. Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC) and Aqaba Ports Corporation (APC) both have a potentially high impact, especially if unrestricted developments occur within the buffer zones to the AMR. The real estate and hotel sectors, including the Hotels Association of Aqaba, also have a high potential impact, particularly in promoting environmentally sustainable practices within the AMR. Watersports companies, such as Sindbad, are key stakeholders for advising on environmentally sustainable practices within the AMR, especially given their influence in water-sport activities.

Community organizations: Community organizations will be engaged to raise awareness about marine matters and to promote sustainable practices amongst all sectors. They will also be responsible for the implementation of community-based initiatives and activities of the project.

Under-represented groups: The project will engage under-represented groups such as women and marginalized communities, to ensure that their needs are taken into consideration and to promote their participation in the project activities. All stakeholders will work together to implement the project, and each will have specific roles and responsibilities to achieve the project's objectives.

With a limited budget, this MSP is strategically designed to complement and leverage existing investments in the development of the MSP and SBE in Aqaba. Significant co-financing from the EU project and the Global Coral Reef Fund amplifies the project's reach and impact. The GEF8 funding will fit neatly within the current landscape of projects currently underway in Aqaba, building on the investments ongoing from both GEF and non-GEF projects. The most relevant ongoing UNDP and IUCN initiatives that support the AMR and beyond are set out below:

- “Improving the management and operation system of the new Aqaba Marine Reserve” (USD 345,000- Donor: Norway). The intervention aims to contribute to sustainable management and conservation of globally and nationally significant marine biodiversity in Aqaba through supporting the new marine reserve.
- “A collaborative management of the Aqaba Marine Reserve Ecosystem” (USD 345,000- Donor: Norway). This project aims at sustaining and advancing the implementation of the Management Plan of the marine reserve through inclusive, adaptive, and collaborative management. There is an important connection with the proposed SBE project particularly in areas related to the implementation of the sea use plan through enhancing patrolling and surveillance to areas within the marine reserves and its buffer zone.
- “Enhance the Conservation of The Aqaba Marine Reserve by Improving Capacity for Effective Management” (USD 4,491,733- Donor: EU). The project aims to improve the management and operation of the Aqaba marine reserve through applying the best practices for the management of marine protected areas and contribute to conserve unique and globally significant marine biodiversity in Aqaba. The project will contribute to capacity development and awareness raising among different stakeholders.
- “Supporting the Operation and Effective Performance Management of the Aqaba Marine Reserve, Jordan” (USD 663,073 – Donor IUCN and GEF). The project aims to enhance management effectiveness and equity and operational capabilities of the Aqaba Marine Reserve through capacity building and participatory approaches. It should be noted that the IUCN-GEF project shall be geographically focused on the boundary area of the AMR only, while this proposed GEF 8 MSP Project aims to support a Marine Spatial Plan process for the whole length of coast in Aqaba, which also includes the ARM. The latter GEF8 project will be introducing governance (institutional and capacity) enhancements that are national in focus (not specifically for the smaller AMR operational support). In addition, work identified through the IUCN-GEF Project (such as the design of NbS activities) shall then be upscaled and delivered through the GEF8 project.

- Jordan Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution (USD5,000,000 – Donor, GEF). This is a national project with planned activities in the Aqaba region, particularly with the private sector engaged in food and beverage industries, to promote the use of alternative materials for packaging in order to reduce single plastic use. The project will also support policy level interventions such as creation/strengthening and implementation of regulations and laws to control the production and leakage to the environment of single-use plastics, such as plastic bags, and regulations on the amount of plastic that can be used in packaging.

It is also timely in that it will be able to learn lessons from these initiatives to ensure that this GEF8 project aligns well with country priorities to pursue efforts for a green economy transition. This includes the policy that is already being promoted by the Government of Jordan to promote a Green Economy (Ministry of Environment (2017), “A National Green Growth Plan for Jordan, Amman, and Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. From past initiatives, several key lessons have emerged that are crucial for the success of the GEF8 project. One is the importance of early stakeholder engagement, involving all relevant parties from the planning and design stages ensures a more cohesive and effective approach. While Aqaba remains central, broadening consultations to include national entities like the Ministry of Environment is vital, given their role in several Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Additionally, the potential of regional collaboration offers a wealth of opportunities, from shared resources to knowledge exchange. Aligning projects with national priorities, such as Jordan's Green Economy transition, ensures both support and synergy with broader objectives. Lastly, maintaining flexibility in the project's approach allows for adaptability to evolving situations, ensuring continued relevance and effectiveness.

B. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project description

This section asks for a theory of change as part of a joined-up description of the project as a whole. The project description is expected to cover the key elements of good project design in an integrated way. It is also expected to meet the GEF's policy requirements on gender, stakeholders, private sector, and knowledge management and learning (see section D). This section should be a narrative that reads like a joined-up story and not independent elements that answer the guiding questions contained in the PIF guidance document. (Approximately 3-5 pages) see guidance here

The project aims to reduce the risks that poor marine management presents to the marine biodiversity of Aqaba by formulating a new MSP governance and regulatory framework that supports investments, benefit people's well-being. The main objective of the project is to ensure that a more formalized MSP process is adopted within ASEZA to conserve, restore and build resilience into Jordan's marine ecosystem, supporting SBE-related investments and providing benefits to the people's well-being in the process. This shift from the 'business as usual' approach to a more SBE modality will support investments, benefit people's well-being, and contribute to the GEF-8 Focal Area strategies for Biodiversity and GEF Core Indicators 3, 6 and 11. It will also enhance NbS and coral reef carbon sequestration, generating ecosystem services for people, marine wildlife, and local economies. The project will benefit the 188,160 people living in the Aqaba, about 50% of whom are women. The project will contribute to the goals of the CBD and the Kunming-Montreal GBF - targets 2, 3, 11, indirectly 19, and support achieving SDG 14.

Expected results include: (i) establishing a formally mandated SBE Development institutional, policy and legislative framework that will strengthen capacities and private sector engagement (ii) improved business and investment community partnerships supported by financially innovative incentive mechanisms to enhance sustainable investments that will reduce pressure on the marine environment (iii) improved marine ecosystem resilience to climate change and disasters and (iv) create a new research agenda and coupled with monitoring and evaluation processes to assess project related performance. The project shall help to initiate a transformative approach towards addressing marine plastics in Aqaba, seeking, in partnership with other ongoing/pending projects, to shift the “business as usual” approach to a more SBE modality.

The project is transformative in nature, updating the current Sea Use Management Plan (2014) in an attempt to shift the “business as usual” approach towards managing the use of the marine space (including the preservation of marine biodiversity) to one that is more sustainable and transparent in its approach that will benefit current and future generations alike.

The project's area geographic extent embraces the administrative boundary of the ASEZA (see Annex C) although the impact of the project is expected to have wider national level benefits that lie beyond the ASEZA boundary limits. It shall also help ASEZA

and the wider community to support initiatives that improve wider marine biodiversity and, from this, maximize economic benefits from living marine resources without compromising the long-term health of coastal ecosystems.

Theory of Change

The marine environment of Jordan is under threat from a range of pressures. Its marine biodiversity and the people whose resilience, livelihoods and food security are supported by it is threatened by overfishing, habitat loss, pollution and the impacts of climate change. The intended Theory of Change (ToC) is defined in Figure B1 below, which includes details on proposed barriers and assumptions.

