



Evaluation Summaries

Joint Evaluation of the UNESCO, ILO, UN-HABITAT Joint Project: Improving Quality and Relevance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Iraq

Quick Facts

Countries: *Iraq*

Final Evaluation: *August 2011*

Mode of Evaluation: *Independent External*

Technical Area: *Vocational Training*

Evaluation Management: *responsible Region or Technical Sector in HQ*

Evaluation Team: *David Comerford & Associates*

Project Code: *IRQ/07/03/UNQ*

Donor: *UNESCO, UN-Habitat, ILO*

Keywords: *Vocational training, economic reconstruction*

Background & Context

This evaluation of the joint UNESCO/ILO/UN-HABITAT project, “**Improving Quality and Relevance of TVET (IQRTVET)**” in Iraq seeks to provide a clear and honest picture of the common and shared challenges, failures and successes of these three UN agencies in the project implementation. The findings and observations are meant to reflect the overall programme results and not those of the individual UN Agencies. Nevertheless, where appropriate and validated, specific agency related findings, observations and recommendations are made throughout the report.

The critical need for such a project was evident given the context in the country after two decades of conflict. Iraq’s Technical and Vocational

Education and Training (TVET) system first began to deteriorate beginning in the 1980s with the Iran-Iraq war. The 1991 Gulf War, the ensuing sanctions imposed during the last 13 years, and the period of occupation and conflict led to heavy damage of infrastructure and a general dislocation of the system. Enrolment in TVET secondary schools recorded a decline of 56 per cent between 1990 and 2000 with an absolute decrease in enrolment from 147,942 students in 278 schools to 65,750 students in 263 schools during the same period. The situation deteriorated further as a result of the 2003 invasion and subsequent civil conflict.

In this context, the *Improving Quality and Relevance of TVET in Iraq* was initiated by the Government of Iraq with funding of \$8,850,000 from the Iraq Trust Fund managed by three UN partner agencies. These agencies include UNESCO-Iraq as lead agency, UN-HABITAT, and the ILO. This program aimed to develop a highly effective, relevant, and quality TVET system in Iraq with the TVET stakeholders capacitated to deliver flexible and demand-driven training programs that meet the needs of the industry and labor market. The project aimed at the rehabilitation and modernization of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Sector in Iraq supported by re-orienting and improving the TVET system in order for it to effectively prepare young people for wage and self-employment in the industrial, construction, and service sectors of the economy.

The 3 key project objectives included:

1. Establish a National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Policy Framework
2. Enhance Vocational and Technical skills provision in all TVET public structures.
3. Improve and modernize MOE, FTE and MOLSA TVET equipment.

This evaluation of the project aimed to:

1. Measure the results of the project, determine if it has achieved its stated objectives, and explain why it has or has not achieved those objectives.
2. Provide all three Agencies (UNESCO, ILO, UN-Habitat) with lessons learned and recommendations to improve general implementation modalities and future initiatives that these Organizations may undertake in supporting the reform of technical and vocational education in Iraq.
3. Address the implementation issues and challenges.
4. Assess the effectiveness of strategies to achieve the underlying project's results.
5. Determine the impact of the project in terms of sustained improvements achieved.
6. Examine the programming management arrangement among UNESCO, ILO and UNHABITAT.

The evaluation approach was based on the seven principles that are essential to the success of any evaluation: Efficiency, Effectiveness, Relevance, Impact and Sustainability, Partnership, and Development results.

Methodology of evaluation

The methodology used in the study constituted a blend of evaluation synthesis and Meta evaluation, inclining more towards evaluation synthesis. The study thus used information from literature reviews, field visits, survey questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews with a range of stakeholders. These stakeholder groups include UN implementing agency representatives, and Iraq partner representatives from MOLSA, MOE and MOHESR, local authorities in five governorates, capacity development trainees, TVET institutional managers and staff, and TVET trainees and graduates. The study and reporting was led by David Comerford, the Managing Director of David Comerford & Associates; and a local NGO based in Baghdad, Mercy Hands, which was contracted by UNESCO-Iraq to conduct the

data collection and preliminary observations on-site in five pre-selected Governorates.

