



Evaluation Summary



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“Strengthening gender monitoring and evaluation in rural employment in the Middle East and North Africa Project – Final Independent Evaluation”

Quick Facts

Countries: *Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco*

Evaluation Timing: *Final*

Evaluation Mode: *Independent*

Administrative Office: *DWT/CO-Beirut*

Technical Office: *Employment Department, Youth Employment Programme, Geneva*

Evaluation Manager: *Mini Thakur/Jean François Klein*

Evaluation Consultant(s): *Amy Jersild, Hanan Kwinana*

Project Code: *GLO/14/24/IFA*

Donor(s) & Budget: *IFAD, (US\$ 1.72m)*

Keywords: *Evaluation, MENA, youth employment, M&E, RCTs, experimental designs*

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The “Strengthening gender monitoring and evaluation” project, was based on the premise that there exists a dearth in research and evaluation demonstrating what works in the field of gender and employment, as well as the need and demand for that evidence. The project aims to generate better

evidence and build evaluation capacity among stakeholders, both policy-makers and program implementers, in the MENA region with a particular focus on gender and rural employment. Programme activities expanded into formalizing its network of interested academics and researchers into what was called the Taqueem Advisory Council. It also aimed to expand its work into the area of policy advocacy in the MENA region, using the results of studies generated and funded by Taqueem on what works in youth employment.

The Project Document outlines 2 objectives and related outputs, which aim to contribute toward its overall goal: improved project management and gender mainstreaming for organizations implementing development projects in rural areas of the MENA region through rigorous M&E; and improved gender policy and investment for governments and international organizations. To achieve its overall goal and objectives, the project is organized around three distinct yet interlinked components: (i) capacity development to equip practitioners and policy makers with evidence and skills on monitoring and evaluation; (ii) the production of impact research focused on innovative rural employment interventions to learn what works; and (iii) policy influence through the dissemination of research findings and the creation of partnerships with policy makers to design evidence-based policies and programmes.

Activities implemented as part of the capacity building component included basic training courses in impact evaluation, and executive trainings on impact

evaluation with a module devoted to the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI). Activities under the second component activities included a call for proposals for impact research seeking to improve the effectiveness of employment and enterprise interventions in the Middle East and North Africa, with a specific focus on gender and youth employment outcomes. Experimental approaches to Impact Evaluation (IE) approaches are noted and prioritized, including Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental methods, as rigorous approaches that produce credible evidence. Further, the RFP indicates a preference for mixed methods, noting the value that qualitative data collection and analysis provides in supporting and interpreting the quantitative data generated by the experimental designs.¹ The few experimental studies that exist in the MENA region are noted as a rationale for prioritizing them. The formation of a Community of Practice (CoP) with technical assistance offered on project management and gender mainstreaming was also a focus in the latter half of the programme. Under the third component, activities included policy influence plans for impact evaluations for selected countries, the publishing of policy briefs, and implementation of high-level policy roundtable discussions and evidence symposiums.

The Project Document notes a large network of partners to deliver the project activities, including International Development Research Centre (IDRC), International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), and Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) for technical and financial inputs; ILO regional and country offices for coordination and support; ILO tripartite constituents; and Taqueem Advisory Council members representing academic institutions both within the MENA region and elsewhere, who are to provide strategic and technical advice to the project.

Present Situation of the Project

The project has finished its third and final year of implementation.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The purpose of the final evaluation is to indicate to the ILO, IFAD and its partners the extent to which the

project has achieved its aim and objectives and to determine the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of project outcomes.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation team collected primary data through semi-structured interviews and an online survey, and secondary data from a review of project documentation and other relevant sources. The evaluation team interviewed a total of 73 persons over a period of one month, from early July to early August. Follow-up interviews with selected interviews took place in September and October for further clarification on certain points. Interviews took place with stakeholders in Geneva, Cairo, and Amman, and via Skype with others based in Germany, Lebanon, Morocco, Switzerland, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and USA.

Data collected from interviews and the online survey were analyzed and triangulated to determine emerging trends. The project documentation was reviewed and interpreted along with the qualitative data collected and analyzed together. Findings were then articulated on the basis of this analysis.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Relevance: The programme's focus on the MENA region is of relevance given high rates of youth unemployment, rural unemployment and gender disparities. The programme's focus on Egypt and Jordan in particular is justified given their higher youth unemployment rates. The programme's efforts on building capacity on M&E and supporting evaluations is relevant in that there are many ALMP interventions implemented across the MENA region -- and particularly many duplicate ALMP pilots and programmes in Egypt -- which have not been evaluated. The activities of Taqueem fall broadly under the ILO's mandate in furthering understanding about youth employment in the region through providing evaluation and capacity building services. Taqueem's goal was to support youth and gender employment focused "implementing organizations" which included international organizations, governments and civil society. Workers and employers associations,

¹ RFP, Taqueem Programme, 2015.

traditionally ILO's tripartite partners, were targeted more indirectly from the policy angle as recipients of better evidence on what works. The programme was aligned well with ILO Egypt and Jordan country programmes. Other Taqueem partners and donors, including IFAD, IDRC, 3ie, and J-PAL, have a clear interest in Taqueem's work and view the ILO's close cooperation with government partners and the cultivation of a CoP in previous phases of Taqueem as their added value to the youth employment sector in the MENA region.

