



**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK**
Danida

APRIL 2018

EVALUATION OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROTECTION PROGRAMME IN LEBANON, JORDAN AND IRAQ 2014-2017





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Cover: Danish Refugee Council runs the Kas Nazan Job Center
in Erbil, Iraq. The center receives funding from RDPP.
Danish Refugee Council, Erbil, 2017.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------|--|
| ACF | Action Against Hunger |
| AJEM | Association Justice et Miséricorde |
| CFP | Call for Proposal |
| CLDH | Lebanese Centre for Human Rights |
| CLDH | Lebanese Centre for Human Rights |
| CRRF | Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| DG DEVCO | Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development |
| DG ECHO | Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection |
| DG NEAR | Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations |
| DRC | Danish Refugee Council |
| DSP | Durable Solutions Platform |
| ET | Evaluation Team |
| EU | European Union |
| FAFO | Norwegian Institute for Labour and Social Research |
| FCA | Finn Church Aid |
| FMR | Forced Migration Review |
| GB | Grand Bargain |
| GBV | Gender-based violence |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Person |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| INGO | International Non-Profit Organisation |
| IRC | International Relief Committee |
| JCLA | Justice Centre for Legal Aid |
| JRF | Jordan River Foundation |
| KRI | Kurdistan Region of Iraq |
| LWF | Lutheran World Federation |
| MFA | Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| MoPIC | Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NRC | Norwegian Refugee Council |
| NWOW | New Way of Working |
| OCHA | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| PMU | Programme Management Unit |
| RDPP | Regional Development and Protection Programme |
| RI | Relief International |
| SGBV | Sexual Gender-Based Violence |
| SME | Small- and Medium-sized Enterprise |
| ToRs | Terms of Reference |
| UK | United Kingdom |

| | |
|--------|--|
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNHCR | United Nations Commission for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| USJ | Saint Joseph University |
| VTC | Vocational Training Centres |
| WFCL | Worst Forms of Child Labour |
| WFP | World Food Programme |
| WHS | World Humanitarian Summit |

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 programme 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 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 evaluation 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 evaluation 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 evaluation 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 assess-

ments 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 evaluation 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 evaluation 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 lessor 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 evaluation 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 evaluation 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 division 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.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Regional Protection and Development Programme (RDPP) works in Lebanon, Jordan and Northern Iraq. As of end June 2017, RDPP was supporting 33 projects through a wide range of government, civil society, UN and research institution partnerships. The programme includes components focused on research, advocacy, protection and livelihoods and many individual projects combine these areas of work. Lebanon receives the largest share of support, followed by Jordan and Iraq. The total budget for the implementation period from July 2014 to June 2018 is 41.6 million Euros. The European Union (EU) with 12.3 million Euros committed for four years and Denmark with 23.4 million Euros are the largest donors. RDPP was originally a 3-year programme running from 2014 to 2017, but in 2016 it was extended till July 2018.

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

The Terms of Reference (ToR) of this evaluation state that: “the purpose of the evaluation is to provide an evidence-base for the upcoming preparation for the next phase of RDPP, by focusing specifically on the following aspects:

1. Documenting outcomes at programmatic level and assessing possible synergies between programme components.
2. Demonstrating the value added of RDPP vis-à-vis other initiatives in the region and the innovative elements of the programme such as working towards durable solutions and addressing the humanitarian-development nexus.
3. Documenting lessons learnt for future programming.

The evaluation will balance a results-focus with a focus on the effectiveness of the programme modalities and management arrangements. The learning aspect of the evaluation will be emphasised, as the programme constitutes an innovative approach to addressing protracted humanitarian situations.”

The evaluation is framed by the need to use the RDPP experience to reflect over the extent to which aid actors, national/local governments and civil society are finding innovative and effective ways to work across the humanitarian-development nexus.

This evaluation has been conducted towards the end of the current phase of the programme and builds on both a mid-term review¹, which was undertaken before programmatic results had become apparent, and Results-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) mission just before this evaluation². Further results may of course be achieved before the end of the current phase, which will end in June 2018

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. It has also analysed the extent to which the 'RDPP model' has informed donor approaches for addressing protracted crises, and the extent to which it has facilitated stronger policy dialogue and influence.