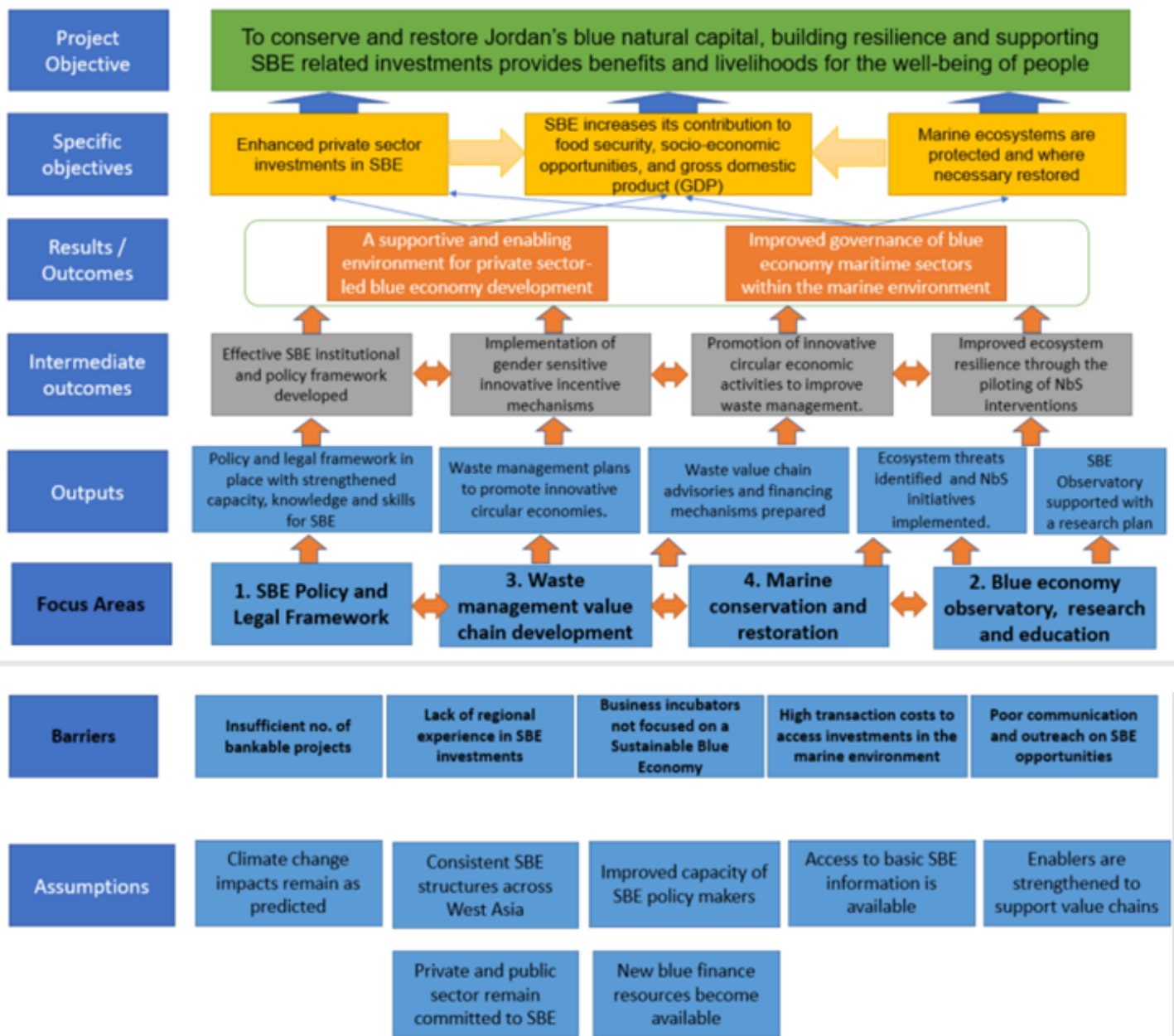


Figure B1: Project Theory of Change

Further to Figure B1, the following theory of change statement can be made: IF a framework for effective MSP (see Component 1) is developed for ASEZA with an updated Sea Use Management Plan to support SBE delivery, THEN a cohesive approach to

mitigating local drivers of marine ecosystem degradation and deteriorating habitat health can be implemented (see Component 2) and sustained long term through the adoption of a modern marine research agenda and “hub” to support Knowledge Management for informed decision-making, monitoring and evaluation (M&E system in Component 3). IF the approach couples these MSP principles with ASEZA’s economic growth ambitions (embracing SBE), THEN economic development can avoid unregulated use and degradation of vital marine ecosystems and safeguard blue natural capital ecosystem services for Aqaba coastal communities. The outcomes shall then include incentivized sustainability within the blue economy, which shall help to increase its contribution to improved coastal resiliency.

The assumptions related to this project (included in Figure B1) include the following:

- Factors relating to climate change adaptation do not increase at a rate faster than expected, both private and public sectors remain committed towards implementing the SBE agenda and that climate finance and other new “blue finance” resources will become available to support implementation of the SBE framework over time.
- MSP policies, strategies and work plans when produced, are consistent with national development plans, supported by improved institutional structures for cross-sectoral planning, enhance alignment with international standards and embrace the uptake of a SBE;
- Capacity of policy makers and managers is improved to guide and steward finite natural resources, through more evidence-based decision-making; enhanced compliance with international standards; and better tools, e.g., updated sea use management plans, etc.;
- All actors and stakeholders in the MSP process have access to the basic information required for the sustainable and equitable governance of Gulf of Aqaba and its blue economy; and
- Specific enablers are strengthened, such as governance tools, human capacity, and sustainable financing (linked to the policy priorities) to support both value chain development and associated/inter-linkages to advance marine conservation.
- The co-financing that both complements and is supported by this project, materialises, and delivers on planned goals and targets.

Importantly, this is a transformative project in nature which shall be achieved through the implementation of marine spatial planning, advancing the operationalization of the AMR PA in accordance with the best international practices (started through a GEF7 IUCN project to initiate implementation imminently), and trialling pilot innovative nature-based solutions such as coral restoration, mangrove planting and seagrass bed restoration integrating proven solutions into future investment frameworks. There will be also an opportunity to having actions for localizing SDGs, enhancement of coastal management and providing advocacy and awareness to different target groups using “learning by engaging”. Through this process, existing barriers shall be overcome such as strengthening policy, political and institutional frameworks through the revision and assessment of the existing relevant policies and strategies and strengthening local capacities to scale up and sustain climate/disaster resilience in tandem.

The adaptation benefits include the creation of the Aqaba Marine Science “hub” (Output 3.1) that shall represent the portal for the private and public sectors plus a new SBE research strategy from which to access and share critical new findings and outputs, enhancing nature-based solutions in the process (Output 2.1.1) to minimize the impact of natural disasters (e.g., flash floods).

From a sustainability perspective, the proposed project interventions are intended to make use of MSP to enhance blue economy opportunities in a more institutionalized and well-established framework and procedures (Output 1.1.2) that take into account the interest of all concerned stakeholders and facilitate and support the decision-making process. To this end, an important opportunity will be provided for women empowerment and gender mainstreaming into coastal management in Aqaba through enhanced institutional and technical capacity development (skills strengthening for SBE - Output 1.1.3).

Finally, the project is committed to knowledge management (KM) and has dedicated activities for KM in Project Component 3 (“hub”). This is purposely designed to manage SBE knowledge, raise awareness about the project and SBE in general, and implement risk management plans to ensure that the project’s results and impacts are communicated effectively to all SBE stakeholders. This is key as limited capacity was recognized as a key project barrier/ The use of knowledge to strengthen capacity will be critical to the project’s success. Core to this project component will be the development of a meaningful marine research “hub” that is built around a knowledge management plan for the project that ensures a robust information exchange (of relevant national policies etc) to increase awareness and engagement on the topics of MSP, wider blue economy matters and NbS in the Gulf of Aqaba. This will be ensured through the ability of the “hub” to disseminate lessons learned from the project, as well as other related initiatives, promoting best practices for advancing blue economy strategies, including MSP and NbS solution pilot exercises.

Strengthened KM (as a cross-cutting outcome) aims to ensure that the knowledge, lessons, results, and impacts generated through the project are effectively shared and communicated to relevant stakeholders. The project will build on existing capabilities and supplement and complement existing knowledge and information platforms such as communication strategies (to be designed). Importantly, it shall develop and disseminate strategies for sharing and exchanging knowledge and lessons learned, as well as communicating project results and impacts. Additionally, the project will implement and report on project-level safeguards and risk

management measures, including action plans and for gender equality and women's empowerment and stakeholder engagement. By doing so, the project aims to ensure that the project is transparent and accountable, and that risks are identified and managed effectively. The project will monitor progress through regular reporting on the implementation of risk management measures and the sharing and dissemination of knowledge and project results.

Component Details

Throughout, this project shall support ongoing work proposed within the GEF-7 Integrated Program entitled "Supporting the Operation and Effective Performance Management of the Aqaba Marine Reserve, Jordan" (USD 663,073 – Donor IUCN and GEF) which is designed to improve management effectiveness and equity and operational capabilities of the AMR. The project is structured into four separate Components that are supported by five Outcomes and ten Outputs. These are summarised below.

