

Final Management Response and Follow-Up Note

Evaluation of the Regional Development and Protection Programme for refugees and host communities in the Middle East (RDPP)

July 2014 – June 2018

This note to the Programme Committee summarises the main findings, lessons learnt and recommendations from the evaluation report. It also includes the MFAs management response and intended follow-up to the evaluation. The management response has been elaborated by the Department of Humanitarian Action, Migration and Civil Society (HMC). MFAs Evaluation Department (EVAL) commissioned and managed the evaluation, which was conducted by an independent evaluation team of international consultants from TANA Copenhagen ApS (DK).

1. Executive Summary

Overview

This evaluation has been commissioned by the Evaluation Department of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide an evidence-base to prepare for the next phase of the Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP). It was conducted three years into the four-year implementation period. The evaluation focuses on assessing programmatic outcomes in line with the OECD-DAC criteria relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency and sustainability, and also assesses the added value of RDPP in relation to other initiatives and approaches.

The challenges posed by the Syrian displacement crisis are profound, protracted and varied. In the neighbouring countries refugees and internally displaced persons are faced with interrelated livelihood and protection crises. Furthermore, the impact of the war on host populations in the neighbouring countries has been severe and has compounded a number of pre-existing economic problems, governance deficits, strains on public services and societal tensions. RDPP seeks to mobilise a variety of actors to contribute to addressing the protracted crisis facing both Syrian refugee and vulnerable host populations.

RDPP is a multi-donor European initiative combining humanitarian and development funds with objective to support Lebanon, Jordan and the Northern Iraq to better understand, plan, and mitigate the impact of forced displacement of Syrian refugees on the host communities. Currently eight European donors support the RDPP: the Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Union, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. It has been under the responsibility of the EU Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO). The EU Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO) and the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) have had observer status on the Steering Committee since 2015. The Steering Committee is a consensus-based, donor-led governance mechanism providing consultation, strategic

direction and oversight on RDPP implementation and ensuring alignment with the priorities of its members.

Denmark manages the programme, which has a budget of 41.6 million euros. The programme runs from July 2014 to June 2018 (in 2016 it was extended till June 2018). The programme includes four components: research, advocacy, protection and livelihoods. As of end June 2017, RDPP was supporting 33 projects through a wide range of partnerships. Many individual projects combine these areas of work, thus enabling synergies. As such, it is a highly ambitious and complex programme, which seeks to address a variety of development and humanitarian needs in a joined-up manner.

The focus of the evaluation is on documenting outcomes at programmatic level and assessed possible synergies between programme components. It also analyses the value added of RDPP vis-à-vis other initiatives and the innovative elements of the programme in working towards durable solutions and addressing the humanitarian-development nexus. The Evaluation Team (ET) has approached this evaluation on a broad programmatic level with the evidence collected regarding individual projects being aggregated and analysed for lessons related to how the humanitarian-development nexus can be better managed amid protracted, volatile and at times deteriorating conditions. Considerable attention has been given to the actual and plausible contributions of the individual projects towards the goals of the overall programme. Contextual factors have been emphasised in order to support understanding of how RDPP has responded to a volatile setting.

The evaluation has also analysed the extent to which the ‘RDPP model’ has informed donor approaches for addressing protracted crises, and where it has facilitated stronger policy dialogue and influence. This has included looking at how RDPP has informed and enhanced Danish, EU and other donor structures for policy dialogue and response to a protracted crisis.

Results at Programme Level

The ET finds that impressive outputs have been achieved at project level, with achievements primarily flowing from its careful selection of partners, close follow-up, partner ownership and foresight. Selection of projects to support has been careful and iterative. Particularly in the start-up phases of projects, RDPP staff engaged in a constructive dialogue and provided extensive feedback on project designs. A picture of a very ‘thoughtful’ approach appeared through the interviews, wherein RDPP was contrasted with more mechanistic and often non-transparent procedures in other funding mechanisms.

