International Labour Office

Support to Public Employment Services in Lebanon: Strengthening the Capacity of the National Employment Authority

Quick Facts

Countries: *Lebanon*

Final Evaluation: *August 2010*

Mode of Evaluation: *Independent*

Technical Area: *Employment /Skills / Information System*

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

Evaluation Team: *Raouf F. Khouzam*

Project Start: *March 2009*

Project End: *March 2011*

Project Code: *LEB/08/01/CAN*

Donor: *CIDA*

Keywords: *Government capacity building, employment service, skills development, labour market information system*

Background and Context

Summary: Programme Purpose, Logic and Structure

The project seeks to ensure: (1) increased institutional capacity of the National Employment Office (NEO) of the Ministry of Labour (MOL) to assist the unemployed and underemployed and ensure efficient and equitable provision on employment services; (2) improved connectivity of municipalities, employers and job seekers to a general network of employment related information through the enhancement of the labour market information (LMIS) and the development of an occupational information system (OIS); and (3) enhanced self-employment opportunities through the establishment of successful small enterprises and improved skills.

The project covers every region in Lebanon. The ILO/ROAS is the executing agency. The project is implemented through a management team consisting of a Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) and a National Coordinator. The project is technically backstopped by the Senior Skills and Employability Specialist at ILO/ROAS. The Regional Programming Service Unit provides programmatic support and facilitates the implementation of the project. Strategic guidance is provided by a Project steering committee (PSC) representing key stakeholders.

The project faced many difficulties beyond its control. The unfavourable work environment forced the project management to steer the execution of its activities more towards those activities under project control focusing on capacity development activities, including staff training, preparation of training material and guidelines, mapping institutions practising relevant activities, hiring international and local consultants, and carrying out sector studies. Work on assignments that require contribution from other stakeholders was initiated but not completed. However, a number of recently emerged positive signs promise better project completion.

Purpose, Scope and Clients of the Evaluation

The **purpose** of this mid-term independent evaluation is of two fold:

1. Examine the project implementation and enhance its performance,
2. Garner stakeholder consensus around scenarios outlining the way forward for the remaining duration of the project.

The primary clients of the evaluation are the ILO/ROAS, the MOL, the NEO and CIDA. Secondary clients include social partners, and other units within the ILO that may indirectly benefit from the knowledge generated by the evaluation.

One international evaluator conducted the assessment.

The scope of the evaluation covers NEO programming activities from its initial start in to the end of July 2010. The evaluation covers the three key programming objectives. Importantly, it recommends two scenarios. One scenario proposes to continue the project with a reduced scope of activities until its original completion date end March 2011. The second scenario requests a no-cost extension until the end of the year 2011 to finalize all activities as per the original work plan, but in an extended time frame and amended sequence of activities.

Evaluation Methodology

The methodological approach to this evaluation had three phases:

- The starting point was a desk review of the main project documents to collect the relevant information available on the project. Further information was collected, verified and investigated during a nine-day field visit to Beirut between 19-27 July 2010.
- Personal meetings and conference calls were conducted during the field visit. Meetings included at least one person from each group of key stakeholders. Those included inter alia from the ILO/ROAS office, the project CTA, and the project National Coordinator. From the MOL, the Evaluator met with the Minister H.E. Minister Botros Harb, his Counsellors, the MOL Director General (DG), and the Chief of Statistics Department. A whole day was spent in the NEO meeting with the DG, Chief Department–Employment Offices, Chief Department–Statistics, and Chief Department–IT. During that day a focus group meeting was held with the PES officers who received the training including NGO trainees. The Beirut pilot office was also visited.

  The Evaluator met with the two CIDA officers in charge of project funding. A series of meetings were also held with key relevant government and non-government institutions: Ministry of Industry, Consultations and Research Institutes (CRI), Rene Mouawad Foundation (RMF), UNRWA, and the Labour Union (CGTL; "Conseil general des travailleurs Libanais").
- The Evaluator concluded the field trip with a presentation of the mission's tentative findings during a workshop attended by key stakeholders. The objective of the workshop was: i) to gather additional information from the participants, ii) to answer the evaluation questions, and iii) to make recommendations on how the project should go forward.