Component 1: Establishing a gender responsive marine spatial planning framework to support a Sustainable Blue Economy

Outcome 1.1 A gender-responsive institutional, policy, and legislative Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) framework is established that promotes implementation of a Sustainable Blue Economy for Aqaba

This includes the following: Output 1.1.1: Sea Use Management Plan is updated to embrace international Marine Spatial Planning principles and strategies. Output 1.1.2: A regulatory framework is established to support MSP delivery and SBE implementation; Output 1.1.3: SBE Coordination Mechanism (institutional arrangements) created to support strengthening of technical capacities, knowledge and skills on MSP and SBE implementation.

Output 1.1.1 shall focus on updating the 2015 Sea Use Management Plan, implementing core aspects of it that are in line with existing EU funded work streams which is being implemented by ASEZA, and incorporating rigorous social and environmental standards for avoiding, minimizing or mitigating potential adverse impacts. This output shall also pay due reference to the needs to update (as required) the 2014 Ecotourism Plan and the Land Use Master Plan, the latter of which is currently being updated to embrace international Marine Spatial Planning related principles and strategies to address sea user impacts on marine biodiversity.

Output 1.1.2 shall establish a MSP regulatory framework which will require that focuses directly on planning needs for sea users whilst in tandem, seeking to foster improved engagement between the private sector and research and educational establishments (see Components 2 and 3) to ensure relevant and applied research to commence. This may involve the production of policy guidance required to introduce stricter control measures to reduce plastic consumption, promote sustainable production and consumption practices, develop alternatives, and enhance public awareness of marine biodiversity impacts and promotion of marine environmental protection. The phased SBE framework proposed in this project will therefore be vital to help initiate such a process. In the first instance, policy shall be created that targets causes and potential remedies to addressing MPs entering the marine environment, namely:

- Promoting Sustainable Fisheries Practices: One key policy area within the SBE policy framework shall relate to the promotion of sustainable fishery practices and how to effectively discard fishing gear in a sustainable manner. Fishing activities contribute significantly to plastic pollution, with discarded fishing nets being one of the most pervasive forms of plastic waste occurring in the GoA. Incentives and alternatives shall be explored/introduced to help ensure a reduction in the amount of fishing-related waste in tandem to promoting sound environmental practices for Aqaba.
- Promoting Marine Ecotourism: Sustainable tourism activities are important to continually offer revenue streams to coastal communities in Aqaba that do not impact on marine health. If undertaken well, these can also promote marine environmental conservation and sustainable management activities over a longer period. Sustainable tourism practices amongst glass bottom boat operators, for example, coupled with education to private boat users collectively, needs to be improved upon to encourage and deliver responsible waste management and practices amongst all boat users. Eco-friendly accommodations, and educational programs on sustainable development also need to be initiated and upscaled.
- Greening Marine Transportation and Trade: Marine transportation and trade associations are key sectors that can benefit from an effective MSP policy framework that focuses on green strategies. For example, the utilization of micro-plastics as fuel additive would offer a more environmentally friendly solution to traditional fuels and potentially reduce emissions (thus contributing to Jordans NDC).

Other core topics for focus (and linking to Outcomes 2 and 3 specifically) may include the following:

- Education and awareness-raising initiatives;
- Developing standard methodologies and digital tools;
- Citizen partnership for cleaner coasts;
- Innovative research.

Output 1.1.3 lays the foundation of a robust and integrated framework by enhancing institutional capacities and fostering collaborations essential for a successful future SBE. The knowledge and skillset required for a successful SBE will be interrogated which shall be instrumental in identifying, designing, and implementing nature-based solutions (Component 2), ensuring that the marine ecosystem not only thrives but is also resilient to emerging challenges. This Output shall also focus on coordination mechanisms and updated regulatory tools as required. To this end, institutional and technical capacities, knowledge and skills shall be strengthened to help facilitate SBE with ‘industry-ready’ pool of human capital that possess the ability to provide research and educational opportunities. This will serve to reduce the ‘brain drain’ from Jordan through the support provided by SBE actions by building capacities of individuals to secure productive employment in, and within, a dynamic and growing blue economy. Coordination mechanisms shall also be designed in a participatory and gender responsive manner that may include an Inter-Ministerial SBE working group or taskforce to support the implementation of the MSP policy framework. This framework shall be supported by specific training and capacity strengthening programme (events for beneficiaries - ASEZA and beyond) to better communicate the proposed regulatory requirements outlined in the MSP regulatory framework to support its future implementation.

The Component seeks to offer beneficiary support to the Aqaba populous in general (i.e.: Female 80,990; Male 107,170 and total 188,160).

Component 2: Enhancing Resilient Ocean Ecosystems and Livelihoods through MSP

Outcome 2.1: Marine ecosystem resilience is improved through targeted NbS interventions

This includes the following: [Output 2.1.1: Selection and piloting economically and technically viable NbS interventions from the shortlist, with a focus on strengthening local capacities to enhance marine ecosystem resilience against climate change and disasters.](#) [Output 2.1.2: Gender responsive and innovative finance incentives and mechanisms are implemented to enhance sustainable and nature-positive investments to offset pressure on the marine environment](#)

This component aims to support marine ecosystem resilience by building on ongoing project initiatives, particularly the GEF7 MSP project managed by IUCN, (US\$665,000), which supports the operational management of the AMR. While the IUCN project lays the groundwork for ecosystem resilience against climate change, Component 2 will delve deeper into specific NbS related interventions such as coral restoration, mangrove planting and seagrass bed restoration. Output 2.1.1 will therefore undertake a thorough assessment to identify existing threats and vulnerabilities, encompassing climate change, human-induced hazards like oil spills, marine resource extraction, and plastic pollution. From this assessment, it will provide a foundation for targeted NbS interventions that are deemed the most suitable and sustainable for the AMR.

Output 2.1.1 will develop and implement solutions to the identified threats. A primary focus will be on coral restoration across 500ha of the marine environment, utilizing innovative technologies for coral restoration and translocation^[11]. This will not only assist in biodiversity conservation but also serve as a buffer against potential oil spills and other marine threats. It will also explore other NbS interventions, such as mangrove planting and seagrass bed restoration, which can further enhance marine resilience.

This output shall then build upon and compliment work (to be) initiated under a separate IUCN project, to collaboratively, ensuring active participation from local tourism stakeholders like hotels, diving centers, and tour operators in the design process. A strong emphasis will be placed on an inclusive, gender responsive approach, aligning with the IUCN Global Standards for NbS. Alongside the proposed GEF-7 IUCN project (set to commence in 2024), the proposed GFCR Concept Note, which started in 2024, has also highlighted key activities in this domain.

Specific details of the proposed pilot NbS project design will be finalised through the IUCN/GEF7 project, though building on the opportunity to offer blended support to ongoing/future project concepts being discussed (i.e.: GFCR project), one conceptual NbS intervention “programme” is set out in the box below:

1. **Pilot Coral reef restoration programme** – this activity will encourage partnership working with regional / local coral reef research programs and scientists to identify areas with optimal conditions that can support coral restoration measures (linking experience from the IUCN GEF7 activity 1.2.3 to produce a Collaborative Learning Strategy with 1) Abu Galum Managed Resource Protected Area; 2) Nabq Managed Resources Protected Area; and/or 3) Ras Mohammed National Park and regional organisations such as KAUST NEOM, CORDAP, the Aqaba Marine Research Station, NIOF, and other partners.
2. The NbS intervention site shall be designed to encourage innovation with regards to the use of new technologies for coral restoration and/or translocation for scalable coral restoration / translocation and implementation of additional pilot projects etc. It shall be designed to support AMRMP (2021-2026) Strategy 5.4, namely “*Investigate mechanisms for direct interventions – e.g.: coral nurseries, shading of key sites, promoting higher herbivore densities*” and Strategy 3.5: *Investigate mechanisms for direct interventions – e.g. coral nurseries, shading of key sites, promoting higher herbivore densities;*

Output 2.1.2 aims to support the future maintenance and upscaling of the NbS activities identified in Output 2.2.1 through implementing gender responsive finance incentives and mechanisms that are innovative and can catalyse sustainable and positive investments aimed at offsetting pressure on the marine environment, aimed at small businesses, especially those involving women. Output 2.1.2 is designed to operationalize this by piloting new and supporting existing finance solutions to accelerate future SBE investment opportunities within the ASEZA, learning from approaches promoted by UNDP BIOFIN and similar. Tailoring these finance solutions and mechanisms to the unique needs and opportunities within ASEZA will ensure they are both long-lasting and effective. This Output will also benefit from a national process that UNDP will also be leading on between under the Umbrella Programme to Support Development of Biodiversity Finance Plans (2024-2025). The process will assess the root causes of biodiversity loss, identify national biodiversity finance gaps, and articulate strategies on how to reduce the gaps through a suite of finance solutions aimed at reducing flow of resources that cause harm to biodiversity; generating additional resources; and enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of resource use.