The objectives of the evaluation also reflect the fact that most projects within RDPP are ongoing (and some have only recently begun to be implemented), and that therefore it is premature to assess many of their outcomes and impacts on those refugees and host populations receiving support. 'Results' in the programme are interpreted as being related to both mobilising joint efforts across the nexus so as to be more coherent, and also focusing on both humanitarian and development risks and needs of the affected populations.

The evaluation therefore focuses on the programmatic outcomes and effectiveness of the modalities of RDPP, rather than outputs of the individual projects being supported. Emphasis is given to the extent to which the unique structure of RDPP, proactive efforts to apply research in praxis, selection of interlocutors, priority activities and scale have enabled the programme to find innovative ways to overcome obstacles in the Syrian crisis to mobilising joint efforts to move towards more durable solutions.³

The evaluation has been commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Evaluation Department (EVAL) and the intended users of the evaluation also include the donors to RDPP, EU agencies and decision-makers in the donor community more generally. Furthermore,

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- 1 Voluntas Advisory. (2016). Mid-Term Review of Regional Development and Protection Programme. *The Regional Development and Protection Programme*.
 - 2 ROM. (2017). Results-Oriented Monitoring report on RDPP for refugees and host communities in the Middle East (Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq). *The Regional Development and Protection Programme*.
 - 3 The term "Durable Solutions" refers to voluntary repatriation/return, local integration or resettlement in a third country. Source: UNHCR. (2003). Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern. *The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*.

the evaluation is intended to support broader learning about how to address the nexus among the different actors, most notably host governments, that are involved in exploring how to work together in other protracted crises.

1.2 Evaluation focus

In interpreting the ToRs for the evaluation, the ET understands that the primary focus of the evaluation is on programmatic outcomes in relation to the following criteria:

- **Relevance** has been assessed in relation to the context and particularly the opportunities for pursuing solutions to a protracted crisis in an extremely challenging environment. As such, relevance is analysed from a political economy perspective, acknowledging the interests and incentives of different national/local and state/civil society stakeholders.
- **Effectiveness and impact** have been assessed with regard to the extent to which the RDPP design, structure and management have provided a basis for the following explicit and implicit goals:
 - Transcending humanitarian-development divides
 - Contributing to addressing both transitory and chronic livelihood and protection risks (and recognising how a protracted crisis may blur these distinctions)
 - Establishing collaboration, not only between humanitarian and development aid actors but with national/local government, civil society and the private sector in the three countries
 - Identifying and acting on windows of opportunity to respond innovatively to changing needs and contribute to durable solutions
 - Finding overall synergies among research, advocacy and service provision functions and between support to refugees and host communities
- **Efficiency** has been assessed with particular regard to the “added value of jointness” in terms of (to roughly generalise) the extent to which the modalities established in RDPP provide transparent, expeditious and accessible ways for partners committed to innovative programming to mobilise, collaborate and apply research/evidence in their work. The “added value of jointness”

is also assessed in relation to the extent to which the multi-donor approach has reduced transaction costs and increased multi-stakeholder collaboration (a) within the aid community, (b) between the international community and government, (c) with national and grassroots civil society, and (d) across the region.

- **Sustainability** has been assessed in relation to the extent to which RDPP has enabled localisation in relation to civil society, national research institutions, national governments and local governments⁴. Localisation is a concept that has recently entered into the humanitarian lexicon, but has long been recognised as central to development cooperation, primarily as related to local capacity development, ownership and other goals. The evaluation did not assess localisation in relation to recently established humanitarian indicators, but rather focused on broader elements of results and commitments to empowerment and ownership by partners. RDPP is not primarily a capacity development programme, but it is being implemented in a context where the protracted nature of the crisis has led to increasing reliance on local actors. The evaluation has looked at the ways that RDPP has enabled and/or adapted to these changes.

1.3 Structure of the evaluation report

This evaluation begins with an introductory review of purpose, focus and context for the evaluation. A strong emphasis has been given to contextual analysis in order to frame the subsequent findings and analyses.

This is in accordance with the methods described in chapter two, which are based on contribution analysis and a realist perspective. The intention has been to ensure that readers recognise the spheres of control, influence and interest of RDPP in a wider perspective.

The evaluation findings in Chapter 3 are divided into the main sets of issues raised in the terms of reference for the evaluation.