RDPP has effectively ensured relevance to the protracted crisis, which has been key to mobilising efforts that are (a) appropriate in fostering institutional change in a dynamic period; (b) relevant for addressing economic and protection risks facing refugees and other target populations based on awareness of windows of opportunity to respond amid changing political constraints; and (c) responsive to the three-way nexus of humanitarian-development-conflict/social stability efforts. Relevance in relation to systematic attention to inclusion (‘leaving no one behind’) is mixed in the portfolio and indeed this was not stressed in the calls for proposals, despite being a clear objective in the programme document.

For those aware of them, **research** outputs have been seen as being of high quality and relevance. However, research has thus far been insufficiently ‘put to use’ and disseminated, partly due to

delays in finalising some of the studies. The visibility of research projects funded by RDPP is limited.

An example of the research is the RDPP co-financed, UNDP-led study, 'Jobs Make a Difference, which analyses how host governments, international actors, and private sector partners can create new economic opportunities and expand access to existing economic opportunities. UNDP has remained cautious about actively publicising the report due to the sensitivities in the individual countries around granting refugees access to the labour market. Although the ET found that the research was of high quality and very timely, few interviewees knew of it or had used it. Despite a high degree of relevance, this research initiative exemplifies systemic obstacles related to making the link from research to advocacy and policy influence around sensitive topics.

Advocacy has also had varied results, with some notable successes. Protection partners recognise that advocacy is central to all their work, whereas livelihood partners tend to describe advocacy as an added component on top of their service provision role. RDPP has been most effective in advocacy when it has supported organisations that already had a clear advocacy profile to continue and expand their activities.

An example of RDPP's advocacy support is the strategically targeted assistance to the ongoing activities of ABAAD, a well-established Lebanese civil society organisation working for gender equality and to prevent gender-based violence. This support has enabled ABAAD to 'fill gaps' in complex advocacy efforts that were otherwise receiving rather piecemeal donor support. RDPP has thereby helped them to increase their policy influence and visibility, for example in introducing changes to legal frameworks for criminalising rape.

Most of the **livelihoods** projects analysed are in early stages of implementation and it is therefore difficult to assess results at output and outcome levels. It should also be noted that the programme will continue to June 2018, and the challenges described here may in some cases be overcome by then. The ET expects that further outputs are likely to be achieved in this period, but ultimate outcomes in relation to employment are less likely to be realised. In all three countries, there is a recognition among partners of the need to ensure that vocational training efforts contribute to national and local capacities for either scaling up or at least promoting sustainability. Significant investment is being made through a range of RDPP projects that contribute to a knowledge base for targeting genuine livelihood opportunities, both in regional research and in labour market and/or small enterprise assessments within livelihoods projects. As such, the current phase is creating favourable conditions for future outcomes.

The project "Increasing access to immediate and long-term economic opportunities of vulnerable displacement-affected populations in the Kurdistan region of Iraq" included investments in job centres designed largely to coach urban job seekers and help link them to potential employers. This project was largely directly implemented by Danish Refugee Council, but with a strong focus on working within local norms for livelihoods support and thereby overcoming the prevailing 'wild west' of un-coordinated vocational training efforts in the region. The success of the job centres has led to them accessing additional support and expansion with additional facilities.

Compared to livelihoods, **protection** programming has advanced further. This is partly due to RDPP support building on partners' existing plans and programming. Protection is also more advanced as it has been primarily concentrated in Lebanon, where programming was initiated more rapidly during the first two years of the programme. Overall it appears that protection has been effective when focused on (a) building national systems among authorities that also respond to the needs of the host population; (b) financing direct service provision by national NGOs; and

(c) enhancing social cohesion by finding ways to bring refugee and host populations together in joint initiatives.

With RDPP support, ILO has conducted child labour awareness raising events and capacity building activities for numerous relevant stakeholders at the national and district levels including the Ministries of Labour of Jordan and Lebanon, the Ministry of Agriculture in Lebanon, employers' associations, local governments, civil society organisations, universities, and parliamentarians. The project has also engaged with the private sector in both countries in order to raise awareness of issues related to child labour, specifically on the negative impacts on the social development and economy of Jordan and Lebanon. As a result of the ILO project in Lebanon, the Ministry of Labour committed to providing work permits to adults who removed their children involved in the worst forms of child labour, resulting in 270 children being withdrawn from their work. The parents of the children have accessed labour permits.

