

**EVALUATION OF THE UNDP/UNDCP PROGRAMME IN  
BAALBECKA-EL HERMEL**

**“Support to the Regional Development Programme of Baalbeck-Hermel”  
LEB/96/100 and LEB/99/B99**

**LEBANON**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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**Team Composition:**

Evelyn Bazalette, UNDCP consultant  
Kamal Hamdan, UNDP consultant  
Tomas Paquete, UNOPS, Team Leader

## **Executive Summary**

Our overall assessment of the UNDP/UNDCP programme is highly positive. The programme UNIRDP (as it is known in the Baalbeck-El Hermel region) has contributed to the improvement of social and physical infrastructure in the project areas as well as to the strengthening of participatory decision-making mechanisms through the Local Development and Credit Committees (LDCCs).

It has been successful in demonstrating that modalities for participatory planning can be developed at the local level even when the municipal structures are not functioning and that these modalities (Local Development Credit Committees) can be practically and effectively applied once the municipalities begin operating again. In terms of priority setting and project selection, the LDCCs have been able to evolve from credit-oriented committees to local development dialogue forums.

The participating areas (not all of the LDCCs are in the same geographic space as the municipality) have developed and made use of skills related to credit and project identification, priority setting, development of project proposals and have helped monitor their successful execution. There is an assumption that strengthening local participatory planning mechanisms for consensual decision making on local development issues and governance through funding priorities identified by this process, has facilitated relationships across communities with differing religious beliefs and political allegiances. It has also contributed to peace building and reconciliation. Although never documented, this is one of the major achievements of the programme as stated by several LDCC and PDCC members. The evaluation fully concurs with this perspective and exhorts the programme to ensure that this perspective is captured in programme documents as well as in the designing of the third phase. It should also be made known to potential donors and other partners.

The LDCCs supported by the UNDP/UNDCP have increased the ability of the areas to improve co-ordination with international agencies working in their communities. A concrete case offered by the LDCCs, themselves, is the case of the Co-operative Housing Foundation: a USAID sponsored project. There were other instances where donors consulted with the programme or the LDCC and/or used their lists of priorities to make decisions about which projects they would fund.

The programme's strategic decision to focus on the "water sector" although not previously stated in writing, proved correct as water development resources constitute one of the major issues in the region. The implementation of the decision to move from an IRDP (at the end of 1996) to a programme in support of regional development (in February 1997) has not been easy, as requests for direct local activities remained the bulk of the programme.

In sustaining the abandonment of illicit crops, marketing has been one major problem. Illicit drug traders came to producers for production of illicit crops. For legal crops, the producer has to find the retail outlets for produce. There is no thorough survey of potential market niches which could be met from regional produce (agricultural, agro-industrial, artisan) which could help inform producers as to what to produce. As a result, most farm produce goes, unprocessed, into the general fresh fruit and vegetable market, either through small stands or through sales to merchants, at times when all farmers are selling the same products (and the same goods are being imported from neighbouring countries at lower costs and with government subsidies). Farmers are calling for protection under an agricultural

policy which should, they say, prevent imports which undercut national farmers' prices. More attention is needed to develop greater diversity in both crops and types of crops, including early or late varieties of common fruits and vegetables.

International market survey support might be sought. This could add an extra dimension to a national market survey undertaken by a local consultant.

Moves towards start-up of a regional development planning process leading to the formulation of the regional development programme only began in mid-1999. The programme's historical background and its perception as a programme for illicit crops substitution, combined with expectations that hundreds of millions of dollars for the region would be channelled through it, has always hampered the programme's movement from a "regional all-demands absorber" to a "mechanism of regional planning support."

The integrated approach used by the programme worked effectively at the LDCC's area levels, with the exception that it lacked an element related to regional planning and programming. Apparently, the original programme concept that would have involved area-based planning was never put into practice. This has been a consequence of the Baalbeck-El Hermel social fabric (strong political affiliations, sub-regional politics, links between the South Lebanon and the Beeka, various religious beliefs and practices, differing communities and strong family identities) that have compelled the programme to make a choice to be present all over the region without focus on particular areas, as a criteria of intervention.

The initial conception of the programme was vague and overly ambitious and lacked a single programme document for all activities. The lack of annual work plans has not facilitated a clear understanding of the programme goals and achievements.

In reality, the programme functioned, in the first phase, as an integrated rural development programme. The basic goals and framework of the programme have gone through several revisions. Clearly, the possibility for revision and flexibility needs to be built into the design of programmes that operate in such transitional environments as these do. However, poor second phase project conceptualisation has led to initially unrealistic expectations as to what could be accomplished by the programme in terms of support to regional development. Over time, the project has become more focused on practical and achievable objectives and has moved slowly towards supporting regional development.