Gender responsive approaches will ensure that the financial mechanisms are accessible and beneficial to all and include incentives for women and underrepresented groups who often face challenges accessing finance. Innovative approaches could involve leveraging new technologies or financial models to attract investment in sustainable marine practices. The output seeks to offer financial solutions that are both equitable and cutting-edge, serving the broader ASEZA community and contributing to marine conservation.

Component 3: Using MSP to enhance research priorities to improve resilient ocean ecosystem health, and livelihood protection

Outcome 3.1 Improved research on marine biodiversity to support improved and sustainable decision-making.

This includes the following: [Output 3.1.1: Aqaba Marine Science “Hub” programmes and research plan is established to support improved Knowledge Management and evidence-based Decision-making on MSP related topics;](#) [Output 3.1.2. Citizen partnership pilot programmes are initiated that are designed to strengthen marine ecosystem resilience related research.](#)

There is an urgent need for more scientific research and policy measures to support the understanding of how GoA related marine ecosystems can adapt to climate change and how this may impact on human health. This is needed as there still remains a research challenge to achieve a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors influencing, for example, the absorption and bioaccumulation behaviors of micro-plastics on human food chains. To support this, public (citizen) awareness, stakeholder engagement programmes remain pivotal to enable actions to take place to support a successful MSP and SBE in Aqaba. Therefore Outcome 3.1 offers the opportunity to improve knowledge on this important matter as part of the MSP Policy Framework (Component 1). This will focus on the production of a supporting public communication and outreach strategy to assist in conveying key SBE messages to a range of stakeholders. This shall build upon any research and human capacity outreach recommendations and needs identified in Component 1.

Through Output 3.1.1, efforts to learn from global best practices, where suitable shall be targeted. This will help build on the “Marine Science Hub” Park that Aqaba shall be developing to help support improved Knowledge Management to help deliver an effective SBE with a core focus on innovative solutions related research. The Marine Science Station (MSS) in tandem with the new “Science Hub” shall be encouraged to target research into areas such as finding ways of reducing plastic waste materials at the source (i.e. recycling and compostable packaging), reducing MP leakage from waste treatment facilities, or increasing the use of biodegradable or renewable-sourced plastic. This Output shall focus on new techniques, tools and methodologies to support collection and dissemination of insightful scientific data and facts on NbS and wider marine biodiversity related innovative research topics. Experience sharing on best practices will facilitate better implementation of policies and strengthen capacities at various levels. Therefore, increasing awareness among stakeholders, enforcing stricter regulations coupled with educational programs, workshops and conferences that foster knowledge exchange and partnership amongst stakeholders, can all help highlight the possibility and potential of a functioning SBE that targets marine conservation at its core. The excellent ongoing work of the AMR shall be supported here, complementing activities that are already proposed within the GEF 7 “Support to the AMR” project (yet to start at the time of writing).

Output 3.1.1 will focus on increasing the capacities and capabilities of national university and vocational training providers, support enhanced research outputs for the blue economy, and establish a blue economy centre of excellence with an increased emphasis on blue economy related science and technological research for ASEZA and Aqaba in general. Activities included to support this shall be the production of a SBE Research Plan and Strategy that seeks to link research and educational awards with future “innovation centres” (as/if they become established through other initiatives), ensuring that individuals from government, civil society and the private sector benefit (i.e.: research funding and scholarships) and also through disseminating new SBE related research to policy-makers to underpin decision-making processes. A newly proposed blue economy research and talent master plan; ideas for scholarship exchange modalities (MoUs signed with regional organisations etc) and a new SBE Masters Programme designed and established for adoption within Jordanian Universities shall be produced. This will be partially funded through co-financing, details of which will be determined during the PPG stage.

Output 3.1.2 shall initiate “citizen partnership for cleaner coasts” programs for increasing public awareness and changing sea use behavior. This is a crucial intervention that shall especially be targeted at coastal community groups and users of the marine space including fishermen. A collaborative approach is essential for such a societal shift that consists of policy reforms, development of future waste management infrastructure (amongst others), and widespread marine environmental education (all part of a new SBE framework and supported through use of a new “platform” – see Output 4.1.1 below). These initiatives may also include citizen participation in beach cleaning and tracking litter leakage using digital tools (as identified through Output 3.1.1 above).

Component 4: Knowledge Management and Monitoring and Evaluation

Outcome 4.1: Improved SBE related knowledge management in support of decision-making and raising public awareness.

This includes the following: **Output 4.1.1: Creation of a knowledge management platform to support gender responsive MSP related decision-making**

Output 4.1.1 involves the creation of an information management platform and supported by associated strengthened institutional capacities within (and outside of) ASEZA. The platform will support a Jordanian “Community of Practice” that connects and facilitates interaction between all stakeholders designed to incentivize innovation on **MSP and** SBE matters. The provision of specific information to be included within the “platform” will not only improve decision making and governance matters within ASEZA, but it shall also help to incentivize private sector investments through the gathering, analyzing and dissemination of knowledge and statistical data to better understand the Aqaba SBE potential and the opportunities it may provide. The detailed design of the platform and its implementation will involve working with relevant Ministries and stakeholders to ensure that the platform reinforces its affiliation with and support for Aqaba’s blue economy-related policies and strategies. The Inter-Ministerial Blue Economy Working Group (designed in Component 1) will thus play a key role in overseeing this component.

Activities associated with this component during implementation in years 2-4 will include the building of an interactive, dynamic, web-based and publicly accessible knowledge gateway that facilitates end-to-end access to analyses and data related to the Aqaba SBE that shall seek to support decision-making by policymakers and investments made by the private sector. **The content of the platform will be determined through detailed consultation with key stakeholders but is likely to include maps linked to the updated Sea Use Management Plan (Output 1.1.1), ASEZA blue economy satellite accounting, a dashboard of socio-economic data, GIS visibility mapping, an investment platform, and information on blue economy documentation, projects and events.**

Outcome 4.2. Adaptive management of project activities in line with UNDP and GEF M&E and SES policies

This includes the following: **Output 4.2.1: Project M&E plan implemented and results reported through Project Board, quarterly and annual reports (PIRs); Output 4.2.2: TE conducted and reports shared with UNDP and GEF IEOs.**

Output 4.2.1 focuses on monitoring and evaluating project activities to ensure their effectiveness and to identify areas for improvement. This includes the implementation of a project monitoring and evaluation plan, as well as conducting project reviews and evaluations. The purpose of this output is to track project progress and to ensure that the project is meeting its objectives and achieving its expected outcomes.

Output 4.2.2 is included to ensure adaptive management of project activities occurs in accordance with UNDP and GEF Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Social and Environmental Safeguards (SES) policies. This includes the implementation of a comprehensive M&E plan and reporting of results and SES performance through regular Project Board meetings, as well as quarterly and annual reports (PIRs). Additionally, the project will conduct a Terminal Evaluation (TE) and share the resulting reports with UNDP and GEF Independent Evaluation Offices (IEOs). The objective of this outcome is to ensure that the project is responsive to changing circumstances and that progress is being monitored and evaluated effectively. The project will also develop a knowledge management and learning plan that will be further elaborated at the PPG phase.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

With specific reference to gender, the project context is characterized by cultural norms and traditions that, combined with early exit of women from labour force to start a family, have led to a low to very low participation rate in income earning activities in the ASEZ region. The lack of suitable job opportunities for women and the discrimination against female job applicants are other important factors contributing to the comparatively high unemployment rate of women. As a result, many young women stay at home without any professional occupation despite a frequently high level of education and the desire to work. These are contextual conditions and given limited size and scope of the project it cannot be expected that the project contributes to significant improvements of the employment situation. However, the project does seek to promote women's representation in participatory and decision-making processes and empowerment of women as part of the **proposed MSP Policy Framework** (strategy) that will support a future SBE, among others by preparing "Gender Representation Guidelines for a SBE" document for all participatory and decision-making bodies and capacity building measures of the project. As such it will contribute to improved capacity which might translate into positive but limited employment impacts. The project should seek opportunities in this respect.