Results have so far been limited in relation to analyses of **'durable solutions'**, but a useful foundation has been laid for more evidence-based and transparent efforts to pursue future results. Interviews indicate that, due to cautious optimism that opportunities for return may soon improve, durable solutions are now being discussed in an increasingly open manner among some international agency stakeholders.

Questions of whether or not it is an appropriate time for refugees to return to Syria are some of the most contentious and politicised issues in Lebanon and Jordan. The RDPP supported "Durable Solutions Platform" has played an important role in providing a more solid evidence-base, thereby helping shift the discussion towards more reflective and informed consideration of safe alternatives in a rapidly changing context.

Synergies and added value

Synergies between livelihoods and protection are apparent within projects, with clear and even innovative approaches to applying a protection lens to livelihoods efforts and vice versa. For example, ABAAD's work with gender-based violence explicitly acknowledges the role of livelihood related psychosocial stress as a major factor influencing male violence. The work of ILO on child labour also bridges livelihood and protection concerns.

Overall findings indicate very good results at output level, and significant potential for outcomes, but there are notable concerns about sustainable results (particularly in relation to livelihoods) due to squeezed timeframes related to the slow start-up of the programme and the time required for partners to plan, recruit staff, engage/mobilise national partners and begin implementing activities. RDPP has not sufficiently considered the consequences of these delays and therefore has not been able to ensure appropriate timeframes.

RDPP's added value is strongest in the unique, close and flexible partnership that enables adaptation to emerging nexus priorities at both policy and community levels. In various ways, informants emphasised that RDPP has been willing and able to finance the 'software' required to make the nexus work, especially knowledge and capacities.

Policy dialogue has been strong in Lebanon and Jordan between partners and government, but has been weaker in Northern Iraq as most of the projects started later, the smaller portfolio and the lack of a permanent presence. No significant evidence was found of RDPP contributing to policy dialogue between RDPP donors and host governments. In general, the conditions for policy dialogue between donors and host governments have not been fostered due to RDPP

being led by a Steering Committee consisting largely of Brussels-based representatives, rather than the in-country embassies, EU delegations and other policy-formation stakeholders.

The RDPP model has ‘proven’ the value of a multi-donor approach and the potential to work through the EU while retaining sufficient autonomy to avoid undue bureaucratic and political obstacles associated with EU procedures. In Brussels, the model has helped inform how to better link humanitarian and development efforts, although links to DG NEAR have been slower to establish. This may have implications for a future phase of the programme if closer links are established with other DG NEAR programming. In both Brussels and Copenhagen, and also in some other donor capitals, RDPP has influenced key stakeholders to recognise the value of research to inform more evidence-based programming.

Throughout this assignment, the ET has been informed, particularly by EU actors and donors, that an underlying expectation regarding the added value of RDPP was its assumed status as a “laboratory” for innovation. However, the concept and scope of innovation related goals are poorly defined, including the theory of change through which, for example, the ‘experiments’ underway in the individual projects supported could then inform and even inspire diffusion of these innovations in programming more generally. The innovative qualities of RDPP primarily consist of providing space for greater and more informed ‘strategic direction’ and foresight among its partners. To some extent it has also been a mechanism to adapt donor support to facilitate thinking in a protracted crisis and avoid conventional siloes between humanitarian and development efforts. The partners interviewed had, for example, been able to use the relatively flexible support provided to invest in capacity development for strategic thinking and other refinement of existing programming, rather than introducing completely new ‘innovations’.

RDPP has not been explicitly designed to emphasise localisation. Indeed, mention of the term ‘localisation’ as broadly conceptualised in current humanitarian reform commitments is absent in the programme document and subsequent annual reports, even though attention is given to local partnership issues. RDPP annual reports make reference to capacity development in ways that suggest an implicit commitment to ensuring that local partners gradually take on leading roles as international agencies phase out, which is in turn reliant on strong national and local institutions. Over time, there has been a shift within the RDPP portfolio to have a greater proportion of national NGOs, which reflects broader shifts in the refugee response and government policies in Jordan and Lebanon requiring locally led programmes. RDPP is universally seen as being positively responsive to partner plans to invest in capacity development within their own organisations and among those institutions with which they work. Partners stated that the RDPP team differs from more bureaucratic and top-down mechanisms in having the stronger normative commitments and flexibility required to listen to what partners have to say about the needs on the ground, the existence of strategic gaps and how to build on (and trust in) partner capacities.

