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IN BRIEF

FINAL EXTERNAL EVALUATION – JOINT UN WOMEN/ UNICEF PROJECT “STRENGTHENED GENDER ACTION IN CAHUL AND UNGHENI DISTRICTS” (EVA)

Photo: UN Women

This evaluation brief presents a summary of the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations, as identified by the evaluators. More details can be found in the full evaluation report.

EVALUATION TYPE: External final evaluation

EVALUATORS: Gheorghe Caraseni, international consultant, Team Leader; Liuba Kuznetsova, national consultant.

FIELD VISIT DATES: 22-31 March 2023

FINAL REPORT DATE: 31 July 2023

COMMISSIONED BY: UN Women and UNICEF

MANAGED BY: Evaluation Management Group led by UN Women (Task manager: Lucretia Ciurea, M&E Analyst) and Evaluation Reference Group: UN Women, UNICEF, partners, LPAs and donor.

EVALUATION PURPOSE: To assess the programmatic progress and final performance, identify good practices and lessons to be learned, and to develop recommendations for the next phase or other similar initiatives.

EVALUATION CRITERIA: Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, Gender Equality & Human Rights.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY: Mixed methods (desk review, interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation), with a participatory and utilization-focused approach, and attention to Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), Leave No One Behind (LNOB), disability inclusion, and gender.

PROJECT INFORMATION:

Geographical coverage: The Republic of Moldova (Cahul and Ungheni districts)

Participating Agencies: UN Women, UNICEF

Project period: January 2020 – May 2023

Donor: European Union

Budget: EUR 5,250,000, including:
EUR 5,000,000 – EU funded and
EUR 250,000 – UN Women’s contribution



Project summary

The overall goal of the project is to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through strengthened implementation gender mainstreaming in local development planning processes, including budget planning and addressing gender-based and domestic violence affected women and children in Ungheni and Cahul regions.

The EVA Project has two outcomes and three outputs:

OUTCOME 1: Gender equality is mainstreamed in the local policy-making by the local public authorities (LPAs).

OUTPUT 1.1: Gender mainstreaming of public policies at the local level by the LPAs.

OUTCOME 2: Victims of domestic violence, including sexual violence, have greater access to effective survivor-focused multidisciplinary services, and violence prevention is piloted in local schools and communities.

OUTPUT 2.1: Range of quality services for women victims of domestic, including sexual violence developed.

OUTPUT 2.2: Secondary schools and media have staff trained to plan and implement violence prevention programmes.

The project successfully used a 'bottom-up' (unlike the 'top-down') change-oriented approach, based on valid, but incomplete Theory of Change (ToC) and consistent results' chain.

The "bottom-up approach", including community participation was effective in the local policy-making and gender-responsive local budgeting and all targeted local policies and budgets were successfully engendered. The "top-down" approach was not foreseen and the high decision-maker impeded approval of the GRBs. The results 'chain is logically interlinked to the project's ToC, which is valid, but still incomplete, because the offender-oriented dimension is not reflected.

Key Findings & Conclusions



RELEVANCE

The project is multi-dimensional and comprehensive, it reflects the needs of the target groups and beneficiaries and is aligned to the thematic national and local priorities strategies. The project used a multi-level and multi-stakeholder participatory approach based on the involvement of a high number of state and non-state local, national and international actors, but with some coordination and synergetic issues. Some relevant actors (local councils, district financial authorities and the Ministry of Finance) were insufficiently involved. The project is relevant, and aligned to the national strategic documents. It reflects the needs and priorities of the targeted localities regarding the prevention of the violence, increasing the functionality of the services oriented towards the victims of violence and enhancing the thematic and operational capacities.



COHERENCE

The internal coherence of the project is mixed, it takes into consideration the previous thematic experiences of the both UN entities and implementing partners. The coordination and synergetic effects between the implementing partners (IPs) is insufficient, but is well between UN Women and UNICEF. The external coherence is stronger than the internal one and communication, coordination and synergy with the similar projects implemented by other development organizations is mostly well.



EFFECTIVENESS

The project was instrumental in promoting social change and generated positive effects across both components (outcomes) and was successful in gender mainstreaming

in the local policies, enhancing the access of the victims of violence to survivor-focused multidisciplinary services, and piloting violence prevention in the local schools and communities. The project performed mostly well against the targets of both components, despite some delays in implementation and changes in the country context in Moldova. The partners managed to implement all planned actions and achieved its targets and expected results at the outcome and outputs level as per the Results Framework. The project made tangible contribution towards mainstreamed gender issues in the local policies and combating domestic violence affecting women and children. This resulted in engendered local policies/socio-economic development strategies and GRBs, which still needs approval. The project reinforced the local capacities, improved the functionality of the multidisciplinary services and local actors, especially. As the consequence, it positively impacted the increase of number of women and girls who experience violence seeking assistance from public institutions in both targeted districts and number of reported cases of violence against children.