Main Findings & Conclusions

The key findings include:

1. According to the UN representatives of UNESCO-Iraq, UN-Habitat and ILO, the IQRTVET has accomplished all of its planned outputs and activities as of July 2011. Based on a crosschecking of the Log Frame activities and outputs with the reporting to date, the Consultant can confirm that all activities were undertaken and that the outputs have been achieved to varying degrees of success and quality. The level of completion is also reflected in the budget disbursements for each of the three agencies as of the end of the 3rd Quarter 2010. Though UNESCO and UN-HABITAT had almost completed their disbursements by the time of this evaluation, ILO was still finalizing a number of activities until July 2011. No updated financial report was available for the Consultant's review.
2. The questionnaire respondents and interviewees from all categories expressed in a large majority to being satisfied or highly satisfied with the results of IQRTVET. These categories include the TVET institution trainees and graduates, the training centres' management representatives, key informants from the UN Agencies and the Iraqi partner ministries and participants in the capacity development workshops.
3. The Stakeholders generally agreed that the program was cost-effective. However, little apparent reflection was given on ways to decrease the relatively high costs associated with capacity building and equipment procurement. Both these components of the program consumed the majority share of the budget. Increased costs over the course of the program necessitated adjustments to its other components.
4. The issue of high procurement costs was an ongoing concern during the project implementation, especially in the case of UNESCO. The complexity of UNESCO's procurement rules were often cited as one of the main reasons for the increase in procurement costs as the long competitive bidding process made delivery of goods more costly in the volatile Iraqi environment. UN-HABITAT on the other hand, did not experience the same level of delays and associated cost overruns as UNESCO.

5. Though the UN agencies and Iraqi partner representatives generally agreed that the program has effective monitoring mechanisms in place, some concerns were raised by several key informants regarding the effectiveness of the actual monitoring or the lack of adherence to the monitoring mechanisms. Some of the issues raised include:

- a. Slow response from Ministries in Iraq on implementation requirements.
- b. Frequent references on the weak follow-up to activities and training and lack of evaluation of activities.
- c. Weak coordination mechanisms between the UN Agencies and the Iraqi partners.
- d. The need to contact UNESCO too often for information, directives, and clarifications.
- e. Insufficient reporting from UNESCO.
- f. Lack of regular supervision. Better supervision could have helped to overcome delays in implementation and procurement.

6. Overall, the participants in training were satisfied with their training programs though some did express that the programs did not always respond effectively to employer driven needs. In addition, the majority of TVET trainee questionnaire respondents did not have jobs six months after completing their training course.

7. Interviewees and questionnaire respondents generally agreed that the management capacities were adequate and that the project governance structure enabled the attainment and delivery of good results. In addition, most partners and UN representatives felt that there was a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

8. It is widely acknowledged by the project stakeholders that the original project timelines were unrealistic. The eighteen month original project cycle was dictated by the ITF funding guidelines. The required project extensions enabled the project to be implemented over a four year period for ILO and 44 months for UNESCO and UN-HABITAT thereby enabling a more realistic timeline for the delivery of outputs. Nevertheless, as with any large development project, some delays were experienced especially in the procurement and delivery of equipment and materials.

9. A few key elements of the project will require additional time and resources to ensure that they are fully integrated into the TVET sector in Iraq including but not limited to: i) The TVET Policy

Framework; ii) The further development and testing of the CBT; and iii) Restructuring of the VTCs. Each of the above project components have been left in a state that requires further external support and funding or they risk the loss of any progress made to date particularly in light of findings and observations on the weak capacities of the Iraq stakeholders to undertake and complete such activities.

10. As acknowledged by several key Iraqi and UN agency respondents and interviewees, capacity building costs increase due to the time and resources allocated for facilitators from outside the training location and displacing of dozens or hundreds of Iraqis to other locations either inside or outside of Iraq. They also have significant cost implications not only related to the travel and accommodation costs, but to the additional time required for travel and, therefore, time away from the participants' workplace.

11. Inadequate monitoring of implementation by UNESCO and insufficient follow up and evaluation of activities overall led to inefficiencies, delays, or poor coordination of initiatives. The turnover in project managers and others in UNESCO responsible for ensuring the implementation of IQRTVET was cited as one of the reasons for poor coordination. However, the security situation in Iraq was also a key factor in limiting access of the UN representatives to project sites to conduct monitoring visits and to ensure overall effective management of resources and people.

