



Evaluation Summaries

Skills Development to Support Employment Generation in Iraq

Quick Facts

Countries: *Iraq*

Mid-Term/ Final Evaluation: *May 2010*

Mode of Evaluation: *Independent*

Technical Area: *Skills*

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

Evaluation Team: *Frederick Huxley (Team Leader) and Akeel al-Khakani (National Evaluator)*

Project Start: *February 2007*

Project End: *July 2010 (extended till 2011)*

Project Code: *IRQ/07/01/UNQ*

Donor: *Iraq Trust Fund*

Keywords: *Skills development, employment generation, entrepreneurship, vocational education and training*

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

This project fosters reconstruction and economic development in Iraq by supporting the establishment of a cost-effective, employment-oriented skills training system. It pursues this development objective via three mutually reinforcing components: two of them involve skills training across all governorates of Iraq (including Kurdistan), and the third supports development of a national policy for employment.

The first component is a revitalized vocational-education system using competency-based training (CBT) techniques, materials, and curricula to develop skills for emerging jobs in the hotel industry, personal services, and related sectors. The second training component focuses on skills for entrepreneurship. The third policy component engages government officials, members of employers' and workers' organizations, and university professors through the Inter-ministerial National Committee for Employment (NCE) in designing national policies for employment, vocational training and small business creation and development. The project is managed by a joint ILO-UNOPS unit based in Amman, Jordan, that is supported by ILO-ROAS in Beirut and ILO-HQ departments in Geneva. It is implemented in partnership with the Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs, Education, and Higher Education.

Currently the project seems to have achieved important outcomes with regard to the entrepreneurship component. As part of this component, "Know About Business" materials were translated in Arabic and culturally adapted to suit the Iraqi context. KAB was subsequently piloted in 22 institutions across the country. The perceived positive changes in trainee attitudes about business and the private sector as a result of KAB led the project and its partners to expand this component almost five-fold.

Relative to the vocational-training component, SDE-Iraq has addressed the more than 20-year isolation of Iraqi vocational education and training providers via several efforts: it has conducted more than three times the workshops originally planned to acquaint Iraqis with current international training methods. It has helped Iraqis in both government and the private sector to write 33 new training modules embodying CBT; and it expects to have significant outcomes when those modules are piloted during 2011.

With respect to the employment policy component, on the other hand, the project has aided the formation of a network of officials, private-sector representatives, and academics that has carried out six in-depth background studies of the labour market economy in Iraq. This network expects to present a draft national policy for employment when a new government is formed on the basis of the elections last March.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The evaluation of this project is conducted as part of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) Iraq Trust Fund (ITF) Steering Committee evaluation process. UNGD ITF has launched an evaluation process for a sample of 37 projects and programmes funded by the ITF, where at least one project from each agency has been chosen for the evaluation process.

Two evaluators, one international and the other an Iraqi national, conducted this assessment. They began with a desk review of secondary data provided by the project team and ILO-ROAS. Then they collected primary data through interviews with beneficiaries and key informants, and field visits to project sites to consult with partners, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. Finally, the evaluators and the project team organized a Stakeholders' Workshop to disseminate a first draft of evaluation findings and analyses, receive comments about the draft, and collect additional information. Overall the evaluation was sustained

by the work of all concerned, though it also was constrained by factors such as the elections in March.

The **purpose** of this formative evaluation process is:

- To determine if SDE-Iraq has achieved its stated objectives and explain why/why not;
- To determine the initial impact(s) of the project in terms of sustained improvements achieved;
- To provide recommendations on how to build on project achievements and ensure that they are sustained by the relevant stakeholders;
- To document lessons learned, success stories, and good practices in order to maximize the existing resources within the constraints of the political environment; and
- To examine the joint-programming management model (mainly the coordination between ILO and UNOPS) to achieve the common objectives of the project.

The **primary client** for the evaluation is the project's funder, UNDG-ITF. This multilateral trust fund will consider the evaluation's findings, along with those of 36 similar assessments being conducted at about the same time, in carrying out a "lessons learned" examination before the fund officially ends in July 2010.¹ Additional primary clients will include ILO-ROAS in Beirut, the PMU in Amman, national and local partners inside Iraq, and others. Secondary clients of the evaluation include ILO-HQ departments in Geneva (SKILLS, CODEV, and EVAL), as well as the ILO International Training Center in Turin.²

The **scope** of the evaluation covers SDE-Iraq from its inception, and it projects slightly beyond its scheduled end of funding in July 2010 to preview possible activities continuing in a short, "no-cost"

¹ Interview with Ms. Bana Kaloti and Mr. Muhammad Usman Akram, Monitoring and Evaluation Advisors: Office of the Resident Coordinator-Iraq, 3 March 2010.

² TOR, p. 6.

extension. The evaluation also examines four administrative levels concerned with project actions. First, the National Evaluator has focused on activities inside Iraq via visits and interviews in Baghdad with persons working in different areas of the country and through internet interviews with two officials in Kurdistan.³ And second, the International Evaluator has focused on project-related activities outside Iraq via interviews with ILO-ROAS personnel in Beirut, PMU staff and persons working with partner organizations in Amman, and interviews with two individuals connected with ILO-Headquarters in Geneva.⁴

Methodology of evaluation

The methodological approach to this evaluation had three phases:

- A desk review of secondary data provided by the ILO ROAS and the project team.
- Field interviews to collect primary data and validate information documented. Interviews included project beneficiaries and key informants, field visits to project sites for consultation with project partners and beneficiaries and other stakeholders.
- A Stakeholders' Workshop was held at the end of the process to disseminate a first draft of findings and analyses, to receive feedback comments about that draft, and to collect additional information (please see Appendices 2, 3, and 5 for further details).