The first section looks at programmatic results in the components of research and advocacy⁵, livelihoods, protection and the example of the

4 The evaluation has not attempted to assess the sustainability of project outputs and outcomes, as it has been deemed too early to empirically assess their plausible sustainability. Also, the nature of the protracted crisis indicates that it is more important to understand how programming contributes to institutional capacities for 'adaptive management' in the face of a volatile situation, rather than assessing the sustainability of outcomes from specific service interventions.

5 These are addressed together and they have been closely linked in programme implementation.

Durable Solutions Platform as an individual project within RDPP that the evaluation has assessed to be illustrative and of particular strategic importance to the overall objectives of RDPP. This is followed by an analysis of synergies across the components and also of the implication of timeframes for programmatic results, as this emerged as a central factor affecting achievements.

The second section of the findings unpacks some of the core underlying added values of RDPP that emerged in the evaluation. These include different aspects of innovation, localisation and commitments to capacity development.

The third section looks beyond the programmatic aspects to focus on the extent to which RDPP has worked as a mechanism for bring together joint efforts, and has been able to generate more effective donor efforts across the nexus. This includes the shift, promoted by RDPP, towards more evidence-based and concerted efforts to influence policies, both in Europe, and in the affected region and among host governments.

The report then synthesises the overall analyses with conclusions, lessons learnt and recommendations for both the next phase of RDPP and other related learning.

1.4 Policy context

The evaluation is framed by the need to reflect on the extent to which aid actors, national/local governments and civil society are finding innovative and effective ways to work across the humanitarian-development nexus in order to provide more robust and effective humanitarian assistance in protracted crises. These innovations may reflect the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and in the Grand Bargain (GB), more recent discussions regarding the New Way of Working (NWOW) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) resulting from the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants⁶. Innovation may include commitments to applying a 'protection lens'⁷, ensuring that programming 'leaves no one behind'⁸,

6 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, 3 October 2016: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1 (last accessed 20 November 2017).

7 Recently emerging protection guidelines have increasingly called for efforts to apply concerns (i.e., a 'lens') regarding protection risks in a wide range of programming.

8 An objective that is central to ensuring that inclusion is central to efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

and working towards localisation⁹. These commitments are global, but the opportunities and obstacles for achieving them differ enormously according to the country, and indeed often in the sub-national context.

The overall purpose of the evaluation is understood to be to support learning about effective response in the Syria crisis regarding how to adapt and move forward in achieving such goals in three diverse country settings and in dynamically changing contexts. This learning is to primarily be applied in a future RDPP phase and potentially also for nexus programming elsewhere. It is also recognised that RDPP began before many of these commitments were in place, even if related aims have been implicit in the programme since the outset. The nexus commitment from the programme is summarised in this statement from the programme document:

To be able to support refugees in a crisis that already entered its fourth year and which seems it will be active unfortunately for many years to come, a different approach than just the humanitarian needs to be taken. While humanitarian assistance continues to be needed both for new arrivals and extremely vulnerable groups, it cannot be sustained for all refugees. For this reason, the RDPP will try to link the short-term assistance currently predominating with a long-term and development perspective that focuses on strengthened protection and livelihoods among refugees and host communities, and which will contribute to unlock this protracted displacement situation through improving their daily life and promoting durable solutions in the longer-term¹⁰.

Denmark's 2030 Strategy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action¹¹ makes no specific reference to 'the nexus' per se but mentions coherence between humanitarian and development aid. The strategy explicitly endorses WHS commitments stating that conflict demands more comprehensive approaches. "A new international approach to crises is required, in order to strengthen the coherence between political conflict resolution, humanitarian actions and development cooperation¹²." It also mentions that "Denmark in compliance with the recommendations of the World Humanitarian Summit, will

9 Localisation is a term that commonly refers to GB and WHS commitments to move away from past dominance of international agencies in humanitarian response towards greater involvement and ownership among local civil society. In the RDPP context this is interpreted to include ownership and engagement by national and local governments in the region and may not involve efforts to directly meet GB and WHS commitments.

10 RDPP. (2013). Revised Programme Document following Inception Phase. *The Regional Development and Protection Programme*. P.11.

11 Danida. (2017). The World 2030: Denmark's strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action. Danida.

12 Danida. (2017). The World 2030: Denmark's strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action. Danida. p.3.

work to ensure that the interventions of the international community in protracted humanitarian crises strengthen the coherence between humanitarian assistance, development activities and efforts towards peace and security, while adhering to the humanitarian principles”¹³.

