



# Evaluation Summaries

## Skills development, employment services and local economic recovery for the construction sector in South Lebanon

### Quick Facts

**Countries:** *Lebanon*

**Final Evaluation:** *April-May 2011*

**Mode of Evaluation:** *Independent*

**Technical Area:** *Employability /Skills*

**Evaluation Management:** *Regional Programming Service Unit, ILO ROAS*

**Evaluation Team:** *Wolfgang Schwegler-Rohmeis*

**Project Start:** *April 2008*

**Project End:** *December 2011*

**Project Code:** *LEB/07/03M/ITA*

**Donor:** *Italian Cooperation*

**Keywords:** *Skills development, employment generation, livelihood recovery*

speedily despite high public debt in the country. So, to date, the political situation seems to be unstable and unpredictable.

Although there are no clear labour-market data, it seems there is demand for skilled labour related to a boom in the building and construction sector, a sector dominated by a relatively unskilled non-Lebanese labour force.

In this context, the project "Skills Development, Employment Services and Local Economic Recovery for the Construction Sector in South Lebanon" was designed. The project was fully funded by the Italian Government. Seven technical vocational education and training (TVET) schools were selected as the main implementation partners, all located in the south.

The project was part of the multi-dimensional recovery strategy implemented by the ILO in Lebanon following the July 2006 hostilities. The project was built on an ILO multi-disciplinary rapid needs assessment which concluded that one key employment sector that should be addressed is the high demand for skilled construction workers.

The needs assessment also reported a focused employment strategy should be formulated and implemented as an integral part of the national development efforts. Special priority was required to help stimulate the productive capacity of youth age groups to promote and develop a workforce with employable skills; this means prioritizing

### Background & Context

#### Summary: Programme Purpose, Logic and Structure

The war-related events in 2006 caused significant damage to the Lebanese economy (estimated at US\$3.6 billion in infrastructure damage) with a negative impact on employment. On the other hand, these events and the necessity for urgent reconstruction prompted the Government to develop a new economic programme. Unfortunately, there was a setback with a prolonged political impasse through May 2008, but reconstruction and recovery progressed

efforts to reduce the skilled labour shortage in the construction sector.

### **Purpose, Scope and Clients of the Evaluation**

In March 2011, a Senior Evaluator – Mr. Wolfgang Schwegler-Rohmeis – was recruited to conduct an independent final evaluation for the project, in line with ILO policies and procedures on evaluations. Mr. Schwegler-Rohmeis was assisted by Mr Khalil Asmar, a national Monitoring and Evaluation Officer.

The evaluation ran between March 11 and March 25, 2011 and included desk review of secondary data, several meetings with key project personnel and institutional counterparts in Beirut and South Lebanon, 5 Focus Groups with the project trainees and trainers, several visits to a trainees' workshop in their place of work, as well as a stakeholders' workshop to triangulate information received and gather comments and feedback on the draft findings.

The **purpose** of this formative evaluation process was to:

1. Determine if the project achieved its stated objectives and explain why/why not.
2. Identify needs that may not have been addressed or fully met, and the reasons why.
3. Determine the implementation status of the Project; the effectiveness of the Project management, the timeliness of project activities, as well as the degree of performance monitoring.
4. Assess the Project's achievements and synergies in supporting other ILO projects in South Lebanon (i.e. the 'Local Socio-Economic Recovery and Development in War Affected Areas in South Lebanon', 'Support to Public Employment Services in Lebanon: Strengthening the Capacity of the National Employment Authority in the South').
5. Determine the impact of the project in terms of sustained improvements achieved, and the long-term benefits to target groups.

6. Provide recommendations on how to build on the achievements of the Project and ensure that the relevant stakeholders sustain it; identify results that could be emulated in other projects.
7. Document lessons learned, success stories, and good practices in order to maximize the experiences gained.

The primary clients of the evaluation are the ILO Regional Office for Arab States (Beirut), and the ILO constituents, the Project Management Team, the local and national partners and the donor. Secondary clients include other units within the ILO that may indirectly benefit from the knowledge generated by the evaluation (CRISIS, EMP, CODEV, EVAL,) and UN agencies collaborating with the ILO in the south as well as project beneficiaries.

The **scope** of the evaluation covers all activities implemented from April 2008 to April 2011. In particular the evaluation examined the impact of project activities on employment generation of the target groups. The evaluation also examined the impact of project activities in terms of the overall social and economic recovery of South Lebanon.

### **Evaluation Methodology**

The methodological approach to this evaluation had three phases:

- A desk review of secondary data provided by ILO ROAS.
- Field interviews to collect primary data and validation of the compiled information. Interviews were conducted with project beneficiaries and key informants, and field visits were performed to project sites for consultation with partners, beneficiaries and other stakeholders.
- A Stakeholder Workshop was held at the end of the field mission to disseminate the findings, triangulate information received from

stakeholders, collect comments, feedback and additional information.

