End-Term Review

Support to the Development
of Human Resources of Beneficiary
Organisations (SDHR), Bridging Phase
Uganda

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Executive Summary

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1 Presentation of the evaluation

The Support to the Development of Human Resources of Beneficiary Organisations (SDHR) Bridging Phase intervention is implemented from January 2021 until July 2023. The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) and the Belgian development agency (Enabel) are jointly responsible for the implementation.

As an extension from the first SDHR phase (2014-2020), this second phase continued with the same strategy of supporting the organisational development of selected beneficiary organisations (BOs), with a budget of € 2 million. The list of 50 Beneficiary Organisations (BO) from the first phase was reviewed and 17 selected for inclusion in this bridging phase, together with three new Government Departments, making a total of 20 BOs. Because of delays in the first half of 2022, beyond the control of the project, the intervention was extended until 27 July 2023. The results to be achieved were:

1. BOs are selected and strengthened to define objectives to improve their organisations

2. BOs are strengthened to develop their HRD Plan linked to organisational performance goals

3. Activities selected from the HRD Plan effectively implemented. A number of trainings is financed and monitored

The project incorporated most of the recommendations from the ETR of the first phase, the main ones being:

- Involve the Ministry of Public Service (MoPS) and Human Resource Departments of other relevant ministries in the implementation of the project
- Make ICT a larger component of the programme, create more options for blended learning
- Pay attention to the lack of equipment among BOs
- Make the organisational improvement needs of BOs leading in programme development, also in the dialogue with national agencies

The SDHR intervention was in line with the Government of Uganda's (GoU) focus areas as indicated in the National Development Plan III, which states that the goal of the Human Capital Development (HCM) Programme is to improve labour productivity for increased competitiveness and better quality of life, as well as with Vision 2040, which states that over the vision period, Government expenditure will increase beyond the current levels of about 24 percent of GDP and the areas of investment will include infrastructure and human capital development. The project supports the Uganda Public Sector Capacity Building Plan (UPSCBP) coordinated by the Ministry of Public Service (MoPS).

From 28 November until 9 December 2022 an End-Term Review was carried out by Jos Brand (Team Leader, Institutional Development Adviser) and Rachel Dumba (Human Resource Management expert) with the active assistance of all project staff. The review team was able to carry out 22 interviews, most of them in person. Two groups of National Teachers Colleges (NTC) and Vocational Training Institutes (VTI) has to be interviewed online because of the recent Ebola outbreak. A limitation of the ETR was that the actual training implementation period was rather short, leading to less information on training-learning-performance linkages.

2 Results and conclusions

2.1 Performance criteria (all rated A)

Relevance

SDHR is relevant for both GoU because it contributes to local human capacity development with a special emphasis on digitalisation and ICT literacy, both are key areas of attention in the current National Development Plan (NDP III). The results of the project provide entry points for policy discussions on how to support and improve the performance of local level service providers.

For Belgium, SDHR fits in the strategic direction of supporting capacity development in the health and education sectors. For the next period of partnership between Uganda and Belgium (2023-2027), SDHR is relevant for introducing successful CD mainstreaming.

Coherence

SDHR became the 'CD support' to the other two education support projects: Support to the Implementation of Skilling Uganda (SSU) and Teacher Training and Education (TTE). SSU/TTE, larger in terms of budget and scope, provided infrastructure and technical educational support, SDHR provided ICT equipment and organisational development support. Overlapping support topics were in the area of institutional development. There was joined planning and partly joined implementation. Coherence with the other DPs involved in the relevant sectors will need to become an issue during the next portfolio period.

Efficiency

The project managed to take a few efficiency hurdles; for a relatively short project it had a tight schedule. The first year was scheduled to work on all programming activities, the second on implementation. Even with a 42 days lockdown period, the project succeeded to finalise the CD plans, in time for the implementation expected to start February 2022. The implementation of the actual face-to-face and online training activities got delayed by the rather long tender procedure for the framework contract of training providers. Mitigating measures were to organise communities of practice among the participating VTIs, start with long term training activities for all BOs and start with the short online courses that would be relevant anyway, irrespective of the CD plan outcomes.

Effectiveness

The project was effective, both in terms of its achievements among the BOs and as a bridging phase preparing for CD mainstreaming. Both the results of the self-assessments and the ETR interviews confirm the performance improvements and also the increased confidence of BO management. In terms of preparing for CD mainstreaming in Enabel's new Portfolio 2023-2027, the project has – since the start of the first phase in 2014 – tested and further developed an approach, a series of tools and a systematic methodology that will prove useful for the success of future health and education interventions in the Districts.

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2

Impact

SDHR's impact is measured by the BO managers' and senior staff satisfaction with their service delivery and their confidence in internal HRD processes. Through an intermediate survey among the BO managers in November 2022, both these satisfaction levels have improved; 92% of BO staff and managers (N=75) are satisfied with their improved service delivery and the satisfaction rate on their HRD function has increased from 1.57 to 2.84 (on a 3-point scale).

