FINAL EVALUATION OF THE REGIONAL PROJECT ON STRENGHTENING ARAB ECONOMIC INTEGRATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (AEISD)

SUBMITTED TO:

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS)

01 October 2017-31 March 2022

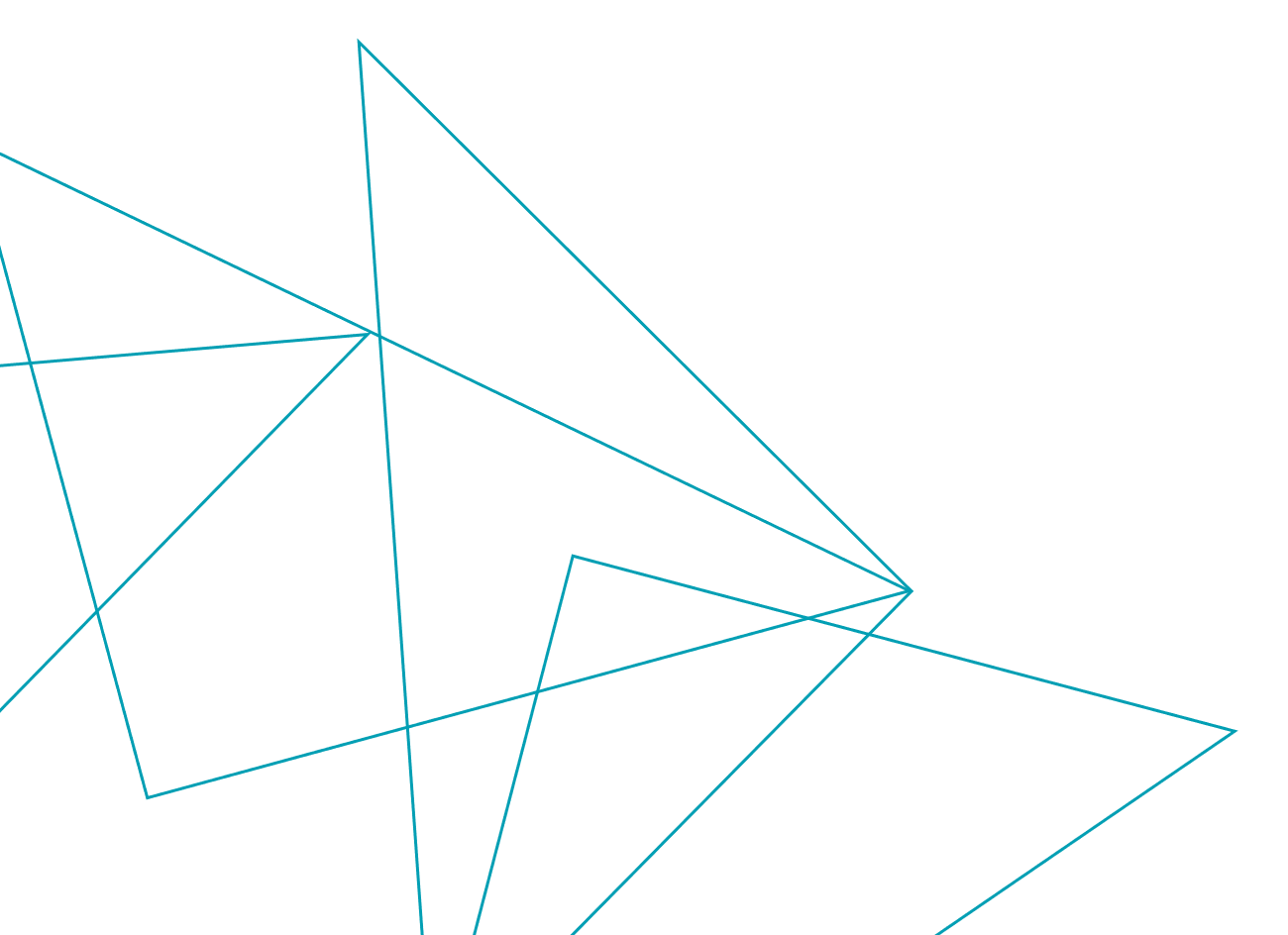
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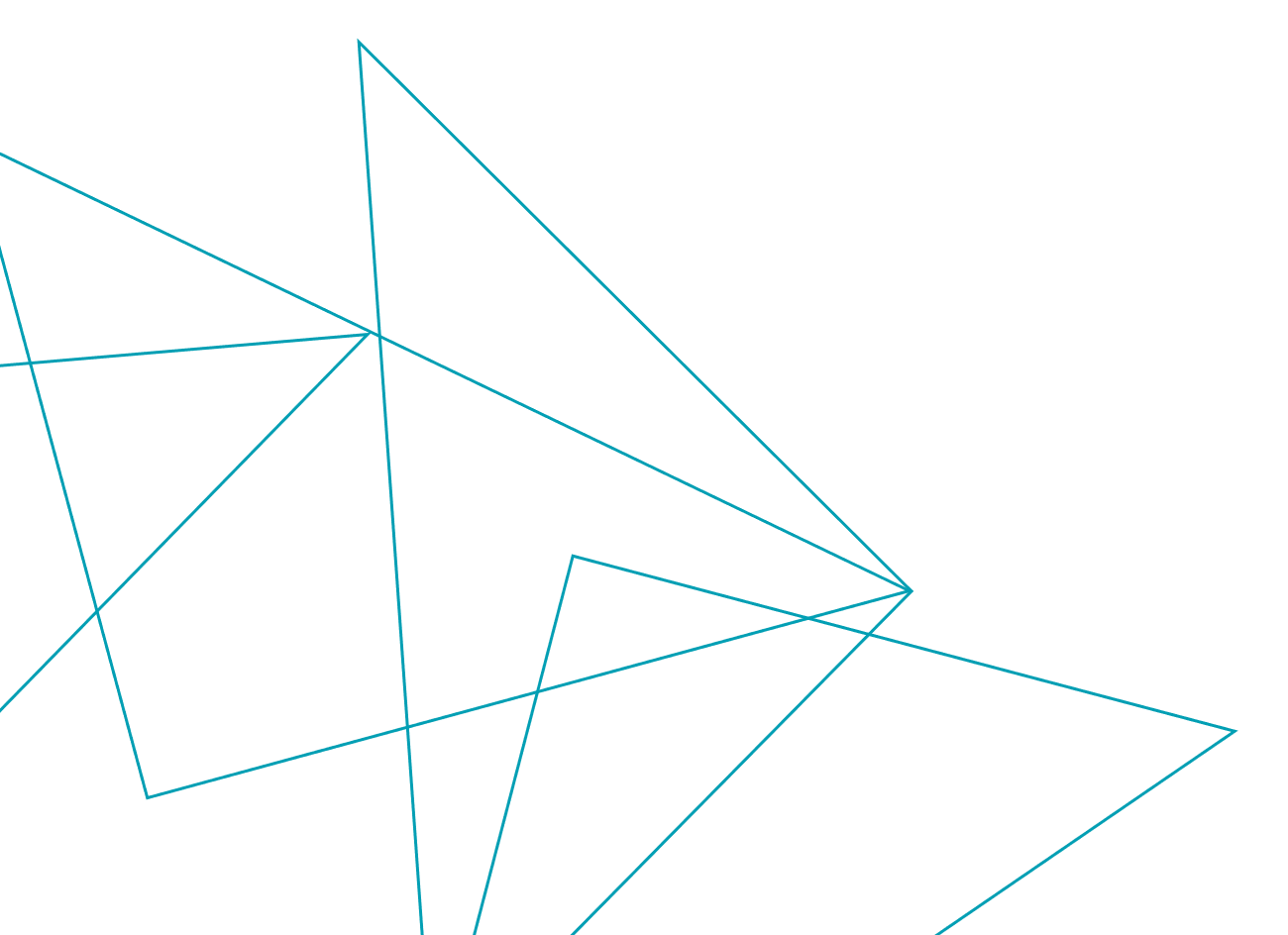
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| **Project title** | Strengthening Arab Economic Integration for Sustainable Development | |
| **Atlas ID** | 00099964 | |
| **Corporate outcome and output** | RPD Outcome 1 (2018-2021 cycle): Accelerate structural transformation of productive capacities in a sustainable and inclusive manner  RPD Output 1.1.1 Capacities developed for progressive expansion of inclusive regional economic integration (Strategic Plan 1.1.2) | |
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| **Funding source** | The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) | |
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **ACU** | Arab Customs Union |
| **AEISD** | Arab Economic Integration for Sustainable Development |
| **AEO** | Authorised Economic Operator |
| **GATT**  **GIZ**  **ITFC** | General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade  German Agency for International Cooperation  International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation |
| **KII** | Key Informant Interview |
| **LAS**  **LAS-ECOSOC**  **LDCs** | League of Arab States  LAS-Economic and Social Council  Least Developed Countries |
| **LNOB** | Leaving No One Behind |
| **M&E** | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| **MSME** | Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise |
| **NAFTA** | North American Free Trade Area |
| **NGO** | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **NSW** | National Single Window |
| **OECD-DAC** | The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee |
| **PAFTA** | Pan Arab Free Trade Area |
| **SDG** | Sustainable Development Goal |
| **Sida** | The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency |
| **SOW** | Scope of Work |
| **TOC** | Theory of Change |
| **TOR**  **UNCTAD** | Terms of Reference  United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| **UNDP** | The United Nations Development Programme |
|  |  |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To accelerate progress towards an Arab common market, UNDP launched the “Regional Project on Strengthening Arab Economic Integration for Sustainable Development” (AEISD) in October 2017. The project received funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Sweden’s government agency for development cooperation. The project aimed to enhance economic partnerships across the region by providing technical support to the PAFTA Technical Secretariat, which sits with the LAS Arab Economic Integration Department, as well as individual LAS member states. Key project activities included analysis, webinars, studies, reports, and helping to design legal frameworks. The purpose of this final evaluation, commissioned by UNDP, is twofold. Firstly, assess the project’s performance and results according to the OECD-DAC criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, and its overall contribution to the UNDP Regional Programme outcome 1: “Accelerate the structural transformation of productive capacities in a sustainable and inclusive manner”. Secondly, ensure accountability, as well as identify and analyse findings and results to enable the incorporation of lessons learned and prepare recommendations that can be useful for the design of similar projects in the future, organizational learning and enhancing the quality of future aid policy

The report covers the project’s duration – from October 2017 to December 2021, and only partially touches upon the last extension till March 2022 – and focuses on four main points of the OECD-DAC criteria – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. These lines of enquiry generated recommendations that are specific and actionable, communicating clearly what worked as planned and what did not. This evaluation also looked at the causes of challenges and how these can be mitigated in future. Overall, the recommendations will help guide the design and implementation of similar future interventions, as well as enhance organisational learning and the quality of future aid policy.

In conclusion, the evaluation found that the project relied on an overly ambitious scope and under-estimated regional challenges such as political bottlenecks and poor national and regional coordination mechanisms in the Arab region. The project’s theory of change was conceived following the 2011 Arab uprisings when demands for change and more opportunities ignited in the region and made policy makers identify regional economic integration as a potential avenue to generate new and promising opportunities. However, it was not able to adapt to the quickly evolving context due to an inadequate RBM strategy that had weakly-formulated causal links between inputs, outputs and outcomes. While, among other successes, the project readjusted its work plan and redesigned its activities to adapt to the changing context due to COVID-19, the endemic lack of defined measuring metrics and a lack of reporting mechanisms to document lessons learned complicated assessing the project’s impact over the long term.

The project implemented a hybrid regional-bilateral approach to trade facilitation. It was demand-driven with a bottom-up approach, making it relevant to the needs and priorities of both LAS and national counterparts. Its mobilisation of relevant and high calibre expertise also helped stakeholders benefit from the project and are expected to have lasting benefits. However, overall, the desired change in terms of a mutually-beneficial integration of Arab economies into the multilateral trading system failed to materialize during the life span of the project.

The project effectively responded to most requests for support under its first outcome to strengthen LAS’ capacity in trade integration. The project further targeted five member states - Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan – under outcome 2 to build the capacity of national counterparts. Out of all the interventions, Jordan’s case study – support for the Licensing Hub - was hailed as a success story among stakeholders. The project’s pilot support to social enterprises in Lebanon and Morocco was also promising and could be the missing link to an adequate theory of change. Furthermore, while the project design had a gender component included in outcome 3, gender mainstreaming remained weak during implementation. Moreover, reporting on contribution towards the outcomes was vague, and progress against the planned activities was occasionally inconsistent.

Based on this evaluation, key recommendations to UNDP and Sida for future economic trade integration projects in the Arab region include:

1. The focus should be limited on a few key pillars for trade assistance to avoid an overly ambitious scope of work and provide a rationale for it.
2. Design a results framework with both quantitative and qualitative indicators that are plausible, attributable, cost-effective, targeted, and verifiable.
3. Undertake a series of in-depth country needs assessments and stakeholder/context mapping before project design and implementation, to identify three economic sectors feasible for early trade liberalization.
4. Ensure that trade interventions guarantee more solid gender mainstreaming in future programming.
5. Combine upstream policy work with more bottom-up and direct engagement of users of trade services.
6. Develop a clear and structured approach to assisting least-developed countries in building their trade-related capacity.
7. Address the importance of digital transformation for the delivery of trade services, including opportunities to boost e-commerce.
8. Push for specific environmental protection objectives and design trade policies with environmental protection in mind, abiding by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The project’s key lessons learned include:

* Effective trade interventions need to focus on few ambitious but achievable and clearly defined pillars – preferably capacity-development and infrastructure support.
* While being demand-driven is conducive to beneficiaries’ satisfaction and responsive to their needs, detailed data at the national and regional levels is required to tailor the project’s support areas for regional economic integration.
* Working with users of trade services – for example, SMEs – or institutions that provide these services could help showcase impact in the short-term and eventually inform longer-term trade reform processes.

1. Introduction

This report represents a final evaluation of UNDP’s regional project on Strengthening Arab Economic Integration for Sustainable Development (AEISD) which was launched in October 2017. The project receives funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority (Sida), Sweden’s government agency for development cooperation. This final project evaluation undertakes an overall assessment of implementation and performance, including a description of the intervention, the evaluation’s purpose, scope, objectives, approach, and methodology. It lays out the findings of the evaluation according to the identified criteria, and includes conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations.

The purpose of the final evaluation is twofold: (1) Assess the project performance and results following the OECD/DAC criteria[[1]](#footnote-2): relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, as well as its overall contribution to the UNDP Regional Programme outcome 1: “Accelerate the structural transformation of productive capacities in a sustainable and inclusive manner” as well as the overall impact of the project on gender equality and inclusion; and (2) to ensure accountability, as well as identify findings to come up with lessons learned and prepare recommendations for the design of similar projects in the future, organizational learning and enhancing the quality of future aid policy. The evaluation report is addressed to both the donor (Sida) and the project implementor (UNDP) to improve any future initiatives for trade integration in the Arab region It gives the intended users the information needed to make decisions, take action and add to knowledge. The report focuses on four main points of the OECD-DAC criteria – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION
2. Background & Context

For over a decade, Arab states have become increasingly enthusiastic about the benefits of greater economic integration across the region. The experiences of other neighbouring countries indicate that building a shared economic space can reap various socio-economic advantages. For example, studies indicate that close economic integration has boosted economic growth and job creation under the European single market, the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and others. These regional integration frameworks remove tariffs imposed on imported goods and services, provide for fluid trade in services, and allow both capital and citizens to move freely. Under these conditions, state economies can grow stronger by building expanded, regional markets for goods and services, while also promoting development and fairer wealth distribution. Acknowledging these benefits, the League of Arab States (LAS) announced the establishment of the Arab Customs Union (ACU) in 2009, as a preliminary step towards establishing an Arab common market by 2020.

Despite this growing enthusiasm, LAS and its member states have faced significant hurdles in implementing an effective, integrated common market. As far back as 1957, LAS concluded an agreement to provide for an integrated regional economy, largely mirroring the European Union’s current arrangement. Today, however, the Arab world remains far from achieving this objective. Arab countries have maintained most tariffs on goods from other LAS member states, regional trade accounts for a fraction of overall commerce, and labour mobility between Arab countries is still very low.[[2]](#footnote-3) Accordingly, the ACU’s creation reflects an acknowledgement by LAS that the region has plenty of work ahead to reach meaningful economic integration.

Several LAS member states have accepted the need to adopt extensive trade policy reforms to create a common market. Most Arab countries have enacted the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), an international instrument that promotes free trade by lifting barriers like tariffs and quotas. The GATT’s principles are largely reflected in the Pan Arab Free Trade Area (PAFTA) agreement, which provides the region’s main source of economic integration. Over time, countries around the world have updated and expanded upon the GATT’s central focus – free trade of goods – to other, pressing priorities such as free trade of services and movement of capital. Modern free trade agreements also approach economic integration holistically, looking beyond tariffs to overall supply chain barriers to trade, such as high taxation on manufacturing. By contrast, Arab countries have largely failed to update PAFTA’s terms, remaining stuck with the decades-old, goods-focused GATT principles.[[3]](#footnote-4)

When crafting regional trade policy, gender sensitivity stands out as a salient issue due to current labour market conditions. In the Arab States region, gender inequalities in access to productive assets such as land and credit, or storage and transport facilities, tend to constrain women’s benefits from trade policies.

The imperative for improved economic growth has become especially urgent in the Arab States region. Several LAS member-states, including Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, face crushing financial crises and skyrocketing unemployment rates, also due to protracted conflicts. According to the OECD Paper for G20 Finance Ministers on Developments in Trade and Policy Challenges, the estimated labour force growth would need to be met with estimated annual GDP growth higher than 7.5% - approximately 3% points higher than the average achieved in the past decade.[[4]](#footnote-5) Regional trade imbalances have also exposed the region ’s chronic over- exposure to oil markets’ volatility. Fuel exports make up an average 45 percent of total merchandise exports, compared to a global average of 12 percent. All Arab countries are net food importers, with food imports making up to 13 percent of total imports, compared to the global average of 8 percent[[5]](#footnote-6). The Arab countries have not tapped the potential of trade in services (e.g. in tourism, and transport), and are not highly engaged in world value chains.[[6]](#footnote-7) Limited integration of Arab economies in the global value chain (measured mainly by trade in intermediate goods)[[7]](#footnote-8) and the relative absence of an Arab regional value chain should signal the need for a new setup in light of the disruption that happened to global value chains due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Project OVERVIEW

To accelerate progress towards an Arab common market, UNDP launched the “Regional Project on Strengthening Arab Economic Integration for Sustainable Development” (AEISD) in October 2017. The project receives funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority (Sida), Sweden’s government agency for development cooperation.