This enables those partners with field level programming experience to work on what they see to be relevant issues. Very few examples were noted of programmatic crowding or coordination issues. The livelihoods sector has begun to attract considerable attention in all three countries, but no specific examples of overlap or duplication with RDPP programming were noted as the needs are still greater than the levels of support available. In general, this avoidance of coordination problems is due to RDPP being a relatively small but proactive channel for donor

funding that has recognised and respected the ability of partners to carve out appropriate scopes for their programming.

The ET was tasked with analysing the added value of RDPP's approach of bringing donors together in a joint effort across three countries. The evaluation has found that 'jointness' is a lesser factor in RDPP's strengths and weaknesses as a programme than other qualities and constraints. There are limited notable strengths derived from being a regional programme, apart from perhaps some efficiencies in having a single management structure.

When RDPP was created, some interviewees in Denmark and Brussels stressed that it was expected to provide a learning platform, and perhaps even a model, for finding a new and more constructive way of linking humanitarian and development programming. This was to be underpinned with a strong and relatively unique emphasis on enhancing the evidence base for decision-making through research and by using practical experience from small projects as a basis for learning. The ET finds that this has been successful, though the extent to which this learning has diffused within donor organisations as a whole is not possible to confirm. Interviewees from donor agencies sometimes noted that, even though the projects were seen as interesting, the big picture of RDPP as a 'programme' was perceived to be somewhat amorphous in their organisations.

Overall, donor learning and application of lessons from RDPP fall into two categories. First is how RDPP has constituted a 'model mechanism' for multidonor coordination and integration of research and a somewhat longer-term perspective in addressing a protracted crisis on a regional level. Second is in relation to learning and application of lessons from the specific projects and types of interventions, i.e., diffusion of programmatic innovations in terms of new methods or other aspects of project design.

Regarding the first category, RDPP as a 'model mechanism', it is clear from interviews that the extensive discussions, primarily in Copenhagen, during the period of planning RDPP generated ownership and appreciation for the model. Even relatively unusual aspects, such as the inclusion of research and advocacy, and a strong element of evidence-based programming has been accepted as vital.

Interviews in Brussels indicate that there has been a positive, but perhaps less striking influence of the model. As in Denmark, RDPP has been seen as an important experiment with a new institutional structure to address long standing silos and to use research to promote more evidence-based programming and advocacy. Another major driver has been that of using RDPP to explore how aid modalities need to change in recognition of the centrality of migration in the EU development and humanitarian agendas.

Regarding the second category of learning, donor interviewees expressed optimism regarding RDPP contributing to application of results through innovations being scaling-up from the de facto pilots that the RDPP projects constitute. At country level, the RDPP 'model' itself has been treated as an innovation, and has already been used to promote a discussion around how humanitarian, development and conflict related aid architecture may need to be modified to function in a more joined-up manner in the nexus. There is, however, a lack of clearly defined pathways and strategy for achieving such influence.

Conclusions

RDPP has proven to be a very effective modality for practical response to a protracted crisis in terms of providing for adequate foresight, flexibility and strategic gap filling. It is an approach that could and should be adapted and replicated elsewhere. Results are highly appropriate for responding to protracted crisis – even if it is too early to draw verifiable conclusions regarding contributions to ‘durable solutions’.

Programmatic results are anchored in the strong relevance of the components, modalities, selection of projects and above all the partners. There are good synergies across the livelihoods and protection components within the projects, but insufficient horizontal linkages among the projects/partners. Opportunities for synergies across the individual projects in the programme have thus far been largely missing. Furthermore, synergies with research and advocacy outside of the projects are limited thus far. In sum, the ET draws the following conclusions:

- **Relevance** to the context has been strong, particularly in focusing programming on emergent opportunities to impact on livelihoods and protection in a dynamically changing environment.
- **Effectiveness and impact** have benefitted from the RDPP design and structure through which management has established collaboration among a range of actors, enabling a clear shift into the development sphere along with the demands of host governments.
- **Efficiency** in RDPP is found in the ‘added value of jointness’. RDPP enables both donor and operational partners committed to innovative programming to mobilise, collaborate and apply research/evidence in their work. This stems from the uniquely high levels of flexibility and close dialogue that characterise RDPP’s modus operandi.
- **Sustainability** has been strongly encouraged due to commitments in most programming to localisation in relation to civil society, national research institutions, national governments and local governments.

