

Evaluation of a Community Based Development Project in Egypt



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OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

New Valley Governorate in the Western Desert is the largest governorate of Egypt, covering 44% of Egypt's land. The economic basis of the area is agriculture. However, the oases of the New Valley suffer from underemployment resulting in migration for work to the Nile Valley. The *objective of the project* is to support sustainable development for and in the New Valley Governorate by income generating activities for unemployed youth and young adults in the area of organic agriculture and community-based tourism. The project facilitates support from local NGOs and local authorities in promoting local initiatives in this context.

EVALUATION

In February 2019, the project was evaluated by a team of Egyptian and international experts. The evaluation covered the activities and results of the project between January 2016 and September 2018. The *overall goal of the evaluation* was to identify key areas and factors of success and achievements of the project and assess to what extent the interventions undertaken made a contribution to the project objective.

METHODOLOGY

During the evaluation, the team applied quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. One important tool within the quantitative set of methods was a standardised questionnaire. During the field visits, *Focus Group Discussions* (FGDs) were also used as a tool for interaction with the beneficiaries. Altogether, nine discussions were held. *Group Discussions* complemented *individual interviews* mainly with representatives of various Community Based Organisations (CBOs), and the local authorities.

IMPORTANT FINDINGS

The evaluation came to the conclusion that regarding the five OECD/DAC-evaluation criteria, the project performed well and has achieved most of its objectives. The project objective 1: "Unemployed youth and young adults gain income in the sectors of organic agriculture and community-based tourism" is realistic. Indeed, the project has significantly contributed to this objective at least regarding its first component. The second component, which focused on community-based tourism, faced quite a few challenges which, however, were out of control of the project.

Good work was also confirmed by the evaluation regarding objective 2: "NGO and local authorities in the New Valley support local initiatives regarding organic agriculture and community-based tourism". The CBOs in all reference villages with project activities do a very good job in this context.

Regarding **relevance** of the project, the majority of all respondents of a standardized questionnaire stated clearly that the project and its activities corresponded to the core needs of the identified target group of younger women and men (age 18 to 35 years). There are mainly economic reasons why people are fond of the activities in which they are able to participate. This is mainly true for the agricultural sector. For the training in traditional

handicrafts there is a high satisfaction regarding the training but, with the exception of carpet making during two or three months per year, income is very low. Therefore, the women value more the social relevance of the trainings and activities.

Regarding **effectiveness** the project has reached the right target groups. The evaluators conclude that both men and women have indeed been reached, which is proven by the high percentage of trainees who started at least some income generating activities (65.6% of all 325 trained individuals) while the total number of registered micro projects or activities is 262. However, this number does not show the real size of activities, as during the FGDs it became evident that almost all men and women with greenhouses also produce their own compost and that all people who are registered as being engaged in compost making also started e.g. to use improved seeds or, at least a few, use sprinkler irrigation techniques.

If the total budget of the project alone is compared to the direct target group of 325 persons, the assessment of project costs per capita would be very high and accordingly **efficiency** of the project would be low. However, it is difficult to use this beneficiary-cost approach for the project evaluated as the activities carried out include some other measures, which cannot be attributed to one single person. For instance, the project held a policy dialogue with the regional government of the New Valley with important results. For example, with the support of the regional government the partner organisation has acquired 200 hectares of desert land. Out of this land, already 16.8 hectares have been prepared for cultivation and provided to 16 young women and men, and land distribution will continue. In addition, the partner organisation has not only prepared 4.2 hectares of land for demonstration purposes according to the work plan but also opened its model farm for training purposes for students of the Agriculture Secondary School of Dakhla.

The results of the evaluation show that **project outcomes** are either satisfactory or very satisfactory. For instance, 35 woman and 31 men started constructing and operating greenhouses, which today have a total surface of 11,460 m². In addition, many respondents and FGD participants stated that they will either enlarge their greenhouses or built a second one. From improved agricultural techniques (irrigation technology, use of compost, use of certified seeds, etc.) outside of greenhouses (159 individuals concerned) there are visible benefits such as a lower consumption of electricity for those who use their own private wells, about 50% reduced costs for purchasing chemical fertiliser, and increased yields for many agricultural products by at least 30%.

From handicrafts such benefits could not be achieved. Dress making so far has brought no financial benefits to the participants at all although the women met during our meetings were unanimously happy with the social impacts of the project.

Training courses for CBO board members show remarkable outcomes such as an improved management capacity of all CBOs that participated in three consecutive training sessions.

Coming to **impacts**, all respondents from the interviews and during FGDs confirmed that they gained a marginal up to a high economic benefit from their participation in training activities and from the projects subsequently started by them.

Women participating in farming is not an absolutely new thing in Dakhla, but before the start of the project it was not at all common. With the project and the discussion on CBO level this

point of view had already changed a little: when women started using compost or managed to reduce expenditure or when the first greenhouses yields substantially increased their harvests than men started to recognise the “new” positive role of their wives and / or daughters. According to the beneficiaries, increased income from the agricultural activities was mainly spent for the family.

For agricultural activities, **sustainability** is quite good. Although most farming men and women are only in their second year, almost all are successful either with their greenhouses or with organic farming. For the handicrafts, we estimate that, as long as the women want to continue to work in groups in order to leave homes, communicate with each other and have the feeling that they learn something and / or are perfecting their skills, most activities will continue.

Regarding **lessons learnt** it is obvious that, although agriculture is already predominant in the oasis, there is a high potential in the existing lands to increase yields and income substantially. Establishing greenhouses has contributed to the upgrading of land productivity to a very high degree, as the demand for fresh vegetables can at this point not be covered from the local production in Dakhla.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The main **recommendation** from the evaluation is that the project should be extended within the frame of a second phase. The agricultural activities from phase 1 should be continued and all activities from the new phase should also be followed up until the end of the project. In order to increase efficiency and effectiveness and especially to broaden the impact, the size of the target group should be substantially larger than in the current phase.

As interventions in the handicraft sector are less successful regarding economic profits (but as they contribute to social empowerment of the concerned young women) it is worth thinking about how economic outcomes could be amplified, thus enhancing economic gender impacts. Innovative marketing would be a key word in this context.

In the agricultural sector, one of the most frequently reported issues mentioned was the lack of high-quality seeds. The second issue was the problem of dealing with plant pests. A third issue is the lack of construction supplies for greenhouses in Dakhla. As all three issues are essential for optimising income from the greenhouses it is worth thinking about having them as separate activities with output indicators.

The most essential challenge in the oases of the New Valley is the perilous combination of lack of good land for farming and the sinking level of the subsurface water. Consequently, it is worth thinking about focussing additional activities on the upgrade of old lands, which are productive but not or not efficiently used. Parts of such land, for instance, could be rented by the young men and women.

The investment in date production is still worthwhile, based on comparative location advantages in the New Valley. An additional general recommendation is therefore to include support of date production into the future portfolio. Considering strengthening general environmental awareness, including handling of waste with a focus on plastic bags within all sensitisation and education activities would be helpful.