The project is a continuation of Sida’s funded interventions in the region. From April 2014 to March 2017, UNDP implemented the Aid for Trade Initiative for the Arab States (AfTIAS) in partnership with the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC). At the beginning of the project, ITFC proposed new mechanisms of management, from 2015, they managed the implementation of the project while UNDP re-focused on the delivery of specific results. AfTIAS aimed to deepen Arab Economic Integration through the enhancement of trade development in the Arab region, through gradual modernization of trade and economic policymaking. It had two lines of work: trade facilitation through cross‐border operations and provision of support to LAS to revitalize the PAFTA and to modernize the ACU. With the support of SIDA, the project was scaled-up and expanded its portfolio of activities. AEISD project was thus designed and fully funded by SIDA. The new project activities were expected to help the Arab region (20 countries) address their needs around trade facilitation and its relation to sustainable development to eventually help member states and the region achieve SDGs under the agenda 2030.

The project being evaluated aims to enhance economic partnerships across the region by providing technical support to the LAS Secretariat, as well as individual LAS member states. It contributes to outcome 1 and output 1.1.1. of the UNDP-RBAS Regional Programme for Arab States (2018-2021). The project’s key activities include analysis, webinars, studies, reports, and helping to design legal frameworks. These activities support outputs aimed at building capacity for the LAS and member states to reform trade policy (especially in terms of upgrading PAFTA’s terms) and boosting organizational capacity. The project also leverages stakeholder dialogue to improve regulations on integrity and good governance, as well as building gender sensitivity into trade policy frameworks.

1. Project Timeline

AEISD started in October 2017, and throughout its first year, the project made progress in digitalization initiatives and improving technologies for ensuring good governance, while beneficiaries –the LAS and individual member states – also worked towards securing the necessary political mandates for PAFTA upgrading. UNDP partnered with the beneficiaries to design and adopt the work plan. In the process, UNDP’s technical team collaborated with LAS officials and staff members to secure active engagement from the beneficiaries in relation to their identified needs. In Jordan, the project made key steps towards implementing the Jordan National Single Window, with the establishment of 96 digitized trade-related services in that country. UNDP provided key support to Jordanian government agencies in achieving these goals. UNDP also transferred knowledge to Jordanian Customs and other entities that helped to enact national initiatives to simplify procedures and deliver public services more effectively. During 2019, key challenges emerged related to the beneficiaries’ capacity to push through modernized regulatory frameworks; the impact of regional conflict on beneficiaries’ political will to adopt ambitious new reforms; the varying levels of preparedness amongst beneficiaries; and the availability of qualified experts to support the project and its beneficiaries.

In 2019, the project focused on promoting the Arab Agreement in trade in services, which entered into force on the 14 October 2019. UNDP provided support for countries that expressed interest in becoming a contracting party, including Iraq and Palestine, while also assisting Palestine to finalize its schedule of commitments. The project generated four draft protocols on, respectively, Dispute Settlement Mechanisms, Competition, Protection of Intellectual Property Rights, and Trade Facilitation. The production of technical analysis reports facilitated thematic discussions on trade and trade-related topics such as E-Commerce and Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs), while continued digitalization activities further enhanced delivery of public services, with a view to improving regulatory transparency.

For individual member states, UNDP provided extensive assistance to Egypt and Jordan during 2019. The project supported Jordanian-Egyptian collaboration, through policy dialogues and consultations with dozens of government agencies, in relation to the ports of Aqaba (Jordan) and Nuweiba (Egypt). Bilateral discussions between the countries resulted in a common agreement on technical details and operational mechanisms. Jordan showed especially encouraging signs of progress in designing procedures to operationalize trade facilitation measures, which occurred across six governmental agencies. In Jordan, the National Steering Committee of the Jordan National Single Window endorsed the proposal of sharing experiences at the national level to other Arab countries under UNDP’s coordination. Nevertheless, the project encountered bureaucratic obstacles in Egypt, where the government adopted new approval requirements for regulatory reforms, slowing down the project’s expected progress in that country.

In 2020, the project’s work plan underwent significant changes due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 restrictions meant that UNDP needed to re-design the project to acknowledge new practical realities: capacity development workshops for Q1 and Q2 needed to be postponed, as other activities were prioritized, chiefly public health measures. Ultimately, UNDP requested two No-Cost Extensions (the first covered 2021 and the second covered the first quarter of 2022), given that COVID-19 had adversely impacted project deadlines. Specifically, the project’s lengthy consultation periods and coordination procedures had been set back by COVID-19 restrictions such as travel bans and reduced working hours for public institutions across the region. During 2020, cancelled activities included a regional seminar on trade for PAFTA members, two regional seminars on trade facilitation, an assessment of current PAFTA conditions, fostering regional participatory policy dialogues, and training courses for key stakeholders on implementing transparent trade policies. UNDP switched to virtual engagement where possible to continue working under COVID-19 restrictions. The project also assisted with COVID-19 responses: for instance, UNDP supported the LAS Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in adopting Policy Statements (May 2020) to facilitate trade of critical goods and services such as medical products, food supplies and personal protection equipment.

Despite these obstacles, UNDP did implement a range of activities under the project’s different outputs in 2020. At the supra-national level, the project reinforced the capacity of LAS to undertake analysis to inform policies related to the Arab Agreement in trade in service, e-commerce, the green economy, construction services, and the Arab Customs Union (ACU). It also accelerated the finalization of outstanding tasks under the Executive Program of PAFTA, by enabling enhanced technical coordination with PAFTA members and developing the capacities of the Technical Secretariat. Moreover, the draft Agreement on Arab Customs Union was finalized for policy consideration and the institutional arrangements of the draft agreement on trade facilitation were adopted by Arab Countries. Some improvements were achieved in good governance and transparency through the LAS ECOSOC decision to enhance notification procedures of new trade regulations implemented by member countries, but no improvements were reported in relation to supporting gender responsive mechanisms in trade policy making and negotiation.

At the level of individual member states, UNDP supported Palestine’s application to become a member of the Arab Agreement in trade in services, which was confirmed on 4 February 2021. In Jordan, The Jordanian Government fully adopted UNDP’s proposed method to monitor implementation progress and activated a governmental taskforce to ensure the development of the Jordanian Licensing Hub. Moreover, two additional customs regimes applied procedures of pre-arrival clearance of international shipments (introduced in 2019), further reducing time required for clearance. Furthermore, in 2020 all member states adopted 14 out of 58 measures in trade facilitation measures applicable to trade in goods. In response to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, several countries stepped up their adoption of digitalized applications to facilitate trade through electronic transactions.

In 2021, at the supra-national level, regional workshops, organized virtually through webinars, were conducted to present findings of the 6 studies on ACU to member states. A draft ACU Agreement and proposed governance framework was prepared and presented to the Technical Committee of ACU for negotiations. UNDP also presented a proposal of Arab Trade Observatory to the Technical Secretariat at LAS and carried on coordination with the Arab Economic Department at LAS on the Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs). Finally, Arab countries agreed to adopt the governance mechanisms of the draft Protocol on Trade Facilitation.

At the level of individual member states, UNDP supported the drafting of the country’s National Single Window Roadmap based on country’s request. Jordan progressed in 2021, establishing the Jordanian Licensing Hub, which entered into operation in 2022. Jordanian authorities had also extended the adoption of the pre-arrival to the clearance of shipments, which can be seen as a boost to enhance the competitiveness of the Aqaba port. The project also developed partnership with Moroccan Government to foster assistance to Argan oil cooperatives, operated by women, and as a result, it initiated the pilot of Export Promotion to support a dozen Moroccan Argan Cooperatives in the exportation of their products to the American market through digitalized e-market and improve advertisement. A similar intervention was launched to assist 20 Lebanese SMEs in bringing their products to the American Market. For that purpose, the Guidelines for Exports and related logistics formalities were prepared and representatives of 20 cooperatives were trained on techniques of contract negotiations and formalities. Furthermore, in Lebanon, the project provided assistance to the Ministry of Economy and Trade to develop the Roadmap of Export Promotion toward the new strategies for Reform-Recovery-Reconstruction Program (initiated by UNDP, EU and the World Bank), inclusive of a monitoring mechanism.

1. Results framework:

The project’s full outcomes and outputs are as follows:

**Outcome 1:** LAS capacity strengthened to manage regional economic integration related processes:

*OUTPUT 1:* Structured and targeted technical support to LAS Secretariat and Arab negotiators on trade policy formulation and reform under PAFTA.

*OUTPUT 2:* Provision of support for the organizational capacity of LAS Secretariat to facilitate the regional economic integration agenda.

**Outcome 2:** Members States are technically prepared for regional economic integration:

*OUTPUT 3:* Provision of country-based technical assistance to policymakers for their activities related to trade policy reform and coherence.

*OUTPUT 4:* Provision of country-based technical assistance to policy makers for the modernization of the supply/value chain in preparations for the Arab Customs Union.

**Outcome 3:** Engagement of key development actors ensured through inclusive and transparent processes for regional economic integration:

*OUTPUT 5:* Improvement of related regulatory frameworks for integrity, aiming for good governance for trade development measures.

*OUTPUT 6:* Supporting gender responsive mechanisms to ensure systematic integration of gender sensitivities in trade policymaking and negotiations.

*See the detailed Results Framework in Annex B.*

1. Theory of Change:

The project’s theory of change holds that LAS and its member states, with improved technical capacity and financial resources, can become more prepared for establishing a true, effective Arab common market. Under the project, the LAS Secretariat has received assistance in discharging its role as the administrative leader of the region’s economic integration. These activities are intended to help the PAFTA Secretariat within the LAS Economic Integration Department to manage the eventual common market’s organization, while also contributing to sound and coherent trade policy formulation. Complementarily, at a country level, policymakers receive help in modernizing domestic supply and value chains in anticipation of the fully integrated Arab Customs Union. Member states can also benefit from technical advice on crafting regulations aimed at integrity and good governance, with a view to further developing trade relations across the region. The AEISD project aimed to tackle key policy and legal changes to improve entry points that could enhance the gender mainstreaming in trade policies; achieved through facilitating the design and conduct of gender auditing of related policies, measures, and their implementation with the overall view to promote Arab economic integration. Apart from a range of analyses dedicated to gender-related impacts of policies and further regional integration, the promotion of women’s empowerment and gender equality were considered at the level of activities within each component of the project, for example, by actively supporting high participation rates of women in training and other capacity development measures. However, overall, the theory of change was not able to adapt to a quickly evolving and complex context due to an inadequate RBM strategy that had weakly-formulated causal links between outcomes, outputs and inputs.

Figure 1: AEISD Project's Theory of Change (Sketch Provided By donor)

Diagram

Description automatically generated

1. Key stakeholders:

The majority of stakeholders were staff from the implementing organization (UNDP) and the League of Arab States, mostly PAFTA members; and National Counterparts from the public and private sectors*. See List of Stakeholders in Annex C.*

1. Analysis of social groups and cross-cutting themes:

In its design, the project intended for gender mainstreaming to be a key cross-cutting theme and gave it particular attention, acknowledging that trade development has a strong potential for addressing gender equality. Additionally, as the project was implemented in Arab countries with significant diversity of beneficiaries and stakeholders with varying interests, within a dynamic environment, and exposed to conflicts and discordance, the AEISD project team tried to include essential elements to make the project conflict sensitive. Also, in its activities, the project aimed to target all social groups, but particularly women, in participating in cross-border operations and related economic activities.

1. Project Resources:

From 2017 to 2019, the project budgeted USD 2,011, 320 under outcome 1 to strengthen LAS capacity to manage processes related to regional economic integration. This budget was specifically allocated to outputs 1 and 2. Under outcome 2, the project budgeted USD 3,197,688 to capacitate and prepare member states for regional economic integration. This budget was specifically allocated to outputs 3 and 4. Under outcome 3, the project budgeted USD 890,198 for the engagement of key development actors through inclusive and transparent processes for regional economic integration. This budget was specifically allocated to outputs 5 and 6. *See detailed Project Resources in Annex D.*

1. EVALUATION SCOPE & OBJECTIVES
2. scope & objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation intends to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of the project’s contributions towards “accelerating structural transformation of productive capacities in a sustainable and inclusive manner”, as articulated in Outcome 1 of the Regional Programme for Arab States (2018-2021). The scope of the evaluation will focus around the three articulated outcomes of the project to assess all the indicative outputs under each (Section D: Results Framework). The evaluation covers the project’s full duration, from October 2017 to December 2021, and only partially until 31 March 2021.

evaluation Objectives

UNDP has commissioned this final project evaluation to achieve two key objectives:

1. Assess the project’s performance and results according to the OECD/DAC criteria: relevance, , effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. These lines of enquiry will generate recommendations that are specific and actionable, communicating clearly what worked as planned and what did not. The evaluation identifies causes of challenges and how they can be mitigated in future. The recommendations will help guide the design and implementation of similar future interventions, as well as enhancing organisational learning and the quality of future aid policy.
2. Analyse the project’s approach to addressing strategic bottlenecks, including institutional resistance to change. This research will aim to guide future policymaking priorities and strategies aimed at accelerating structural transformation in a sustainable and inclusive manner.
   1. EVALUATION CRITERIA & questions

This evaluation seeks to measure the (a) relevance, (b) effectiveness, (c) efficiency, and (d) impact and sustainability of the programme, by answering evaluation questions grouped according to the abovementioned OECD-DAC criteria. By measuring these four criteria, the evaluation will allow users to benefit from lessons learned in future trade aid project design.

RELEVANCE

* To what Sustainable Development Goals did the project contribute, and to what extent were they mainstreamed? Which SDGs were seen to be most and least important and prominent to institutions involved in the project?
* What were the regional and national development priorities identified during project design phase? How were they identified (desk review, consultation, requests, recommendations from other projects)? How did they evolve throughout the project?
* Was a solid theory of change developed, capturing the analysis from the development problem, and were impact, outcomes, outputs and activities mapped? If not, what provisions and changes should have been made?
* In your opinion, what was the “value added” of targeting this development problem with a regional approach rather than bilateral one?
* How involved were project stakeholders in the project design and implementation? Which stakeholders were the most involved? and what were the engagement mechanisms adopted by UNDP?
* To what extent has the project been appropriately responsive to political, legal, economic, institutional, and other changes in the region?
* To what extent has the project been appropriately responsive to the needs of the regional and national constituents and changing partner priorities, and at the same time keeping commitments made and respecting the design of project and subsequent agreement?

EFFECTIVENESS

* To what extent did the project achieve its intended and unintended outputs and outcomes? What outputs, outcomes (and if possible impacts) can be reasonably attributed to project interventions?
* What observable effects on gender equality, women’s empowerment and human rights advancement did the project achieve/not achieve? Are their indirect effects on vulnerable groups, gender equality, women’s empowerment and human rights advancement which can be attributed to the project?
* Where achievements were made, what were the underlying programmatic and contextual factors which contribute to them?
* Where achievements were not made, to what extent can the reasons be attributed to programmatic or contextual factors, if at all?
* Did the partnership between UNDP, Sida and LAS ultimately further or hinder project effectiveness? How so? And were project priorities and intended outputs sufficiently aligned between UNDP and SIDA and LAS throughout the course of the project, specifically, in terms of gender equality, LNOB and SDG achievement/non-achievement?
* What measures were taken at the institutional and programmatic levels to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic? How sustainable are these measures over the longer term, and did they become more sustainable over time?
* What adverse effects on project outputs and outcomes can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic?
* To what extent did the inclusion/non-inclusion of particular stakeholders improve the effect of project interventions? In retrospect, which stakeholders made the most gains or created the most impediment to the achievement of project objectives?

EFFICIENCY

* Were their specific project components which were deemed to be cost effective or ineffective? What components of the implementation strategy could be changed to increase cost efficiency across the board, or within specific components?
* To what extent was human and financial resources allocation optimized? Did resources focus on particular outcomes over others, or were they attributed appropriately across components?
* To what extent did the project adjustments in light of the disruption to major activities imposed by COVID-19 yield to the expected results? Did adapting project activities to the COVID-19 pandemic ultimately prove more or less time consuming?
* Was the project management structure generally seen to further or impede projected outcomes of the project?
* To what extent can it be said that alternative strategies would have achieved better results?
* Were project objectives and timeframes clearly understood and communicated to all stakeholders? To what extent have project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?

IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

* What lasting effects do you anticipate that the AEISD Project will have on LAS and other stakeholders?
* Have complementarities collaboration and/or synergies fostered by the project contributed to greater sustainability or results?
* As a result of the project, have partner institutions built the organizational capacity and processes to monitor and implement gender-sensitive programming? Have partner institutions taken on human rights and development as core principles of their activities?
* To what extent are lessons learned being documented by the project team on a continual basis and shared with appropriate parties who could learn from the project?
* To what extent are partner institutions committed to the outcomes of the project over the long term, both from a strategic planning perspective and an institutional one?
* Have any outcomes of the project been translated into an official legal text?
* Was an exit strategy discussed with partners to ensure a sustainable policy framework for Arab economic integration towards Common Market? Have UNDP and partner organizations regularly discussed and agreed upon project closure activities and sustainability?

1. EVALUATION APPROACH & METHODS
2. Evaluation Approach

Following UNDP’s guidelines and required deliverables, this final evaluation covers all activities undertaken in the framework of the AEISD project, during the project’s full duration, between October 2017 and December 2021, and only marginally the additional three-month extension until March 2022.

Triangle implemented a novel and bespoke overarching methodological framework to guide the design and implementation of this evaluation. The framework accounts for subtle yet important differences between the OECD-DAC criteria (which the evaluation framework stipulated in the Terms of Reference (TOR)) and other key metrics – namely, capacity measurement, LNOB (Leaving No One Behind) analysis and contextual factors. The agreed methodological framework bolsters each of the OECD-DAC criteria to account for capacity development measurement, LNOB analysis, and cross-cutting themes. This level of analysis, when combined with the OECD-DAC evaluation approach, intended to develop a hierarchy of priorities and recommendations rooted in real opportunities to develop Arab regional economic integration. At all times, recommendations aimed to focus on development that is gender-sensitive and aligned with the LNOB principle and Agenda 2030.

The evaluation framework has guided both the adaptive literature review and the development of research tools. The evaluation matrix (See Annex A) illustrates how Triangle’s analysis team developed key questions and sub-questions based on the evaluation criteria (OECD-DAC) – as well as data analysis methods – to answer the agreed research questions.

1. EVALUATION METHODS

In the evaluation, Triangle engaged key stakeholders, which were involved in the delivery process and/or received advisory support, as well as project staff. Evidence obtained and used to assess the results was gathered from a variety of sources, including data on objectives’ achievement, existing reports, and stakeholder interviews. This ensures a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the data, generated through the evaluation.

This evaluation’s framework relies on several inputs of data, presenting a robust approach comprised of qualitative data, analysis, and triangulation. Where possible, Triangle’s analysis team used multiple sources to support analytical findings, insisting upon inter-source corroboration for optimal results. This triangulation approach allows for direct interaction between different research activities – being KIIs and the adaptive literature review – to maintain analytical objectivity. Accordingly, this section details the various evaluation activities that will support the overarching framework.

This report bears a rating to the project against the OECD-DAC selected evaluation criteria. It uses the 5-point Likert rating method with the following scale against each of the evaluation criteria (5 for highly satisfactory, 4 for satisfactory, 3 for partially satisfactory, 2 for unsatisfactory and 1 for highly unsatisfactory).