## Main Findings & Conclusions

The main findings of the evaluation can be summarized as follows:

The evaluation confirmed the **relevance** of the project in selecting the construction sector. The region (South Lebanon) was adequate because it was hit very hard by the war of 2006 and there were no satisfactory training or employment opportunities offered for the target groups among the low skilled. However, project design was too ambitious, especially taking into account the short duration (2.5 years) and the unstable and unstructured political environment in Lebanon. Further, it was not deeply considered that the existing short-term training curricula were out of date and needed to be replaced (almost) completely. Further, unrealistic and imprecisely defined indicators (in terms of high success rates in graduation and placement after training) made it difficult to manage the project successfully to achieve these objectives.

Moreover, the definition of the target group was, to some extent, too specific. Originally, there had been plans to recruit only young unemployed people (aged 18-25 years). Further, a special quota (for women) and a priority for disabled people needed to be applied. This led to problems in some locations identifying participants, e.g. in some vocational education and training (VET) schools, it was not possible to include women. Additionally, it became clear that the inclusion of the disabled needed specific knowledge and background experience in the schools involved. Also, the definition of “unemployment” was unclear in post-war South Lebanon dominated by precarious employment situations, especially for the target group of low-skilled people. Consequently, the decision was made to use different selection criteria depending on the location (e.g. in some schools, no women were

involved; evaluations in other schools included some people who were already employed, but working under precarious conditions). This kind of pragmatic approach to the recruitment criteria led to the courses being filled (sometimes with people already on the job, or working in some capacity in the sector), but another problem occurred: it was now more complicated to establish how to measure correctly the employment effects of the project. If a significant number of trainees had been on the job before starting training (around 60% in the first round of training), the direct impact of the training on employment is somehow reduced or limited. Nonetheless and all in all, **the relevance of the project is satisfactory.**

There was a change of paradigm from emergency interventions (short-term training with direct employment effects) to a strategic transition interventions (based on the competency-based training CBT and KAB). This changed the system of project resources distribution from outcome-orientation (graduates, placements, jobs, self-employment, etc.) to a greater output-orientation (participatory development of curricula). This increased the relevance of the project from the regional to the national level. Consequently, the region-focused project managed to actively involve the responsible ministries (MoL/MoE) and relevant national institutions (e.g. Educational Centre for Research and Development -ECRD) in the process of project implementation.

A very positive aspect is the fact that the project CTA was permanently in the country where the project is implemented. This made it possible to react flexibly to unexpected challenges and to communicate intensively with the stakeholders and the framework supporters of the ILO (specialists and back stoppers, programme officer, administrative supporters, etc.) and the constituents at the school and political levels.

In the project document, objectives should have been measured by the key performance indicators, such as job placement or job creation. During the implementation of the project, it was necessary to

change the orientation of the project to an output orientation, i.e. the decision to adopt a flexible approach to the recruitment criteria for participants led to the inclusion of a high number of “employed” people, or the decision to use KAB instead of SIYB transformed the orientation of the project from self-employment to “changing the attitude on self-employment” among the participants. Although there was a change from an outcome orientation to an output orientation as the means of achieving the Immediate Objectives, the effectiveness of the project is evaluated as good. The project management team reacted adequately to unexpected problems, especially the fact that there were no existing curricula for the implementation of short-term training in the building and construction sector. Outstanding management quality compensated for the design deficits. The management team assessed the situation correctly and decided to change the structural orientation of the project – i.e. to develop completely new curricula – although this decision led to a situation in which a significant part of the limited project resources was now to be used for something that was not included in the original design of the project. Further, the regionally designed project showed effects beyond its agreed scope and actively involved relevant actors from the central level, creating really innovative inputs on the development of curricula for short-term training in Lebanon. **The effectiveness is assessed as very good.**

Regarding the project’s **impact**, first should be mentioned the development and introduction of CBT curricula. This is something that would be a benefit for the country at large, not only for the six occupations in the construction sector. Further, the participatory approach was appreciated very much by all interviewed people involved in the curricula development and should be used for other comparable activities. In this regard, the introduction of KAB in Lebanon (as part of the curricula) would also have long-term effects, e.g. improved entrepreneurship awareness among VET schoolteachers, trainees and the new KAB

facilitators would establish solid steps forward in the development of entrepreneurship attitudes in Lebanon.

There is no doubt that the project developed the capacity of the VET schools. The training of trainers and active participation of teachers in CBT curricula development has left its marks. The skills development (improvement of employability) is assessed as very positive among the interviewed trainees.