Validity of project design: The programme's 3-prong approach is logical and coherent in its vision for creating new knowledge and effecting change through M&E and evaluation, yet the large geographical scope of the programme and the management team's presence outside the region made the achievement of its overall development objective a challenge. While the Taqueem Advisory Council had a TORs drafted outlining its mandate, in practice stakeholders faced challenges with uncertainty about the Council's role in the programme and a certain conflict over whether Taqueem is an ILO programme or an initiative that is much larger than the ILO. Stakeholders playing multiple roles, and ILO programming benefiting from Taqueem's competitive process -- while internally in ILO may be viewed as productive and positive -- from an external perspective raises questions about transparency and conflict of interest in the context of a competitive RFP process.

Management: The management of the Taqueem programme required a complex set of functions related to partnership management and coordination among a wide range and types of individuals and institutions with varying interests and agendas; heavy investment of time in fund-raising; logistical and administrative tasks; and overseeing the writing and publication of reports. The programme team experienced communication and relationship management challenges among a number of stakeholder groups, including Council, donors, and other programmes/functions within ILO. The project management team was successful in raising funds to match and even exceed the amount of IFAD's contribution to Taqueem. One RFP process was successfully carried out in 2015, enabling identification of organizations with capacity building

needs in M&E and programmes that could be studied through an impact evaluation. Yet the evaluation team found issues adversely impacting the Taqueem brand, including issues on transparency, as well as coordination with other donors. The programme alignment and partnership with the Egypt and Jordan country and regional programmes was positive, yet integration of Taqueem within country programmes was not achieved to the extent where policy influence could effectively be achieved. The centralized management structure in Geneva contributed toward this challenge. A definition of both impact evaluation and employment terms is needed to better facilitate understanding within the programme and to promote greater efficiency.

Project effectiveness: Trainings and workshops were highly appreciated by CoP members, both for their quality and opportunity to network. There was evidence of learning achieved through pre- and post-tests administered at the time of the trainings. The majority of Track 2 CoP members demonstrated new learning and application of their learning in their collaboration with technical advisors who provided ongoing assistance. Further, the CoP organizations were able to effectively internalize new learning and apply it to other programming. The evaluation team suggests that Taqueem's approach to building capacity of Track 2 CoP members, involving an in-house technical advisor over the long-term, yields a more significant investment as it is rooted in an understanding of both individual and organizational capacity and involves contextualized follow-up. Whereas the impact studies built some capacity yet it was uneven given the nature of the collaboration for Track 1. Eleven impact studies were produced by the end of Phase 3. The extent to which these studies respond to an "evidence gap" in the youth/gender/rural employment field is unknown without performing an analysis of what that gap may be. Taqueem disseminated high quality and well appreciated policy briefs, impact briefs, and other products as a means to disseminate learning and influence policy. The evaluation team found some initial progress but very little evidence of policy influence and uptake having taken place during the scope of the programme. CoP capacity to influence policy themselves on youth employment as a result of their success -- a desired outcome for Taqueem -- was

not realized and should be considered a long-term objective due to local political and contextual realities. ILO country program's lack of resources and ability to absorb the extensive material generated by Taqueem, coupled with Taqueem's centralized management in Geneva and limited time in the MENA region, has led to limited success with policy influence efforts. Further, demand for evidence, the supply of evidence and its timeliness are all factors in whether uptake is possible.

Sustainability: Track 2 CoP members' new learning and capacity achieved during the program has already been sustained as the result of that learning has been embedded within their respective organizations. The programme did not achieved substantial ownership over Taqueem in the MENA region, aside from the enthusiasm from CoP members who have directly benefited from its capacity building interventions.

Recommendations

Main recommendations and follow-up

Going forward, the evaluation team recommends wide consultation among Taqueem stakeholders in undertaking the following recommendations. In achieving Taqueem's ambitious and broad agenda, a multi-stakeholder approach brings a clear added value.

- Formalize the role of the Taqueem Advisory Council, clarify its function, and further diversify its make-up.
- Base activities in the region as a means toward reaching policy objectives and ensuring greater efficiency for the programme.
- Continue moving toward a clearer research agenda for Taqueem with clarity on what questions need to be asked that better fulfills the evaluation "demand".
- Continue to move away from a methodologically-driven approach to evaluation through clear questions and an emphasis on value, merit and worth.
- Further develop programme strategy for evidence-based decision and policy making that reflects an understanding of country realities, power structures, and government interests, and

capitalizes on ILO government partner relationships.

- Develop a more credible and standardized grants management process.
- Develop a grant management or operational handbook for the programme to orient CoP organizations, CSOs, government entities and others.
- Limit the geographical scope of the programme to build a greater critical mass of capacity at the country level.
- Consider a more purposeful and planned introduction to the WEAI tool in future phases of Taqueem.
- Consider a local research entity or local research partner at the country level as a sustainability measure for Taqueem's work.