ADAPTIVE LITERATURE REVIEW:

In line with the evaluation framework, Triangle has undertaken an adaptive literature review of project documentation provided by UNDP (see Annex E for more detail), and relevant secondary sources. The latter includes available humanitarian and development indicators, socioeconomic assessments, reports from development agencies, and academic sources. The literature review started during the inception phase and remained adaptive throughout the evaluation as new information became available and spurred further lines of inquiry. When literature was found to be unavailable, the research team tried to integrate information gaps in primary data collection tools and interview guides.

INCEPTION INTERVIEWS:

Alongside the literature review, a series of inception interviews with programme staff and development experts took place to provide the basis for issue identification as well as context-specific introspective tools development. As such, overarching tools were developed and approved by UNDP as part of the Inception Report and were be piloted on selected key informants to test their relevance and appropriateness. Issue-specific tools followed the agreed-upon formats and were amended to be employed during field deployment.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS:

Key informant interviews were employed as the main avenue for qualitative data collection, due to time constraints and logistics. Triangle has provided an indicative sampling frame for conducting key informant interview types (see Annex F for more detail). All strata were subject to ensuring gender parity in KII respondents. It is important to note that key informant interviews targeted management-level respondents that have the capacity to provide high-level information about the interaction between their institutions and the project.

Table 1: key informant interview tracker

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Level** | **Target** | **Achieved** | **Balance** | **Percent Achieved** |
| **National Counterparts** | 10 | 5 | 5 | 50% |
| **Las Counterparts** | 8 | 5 | 3 | 62.5% |
| **Development Personnel / Project Staff** | 9 | 8 | 1 | 88.9% |
| **Total** | **27** | **18** | **9** | **66.7%** |

SURVEY:

The institutional survey was deemed not feasible due to time constraints and low response rate to online surveys in the region.

1. Cross-cutting ISSUES:

In addition to OECD-DAC criteria-specific questions, Triangle developed research tools and analysis strategies suited to measuring and understanding cross-cutting issues, which affect the entire evaluation (across all specific criteria). First, Triangle research methodology and tools were appropriate and adapted for gender sensitivity and avoiding gender bias. Where possible, sampling for KIIs drew on female and male participants in equal proportions. Questions were specifically designed with gender sensitivity in mind, to ensure that they can elicit any potential gender biases; at the same time, Triangle’s field team ensured that respondents of all genders can respond free from intimidation or harassment to all research questions. Second, the developed tools tackled the integration of human-rights and the inclusivity of people with special needs in the project design and implementation. The tools were specifically tailored to ensure accessibility and involvement of persons with special needs in the evaluation. Thirdly, Triangle’s research tools included questions aimed at cross-cutting themes related to the environment and climate change, as well as good governance practices. These issues permeate most (or all aspects) of the evaluation, as do gender-related issues.

1. Performance Standards (Evaluation matrix):

Triangle maintains rigorous quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that data collection, analysis and reporting standards are maintained and developed throughout project lifecycles. These assurance mechanisms are designed to ensure that research produced by Triangle is rigorous, ethical, adheres to international best practices and meets the highest quality research standards. Triangle’s management team are the ultimate duty-bearers of quality assurance mechanisms while team leaders are tasked with upholding standards throughout project cycles. In turn, Triangle’s management team holds bi-weekly meetings with team leaders in order to ensure that quality assurance mechanisms are adhered to and corrective actions are taken in due course.

*See Evaluation Matrix in Annex A.*

1. ethical considerations

Research conducted by Triangle seeks to ensure accordance with local laws and regulations as well as the adoption of ethical research principles throughout project cycles. As such, Triangle’s management team first conduct legal and ethical briefings with team leaders and primary staff involved in research activities prior to the commencement of research activities. During this process, contextual legalization and regulations are reviewed in order to ensure that research activities fall within the law of any localities where the company operates. Subsequently, an assessment of ethical considerations is conducted depending on the research in question; for example, with regard specific ethical considerations pertaining to research involving children, survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence.

Once preliminary legal and ethical assessments are completed, Triangle then develops a project-specific legal and ethical framework and applies both through the project life cycle. Accordingly, team leaders are tasked with ensuring that legal and ethical guidelines are maintained and upheld. Monitoring and assurance of legal and ethical guidelines are conducted by Triangle management who review progress at project milestones and during bi-weekly quality assurance meetings with team leaders.

Triangle’s Code of Conduct (See Annex I) lays out ethical standards which ensure the protection of, and respect for informants, clients, and programme beneficiaries, as well as Triangle employees, consultants, partners and their employees. Further, the Code of Conduct is designed to ensure effective processes and accountability for assignments.

*See Presentation & Informed Consent for Key Informant Interviews in Annex G.*

1. Background information on evaluators

Triangle’s project team consists of the team leader, a senior evaluator and a junior evaluator and a research analyst. Key personnel will be supported by Triangle’s in-house analysts, editors, graphic designers, and administrators. Several of Triangle’s support staff were involved in conducting and compiling interviews, given the wide reach of the project.

**NIZAR GHANEM** — TEAM LEADER

Nizar Ghanem is Triangle’s Director of Research and has more than a decade of extensive experience in conducting quantitative and qualitative research. Nizar led multiple evaluations and activities in the MENA covering economic development, regulatory policy, and economic integration UN-ESCWA, UNDP, the European Union, WFP, UNICEF and many others. Some of Nizar’s most relevant projects for this assignment include a comprehensive Assessment and Analysis of Business Environment Legislative Frameworks in the Arab Region for UN-ESCWA covering 22 Arab states. Recently, Nizar has completed an in-depth strategic analysis economic assistance strategy in Lebanon for the EU. Nizar also founded and managed the policy development platform Khamsoon, a policy research project on inter-Arab economic integration which produced over 100 public content items policy briefs, videos and media monitoring of economic integration in the Arab States. Nizar has also conducted several high-level training sessions for several governments in the MENA region on regulatory reform, foreign direct investment and public policy. Previous to Triangle Nizar was Senior Analyst at the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and authored various reports and published scholarly articles on a variety of topics related to governance and development in the West Asia and North Africa region. Nizar holds a Masters in International Relations and Economics from the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at John Hopkins University.

**DAVID WOOD** – SENIOR EVALUATOR

David Wood is a senior analyst with broad experience leading led monitoring and evaluation projects in the West Asia and North Africa region. David has recently led an impact valuation for 3 projects funded by Japan Platform (JPF) and implemented by member NGOs in all areas of Syria and a TPM assignments for the EU Delegation to Syria’s non-humanitarian development portfolio, which includes programmes with Oxfam, SOS Children’s Villages, UNDP, a consortium of Red Cross Societies collaborating with SARC, amongst other agencies. David has also recently been chief analyst on projects for Terre des Hommes Italia, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) and the U.S. Institute of Peace, with the latter project focusing on security forces in Tunisia. David is a strong writer who has had his work published in media outlets such as The Guardian and Foreign Policy, as well as several peer-reviewed law journals. David holds a Master’s degree in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Texas at Austin and Bachelor’s degrees in Law and Arts from the University of Melbourne, Australia.

**REINE ZAHREDDINE** – JUNIOR EVALUATOR

Reine Zahreddine is a researcher and evaluator with over six years of experience in conducting evaluation and research projects across Lebanon and Syria for organizations. Reine is experienced in managing field teams, overseeing project implementation, identifying and mitigating risks as well as developing evaluation methodologies and field implementation strategies. At Triangle, she has recently led a third-party evaluation of Japan Platform funded humanitarian assistance projects run by three Japanese organizations and four local implementing partners in both government and opposition-controlled areas of Syria where she had previously work for UNOCHA and Relief International. Reine has also worked as a programme officer specialised in gender advocacy and programme management. Reine holds a masters’ degree in socio-economic development from the Social Sciences Institute at the Lebanese University and a Supply Chain Management BA from Notre Dame University.

**SHAYA LAUGHLIN** – RESEARCH ANALYST

Shaya Laughlin is a research analyst with experience leading data analysis for projects in Lebanon and Syria. Shaya recently was the Chief Analyst for a gender and drought study in Northeast Syria funded by Mercy Corps. Shaya was also recently an analyst for a monitoring and mapping project of intra-Lebanese tensions for UNDP in Lebanon. Shaya is an experienced journalist whose work has been published widely by NewsCorp Australia, as well as other outlets such as the New Humanitarian. In addition, Shaya is experienced in managing field teams, overseeing project implementation, identifying and mitigating risks as well as developing field strategy. Shaya holds a Master’s degree in History and International Relations with a focus on the Middle East from University of Saint Joseph in Lebanon alongside a Bachelors in Journalism from Bond University in Australia.

1. major challenges & limitations

The methodology was designed considering the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the timeframe set out by the tender. Due to COVID-19, the evaluation used methods for data-collection and interviews that do not require travel or physical meetings. The evaluators did not engage in any activity that may place them or stakeholders at risk of being infected by the virus. Hence, data collection efforts, team meetings, and engagement with stakeholders were held virtually. The conduct of the interviews took place via remote platforms. It is acknowledged that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a higher-than-usual risk that the evaluation may be subject to unforeseen changes along the way. An implication of undertaking all interviews and discussions remotely is that there was no on-site observable data collected*.* Furthermore, due consideration was given to stakeholder availability and willingness to be interviewed remotely, their access to the internet/computer, and the possibility that some may be still working from home.

Given the wide scope and spread of the regional project, the evaluation had to focus on a limited range of activities which have potential to contribute to lessons learning and strategic directions for the programme. Triangle had anticipated that the main challenges to be faced would most likely come at the data collection stage due to the relatively short timeframe of this evaluation. In fact, weak response rates from respondents, and the postponement of several KIIs resulted in delays in the data collection phase. Triangle’s research team was able to mitigate this through continuous follow-ups with the respondents Additionally, differences in Arabic dialects affected some respondents’ understanding of questions, the flow of the interview and the reliability of the data (KIIs with Morocco). Triangle’s research team was able to mitigate this by conducting some interviews in French. Due to the inability to conduct all of the KIIs (KIIs not conducted with Sudan, Egypt, Iraq, private sector, and five LAS committees) the data collected only reflects the perspective of the interviewed stakeholders and their respective activities.

Finally, there was a serious lack of quantitative indicators in the project design which made it hard for the evaluation team to assess the performance and grade it. At the same time, as noted in the methodology, the survey was unfeasible and hindered the ability of the team to grade the project’s performance according to a set scale. Instead, Triangle added a qualitative summary and rating.

1. DATA ANALYSIS

Evidence obtained and used to assess the results was gathered from a variety of sources, including data on objectives’ achievement, existing reports, and stakeholder interviews. This ensured a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the data, generated through the evaluation. Moreover, Triangle engaged key stakeholders, which were involved in the delivery process and/or received advisory support, as well as project staff. The evaluation’s framework relied on several inputs of data, presenting a robust approach comprised of qualitative data, analysis, and triangulation. Where possible, Triangle’s analysis team used multiple sources to support analytical findings, insisting upon inter-source corroboration for optimal results. This triangulation approach allowed for direct interaction between different research activities – being KIIs and the adaptive literature review – to maintain analytical objectivity.

Being conscientious of the timeframe of this evaluation, the analysis team cleaned and analysed all qualitative data in real time. Triangle analysed all data collected according to the grounded theory method, also known as Glaser-Strauss method. Under this approach, the analysis team iteratively reviewed data according to principles of inductive reasoning, as opposed to working deductively from a hypothesis and / or predicted finding(s). By employing grounded theory, the analysis team was able to build theory and validate information from the field as necessary, further reinforcing the iterative research philosophy.

1. FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

**Summary:** The project was demand-driven with a bottom-up approach, making it relevant to the needs and priorities of both LAS and national counterparts. The project’s theory of change was conceived following the Arab uprisings when demands for change and opportunities ignited the region and made policymakers identify regional economic integration as a potential avenue to generate new and promising opportunities. The project’s pilot support to social enterprises in Lebanon and Morocco seems promising and could be the missing link to an effective theory of change. Overall, the project design had an overly ambitious scope and under-estimated regional challenges. It also had weakly formulated causal links between outcomes, outputs and indicators. The project implemented a hybrid regional-bilateral approach to trade facilitation based on an unclear methodology. Finally, the project design attempted to mainstream gender but did not include human rights and the environment as cross-cutting themes.

**This report bears the following rating for the relevance criteria:** Partially satisfactory (3)

**The project was demand-driven with a bottom-up approach, making it relevant to the needs and priorities of both LAS and national counterparts.**

The project design was needs-based and helped stakeholders develop their institutional capacity. UNDP provided support based on specific requests submitted for assistance, which increased stakeholder ownership of the programme. Technical support included thematic, research and capacity development assistance. On the one hand, stakeholders praised this approach because it was based on specific requests, ensuring relevance to the needs and priorities. On the other hand, other stakeholders criticized it because this approach lacked clear guidelines and failed to specify the thematic areas of interest related to trade facilitation. Stakeholders also reported that they were given a vague briefing of the project to guide their requests, without any clear theory or methodology on programmatically strengthening Arab economic integration and facilitating trade in the region within a given timeframe. As a result, the project could not address specific weaknesses because Arab countries – which suffer from an endemic lack of available data – were not able to prioritise the support they needed strategically.

**Project design had an overly ambitious scope and under-estimated regional challenges.**

The project’s ambitious scope included three pillars: trade policy reform and regulations, trade-related infrastructure, and building productive capacities. Yet, it did not justify the linkages nor the rationale of working on all three pillars simultaneously, rather than choosing one or two. It also did not specify the roadmap for each specific pilar and how they would intertwine successfully. The project design did not correctly account for the region's dynamics, complexities, culture and readiness to facilitate intra-regional trade due to a lack of in-depth problem analysis to establish a comprehensive method of working around these challenges. The risk assessment was also insufficient to account for the existing challenges. For example, the project design did not address the lack of coordination between different stakeholders at the national and regional levels or the current national trade policies weakness. Due to regional heterogeneity, sanctions and conflicts, national counterparts preferred to opt for bilateral trade agreements with non-Arab states - mainly European countries. Therefore, the project design was hindered by bottlenecks such as political unwillingness, protracted conflicts affecting several countries in the region, and lack of comparative advantage among Arab countries, which complicated trade integration. Hence, the regional integration-focused intervention fell into the trap of premature load-bearing (promising too much too soon). Moreover, in the absence of a specific number of member state beneficiaries, the project’s dedicated resources for implementation were insufficient to produce tangible changes in the whole Arab region, which UNDP considers to include LAS members with the exception of Mauritania and Comoros (the 20 countries where UNDP-RBAS regional programmes can operate). Overall, the project contributed to Outcome 1 of the Regional Programme Document (2018-2021): “Accelerate the structural transformation of productive capacities in a sustainable and inclusive manner”, which falls under the UNDP Strategic Plan (SP) Outcome 1 on poverty eradication.

**The project’s theory of change was conceived following the Arab uprisings when demands for change and opportunities ignited the region.**

The 2011 uprising made policy makers identify regional economic integration as a potential avenue to generate new and promising opportunities. Yet, only certain countries remained committed to such integration – for example, Jordan - while others had competing priorities and issues, including social and political turmoil, regime changes in Egypt and Sudan, and the financial crisis in Lebanon. Furthermore, after the COVID-19 pandemic, Arab countries increasingly attached importance to trade, intra-trade, transport facilitation, and productivity enhancement. Yet, the theory of change – which data shows that many stakeholders were unaware or - did not adapt well to the evolving contexts, including the lack of political will for trade facilitation and integration.

Based on an extensive desk review and key informant interviews, the project’s theory of change included several assumptions that proved challenging to measure and implement. Firstly, that trade integration in the Arab world would alleviate poverty and political stability. While sound theoretically, this assumption was not practically addressed in the project design. For example, there was no clear link in how some implemented activities would alleviate poverty.

Secondly, that the PAFTA is an adequate vehicle for deepening economic integration. However, PAFTA did not attract the necessary political buy-in or support since its inception. Data clearly showed that, despite acknowledging its benefits, stakeholders sidelined this trading instrument. One key informant with extensive experience in trade and economics said that focusing on developing the ACU instead could be more efficient to advance economic integration in the region, particularly by adopting different approaches such as differentiated speed integration or variable geometry.

Thirdly, economic integration can be enhanced by the technical capacity development of LAS and national counterparts. The project design was heavily weighted toward capacity development; however, it did not justify how these activities would materialise into concrete reforms in trade policies. The final assumption was the existence of sufficient political buy-in to increase regional trade. Yet, most Arab states do not follow through on their verbal statements regarding regional economic integration.

**The project had weakly formulated causal links between outcomes, outputs and indicators** The project's results framework was vague and underdeveloped. Missing elements included: the inputs needed to achieve outputs, targets, and means of verifications. The set of indicators lacked quantitative indicators, relying instead on qualitative ones, which were unspecific and unmeasurable. For example, under the project outcome 2, one of the indicators included the “level of readiness and preparedness of Arab LDCs to participate in PAFTA Upgrading”, without mentioning how this would be measured. The lack of problem analysis meant that the project could not specify concrete action areas with clear indicators and milestones. Moreover, the project lacked a solid stakeholders analysis to inform stakeholder identification. Instead, the project mainly relied on demand-driven requests submitted by stakeholders. As a result, the project activities were not well integrated, which led to a fragmented and ad-hoc approach to support provision. For instance, the link between capacity development activities and trade reforms was unclear. While the results framework was updated in 2020, the activities were already well underway, and it was hard to redress the project’s course at this late stage. Furthermore, the new indicators lacked specificity and could not be measured easily.

**The project implemented a hybrid regional-bilateral approach to trade facilitation based on an unclear methodology.**

Data indicates that a bilateral approach was more suitable to the Arab region’s context and more relevant to the stakeholders’ needs than a wider regional one. A bilateral approach was more specific and concrete for this project. It included infrastructure support – such as the Licensing Hub in Jordan – and capacity development of national counterparts through training on trade facilitation. A regional approach would have necessitated a robust regional entity with enough maneuvering strength to unite member states and push for a common agenda on trade integration. While several respondents considered LAS a necessary platform and important coordination hub, many also noted that its processes and capacities would require additional enhancement to perform at the intended level. While a multilateral approach theoretically enables multiple countries to share resources, the project didn’t address this fundamental trade integration element in its programming. For instance, the project did not conduct a comparative advantage study to determine and help capitalise on complementary sectors in the region. The only relevant example was in the form of experience sharing when Jordan shared its knowledge gained from developing the Licensing Hub with Palestine and Sudan. Finally, the project design did not have a clear micro-approach to engage the private sector and small businesses on national levels. For example, the Union of the Arab Chambers were not a solicited stakeholder despite its essential role in regional trade facilitation.