Lessons learnt

Successful programmatic outcomes can be built upon by (a) focusing efforts on synergies between protection and livelihoods programming; and (b) accepting that a measure of strategic gap-filling is likely to be required to find more effective modalities for overcoming prevailing siloes between humanitarian and development programming.

Weaknesses in achieving programmatic outcomes can be overcome by (a) greater realism regarding inevitable start-up delays wherein ‘appropriate timeframes’ will vary according to each project; (b) rethinking the current primary emphasis on accountability relations to Brussels and Copenhagen so as to better incentivise ownership from donors and EU delegations in Beirut, Amman and Erbil/Baghdad; and (c) recognising that the link from research to advocacy and policy dialogue involves exploring knowledge gaps and being savvy about how to ‘position’ research initiatives and partners to effectively engage in this dialogue.

Added value is strong and can be maintained in the future by (a) recognising the strengths in small-scale programming developed in close dialogue with partners, (b) recognising complementarities and synergies between RDPP’s small-scale programming and larger-scale

modalities, without assuming that good small-scale projects should necessarily be scaled-up; (c) continued emphasis on the qualities that have emerged from the flexibility and use of the RDPP Programme Management Unit to provide space to develop relations with national NGOs and host governments; and (d) recognising that RDPP may not be able to produce sustainable outcomes alone, but it can and should focus on processes that contribute to institutional sustainability through capacity development for partners that are able to provide relevant services and policy advice, now and in the future.

Recommendations

The RDPP Steering Committee, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the other individual RDPP donors should recognise the value of the RDPP model and use this experience to adapt the model for use elsewhere, including undertaking proactive efforts to inform the other RDPP initiatives of the lessons that have been learnt. This should most notably include lessons related to effective, large-scale response to migration crises.

RDPP management should redesign support in Phase Two to explicitly encourage more realistic (i.e., multiyear) project engagements. Many of the initial investments needed to develop trust and understanding with partners have now been made, so it should be possible to shorten the start-up period for designing projects. If the current partners are encouraged to apply for funding, building on lessons they have learnt and capacities they have developed in phase one this could also streamline efforts.

The RDPP Steering Committee should refine overall goals to reflect a more comprehensive perspective on how to jointly address humanitarian, development and social cohesion aims, i.e., in programming that combines these goals rather than addressing them independently, ensuring that timeframes and modalities are conducive to capacity development and localisation.

RDPP's greatest strengths are in flexibility, ongoing follow-up, low transaction costs, trust and transparency; qualities that need to be firmly anchored in the discussions between the Steering Committee and RDPP management regarding the next phase. These qualities should be enshrined in the next phase in more explicit programming policies and praxis designed to encourage innovation, for example, by mandating a national research partner to manage a community of practice for learning about how to jointly manage humanitarian and development programming in rapidly changing contexts.

RDPP management should design more explicit approaches to putting research into use by identifying synergies for advocacy and policy dialogue/influence and working to ensure that local research institutions are leading these processes.

In the coming years the role of host governments vis-à-vis the aid community will become increasingly central, with implications for programme design. Furthermore, there are already signs that a high-risk, but perhaps inevitable, discussion on returns will be on the agendas of the host governments. RDPP management needs to retain a high degree of flexibility in responding to this, with what may be different strategies in the three countries.

The RDPP Programme Management Unit has done an extraordinary job in establishing a strong portfolio of projects based on close and trusting relations with partners and government agencies. Without reducing the resources for these essential functions, the Programme Management Unit needs increased staffing capacity to take a 'seat at the table' in coordination and policy dialogues at country-level.