12. Overall, stakeholders feel that the project is addressing the needs of some of the target groups, i.e. the direct beneficiaries including senior staff at MOE, FTE/MOHESR, MoLSA and TVET planners, administrators, project managers, practitioners, trainers and facilitators at all levels, and more importantly, the learners (students, between 4000 and 5000 in number). Key policy decision-makers, trainers, employers, and Industry leaders who are actively involved in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of TVET programmes geared to the needs of TVET system also benefited from the program. The indirect beneficiaries have been the unemployed and vulnerable, especially unemployed youth, and the unskilled and females.

13. The capacity development trainees from the Ministries and TVET institutions were largely satisfied with the training programs, claiming they responded to their professional needs. For the 8%

who were not satisfied; unemployment, limited scope of the course, and poor quality of instruction were the reasons for their dissatisfaction.

14. Not all target groups' needs were equally addressed or satisfied during the implementation of IQRTVET. This is apparent particularly for employers and industry leaders and civil society groups. Indeed, no questionnaire or interviews were conducted with these target groups at the request of the UN Agencies due to the poor probability of identifying participants who have been active in the IQRTVET process and actions.

15. Though the ILO concentrated its efforts on capacity building, overall the program put insufficient focus onto TVET institutional capacity building, teacher training, curricula development, and development of linkages with the employer and industry sector. Instead, most of the overall program financial resources went into capacity development of the partner ministries and equipment and material procurement. As a joint program, greater focus and, therefore, greater allocation of resources, could have been dedicated by all the UN Agencies to capacity building and other key components of the TVET sector beginning at the design phase.

16. IQRTVET has responded to the underlying development issues by helping shape and remodel the TVET sector policy and strategic planning environment, in building the capacities of the key Ministries to deliver TVET programs and priorities, providing critical support for the reform; and upgrading TVET institutions, programs, teaching methodologies, and equipment in order to better respond to labor-market needs. One of the recurring comments in questionnaires, interviews, and focus group reports was the impact of the program on the internationalization of the TVET sector and the move towards the establishment of international standards.

17. The program laid much of the groundwork for the TVET sector policy framework and strategic planning. It set the tone for effective partnership and planning among the principle Iraqi Ministries involved in the delivery of TVET and has begun the process of linking the TVET sector development to the National Development Strategy and job creation. These are ongoing processes which will, if supported in future initiatives, enable Iraq to sustain the efforts to address its local and national needs and priorities.

18. A number of factors were cited by the stakeholders as affecting partnership development. Several Iraqi partners expressed their perception that they were poorly oriented on the mechanisms and activities of the program. This situation could understandably affect their partnership arrangements with the UN agencies. This will need to be addressed. Other factors cited as impediments to effective partnerships include: a. UN Agencies working too independently of each other; b. Competition for funds hindering a cooperative approach among the agencies; c. One IQR coordinator representing all stakeholders would have been ideal; and d. Excellent partnership between ILO and MOLSA, but need to strengthen the cooperation between ILO and the MOE.

19. IQRTVET brought together the three key ministries involved in TVET delivery and three UN agencies in a process of elaboration and implementation of a complex set of activities and initiatives in the TVET sector. The Agreement between MOE, FTE and MOLSA and UNESCO, ILO and UN-HABITAT to address and support the existing structure in the vocational education system is an example of a working agreement which was necessary to ensure the achievement of the IQRTVET outputs and outcomes. Overall, the collaboration among these stakeholders showed exemplary results in a very difficult political and security environment.

20. Due to the scope and diversity of activities which fall under the IQRTVET program, no blanket statement can be made regarding the sustainability of all activities. It is clear, however, that a number of activities may suffer on the cessation of support from the UN Agencies. These include, but are not limited to: Capacity Building for key management and staff of Ministries and TVET providers; Vocational Training Center restructuring; Implementation of the CBT; Implementation of the Framework for Program Review and Renewal and a Manual for Policies and Procedures; Adherence to the Action Plan developed by ILO to ensure that TVET policy remains in line with the NDP (2010-2014); Full application of the Apprenticeship Guide for MOE and use of the textbooks and workbooks for three disciplines; and Final revisions to, and full application of, the KAB in TVET institutions throughout Iraq.