**The project’s pilot support to social enterprises in Lebanon and Morocco seems promising and could be the missing link to an effective theory of change.**

The support for MSMEs grounds the theory of change in a specific and tangible output and results at the micro-level. The pilot support could ground economic integration efforts for local private sector needs with necessary links to other programme components. The project's pilot support was relevant to local businesses’ capacity and knowledge development needs. For example, Lebanese SMEs and Agadir Cooperative's networks benefited from technical, financial, and capacity support. Yet, it is unclear how the pilot support fits in the larger programmatic design in an integrated manner. Further fine-tuning and integration of this pilot component with outcome 2 could be helpful to ensure project relevance to local needs. For example, Agadir cooperatives raised concerns over the lack of clarity on the assistance and the potential incurred costs after the end of the project. These factors are crucial to consider to avoid harm in the long term. Therefore, any programming that supports social enterprises – especially ones with smaller capacities - should be meticulously planned before implementation.

**The project design attempted to mainstream gender but did not include human rights and the environment as cross-cutting themes.**

The project proposal committed to gender mainstreaming and dedicated an output to gender to systematically pursue gender-related issues in trade, including facilitation and commissioning policies on gender auditing. In a sector-first, UNDP and LAS had specific quotas for women’s participation in trade and services-related workshops. They also tried to ensure that each panel had at least one woman. Moreover, the project implemented a range of analyses dedicated to gender-related impacts of policies and COVID-19 in Morocco, including the implications of preferential trade agreements on women-led cooperatives and two more gender studies. However, gender mainstreaming remained a weak area as UNDP faced pushback from stakeholders citing cultural sensitivities. LAS and national counterparts’ understanding of gender sensitivity were limited to female staff's participation in training and workshops. For example, LAS stakeholders said they tried to increase female participation in various meetings by contacting member states and relevant stakeholders. Yet, this practice is not a valid indicator of meaningful women’s participation. As for other cross-cutting themes, the project design did not include environmental and human rights considerations. Indeed, data showed that respondents considered these out of the project’s scope of work and did not know they were vital project elements.

EFFECTIVENESS

**Summary:** The project responded to most requests for support under outcome 1 to strengthen LAS’ capacity. The project targeted five member states - Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan – for support under the project outcome 2; however, more data is needed to evaluate levels of success. Jordan’s case study – support for the Licensing Hub - was a success story among stakeholders. Overall, however, the project did not promote a mutually beneficial integration of Arab economies into the multilateral trading system. Furthermore, reporting for all project outcomes and outputs was vague, and details about progress against planned activities were occasionally inconsistent. The project underdelivered on outcome 3, particularly regarding gender mainstreaming. As a whole, the project readjusted its work plan and redesigned its activities to adapt to the changing context due to COVID-19.

**This report bears the following rating for the effectiveness criteria:** Partially satisfactory (3)

**The project responded to most requests for support under outcome 1 to strengthen LAS’ capacity.**

Support provision targeted eight technical committees and 13 working groups in LAS. Based on project documents, AEISD received seven requests from five member states - Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq and Morocco - and one from LAS. Furthermore, the project is reported to have also supported Sudan and Lebanese customs.

Overall, the project assisted LAS and its counterparts on a request basis in three main areas. Firstly, through research and analysis on trade matters to inform and negotiate policies. Secondly, through technical assistance on topics such as rules of origin, the impact of COVID-19 and trade facilitation. Thirdly, capacity development through targeted training and workshops. Notably, the project assisted the Technical Secretariat to enhance its capacity to document, monitor and report the progress of PAFTA through a unified report. It also supported the preparation of technical documents and regional seminars or conferences on economic and trade matters.

According to project documents, the project had three critical achievements with LAS. Firstly, it analysed the potential impacts on national revenues and trade and the industrial policies for countries’ membership in the Arab Customs Union. The report analysed eight scenarios under two alternatives of the Common External Tariff (CET), detailing the impact on countries’ tariff revenues, GDP, sectoral outputs, employment, and trade. These outputs are required for countries to define their negotiating positions with the ACU. The study clarified ways and scenarios to increase flexibility in the context of the ACU by providing international examples. The study further analysed the risks of a flexible approach which could delay the benefits of economic integration for non-participating members. Secondly, the project assisted in drafting legal protocols in dispute settlement, the protection of intellectual property rights, consumers’ protection, trade facilitation for PAFTA upgrading, and the preparation of trade-related guidelines for PAFTA. Thirdly, the project completed a technical analysis to apply “cumulation of origin of goods” to increase intra-Arab trade. The analysis’s conclusions and recommendations led to the development of guidelines on the cumulation of origin adopted in 2021. As a result, the goods being produced in Arab countries benefit from preferential treatment.

Also significant, the project contributed to the development and finalisation of the Agreement on Liberalization of Trade in Services among Arab States in October 2019. Stakeholders reported that the negotiations were only fruitful thanks to support from UNDP. The project facilitated the engagement of the private sector and held workshops and seminars to increase their awareness of the agreement and its benefits. Plans by the Arab Economic Integration Department at LAS to further engage the private sector in the agreement were reportedly hampered by COVID-19 and geopolitics.

The project also promoted evidence-based policy dialogues on trade policy measures, particularly regarding dealing with the effects of COVID-19, the role of trade and services in deepening economic cooperation, actions for trade facilitation, and the impact on revenues of the Arab Customs Union. It increased understanding of trade liberalisation and economic integration as significant vehicles for development and integration in the Arab region. More than a thousand Arab policymakers and government technicians benefited from discussions and training throughout the project’s four years. While stakeholders appreciated the project’s capacity-development efforts, these did not materialise into concrete achievements at the trade policy reform level. Notably, the intervention design should be more comprehensive and integrated to build viable trade policy frameworks. Interventions need to have clear rational, achievable, feasible, realistic and measurable objectives, as well as a clear target audience - including age, background, function and role. Furthermore, support provision should be continuous and monitored, to increase the chances of achieving concrete results.

**The project targeted five member states - Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan – for support under the project outcome 2; however, more data is needed to evaluate levels of success.**

The available data validated the project’s support for Morocco’s research studies, Lebanese SME access to foreign markets, Palestine, and the Jordan’s Licensing Hub. In cooperation with UNCTAD, the project successfully reviewed Morocco's trade policies to align national practices to international standards – including WTO practices in goods and services trade – and facilitate access to global markets. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Digitalization – the central coordinator - prioritised three sectors: wholesale and retail distribution, legal services, and logistics for pharmaceutical goods. This assistance followed Morocco’s Ministry of Trade and Digitalization’s request in 2018 to review its trade in services policy. Hence, UNDP and UNCTAD identified opportunities to diversify Moroccan services and capitalise on new opportunities in Africa to export services.[[8]](#footnote-9) UNDP conducted thematic consultations with four governmental agencies and the private sector as part of this. The analysis resulted in recommendations for modernising trade policies, mainly aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of Moroccan services. Furthermore, the 20 policy recommendations – designed in consultation with relevant stakeholders – contributed to the analysis, facilitating Morocco’s negotiations to become part of the African Continental Free Trade Area. While the project also reported assisting Moroccan Customs, the interviewed stakeholder denied being part of it.

In Lebanon, the project provided practical support to small Lebanese SMEs - particularly through the engagement of Fair Trade Lebanon (an NGO experienced in the promotion of local agro-business products) - to support the private sector in generating business opportunities in the US market. After numerous consultations with potential beneficiaries like food manufacturers and logistics operators, the project started providing support in 2021, mainly through capacity development.

The project also assisted Palestine in joining the Arab Agreement on Trade in Services in February 2021. UNDP held two workshops in Jordan to provide basic trade agreements negotiation skills to about 20 Palestinian staff from engaged ministries. UNDP then supported Palestine in preparing its schedule of commitments and reviewing its compliance and membership offer. This assistance also contributed to raising Palestine’s understanding of the WTO’s General Agreement on Trade in Services and its modalities to prepare its offer of commitments. Support was provided to progressively align Palestine’s trade policies to the international standards and conventions of the multilateral systems in support of its decades-long interest in joining the WTO. Furthermore, the project conducted national consultations with related stakeholders to consider their interests. Finally, the project helped Palestine’s Customs learn from Jordanian experiences of Authorized Economic Operators (Gold Card Programme for the private sector) and develop a National Single Window.

The project also assisted the joint working group of Egyptian and Jordanian customs and concerned agencies to establish a trade/transport corridor between Nuweiba and Aqaba. The team helped finalise the MOU based on consultations with border management authorities in Egypt and Jordan. Through this Egypt-Jordan economic cooperation, the corridor was expected to be activated in 2020. However, meetings of policymakers from the two countries were postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions, and they had not been reactivated by the end of the project.

**Support provided as per project review (progress) reports:**

Project review reports also mention that support was provided to Egypt to re-activate efforts in improving trade transparency through the national single window. However, insufficient data was available to validate this assistance, similarly to the support reportedly provided to Lebanon, Sudan and Iraq.

In Lebanon, the project reportedly provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Economy and Trade to develop the Roadmap of Export Promotion of Lebanon towards the new strategies for Reform-Recovery-Reconstruction – a programme initiated by UNDP, the EU and the World Bank. The project supported Lebanon to upgrade its trade policies by investing in and promoting e-Commerce. Hence, a study of legal foundations for e-Commerce and automation in Lebanon was completed and reviewed several Lebanese initiatives and national regulations surrounding telecommunication operations. The study pointed to the need for more public investment to improve the outdated telecommunication infrastructure and the need to promote competition. This detailed analysis was prepared and consulted with the Lebanese Customs and then used to boost the reform and modernisation of the Lebanese Customs and related agencies. In addition, following the Beirut Port explosion, the project prepared and presented Lebanese Customs with a proposal for a new governance model for the Port of Beirut, including technical analysis and mapping of stakeholders to support anti-corruption activities.

The project reportedly provided capacity development assistance in Sudan, based on a short-term request submitted in 2021. Sudan benefited from the exchange of experiences on trade facilitation activities in alignment with the international provisions of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Representatives from various Sudanese agencies participated in training on trade policies to better understand the draft protocol on the trade facilitation part of PAFTA upgrading. The project also assisted the country in drafting the National Single Window Roadmap. A virtual workshop on the design and planning of the Sudanese Single Window was planned but put on hold due to logistics challenges.

In Iraq, the project reportedly lifted the WTO negotiating team’s capacity on trade policy reforms and coherence with WTO requirements. The aim was to give the Iraqi team a better understanding of the WTO legal instruments and progressively align Iraq’s national trade policies to WTO standards in goods and services trade. In addition to thematic support on trade matters, the project also advised Iraq to strengthen its institutional arrangements, such as designing the required working groups and task forces. Furthermore, the project team reviewed Iraq’s compliance with the technical requirements of the Arab Agreement on Trade in Services, which resulted in the upgrade of the country’s thematic preparations. While Iraq suspended its PAFTA commitments in 2019 due to political volatility, the project continued its support to the country. However, a training to modernise Iraq’s supply chain in 2020 had to be cancelled due to logistical and pandemic-related challenges.

**Jordan’s case study – support for the Licensing Hub - was a success story among stakeholders.**

The project supported the Licensing Hub, a fundamental component in the Jordan National Single Window Roadmap expected to operate in early 2022. The project also helped Jordan develop capacity and design and activate the pre-arrival clearance of shipments at the Aqaba Port (2018). While the transition to paperless work was considered necessary, Jordanian Customs initially faced some resistance and difficulties in implementation. Overall, stakeholders associated several specific factors which contributed to Jordan’s successful performance, including political buy-in, inter-agency cooperation, financial support, alignment of objectives, the involvement of the private sector, experienced staff, and proper assessments.

**The project did not promote a mutually beneficial integration of Arab economies into the multilateral trading system.**

While the project supported specific countries and initiatives, there was no overall sector research or comparative analysis. There was also no data or SWOT analysis to understand each sector’s strengths and weaknesses, nor their comparative advantages. Therefore, the project lacked an understanding of complementary areas which could be capitalised on – both at the outcome or approach levels. For example, Arab countries produce similar products, yet the project did not focus on agriculture or textile, the principal industrial employer in Arab countries, particularly women. All these factors hindered the promotion of mutually beneficial integration. Furthermore, the project did not foster or encourage intra-state collaboration on a particular topic. In a limited manner, the project connected national and LAS counterparts with a variety of experts, through specific collaborations or for thematic advice. However, while the project fostered several collaborations, it did not create synergies or complementarities.

**Reporting for all project outcomes and outputs was vague, and details about progress against planned activities occasionally inconsistent.**

UNDP used a qualitative value for targets and actual achievements (i.e., limited, moderate, high, significant). The lack of quantitative data made it difficult to assess how the activities conducted contributed to several programmatic aims, including poverty reduction, job creation and a decrease in unemployment; achieved economic growth in the supported countries; or resulted in an increase or variation in intra-trade, particularly in trade in services. Furthermore, reporting on project achievements was not comprehensive, clear and completely accurate. For example, progress reports (2020 and 2021) said the development and upgrade of the website of Arab Economic Integration in 2021. However, the website was never developed. In another example, the project team reported working with the Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce, yet this important actor said it was not solicited. Indeed, when reaching out to conduct a critical informant interview with the Moroccan Customs Director, the latter said that they were not part of the AEISD project, unlike what project review reports reported.

**The project underdelivered on outcome 3, particularly regarding gender mainstreaming.**

The project faced several challenges to gender mainstreaming, including cultural barriers and UNDP’s lack of advice and emphasis on the matter during project design and implementation. The project did not engage female entrepreneurs as critical stakeholders or involve them in policy discussions. The project had no gender sensitivity and awareness-raising component, no active support for higher participation of women in training and other capacity-building measures, and no facilitation of gender auditing of related policies and measures and their implementation. Furthermore, in terms of budgeting, this outcome was given the lowest budget among all project outcomes. UNDP reported limited achievement towards increasing the number of gender-responsive mechanisms to ensure systematic integration of gender sensitivities in trade policymaking and negotiations. For example, in Morocco, the project conducted a study on Sustainable Impact Assessment (SIAs) and Gender Trade Impact Assessment (GTIAs) to evaluate the effects of trade agreements and policies on women. The assessment revealed that most trade policies are gender blind, reaffirming the need for gender-responsive mechanisms and women’s participation in trade. However, no concrete actions were taken at the back of this study.

**The project readjusted its work plan and redesigned its activities to adapt to the changing context due to COVID-19.**

The impact of the pandemic shifted national priorities. Arab countries re-adjusted their policy priorities to strengthen the national economic recovery and production. The changing national priorities and the travel restrictions since 2020 caused several delays, and the project was extended three times. Many activities were delayed, postponed or cancelled. The project team tried to capitalise on the shifts brought on by COVID-19 by focusing on new trade areas and policies such as e-Commerce. Indeed, the project added virtual training for more than 400 policymakers from 17 Arab countries on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Arab economic integration. UNDP repurposed activities and adopted innovative delivery modalities to mitigate diverse restrictions. Stakeholders reported different levels of adaptation. Stakeholders reported drags to switching to virtual correspondence – a modality rarely used in the Arab region. For example, several critical legal discussions related to PAFTA could not be adequately tackled online given their sensitive nature and meetings were thus delayed.

EFFICIENCY

**Summary:** The project’s weak Results-Based Management (RBM) strategy affected all aspects of planning and implementation. Data indicates mixed reports regarding communication between UNDP and project stakeholders and its link to project efficiency. Overall, bureaucracy decreased the project’s operational efficiency. Notably, the project’s mobilisation of relevant and high calibre expertise helped stakeholders benefit from the project. While the project adapted to restrictions imposed by COVID-19, the pandemic caused some implementation delays.

**This report bears the following rating for the efficiency criteria:** Satisfactory (4)

**The project’s weak Results-Based Management (RBM) strategy affected all aspects of planning and implementation.**

While there were efforts to take corrective actions in strengthening the application of RBM to the extent possible in the last year and a half, the project had endemic design weaknesses. UNDP did try to shift some of the activities to maximise the project’s possible impact. However, they faced difficulties redressing the course because the project was already underway. The weaknesses in the RBM strategy made it difficult to efficiently communicate with stakeholders in a demand-driven and complex project where good communication was crucial.

**Data indicates mixed reports regarding communication between UNDP and project stakeholders and its link to project efficiency.**

Overall, national counterpart stakeholders reported higher communication efficiency than LAS counterparts. Regular communication between UNDP and national counterparts – especially with Jordanian Customs, Moroccan Customs, Fair Trade Lebanon - reportedly helped operational efficiency, particularly between UNDP and Jordanian customs, UNDP and Fair Trade Lebanon. For example, Jordanian Customs appreciated the open lines of communication that the UNDP team had established throughout the project lifespan. The Ministry of Trade reported the same in Morocco. The main exception was with Palestine, whereas the communication lines were reportedly blurry and confusing at the national counterpart’s level. While there were no reporting requirements for national counterparts towards UNDP throughout activity implementation, yet the latter did have to validate contractors’ reports to UNDP. As for LAS counterparts, the communication with UNDP project staff was generally considered efficient. Some stakeholders reported challenges with the project manager, whom they perceived to be more theoretically focused than practical, with limited knowledge of the region’s challenging context. Furthermore, communication was continuous but only partially flexible (see the bureaucracy section below). UNDP was responsive to most requests, contributing to logistical planning and organisation efficiency.

**Communication and project governance:**

In October 2019, UNDP set forth a project steering committee to provide strategic guidance, monitor compliance, direct the implementation, and oversee the project’s overall achievements. On paper, the committee was meant to include the director of UNDP’s Regional Bureau for the Arab States, a high-level officer from SIDA, and a representative from LAS and its counterparts. However, it did not convene throughout the project’s lifespan. Operational efficiency challenges could have been mitigated if this committee had regularly convened as per its set TOR. Furthermore, four donor focal points were appointed throughout the project implementation period, resulting in a high turnover which negatively impacted donor’s monitoring and overseeing of the project’s implementation. Yet, communication and advice from the donor reportedly improved as of 2020. Overall, the project priorities and the intended outputs were sufficiently aligned between UNDP, SIDA and LAS throughout the course of the project.

**Communication and project partnerships:**

Partnership between UNDP and LAS was fundamental for project implementation and did further project effectiveness. Communication was more regular and inceptive throughout project implementation. The UNDP Regional Programme sub-office based in Lebanon ran the AEISD project. Relevant intra-organizational collaboration took place on a needs basis, for example, with UNDP Country Office in Morocco to help roll out the national trade review with the Moroccan government and the women-led cooperatives supported in Agadir. UNDP collaborated with several international agencies, such as UNCTAD and WTO, to mobilise global expertise and relevant support for project implementation. Inceptive and regular communication between UNDP and UNCTAD reinforced the project's relevance to stakeholder needs and priorities. Whenever LAS and national counterparts stakeholders received trade support from multiple avenues, the project efficiently coordinated efforts to avoid duplication. For example, the Jordanian Customs were also supported by GIZ for their National Single Window strategy. Hence, the customs and UNDP regularly communicated with GIZ to optimize operational efficiency.

However, concerning gender equality and LNOB alignment could have been further improved (please refer to effectiveness section for more details on the insufficient achievements on gender mainstreaming and the relevance section on the weak gender sensitive project design).

