Mid-Term Review Report of the Intervention "Schools Construction, Restoration and Equipment in the Palestinian Territory – Phase 4"

Executive Summary

- ***Challenges and objectives of the review***

The present report describes the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the intervention: "School Reconstruction, Restoration and Equipment in the Palestinian Territory – Phase IV" (PZA 12 032 11), pursuant the development cooperation between the Kingdom of Belgium and the State of Palestine, through the implementation of the Belgian Development Cooperation (BTC).

The objective of the MTR review is **to assess the state of implementation of the project and to propose recommendations for the remaining time of it**.

- ***The context in which the review took place***

Before the field mission, a home based documentary phase of study was carried on by the Experts, which was concluded with a Start up Report presented on 07/02/2017 in the BTC HQ in Brussels. The analysis presented by the Team Leader on the team's behalf, was in general accepted by the BTC representatives.

The MTR review field phase started on Monday 20/02/2017 and was concluded on Friday 03/03/2017, for a total of 12 working days.

The Team Leader, based in Ramallah (oPt), met daily with the local Expert; jointly – with the exception of the working day spent in East Jerusalem, where the local Expert could not participate due to visa restriction – the two Experts conducted a wide analysis, according to the MTR Terms of Reference (ToR).

The planned field activities programme (visits, workshops, meetings, documentary analysis, debriefing …), actually very intense and time-restricted, were regularly carried on, without major limitations (apart from the one indicated above). The BTC and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) representatives ensured a good logistic support and, apart from a few days, professionally assisted the experts during their activities, providing profuse information and technical data.

The Experts travelled (back and forth in the same day) to 5 sites, namely: Beita village (South Nablus – Wednesday 22/02/2017 and Thursday 23/02/2017); Hebron and Bethlehem districts (Sunday 26/02/2017); Hebron (Monday 27/02/2017); Jerusalem (Tuesday 28/02/2017). A map showing the sites visited is in Annex 10; also, detailed table of meetings and participants is provided in Annex 4.

On Thursday 02/02/2017 a debriefing took place in the MoEHE premises, in Ramallah; the Experts presented their first findings to a very qualified group of Donor's and partner Country's representatives, and an animated discussion followed the presentation. Overall, the findings and a first group of basic recommendations were agreed on by all participants and the Experts were able to gather more information, useful as a whole, to report.

- *Reference to the methodology followed, spelling out the main data collection methods used*

The many meetings held (according to different approaches, participants, sites, goals, contribution) gave the Experts a very large range of information; a list of questions - prepared and tailored by the Experts before and/or during the field mission – were used to investigate the many aspects of the MTR, according to the ToR requirements.

The Focus Group Discussions (FGD) targeted specific groups of people referring to particular site (school, kindergarten, activity, directorate …); the Experts stimulated many active discussions between the stakeholders, gathering information, suggestion, criticisms, further requirements, etc. In particular, the FGD held in Wadi Al-Mughair (WAM) pilot School in Hebron was extremely animated, due to the very large participation of different participants (from the School itself; from Municipalities; from MoEHE; from DGBs; from Parents committee; …) and the remarkable experience constituted by the WAM pilot school.

The Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI) were held separately from the FGD, ensuring the interviewees absolute confidentiality and anonymity of any information eventually provided; actually many interviewees were very verbal with their criticisms whilst remaining quiet during the public sessions and this gave the Experts a unique opportunity to investigate many aspects relevant to the present MTR in a far deeper way.

During the visits at the construction sites and the WAM pilot school (WB) and Al-Huda school (EJ), the evaluators studied the characteristic of the buildings, the surrounding areas, environmental conditions, engineering drawings, the tender documents, different minutes of meetings, the Bills of Quantity (BOQ) of the project, sample invoices for the Contractors, and financial documents available. In addition, special attention was also drawn to the Health and Safety regulations that were followed and with respect to mitigating the environmental impact of the works. Furthermore, environmental concerns and gender aspects were analysed. Geo-referenced photographs were taken for all construction sites.

All the documents collected from many individuals (Headmasters; Designers and Work supervisors; Contractors; MoEHE, BTC; …) were studied, cross checked and used to provide the MTR with updated information. A table specifically designed by the Experts to collect a large set of data was unfortunately of relatively little use, due to the absence of required inputs (likely due to the current implementation of some projects, and/or because some information is not available at the line Ministry).

- *Main findings regarding the evaluation questions*

MTR main findings are listed below, following the OECD DAC criteria:

RELEVANCE:

The objectives of the project which include building new schools (WB), restoration works for existing schools (EJ) together with extra curricular activities are consistent with the country needs and priorities[1].

The School Programme Phase IV is in tune with problems, needs and priorities of beneficiaries and the main strategic national plans available as it factually contributes to basic human (and children's) right and a vital tool for socio-economic development.

Many improvements in the design, management and implementation of the programme have been achieved and we had a clear picture of a good overall performance.

The relevance of the School Phase IV action is also politic and social: both in Area C and in East Jerusalem (EJ) the pressure of Israeli occupation hampers a smooth schooling and this becomes even more persistent every year, affecting the educational aspects overall.

