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This Evaluation was Evaluated by Matthew Hiebert
Dear Reader,

On behalf of the UNESCO Iraq Office, I am pleased to present the External Evaluation of The Distance Learning Project, which has been funded by the generous support of the European Union (EU) under the auspices of the Iraq Trust (ITF) as administered by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG).

The project has achieved the majority of the developmental results that supported primary and secondary level students inside and outside Iraq; however numerical targets were not achieved due to some challenges that has been faced during implementation. The project development goal was to increase the participation and involvement of primary and secondary school students in their studies within the context of the deteriorating security situation, through distance learning tools designed according to the Iraqi formal school curricula.

It is our intent that the work of the organization builds on the lessons learned from the evaluation process in order to improve project management and the outputs of our interventions in Iraq.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the external evaluators in carrying out this exercise, especially given the logistical constraints of data collection in Iraq. UNESCO Iraq extends its thanks for the support and collaboration of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), sister agencies and programmes. A very special thanks goes to our Iraqi partners, especially to the Ministry of Education (MoE), who worked closely with UNESCO during the implementation of activities.

Finally, I would like to pay special homage to our Iraqi colleagues working in the field who daily subject their very selves to the risk of injury or worse. It must be remembered that many of the activities carried out during the life of the project were done so under security conditions which often posed considerable difficulties, and it is a tribute to the dedication of all involved that the project was able to move forward to completion despite this.

The great people of Iraq, who have suffered so much, deserve no less.

I thank you for your consideration.
Introduction

The Distance Learning Project aimed to support primary and secondary level students inside and outside Iraq to continue their curricular learning in spite of deteriorating security conditions. These security conditions continue to threaten the formal education system, as the dangers have led to declines in attendance and enrolment, displacement of students and teachers, and closures of schools. The project concept was to develop the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to deliver curricular content to school-aged children inside and outside Iraq—including those in school, out of school, internally displaced personal (IDPs), refugees, girls prevented from attending schools, special needs etc.—through distance education. The project focus was on the transitional grades of 6, 9, and 12, through distance education modalities such as educational TV and radio programming. The radio component was cancelled early on due to its cost and limitations, and was replaced with the development of a curriculum-focused website which would ultimately include electronic copies of all school and supplemental textbooks, TV lessons, interactive lessons, educational games, and other tools.

The development goal of the project, as stated in the approved Project Document was, “To increase the participation and involvement of primary and secondary school students in their studies, within the context of the deteriorating security situation, through distance learning
tools designed according to the Iraqi formal school curricula.” This goal was operationalized in terms of the development of an educational television station and related programming, in order to reach children inside and outside Iraq.

The project began in May 2007, and was originally planned to run for 18 months, ending in November 2008. It was subsequently extended five times, for a total of 29 months of extension, and a total implementation period of 47 months. The project closed operationally in December 2010, with a final end date of 31 March 2011. The total project budget was USD 5,605,228 Funded by European Union (EU) through United Nations Development Group Iraq Trust Fund (UNDG ITF).

**Achievements**

Overall, the project has achieved the majority of the developmental results laid out in the original project documents. Short-term (output) targets were achieved in most cases, as were intermediate outcomes. Where numerical targets were not achieved, appropriate explanations have been provided.

Some adjustments were made to the project structure during implementation, which resulted in the achievement of additional results with no additional costs. A summary of the project’s main achievements is provided below:
• Establishment of a fully functional Educational television (EDTV) station, operational, and institutionalized within the MoE structure;
• Rehabilitation of the educational TV building including the provision of a power generator and a UPS unit as well as preparing the floor design for the TV station;
• Establishing and equipping a TV broadcasting studio with a satellite broadcasting/transmission unit at MOE for broadcasting educational TV programs;
• Establishing and equipping a TV production studio (TV Studio and a control room) with editing suites;
• Designing and establishing the Iraqi curricula website. This result was not included in the original project concept, and was achieved through cost savings on other activities;
• 624 Educational TV programs, covering all subjects of 6th, 9th & 12th educational levels produced and broadcasted;
• In depth training provided to: 20 MOE technical staff members; 40 MOE educational specialists; 8 MOE directors/scenario developers; 2 MoE TV managers; 6 MoE IT technical staff;
• 25 animated TV clips for promoting peace, human rights, gender equality, right to education, health care and noble values are produced and broadcasted;

**Challenges**

The main challenges faced during implementation are presented below, along with mitigation measures from the project.

• **Project was managed remotely from Amman due to security concerns in Iraq:** Follow-up was provided by a project officer in Baghdad, as well as MoE focal points. Project
management visited Iraq on a regular basis.