**Bureaucracy decreased the project’s operational efficiency.**

Stakeholders reported UNDP’s administrative procedures and requirements resulted in long decision-making time and inflexibility. Concurrently, UNDP project staff also reported drags due to LAS’s bureaucracy in decision-making and communication which affected project implementation. Bureaucracy was described as “deadly”, hindering the project’s timeliness. Reported bureaucratic challenges were numerous. In Palestine, stakeholders said per diem payment issuance was always six months to a year late. As a result, participants had to pay out-of-pocket commuting costs, which decreased their motivation. In another example, stakeholders reported language difficulties, whereas UNDP did not accommodate Arabic-speaking Jordanian customs staff and insisted on using English, despite Arabic being an official UN language. During the contractor selection process for Jordan’s Licensing Hub, UNDP's specific prerequisites led to financial inefficiencies and delays in the implementation deadline. UNDP had strict requirements regarding the international company, while the Jordanians preferred a local contractor. Ultimately, local contracting proved to be a more effective and cost-efficient solution.

**The project’s mobilisation of relevant and high calibre expertise helped stakeholders benefit from the project.**

All stakeholders praised the quality of expertise provided by UNDP in specialist domains. Overall, the project optimised human and financial resources. Project review reports show that it achieved 86.6% of the annual activity implementation and spent 89% of the annual budget from 2017 to 2021. A large part of the funds allocated under project outcome 1 was used for LAS capacity building and development activities - two key domains which LAS struggles with. The funds were also used to commission experts to conduct research and studies. Similarly, the funds allocated under project outcome 2 to national counterparts mainly were spent on capacity development, commissioning studies, and targeted technical and equipment support. Stakeholders primarily appreciated the level of expertise and calibre mobilised by UNDP, responsible for managing all recruitment needs throughout the project. Stakeholders contributed to TOR development by providing UNDP with the general framework of expertise sought. Yet, procurement was sometimes challenging and did not consider stakeholders’ feedback on bidders, as previously exemplified in the collaboration for the Jordanian Licensing Hub.

**While the project adapted to restrictions imposed by COVID-19, the pandemic caused some implementation delays.**

Since 2020, the delivery of project activities occurred in the challenging circumstances of COVID-19 and the adjustment of national priorities in economic development. In 2020-2021, the project had to readjust its work plan and redesign activities in response to the new regional and national priorities of dealing with the adverse impacts of COVID-19. The pandemic presented the project with both opportunities and challenges. The project tried to capitalise on the requirements imposed by COVID-19 to introduce new initiatives on trade policies like e-Commerce, a proposal to establish the Arab Trade Observatory, and an analysis of trade and the green economy. Stakeholders adapted to COVID-19 restrictions by adopting coping strategies such as switching to online meetings, training and workshops. However, initially, the transition received some resistance; changing to virtual work affected stakeholders’ engagement. For example, LAS had to put everything on hold for a while until they found effective and cost-efficient alternatives. These alternatives did not reach the same level of engagement and response as in-person interactions. Some trips, meetings and workshops were cancelled, and others were delayed. The only risk management mechanisms, forecasting or analysis to address pandemic-related challenges were conducted in Morocco by analysing the impact of COVID-19 on trade. While imposing new challenges, COVID-19 also emphasised the importance of a strong regional supply chain, intra-trade and e-Commerce for the Arab region. The continuous communication between UNDP and critical stakeholders was vital in maintaining project relevance amidst contextual changes.

Impact and SUSTAINABILITY

**Summary:** The project produced tangible outputs which are expected to have lasting benefits. However, the lack of defined metrics to measure sustainability in the project design makes it difficult to assess the project’s impact over the long term. There was a lack of reporting mechanisms to document lessons learned and ensure product sustainability. Furthermore, while the project explicitly linked economic integration and sustainable development, its substantial impact on SDG achievement was unclear.

**This report bears the following rating for the impact and sustainability criteria:** Partially satisfactory (3)

**The project produced tangible outputs which are expected to have lasting benefits.**

The project’s tangible outputs can be built upon for future projects designed by stakeholders. Such outputs include various studies, research, and policy reviews conducted; the Licensing Hub; and Palestine’s entry into the Arab Agreement in Trades in Services. However, the sustainability of most project outputs will largely depend on the availability of funds after the project’s completion. Indeed, in the absence of funding, all stakeholders reported that they could not sustain the benefits of the received support because they did not have the required human and financial resources to do so. While mandated with facilitated regional economic integration, LAS’ Arab Economic Integration Department is already understaffed and lacks funding. Thus, without external financial support and technical assistance, LAS’ time and operational efficiency are further weakened. As for national counterparts, especially the LDCs, financial and technical support are critical to advancing trade-related infrastructure and productive capacities.

Notably, stakeholders reported having gained valuable skills in trade that will be useful in the long term, for example, trade negotiation skills. For example, stakeholders in Morocco said that the studies conducted were helpful and will be used as supporting material to work on a national Trade Law Reform Project. However, during the span of the project, there were no tangible reforms in the legal framework due to political reasons – a change of government after the elections - but these reviews were used and will be used for trade agreements negotiations, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA).

Another example is the Jordanian intervention, which helped generate lasting benefits in transparency and accountability through the move to paperless work processes and skills to avoid duplication. While it is too early to quantitively estimate the potential benefits since the hub is not operational yet, it is expected that the support will help reduce the overall time and cost inputs. Jordan’s Licensing Hub was also the only example of having a good exit strategy - plans to sustain the benefits and support over the long term - because customs were given ownership of the development process and the tools to take over after the project’s intervention’s completion. Other exit strategies were not discussed in other interventions, decreasing the project’s level of sustainability.

There are several risks to take into consideration for the sustainability of produced outputs. Firstly, political turmoil, and further economic crises, which are thought to generally shift governments’ attention to the national level and therefore slow down economic integration and negotiation efforts. Secondly, a change in government and political players at the national level. Thirdly, a change in representatives in LAS, particularly if their agenda substantially varies. Finally, a lack of or inconsistent follow-up by UNDP for implemented activities.

**The lack of defined metrics to measure sustainability in the project design makes it difficult to assess the project’s impact over the long term.**

The project did not have a clear and structured monitoring and evaluation strategy in the design phase to measure the impact of capacity-development activities. Therefore, it was unable to evaluate the effectiveness of the staff learning – for example, through feedback forms or exams - nor their lasting benefits. Overall, institutional knowledge was hindered for two main reasons. Firstly, a clear and structured rationale was absent for participants’ selection when planning capacity building and development activities. For example, in Palestine, the choice of participants to attend training mainly was ad-hoc. Many of those who received the training were close to retirement age. LAS stakeholders reported that the project trained in majority staff aged 45 and 48, who are expected to continue contributing their new skills to the sector for about another decade. In both cases, the gained knowledge is likely to be lost because the project did not guide stakeholders for effective knowledge transfer mechanisms or tools for institutional learning. Secondly, there was an absence of lessons learned documentation (see the following lessons learned section). Only the participants present during the training benefited, and there was no clear strategy for the staff members who may have been absent that day. The project’s policy component also did not have a plan to measure the sustainable impact of the results of various research and studies. More time is needed to assess how the findings were concretely used. Other ongoing activities include the Licensing Hub and the Fast Track with Fair Trade Lebanon and Agadir Cooperatives. To measure these activities’ sustainability would first require the revision of KPIs and a testing period.

**There was a lack of reporting mechanisms to document lessons learned and ensure product sustainability.**

A lack of lessons learned documentation will limit future projects’ performance. Documenting lessons learned allows an organisation and other stakeholders to institutionalise learning and place themselves in a continuous improvement cycle. While the support prioritised the provision of technicalities and tools, it did not address knowledge transfer. A lack of lessons-learned documentation decreases the likelihood of institutional learning and, therefore, the prospect of impactful and sustainable assistance. In a notable example, the LAS website – which could have helped improve the dissemination of resources and awareness-raising about Arab trade matters – was never established due to a new regulation passed by LAS limiting the hosting and development of online platforms to its own IT division for security reasons.

**While the project explicitly linked economic integration and sustainable development, its substantial impact on SDG achievement was unclear.**

Project activities were expected to help countries address their needs around trade facilitation and its relation to sustainable development. In theory, improving trade facilitation and economic growth - on both national and regional levels - would eventually help member states and the region achieve SDGs under the agenda 2030. The specified SDGs included SDG8 regarding decent work and economic growth and SDG 17 regarding partnerships for the goals. Enhanced economic integration also benefits SDGs 1 (no poverty) and 2 (zero hunger) by providing disadvantaged people with access to finance, technology, and employment opportunities and boosting the fragile food security in a region heavily dependent on food imports. In theory, the project also contributed to SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) through activities focused on analysing the linkages between economic integration and issues related to both gender parity and transparency in governance. However, stakeholders did not unanimously acknowledge the impact or links to SDGs. The project did not set indicators to reflect the member states' adherence to the SDGs to achieve the 2030 agenda. LAS only had a general understanding of the project’s relevance and its direct effect on sustainable development. Data shows that SDG achievement was not considered a priority due to a lack of related indicators in the project design. Furthermore, the project did not capitalise on the SDG’s ready-to-use metrics.

1. CONCLUSIONS

**Conclusion 1.** The project relied on an overly ambitious scope and under-estimated regional challenges, such as political bottlenecks and poor national and regional coordination mechanisms in the Arab region. The project’s theory of change was conceived following the 2011 Arab uprisings when demands for change and more opportunities ignited in the region and made policy makers identify regional economic integration as a potential avenue to generate new and promising opportunities. However, the project was not able to adapt to the quickly evolving context due to an inadequate RBM strategy at the design phase that, among other weaknesses, had weakly formulated causal links between outcomes, outputs and indicators.

**Conclusion 2**. The project implemented a hybrid regional-bilateral approach to trade facilitation. It was demand-driven with a bottom-up approach, making it relevant to the needs and priorities of both LAS and national counterparts. While it succeeded in assisting LAS counterparts developing and finalizing the Arab Framework Agreement of Liberalisation of Trade in Services, it did not see the realization of mutually beneficial integration of Arab economies into the multilateral trading system. Furthermore, while the project design had a gender component, gender mainstreaming remained weak during implementation.

**Conclusion 3.** The project effectively responded to most requests for support from LAS under the project outcome 1 and targeted seven member states - Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan – under outcome 2. However, reporting on the outcomes was vague, and progress reported against planned activities was occasionally inconsistent. Out of all the country-specific interventions, Jordan’s case study – support for the Licensing Hub - was hailed as a success story among stakeholders. The project’s pilot support to social enterprises in Lebanon and Morocco was also promising and could be the missing link to an adequate theory of change.

**Conclusion 4**. Among its successes, the project readjusted its work plan and redesigned its activities to adapt to the changing context due to COVID-19. The project’s mobilisation of relevant and high calibre expertise also helped stakeholders benefit from the project and is expected to have lasting benefits. However, the endemic lack of defined measuring metrics and a lack of reporting mechanisms to document lessons learned complicated assessing the project’s impact over the long term.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are addressed to both the donor (Sida) and the project implementor (UNDP) to improve any future initiatives for trade integration in the Arab region:

Related to Conclusion 1:

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| Recommendation 1 deals with | Relevance: project scope |
| Recommendation 1 is directed at | Donor, UNDP |

**Recommendation 1. The focus should be limited on a few key pillars for trade assistance to avoid an overly ambitious scope of work and provide a rationale for it.** Projects’ scopes should focus on one or two pillars: such as trade policy reform and regulations, trade-related infrastructure, and support SMEs access to external markets. Projects should also justify the rationale and create a comprehensive roadmap for the pillar/s that it decides to focus on. It should be noted that, policy assistance is the most challenging trade assistance pillar as it would require extensive effort to generate political buy-in and commitment, which the Arab region currently lacks. Hence, it is advised to focus on infrastructure and assistance to export promotion for the private sector, which are more feasible to achieve concrete results in the short and medium term. These types of initiatives can also provide some bottom-up proof of concept to help donors, direct implementers, relevant stakeholders advocate for policy reforms based on tangible results. Policy assistance can therefore be better tailored and informed by more accurate baselines.

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| Recommendation 2 deals with | Efficiency: M&E architecture |
| Recommendation 2 is directed at | Donor, UNDP |

**Recommendation 2. Design a results framework with both quantitative and qualitative indicators that are plausible, attributable, cost-effective, targeted, and verifiable.** The linkages between outcomes, outputs, indicators and impact need to be identified, particularly regarding trade expansion, growth and poverty reduction. Subsequently, implement project governance mechanisms to ensure corrective action and sustainability beyond a project’s duration. The project oversight can be strengthened by designing, activating and consistently running a project steering committee that includes key stakeholders. Activating the project advisory board from the project’s onset ensures that monitoring can trigger timely corrective action to optimise synchronicity between all stakeholders, as well as adequate risk identification and management. While project governance mechanisms must allow for flexibility for project staff and stakeholders to adapt to contextual and project-related changes, sustainability must be integrated from the project’s design phase to ensure adequate exit strategies.

Related to Conclusion 2:

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| Recommendation 3 deals with | Relevance: identifying and addressing needs |
| Recommendation 3 is directed at | Donor, UNDP |

**Recommendation 3. Undertake a series of in-depth country needs assessments and stakeholder/context mapping before project design and implementation, to identify three economic sectors feasible for early trade liberalisation.** Micro-level assessments are required to tailor the assistance to specific national needs. More specifically, the series of assessments at a national level should focus on three main points. Firstly, an overview of the country’s economic performance and economic trends; politics, and safety and security trends; political and diplomatic relations with other Arab countries; existing trade-related policies and trade-related procedures; rating on transparency, accountability, access to information, women and youth inclusion, social inclusion, and equity. Secondly, an examination of the performance of the public sector, particularly institutions engaged in trade and economic matters, as well as the performance and engagement of the private sector. Thirdly, a mapping of existing resources such as natural, financial, industrial, and human; industries; and internal and external growth limitations. Finally, an in-depth analysis of supply-side constraints is required to pinpoint inadequate infrastructure, lack of credits, inadequate technology or labour force. The project should consider tackling demand-driven reforms to upgrade supply chains, propose tools to address market failure and social/environmental challenges, and help design trade policies that are conducive to economic growth, industrial development, and innovation. Due to the Arab region’s endemic lack of available data, creative ways need to be explored to access relevant sources of information to guide programming design and/or policy recommendations.

Theexamination of national needs, resources and aspiration could inform and guide future programming to identify economic sectors for early regional integration in consultation with relevant stakeholders.Needs assessment at the national level provide understanding of the national context, such as resources, sectors and challenges. These assessments can be used to then identify potential areas of complementarity and comparative advantages to guide regional level interventions such as project and assistance designs. To further promote mutually beneficial integration, a study should identify national infrastructure linking local producers to domestic, regional, and global markets and trade's governing regulatory and legal environment. It is essential to study regional dynamics to be able to adjust programming to the specific regional context.

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| Recommendation 4 deals with | Cross-cutting issues: Gender |
| Recommendation 4 is directed at | UNDP |

**Recommendation 4. Ensure that trade interventions guarantee more solid gender mainstreaming in future programming.** Theproject design needs to explicitly formulate a gender equality objective to have gender mainstreamed in trade assistance. Such objectives should be designed to impact advancing gender equality or the empowerment of women positively. Firstly, the project should assess gender inequalities at the national economy level, a quantitative analysis of the expected consequences of trade reforms, and develop a trade and gender index to synthesize the impact of trade liberalisation on women. Secondly, the project should ensure 360-degree awareness of trade policies’ impact while taking the necessary measures to redress pre-existing inequalities through a gender-sensitive lens. Additionally, it should avoid assumptions of gender-neutrality, account for all aspects of negotiators’ legal obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Further considerations should be given to promoting women’s productive employment and challenging discriminatory social norms in trade and the business market.

Related to Conclusion 3:

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| Recommendation 5 deals with | Effectiveness: review of project policy work |
| Recommendation 5 is directed at | UNDP |

**Recommendation 5. Combine upstream policy work with more bottom-up and direct engagement of users of trade services.** Trade policy reforms are insufficient to deliver the expected benefits from trade expansion. Hence the importance of clearly showing how trade aid, at the level of policy reforms, can be materialised and directly impact alleviating poverty and raising living standards for the most vulnerable groups. Concrete achievements could be the primary motivation used to encourage stakeholders – country and regional counterparts – to engage in policy reforms. Hence, tangible outcomes are needed to justify and strengthen policy reforms, advocacy and efforts. For the few countries that have existing national trade policies, these policies must be (1) re-vamped with results-based management (RBM); (2) comprehensive and fit into the regional agenda; (3) linked to the SDGs; and (4) have services, environment and gender as essential components.

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| Recommendation 6 deals with | Effectiveness: strengthening capacity development |
| Recommendation 6 is directed at | Donor, UNDP |

**Recommendation 6. Develop a clear and structured approach to assisting least-developed countries in building their trade-related capacity.** This approach includes helping countries with information, policies, procedures, institutions and infrastructure.Consider designing activities toencourage active knowledge-sharing between south-south countries. There needs to be a framework of cooperation and best practices to improve institutional learning and strengthen institutional memory. Such actions will further help strengthen accountability and ownership of Aid for Trade.

Related to Conclusion 4:

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| Recommendation 7 deals with | Sustainability: digital transformation |
| Recommendation 7 is directed at | UNDP |

**Recommendation 7. Address the importance of digital transformation for the delivery of trade services, including opportunities to boost e-commerce.** Future projects should begin by enriching existing data on opportunities for digital transformation. The project should also increase the awareness of the public and private sectors on digital trade trends and provide stakeholders with concrete examples of what can be achieved. Capacity-development activities should be designed for digital transformation. However, the latter also needs to be accompanied by infrastructure support. For example, the project could provide new digital tools, then work to develop the capacity of staff to use these tools effectively. Future programming should take into account previous and ongoing UNDP projects addressing digital transformation and capacity development to synergize efforts and optimize resources – and thus, a positive impact on sustainability.

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| Recommendation 8 deals with | Sustainability: SDGs |
| Recommendation 8 is directed at | Donor, UNDP |

**Recommendation 8. Push for specific environmental protection objectives and design trade policies with environmental protection in mind, abiding by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.** The latter has fortified the acknowledgment that environmental degradation, lack of access to clean and affordable water, and spreading hunger and poverty have become the most pressing concerns faced by the international community and that trade can play an essential role in finding solutions. For example, while reducing costs, lower trade tariffs can also facilitate trade actors’ access to equipment and technologies that can mitigate environmental harm caused by all stages of economic activities. Fostering cleaner practices in business through increasing awareness can also provide competitive advantages to green businesses and make green practices more widespread. Future projects should address environmental challenges in a comprehensive and holistic approach that reflects international, regional and national supply chains. Data and analysis are the keys to making informed decisions. Hence, greater investment is needed for the systematic collection of data related to the environment – for example, firms providing green services, the financial cost of environmental harm, simulations on how cleaner practices can improve performance and profits.