Furthermore, the Statement¹⁴ on behalf of the European Union and its Member States as part of the First Thematic Session, 10 July 2017 on the Global Compact on Refugees summarises commitments that closely mirror RDPP’s stance on the nexus (Box 1):

EU STATEMENT ON GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES COMMITMENTS:

First lesson: forced displacement, including large refugee situations, is a complex challenge going beyond humanitarian action. Political, human rights, security, developmental and economic dimensions must all be considered in our response in terms of solution and prevention. All actors, including local authorities, civil society, the private sector and diasporas, should be involved from the early stages and throughout a crisis.

Second lesson: Refugees should be given a chance to improve their lives and move from aid dependence to self-reliance; we should recognise their potential to actively contribute to the economy and society of host countries and communities; socio-economic inclusion through access to labour markets, education and services is of crucial importance. Refugee self-reliance will also increase the likelihood that solutions are sustainable, be it voluntary return, resettlement or local integration.

Third lesson: forced displacement has a severe impact not only on displaced individuals and their families, but also on host countries and communities; host countries and communities should receive adequate and sustained support.

Fourth lesson: We acknowledge that solid evidence, reliable data and comprehensive analysis of refugee situations, including impacts on host communities, are crucial to formulate evidence-based and results-oriented policies.

Last but not least, a fifth lesson: the importance of an enabling environment. Building and maintaining adequate protection space, that reduces vulnerabilities and empowers refugees and other displaced populations, is crucial to implement all the actions just outlined.

Box 1 - EU Statement on Global Compact on Refugees Commitments

13 Danida. (2017). The World 2030: Denmark’s strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action. Danida. p. 20.

14 EU. (2017). Global Compact on Refugees - First thematic session - EU Statement. *European Union*. p.3.

1.5 Nexus challenges that RDPP seeks to address

The scope of challenges posed by the Syrian refugee crisis is profound, protracted and varied. In the neighbouring countries, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) 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 addresses both immediate humanitarian needs and seeks to mobilise a variety of actors to contribute to addressing the protracted crisis facing both refugee and vulnerable host populations. As such, it is a highly ambitious and complex programme which seeks to address a variety of development and humanitarian needs in joint programming.

RDPP's goals reflect a highly formative effort to explore modalities to take an evidence-based approach to addressing a protracted crisis within institutional structures that are only starting to evolve towards what has sometimes more recently been referred to as a 'new way of working', bringing together humanitarian and development efforts. Interviews conducted during the evaluation show that the RDPP concept emerged out of a dissatisfaction in the EU, Denmark and among other bilateral agencies with the extent to which the prevailing aid architecture was (a) able to respond to protracted crisis where the distinction between acute and chronic needs and vulnerability was blurred, (b) manage knowledge (especially use research and evidence) to learn from data and experience, and (c) adapt modalities to contribute to localisation and the capacitation of national partners. Since the start of RDPP in 2014, international policies have increasingly begun to be adapted to reflect these changing priorities. It is still rather unclear how the policies will ultimately reflect in-country institutional and political relationships and the practicalities of designing and implementing programming in highly challenging contexts. RDPP has been an important opportunity to test new approaches and learn about how new policies and concepts can and should be put into practice.

The evaluation has approached the concept of the humanitarian-development nexus as encompassing two different levels. First, the nexus involves 'new ways of working' together among different humanitarian and development stakeholders, including researchers, both internationally and within host countries. Second, the nexus involves recognising that acute needs and vulnerabilities (e.g., of displaced populations) should not be addressed without concurrent attention to chronic needs and vulnerabilities (e.g., of poor host country populations). This does not question the need for a certain separation between humanitarian and development efforts, but recognises that synergies are possible and that durable solutions to protracted crises may even require efforts to address acute and chronic risks in a synchronised and integrated

manner – particularly when programming focuses on both refugees and chronically vulnerable host populations.

This evaluation, undertaken three years into the four-year programme, coincides with a growing demand for better understanding of whether or not we are ‘doing the right thing’ in order to achieve the rapidly evolving goals of finding a ‘new way of working’. ‘Doing the right thing’ relates to the two levels of the nexus described above, and is contextualised by the protracted nature of displacement crises. New international policies and goals are being promulgated for focusing on the nexus, but there is strikingly little empirical evidence about the outcomes of these approaches and whether we have found more appropriate modalities to work across the nexus. Indeed, the very concept of the nexus remains largely undefined and amorphous. RDPP is an important test, and indeed a laboratory to learn about the nexus due to its presence in three diverse country settings and its unique mix of research, advocacy, protection and livelihoods components. It is an opportunity to judge whether a broad concerted approach across the nexus and through different types of interventions can lead to programming that is more than the ‘sum of its parts’.