2. General comments to the evaluation

The MFA welcomes the evaluation and its findings and recommendations. The MFA has embarked on a process of formulating a second phase of the Regional Development and Protection Programme for refugees and host communities in the Middle East (RDPP) for the period July 2018 to December 2021. The evaluation has provided a timely and strategic input to inform this process, which has strengthened the design and approach of the next phase of the RDPP.

In 2017 the MFA decided to initiate this evaluation of the programme level to compliment the Mid-Term Review (June 2016) and the EU Results-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) Review (July 2017) conducted of the RDPP, which to a larger degree focused their analysis on the outcomes and results at partnership level. As the two reviews strongly recommended a continuation of the RDPP, it was decided to carry out the evaluation in a manner that would inform the formulation of a next phase of the programme. To ensure this, the evaluation was conducted in the fall of 2017 after three out of four years of programme implementation. As such, it was not designed to fully capture the final results of phase I of the RDPP, but rather to assess the relevance of the modality and the objectives. A review of the overall programme results will be carried out upon completion of the RDPP phase I in mid-2018.

The evaluation constitutes a significant contribution to the evidence package on which the RDPP phase II is based. Hence, it has confirmed the majority of the findings and recommendations of the two reviews, in addition to providing additional valuable analysis and recommendations with a focus on RDPP as a programming modality.

The overall findings of the evaluation underscores that the RDPP has been a very effective modality for relevant and targeted response to a protracted crisis in terms of providing for adequate foresight, flexibility and strategic gap filling in line with the contextual changes. It highlights that the RDPP is based on a partnership approach that could and should be adapted and replicated, when developing programming in response to fragility and displacement. It recognises that the greatest strength of the RDPP as a funding modality is in the flexibility, ongoing follow-up, low transaction costs, trust and transparency, which should be reflected in the discussions of the design of the next phase of the programme.

The MFA acknowledges that initial delays in the early implementation stages and in building up the management structures has impacted the potential for longer timeframes for projects and thereby the potential for creating greater sustainability for some partnerships, especially in the livelihood sector. The MFA also recognises the evaluations findings that the appropriate timeframes for addressing hum-dev nexus efforts should be carefully considered in the next

phase of the RDPP. It welcomes the reflection on opportunities to create greater synergies between thematic areas, in particular enhancing the link between research, advocacy and policy dialogue efforts. The MFA take note of the need to consider further strengthening the management structure of the programme in the next phase and the need for engaging donor representations in the three focus countries more actively in the dialogue on the RDPP progress and results.

In the following, the MFA responds to the recommendations of the evaluation. As phase I of the RDPP will end by mid-2018, most of the recommendations will be addressed in phase II of the RDPP Middle East.

Recommendation 1: *The RDPP Steering Committee, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the other individual RDPP donors should recognise the value of the RDPP model and use this experience to adapt the model for use elsewhere, including undertaking proactive efforts to inform the other RDPP initiatives of the lessons that have been learnt. This should most notably include lessons related to effective, large-scale response to migration crises.*

The MFA recognises that the RDPP as a model has proven to be a valuable and highly relevant modality in addressing hum-dev nexus efforts and jointly engaging in piloting approaches to addressing protracted displacement. As such, the evaluation findings are of relevance well beyond the formulation of a phase II of the RDPP. The lessons learnt from the partnership approach are of clear value for programming in response to fragility and displacement. The lessons learnt and experience from the RDPP contribute to Denmark's input to the dialogue on New Way of Working, Grand Bargain and hum-dev nexus efforts as well as to the ongoing thinking on Denmark's collective engagement on addressing the Syria crisis. The MFA will continue to utilise the lessons learnt from RDPP to contribute to the international dialogue on addressing protracted displacement through integrated solutions and with longer-term development oriented approaches.

The RDPP steering committee, other donors and EU institutions have shown strong interest in the evaluation and for the lessons learnt to form the building blocks for phase II of the RDPP. The RDPP management will share the evaluation report with the contributing donors to phase I, other donors potentially interested in contributing to phase II, and stakeholders contributing to the evaluation process or engaged in the formulation of phase II of the RDPP.

To further disseminate the evaluation recommendations and the lessons learnt RDPP Programme Management Unit (PMU) will develop a short summary paper to be distributed and disseminated to the contributing donors and other EU institutions relevant to the RDPP implementation (including for the Horn of Africa and North Africa), such as DG NEAR, ECHO and DG Home. The paper will also be shared and discussed with relevant stakeholders in the three focus countries, including national government institutions and implementation partners.