1. LESSONS LEARNED

* Effective trade interventions need to focus on few ambitious but achievable and clearly defined pillars – preferably capacity-development and infrastructure support - and provide a clear rationale and results chain based on comprehensive roadmaps showing how these interventions contribute to development outcomes such as poverty reduction.
* While being demand driven is conducive to beneficiaries’ satisfaction and responsive to their needs, detailed data at the national and regional levels is required to tailor the project’s support areas for regional economic integration. The lack of needs assessments and stakeholder/context mapping can easily result in the provision of ad-hoc, incoherent and not integrated support, with limited contribution at the outcome level.
* Working with users of trade services – for example, SMEs – or institutions that provide these services could help showcase impact in the short-term and eventually inform longer-term trade reform processes. This type of downstream approaches need to be implemented with adequate planning and precautions to ensure no harm is done, including securing sustainable funding.
* The application of digital solutions to trade processes can be a low-hanging fruit to engage decision makers in policy reform processes that increase efficiency, reduce time and monetary transaction costs, while also enhancing transparency and responsiveness to public and private stakeholders.
* Gender mainstreaming cannot just be limited to increased female participation in training and workshops. The involvement of women entrepreneurs and stakeholders needs to be an integral part of the gender mainstreaming of all trade-related initiatives.
* Weaknesses in the design phase hampers a project’s overall implementation and sustainability and it undermines several components of monitoring and evaluation, which. To avoid this, a comprehensive RBM strategy should be established and closely monitored from the onset of project design.
* Tools to measure capacity development initiatives' effectiveness are essential to capture the project’s actual benefits for stakeholders adequately. To scale and replicate successful initiatives, lessons learned documentation and institutional learning mechanisms need to be put in place.
* Project governance mechanisms are essential for corrective action and sustainability beyond a project’s duration. In this project, if the project advisory board was activated from the project’s onset, better monitoring could have triggered timely corrective action to optimise synchronicity between all stakeholders.

1. ANNEXES

Annex A: evaluation matrix

Table 2: evaluation matrix

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Evaluation Criteria** | **Key Questions** | **Sub-questions** | **Methods for Data Analysis** |
| **Relevance** | The extent to which the AEISD project, its design, objectives, and approach respond to regional and national stakeholders’ needs and priorities?  *Is the intervention doing the right things?* | To what Sustainable Development Goals did the project contribute, and to what extent were they mainstreamed? Which SDGs were seen to be most and least important and prominent to institutions involved in the project? | Desk Review, KIIs with project staff, LAS, and national counterparts. |
| What were the regional and national development priorities identified during project design phase? How were they identified (desk review, consultation, requests, recommendations from other projects)? How did they evolve throughout the project? | Desk Review, KIIs with project staff, LAS, and national counterparts, Institutional surveys |
| Was a solid theory of change developed, capturing the analysis from the development problem, and were impact, outcomes, outputs and activities mapped? If not, what provisions and changes should have been made? |
| In your opinion, what was the “value added” of targeting this development problem with a regional approach rather than bilateral one? | Desk Review, KIIs with project staff, LAS, and national counterparts. |
| How involved were project stakeholders in the project design and implementation? Which stakeholders were the most involved? and what were the engagement mechanisms adopted by UNDP? |
| To what extent has the project been appropriately responsive to political, legal, economic, institutional, and other changes in the region? |
| To what extent has the project been appropriately responsive to the needs of the regional and national constituents and changing partner priorities, and at the same time keeping commitments made and respecting the design of project and subsequent agreement? | Desk Review, KIIs with project staff, LAS, and national counterparts, institutional surveys |
| **Effectiveness** | The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives and its results.  Did the project achieve its objectives? | To what extent did the project achieve its intended and unintended outputs and outcomes? What outputs, outcomes (and if possible impacts) can be reasonably attributed to project interventions? |
| What observable effects on gender equality, women’s empowerment and human rights advancement did the project achieve/not achieve? Are their indirect effects on vulnerable groups, gender equality, women’s empowerment and human rights advancement which can be attributed to the project? | Desk Review, KIIs with project staff, LAS, and national counterparts. |
| Where achievements were made, what were the underlying programmatic and contextual factors which contribute to them? | Desk Review, KIIs with project staff, LAS, and national counterparts, institutional surveys |
| Where achievements were not made, to what extent can the reasons be attributed to programmatic or contextual factors, if at all? |
| Did the partnership between UNDP and SIDA/ LAS ultimately further or hinder project effectiveness? How so? And were project priorities and intended outputs sufficiently aligned between UNDP and SIDA and LAS throughout the course of the project, specifically, in terms of gender equality, LNOB and SDG achievement/non-achievement? | Desk Review, KIIs with project staff, LAS, and national counterparts. |
| What measures were taken at the institutional and programmatic levels to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic? How sustainable are these measures over the longer term, and did they become more sustainable over time? |
| What adverse effects on project outputs and outcomes can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic? |
| To what extent did the inclusion/non-inclusion of particular stakeholders improve the effect of project interventions? In retrospect, which stakeholders made the most gains or created the most impediment to the achievement of project objectives? |
| **Efficiency** | The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.  How well are resources (intel, human and financial) being used? | Were their specific project components which were deemed to be cost effective or ineffective? What components of the implementation strategy could be changed to increase cost efficiency across the board, or within specific components? |
| To what extent was human and financial resources allocation optimized? Did resources focus on particular outcomes over others, or were they attributed appropriately across components? |
| To what extent did the project adjustments in light of the disruption to major activities imposed by COVID-19 yield to the expected results? Did adapting project activities to the COVID-19 pandemic ultimately prove more or less time consuming? |
| Was the project management structure generally seen to further or impede projected outcomes of the project? |
| To what extent can it be said that alternative strategies would have achieved better results? | Desk Review, KIIs with project staff, LAS, and national counterparts, institutional surveys. |
| Were project objectives and timeframes clearly understood and communicated to all stakeholders? To what extent have project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner? |
| **Impact and Sustainability** | The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.  Will changes be sustained? | What lasting effects do you anticipate that the AEISD Project will have on LAS and other stakeholders? | Desk Review, KIIs with project staff, LAS, and national counterparts. |
| Have complementarities collaboration and/or synergies fostered by the project contributed to greater sustainability or results? |
| As a result of the project, have partner institutions built the organizational capacity and processes to monitor and implement gender-sensitive programming? Have partner institutions taken on human rights and development as core principles of their activities? |
| To what extent are lessons learned being documented by the project team on a continual basis and shared with appropriate parties who could learn from the project? |
| To what extent are partner institutions committed to the outcomes of the project over the long term, both from a strategic planning perspective and an institutional one? |
| Have any outcomes of the project been translated into an official legal text? |
| Was an exit strategy discussed with partners to ensure a sustainable policy framework for Arab economic integration towards Common Market? Have UNDP and partner organizations regularly discussed and agreed upon project closure activities and sustainability? |

Annex B: results framework

|  |
| --- |
| **Project Objective:** Growth is inclusive and sustainable, incorporating productive capacities that create employment and livelihoods for the poor and excluded (UNDP Strategic Plan Outcome #1) |
| **Project Related Outcomes:**   * Outcome 1: LAS capacity strengthened to manage regional economic integration related processes * Outcome 2: Members states are capacitated and technically prepared for regional economic integration * Outcome 3: Engagement of key development actors ensured through inclusive and transparent processes for regional economic integration |
| **Expected Outputs:**  **Outcome 1:**   * Output 1: Structured and targeted technical support to LAS secretariat and Arab negotiators on trade policy formulation and reform under PAFTA * Output 2: Provision of support for the organizational capacity of LAS secretariat to facilitate the regional economic integration agenda   **Outcome 2:**   * Output 3: Provision of country-based technical assistance to policymakers for their activities related to trade policy reform and coherence * Output 4: Provision of country-based technical assistance to policy makers for the modernization of the supply/value chain in preparatory process for the Arab Customs Union   **Outcome 3:**   * Output 5: Improvement of related regulatory frameworks for integrity, aiming for good governance for trade development measures * Output 6: Supporting gender responsive mechanisms to ensure systematic integration of gender sensitivities in trade policy-making and negotiations |
| **Output indicators:**  **Output 1:**   1. The degree of success in introducing a technical and regulatory framework for upgrading the current PAFTA towards the Arab Customs Union, in line with priorities and interests of the Arab Member States in partnership with the LAS and its technical secretariats and committees. 2. The degree of enhancement in the technical and managerial capacity of Arab Economic Integration Department of the LAS in terms of its functions and roles in the design and implementation of PAFTA upgrading. 3. The level of quality of LAS support to the technical works by the relevant working groups and committees (LAS working groups and technical committees in charge of the portfolios in defined stages). 4. Adoption by LAS and its member states through the relevant technical committees of organizational foundations and institutional arrangements necessary for the PAFTA upgrading and preparations for the Arab Customs Union. 5. The level of increase in trade flows through border posts where the project has interventions. 6. The number of additional jobs to local communities, resulting from supply of services, among others, to operations of cross border operations. 7. The degree of success in modernizing relevant national regulations for Arab economic integration in countries of project interventions. 8. The number and quality of regulatory documents developed to support PAFTA upgrading and preparations for Arab Customs Union (i.e., Customs Law, Competition, Dispute Settlement, etc.). 9. Availability of dedicated trade policy dialogue platform(s) among Arab Member States aimed at increased intra-trade in the Arab region through better logistics operations aligned to the legal framework of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. 10. The availability and degree of quality of practices for monitoring the progress of Arab economic integration, particularly for the implementation of the PAFTA upgrading and progress towards Arab Customs Union. 11. The level of improvement in the regulatory transparency and level of compliance at the border posts where the project has interventions. 12. Level of capacity to promote transparency and accountability in trade policies and measures, with a focus on the customs and other border management authorities. 13. The level of increased participation of women into the processes related to regional economic integration, particularly during the PAFTA upgrading and its implementation towards the ACU establishment. |

Annex C: List of Stakeholders and beneficiaries’ profile

Table 3: list of stakeholders

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Development Personnel** | | | | | |
|  | **Stakeholder** | **Institution** | **Contact Person** | **Title** | **Gender** |
| 1 | **Donor** | Swedish International Cooperation Development Agency (SIDA) | Mr. Walter Del Castillo |  | M |
| 2 | **Implementing Organization** | UNDP | Mr. Quang Le | Chief Technical Officer | M |
| 3 | **Implementing Organization** | UNDP | Mr. Amr Radwan | Project Analyst | M |
| 4 | **Implementing Organization** | UNDP | Ms. Paola Pagliani | Regional Programme Coordinator | F |
| 5 | **Implementing Organization** | UNDP | Ms. Maya Abi Zeid | Reporting and Knowledge Management Specialist | F |
| 6 | **Implementing Organization** | UNDP | Mr. Abdelkader Alhaj Ahmad | Programmes Support/ Operations | M |
| 7 | **International Organization Partner** | The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) | Mr. Khairedine Ramoul | Economic Affairs Officer, Trade Negotiations and Commercial Diplomacy Branch | M |
| 8 | **International Organization Partner** | UNDP CO Morocco | Mr. Edward Christow | Resident Representative UNDP Morocco | M |
| 9 | **Consultant** | ACU study with LAS | Dr. Azza Kamal |  | F |
| 10 | **Experts/** **stakeholders** | Trains company - Private institution | Dr. Tamer Mahmoud | Trade consultant, CEO of Trains company | M |
| **League of Arab States** | | | | | |
| 11 | **Public Sector** **User/ Regional** **Organization** **/recipient** | League of Arab States (LAS) | Dr. Bahgat Aboelnasr or Miss. Noura El Nabawi | Director of Economic Integration Department, Economic Sector or Trade policy researcher, in charge of the services and trade facilitation files. | M |
| 12 | **PAFTA members / Enforcement and Monitoring Committee** | Trade Agreements Sector, Ministry of trade and industry | Dr. Dina Mahmoud Under Secretary | Head of the central department for regional and bilateral trade agreements. | F |
| 13 | **PAFTA members / technical committees** | Ministry of finance and national economy, Bahrain | Mr. Abdallah Elarady | Head of Arab countries relations department | M |
| 14 | **PAFTA members/Technical Committees** | Ministry of trade, Lebanon | Mr. Simon Gabour | Head of trade sector | M |
| 15 | **PAFTA members/ Rules of origin committee** | Trade Agreements Sector, Ministry of trade and industry, Egypt. | Mr. Mohamed Samir | General Manager, Head of Rules of origin general department | M |
| 16 | **PAFTA members/ trade in services committee** | Trade agreements sector, ministry of trade and industry, Egypt | Mrs. Mayee Amer | General manager of the trade in services department | F |
| 17 | **PAFTA Members/ trade in services awareness activities / Technical committees** | General Authority of foreign trade, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia | Mr. Anwar Bin Hasousah | Commercial Attaché, Saudi embassy in Cairo | F |
| 18 | **Private sector** | Union of Arab Chambers | Mrs. May Serhal | Economic consultant | F |
| **National Counterparts** | | | | | |
| 19 | **Public Sector User/ recipient** | Ministry of National Economy of Palestine | Mohammed Hmidan | Director of Economic Agreements | M |
| 20 | **Public Sector User/ recipient** | Jordan Customs | Brig. Ahmed Alem | Head of the Jordan National Single Window (JNSW) | M |
| 21 | **Private sector** | Aqaba Chamber of Commerce, Jordan | Mr. Amer Ibraheem Almasry | General Manager | M |
| 22 | **Public Sector User/ recipient** | Sudanese Customs | Dr. Bashir El Tahir | Sudanese customs DG | M |
| 23 | **Public Sector User/ recipient** | Egyptian Customs Authority (ECA) | Ali Galal Youssef | Technical office | M |
| 24 | **Public Sector User/ recipient** | Ministry of trade | Mrs. Nidhal Sebry Ahmed | Head of the Iraq WTO Team Ministry of Trade | M |
| 25 | **Public Sector User/ recipient** | Morocco Ministry of Industry, Trade, Green and Digital Economy | H.E Dr. Rahal Abdelouahed | Directeur Général du commerce | M |
| 26 | **Public Sector User/ recipient** | Moroccan Customs | Lhassane Hallou | Director | M |
| 27 | **Private Sector** | Agadir Cooperatives Association | Mrs. Nadia Fatemi | Chairwoman | F |
| 28 | **Private Sector** | Fair Trade Lebanon | NA | NA | NA |