An additional Annex is offered to present detailed information on gender analysis, possible SBE related indicators and socio-economic data to support the information provided above.

During PPG preparation, the project will carry out a gender analysis and prepare a Gender Action Plan to ensure that gender is effectively mainstreamed into all aspects of project implementation, and gender-disaggregated targets will be incorporated into the project results framework.

Private Sector

Private sector engagement in Jordanian blue economy initiatives at the national and regional level are key aspects of all technical project components. More specifically, the project aims to facilitate increased private investment into blue economy priorities, especially sustainable business ventures that rely on important marine resources of the Gulf of Aqaba. Project success and long-term impact relies heavily on private sector engagement in the project's design and implementation, but more importantly, in long-term private sector investments into strengthening existing and capitalizing on new local, national, and regional waste management related value chain opportunities as a result of the project. Potential private sector partners will be screened through application of UNDP's Private Sector Partnership Due Diligence tool, as appropriate.

Management Arrangements

ASEZA has been identified as the Implementing Partner. UNDP, together with ASEZA, will ensure synergies are built with other potential technical assistance and/or investment projects underway in Aqaba (or planned through ASEZA). They will also foster the dialogue with other cooperation agencies addressing marine conservation, restoration and SBE issues, such as (not limited to): FAO, IUCN, EU, NGOs and local communities.

UNDP in coordination with ASEZA is accountable to the GEF for the implementation of this project. This includes overseeing project execution undertaken by the Implementing Partner (IP) to ensure that the project is being carried out in accordance with UNDP and GEF policies and procedures. UNDP is responsible for the Project Assurance function in the project governance structure and presents to the Project Board and attends Project Board meetings as a non-voting member.

UNDP Jordan Country Office (CO) has received an official request from Government to implement the project under a support to National Implementation Modality (NIM). The execution support services – whether financed from the project budget or other sources - will be set out in detail and agreed between UNDP Country Office and the Implementing Partner in a Letter of Agreement (LOA) during PPG phase. To ensure the strict independence required by the GEF and in accordance with the UNDP Internal Control Framework, these execution services will be delivered independent from the GEF-specific oversight and quality assurance services. A firewall will be maintained between the delivery of project oversight and quality assurance performed by UNDP and charged to the GEF Fee and any support to project execution performed by UNDP (as requested by and agreed to by both the Implementing Partner and GEF) and may be charged to the GEF project management costs (only if approved by GEF).

The Support to NIM was discussed during consultations with ASEZA who raised concerns regarding their ability to effectively implement the project and achieve its objectives timely and efficiently. ASEZA has stressed that support from the UNDP is still required to ensure Operational Efficiency and avoid challenges, particularly the prolonged financial and operational/procurement procedures at ASEZA, that would hinder the smooth implementation of the project. Further, ASEZA has indicated that they currently have limited capacity in-house and they are in need of UNDP support to compensate for that. ASEZA has requested UNDP the same

support for another EU-funded project to avoid any potential risk associated with the lack of the necessary technical and project management capacities.

Under support to NIM, the following arrangement will be in place to ensure a strict firewall between execution and oversight functions: The National Project Director (NPD) will be appointed by ASEZA and will be the authority implementing the project workplan and authorizing project expenses on behalf of ASEZA. The Project Management Unit (recruitment will be in coordination between UNDP and ASEZA) will be responsible for operationalizing project activities under the strategic direction of the NPD. UNDP will ensure the financial management of expenses for activities authorized by the NPD, ensuring that transactions are in line with GEF and UNDP regulations. UNDP staff providing HR, procurement and Finance execution support services to the project will ultimately report to the UNDP Operations Manager. UNDP staff providing oversight will report to UNDP nominated lead contact.

Project progress will be managed by the Project Manager, with the support of the Project Management Unit (PMU) and the Project Steering Committee (PSC). The PSC will be established to provide guidance and assist with decision-making and will comprise representatives from agencies associated with marine ecosystem conservation, restoration and SBE in the Gulf of Aqaba, NGOs, community and private sector representatives. The exact PMU and Steering Committee structures will be specified during the PPG phase. The project may also establish any necessary thematic or technical committees that would be of help in ensuring smooth and proper implementation and ensure the engagement of the relevant partners.

As per the Operational Guide of the Internal Control Framework for UNDP, necessary provisions have been identified to ensure that a proper segregation of functions between staff providing oversight of the Implementing Partner executing the project and execution on behalf of the Implementing Partner is in place at the CO level. The provisions involve, but are not limited to:

As such three lines of authority have been identified and their respective mandates and prerogatives have been clearly set up as follows:

- First authority – Project Manager: The first authority, referred to herein as the ‘project manager,’ has the primary responsibility for managing the resources being spent. This authority approves e-procurement requisitions for purchase order (PO) transactions, requests for non-PO payments for non-PO transactions, and requests for pre-payments.
- Second authority – Approving Manager: The second authority, referred to herein as the ‘approving manager,’ approves POs, non-PO payment vouchers for non-PO transactions, and prepaid vouchers.
- Third authority – Disbursing Officer: The third authority, referred to herein as the ‘disbursing officer,’ authorizes pending disbursements.

In addition, UNDP has a distinct assurance role for all UNDP projects in carrying out objective and independent project oversight and monitoring functions. Project Assurance has to be independent of the Project Manager. A UNDP program or monitoring and evaluation officer typically holds the project assurance role on behalf of UNDP. For this project, the project assurance will be conducted by UNDP Team Leader of the Environment, Climate Change and DRR pillar, Environment Programme Analyst and Environment Programme Associate.

Coordination and Cooperation with Ongoing Initiatives and Project.

Does the GEF Agency expect to play an execution role on this project?

Yes

If so, please describe that role here. Also, please add a short explanation to describe cooperation with ongoing initiatives and projects, including potential for co-location and/or sharing of expertise/staffing

Working with other major GEF or non-GEF initiatives: other major GEF or non-GEF initiatives are also addressing marine related issues. By working with these initiatives, the project will be able to share resources, collaborate on common goals, and leverage the strengths of each initiative. This will help to increase the project's impact and promote a more comprehensive approach to addressing marine spatial planning and SBE. Of key importance is the proposed coordination mechanism and complementarity between this project and the pending IUCN/GEF7 project. ASEZA shall play a key coordinating role between both projects with support from UNDP CO. The Director of the AMR shall be the primary contact point on the IUCN project as that focuses squarely on delivering operational management support direct to the AMR. ASEZA shall be embracing the findings of the IUCN project to ensure that a clear pathway is set for aspects of the GEF8 MSP project, most notably ensuring that Component 2 (NbS) and Component 3 (research priorities and outreach) are embedded into the work plans of this GEF8 project. Project Steering Committee meetings will (where possible) be aligned should programmatic schedules allow for this. If not, the connection between the two projects shall be enforced through the tight overview role offered by both ASEZA and UNDP CO, in tandem with the Director of the AMR and through targeted consultant engagement.

In light of the above, and with a limited budget, this Medium Sized Project is therefore strategically designed to complement and leverage existing investments in the development of the SBE in Aqaba. Significant co-financing from the EU project and the Global Funds for Coral Reefs (GFCR) amplifies the project's reach and impact. The project is also designed to build upon ASEZA priorities (linked to the Jordan Political Modernization Process - 2022), and the experiences and outcomes of some highly relevant ongoing projects, as well as support or complement projects that are about to commence in 2023 and 2024. Those most relevant ongoing UNDP and IUCN projects include:

- “Improving the management and operation system of the new Aqaba Marine Reserve” (USD 345,000- Donor: Norway);
- “A collaborative management of the Aqaba Marine Reserve Ecosystem” (USD 345,000- Donor: Norway);
- “Supporting the Operation and Effective Performance Management of the Aqaba Marine Reserve, Jordan” (USD 663,073 – Donor IUCN and GEF);
- “Enhance the Conservation of The Aqaba Marine Reserve by Improving Capacity for Effective Management” (USD 4,491,733- Donor: EU). This is perhaps most relevant as its overall objective is to conserve and restore Jordan’s blue natural capital along the Gulf of Aqaba, building resilience and supporting investments for sustainable blue economy development that provides benefits and livelihoods for the well-being of people. Numerous workshops have been delivered that enforce the stakeholder expectation that SBE efforts shall be increased to help support ASEZA aspirations.
- Jordan Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution (USD5,000,000 – Donor, GEF). This is a national project with planned activities in the Aqaba region, particularly with the private sector engaged in food and beverage industries, to promote the use of alternative materials for packaging in order to reduce single plastic use.
- Umbrella Programme to Support Development of Biodiversity Finance Plans, financing support from the GEF, and led by UNDP._
- The GFCR regional project “Gulf of Aqaba and Northern Red Sea Resilient Reefs Programme” will support regional context for a successful SBE delivery over the near term but offering specific inputs to advance science on reef resilience and coral reef restoration, identify and protect climate refugia, establish a regional scientific hub and regional marine conservation coordination mechanism, and implement financing mechanisms to ensure sustainable financing of MPAs that harbour critical coral reef ecosystems. This is due to commence in 2024 following PPG related approvals.

