Executive Summary

Evaluation of Development Account Project

Strengthened National Capacities for Integrated, Sustainable and Inclusive Population and Development Policies in the Arab Region (2014-2018)

Commissioned by the United Nations Economic & Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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In response to the pressing population and development issues that prevail in the Arab region in the post Arab uprising period, and the increasing demand for support by the ESCWA Member States, the Social Development Division (SDD) of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) implemented the Development Account (DA) Project on *Strengthened National Capacities for Integrated, Sustainable and Inclusive Population and Development Policies in the Arab Region*. The project was executed by the Population and Social Development Section (PSDS) in July 2014 with a budget of USD 714,000. It was designed to be completed by December 2017, however, after being granted two extensions, the project ended in December 2018.

The DA project was subject to a rigorous assessment covering the entire project life span that made part of the evaluation of the Social Development Sub-programme. In order to provide an independent and impartial account of the DA project, the assessment was designed to be utilization-focused through the use of a mixed approach to capture the complex scope of the project (aiming at policy influence) and its politically sensitive context. A Theory of Change (ToC) was developed to map and illustrate the linkages between the project's activities and expected changes and accomplishments. The ToC was used to evaluate and challenge the project's tenets, namely: *If* a national consultation is convened, a research/policy study (mapping/ roadmap/ etc…) is commissioned and a validation workshop is held, *then* a policy/ strategy document is formulated (ECs), and subsequently capacities of National Population Councils and civil society actors are strengthened (EA1) and partnerships are reinforced (EA2).

To assess the plausibility of the project's tenets, the evaluation relied on a mixed data collection approach that consists of a desk review and semi-structured interviews with the project's key informants. The analysis was based on three assessment criteria set in the evaluation's Terms of Reference: relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. Each criterion was further elaborated to provide a comprehensive and nuanced analysis, while considering the project's responsiveness to human rights and gender considerations. In addition, a simple version of the UNIDO rating system was adopted to provide an overall judgment of the project's achievements and interventions.

The assessment was conducted for the five target Member States. However, only four in-country missions were launched in Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia. The mission to Sudan was cancelled due to the political situation that erupted in January 2019.

The assessment confirmed the relevance of the DA project whose thematic interventions were pertinent to the needs of the region. However, the project design was not satisfactory as its inception was generic in nature. In fact, neither the target country nor the thematic areas were clearly identified, and the stakeholder engagement was minimal. Upon execution, the project relevance was reinforced due to increased systematic national consultations within the five target Member States, when scoping the respective national interventions. It remains that the project was managed to achieve the expected changes and accomplishments with less focus on the synergies with other SDD outputs and interventions in the target Member States.

The effectiveness of the project is found to be less satisfactory than expected. The project design flaws, associated with a hampered PSDS professional resource, seriously influenced the project's implementation in three of the five target Member States.

The findings of the case study asserted that the tenets on which the DA project was formulated do not hold to achieve the intended Goal and Expected Accomplishments. While the implementation of the DA project's activities is necessary, they proved to be insufficient to achieving the expected accomplishment that the activities support. Thus, the project lacks internal consistency and plausibility. It was designed as a typical Technical Assistance (TA) which assumes a basic "*one-size fits all*" approach to capacity building and overlooks the complexity governing the population and development nexus, as well as the intricacy of policy-making processes in the various target states. It is further criticized for its flawed assumptions and its activity-focused rather than result-oriented approach. In fact, its intrinsic linear logic is driven mostly by generic activities and lacks both target and baselines.

While the extent of EA achievement could not be established due to lack of targets and baselines, it was possible to track the degree of achieving the Expected Changes (ECs). The latter proved to differ from country to country depending on the national context, the enabling opportunities and the engagement of the project team with the national counterparts. Latent engagement with stakeholders determined the effectiveness of the project implementation in the five target countries.