Annex D: Project Resources

Table 4: project resources

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Outcome 1: LAS capacity strengthened to manage regional economic integration related processes  Budget: US$ 2,011, 320 (for Outputs 1 and 2) | | | | |
| Output 1: Structured and targeted technical support to LAS Secretariat and Arab trade negotiators on trade policy formulation and reform | | | | Budget (USD):  US$ 1,496,280 |
| **Baselines** | **Output Targets and Indicators** | **Indicative Activity/ies** | **Responsible parties** | **Inputs**  **(2017-2019)** |
| Baseline 1.1: low level of implementation undermines the confidence of the public on regional economic integration. Slow realization of benefits for businesses and industries. |  | 1.1 Provide technical assistance at the regional level for PAFTA upgrading as well as preparations towards the envisaged Arab Customs Union, with a focus on supporting LAS Secretariat and its technical committees in: | UNDP | Inputs for Output 1.1:   * Project staff and direct costs * Consultancy and experts * Meeting and consultations with LAS * Missions |
| Baseline 1.1.1: Status-quo of the PAFTA, requiring to be examined and assessed to identify the required areas to be inserted into the agreement. | Indicator 1.1.1: detailed need assessments, studying the PAFTA status-quo and its current conditions.  Target Output 1.1.1: need assessment conducted and outcomes are presented. | 1.1.1 Conduct an assessment of current conditions of PAFTA to identify a way forward for its upgrading and related technical assistance needs |  | Budget for Output 1.1  (Sum of Outputs 1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 1.1.4)  US$ 1,135,530 |
|  |  |  |  | Budget for Output 1.1.1  US$ 656,010 |
| Baseline 1.1.2: Based on the needs assessment exercise outcomes and results, a technical model would be developed for PAFTA upgrading. | Indicator 1.1.2: Design technical new models for PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations in the light of the WTO rules and best practices, to be presented to the LAS and Member States for discussions and adoption.  Target Output 1.1.2: Technical models for PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparation are finalized and technical areas are identified in terms of process. | 1.1.2 Develop the necessary technical models to guide both processes in consistency with the WTO-based rules and best international as well as regional practices. | UNDP | Budget for Output 1.1.2  US$ 257,520 |
| Baseline 1.1.3: Lack of work programs for PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations | Indicator 1.1.3: Availability of a comprehensive work programs of implementation for PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations.  Target Output 1.1.3: Work program developed, discussed and adopted. Designed the governance framework/scheme for consideration by Member States. | 1.1.3 Developing the governance framework/scheme and an indicative work program/ roadmap for the implementation, which identifies the priorities and thematic areas as well as the needed process of engagement with key stakeholders. | UNDP | Budget for Output 1.1.3  US$ 61,050 |
| Baseline 1.1.4: Regulations/mandates for PAFTA upgrading and ACU related measures do not exist. Models of governance not existent. No clear direction for mechanisms of consultations for policy coherence. | Indicator 1.1.4: Ability of the concerned stakeholders to identify the needed regulations and legal instruments. Availability of technical models of governance for PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations and defined mechanisms of consultation with stakeholders.  Target Output 1.1.4: Draft regulations prepared and presented to the LAS and Member States for policy making purposes, to be discussed and to be ready for implementation. 2 alternative governance models considered and 1 adopted, to follow the implementation of the indicative technical framework. | 1.1.4 Drafting regulations and legal instruments in thematic areas identified by concerned stakeholders, including trade policy, facilitation, and mutual recognition, aimed at guiding the necessary policy coherence and ownership. | UNDP | Budget for Output 1.1.4  US$ 160,950 |
| Baseline 1.2: Consultation modality among Member States on how to improve existent programmes of regional economic development no existent. | Indicator 1.2: Availability of a mechanism for consultations among Member States to gather information on their concerns and interests on a deepened Arab economic integration framework. Identify priority areas for intervention and follow ups.  Target Output 1.2: Detailed understanding of matters of interest to four to five Member States on PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations through dedicated consultations.  Consultation mechanism is established. | 1.2 Assist LAS in organizing regional consultations with Arab countries on the improvement of the regional economic integration and related governance of economic development, with focus on the PAFTA upgrading as well as preparations for the ACU, and the related alternative technical models to make them realistic and responsive to their needs and requirements. | UNDP | Budget for Output 1.2  US$ 227,550 |
| Baseline 1.3: Limited availability and low level of use of international expertise on Arab economic integration. | Indicator 1.3: number of expertise mobilized through the UN System and other international organizations on need basis  Target Output 1.3: Mobilized expertise for at least three activities with key UN agencies in support to LAS and Arab countries. | 1.3 Collaborate with UN agencies, regional commissions, international organizations and regional organizations, including the GCC CU Secretariat, in mobilizing international expertise to support the LAS Secretariat in the works of deepened Arab economic integration in order to assist Member states at the national and regional level. | UNDP | Budget for Output 1.3  US$ 44,400 |
| Baseline 1.4: Limited availability and low level of use of regional expertise on Arab economic integration.  Limited information on major trader partners. | Indicator 1.4: Technical discussion/dialogues and meetings with the EU and other regional organizations.  Target Output 1.4: Meetings conducted, expertise invited, technical information are exchanged | 1.4 Facilitate exchange of experiences between the LAS Secretariat and the EU and other regional organizations on deepening regional economic integration and implementation of their Customs Unions. | UNDP | Budget for Output 1.4  US$ 88,800 |
| **Output 2:** **Provision of support for the organizational capacity of LAS Secretariat to facilitate the regional economic integration agenda** | | | | Budget: US$ 515,040 |
| **Baselines** | **Output Targets and Indicators** | **Indicative Activity/ies** | **Responsible parties** | **Inputs** |
| Baseline 2.1: Lack of dedicated support LAS senior management for PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparatory processes | Indicator 2.1: Frequency of senior level consultations undertaken at official and informal level of matters of PAFTA upgrading  Target Output 2.1: Number of political notes and strategy concepts developed for the senior management for consultations on policies of PAFTA Upgrading towards ACU. | 2.1 Assist the senior management of the LAS in supporting policy consultations and dialogues with policy makers of Arab countries on major elements of PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations. | UNDP | * Project staff and direct costs * Consultancy and experts * Meeting and consultations with LAS * Missions   Budget for Output 2.1  US$ 142,080 |
| Baseline 2.2: Lack of tools and facilities for effective management and technical analysis in the Economic Sector. | Indicator 2.2: LAS seniors provided with the management tools.  Target Output 2.2: Management tools are provided on the ground, such as website establishment, economic sector related departments are upgraded. | 2.2 Provide the senior management of the LAS with necessary management tools. | UNDP | Budget for Output 2.2  US$ 22,200 |
| Baseline 2.3: Inadequate knowledge and skills linked to the PAFTA Upgrading and ACU preparations and their implementation to sustain modernization efforts. | Indicator 2.3: The level of increase in the knowledge and skills of technical staff.  Target Output 2.3: approximately 80 officials of Member States and of LAS being trained. | 2.3 Train experts of the LAS on techniques of economic and trade analysis to equip them with required knowledge and skills for their subsequent advice to national authorities on the PAFTA/PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations and their implementation. | UNDP | Budget for Output 2.3  US$ 66,600 |
| Baseline 2.4: lack of technical advice and expertise to Member States for PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations in a systematic manner. | Indicator 2.4: Number of trade policy makers in selected Member States and themes benefiting from the assistance.  Target Output 2.4: At least four Member States would benefit from the support. | 2.4 Provide assistance to the negotiators and policy makers of Member States at LAS technical committees that are in charge of the design and negotiations related to the technical features of the PAFTA upgrading. | UNDP | Budget for Output 2.4  US$ 164.280 |
| Baseline 2.5: lack of technical advice and expertise to LAS Economic Sector and its related Department, representatives of Member States at technical committees for PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations | Indicator 2.5: Economic Sector and its related Departments, and committees’ representatives benefiting from the assistance.  Target Output 2.5: Technical committees representatives are equipped with technical knowledge, and provided with new proposals in term of their mandates and responsibilities, trade related departments in the economic sector are countries would benefit from the support. | 2.5 Provide technical assistance to LAS, its departments, and the technical committees, for the design of the necessary evaluation and monitoring tools to document progress of PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations and highlight matters to be addressed by the countries to secure full operation. | UNDP | Budget for Output 2.5  US$ 119.880 |
| Outcome 2: Members states are capacitated and technically prepared for regional economic integration  Budget: US$ 3,197,688 (for Outputs 3 and 4) | | | | |
| **Output 3:** **Provision of country-based technical assistance to policymakers for their activities related to trade policy reform and coherence** | | | | Budget: US$ 280,608 |
|  |  |  |  | Inputs for Output 3   * Project staff and direct costs * Consultancy and experts * Meeting and consultations with LAS * Missions |
| Baseline 3.1: Absence of trade policy coherence mechanism at the national level.  Increased of trade arrangements and the number of FTAs in the region. | Indicator 3.1: Conduct an assessment on the status quo of policy coherence mechanism and the relation between trade agreements signed, in selected Member States (4 -5 countries)  Target Output 3.1: A mechanism for coherence of trade policy is established; policy makers achieve better understanding in trade issues and how to secure the compatibility of requirements of trade policy in various trade agreements. | 3.1 Examine trade policy coherence mechanisms in terms of compatibility of different trade agreements at the national level in selected Member States. | UNDP | Budget for Output 3.1  US$ 57,720 |
| Baseline 3.2: Lack of dedicated support to national teams of Member States with respect of making them more prepared PAFTA upgrading and ACU requirements | Indicator 3.2: Number of countries and themes benefiting from the support.  Target Output 3.2: At least four countries would benefit from the support. | 3.2 Provide technical advice and expertise to Arab countries in building national capacity in preparation of proposals for the PAFTA upgrading and ACU preparations. This activity also includes initial support to national teams of the countries in related works. | UNDP | Budget for Output 3.2  US$ 119,880 |
| Baseline 3.3: Lack of dedicated support for Arab LDCs to enhance their capacity and knowledge on how to align their trade policy to the regional preferential trade arrangements. | Indicator 3.3: Level of readiness and preparedness of Arab LDCs to participate in PAFTA Upgrading.  Target Output 3.3: Key legal instruments of at least two LDCs Arab countries aligned to the PAFTA/GAFTA Upgrading. | 3.3. Provide dedicated support to Member States that are categorized as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) for their alignment and upgrading of the legal and regulatory framework necessary for the PAFTA upgrading. | UNDP | Budget for Output 3.3  US$ 66,600   * Project staff and direct costs * Consultancy and experts * Meeting and consultations with LAS   Missions |
| Baseline 3.4: the DSM has not been used by LAS Member States. | Indicator 3.4: Level of usage of dispute settlement and of understanding of DSM in economic relations.  Target Output 3.4: at least one training on DSM to be conducted to equip trade/economic policy makers with knowledge on DSM within the PAFTA/GAFTA Upgrading. | 3.4 Provide support to Arab countries, within a coordinated scheme through the LAS, in strengthening their monitoring mechanisms and design procedures and operations to deal with the disputes coming out of PAFTA and GAFTA upgrading. | Budget for Output 3.4  US$ 36,408 |
| **Output 4: Provision of country-based technical assistance to policy makers for the modernization of the supply/value chain in preparations process for the Arab Customs Union** | | | | Budget (USD): US$ 2,917,080 |
| **Baselines** | **Output Targets and Indicators** | **Indicative Activity/ies** | **Responsible parties** | **Inputs**  **(2017-2019)** |
|  |  |  |  | Inputs for output 4   * Project staff and direct costs * Consultancy and experts * Meeting and consultations with LAS * Equipment   Missions |
| Baseline 4.1: Arab countries/ Member States still maintain a low level of commitments to provisions under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and limited formalization of related international conventions dealt with trade and transport facilitation into national regulations and legislations. | Indicator 4.1: Introduction of international standards, and good practices, procedures related to trade, transport facilitation, into national legislations. Member States achieve a higher level of preparedness for commitments to the WTO Trade Facilitation and international agreements/ conventions.  Target Output 4.1: two countries adopted new legislations of trade, transport, investment facilitation during the PAFTA Upgrading implementation. | 4.1 Support key stakeholders, comprised of regulatory authorities and end users, in their efforts to introduce new measures and technical cooperation models at the national levels to modernize cross-border operations and custom practices to facilitate trade. The support will be guided by the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and other relevant international agreements to reduce trade costs and remove trade barriers in the supply and value chains. | UNDP | Budget for Output 4.1  US$ 477,744 |
| Baseline 4.2: Member States are adopting National Single Window aimed at enhancement of efficiency, competitiveness and better control of international trade and movement of means of transport. | Indicator 4.2: Enhanced strategic planning and conduct of preparatory activities for the design of national single windows (NSWs) of Member States, such as capacity building and acquisition of operational experiences from countries having activated NSWs  Target Output 4.2.1: at least one National Single Window of a Member State will have the Roadmap of establishment. Conducted the analysis of gaps in the legal and regulatory framework.  Target Output 4.2.2: Assistance to Member States either on sub-regional, regional or individual basis in adoption of automated systems of information processing for control purposes. Promoted sharing of information through dialogues among automated systems, included design of regional platforms or programmes for better exchange of information and data among countries. Promotion of adoption of technical support such as data set of logistics of Member States for the regional exchange in coordination with the LAS. Organization of specialized platforms and discussions with regional and international organizations on NSWs design and development. | 4.2 Support country level efforts to introduce national single window systems and other related data exchange systems and models to complement the efforts for trade facilitation, including for modernization of cross-border operations. | Budget for Output 4.2  US$ 697,968 |
| Baseline 4.3: Works on mutual recognition at the regional level has started. It is unclear how effective is the recognition program for trade facilitation and better management. | Indicator 4.3: Development of operational models to activate mutual recognition and acceptance practices, particularly for cross border operations and trade facilitation.  Target Output 4.3: Designed operational models in partnership with Member States and LAS. Trained technical experts of Member States (at least two to three Member States). | 4.3 Design operational models in promoting mutual recognition and acceptance in the area of conformance documents in facilitating trade, transport and investment at the national level in support of regional schemes and programmes. | Budget for Output 4.3  US$ 143,190 |
| Baseline 4.4: 02 pilots have been initiated with limited functional scopes. | Indicator 4.4: Adoption of more facilitation in the clearance of cross border operations with introduction of changes to trade and/or trade-related policy or regulation as possible.  Target Output 4.4: two new border posts/pilot schemes among Member States to be initiated. | 4.4 Conduct pilot schemes for integration of facilitation operations of the supply and value chains, taking account of experiences of initiatives of cross border operations in consultation with concerned stakeholders, including provision of applications of electronic application of National Single Window and data exchange at the regional level as suitable. | Budget for Output 4.4  US$ 1,026,084 |
| Baseline 4.5: international best practices have been partially introduced into national legislations of Member States | Indicator 4.5: Introduction of international best practices into new legal and regulatory framework of Member States  Target Output 4.5: Adoption of at least three international best practices on the basis of provisions of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and concerned international conventions and agreements. | 4.5 Facilitate adoption of international best practices required for improved trade and transport facilitation in Member States, in cooperation with the LAS. This would require providing technical assistance on adopting of common documentation, joint technical models, and standards of data sharing and regional harmonization as agreed by the countries. | UNDP | Budget for Output 4.5  US$ 197,470 |
| Baseline 4.6: Arab countries have a low level of commitments to the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement as per findings of the 2015 Survey by UN Regional Commissions. | Indicator 4.6: Higher level of awareness and preparedness of Member States to undertake strategic commitments in the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Adoption and alignment of national regulations to this Agreement and concerned international conventions and agreements.  Target Output 4.6: Conduct a review of key provisions of national regulations to analyze level of its compatibility to commitments of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and concerned international conventions and agreements related to trade, transport facilitation and regional economic integration. | 4.6 Improve the level of readiness of Arab countries for implementation the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and other related international agreements and conventions. | UNDP | Budget for Output 4.6  US$ 174,936 |
| Baseline 4.7: There exists ICT applications for customs operations in use in certain Member States. Lack of common protocols and procedures of information sharing. | Indicator 4.7: Achieving higher level of compatibility and interoperability of ICT applications/solutions applicable to the management and operations of the trade/transport corridors (i.e… movement tracking).  Target Output 4.7: Design and development of technical platform in the promotion of coordinated control for Member States that participate to operations of trade/ transport corridors. | 4.7 Support Arab countries in the adoption of ICT solutions as an enabler of the trade/transport corridors in the region. | UNDP | Budget for Output 4.7  US$ 200,688 |
| Outcome 3: Engagement of key development actors ensured through inclusive and transparent processes for regional economic integration  Budget: US$ 890,198 (for Outputs 5 and 6) | | | | |
| Output 5: Improvement of related regulatory frameworks for integrity, aiming for good governance for trade development measures | | | | Budget (USD): US$ 610,500 |
| **Baselines** | **Output Targets and Indicators** | **Indicative Activity/ies** | **Responsible parties** | **Inputs**  **(2017-2019)** |
|  |  |  |  | **Inputs for Output 5**   * Project staff and direct costs * Technical expertise * One regional conference on customs integrity * Four regional working group meetings on customs integrity * 3 consultation meetings per country with the private sector and local communities * Conference facilities * Travel |
| Baseline 5.1: No regional recommendations available to promote transparency and accountability in the implementation of programmes of the PAFTA Upgrading | Indicator 5.1: Degree of transparency and accountability in the implementation of programmes of the PAFTA Upgrading  Target 5.1:Recommendations developed and adopted in the first year of the project and significant progress achieved in their implementation by the end of the project. | 5.1. Foster regional participatory policy dialogues, including the private sector, on the adoption of good governance principles, with a focus on transparency and accountability, in the implementation of the PAFTA upgrading. | UNDP | **Budget of 5.1**:  US$ 166,500 |
| Baseline 5.2: No senior officials effectively engaged in trainings on transparency and accountability | Indicator 5.2:Number/level of stakeholders effectively engaged in trainings.  Target 5.2: 80 senior officials and representatives of business associations and local communities participate in related trainings. | 5.2. Train key stakeholders to promote the transparent and accountable implementation of trade policies and measures, drawing on international standards and comparative experiences, including the UN Convention against Corruption and other relevant treaties and principles such as the Revised Arusha Declaration on good governance and integrity in customs. | UNDP | **Budget of 5.2**:  US$ 222,000 |
| Baseline 5.3: No coherent body of information available on corruption risks and integrity challenges that undermine Arab economic integration | Indicator 5.3: Publically available information on corruption risks and integrity challenges that undermine Arab economic integration  Target 5.3: Information available on www.arabacinet.org | 5.3. Produce and disseminate knowledge products on corruption risks and integrity challenges that undermine Arab economic integration with a focus on customs and cross border management. | UNDP | **Budget of 5.3**:  US$ 111,000 |
| Baseline 5.4: No regionally-adopted guidance tools produced towards identifying and reducing corruption risks and integrity challenges in the customs and other concerned border control authorities | Indicator 5.4:Number of regionally-adopted guidance tools produced towards identifying and reducing corruption risks and integrity challenges in the customs and other concerned border control authorities  Target 5.4: At least two regionally adopted guidance tools | 5.4. Support the development and the piloting of practical tools that could be used to guide policy makers in Arab countries on how to identify and respond to corruption risks and integrity challenges in trade policies and measures in the context of their respective countries. | UNDP | **Budget of 5.4:**  US$ 111,000 |
| **Output 6**: **Supporting gender responsive mechanisms to ensure systematic integration of gender sensitivities in trade policy-making and negotiations** | | | | Budget (USD): 279,698 |
| **Baselines** | **Output Targets and Indicators** | **Indicative Activity/ies** | **Responsible parties** | **Inputs**  **(2017-2019)** |
|  |  |  |  | Inputs for Output 6:   * Project staff and direct costs * Technical expertise * Workshops on the gender-related component of the governance structure and guiding methodologies of integration of gender-related matters for the PAFTA towards ACU establishment. * Conference facilities * Travel |
| Baseline 6.1:Low number of regional policy papers geared towards gender sensitive policies | Indicator 6.1: level of usage and circulation of the study regionally.  Target 6.1:At least 2 policy papers developed to propose gender sensitive policies on wages and employment especially informal sector | 6.1. Conduct a regional study on systematic Sustainable Impact Assessment (SIAs) and Gender Trade Impact Assessment (GTIAs) to evaluate the effects of trade agreements and policies on women. These could include gendered value chain analysis as well as the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex- disaggregated data on wages and employment, with special attention to the effects on the informal sector. | UNDP | Budget of 6.1:  US$ 67,000 |
| Baseline 6.2: lack of commitment and acknowledgement from senior stakeholders in lobbying for key issues in gender and trade | Indicator 6.2: number/ level of stakeholders engaging in the consultations  Target 6.2:around 100 regional senior multi stakeholder engaging in consultations on key gender issues in trade. | 6.2. Organize regional multi-stakeholder consultations on key issues in gender and trade (e.g. impacts of trade policies on the informal sector, employment, domestic labor laws, fiscal revenue and taxation). | UNDP | **Budget of 6.2**:  US$ 133,000 |
| Baseline 6.3: Low percentage of women in the Arab Region aware of the positive opportunities in trade policy | Indicator 6.3: level of women capacity increased regarding the awareness of their rights and positive opportunities in trade policy  Target 6.3:Increase by 50% in thelevel of understanding and awareness raising | 6.3. Design and conduct a capacity development program targeting women to strengthen capacities to enable women producers and workers to turn positive changes in trade policy to their advantage. | UNDP | Budget of 6.3:  US$ 80,000 |
| **MANAGEMENT OF RISKS OF THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION** | | |  | US$ 33,710 |
| **PLATFORM FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION** | | |  | US$ 77,000 |
|  | | | **SUB-TOTAL** | US$ 6,210,617 |
|  | | | ***GMS (8%)*** | *US$ 496,850* |
|  | | | ***TOTAL*** | US$ 6,707,466 |

Annex E: LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

1. Annual Progress Reports 2018-2020

* Progress Annual Report 1 AEISD 2018-Final
* AEISD\_Annual progress report 2019\_Final
* Complementary information Annual Progress Report 2019 (Answers to Mr. Walter)Final
* Progress Report\_AEISD 2019 (Jan-June 30 2019) Final
* AEISD\_Annual progress report 2020\_Final-clean (002)
* Covid 19 Adjustments and progress of AEISD (March to September)1
* AEISD deliverables and outputs-Nov2019 (Distribution)Rev
* BRIEFING-PROGRESS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF AEISD(Dec 5 2018) Sida Director-Delivered
* PROGRESS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SIDA STRATEGY-Feb 2019-Final

1. Annual Workplans 2018-2021

* AEISD 2021-6month Work Plan.docx
* AWP 2018\_AEISD
* AWP 2018\_AEISD\_August Revision
* AWP 2019\_AEISD
* AWP 2020\_AEISD pre COVID-19
* AWP 2020\_AEISD post COVID-19 April

1. AEISD project-Updates-2020 implementation\_Final
2. AfTIAS Project evaluation 2017

* Final ER AfTIAS 27 Oct 17
* Final ER AfTIAS 27 Oct 18

1. Beneficiaries' profile
2. Country requests for support

* Egypt 2019
* Egypt 2020
* Endorsement of the project-Jordan Customs (April2nd2018)
* Iraq
* Jordan 2018
* Jordan 2018 (2)
* Jordan 2019
* LAS 2018 (Quang)
* LAS 2018
* LAS 2019
* LAS 2020
* LAS 2021
* Letter from Jordan (March112018) MITI
* Ministry of transport letter
* Morocco 2020
* Morocco 2021
* Palestine 2018
* Palestine 2019