Main Findings and Conclusions

A number of successive events impeded project progress as scheduled: (1) NEO has been incapacitated by a limited budget and understaffing (running by 20% of its force). (2) Two CTAs took over project management within 2 years. (3) Two Ministers took office within 2 years. This contributed to the delay of the appointment of the PSC, and the signing of the "Agreement" between the MOL and ILO/ROAS. The refurbishing of the pilot employment offices and the appointment of the NEO's new staff was also considerably delayed. (4) PSC is supposed to meet semi-annually. It met only once since the project start. Consequently, many strategic decisions and directives were not made. (5) The payment of the second (and the last) instalment of the project fund was frozen subject to meeting 3 conditions to boost project performance: enhancing NEO's financial and human resources, refurbishing the pilot offices, and signing the agreement between the MOL and the ILO/ROAS.

Achievements were made in the area of capacity development. Senior and junior employment officers have received various trainings including a study tour to Canada, a field visit to Tunisia, and a workshop held in Lebanon jointly with the Jordanians concerning their system. In addition, several drafts training materials, guidelines, self-instructional material have been prepared. Project and some stakeholder staff went to Turin for an introductory course on LMIS.

Towards utilizing the resources available in Lebanon, the project mapped: relevant ILO projects to synergize their results, specialized NGOs to form referral systems and to hold job fairs, vocational and business training centres, and microfinance providers to support entrepreneurship.

An unscheduled, but directly relevant, achievement is the "Hospitality Sector Study" which is due in August 2010. It is an employment needs assessment conducted by means of an elaborated field survey.

An international consultant visited Lebanon twice to present a vision paper and work plan for LMIS.

The above results were achieved in an unfavourable work environment. This environment did not affect project efficiency because all operations are carried out according to the strict ILO regulations. Nonetheless, it adversely affected the effectiveness of the project because of: (i) the delay in introducing the new services to the unemployed and underemployed people specially the vulnerable group, and (ii) raising many of the risk factors associated with the realization of many outputs and outcomes.

A number of positive factors have emerged that will, if fully realized, boost project performance: (a) the determination and the commitment of H.E. the Minister and his top aides to the successful completion of the project since NEO is a principal contributor to the formation of the long-awaited Lebanese labour policy, (b) the high calibre and devotion of the ILO/ROAS project team as has been demonstrated over the past two years, (c) the strong project ownership of NEOs staff shown during the meetings, (d) the enthusiasm of the key stakeholders to the project success as demonstrated during the interviews the Evaluator made and the reports of the international consultant, (e) the signing of the "Agreement" between MOL and ILO/ROAS, (f) the initiation of the procedure to appoint the new NEO 41 staff members (more than 100% of the current force), (g) raising NEO's budget by 50% with another 50% being negotiated, and (h) appointing a senior advisor to support NEO's management.

The above positive indicators invite the consideration of the road ahead of the project over the coming period. Assuming that the project will receive the second instalment of the fund at a suitable time, there are two possible end dates for the project.

Scenario 1: the project ends as scheduled on March 31, 2011. Specifically there is a lack of time to properly implement the main component of Labour Market Information System (LMIS). The suggested strategy will be to cut down on the activities under LMIS and utilize the savings mainly to support entrepreneurship and capacity building components.

Scenario 2 assumes that the project succeeds in securing CIDA's approval for no-extra-cost extension to December 31, 2011.

The project sustainability is assured by qualifying a carefully selected number of the already trained staff to be trainers for their new colleagues on the Canadian model.

Recommendations and Lessons Learned

Main Recommendations and Follow-Ups specifically for the ILO component of the LADP programme

1. The MOL is recommended to refurbish the pilot employment offices without any further delay.
2. Urgently, the project should request from CIDA an extension from March 31, 2011 to December 31, 2011 at no extra cost in order to compensate for the time lost because of circumstances beyond its control.
3. PSC is better replaced by ad hoc committees to address specific urgent issues.
4. CAS status should be upgraded from a key stakeholder to a full partner in the implementation of LMIS component.

Partnership to take the form of a signed protocol to unify the OCIS between the two institutions and to secure regular flow of data and information between them.

Important Lessons Learned

- Project inception documents have to be complete from the beginning (Inception Report, Logical Framework Analysis, and Performance Measurement Framework)
- Agreement between the Executing Agency and the host country has to be signed in the early stages of project implementation.
- The project should invest in achieving mutual understanding and securing effective participation of key stakeholders