Regarding the soft component (R2), these results are far from a possibly reliable measurement and evaluation, since generally they ground on schools' completion (e.g.: extra-curricular activities) or on external activities (e.g.: training programmes) which are not started yet (only 2% of expenditure).

The Phase IV School Programme places stress on a green building approach. According to different manuals, guidelines and targets, there is a fair and agreeable level of eco-friendly approaches to the design and execution of works (this threshold is very high with regards to Wadi Al-Mughair pilot school); this has also some very positive intangible psychologically good effects on a short and long term.

This strategy has immediate and long-term benefits; MoEHE is improving the design of its schools and technical (and psychological) indoors performances; this approach is very well perceived by the targeted

[1] A table reporting those works is provided in Annex 8

schools users, but has resulted in feelings of strong frustration within the non-selected schools communities because of the related extra-costs.

These extra-costs are likely to be recuperated during the life cycle of the buildings, by saving money for their maintenance, but so far this calculation remains theoretical, as it will take some years to calculate the actual running costs economy.

EFFICIENCY:

Because of the eco-friendly approach and according to the field information, we were verbally (without objective evidence) made aware that an extra cost (+10-15%) is caused by the higher quality of the building: if these figures would be confirmed, this might be in line with similar experiences in other countries and would constitute the need for a short-, mid- and long-term investment regarding the consumption of resources and the maintenance. The whole package of information regarding the extra-costs and higher buildings performances is mostly theoretical; as such it cannot be compared with real statistics so far.

It is difficult at this stage to comment on the outcome as many schools are not completed (or even not started yet) in the WB. The EJ works are mainly restoration and targeted a lower standard.

The cash-flow has been reported to the Evaluators as very regular in many areas and less efficient in a few others (depending by different Directorates). The payment of the invoices followed a regular stream: one month is the average time gap for the Vendors to get paid, which is an acceptable time. As far as we verified, the relevant documentation is fair enough and accurately prepared.

Some activities within Schools Phase IV are delayed (namely: soft component; Bakri pilot School; Kindergartens in the WB), due to different factors.

Although the infrastructures under the Phase IV are far from completion, we noted a satisfactory level (EJ) or even a high quality level (WB) of design components and the overall good performance of the many professionals involved in the whole programme. However, regarding the soft component, still very little can be said, since the relevant activities are not yet started nor planned in detail and both their proposed outputs and expected outcomes are therefore not tangible.

The MoEHE (local partner) is fully involved in the programme implementation; many officers, at MoEHE and Directorates level, carry on a daily base their commitments, with overall sincere interest and enthusiasm regarding the R1 (hard component). However, we noted a certain level of reluctance and/or partial lack of interest from MoEHE to implement the soft component related activities

EFFECTIVENESS:

Some Indicators for the S.O. (e.g.: School enrolment; Students graduating) are very far from able acknowledged (especially in the WB), since they will need years to be verified. In fact, amongst the relevant Indicators for R1 (hard component), many are not measurable at the moment, since they build on the completion of the schools (e.g.: Number of students attending the schools; Attendance rates; water and energy consumption; monthly average temperature), however significant improvements will be likely achieved regarding water and electricity consumption.

The ESS (Equivalent Students Sufferings; a decision-making tool) and further analysis, helped in identifying the most needy situation.

Regarding R2 (soft component) many of the indicators are hardly verifiable at the moment, as they depend from the start of many activities, currently not implemented yet, mostly due to the absence of a clear plan.

The tenders for the construction of Kindergartens in the WB were unsuccessful (twice), with a significant loose of time and technical and administrative efforts from both the donor and the beneficiary part (intangible discontent is also to be kept into consideration, within the beneficiary communities).

Regarding the use of the schools after school hours, nothing can be said with regards to the expected outcomes nor the many activities planned (extra-curricular activities; pedagogic programmes; trainings; sport activities especially for girls; artistic performances; …).

Schools built under Phase IV in WB will confidently achieve their expected outputs, as their implementation is ongoing, based on factual data and is fully supported by beneficiary communities and the local partner.

We criticise some element of the architectural design, somehow picturesque (especially in the South, Hebron district): there is the need to avoid the extra-décor, making the buildings more simple and cost-effective.

IMPACT:

The project has been having a high impact on the targeted communities in the WB. We also appreciated that the workers on the works sites mostly come from the villages themselves, with direct impact on the local economy. On the other hand, the fair level of the restoration works (EJ) maximised the impact, in spite of the relatively low expenditure.

Within this frame, the unique experience of the Wadi Al-Mughair pilot school (funded under School Phase III; the monitoring of environment system is included in the present MTR) is outstanding, in both infrastructural (direct impact) and educational (indirect impact) terms; also Doma School in Al Dheir (Hebron), is really nice and well designed.

ESS (a customized software for site selection) impacted the proposed project very well; all the interviewed stakeholders displayed a very positive comment on the ESS, also at the Municipalities level (in spite a lower degree of acknowledgment) and expressed their conviction that the ESS helped in identifying the more needy situation amongst hundreds of potential schools.