Core Indicators

Indicator 3 Area of land and ecosystems under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
500	0	0	0

Indicator 3.1 Area of degraded agricultural lands under restoration

Disaggregation Type	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)

Indicator 3.2 Area of forest and forest land under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)

Indicator 3.3 Area of natural grass and woodland under restoration

Disaggregation Type	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
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Indicator 3.4 Area of wetlands (including estuaries, mangroves) under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
500.00			

Indicator 5 Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (excluding protected areas)

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
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Indicator 5.1 Fisheries under third-party certification incorporating biodiversity considerations

Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
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Type/name of the third-party certification

Indicator 5.2 Large Marine Ecosystems with reduced pollution and hypoxia

Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
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LME at PIF	LME at CEO Endorsement	LME at MTR	LME at TE
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Indicator 5.3 Marine OECMs supported

Name of the OECMs	WDPA-ID	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
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Indicator 6 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigated

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (direct)	6898	0	0	0
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (indirect)	6898	0	0	0

Indicator 6.1 Carbon Sequestered or Emissions Avoided in the AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) sector

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (direct)				
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (indirect)				

Anticipated start year of accounting				
Duration of accounting				

Indicator 6.2 Emissions Avoided Outside AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) Sector

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (direct)	6,898			
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (indirect)	6,898			
Anticipated start year of accounting	2025			
Duration of accounting	20			

Indicator 6.3 Energy Saved (Use this sub-indicator in addition to the sub-indicator 6.2 if applicable)

Total Target Benefit	Energy (MJ) (At PIF)	Energy (MJ) (At CEO Endorsement)	Energy (MJ) (Achieved at MTR)	Energy (MJ) (Achieved at TE)
Target Energy Saved (MJ)				

Indicator 6.4 Increase in Installed Renewable Energy Capacity per Technology (Use this sub-indicator in addition to the sub-indicator 6.2 if applicable)

Technology	Capacity (MW) (Expected at PIF)	Capacity (MW) (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Capacity (MW) (Achieved at MTR)	Capacity (MW) (Achieved at TE)

Indicator 11 People benefiting from GEF-financed investments

	Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
Female	80,990			
Male	107,170			
Total	188,160	0	0	0

Explain the methodological approach and underlying logic to justify target levels for Core and Sub-Indicators (max. 250 words, approximately 1/2 page)

The proposed project will generate global environmental benefits that will be measured through four GEF Core Indicators aligned with the GEF Biodiversity Focal Areas. More refined GEF Core Indicator targets values will be defined during full project development phase. The proposed project will generate global environmental benefits (GEBs) that will be measured through four GEF Core Indicators aligned with the GEF Biodiversity Focal Areas. Specifically, the project will generate benefits under the following Core Indicators:

- Core Indicator 3: The project will support Marine protected area (including estuaries and mangroves) under restoration, sub-indicator 3.4, which is estimated at 500 ha. More refined GEF Core Indicator targets values will be defined during full project development phase.
- Core Indicator 6: The project will yield 13,796 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigated (metric tons of CO₂e). More refined GEF Core Indicator targets values will be defined during full project development phase.
- Lastly, the project will also yield co-benefits that can be monitored under Core Indicator 11: Number of people benefiting from GEF investment, with an early and initial goal to generate direct benefits to the population of the Aqaba Governorate which totals 188,160 persons participating in the project (Female 80,990; Male 107,170).

Key Risks

	Rating	Explanation of risk and mitigation measures
CONTEXT		
Climate	Moderate	The potential impacts from climate change represent a risk as they can cause an impact on coral reef structure (e.g., as a consequence of bleaching or acidification), as well as the loss of marine and coastal ecosystem services and assets (fisheries; coastal infrastructure; etc.) that may impact blue economy projects and businesses, especially if appropriate risk measures are not in place. It is acknowledged that Aqaba coral reefs exhibit remarkable resistance to climate change, however, the rate of change being witnessed remains to significant alarm and concern in the region. Mitigation Measure: The project includes activities to enhance resilience to external shocks including climate change, and portfolio investments will include nature-based solutions (NbS), climate risk assessments, safeguards and associated contingency plans. A climate risk assessment will be conducted during in PPG phase.
Environmental and Social	Moderate	The development and implementation of a Sustainable Blue Economic (SBE) development framework including nature-based solutions activities, if not done properly, could lead to the exclusion of certain stakeholder groups from decisions affecting the socioeconomic development of Aqaba and leading to environmental deterioration. This risk is especially relevant for stakeholders with limited capacity for participation and representation in the planning processes, such as women, poor people and/or fishermen and other people involved in artisanal or informal activities. Lack of meaningful and effective participation might result in some of these stakeholders not fully benefitting from the project benefits, such as the financial incentives for sustainable investments. Mitigation measures: A more detailed stakeholder analysis, including consultations with the various stakeholder groups, will be undertaken in during PPG formulation. As part of this analysis, stakeholders will be characterized in terms of their socioeconomic status and their capacity to meaningfully participate in the project and represent their interests. Vulnerable/marginalized groups will also be identified. This stakeholder analysis will inform the Stakeholder Engagement Plan, to be developed during the PPG phase. A Gender Analysis and Action Plan will also be developed during the PPG phase to identify opportunities for supporting women's participation in the project. All these plans will be determined and avoided negative impact on the environmental deterioration in the project area.
Political and Governance	Low	Low political interest to prioritize MSP and SBE. Mitigation Measure: ASEZA have a priority focus on economic development and SBE is seen

		as a contributory aspect of this. As Aqaba already has a Sea Use Management Plan produced, and coupled with efforts underway to gain World Heritage Status for the AMR, this risk is deemed low.
INNOVATION		
Institutional and Policy	Low	ASEZA have a priority focus on economic development and SBE is seen as a contributory aspect of this. UNDP Jordan has already supported the design of key plans, strategies and policies that shall align neatly with this project (such as the Sea Use Management Plan produced in 2015).
Technological	Moderate	Alignment of this programme needs to be carefully structured to ensure complementarity with other ongoing marine conservation/blue economy focused projects in Aqaba. Mitigation Measure: UNDP have close relations with all parallel projects, if not directly leading them.
Financial and Business Model	High	Current macro-economic situations may alter as a consequence of current unrest between Israel and Iran. Consequently, macro-economic risks are deemed possible within Jordan depending upon escalating events ensuing which may impact on the projects' design or implementation.
EXECUTION		
Capacity	Low	Change in leadership in relevant govern There is staff turnover in Government agencies. Mitigation Measure: The project will establish a Project Steering Committee (PSC) which will ensure that the policy agreements reached during the Inception Phase remain in place. Preliminary TOR for the PSC will be drafted during the PPG. The AMR has the highest level of political support in Jordan as HM the King is personally supporting any initiative that serves the reserve, so it is assumed that the AMR will remain a priority even if leadership of the relevant government body changes.
Fiduciary	Moderate	Government financial resources and co-financing contributions are not forthcoming in a timely manner. Mitigation Measure: The project will aim to have a participatory approach starting with the design phase. The co-financing was discussed with key stakeholders and will be re-confirmed and new co-financing during the project document development during the PPG phase.
Stakeholder	Low	Government and other non-government related engagement declines during life of project plus failure of government partners to resolve the conflicts between all public, private and civil society related stakeholders. Mitigation Measure: All relevant stakeholders will be involved from the start to create ownership and strengthen commitment to proposed changes and reforms. The PSC will also play an important role in high level coordination and political support for the project. The project will leverage existing coordinating and cross-cutting intergovernmental mechanisms to ensure participation remains strong.