Sustainability

Two types of sustainability are relevant: sustainable development of the beneficiary organisations and sustainability of the SDHR strategies in Uganda's public sector. For *sustainable development in the BOs*, the signs are promising. Indications for sustainable change are for instance the use of the SDHR tools in other parts of the BOs, results in additional resource mobilisation and increased BO digitalisation.

For *making the SDHR strategies relevant and attractive for Uganda's public sector*, important steps have been made by the project. MoPS is responsible for the country's Human Capital Management System; the strategy developed by SDHR may become an important contribution to that System, preferably in collaboration with other national authorities involved in digitalisation, e-services and education support.

2.2 Specific evaluation questions as presented in the ETR-ToR

Question 1:

Did the use of the integrated capacity development framework guarantee success in terms of improved staff performance at the workplace, increased transfer of learning and does that contribute to organisational development and change, and eventually improved service delivery?

The CD framework that was developed and tested during the SDHR first phase continued to prove its worth in the bridging phase. A large number of examples was presented to the team during the interviews, a number of them are:

- On improved teacher performance: learning and communication materials on ICT, better and timely internal reporting, blended learning skills, internal ToT to cascade to others.
- On organisation development: ownership of new strategic plans, resource mobilisation is routine, gender policies introduced, separate budget for staff development
- On service delivery: ICT training to secondary school teachers, services to communities (digital hub, training to public), more accessible website, structuring of teaching process.

Question 2:

Did the sustainability of the strategies (development of action plan, follow up implementation by project team, working groups and focal persons, coaching and mentoring, transversal themes trainings, inclusion of the Ministries of Public Service and ICT and National Guidance, training in resource mobilization, etc) implemented by the project ensure transfer of learning to the work place in relation to the current work environment and guarantee continuity of capacity development initiatives in the workplace?

Most BOs positively answered this question, see under question 1. The consistent SDHR strategies – approach, tools and method – have contributed to a structured and systematic organisation development process by the BOs. It has stimulated BOs to use the same strategies in their further development and in other parts of their organisation, without SDHR support. Continuity of CD

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3

initiatives depends to a large extent on the national level HR Departments. The expectations on their role during the bridging phase were too optimistic; human resource policy developments within the Ugandan public service tend to take longer. For the coming years, linkages with MoPS and their Human Capital Management System will be important.

Question 3:

Considering the fact that the training included digitalization as a big component in implementing the project (almost 50%; 10% budget for training equipment, blended learning, training in ICT skills, and others), what are the end-term review recommendations to Enabel on including digitalization in capacity development?

The SDHR budget dedicated to digitalisation only – like (online) training, consultancies, equipment and support processes – have taken about 27% of the Bridging Phase budget. This figure will increase if also the online parts of other courses, and the costs for internet and data use are included.
Without losing the strengths of face-to-face learning, the SDHR experiences on blended learning will fit well in Enabel's portfolio interventions 2023-2027. Even though it has efficiency advantages, online and self-paced learning will need careful preparation in order to become effective; the strength of using digital tools for learning lies in the proper mix with face-to-face learning. SDHR has created important experiences in working with this strategic mix, which has created interest from MoPS and the Uganda Institute of Information and Communication Technology (UICT).

Question 4:

How does the End-term review evaluate the complementarities/synergies that the project established with other interventions implemented by Enabel in Uganda? With what results?

TTE and SDHR work in all 5 NTCs and have done so in a coordinated manner, see also under coherence above. In terms of capacity and institutional development, SDHR was involved in the organisational assessment, subsequent training activities and action plans, TTE ensured a supporting environment (including infrastructure) in which the action plans can be implemented, and was able to provide continuous quarterly monitoring. TTE also made sure that the skills enhancement would be cascaded down in the organisations, e.g. via ToT, making use of the SDHR developed framework contracts. Joined planning, scheduling and field visits ensured the synergies.

With SSU similar arrangements were made in supporting the VTIs. Both projects agreed on a joined concept note and implementation plan, and worked jointly in the ToT. With the health projects there was less synergy because different BOs were supported, only one was served by both projects. The health project did make use of the SDHR developed framework contract with training providers.

Question 5:

What recommendations does the end term review have for the inclusion of gender as a transversal theme?

As part of the organisational assessments at the start of the bridging phase, gender was taken as one of the six assessment areas, divided in four sub-topics. Based on the assessment results, various training and development actions were organised that were well appreciated by the BOs. Gender inclusion is integrated in the overall organisational improvement activities. By working on a gender policy, gender issues get linked to the other areas of organisational improvement, like strategic planning, leadership and human resource management. For the future of Enabel's work in the selected regions and districts, this strategy of inclusion seems effective; gender is not anymore seen as a standalone topic, but as part and parcel of an approach of institutional and organisational support.

