

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT



Development Account Project: Building Capacities in Developing Appropriate Green Technologies for Improving the Livelihood of Rural Communities in ESCWA Region

Report submitted by Salma Sabri, January 2017

This report is the outcome of the end-of-cycle evaluation of the Development Account project "Building Capacities in Developing Appropriate Green Technologies for Improving the Livelihood of Rural Communities in ESCWA Region", which was implemented by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) from February 2014 till September 2016, with a budget of US\$ 590,936. The objective of this project was to improve the access of rural communities in the ESCWA region to appropriate pro-poor green technologies through building the capacity of member States to identify appropriate green technologies (AGTs) and to design policies for their dissemination.

This end-of project evaluation systematically and objectively assessed the project design, outputs, achievements and implementation in order to promote accountability and learning (please see Annex 1 for the Terms of Reference). The evaluator utilized a mixed methods approach, primarily relying on qualitative research methodologies including desk review, observations at the final workshop, and structured individual and collective interviews with key stakeholders of the project, including representatives of ESCWA member States Oman, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan. The evaluation was carried out from September 2016 to January 2017 and includes data from 39 interviews (36% interviewees female). Finally, the evaluation tried to assess if the project deployed a gender and human rights-based approach through implementing its various activities.

Main Findings

Relevance: The project was found to be very relevant to the global and regional agenda, the work of ESCWA, and to the needs and interests of selected member States countries. Its concept corresponded to the priorities of the selected member States, as its approach directly contributed to their renewable energy, energy access and energy efficiency strategies and programmes. The project promoted the understanding that solutions to ensuring energy supply in rural areas in the Arab Region can be best identified from a multidimensional perspective, rather than focusing on a single aspect of green technology. The project also promotes international development agendas, including the MDG and SDGs. However, difficulties were encountered with some of the national focal points, and the selection process for project participation varied between different MS.

Effectiveness: The project was found to be partially effective. All activities in the updated logframe were achieved, contributing positively to the achievement of the Expected Accomplishments and Objective. The project has indeed produced a variety of excellent studies

on different topics related to its objective, provided a number of well-received trainings and one study tour, offered expertise from a range of developed and developing countries, and made strategic use of its EGMs. However, in terms of project design, the overall Objective and Indicators of Achievement were designed to target long-term impact, and thus were found to be outside the scale of a short UN DA project. As such, not all of the IoAs were met. However, the Proxy Indicators were met, indicating concrete steps towards these achievements. The mid-course revision of the project activities was found to have improved the effectiveness of the project by adapting to the existing circumstances.

Efficiency: The project was found to be efficient in implementing the planned activities and outputs, given its budget. Despite the fact that several key staff members left the project, and that one activity was cancelled and two added, all project activities were achieved within the revised time schedule. No Monitoring and Evaluation plan/framework was developed. However, a project plan with breakdown of its activities was used, an annual progress report was annually submitted UN DESA, and a simple cumulative evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness and relevance of each capacity development activity was successfully utilized throughout the project.

Partnerships: The project was very effective in terms of capitalizing on the experience of various UN organizations, and in promoting their participation. Recognizing UNESCAP's, UNIDO's and UNECA's successful experiences in this area, the project encouraged these organisations to include experts at project events, and to share their experience with business models and disseminating green energy technologies in India, Lesotho and China at various events.

Learning and Innovation: The online sharing platform was not very effective in disseminating produced documents to all project stakeholders. Although well populated and regularly updated, only experts and project staff used the platform regularly; most project participants preferred accessing project documentation via e-mail.

Sustainability: The project was found to be partially sustainable. Despite participants' enthusiasm for the topic, from the evaluator's point of view, the project did not include enough development agents, practitioners and CSOs with market experience to ensure the continuation of the activities the project on the ground. Moreover, the continued application of the skills and knowledge gained by project participants is still very much dependent on institutional and legal frameworks of each MS.

Lessons learnt and recommendations

Lesson Learnt 1: The socioeconomic structure of the region, including the main sources of energy in each country as well as their development profiles, varies widely and requires detailed research. The project addressed this need by conducting a needs assessment in 2016 (after the project started) with the main objective of presenting an overview of the current status of rural development and policy frameworks in the sampled Arab countries, taking gender concerns into consideration.

➤ Recommendation 1: Needs Assessments

For future projects, the Project Team should conduct needs assessments at an earlier stage to present an overview of the current resource base in the main activity sectors. Understanding the differences in the region helps to identify relevant external factors and maybe even potential partners and stakeholders with whom the project can partner.

Lesson Learnt 2: As the main aim of the project was to mainstream AGTs in rural areas through building the capacities of different development actors, further engagement at the local level was required. In the current project, practitioners at the local level were under-represented. The national focal points could have helped inform the initial needs assessment so that it also mapped key and secondary actors in the green technologies sector at the local level. Additionally, given the varied approaches of the project's national focal points, greater clarity was needed in ensuring the focal points understood and implemented their responsibilities.

