

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT



Development Account Project: “Developing the capacities of the Arab countries for climate change adaptation by applying integrated water resource management tools”

Report submitted by Samira Smirat, October 2016

The Project

This report presents the findings of the final evaluation of the UN Development Account (UNDA) project “Developing the Capacities of the Arab Countries for Climate Change Adaptation by Applying Integrated Water Resources Management Tools”. Funded by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), and implemented by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the project was implemented over a three-year period, from 2013 to 2016, with a budget of US\$517,000.

The overall objective of the UNDA project was to develop capacities within Arab countries to undertake climate change adaptation by applying integrated water resource management tools (IWRM). The project focused on the creation of user-friendly tools and training packages designed to help governments and non-governmental organizations respond to the impacts of climate change on water resources in the areas of: agriculture, health, environment, economic development and human settlements.

The Evaluation

The evaluation was designed to provide an informed and independent assessment of this UNDA project and to assess systematically and objectively the project design and outputs, as well as the processes and mechanisms put in place for their implementation, management and monitoring. The evaluation also assessed the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project to identify lessons learned and best practices and to present recommendations for similar interventions in the future.

The evaluation was undertaken from June to September 2016, and included a comprehensive desk review, observations and fieldwork. Almost 90 documents were reviewed, including 15 case studies and 38 workshop presentations; two project workshops were observed; and 23 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, project participants and the Project Team, identified by random sampling. Lines of inquiry were derived from an original set of key evaluation questions set out in the evaluation’s Terms of Reference (ToR). Fieldwork included observations in Amman, a visit to Beirut and virtual and telephone interviews as needed.

Throughout the evaluation, findings were triangulated from more than one data source. As far as possible, the evaluation applied a gender lens throughout the evaluation process. Gender considerations were incorporated in the key evaluation questions and were taken into account

when selecting interviewees, assessing outputs, analysing findings and identifying lessons learned and proposed recommendations. Additionally, the evaluation assessed the extent to which a rights-based approach was employed by the project.

Findings

Overview: It is the clear assessment of this evaluation that the UNDA project has brought to the forefront regionally specific, cutting-edge research on climate change, and has converted this material into user-friendly knowledge products. Indeed, the signals are clear that the project's knowledge products are sufficiently developed to be useful at a country level, that remaining outputs will be realised, and that there is an appetite to use them in the future. The project's final output is currently under implementation, with a planned launching in the second quarter of 2017.

Relevance: The UNDA project was found to be relevant to the work of ESCWA, building on ESCWA's previous research and normative work to a large extent, and to the needs of the Arab region. In particular, the project built substantially on ESCWA's RICCAR initiative (2009-present) that examined the impact of climate change on freshwater resources in the Arab region and provided regionally specific data. The need for and the importance of this project was underlined by all stakeholders and participants, including representatives from participating Arab states and experts. The project was widely described as the first project to squarely tackle the impact of climate change on the Arab Region, as prior data and information had been global in nature. By all accounts – though with some cautionary remarks on the need to further tailor the materials at the sub-regional level and to ensure a wider-level of governmental participation – the knowledge products of the UNDA project (five modules packaged into an overarching manual) were found to be sufficiently relevant to the needs of the region.

Effectiveness: Overall, the UNDA project was designed such that activities and outputs clearly supported the achievement of the project's objectives, although the logical framework's articulation of its Expected Accomplishments and Indicators of Achievement warranted revision. In implementation, the UNDA project has indeed converted planned activities into outputs – marshalling expert inputs and preparing, testing and refining training modules. The project's key deliverable and related activities were not completed at the time of the evaluation, but the evaluation determined a very high likelihood that they will be completed in early 2017. In terms of the content of the UNDA project's outputs, project participants and stakeholders generally found that the modules were useful, with a large number intending to use them in their own work environments. Indeed, the evaluator identified several instances where this has already occurred. ESCWA's effective utilisation of partnerships enhanced the quality of the project's outputs. In delivery, partners were each able to bring to the fore expertise and experience in their knowledge area, despite some initial contracting delays.

Efficiency: The UNDA project was managed efficiently, and the Project Team was successful in leveraging additional funding from partners to offset the initial funding shortfall. Due to delays in contracting and in receiving substantive inputs, the UNDA project was not completed within its extended timeframe, however there is very strong indication that the final output and

activities will take place, with the second quarter of 2017 anticipated as the new completion date. Although the UNDA project utilised a schedule of work, a results architecture and a set of indicators, the evaluation identified little in the way of a results tracking or monitoring system, particularly one which could assess quality as well as implementation, or provide course-correction when needed.

Sustainability: The sustainability of this UNDA project hinges on the ways in which stakeholders and project participants make use of the knowledge products produced. According to evaluation respondents, sustainability depends on: The extent to which new regional capacity can be further attuned to the variegated needs of participating Arab States; The extent to which project participants can influence their own Ministries and organizations; The political will of Arab governments, as they try to implement the outcomes of Paris COP21 and 22; and The extent to which there is sufficient capacity within the Arab IWRM Network (AWARENET) to maintain its role as the knowledge sharing platform of the project.

As a driver for sustainability, stakeholders and participants pointed to a “demand” dynamic in the region for climate change data. The shortage of studies specifically geared to determine the impacts of climate change in the Arab region across the five sectors was frequently mentioned. By highlighting where those needs are, stakeholders suggested that the project is well-placed to raise awareness of policy makers. The evaluation witnessed strong expressions of ownership of the project across the participating countries, as reflected in contributions of information and case studies, and through suggestions put forward to build national capacity and tailored information.

Gender and a rights-based approach: Although the project did not document a specific gender policy in terms of participants and contributors, the project witnessed an acceptable level of women’s participation, with women making up 26% of workshop participants and 32% of all workshop presenters and moderators. A review of the initial set of project deliverables determined that coverage of gender or a rights-based approach was minimal. However, the evaluation witnessed substantial progress in subsequent drafts of the project’s key outputs towards a more comprehensive incorporation of gender and human rights content, and still more is expected prior to the launch of the final package.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Seven lessons and an associated nine recommendations are provided. The lessons learned and recommendations focus on: Ensuring project design is in line with a results-based management framework; Improving monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and implementing a mid-term review; Promoting greater integration of gender concerns and a rights-based approach throughout all aspects of project design and implementation; Building on and further expanding partnerships; Expanding related-project work to target a wider sector of government officials; Designing an exit strategy to ensure project sustainability; and Increasing project output relevance through targeting at the sub-regional level.