Overall, the DA project produced seven knowledge products, convened nine meetings and engaged more than 368 participants with a balanced gender and non-governmental representation, and facilitated the formulation of four policy proposals and recommendations in the five target countries.

In Sudan, the intervention scored very satisfactory for it successfully culminated in the National Population Council drafting *"Draft Zero of the National Migration Strategy"*. The process stimulated the interest of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and resulted in increased support the NPC for mapping migration policies at national and sub-national levels. Similarly, the intervention in Jordan scored very satisfactory for it (a) successfully culminated into drafting a *"policy guidelines to reform the school curricula"* to respond to youth needs by the HPC and (b) stimulated the interest of the Ministry of Education to adopt the recommendations at the national level.

The DA interventions in Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia were, however, less effective in achieving the ECs. In Lebanon, the intervention rated satisfactory, while scored unsatisfactory in both Morocco and Tunisia due to their inability to develop integrated policy for older persons or youth by the relevant authorities respectively.

Throughout, the gender and human right perspectives were intrinsically embedded in the project design and implementation. Substantively, the scope of the thematic interventions (older persons, migration and youth) are gender balanced. In fact, the project interventions at the national level suggests that (i) the project promoted inclusive multi-stakeholder and gender-balanced discourse by bringing a wide array of sector stakeholders to the series of consultations and workshops; and

(ii) the various meetings and their knowledge products were focused on one or more of the population categories (youth, older persons or migration) with a clear right-based approach, and (iii) the national workshops and meetings had an overall balanced gender participation with an average female representation of 49%, with cases exhibiting skewed gender-balance in favor of females.

The case study did not detect serious and systematic efforts to ensure the sustainability of the expected changes achieved by the project in the target Member States. The DA project could not convene a learning workshop to allow a collective exchange of tools and reflections on the learnings. In fact, no toolkit was developed, no Community of Practices (CoPs) were established, and the project closure was not scoped towards that. A couple of the DA project knowledge products have not yet been published or disseminated widely. The fact that only three reports were produced in 2017 and four in 2018, hampered dissemination efforts during the project life span, and has thus seriously challenged the project's sustainability. Besides, the DA project was partially successful in building partnership with other development partners and UN Programmes to capitalize on the momentum. The DA project pulled the trigger by building consensus on key national population issues but did not nurture conducive partnerships.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are grouped by the relevant division and section at ESCWA. They are crafted for Development Account projects of similar regional outreach and scope oriented to influence public policy. To ensure the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the DA project's results, it is recommended that:

1. **Recommendation 1 SDD** should consider the weight of similar DA projects in the Sub-Programme's PoW, and accordingly mobilize the required resources and allocate the necessary time to manage it.

2. **Recommendation 2 PPTCS** should propose a revision of the DA Guidelines that overcomes the project design challenges and considers integrating result-based planning approaches to complementary to the logical framework.

3. **Recommendation 3 PSDS (or the relevant section)** should set the baselines and identify the targets when formulating the project in order to facilitate tracking and evaluating the Expected Accomplishments.

4. **Recommendation 4 PSDS (or the relevant section)** should consider a more inclusive and systematic engagement of the project's partners, during the DA project design phase.

5. **Recommendation 5 PSDS (or the relevant section)** should develop country-specific Project Documents (or Concept Notes) which capture the full in-country strategy in order to survive potential transitions at the country level, ensure buy-in and sustainability.

6. **Recommendation 6 PSDS (or the relevant section)** should foster more engaging partnerships with relevant UN Programmes Country Offices in order to ensure sustainability of the expected changes and accomplishments beyond the project's life span.

7. **Recommendation 7 PSDS (or the relevant section)** should consider institutionalizing the project component which fosters learning and exchange in order to amplify the outcomes (such as establishing Community of Practices (CoPs) or exchange platforms).

8. **Recommendation 7 PSDS (or the relevant section)** should maintain and foster gender and human rights-based approaches in the design and implementation of DA projects.