1.6 Programme overview

RDPP programming includes both humanitarian and development support and objectives have been to support Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq to better understand, plan, and mitigate the impact of forced displacement of Syrian refugees on the host communities.

RDPP is governed by a Steering Committee consisting of the donors to the programme. It is managed by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs through a Programme Management Unit (PMU) with three staff in Beirut and two in Amman. 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. RDPP is a multi-donor programme with Denmark and the EU as the largest donors and six additional contributing donors; the Czech Republic, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The RDPP for the Middle East has been followed by somewhat different RDPPs¹⁵ in the Horn of Africa (managed by the Netherlands) and in North Africa (managed by Italy) which were both initiated in 2015. The EU's Regional Trust Fund 'Madad', established in 2014 has a broader geographic scope than RDPP as it includes Turkey, Egypt and the Western Balkans, in addition to Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. The Fund had reached a total volume of 1.4 billion Euros as of January 2018, with contributions from 22 EU Member States as well as Turkey. Madad funds education, protection and livelihood/resilience programmes. The aim has been to ensure close collaboration and coordination between these two European instruments, RDPP and Madad, to avoid overlap and to be able to create mutual synergies and benefits. This evaluation particularly draws on the added value of RDPP, while noting differences with Madad, as described later.

The total RDPP funding for the period of 2014-2018 has been app. 41.6 million Euros as can be seen in Table 1 below. The largest donors are the EU and Denmark, followed by Ireland.

TABLE 1 - COMMITTED FUNDING FOR RDPP

| Funding committed for four years by Donors to the RDPP | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Donor | Committed for four years | Received | % of total budget |
| EU | 12,300,000 € | 8,029,633 € | 29,6% |
| DK | 23,405,000 € | 23,405,000 € | 56,2% |
| IRL | 2,500,000 € | 2,500,000 € | 6,0% |
| CH | 1,411,000 € | 1,411,000 € | 3,4% |
| NL | 500,000 € | 350,000 € | 1,2% |
| UK | 500,000 € | 499,618 € | 1,2% |
| NO | 452,000 € | 344,436 € | 1,1% |
| CZ | 550,000 € | 550,000 € | 1,3% |
| TOTAL | 41,618,000 € | 37,089,687 € | 100% |

15 The RDPPs build on previous Regional Protection Programmes, which aimed to support the capacity of third countries to provide effective protection, assistance and durable solutions. The RDPPs aim to adopt a more comprehensive approach that also includes stronger emphasis on the development dimension.

1 INTRODUCTION

Diagram 1 shows the percentage budget allocation across the thematic components research, advocacy, protection and livelihoods.. As of June 2017, RDPP had committed 82% of its total budget. As can be seen in the diagram, the thematic area receiving the largest financial allocation by far is 'livelihoods', which reflects higher expenditure inherent in this sector rather than a prioritisation.

As of June 2017, eight projects (24%) were completed and 25 projects (76%) were still ongoing out of a portfolio of currently 33 projects. On average, the project durations range from three months to 36 months, with the average of 15.3 months in duration. The protection projects have the longest average duration of 17.5 months. Types of projects vary considerably, with implications for the different timeframes. Some effectively fill gaps or expand ongoing service provision and therefore are managed relatively easily within limited timeframes. Others involve embarking on entirely new initiatives, primarily in livelihoods and research, where the limited timeframes have proven highly challenging (as will be analysed below).

RDPP works with a range of partners. Diagram 2¹⁶ shows that international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) implement the largest share of projects (43%), followed by national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (21%) and Multilateral Organisations (27%), indicating a rather diverse portfolio of partners. In addition, several international partners work together with national partners in different constellations.

The RDPP team currently consists of a Programme Coordinator based in Copenhagen, three staff based in Beirut; the Programme Manager, Project Manager for Lebanon and an Operations Manager (with regional responsibilities) and a Liaison and Project Manager based in Amman who also covers partnerships in Jordan and Northern Iraq. A regional M&E and Communication position is also based in Amman, but the position was vacant during the period of the evaluation. Regional projects are managed from Beirut.