Recommendation 2: *RDPP management should redesign support in Phase Two to explicitly encourage more realistic (i.e., multiyear) project engagements. Many of the initial investments needed to develop trust and understanding with partners have now been made, so it should be possible to shorten the start-up period for designing*

projects. If the current partners are encouraged to apply for funding, building on lessons they have learnt and capacities they have developed in phase one this could also streamline efforts.

As stated above, the MFA recognises that the initial delays in starting up the first phase of the RDPP and establishing the management structure have influenced the longevity of timeframes for partnerships. To address the recommendation by the evaluation the modalities for selecting partnerships in phase II has been designed to address this. As recommended by the evaluation partnerships from phase I of relevance for the strategic priorities and thematic areas defined for phase II, will be continued. A selected 8-10 partners will be offered this opportunity, which enable phase II to engage in implementation with relevant partners already from the launch of the programme period. Further, the development of a process plan for the call for proposals for phase II also address the need for longer partnerships, as it provides a plan for the PMU to allocating the majority (80-90 %) of funding within the first 1 ½ year, thereby ensuring contracts for 2-3 years can be offered to partners. Timeframes for partnerships will remain dependent on the overall timeframe for phase II though, which will continue until December 2021.

As experience from phase I shows, external factors, such as the need for governmental approval of projects in the countries of implementation can also heavily influence timeframes for partnerships, which are beyond the direct influence of the RDPP management. Further, experience also show that developing proposals even for extending existing partnerships is highly dependent on internal capacities with the partner organisations. Forcing the process is unlikely to foster positive results and undermine the building of trust and ownership, especially in partnerships with national actors. Hence, engaging with existing partners does not necessarily ensure a shortened proposal development process.

The RDPP management will in the coming months discuss the current process for developing proposals with partners and discuss how to address possible bottlenecks. The process for developing proposals in phase II will be described in the organisational manual for the RDPP management to be revised to the new PMU structure during the inception phase of phase II.

Recommendation 3: *The RDPP Steering Committee should refine overall goals to reflect a more comprehensive perspective on how to jointly address humanitarian, development and social cohesion aims, i.e., in programming that combines these goals rather than addressing them independently, ensuring that timeframes and modalities are conducive to capacity development and localisation.*

As stated above, addressing the ability to provide longer timeframes for partnerships has been a core focus for the design of phase II of the RDPP.

Reflecting on ensuring a more integrated and comprehensive perspective on jointly addressing humanitarian, development and social cohesion has been a central discussion in the design of phase II of the RDPP. The integration is addressed in the redefinition at the level of the objectives as well as in the redesign of the thematic areas.

The commitment to retaining localisation and capacity development of national structures and systems as a core principle has been confirmed by the Steering Committee. Building on the

experience from phase I, the ability of RDPP to be a conducive modality for capacity development and localisation has been enhanced in several ways. Localisation is prioritised as an engagement principle for selection of partnerships in the next phase of the programme, whereby direct partnerships with national actors will be favoured over international actors. The commitment and dedicated support to capacity development will be an integrated part of partnerships with national actors. Further, to enhance the approach to localisation and capacity development of national structures, the RDPP PMU is expanded with a Localisation and Partnership Specialist with a specific focus on strengthening this aspect in the management of partnerships in the coming programme phase.

Recommendation 4: RDPP's greatest strengths are in flexibility, ongoing follow-up, low transaction costs, trust and transparency; qualities that need to be firmly anchored in the discussions between the Steering Committee and RDPP management regarding the next phase. These qualities should be enshrined in the next phase in more explicit programming policies and praxis designed to encourage innovation, for example, by mandating a national research partner to manage a community of practice for learning about how to jointly manage humanitarian and development programming in rapidly changing contexts.

The MFA agrees that these strengths have characterised phase I. This is also recognised throughout the discussions between the Steering Committee and RDPP management in the programme formulation of phase II.

