Evaluation Brief

ESCWA's Project : "Capacity Building on Climate Change Mitigation for Poverty Alleviation in Western Asia"

ESCWA

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Background

In many isolated rural areas of developing Arab countries, the perpetuation of extreme poverty is exacerbated due to the lack of access to energy services. The marginalized communities living in these areas mainly depend on biomass and charcoal as energy resources, thereby increasing deforestation and land degradation, and negatively affecting food security. These practices have a direct impact on climate change.

Since 2011, ESCWA has focused on strengthening its Member States' (MS) knowledge and capacity in adopting climate change mitigation measures and in promoting the use of renewable energy (RE) sources.

The "**Capacity-building on climate change mitigation for poverty alleviation in Western Asia**" project, implemented by ESCWA in partnership with ECA, ESCAP and the UNESCO Cairo Office, was designed to focus on these pressing issues.

Undertaken from July 2011 to July 2013, the project aimed at building capacity in the field of RE technologies as an effective element for poverty alleviation in the region. The project targeted policymakers, civil society and the private sector in order to develop effective policies, programmes and partnerships to enhance energy security and to improve access to energy services in poor rural areas.

While targeting the rural areas of all MS, where 42% of the population live at different level of poverty and 8 million people still use traditional biomass for fuel, the project had a special focus on Sudan, Yemen and Palestine.

The implementation strategy of the project consisted of two main axes: the transfer of knowledge and the creation of networks. The project implemented a series of regional capacity building workshops and training activities, and established a reference centre for the promotion of integrated RE sources use in the agricultural sector.

Upon the project's completion, an evaluation was conducted to measure the project's overall achievements. By assessing the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, the evaluation consolidated key findings with regard to the project's challenges and provided insights for future work.

Key Findings

The evaluation found that the project was successful in achieving its stated objectives:

Relevance: The project succeeded in addressing problems relevant to the region. By implementing the appropriate activities and addressing hindrances in scaling-up RE applications, all of the evaluation's survey respondents confirmed that the project increased their awareness of RE sources and provided a good platform for the development of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)

concepts.

Effectiveness: The evaluation showed that the project created a strong momentum in the countries towards RE deployment by: enabling participants to build a network with RE experts, raising awareness on energy initiatives, helping countries improving RE policies and developing RE action plans through national and regional conferences and workshops.

Efficiency: The project was efficient in its use of resources, with 40% of the budget allocated to activities contributing directly to objectives' achievement and sustainability. Moreover, with ESCWA's staff support to the project, most of the planned activities were achieved within the planned time and budget.

Sustainability: The project established a network linking stakeholders, experts and international organizations who participated in the project's many workshops. It also supported the establishment of a training centre promoting the use of integrated RE sources in the agricultural sector, in partnership with the American University of Beirut. These two important achievements supply the basis for a platform for capacity development, research and activities fostering RE sources' use at national and regional levels.

Additionally, by ensuring women's participation in project events, the project initiated a gender-based perspective.

Key Challenges

The project also encountered considerable difficulties on different levels:

1. **Challenging political situation**: The security situation in the region delayed project and resulted in two extensions.

2. **Insufficient enabling factors**: Hindrances to scaling up RE usage in rural areas of the region, such as: a) limited capacities and knowledge, b) lack of incentives to private sector investments, c) and lack of awareness.

3. **Garnering audience participation**: Due to resource constraints, not all project activities were well attended. Also, not all project participants were able to distribute the project's educational materials to their peers.

Recommendations

I. For the project's sustainability: The project-created network and training centre could be developed and formalized into a regional platform of international organizations, practitioners and beneficiaries, thereby maintaining the project's sustainability.

II. For future similar projects:

1. A limited number of countries should be prioritized instead of involving all MS, thereby better focusing their efforts.

2. Participants and stakeholders should be consulted during the project's design to ensure it is "demand driven" and thus increasing its relevance.

3. MS governments should be encouraged to nominate a qualified and representative national team to participate in capacity-building project activities.

4. Additional implementation tools should be developed, such as legal, institutional and policy analyses, to improve the project's effectiveness in supporting policy formulation and PPPs.

5. More alternative financial mechanisms should be explored to remove the cost barriers to RE development.

III. For the DA Secretariat: Modifications to the reporting format for DA projects should be considered to better capture the achievements and efforts of the project teams.

In response to the above recommendations, the project team prepared an action plan specifying the steps to take to enhance performance in future projects.