The programme is now serving as a platform for the co-ordination of a wider range of activities and a more significant volume of resources. The programme has also been able to provide technical assistance in processes of resource mobilisation. Slowly, the programme is now incorporating new tools for working at the regional level. As a result, the programme is now involved in improving municipal participation in processes of local governance, planning and decision-making and is seeking orientation and technical support in its qualitative jump towards supporting regional development. The technicalities of the substantive issues of working at the regional level will be addressed in the formulation process of the third phase.

It is doubtful whether the particular modalities put in place by the programme can be sustained for very long beyond the programme's end, with the possible exception of the LDCC which seems to be now less attached to credit issues and is starting to react to local development issues and challenges. Still, credit, as a major LDCC component, remains very

present and powerful. Some LDCC members challenged this saying that they believed these modalities would survive in some form. At the same time, all agreed that any regional mechanism must be based on the LDCC and have a practical end. Whatever the form of the mechanism which evolves in the future, there will still be a need to mobilise additional resources for development activities as well as to ensure its own existence as a de facto mechanism and vehicle for local development.

No real exit strategy has been devised. In some respects, the possibility of designing municipal micro-regional development plans that would be part of the regional development programme could be seen as a final project activity, as it provides municipalities or group of municipalities (micro-regions) with a tool for use in further resource mobilisation. This approach would enable the programme to finalise the investments foreseen by the UNDCP and the Government. If this option materialises and concentrates on supporting local governance-oriented process(es) and initiatives, the direct technical assistance in the designing of municipal or micro-region and regional development programme could be supported financially by UNDP.

Project management has performed competently. The project is working in a fragile social, economic and political environment. All representatives of the participating LDCCs indicated how helpful the programme has been; particularly, with the implementation of water development resource projects and credit, in spite of the small amounts of loans, according to the creditors. Technical advice and support from the programme staff and consultants have been widely recognised and appreciated. A common refrain was that, for the first time, a programme has been working in such a way that the "beneficiaries" feel that they own the activities, as they are being asked for the first time what they think, how to define their own priorities and strengthen their capacities to mobilise resources in addressing them. The success of the programme in involving local level leadership in identifying needs and formulating them in a way that can be used for regional planning is very significant. This originally took place through the LDCC and PDCC structures, but now, also through co-operation with municipal councils.

It must be noted that very few professional posts are filled by women in the programme, whether on secondment from Ministries or recruited by the Programme. Apart from being in line with UN policies and goals concerning gender equity, appointment of qualified women agricultural engineers, technicians, civil engineers and credit officers would serve to demonstrate that competence in such fields is not a purely male domain. However, it must be recognised that although they do exist,<sup>1</sup> finding such persons who are both willing and able to work in Baalbeck-El Hermel might be difficult.

The Micro-Regional Workshops succeeded in helping 22 LDCCs to formulate needs and priorities, irrespective of individual members' own party, ideology or religious affiliation: albeit, in a "shopping list" fashion. For this process to be sustainable, two elements are essential. Firstly, there must be a formal Regional Development Planning authority, which can receive the contributions of such workshops, and integrate them in a formal Regional Development Plan. Secondly, such a Plan must be implemented, and must be seen to be implemented. In the absence of a regionally-based government, or Regional Development Planning body, progress towards transferring responsibility for co-ordination of

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the MOA agricultural engineer responsible for the Boudai project is a woman.

development of on-going interventions in the region has been limited. The UNDCP/UNDP programme continues to be the de facto co-ordinator for regional level development.

As gender has not been mainstreamed during the second phase, an important contribution to the Regional Development Programme would be the promotion of gender awareness and of gender analysis skills. This would facilitate mainstreaming of gender issues into development planning, both at the Regional level and with partners. It is strongly recommended that the Programme staff receive appropriate gender training, and that this be included as soon as possible within Phase III<sup>2</sup>. It is recommended that the training be linked with a thorough gender analysis of the beneficiary groups of the Programme. Furthermore, steps should then be taken to carry out gender sensitisation activities with the LDCC s and with the foreseen regional participatory mechanisms of the region.

Detailed comments, criteria and recommendations on the designing of the third phase and its implications are part of the evaluation report. As requested by UNDP, the evaluation report offers some suggestions regarding how UNDP could explore the possibilities of supporting the "replicability" of the Baalbeck-El Hermel regional development planning process in others areas of Lebanon.

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<sup>2</sup> . This would be in keeping with UN Administrative Instruction ST/AI/1999/9.