Main Findings & Conclusions

³ Please see Appendix 2a. Appendix 3c also shows the interview questionnaire for the National Program Coordinator to illustrate the kinds of questions posed in Iraq.

⁴ Please see Appendix 2b. Appendix 3b also shows the questionnaire to illustrate the kinds of questions posed outside Iraq.

The overall assessment of SDE-Iraq's performance is positive, though there are some concerns to be addressed so that the project can function better.

First, the project is extremely **relevant** to the country's current situation. Iraq is now assembling the second national government chosen under free and fair (though sometimes dangerous) elections. As it emerges from years of dictatorship and occupation, Iraq's economy will be critical for stabilizing the country and helping guide its future. Employment is thus a critical, cross-cutting issue, and SDE-Iraq addresses three aspects of employment: entrepreneurship, employment policy development, and vocational educational and training.

Second, SDE-Iraq has generally been **effective** in pursuing its objectives. The clear standout achievement here is training for entrepreneurship: the evaluation shows how such training has apparently transformed trainee attitudes to a degree that the Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs, Education, and Higher Education supported nearly five-fold expansions of trainees and institutions during the second year of implementation. Training for entrepreneurship has also illustrated how positive training outcomes can be identified and documented.

With regard to vocational instruction, the project has revitalized training centers, educated Iraqis about competency-based training (CBT), and helped in developing new trainers, curricula, and materials to be piloted in 2011.

The project has also helped Iraqis learn how a national employment policy can illuminate both what skills will be needed to fill emerging job opportunities and how to train for such skills. Still another accomplishment for this component has been creating a network of policy-makers in government and policy advisors in the private sector and academia.

In addition to highlighting these positive aspects of project operation, the evaluation also indicates a key problem: some project reports have not clearly distinguished outcomes of an activity from other outputs, leading to a sometimes inaccurate picture of project accomplishment.

Third, SDE-Iraq has been **efficient** in operation. For example, improved security conditions have allowed the project to conduct half (16 of 32) of its workshops within the country, at greatly reduced cost by comparison to those held in Jordan or elsewhere. Furthermore, the symbiosis of ILO's technical expertise in employment training and policy with UNOPS expertise in procurement of goods and services and financial management have enabled the project to respond resiliently to changing circumstances inside Iraq in ways that save both time and money.

Fourth, the project has produced outcomes with **impact**, especially regarding the entrepreneurship objective. For example, the nearly five-fold expansion of trainees and training sites for such instruction from one year to the next is an impressive change in magnitude. And the illustration of techniques for identifying and measuring training outcomes should be productive for vocational training and perhaps for policy development as well. Positive statements by Iraqis interviewed inside the country, plus the active and informed participation of Iraqi partners at the Stakeholders' Workshop also suggest intensity of support for the project which the evaluation report discusses in greater detail.

Fifth and finally, the **sustainability** of project efforts seems highly likely for the entrepreneurship component due to its apparent success already from the perspective of Iraqi national counterparts questioned by the evaluation. With regard to vocational instruction also, the revitalization of training centers and providers (plus new trainers, materials, and curricula) suggest that this sector is mobilized for

change. While this component has not yet reached its intended outcomes, additional support in piloting CBT courses beyond the current project duration would be important to sustain the investments made so far, reaching a stage in which it is sustained by national resources. And while development of a national employment policy is generally a long-term process, important precursors – such as the network for developing policy, background studies, and understanding of the need for an employment policy – now seem to be in place. A “follow-up” project would therefore have much to build on in Iraq.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Main recommendations and follow-up

1. The project team and ILO-ROAS, should establish an SDE-Iraq monitoring plan that specifies what outcomes are and how they can be measured for each of the three project components – training for entrepreneurship, training for vocations, and policy development. Then they can use the plan to inform project reports, communication, and efforts for sustainability hereafter.
2. The project team should reanalyze the data on changes in attitudes and/or behavior about entrepreneurship resulting from training with the adapted KAB modules in Arabic and Kurdish.
3. It is important that support continue for the vocational training component of the project. The project team ought to analyze the data for outcomes of the vocational training that will be piloted and completed by August 2011, and incorporate that information into project reports, planning, and efforts for sustainability.
4. The project team and ILO-ROAS should follow the development of the national policy for employment in Iraq and assist that effort, as project resources permit.
5. ILO-ROAS and ILO-HQ (SKILLS) can profitably advocate for the continuation, refinement,

and replication of the ILO/UNOPS good-practice model developed for SDE-Iraq.

6. And finally, as part of closing out the current funding for SDE-Iraq, ILO-ROAS can organize a sustainability workshop for project members, partners, and supporters. Such a workshop provides the opportunity to present key project achievements in the areas of entrepreneurship, vocational training, and employment policy development, while discussing how such achievements may be reinforced. Such a workshop also provides the platform to explore funding opportunities for a Phase 2 of the project incorporating these components; and establishing a clear exit strategy for the project.

Important lessons learned

- The combination of ILO and UNOPS in SDE-Iraq unites the technical strengths of the former with the logistical capacities of the latter. This unit can provide a useful model for UN component organizations seeking to operate more efficiently, cost-effectively, and in ways relevant to international hopes and concerns.
- More attention needs to be paid to projects at the design and inception phase to ensure that M&E plans are in order. Work plans and monitoring plans are standard parts of project design and operation and should be part of the prerequisite documentation at the inception phase of any project. The baseline, indicators and monitoring plan will determine the “evaluability” of the project for the duration of its activities, therefore taking the time to make sure that the adequate indicators have been established to evaluate project achievement is vital for an accurate tracking of progress.