21. Many of the focus groups commented that the government and religious leaders should be the key stakeholders at the local level. These comments may be due to a lack of understanding about the potential role of local institutions other than governments and religious leaders in the overall development of their communities via the education sector (including TVET). The lack of real employer and trade associations' involvement in the TVET sector is one illustration of this gap between reality and the ideal situation.

22. Impact at the ultimate outcome level is difficult to assess immediately upon completion of the IQRTVET. In general, the social, economic, political, environmental, and attitudinal changes attributed to a project or program are then measured 1-3 years after the cessation of activities. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that the project will contribute to a number of outcome level impacts including:

- a. TVET stakeholders able to deliver flexible and demand-driven training programs that meet the needs of industry and the labour market.
- b. Increased access to employment through enhanced vocational and technical capacities of Iraqis.
- c. Positive attitudes among Iraqis with regards to the value of technical and vocational education.
- d. Positive attitudes among Iraqis on the subject of the participation of women in the workforce and in non-traditional trades.

23. The Project Reports state that 11,000 men and 3,000 women would benefit directly from the project in addition to 40,000 beneficiaries from employment generation. According to the 2010 3rd Quarter report, the project reached 85%, 50%, and 75% respectively of each of these groups. From the reports it is not clear, however, how these figures were calculated and who constituted the various subgroups. The beneficiaries of employment generation in particular need to be identified along with any specific benefits they may have gained. IQRTVET has contributed to national priorities by addressing the issues of poverty alleviation, employment creation, gender equality, and private sector development. These key issues are core themes in the NDS, the ICI, and the MDGs. The strengthening of the TVET sector by building the capacities of the stakeholders, developing policy and strategic plans, restructuring the TVET institutions, modernising the facilities and systems, and seeking greater

employer involvement all contribute to the economic development of Iraq while alleviating poverty.

25. Stakeholders generally agreed that the TVET policy and strategic planning results of IQRTVET represent significant accomplishments for Iraq given the ongoing turmoil in the country.

Not only have senior and middle level officials received critical policy and strategic planning training, but the key ministries involved in TVET delivery in Iraq have begun to effectively cooperate and coordinate efforts and have made important steps in the development of key TVET policy documents, frameworks, and governance structures.

26. Overall, the beneficiaries have been satisfied with the training and skills development, but have not benefited from job opportunities. Trainees in TVET institutions often require additional support to enable them to continue their training programs. A general recurring complaint was that there was weak follow-up with trainees and little or no support in employment search. This situation is linked to the fact that training and skills development programs in Iraq are still not sufficiently employer driven and that TVET institutions, schools, and training centers do not conduct graduate or employer satisfaction surveys in order to improve their programs.

27. The Project Document affirms "Thus, after the completion of TVET education, there will be thousands of students who will be capable of finding employment in a variety of technical and vocational trades." This affirmation is true if those jobs exist. In the current Iraqi context many trainees and graduates will continue to struggle in their search for jobs. Many of the respondents to the evaluation questionnaires commented on their satisfaction with the training but expressed their disappointment with the lack of jobs or the absence of support from the training institutions in their job searches.

28. The project Log Frame does provide a good overall framework that served as a guide to the UN implementing agencies and the Iraqi partners. The Log Frame clearly identifies the project Development Objective, the Immediate Objectives, Outputs and Activities in an interrelated results chain and provides indicators to measure achievement of results. However, few weaknesses in the Log Frame and Project Document were identified including the absence

of a detailed Work Breakdown Structure, a detailed timelines in a GANTT format and an outputs-based budget.

Overall Conclusions note that the IQRTVET program has attempted to make significant changes to the TVET sector in Iraq with a modest budget over the course of four years in a country still struggling to overcome sectarian conflict, political upheaval, and serious economic problems. The program design included interventions in a broad range of TVET areas with numerous stakeholders involved. However, the scope of the overall program was beyond the ability of the limited budget to effectively ensure sustainable results. Nevertheless, the programme has succeeded in laying the groundwork for real progress in the TVET sector which will require continued and sustained support for several more years.

As findings from this evaluation show, there have been many small-scale successes within numerous areas of the TVET sector. Beneficiaries have expressed overall satisfaction with the training received, equipment procured, programs and curriculum developed, policies strengthened, and the facilities upgraded. Iraqi Ministries and UN agencies have nurtured strong partnerships, and women and youth have better access to training programmes.