As Table 2 below shows, the majority of projects that have been funded under RDPP are in Lebanon (45.5%) followed by Jordan (27.3%) and finally in Iraq (9.1%). In addition, 18.2% of the activities funded have been implemented regionally. All projects are categorised according to a single theme, but most effectively combine two or more, for example the ILO efforts regarding child labour that encompasses all four.

DIAGRAM 1 - PERCENTAGE OF BUDGET ALLOCATION PER THEME

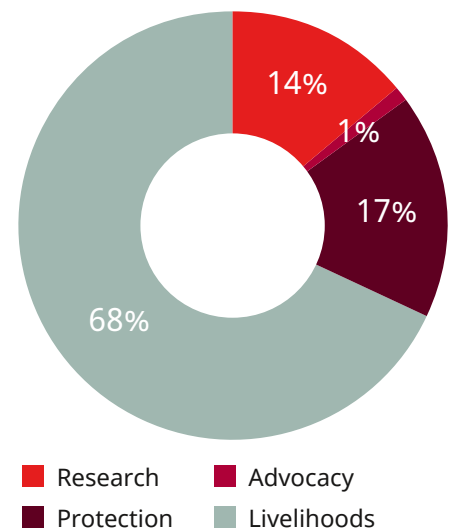
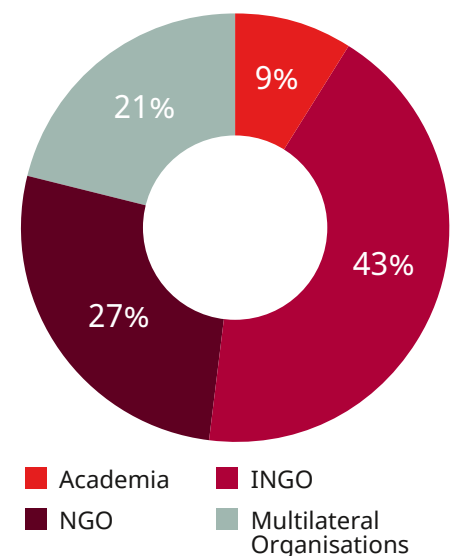


DIAGRAM 2 - PERCENTAGE BY TYPE OF PARTNER



16 Diagram is based on the portfolio review which can be found in Annex 2.

TABLE 2 - TOTAL NUMBER OF PROJECTS FUNDED IN EACH THEMATIC AREA (AS OF 30 JUNE 2017).

| Theme | Regional | Lebanon | Jordan | Iraq | Total Partners | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|----------|---------|--------|------|----------------|----------------|
| Research | 5 | | 1 | | 6 | 18.2% |
| Protection | 1 | 8 | 1 | | 10 | 30.3% |
| Advocacy | | 1 | | | 1 | 3.0% |
| Livelihoods | | 6 | 8 | 3 | 16 | 48.5% |
| Total | 6 | 15 | 10 | 3 | 33 | 100% |
| Percentage (%) | 18.2% | 45.5% | 27.3% | 9.1% | | |

1.7 Lebanon context

Lebanon hosts the largest proportion of refugees (app. 997,905 registered refugees with UNHCR¹⁷) relative to the national population of any country in the world, and the stance of the government and prevailing public opinion reflect this staggering challenge. Lebanon has a long history of labour migration¹⁸, largely seasonal, from Syria and most of the rural informal tented settlements of the refugees are effectively expansions of the camps that these labourers inhabited in the past. The majority of refugees live in urban areas.

The context for the Syrian refugee response in Lebanon is one of largely severe governmentally imposed constraints on the opportunities facing Syrian refugees to pursue livelihoods and a weak protection environment. In the past, the Government had limited engagement in the response to the refugee crisis, leaving much in the hands of the international community and national civil society. This reflects a background of a long history of the Lebanese state failing to act as a duty bearer and delegating a large measure of social protection to civil society¹⁹. Since the inauguration of President Michel Aoun in 2016, after an extended period of political deadlock, the Government has moved to exert somewhat greater efforts to engage and coordinate the refugee response, including the creation of a State Ministry for Refugee Affairs.

17 This number is generally recognised as an underestimate, as the UNHCR has stopped registration of refugees in May 2015

18 300,000 Syrians were living in Lebanon as economic migrants before the conflict. Source: WBG. (2017). *Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts*. The World Bank Group. p.101.