Other	Low	Because few investments or financing mechanisms exist in the region focused on reef-friendly businesses or blue economy approaches, the risk exists that there may not be a sufficient pipeline of “bankable projects” or “investor ready enterprises”. Mitigation Measure: The project design includes funding for an expert to address this issue during the full proposal development phase, and UNDP will contribute its expertise and networks to develop partnerships during programme implementation to encourage investors and funders to provide financing to support the programme pipeline.
Overall Risk Rating	Moderate	As this GEF8 project is designed to build upon at least 2 other ongoing projects plus the aspiration of ASEZA to make this project a success, results in an overall risk classification to be moderate.

C. ALIGNMENT WITH GEF-8 PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES AND COUNTRY/REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Describe how the proposed interventions are aligned with GEF- 8 programming strategies and country and regional priorities, including how these country strategies and plans relate to the multilateral environmental agreements.

Confirm if any country policies that might contradict with intended outcomes of the project have been identified, and how the project will address this.

For projects aiming to generate biodiversity benefits (regardless of what the source of the resources is - i.e., BD, CC or LD), please identify which of the 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework the project contributes to and explain how. (max. 500 words, approximately 1 page)

The project is designed to support key strategies that align with the GEF 8 biodiversity focal area as follows:

- Integrated landscape/seascape management: The project will establish a Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) Development Policy Framework, which will include Marine Spatial Planning updates and coordination mechanisms. This integrated approach will ensure the sustainable use and conservation of marine resources in Aqaba.
- Domestic resource mobilization: The project will create sustainable financing mechanisms to accelerate future SBE investment opportunities. This will mobilize domestic resources for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

The Project also aligns with the two supporting GEF8 Biodiversity Focal Area objectives, namely:

1. Improve conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of natural ecosystems: The project will implement innovative nature-based solutions and promote sustainable business practices, thereby improving the conservation and sustainable use of marine ecosystems.
2. Increase mobilization of domestic resources for biodiversity: Through the creation of sustainable financing mechanisms and promotion of private sector engagement, the project will increase the mobilization of domestic resources for biodiversity.

In addition to the GEF8 Biodiversity focal area, the project supports the GEF8 Climate Change focal area and aligns with the following key strategies:

- Strong support for nature-based solutions with high mitigation potential: The project will implement nature-based solutions, such as coral reef restoration, which have high potential for carbon sequestration and thus climate change mitigation.
- Support for carbon pricing schemes: While the project does not directly mention carbon pricing schemes, its focus on sustainable business practices and innovative financing mechanisms could potentially support such schemes in the future.
- Promote innovation, technology transfer, and enabling policies for mitigation options with systemic impacts: The project will promote innovative nature-based solutions and sustainable business practices, which can contribute to climate change mitigation.
- Foster enabling conditions to mainstream mitigation concerns into sustainable development strategies: Through the establishment of the SBE Development Policy Framework and sustainable financing mechanisms, the project will foster enabling conditions for mainstreaming climate change mitigation into sustainable development strategies.

The proposed project will address SDG Goal 14, which calls for specific actions in fisheries inter alia: effectively regulate harvesting; addressing overfishing and illegal and poor fishing transparency; address fisheries subsidies; increase economic benefits from sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture; provide access for small-scale fisherfolk to resources and markets; implement UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provisions. The project will particularly address targets 14.2, 14.4, 14.6, and 14.7.

The project will generally support Jordan to make progress on several key international policies, including the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 1: Poverty, SDG 2: Food Security, SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 8: Sustainable Economic Growth, SDG 13: Climate, and SDG 14: Marine and SDG 17: Partnership. The project will also support efforts for implementation of the 2009 Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), the 2001 International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, protocols on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) and Land Based Sources of Pollution (LBS) Protocol and the Oil Spills and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea – UNCLOS (1982).

Importantly, and complementary to the above, Jordan is also signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CDB) and more recently the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. They also have made consistent efforts to meet their obligations under this agreement as expressed in national strategies, plans, regulations, and laws. Regarding Aqaba in particular, key Plans and Strategies that align to this project include the following:

- ICZM Country Report 2014: Jordan completed an ICZM Country Report in 2014 that documented progress in ASEZA's coastal zone management approach; offered a detailed assessment of status, trends, and threats in the Aqaba Special Economic Zone's coastal and marine environment; and provided a set of recommendations and lessons learned for better sustainable coastal planning and management practices in the Gulf of Aqaba. A new by-law to support the plan is expected to be endorsed by cabinet in later 2022.
- Sea Use Master Plan 2015: Jordan's Sea Use Master Plan for the Gulf of Aqaba was created in 2015 to provide an overarching policy framework to guide marine development and activity in the territorial waters of Jordan. It is based on authoritative spatial data on the marine environment and its various uses and assets, as well as of the adjacent coastal area. The Plan was developed with the full support of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA), and represents an innovative approach to marine planning in Jordan, based on the commitment of Jordan's national authorities as well as ASEZA to making marine management more efficient.
- National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP): Jordan's NBSAP 2015 – 2020 makes surprisingly little mention of coral reefs and does not include any targets related to coral reef conservation. However, a UNDP-GEF project to update the NBSAP is expected to start in early 2023 and be completed in time for the 2024 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16) of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The Ministry of Environment has expressed its intention to include coral-related targets in the new NBSAP.
- Jordan National Green Growth Plan (2017) and the Jordan Green Growth Strategic Roadmap (2022-2033). Jordan developed the Green Growth National Action Plan (2021-2025) focusing on six sectors, including the waste sector. The plan aims at achieving five green growth objectives where one of them is ensuring sustainable economic growth. 16 actions were identified in the waste sector of GGNAP. Transition towards a circular economy lies within the heart of transition towards green economy, with 2 out of the 16 actions focusing on circular economy.
- Jordan National Climate Change Policy 2022-2050

Jordan has launched its updated climate change Policy (2023-2050) that provides guidance to build a climate resilient society that aims to be part of the global movement that aspires to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. The policy and under “Adaptation Policies and Actions” chapter has set clear policy actions that call for “Improving the social, natural and economic resilience of coastal areas to climate change impacts” e.g.: Enhancing the sustainable use of marine protected areas for climate change adaptation.

D. POLICY REQUIREMENTS

Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment:

We confirm that gender dimensions relevant to the project have been addressed as per GEF Policy and are clearly articulated in the Project Description (Section B).

Yes

Stakeholder Engagement

We confirm that key stakeholders were consulted during PIF development as required per GEF policy, their relevant roles to project outcomes and plan to develop a Stakeholder Engagement Plan before CEO endorsement has been clearly articulated in the Project Description (Section B).

Yes

Were the following stakeholders consulted during project identification phase:

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities:

Civil Society Organizations: Yes

Private Sector: Yes

Provide a brief summary and list of names and dates of consultations

A field mission to Aqaba was undertaken in April 2023 and January 2024, involving key meetings with ASEZA, UNDP Jordan and key stakeholders including:

Mr. Abdullah Abu Awali, former manager, Aqaba Marine Reserve (and a local citizen)

Mr. Mohammad Tawaha, Ecologist and Director of the Royal Marine Conservation Society (NGO)

Mr. Ayman Sulieman, Senior Environmental Advisor for the Chief Commissioner (ASEZA)

Mr. Naser Zawaydeh, manager, Aqaba Marine Reserve

Mr. Belal Qteishat, Director of Nature Protection, Ministry of Environment

Mrs. Natalia Boulad IUCN

Mr. Khammash Yasin, Head of Aqaba dive Association (NGO)

Mrs. Taghreed Maytah, Director of Environment, ASEZA

Ms. Thalms Redwan, Head of tourism section, ASEZA

Mr. Khaled Abu Aisheh, Director of Planning, ASEZA

Mr. Osama Abu Taleb, head of Aqaba Chamber of commerce.

Mr. Nedal Alouran, UNDP

Mr. Mohammad Badran, Senior marine scientist, UNDP

Some preliminary consultations with key stakeholders in government were conducted as part of the workshop events undertaken as part of the PPG design for the GEF-7 IUCN project (April 2023) and the design of the World Heritage Status for AMR (January 2024), and some information relevant to the design is accessible through the ongoing EU project being managed by UNDP Jordan. These consultations have, however, not extended to communities and it is planned that these will be conducted during the PPG stage, through a comprehensive Stakeholder Analysis that will inform a Stakeholder Engagement Plan to be prepared as part of the CEO endorsement request. The community engagement will be needed at the PPG stage to inform them about the project, get any needed information and data as well as to have them ready for the implementation phase.