➤ **Recommendation 2A: Including local actors**

For future projects, the Project Team should enlarge the profile of stakeholders participating in capacity building activities to include the local actors in the energy sector, such as entrepreneurs, as well as practitioners (including representatives of the civil society), who do not necessarily work in the energy field but who understand how to promote new markets in rural communities. This can best be accomplished through a national needs assessment undertaken at the beginning of the project.

➤ **Recommendation 2B: Expectations of Focal Points**

For on-going and future projects, the Project Team should clarify its expectations regarding the national Focal Points' engagement, and establish a follow-up mechanism with them to exchange information about the project and developments within the energy sector. In particular, the Project Team should ask the focal points at the beginning of any project to map and identify key and secondary (local, sub-regional and national) stakeholders from the development, public, academic, research, civil society and private sectors, in order to help achieve recommendation 2A.

Lesson Learnt 3: The selection strategy of the project in terms of targeting participants based on pre-defined technical criteria, as well as with the goal of promoting gender equality and continuity through attendance by the same participants, was not clear to many national stakeholders.

➤ **Recommendation 3: Selection of participants**

For current and future projects, the Project Team should clarify and communicate its strategy for selecting participants to all national stakeholder involved in the selection process. It is encouraged that the Project Team continues with the same participants and experts as much as possible, and that gender equality be more actively pursued.

Lesson Learnt 4: The project design, as indicated in its logical framework, articulated an Objective, Expected Accomplishments and Indicators of Achievement that were overly ambitious in terms of the scale, timeframe and budget of the project, making it difficult to provide an

accurate assessment of the project's achievements. The development of proxy indicators helped to better gauge the likelihood of the project's achievements.

➤ **Recommendation 4:**

For future and current projects, ESCWA should ensure Results Based Management best practice is applied to project logical frameworks, ensuring the formulation of more concrete, achievable and time-bound Objectives, Expected Accomplishments and Indicators of Achievement. ESCWA may consider reviewing the logframes of current projects and developing proxy indicators as necessary.

Lesson Learnt 5: Raising the awareness of the rural communities towards AGTs can provide opportunities for youth, women and relevant local CSOs. Moreover, the diversification of topics proved to be very effective in catering to the needs of a diverse set of stakeholders. Additional topics can be added in ESCWA's future work, as AGTs require considerable local know-how on how to manage and maintain them, plus awareness of their usefulness and limitations. In particular, to increase the project's sustainability and given some stakeholders' indication that they required still further assistance in mobilising resources, subsequent trainings should more concretely address how to write RE proposals and project business plans.

➤ **Recommendation 5A: Increase local engagement and skills**

In its current work and for any next project, the Project Team should organize trainings for: government officials in the public sector, local practitioners undertaking awareness raising with the youth, the local private sector, and for representatives of CSO in rural communities.

➤ **Recommendation 5B: Provide training on how to write RE proposals**

Additional trainings topics should include sections on how to: conduct feasibility studies for new RE projects, assess project proposals from an economic, social and environmental point of view, and write technical proposals and market them.

Lessons Learnt 6: The originally conceived pilot project, or demonstration of facilities in selected member States, was cancelled due to extenuating circumstances. However, project participants expressed considerable interest in seeing practical examples as part of the learning modes offered by ESCWA; moreover, the participants of the study tour found it very beneficial.

➤ **Recommendation 6: Study tours**

It is recommended that ESCWA and the Project Team, for similar future projects, organizes study tours that combine theoretical input, case studies and visits to concrete tangible demonstration projects. Hands-on experience gives space for discussions, as a supplement to presentations.

Lesson Learnt 7: National workshops create positive conditions for the participation of women, as they allow women to better respond to other parallel commitments. In addition, national

workshops are more efficient as they involve fewer expenses, and they can also better adapt to the member State's context, more directly address the specific priorities of each member State, and involve more key players in the national energy sector.

➤ **Recommendation 7:**

For current and future projects, ESCWA and the Project Team should encourage the organizing of more national training workshops to further foster women's participation, reduce costs, reflect the local context and increase impact.

Lesson Learnt 8: As witnessed with this project's increased engagement with gender concerns, a rights-based approach and actions to promote women's empowerment are not only compatible, but actually strengthen, sustainable development work. A national-level gender analysis is required to best identify actions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment for future ESCWA work in renewable energy.

➤ **Recommendation 8A: Engendering project design**

ESCWA should consider adding a gender-related indicator or a percentage of outputs specifically related to gender in future similar project design.

➤ **Recommendation 8B: EGMs as a tool for gender empowerment**

For future projects, the Project Team and ESCWA should ensure that a discussion of how to better address gender concerns is held during projects' first EGM. Experts and consultants can help the Project Team to prepare a simple gender analysis and to integrate a gender dimension in all phases of the project (design, implementation and evaluation)

Lessons Learnt 9: The project benefited from the compilation of the evaluation forms filled out by the stakeholders after each event. By analysing the cumulative trends, the project team was able to better tailor its future activities.

➤ **Recommendation 9: Increasing the usefulness of the evaluation forms**

ESCWA should add a section in the evaluation form on the usefulness of the project activity, and on the envisaged usage of the new knowledge or skills. Questions like "How are you going to apply what you have learned in your own work?" or "Are there any obstacles you might face when applying the new knowledge or skills?" should be considered.