19 Saavedra, L. (2016). *We know our wounds: National and local organisations involved in humanitarian response in Lebanon*. *ALNAP Country Study*. p.19.

Some clarifications and modest improvements have been made in refugee residency issues, but continuing uncertainty about the roles of different institutions, jostling for power among sectarian groups and repeated instances of populist anti-refugee political outpourings have meant that the space for response remains ambiguous, volatile and constrained. Many municipal authorities are demanding sudden evictions of refugees, especially those in informal tented settlements, which generates acute humanitarian needs and undermines progress in livelihoods. Integration of refugees into society is highly constrained, but there remains space, often at municipal level, to pursue temporary improvements even if these do not constitute significant steps towards integration as conceptualised within ‘durable solutions’. Where there are opportunities and commitments to enhance the welfare of both refugees and host populations, pragmatic processes can often, albeit not consistently, be pursued.

1.8 Jordan context

Compared to Lebanon, the situation in Jordan is far more clear and structured. UNHCR figures²⁰ indicate that 654,582 Syrian refugees are registered in Jordan, of which 21% are living in camps and 79% living in urban, peri-urban and rural areas²¹.

The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) is exerting increasingly strong leadership of the international response and sees plans for addressing the refugee issue as part of a broader vision for national development – rather than a strictly humanitarian concern. Whereas some populist statements are evident in Jordan as well, the space for refugees to pursue livelihoods is greater and more stable in Jordan than in Lebanon, particularly where integration of some refugees and increased international commitments generated by the displacement crisis are seen to contribute to broader national development. The Jordanian Government has pursued a transparently transactional approach in engaging with the international community, highlighting the global public good it provides for the international community by caring for a massive number of refugees while explicitly demanding a quid pro quo in the form of international support to its development agenda. The greater degree of control exerted by the Jordanian Government has meant that targets for proportions of assistance provided to refugee and host populations are more strictly enforced. Nonetheless, some of these targets are confusing for those

20 As per 27 September 2017.

21 UNHCR. (2017). 3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2017-2018, in Response to the Syria Crisis. 2017 Progress Report. *The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. p. 35.

trying to achieve these goals, e.g., where a certain proportion of jobs creation efforts is expected to be targeted to Jordanians, although the demand among Jordanians for these job skills is limited. Furthermore, the targets for proportional response for host populations and Syrian refugees have often failed to recognise the needs of large populations of Iraqi and Palestinian refugees and migrants. Some donor requirements, focused on Syrians and host populations, aggravate this problem.

1.9 Northern Iraq context

The most recent UNHCR figures indicate that 244,605 Syrian refugees are registered in Northern Iraq. Most of these refugees have been displaced for over four years and approximately 39% of them live in camps²². At the time this report is being drafted, the policies, roles and responsibilities of the regional government in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) are in flux. During the course of RDPP implementation the overall picture is one of the Syrian refugee response being somewhat of a 'sideshow' in relation to the greater concerns about internally displaced persons (IDPs). This was intensified further with the fall of Daesh control over Mosul, which led to many agencies shifting their focus to IDP support. The largely Kurdish origin of the Syrian refugee population in the Northern Iraq has meant that integration has been far less problematic 'in principle' than in Lebanon and Jordan. However, in practice the very strained economic situation in Northern Iraq has meant that economic opportunities are few. With the recent loss of the majority of oil revenue, this situation is likely to deteriorate dramatically. Furthermore, there are long-standing uncertainties about the respective roles of Erbil and Baghdad, and potential for coordinated efforts in the refugee response. This ambiguity has been intensified with recent political developments wherein the extent of Kurdish autonomy in dealing with the international community has been questioned by central government. RDPP's main interlocutors in Iraq have been in Erbil, and additional transaction costs could be considerable if efforts need to be balanced with greater attention to Baghdad amid this ambiguity.

22 UNHCR. (2017). 3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2017-2018, in Response to the Syria Crisis. 2017 Progress Report. *The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. p. 41.