A more detailed stakeholder analysis, including consultations with the various stakeholder groups, will be undertaken during the PPG phase. This stakeholder analysis will include a preliminary livelihoods assessment to characterize the socioeconomic status of stakeholders, and to identify groups that might be most at risk because of their dependence on marine and coastal resources. This stakeholder analysis will inform the Stakeholder Engagement Plan, to be developed during the PPG phase. A Gender Analysis and Action Plan will also be developed during the PPG phase to identify opportunities for supporting women’s participation in the project. The project will conduct a climate risk/vulnerability assessment under PPG, applying, as a minimum, the STAP Guidance on Climate Risk Assessment. It is likely that a Process Framework will be necessary to establish the community engagement process to address potential restrictions on access to resources as a result of tightened regulations in protected areas – this will be confirmed at the start of the PPG. Finally, an Environmental and Social Management Framework – ESMF will be developed during the PPG phase. The provisional risk categorization of the project, pending further assessments and information collection that will be done during the PPG phase when a full SESP is prepared, is Moderate. See separate Annex outlining the pre-SESP (see separate document).

(Please upload to the portal documents tab any stakeholder engagement plan or assessments that have been done during the PIF development phase.)

Private Sector

Will there be private sector engagement in the project?

Yes

And if so, has its role been described and justified in the section B project description?

Yes

Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) Risks

We confirm that we have provided indicative information regarding Environmental and Social risks associated with the proposed project or program and any measures to address such risks and impacts (this information should be presented in Annex D).

Yes

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
Medium/Moderate			
Medium/Moderate			

E. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Knowledge management

We confirm that an approach to Knowledge Management and Learning has been clearly described in the Project Description (Section B)

Yes

ANNEX A: FINANCING TABLES

GEF Financing Table

Indicative Trust Fund Resources Requested by Agency(ies), Country(ies), Focal Area and the Programming of Funds

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Grant / Non-Grant	GEF Project Grant(\$)	Agency Fee(\$)	Total GEF Financing (\$)
UNDP	GET	Jordan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation: BD-1	Grant	1,776,484.00	168,766.00	1,945,250.00
Total GEF Resources (\$)						1,776,484.00	168,766.00	1,945,250.00

Project Preparation Grant (PPG)

Is Project Preparation Grant requested?

true

PPG Amount (\$)

50000

PPG Agency Fee (\$)

4750

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Grant / Non- Grant	PPG(\$)	Agency Fee(\$)	Total PPG Funding(\$)
UNDP	GET	Jordan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation: BD-1	Grant	50,000.00	4,750.00	54,750.00
Total PPG Amount (\$)						50,000.00	4,750.00	54,750.00

Please provide justification

Sources of Funds for Country Star Allocation

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Sources of Funds	Total(\$)
UNDP	GET	Jordan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	2,000,000.00
Total GEF Resources					2,000,000.00

Indicative Focal Area Elements

Programming Directions	Trust Fund	GEF Project Financing(\$)	Co-financing(\$)
BD-1-1	GET	1,776,484.00	20000000
Total Project Cost		1,776,484.00	20,000,000.00

Indicative Co-financing

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount(\$)
Donor Agency	EU	Grant	Investment mobilized	4500000
Recipient Country Government	ASEZA/ADC	Grant	Investment mobilized	500000
Donor Agency	GFCR	Grant	Investment mobilized	15000000
Total Co-financing				20,000,000.00

Describe how any "Investment Mobilized" was identified

NB: The EU funded project, \$4.5 million, is in coordination with the private sector that helps put the economy on economic growth, resilience and recovery and indicated the significance of supporting the key priority of Aqaba through Amman Aqaba Desalination and Conveyance project and the national employment scheme. GFCR envisions that the \$10 million investment will leverage additional grant and debt and equity investments at a ratio of 20:1, thus increasing the potential of the GFCR to unlock private sector finance in the region well beyond the 30M initial estimate. The vision for the project is "Coral reef ecosystems in the Gulf of Aqaba are conserved and restored, conserving biodiversity, supporting sustainable development, and increasing resilience to climate change". The proposed programme will work towards this vision through the achievement of four outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Heightened protection of functioning, resilient coral reefs in the Gulf of Aqaba
- Outcome 2: Integration of Red Sea coral reefs into the growing sustainability-oriented economy of Aqaba
- Outcome 3: Coral reefs in the region are regenerated and restored through new technologies and adaptive and science-based approaches.
- Outcome 4: Upscaling and replication of coral reef finance and business solutions

ANNEX B: ENDORSEMENTS

GEF Agency(ies) Certification

GEF Agency Type	Name	Date	Project Contact Person	Phone	Email
GEF Agency Coordinator	Nancy Bennet	4/1/2024			nancy.bennet@undp.org

Record of Endorsement of GEF Operational Focal Point (s) on Behalf of the Government(s):

Name	Position	Ministry	Date (MM/DD/YYYY)
Marwan Al-Refai	Secretary General	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation	1/31/2023
Marwan Al-Refai	Secretary General	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation	10/23/2023

ANNEX C: PROJECT LOCATION

Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place

The study area embraces the administrative boundary of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone (ASEZ) as shown in Figure E1. The impact of the project may, however have wider national level benefits that lie beyond these boundary limits, including the wider Aqaba Governorate and beyond which includes all villages beyond the city of Aqaba. This includes the policy that is already being promoted by the Government of Jordan to promote a Green Economy (Ministry of Environment (2017), “A National Green Growth Plan for Jordan, Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan”).



Figure E1: Boundary of ASEZ (Coordinates: 29°31'55"N 35°00'20"E / 29.53194°N 35.00556°E / 29.53194; 35.00556). Source: ASEZA Master Plan).

ANNEX D: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS SCREEN AND RATING

(PIF level) Attach agency safeguard screen form including rating of risk types and overall risk rating.

Title

Jordan GEF8MSP SESP April 23

ANNEX E: RIO MARKERS

Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation	Biodiversity	Land Degradation
Significant Objective 1	Significant Objective 1	Principal Objective 2	No Contribution 0

ANNEX F: TAXONOMY WORKSHEET

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Influencing models			
	Transform policy and regulatory environments		
	Strengthen institutional capacity and decision-making		
	Convene multi-stakeholder alliances		
	Demonstrate innovative approaches		
	Deploy innovative financial instruments		
Stakeholders			
	Private Sector		
		SMEs	
		Individuals/Entrepreneurs	
	Beneficiaries		
	Local Communities		
	Civil Society		
		Community Based Organization	
		Non-Governmental Organization	
		Academia	
	Type of Engagement		
		Information Dissemination	
		Partnership	
		Consultation	
		Participation	
	Communications		
		Awareness Raising	
		Education	
		Public Campaigns	
		Behaviour Change	
Capacity, Knowledge and Research			
	Capacity Development		
	Knowledge Generation and Exchange		
	Targeted Research		
	Learning		
		Theory of Change	
		Adaptive Management	
	Innovation		
	Knowledge and Learning		
		Knowledge Management	
		Innovation	
		Capacity Development	
		Learning	
	Stakeholder Engagement Plan		
Gender Equality			
	Gender Mainstreaming		
		Beneficiaries	
		Women groups	
		Sex-disaggregated indicators	
	Gender results areas		

		Access and control over natural resources	
		Participation and leadership	
		Access to benefits and services	
		Capacity development	
		Awareness raising	
Focal Areas/Theme			
	Biodiversity		
		Protected Areas and Landscapes	
			Terrestrial Protected Areas
			Coastal and Marine Protected Areas
			Productive Seascapes
			Community Based Natural Resource Management
		Mainstreaming	
			Tourism
			Fisheries
		Biomes	
			Mangroves
			Coral Reefs
			Sea Grasses
	International Waters		
		Coastal	
		Learning	
		Fisheries	
		Targeted Research	
		Private Sector	
		Marine Protected Area	
		Biomes	
			Coral Reefs
			Seagrasses
	Climate Change		
		Climate Change Adaptation	
			Sea-level rise
			Climate Resilience
			Ecosystem-based Adaptation
			Mainstreaming Adaptation
			Private Sector
			Innovation
			Livelihoods
		Climate Change Mitigation	
			Agriculture, Forestry, and other Land Use
Rio Markers			
	Sustainable Development Goals		
	Climate Change Mitigation 1		
	Climate Change Adaptation 1		
	Biodiversity 2		