The timely input from the evaluation to the formulation process have helped ensuring that these strengths remain a central aspect of the programming modality for phase II. As co-chair of the RDPP, MFA will ensure that the qualities remains central in the dialogue between the Steering Committee and the RDPP management in phase II, and that it will be unfolded in more explicit programming policies designed to promote innovation.

Based on the recommendation from the evaluation, a mapping of national and regional research institutions has been undertaken as part of the formulation process with a view to explore possibilities for fostering a community of practise and strengthening local advocacy efforts. Partnerships will be further explored, when phase II is initiated.

Recommendation 5: RDPP management should design more explicit approaches to putting research into use by identifying synergies for advocacy and policy dialogue/influence and working to ensure that local research institutions are leading these processes.

Since conducting the evaluation in September 2017, more research products supported by RDPP funding have been completed and released for publication. The RDPP management has closely followed up with the partners and supported them in arranging round table discussions, targeted briefings for donors and practitioners, and policy dialogue events with national government to support policy dialogue and advocacy efforts based on the research.

The recommendation to ensure a stronger synergy between research efforts and policy dialogue and advocacy has also been addressed in the formulation of phase II. Whereas in phase I these were divided into two separate thematic areas, in phase II they have been merged into a joint

thematic focus, whereby the link between research, policy dialogue and advocacy has been more explicitly formulated and reflected in the expected outputs and outcomes for the thematic area.

Recommendation 6: *In the coming years the role of host governments vis-à-vis the aid community will become increasingly central, with implications for programme design. Furthermore, there are already signs that a high-risk, but perhaps inevitable, discussion on returns will be on the agendas of the host governments. RDPP management needs to retain a high degree of flexibility in responding to this, with what may be different strategies in the three countries.*

The MFA agrees with the analysis of the evaluation and acknowledges the need to retain flexibility to respond to a change in implementation context regarding returns and durable solutions more broadly. In the formulation of the objective and thematic areas of phase II the potential to commit to partnerships in support of durable solutions are strengthened by integrating the flexibility to for example engage with partnerships supporting returns, when/if the conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary returns are available. Further, with durable solutions more explicitly addressed in phase II, it will allow for a more focused engagement in all aspect of programming to explore how to support aspects of durable solutions, including by the research, policy dialogue and advocacy thematic area. Phase II will retain the regional focus on the Syria crisis and therefore explicitly be able to provide analysis and evidence to support advocacy towards national governments on relevant topics, including evidence-based analysis on the conditions (or lack thereof) for returns or legislative options for local integration for example.

As the needs and policy context in the three focus countries are very varied and the development in the national context remains fluid, the activities and engagement of the RDPP will continue to adapt to local circumstances.

Recommendation 7: *The RDPP Programme Management Unit has done an extraordinary job in establishing a strong portfolio of projects based on close and trusting relations with partners and government agencies. Without reducing the resources for these essential functions, the Programme Management Unit needs increased staffing capacity to take a 'seat at the table' in coordination and policy dialogues at country-level.*

The MFA agrees with the recommendation, which is firmly reflected in the design of the management structure for phase II. The PMU will be expanded with 25 % with additional positions strengthening the focus on communication and localisation, thereby also freeing up resources for the Programme Manager to prioritise engaging in high-level coordination and foras, where policy dialogue can be influenced. Further, additional staffing support to the partnerships will also allow the Project Managers for Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq to enhance their participation in relevant technical coordination fora and bilateral coordination with partners, line ministries and other donors engaged in sectors relevant to the RDPP focus areas.

The direct relationship to the EU Trust Fund for the Syria Crisis (Madad) in phase II is also expected to provide an avenue to further enhance the ability of the PMU to influence the policy dialogue and advocacy efforts in the region beyond the internal management capacity of the PMU, through the seat the Madad representatives have at high-level donor and government coordination fora. This is also strengthened through the appointment of the Regional

Displacement Advisor to the Danish Embassy in Beirut, which has a specific focus on influencing policy dialogue to further the Danish strategic engagement in the refugee response to the Syria crisis.

As stated above increased engagement with the RDPP donor representatives at the country-level will be sought in a systematic manner in phase II. The MFA will further explore options to strengthen coordination with other Danish engagements in the region, including the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme and the Stabilisation Programme.