The R2 Impact (soft component) seems so far very light and vague; only six workshops have been carried on and further activities are far from implementation. These workshops seemed to be scattered and not based on the real needs.

Especially in the WB, a part of the project Indicators (School enrolment; Students graduating; Students attending school and girl ratio; Attendance rates) will take years to materialise.

In the areas in the WB interested by the action, the newly built schools are likely to create a social feeling of "*few lucky and many poor students*". The technical standards of the restoration in EJ (average) and the new building in WB (high), will increase the educational gap between the two areas; actually the newly built schools in WB will enjoy of a highly targeted standards in terms of internal and external spaces, facilities, easy access and opportunity for extra-curricular activities, whereas the simple restoration in EJ will not significantly improve the standards of the targeted schools.

SUSTAINABILITY:

There is a very strong implication by all parties in maintaining the educational infrastructures in good conditions (by the MoEHE; the DGBs; the Municipalities; the families; the headmasters; the community in general) so that the sustainability of the programme outputs seems ensured.

MoEHE has a special department responsible for maintenance and the staffs at the department's level is well qualified and trained to follow up the maintenance of the new buildings; as such, part of the budget allocated to the training for M&O might be reinvested in more useful products.

A participatory approach is far from being part of the programme as implemented so far (apart from the good example in Industrial Co.Ed. School in Hebron where the Headmaster and many teachers participated in the design, contributing to find better solutions); the targeted Municipalities representatives complained about the difficulty to communicate with the DGB and the MoEHE, in terms of acknowledgement, decision making or any contribution to the design process.

The TFF strongly relies in local partner's capacity, in terms of leadership, management and timeliness in the result; our study also confirms the reliability of the local partner and the overall sustainability of the investment.

During many FGD or SSI, we noted an immediate "confidence" that other Donors will intervene where the BTC School Programme lacked actions; a potential "risk of dependency" is obviously to be considered in any action depending on an external Donor as the habit to rely in a continued culture of dependency is real and is part of the overall cooperation sector[2].

We were made aware that, limitedly to the targeted areas, overall the social cohesion will certainly be fostered through the action; this is a strong base to build on people's involvement. All persons met (from MoEHE; DGB; Municipalities; Schools) strongly believe in full sustainability of the intervention funded under Schools Phase IV.

The worksites are usually not accessible, due to safety reasons, although many experiences all over the world suggest promoting sort of "social days" within the sites, in order to enhance the sense of ownership and the technical awareness within the targeted groups of users.

Top Conclusions

1. Considering political, social and educational needs, the Evaluators believe the interventions in East Jerusalem were limited mostly due to the shortage of funds available, so there is a strong need to increase the funding here;
2. Some soft activities should start soon in EJ, as the restoration of 9 schools is achieved and there is no justification to postpone those actions after the completion of the works in WB (this will also constitute a practical test and will give the stakeholders the opportunity to adjust anything necessary before launching further activities in WB);
3. There is a real need to boost the Bakri pilot-school proposed design and construction process and finalise the re-tendering process for the kindergartens in the WB, as the management of these processes did not follow a positive implementation so far;
4. During the field mission, we ran repeated discussions regarding reducing tender processes (in some cases, they reached up to five months), with both BTC and MoEHE high representatives; in the end we all agreed that, given that three months are "a must", due to compulsory rules and regulations, something speedier should be done within the additional procurement time, to speed up the tendering process.

Top Recommendations → PSC

- There is a strong need to increase the funding of the educational system in East Jerusalem, in order to:
  - create further opportunities to encourage more people into staying instead of leaving (to Area C or even abroad); and

[2] "*In the short to medium term, there is no feasible alternative to budget support as a key source of deficit financing*". In particular for East Jerusalem "*The challenges are significant and the MoEHE has raised the attention to the issue of East Jerusalem in 2016. It calls on donors to support the purchase and rehabilitation of additional buildings, maintenance works, legal support, digitalizing education and administrative work, facilitate communication services, transportation, employment of teachers, enhance teacher qualifications etc. Particularly, the purchase and building of new schools is a major challenge, both for the PA but also for donors due to the high costs, other constraints in being able to purchase lands and the need for building permits, which are heavily restricted by the Israeli authority*" (Sourced from: JFA Annual Report 2016, pages 5)

- to rehabilitate as much of the existing schools as possible; the relevant expenditures being much cheaper than building new schools in the WB, a large impact (both social and educational) is likely to be expected.

- We recommend that the East Jerusalem soft component related activities should start as soon as possible, since there is no need to wait for the WB schools' completion to do so.

Top Recommendations→Intervention Team:

- Foster a participatory approach during the design stage and promote a couple of social days per school during the works implementation (e.g.: students might be requested to propose a colour palette for classrooms, facilities rooms and corridors) ;

- We suggest that part of the budget allocated for the soft component could enhance M&O activities at targeted Municipalities and school level, through direct training sessions provided to the final users (headmasters; parents; teachers; janitors; students etc.) thus improving their own capacity to intervene in case of need, and allowing for buildings to be based on local capacities for their maintenance.