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4

2.3 Conclusions and lessons learned

As a continuation and improvement of SDHR's first phase, and as a preparation for the new Enabel Portfolio 2023-2027, the SDHR Bridging Phase has proven to be effective. The selected BOs benefitted from the CD support provided by the project and they are also moving towards increased financial sustainability by better positioning themselves within their wider communities. At the same time, SDHR has developed strategies that are well suited for inclusion in the next phase of the Uganda-Belgium partnership.

SDHR has generated a few lessons, to be taken into account when continuing with CD interventions and CD mainstreaming:

- Be aware of 'training overload'. Due to the time constraints, training activities were too compressed; some BOs had difficulty in organising these activities in time and getting the right people to participate in the training events.
- Getting the right mix between online and face-to-face learning is a continuous topic of attention and there is no single solution. Online learning is usually not as engaging as face-to-face, but provides a cost-effective and ready to use addition. The balance will depend on many factors, like content complexity, theory-practice mix, e-readiness of participants, prior knowledge, attractiveness of the online learning environment, connectivity, budget, etc.
- The national agencies involved in SDHR deserve a different approach than the field level service organisations. The first phase ETR recommended that by involving the national HR Departments, linkages with the field level HRD issues would become more practical and easier to solve. This appeared more difficult than anticipated. The lesson is that these departments are not 'beneficiaries' but they are 'partners'. The experiences with MoPS (involved in project development and guidance) and UICT (involved as training agency) were quite positive and are suggested to continue. With the other agencies (HR Departments of MoICT, MoH and MoES), other partnership arrangements are suggested to be developed, depending on the mutual benefits of the partnership.

3 Recommendations

SDHR stops, but not the strategies and good practices that it developed over the years. Since Enabel Kampala has chosen for CD mainstreaming in its future Portfolio 2023-2027, the ETR has two recommendations to Enabel and the Steering Committee on how to continue with SDHR's legacy.

1. For Enabel: *Integrate the SDHR strategy in the new portfolio.*

The tested SDHR strategy comprises of three elements:

- Approach: Participatory, tailor made, CD takes time
- Tools: Organisational Assessment, blended learning, trackers, templates and others
- Method: 4 steps (OA self-assessment, CD planning, training with action plan, follow-up/coaching)

This strategy is suggested to be integrated in the upcoming district interventions, which will have two implications for portfolio implementation:

- Balancing the participatory/tailor made approach with the disbursement/result pressure of the intervention. When faced with pressures to achieve results, a regular feature in most interventions, CD professionals tend to have an organisational/institutional focus, whereas technical professionals (health, education) tend to have a focus on the technical contents. Being aware of this potential conflict, and effectively dealing with it once it surfaces, will create better cooperation among professionals

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5

- CD mainstreaming requires CD expertise within and across the interventions. The human resources paragraph of the draft Portfolio document mentions a few staff that will likely be CD focussed: a Governance & Accountability expert, an Institutional Development expert, a Social Behaviour Change Communication expert and a few officers with the latter expertise. In order to ensure continued policy and strategic attention to CD mainstreaming, we suggest that one of the experts (or an additional one) will be coordinating the CD integration across the district interventions. Within the district interventions, CD expertise would remain an area of attention, otherwise there will be nothing much to coordinate

2. For the Steering Committee and Enabel: *Create effective district-national linkages*

The draft Portfolio is aware that district interventions can only be effective if embedded in national policies. The strategy as explained in the portfolio is to 'unpack' the national policies and subsequently create district experiences in terms of effective models, good practices, what works/what not, both at the technical and governance levels. Regular feedback with the national level will create a 'policy-practice loop'. The ETR suggests to put sufficient energy in frequency and contents of this loop.

The ETR has discussed this topic with MoPS who were actively involved in preparing and guiding the SDHR Bridging Phase and who are not yet prominently featuring in the draft Portfolio document. MoPS would be relevant for overall guidance on CD issues and in regularly having a dialogue on field experiences. The ETR concludes that MoPS is implementing at least two NDP III national programmes that will have implications for district level functioning:

- Public Sector Transformation
- Human Capacity Management System

In addition, both programmes will have a large digitalisation component, for instance by reducing bureaucratic steps, automation of internal processes and working towards e-government. This envisages the close cooperation with the relevant agencies with whom Enabel is already cooperating, among others UICT and NITA-U.

To be effective in the policy-practice loop, cooperating with these agencies will require a firmer partnership than the bi-annual Steering Committee meetings, but likely less than a day-to-day working relationship; Enabel has chosen to emphasise its core energy in the districts. The ETR suggests that Enabel discusses this issue internally, and with their district partners, and develop a practical dialogue arrangement. The figure below provides a series of considerations that may be of use in this discussion.

How to make the district-national linkages work?

A continuum

The Steering Committee model (distant) — The 'working together' model (close)

Where on this continuum do we wish to position ourselves at the start of the portfolio?
To be considered:
- Mutual trust
- Mutual accountability
- Focus on dialogue
- Resources (time, finances, staff)
- Chances towards sustainability and change

Implications for frequency, modality and style of communication, + for placement of staff at national level

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6