The project enhanced the visibility of the gender equality and violence prevention issues in the schools and local communities as the result of the piloted prevention actions in the schools, media outputs and mini-grants scheme of supporting the local initiatives.



EFFICIENCY

The project achieved its results in an efficient manner reaching the majority of the targets within the anticipated budget lines, with the available human resources, but within the extended timeframe, generated by the external factors, which influenced the dynamic. The resources were used for the budget lines as planned without the significant deviations. The evaluation did not find any alternative solutions, which could be provided at fewer expenses and/ or would be more economical for the project. The project management is flexible and adaptive and monitoring and evaluation system is mostly robust, although both with some areas for further improvement.



SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability of the project achievements is mixed and differs from component to component. The policy sustainability is promising given the long-term commitments of the LPAs to implement the local engendered strategies. The same is valid for the SOPs and regulatory framework of the Regional Integrated Center for the victims of sexual violence. The sustainability of the GRBs is unclear and at risk, because of lack of normative framework.

The institutional and individual sustainability perspectives are promising in the case of capacitated local actors, although the weak response system to cases of VAW at national level may adversely affect the work of MDTs, which needs further support. The sustainability is rather weak and fragile in the case of women-led startups, Women Clubs and is premature regarding the Regional Integrated Center for the victims of sexual violence. The financial sustainability prospects are either weak (some local CSOs; start-ups) or unclear (Regional Integrated Center).



GENDER EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS

The project is gender-sensitive and rights-based and has a balanced approach targeting “rights holders” and “duty bearers”. Gender, child protection and women’s empowerment aspects are well integrated within the project management cycle. The project used the HRBA and was focused on engendering the local policy and capacity development of the “duty bearers” (MDTs, LPAs, schools’ administrations, teachers, healthcare and foster care professionals), and increasing the capacities and empowerment of the “rights holders” (CSOs, LAGs, LIGs, women and children). The project follows the LNOB Principle focused on: women, children, persons with disabilities, refugees.

Good practices

- *Multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder* approach contributed to enabling environment for promotion of the gender equality, capacitation of the local actors and supporting their initiatives.
- *Flexibility and receptiveness of the project or adaptive management* were important in the changing context, because allowed an adequate management response tailored to the unforeseen external factors.
- *Use of the baseline, mid-term and endline assessment* consolidates the monitoring and evaluation system and represents a good practice to be followed in the future similar actions.
- *Involvement of the local CSOs from the targeted districts as implementing partners* increases the use of available local expertise and consolidates the local ownership and sustainability perspectives.

Lessons learned

- ✓ The design and ambition of the project should take into consideration the available time frame/ funding period and involve the ultimate decision-makers.
- ✓ While increasing the number of the project sites, there is a need to adjust the initial targets.
- ✓ A local policy-level change is never a linear process, it faces resistance both at the local, but also district/ national.
- ✓ For an effective fight against the domestic violence, there is a needed for both survivor-focused initiatives (targeted by the project) and offender-oriented actions (not targeted by the project).
- ✓ Online capacity development events, beside the disadvantages have also one important advantage, but needs to be adjusted in terms of intensity, format and duration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

	Recommendations	To whom	Priority	Time frame
REC. 01	Capitalize on achievements, continue engendering the local policies and support for improving services for victims of violence and child protection. Consider supporting the offender-oriented services.	UNW UNICEF EUD	High	Immediate / Mid-term
REC. 02	Fine-tune the project design, scale up the good practices and consider the lessons learned. Involve the change agents and gender champions generated by the EVA Project in future projects.	UNW UNICEF	High	Immediate
REC. 03	Use a three-level approach in promoting and mainstreaming the GRB. Advocate for adjustment of the regulatory framework on GRB.	UNW	High	Immediate
REC. 04	Improve the internal coherence, particularly coordination and synergy between the partners.	UNW UNICEF	Medium	Mid-term
REC. 05	Support more consistently the local stakeholders' initiatives – more financial resources, longer duration, adjusted logic of intervention.	UNW UNICEF EUD	High	Mid-term
REC. 06	Reinforce the WEE subcomponent. Consider developing a separate project or component.	WEE EUD	High	Long-term
REC. 07	Consolidate the sustainability of the achievements, especially of the Integrated Center and increase the ownership commitments.	UNW UNICEF	Medium	Immediate/ Mid-term
REC. 08	Further improve the M&E system.	UNW UNICEF	Medium	Mid-term