International standards are also being introduced into programs and employer driven skills development notions are being pursued.

However, it may be time to concentrate resources into fewer components of the TVET sector; where the most difference can be made. This may take an additional sector-wide analysis and a lessons learned forum of all the key stakeholders in Iraq to determine the setting of priorities.

Recommendations propose to the key stakeholders a series of recommendations which aim to guide their actions in the TVET sector in Iraq in the coming year.

Project Design and Management

Rec. 1. That project reporting focus more on progress made toward development results as expressed in outcomes or project objectives. The

reporting should be more specific on the contributions to the attainment of outputs and outcomes based on pre-selected indicators monitored throughout the project cycle rather than on the completion of activities.

Rec. 2. That the UN implementing agencies explore the possibility of establishing project financial reporting using outputs based budgets rather than inputs based budgets and that clear financial reports should be produced on at least a bi-annual basis or in conjunction with narrative reports.

Rec. 3. That project narrative reports show the cumulative accomplishments of the project rather than only the accomplishments of the period being reported. This cumulative reporting will enable easier monitoring and tracking of the overall results over time and will enhance the ability to make decisions affecting the project following each report.

Follow up to IQRTVET

Rec. 4. The UN implementing agencies should support and facilitate the conduct of a Lessons Learned forum on IQRTVET for Iraqi stakeholders. These stakeholders include the partner ministries, TVET institutions, capacity development trainees, TVET institution trainees and graduates, and employers and local authorities. The UN Implementing agencies should move forward with a Phase II of IQRTVET based on a clear Log Frame and Performance Measurement Framework including baseline data.

Rec. 5. Future joint initiatives of the UN agencies should pool all financial resources into one Program fund managed by a lead agency while having a Program team dedicated to the project rather than to individual UN agencies.

Rec. 6. The UN agencies should ensure the active involvement of key stakeholders in the design process of a Phase II IQRTVET. Iraqi Government partners, TVET institutions, schools and training centers, employers, labour groups, and community-based organisations should be involved.

Rec. 7. Future joint projects should ensure that the program fund can be reviewed, commented

on and revisions proposed by the Program Steering Committee consisting of representatives from each of the key stakeholder groups including the UN agencies, the Iraqi Government, the TVET providers, employers' associations, labour groups, and women's organisations.

Rec. 8. A Phase II IQRTVET project should focus on fewer components and activities and set clear strategic priorities from the outset in order to channel sufficient resources in the key strategic components required to build a sustainable TVET system in Iraq.

Rec. 9. The appropriate Iraqi ministries and agencies should develop, in collaboration with the UN agencies, a clear strategy for increased involvement of women in the TVET sector in Iraq. This strategy should feed into the IQRTVET Phase II program and into other TVET sector initiatives being pursued.

Rec. 10. The UN agencies should coordinate and share more closely with other donors supporting TVET initiatives in Iraq; such as the British Council which has developed a multi-year education sector program with its implementation commencing in the near future.

Rec. 11. The Iraqi partner ministries should undertake internal evaluations of the results of the capacity development workshops on the overall performance and capacity of the respective ministries. These evaluations should assess the impact of the training on the transfer of knowledge and skills, the application of the knowledge and skills in the workplace and the overall performance of the Ministry in those sectors in which capacity development was delivered.

TVET Sector Development

Rec. 12. That the UN Agencies continue to pursue a holistic approach to the development of the TVET sector in collaboration with the key Ministries in Iraq and the Governorates. A holistic approach should take into account any national TVET policies and strategies and the need to strengthen them as well as the need to decentralize the decision-making process to the Governorates and the institutions, to upgrade

facilities across the country, to establish clear skills training standards and to improve programmes, materials and instructional methodologies.

Rec. 13. That the UN Agencies and the Iraqi partners explore the introduction of TVET models from other countries such as Canada, Germany, Australia and others which have proven track records in the development of Employer Driven Skills Development TVET sectors. An employer driven skills development TVET sector will aim to foster employment generation by strengthening Iraq's ability to respond to employer needs, to plan for development of new sectors of the economy and to improve productivity and innovation.