1. Exchanges between UNDP and SIDA

* Correspondances (work plans, meetings, requests)
* Financials
* Missions
* Progress

1. Project Document

* Proposal-AEISD(Aug162017)
* UNDP Project proposal AEISD-Sida Aug 2017
* UNDP Project proposal AEISD-Sida Aug 2018

1. Technical Documents

* Final Report-Revenue impacts-Distribution ACU (Official version)
* Final Trade and Gender Report (AEISD)
* Guidelines to enhance Regulatory Transparency and Voluntary Compliance-Output 5
* Guidelines to enhance Regulatory Transparency and Voluntary Compliance-Output 6
* Jordan NSW Roadmap1-Final1 (Dec122017)Jan2018 – AR
* MoM - ECA & JCD Bilateral Consultations - Draft 1.0
* Policy Briefing-Achievements-Challenges-ArabEconomicIntegration UNDP2018
* Press release\_AEISD\_PAFTA LDCs training in Cairo\_Dec18
* Press release\_AEISD\_Trade in services workshop\_Amman\_dec18 (QAL)
* Rapport Consolidé de l'EPS-PNUD.CNUCED-final
* Summary-Notes-Morocco PortNet Scoping Mission 1-Oct 2019 (V1)
* UNDP - Morocco Draft Final Report-1 for Delivery
* Analysis of border control- Arab Country A-Output 5
* Analysis of border control- Arab Country A-Output 6
* Argan inception Report final draft-sh1June
* Being finalized the draft-paper for PAFTA upgrading (July 13 2018)-Full
* BUILDING MOMENTUM-PAFTA Upgrading (Submitted) AEISD
* Copy of AfTIAS AEID Knowledge Products 2015-2020
* Covid 19 Adjustments and progress of AEISD (March to September)1

1. Jordan Licencing Hub\_2Dec2021Update
2. ArgaOilCoop\_2Dec2021Update
3. SE-SIDA\_2020\_CFR.pdf\_signed\_2021.06.28.09.41.30
4. Strategic Plan 2018-2021
5. ToC AEISD\_UNDP PAFTA+[5] (sketch provided by project staff).
6. TOR-Steering Committee AEISD(QAL 2019)-Final1
7. Covid 19 Adjustments and progress (March to Sep)
8. Quality assessment section evaluation guidelines[22]

Annex F: Data Collection Tools

Key Informant Interviews

*Key Informant Interview guide attached separately.*

Table 5: key informant interview sampling

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Relevance & Format** | KIIs involved semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders uniquely placed to provide valuable insight into the project’s achievements and lessons learned. There are three main categories of KIIs: Project Staff, LAS Counterparts, and National Counterparts. |
| **Sampling Frame** | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **STRATA** | **PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION** | | **NUMBER** | | **Project staff / Development personnel** | UNDP Project Team | | 3 | | UNDP M&E | | 1 | | Sida (Donor) | | 1 | | International Organisation Partner (UNCTAD) | | 1 | | International Organisation Partner (UNDP Morocco) | | 1 | | External Consultant | | 2 | | **Total** | | | **9** | | **LAS Counterparts** | LAS Department of Economic Integration (AEID) | | 1 | | PAFTA Technical Committee Members (Enforcement and Monitoring Committee, Technical committees, Rules of origin committee, trade in services committee | | 7 | | **Total** | | | **8** | | **National Counterparts** | **Country** | **Institution** |  | |  | Palestine | Ministry of National Economy of Palestine | 1 | |  | Jordan | Jordan Customs | 1 | |  | Private Sector – Aqaba Chamber of Commerce | 1 | |  | Sudan | Sudanese Customs | 1 | |  | Egypt | Egyptian Customs Authority (ECA) | 1 | |  | Iraq | Ministry of Trade | 1 | |  | Morocco | Morocco Ministry of Industry, Trade, Green and Digital Economy | 1 | |  | Moroccan Customs | 1 | |  | Private Sector - Agadir Cooperatives Association | 1 | |  | Lebanon | Private Sector - Fair Trade Lebanon | 1 | |  | **Total** |  | **10** |   **TOTAL 27** |

Annex G: Consent Form

PRESENTATION & Informed Consent for Key Informant interviews

*Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I am part of an independent research team conducting an evaluation on behalf of UNDP for the AEISD Project. We are looking at all aspects of the Project.*

This evaluation is a learning exercise; we are trying to understand how effectively the project contributes to the enhancement of economic partnership in the region through better Arab connectivity. What that means is that we are looking at how the AEISD Project is impacting the capacities of the League of Arab States (LAS) and its member states for PAFTA Upgrading as well as preparation process for the Arab Customs Union. The discussion that we are having today should happen with that context in mind.

*The reason you have been selected is because you are able to speak with expertise and authority on specific aspects of the AEISD Project. All participation in this discussion is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this research, all your responses will be kept anonymous and confidential. Results of this discussion will not be shared with your colleagues, neighbors or any authority, and any results will not be reported in any way that could allow for your identification. Your name will not be asked for or used for any other purpose other than to facilitate this discussion.*

*If you do agree to take part now, you can change your mind at any time during the key informant interview without any implications. The discussion poses no risks to you or your health. However, if a question causes any anxiety or discomfort, you may also choose not to answer without giving a reason.*

*This discussion should take approximately around 45-60 minutes to complete. Do you have any questions that you would like to ask before we begin?*

Annex H: Quality Assurance Standards & Procedures

## Triangle Quality Assurance Standards & Procedures

Triangle maintains rigorous quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that data collection, analysis and reporting standards are maintained and developed throughout project lifecycles. These assurance mechanisms are centred around six core mechanisms to ensure that research produced by Triangle is rigorous, ethical, adheres to international best practices and meets the highest quality research standards. Triangle’s management team are the ultimate duty-bearers of quality assurance mechanisms while team leaders are tasked with upholding standards throughout project cycles. In turn, Triangle’s management team holds bi-weekly meetings with team leaders in order to ensure that quality assurance mechanisms are adhered to and corrective actions are taken in due course. Furthermore, Triangle abided by UN ethical considerations and a pledge of ethical conduct.

1. ADHERENCE TO LEGAL AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Research conducted by Triangle seeks to ensure accordance with local laws and regulations as well as the adoption of ethical research principles throughout project cycles. As such, Triangle’s management team first conduct legal and ethical briefings with team leaders and primary staff involved in research activities prior to the commencement of research activities. During this process, contextual legalization and regulations are reviewed in order to ensure that research activities fall within the law of any localities where the company operates. Subsequently, an assessment of ethical considerations is conducted depending on the research in question; for example, with regard specific ethical considerations pertaining to research involving children, survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence.

Once preliminary legal and ethical assessments are completed, Triangle then develops a project-specific legal and ethical framework and applies both through the project life-cycle. Accordingly, team leaders are tasked with ensuring that legal and ethical guidelines are maintained and upheld. Monitoring and assurance of legal and ethical guidelines are conducted by Triangle management who review progress at project milestones and during bi-weekly quality assurance meetings with team leaders.

2. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project management procedures at Triangle are an integral part of research activity and resource allocation. Triangle’s management team consistently allocates and manages human and non-human resources to particular projects during the proposal phase, so as to ensure that such resources are available when projects commence, according to the level of effort planned.

When projects commence, Gantt charts are only the start of project planning and resourcing at Triangle. During the inception phase of projects, Triangle engages in a deep assessment of project requirements and reallocates resources according to an updated set of needs and timelines. During this process, a set of internal Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are set by Triangle management and agreed to as realistic and achievable by team leaders. Team leaders are mandated to produce bi-weekly quality assurance reports and present them to Triangle’s management team for approval of project progress and agreement upon adjustments, if required.

3. TRAINING & TECHNICAL CAPACITY

Triangle believes that each research project requires a specific set of general skills and competencies that are supplemented by project-specific training to ensure that quality assurance standards and mechanisms are understood as well as adhered to by all research team members. Each team member undergoes a one-on-one assessment by a team leader to ensure that they have the technical capacity and resources to implement research activities accorded to them. Once the assessment is complete, any general training is scheduled and resources are allocated accordingly. When all team members are assessed to have the general training, skills and resources to conduct research activities, team leaders engage with Triangle’s management team to identify project-specific training, technical capacity, and resources. Having identified these needs, Triangle management schedule and conduct project-specific training in advance of deployment.

4. TOOLS & ADAPTATION

Research tools developed by Triangle’s team undergo a rigorous process of review by team leaders, technical advisors and external quality assurance officers. Once tools are compiled by Triangle’s team, they are passed on to a technical advisor with knowledge of the project for review. Doing so ensures that the tools adhere to the technical specifications of project sector’s as well as the any project requirements that may have been overlooked during tool compilation. Once technical comments are incorporated, tools are then submitted to for external quality assurance to Triangle management before they are submitted to clients for review.

After client review, tools are translated and formatted according to the needs of the project (for instance programming on hand-held devices). In particular, translated tools are reviewed to ensure meanings translate across languages. Once this process is complete, the Triangle team takes a segment of research subjects and pilots research tools on these subjects accordingly. Data from the pilot testing is then assessed by project teams in order to identify areas that are non-applicable or can be tailored to make tools more context-specific and results oriented. Finally, tool adaptation is discussed between team leaders and management teams at Triangle before amendments are agreed and adapted for deployment.

Adaptation of tools at Triangle continues throughout field research. Team leaders cover the need or lack thereof for tool adaptation with management teams during bi-weekly quality assurance meetings and at key project milestones. Decisions on the applicability of adaptation are then taken jointly between team leaders and clients.

5. ANALYSIS & REPORTING

Upon completion of research activities, data from the research activities undergoes a process of review and cleaning before analysis commences. Data and formats are reviewed by team leaders and analysts to identify any gaps in deliverables or number of research activities. If such gaps are identified, field teams are queried for justification and/or further completion of research activities. Field teams also remain on standby throughout the analysis and reporting phase for probing and clarification of any emerging needs from analysis teams.

Analysis frameworks vary from project to project based on the nature of the research in question. That said, each project contains a built-in analysis framework which team leaders monitor and ensure adherence with by analysts. These frameworks are developed during the pre-project and inception phases, and are adapted during the field research phase to reflect data collection realities.

Triangle ensures a minimum of two analysis rounds in order to ensure that findings are grounded in rigorous consideration and review, while the expectations and needs of clients are also incorporated in analysis and reporting. Triangle analysts employ analysis frameworks to produce a set of preliminary findings, trends and patterns from the data provided by field teams. These preliminary findings are then discussed by core team members to identify areas for further probing and quality assurance. In order to ground-truth, preliminary findings are shared with field teams for their input. Only then are preliminary findings shared with clients for review and further discussion on probing, direction and areas for recommendation.

Once this multi-stakeholder feedback has been compiled, analysts conduct another round of assessment in order to wean out nuanced findings and conduct further probing of priority areas. This process could, upon the approval of Triangle management, require further fieldwork to be conducted. At the end of this process, preliminary findings are updated and compiled as findings. With findings completed, analysts, the team leader and Triangle management discuss appropriate recommendations to meet client needs and address research questions in full.

The writing process at Triangle is both iterative and adaptive: team leaders ensure that analysis outputs are formulated in a manner which can be incorporated into clear, concise and accessible language that reflect previously agreed upon reporting formats. Reports are compiled jointly by writers, editors, analysts and overseen by team leaders. At the end of the first draft, an external quality assurance officer who is knowledgeable of the research field in question is informed of project and client requirements and mandated with a thorough review of the document in question. Project teams then address external quality review concerns before first draft reports are copy-edited and submitted for client review, comment incorporation and report finalisation.

6. LESSONS LEARNED & PROJECT COMPLETION

Triangle believes in fostering relationships with clients beyond project completion. That is why Triangle engages clients in a post-project debrief to identify lessons learned, areas for further cooperation, as well as methods to improve quality assurance during future research projects. Project review workshops produce written reports on the aforementioned areas, which are then reviewed for accuracy by clients and filed accordingly.

**END OF QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDARDS & PROCEDURES**

Annex I: Code of Conduct

## Introduction

Triangle’s Code of Conduct lays out ethical standards which ensure the protection of, and respect for informants, clients, and programme beneficiaries, as well as Triangle employees, consultants, partners and their employees. Further, the Code of Conduct is designed to ensure effective processes and accountability for assignments. All those contracted by Triangle (hereafter: staff) shall act by, and uphold the core values and guiding principles laid out in the document below in all their professional activities to avoid misconduct in workplace settings[[9]](#footnote-10). Outside of workplace settings, staff should uphold the standards set out in this code of conduct so as to ensure that no ill repute comes to themselves or to Triangle. Senior personnel at Triangle have a particular responsibility to uphold these standards and shall set a good example in all their activities.

To ensure that the Code of Conduct is enforced at all times, Triangle will train its staff on its Code of Conduct regularly. External research personnel contracted by Triangle will be instructed on research subjects’ protection. Triangle is also committed to keep its Code of Conduct updated and will inform and educate its internal and external staff about any updates.

### Core Values and Guiding Principles

## Do no harm

Triangle’s “Do no harm” philosophy commits to the values of the Charter of the United Nations, the respect for human rights, social justice, human dignity, and respect for the equal rights of men and women. The “Do no harm” approach minimises research risks for all stakeholders, while seeking greatest benefits for research projects (See Code of Conduct below for more information). To ensure the minimisation of risks to stakeholders, Triangle and its staff respect research subjects’ decisions on participation (in whole or in part), will always ensure voluntary and informed consent of research subjects, as well as will make effort reasonable effort to protect research subjects from foreseen risks (e.g. through safe places for FGDs and KIIs).

## Respect and equality

Triangle and its staff acknowledge and respect local cultures, customs, and traditions and always take into account cultural differences and corresponding approaches. As such, all stakeholders (i.e. research subjects, staff and clients) will be treated with courtesy and respect. The selection of research subjects will be fair and based on circumstances on the ground. Triangle and its staff will act – and interact with all stakeholders – truthfully and without deception at all times. Triangle is also committed to treating all stakeholders fairly, regardless of gender, ethnicity, national or religious background, age, disability, marital status, parental status or sexual orientation.

## Vulnerable groups

Triangle and its staff are aware that vulnerable groups (such as—but not limited to—children, youth, women, and people with disabilities) are predominantly prone to violence, exploitation and/or neglect, which gives extra reason to commit to handling their participation in the research process according to internationally-recognized best practices. Triangle and its staff also recognise, respect, and understand the physical and emotional privacy of participants of the vulnerable populations. Apart from emotional safety, Triangle and its staff recognise the need for a physically safe environment to conduct research activities and will strive to ensure gender – and context – sensitivity at all times. Furthermore, Triangle and its staff will strive to facilitate accessible venues for people with disabilities to secure their participation in the research process.

## Quality of work and fairness

Triangle offers a comprehensive approach to its work to impress upon stakeholder’s competence, integrity, and honesty. By agreeing to an assignment, Triangle acknowledges to have understood projects’ objectives, to possess staff qualified to achieve those objectives, as well as to have the necessary capacity to process the assignments’ tasks. Triangle always seeks to establish a mutual understanding with clients about objects, scope of work, and workplan. Furthermore, Triangle stands for fairness and impartiality and acknowledges the fact that all disputes are multifaceted. For this reason, Triangle and its staff will seek to provide balanced objective reporting, no matter the complexity of the subject at hand. Triangle and its staff will abstain from personal opinions and will confine themselves to evidence-based reporting and recommendations.

## Confidentiality and privacy

Triangle is aware of the sensitivity and confidentiality of data collected in the field. Therefore, Triangle and its staff will protect the privacy of research subjects and will not disclose any confidential information (such as names, addresses, etc.) unless prior approval by the research subject is provided. Qualitative and quantitative information gathered during the research process will be used in an aggregated format or will be cleaned from identifying information to ensure that any agreed upon anonymity is upheld.

## Conflicts of interest

Triangle strongly avoids conflict of interest to rule out biased objectivity in its research process. However, in case conflicts of interest occur, Triangle and its staff will inform all parties involved in a transparent manner and endeavour to remove or mitigate the effects of any conflicts of interest. Triangle and its staff and the work they produce is and will always be independent, and will not be influenced by political or social pressures or economic incentives, bribes or favours.

## Harassment and anti-fraternization

Triangle is committed to providing a safe environment for all its staff and stakeholders free from discrimination on any grounds and from harassment at work including sexual harassment.[[10]](#footnote-11) Triangle operates a zero-tolerance policy for any form of sexual harassment in the workplace, treat all incidents seriously and promptly investigate all allegations of sexual harassment. Any staff member found to have sexually harassed another will face disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from employment. All complaints of sexual harassment will be taken seriously and treated with respect and in confidence and no one will be victimised for making such a complaint. Triangle also recognises that anyone can be a victim of sexual harassment, regardless of their sex and of the sex of the harasser. Triangle recognises that sexual harassment may also occur between people of the same sex. What matters is that the sexual conduct is unwanted and unwelcome by the person against whom the conduct is directed.

Triangle also upholds anti-fraternization policy which prohibits all supervisor-subordinate romantic relationships and requires staff to notify Triangle’s management of romantic relationships with other staff, so that the Triangle may place the staff in different departments or projects. Any relationship that interferes with the company [culture of teamwork](about:blank), the harmonious work environment or the productivity of employees, will be addressed by applying the [progressive discipline policy](about:blank) up to and including employment termination. Adverse workplace behaviour—or behaviour that affects the workplace that arises because of personal relationships—will not be tolerated.

**END OF CODE OF CONDUCT**

Annex J: TOR for Evaluation

*Attached separately.*

**END OF DOCUMENT**

1. OECD/DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/arab-common-market-fighters-weapons-ideologies [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/event/materials/1901034.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. OECD, June 2016, Paper for G20 Finance Ministers, Developments in Trade and Policy Challenges [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The World Bank. 2020. World Development Indicators. [ONLINE] Avaialble at: https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA). 2017. Transport and Connectivity to Global Value Chains: Illustrations from the Arab Region. [ONLINE] Available at:

   https://www.unescwa.org/publications/transport-connectivity-global-value-chains [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. The World Bank. 2020. Global Development Data. [ONLINE] Available at: https://wits.worldbank.org/gptad/database\_search\_results.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. See the publication Services Policy Review: Morocco (Volumes I and II), available at <https://unctad.org/webflyer/services-policy-review-morocco-volumes-i-and-ii> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. A ‘workplace setting’ is defined as any location or conveyance used in connection with Triangle’s activities, including, but not limited to Triangle’s offices, client offices, field research locations, conferences, social events connected with Triangle or its clients, email correspondence or phone conversations. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Sexual harassment is defined as an unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which makes a person feel offended, humiliated and/or intimidated. It includes situations where a person is asked to engage in sexual activity as a condition of that person’s employment, as well as situations which create an environment which is hostile, intimidating or humiliating for the recipient. Sexual harassment can involve one or more incidents and actions constituting harassment may be physical, verbal and non-verbal. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)