Causally linked to the project’s interventions, the Evaluation Team identified some proposed changes. At the central level (MoE, ECRD), the implementation of CBT curricula development caused a change of attitudes and capacities. It is planned to use the participatory approach for the development of other curricula and also involve increased expertise from outside the formally responsible institutions (e.g. employers, national and international experts, etc.). To summarise, the entire **project’s impact was good, even good enough to support the initiation of a new or an up-scaled project.**

Regarding **sustainability**, there is and will continue to be capacity development inside the VET schools involved in the project. Second, the CBT curricula are likely to be approved very soon by the MoE, MoL and NEO. Even if these curricula are not approved by the responsible intergovernmental body, the ministries will give way for VET schools to use the curricula and to ask for courses financed by the Government.

Reflecting the sustainable impact of the project on employment creation, the Evaluation Team found that there are only a small number of additional job placements as an outcome of the project. The employment effects attributable to the training are unclear because a proportion of trainees were previously employed and kept the same employment after training. Consequently, the real amount of sustainable job creation is small and not clearly identified. Consequently the **sustainability is assessed to be at a limited level.**

## Recommendations & Lessons Learned

### Main Recommendations and Follow-Ups

1. The immediate next step is the consolidation of the project's output and outcomes, through final approval of the CBT curricula by MoE and MoL.
2. Depending upon "financial options and political decisions", it is necessary to investigate other regions that may be suitable for a new project within the same sector (building and construction). It may also be useful to implement a comparable project in other sectors.
3. All planning shall be done in close partnership with relevant partners (MoL, MoE, employers, trade unions, experts, and other donors). The intermediate phase shall be used to clear up the role of the steering committee.
4. Develop a monitoring system that includes :
  - Monthly monitoring reports: These reports monitor delivery according to the project's work plan in a timely and cost-effective way.
  - Quarterly monitoring reports: These reports deliver activity data that are aggregated, summarized and translated into more general opinions on the project's progress towards its objectives (result indicators).
  - Annual or semi-annual monitoring reports: These reports describe progress towards project outputs and outcomes, update stakeholders and advance learning to improve programme design and implementation.
5. The ILO should replace the log-frame orientation by taking over the impact-based (or result-based) management tools. This would make it easier for the M&E aspects of project management (e.g. results-based management RBM tools) so that one does not get lost in the jungle of activities (e.g. if there are seven or ten schools involved in the activities, it is the sole decision of the project management team so long as the outcome – the direct impact – of the project is achieved).
6. The Lebanese Government should support a follow-on project more actively:
  - During the design phase, the Government should be actively involved.
  - The Government should give financial as well as symbolic support, e.g. by subsidizing the training courses directly from the budget of the responsible ministries. This would increase the sustainability of the project.
7. If gender equality is to be better integrated in future projects in Lebanon, it would be necessary to include active engagement of (ILO) gender experts during the design of a project and for the assessment activities. This would make it, for example, easier to adopt more flexible training schedules that would suit women, particularly housewives. Engage in active follow-up on women graduates in order to guarantee internships and job placements. If needed, provide additional incentives for women to enrol in vocational training.
8. The ILO should strengthen cooperation with other donors working in the area of TVET in Lebanon. This would not only avoid duplication of activities but would also identify fields of synergy, e.g. GIZ and the YMCA have a long history of working in the TVET sector in Lebanon.
9. It may also be considered how the experiences of the ILO at the project level – but also in general – may be used to support the development and reform of the TVET system in the country, or even of the

introduction of an active labour market policy approach to enlarge the deficient system of employment creation in Lebanon.

### **Important Lessons Learned**

1. From the very beginning, the project indicators should be measurable (if possible, by quantitative data, otherwise by clearly indicated qualitative methods and sources).
2. Obvious risks for the achievement of (Immediate) Objectives should be mentioned and clearly identified.
3. Choose realistic indicators only, (e.g. placement rates after training at the level of 90 per cent and above are almost impossible to achieve).
4. If there is a need to adapt the project's design, the objectives, etc., do it with transparency. Reflect upon and discuss such adaptations closely with the steering committee.
5. Monitoring and evaluation are important but resource-consuming inputs for the successful implementation of a project. This must be considered when the number and composition of staff for a project is developed.
6. The lack of follow-on services after vocational training (even after vocational education) is a clear sign that the TVET system in Lebanon needs reform inputs. Interventions like short-term training need to be embedded in a modern TVET system. They should not be an isolated action. Otherwise, such training could be another dead-end street for trainees.

Without special follow-up services, it would be difficult to achieve good success rates for (young) women (such activities could include internships or post-training employment placements).