- **Delays on MoE side**: with rehabilitation activities, installation of TV studio equipment, and nomination of trainees. Activities were initiated in advance of schedule to allow a buffer period; outsourcing of pertinent activities/steps; and triggering follow-up steps while waiting for completion of pre-requisites.

- **Security conditions and potential for disappearance of goods**: Tight controls on timing of delivery and coordinating receipt of shipments; storage of goods securely on site to minimize transport; backups of knowledge products kept in Amman.

- **Frequent electricity failure**: TV station was equipped with large generators and UPS, creating a system with three power supplies, as well as additional measures.

- **Lack of experience of MoE staff**: Broadcasting system allows automatic transmission, and will not be affected by human error.

- **Lack of efficiency of Iraqi Media Network (IMN) in production activities**: Production was streamlined from 1000 episodes to 624, and still covering the targeted curriculum levels; in-house production capacity established at MoE.
Key findings and lessons learned

This project evaluation was carried out according to the criteria of: results achievement; efficiency; effectiveness; relevance; impact; and sustainability. Key findings and lessons learned in each area are presented below.

Achievement of results
Although the project design evolved somewhat during the implementation of the project, the overall planned results were generally achieved. The main outcome anticipated by the project—the establishment of a functional EDTV station—was achieved. The responsiveness of the project is to be commended; however, performance measurement was made difficultly by the changes to the project design.

Efficiency
The project was managed efficiently, in light of the implementation context, and the overall cost and duration of the project were appropriate to the results that were achieved. Sound decisions were made around operational efficiency, and the use of project funds, leading to additional results which had not been anticipated in the project design. The primary issue that impacted efficiency was the fact that known issues with the project design were nonetheless approved, and as such, had to be addressed during implementation—which adversely affects efficiency.

Effectiveness
The project was managed effectively in general terms. There were some issues with respect to the application of results-based management and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) within the project, which may have impacted the overall quality of results; however, this did not prevent
results aggregation, and the achievement of planned outcomes. The focus in all education projects, which may have been overlooked in some aspects of the Distance Learning Project implementation, should be on students as the ultimate beneficiaries of all interventions. Greater involvement of teachers and students in the development of EDTV content could have improved the quality of results, and more work remains to be done to support increased awareness and usage of the EDTV programming by both students (at home) and teachers (at school).

Relevance
The relevance of the project design was very high, and the interventions served a very real need to provide educational opportunities to students who are unable to attend school regularly. As the project was implemented, some opportunities to improve the overall relevance of results were missed, as the attention given to end users of the EDTV programming was minimal. The focus of interventions was very much at the central level, and the actual usage of the broadcasts was only considered to a lesser degree. The relevance of the project interventions, and hence the likelihood of increased usage, could have been increased by greater involvement of students and teachers in the development of the EDTV content in particular.
Impact
While it is premature to assess the impact of the project in terms of educational outcomes, the project has been successful in legitimizing distance education as a credible field in Iraq, and in opening up access to new learning opportunities to millions of Iraqi children. More work remains to be done to promote the EDTV station and increase usage, in order to derive the maximum benefit from the successful interventions.

Sustainability
The project design ensured that the EDTV station, once developed, would be institutionalized within the MoE structure. As such, the outlook for sustainability and viability of the station for the coming years is very good. However, there were some concerns raised by EDTV station staff around the budget allocations, and procedures of the station that may impact the quality and quantity of continued work.

No sustainability plan was created under project auspices, and the ownership now rests with the MoE.
**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are provided to the project partners, and are grounded in the findings of the evaluation exercise.

- Processes and policies for the project revision, both before approval and during implementation process, should be reviewed. (For United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Development Group (UNDG))
- Performance measurement against anticipated results should be more rigorous. (for UNESCO)
- A balance needs to be struck between efficiency, rigor, and adherence to RBM principles. (for UNESCO and UNDG)
- RBM practices should be reviewed. (for UNESCO and UNDG)
- A programme-wide logical framework should be developed. (for UNESCO and UNDG)
- Rationale and cost/benefit analysis for changes to Projects should be detailed in revision documents. (for UNESCO and UNDG)
- A review of the programming and its impact on students and teachers should be undertaken (for UNESCO and MoE), an impact assessment is planned for two years from now, and a smaller scale survey was conducted by UNESCO independently of and concurrent with this evaluation.
- Further support should be provided in the field of Distance education (DE). (for UNESCO and MoE)
- Activities to promote the EDTV station should be scaled up. (for MoE)
- Secure, reliable, and sufficient budget allocations should be made to fully leverage the investments in establishing the EDTV station. (for MoE)

There should be continued follow up with the MoE to protect the Iraq Trust Fund (ITF) investment. (for UNESCO)

Linkages should be established with current education programming. (for UNESCO).
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