2 METHODS

2.1 Approach

The evaluation has attempted to maintain a focus on the current and potential programmatic outcomes of a diverse portfolio of projects and stakeholders. This has had to be adapted to the stage in the implementation of the projects at the time of the evaluation (three years into a four year programme), many of which, particularly in Jordan and Northern Iraq, are in early stages of implementation wherein some outcomes have not yet emerged. Considerable attention has been given to actual and plausible future contributions of the individual projects towards the goals of the overall programme. Contextual factors have been emphasised in order to understand how RDPP has responded to what has been a deterioration in some respects in conditions for it to achieve its aims. The methods used have sought to assess the factors in the programme design, stakeholder commitments and the overall political economy of the refugee response that have supported 'adaptive management' when conditions have changed, and innovation in supporting dignity, livelihoods and protection, even where the humanitarian and development space is shrinking.

The evaluation has applied a theory based and 'realist' methodology²³, with recognition at the outset that this is a complex programme in three very different country contexts, working in both urban and rural settings, and with refugee and host populations across the nexus. The theory has consisted of a flexible understanding of how the range of project activities and dialogue are expected to contribute to outcomes in terms of policy influence and emergence of more innovative solutions to protracted livelihoods and protection challenges. In the inception phase, the evaluation used documentation review and initial interviews to unpack the evaluation questions and propose some initial assumptions and hypotheses that have been tested during field visits to Lebanon and Jordan, including some project sites, and in additional interviews in Brussels and by Skype in Northern Iraq and among Steering Committee

23 See Pawson, R. And Tilley, N. (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*, Sage. "Pawson and Tilley (1997) developed the first realist evaluation approach, although other interpretations have been developed since. Pawson and Tilley argued that in order to be useful for decision makers, evaluations need to identify 'what works in which circumstances and for whom?', rather than merely 'does it work?'" Cited from http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/approach/realist_evaluation.

members. A debriefing in Beirut and a preliminary findings report provided opportunities to present and receive feedback on emerging findings about what might be 'realistic' assumptions about causal factors underlying results thus far and plausible future outcomes.

Recognition has been given to RDPP's broader spheres of interest (e.g., the conflict context, political and economic processes, etc.) in the three countries that affect processes and ultimate outcomes but which are beyond the influence of the programme. This is at the core of the 'realist methodology' wherein all interviews have used force-choice questions for exploring, not just achievements, but also where different stakeholders perceive that RDPP has (or has not) impacted on their space for pursuing and achieving their goals. The ways that these methods have been applied have varied. For example, interviews have focused on understanding how RDPP's inevitably modest activities in capacity development have contributed to broader trends in localisation, wherein UN demands for 'hand overs' from INGOs to nationalINGOs and shifts in governmental leadership determine the main trends. In another example, the work around durable solutions has been analysed in relation to the geopolitical factors that are driving the overall discourse (and actions) on refugee return. Interviewees have been asked about the plausibility of the 'theory' that greater transparency and access to evidence will lead to more appropriate praxis. A limitation has been that much of this reflection on plausibility involves speculation about future trajectories in an unpredictable environment.

A 'realist' approach has been essential given the challenges in tracing the contributions of the programme. This includes the overall recognition that this mid-sized programme, covering a diverse range of activities in three countries, is unlikely to result in significant outcomes unless strategically situated within the convergence of a variety of efforts and trends. The reasoning and decisions of RDPP actors have been in focus, stressing how they have led to the emergence of an RDPP structure and management approach (over time). The evaluation has assessed the extent to which RDPP has been flexible in supporting partners as they adapt efforts when addressing a range of humanitarian and development needs simultaneously.

An initial sample of 10 projects was identified for the focus of the evaluation. These projects represented all sectors, countries and sub-thematic areas, as well as including projects that were particularly relevant to look closer at (such as the Durable Solutions Platform). Additional projects were later added (beyond the sample of 10 projects) during the field missions as the evaluation took advantage of opportunities to engage with more projects. In practice, interviews and analyses of a sample of projects were used to understand if and how RDPP has enabled actors to work more effectively and in a more evidence-based manner. This includes the durable solutions example mentioned above,

and also the contribution of research projects to humanitarian and development praxis more generally. Individual stakeholder and focus group interviews drew out their perceptions of the opportunities RDPP provided for them to achieve their aims, and also the obstacles that they have encountered. In a sample of projects, paths were traced in more detail for how they have used RDPP support to achieve objectives and how they have adapted to changing needs, opportunities and obstacles. This was done in interviews with a sample number of projects wherein partners were asked about what has enabled or hindered both project implementation and the eventual contribution to broader programmatic and (where relevant) policy outcomes. Most interviewees stressed that it was too early to assess the outcomes. The delays in finalising, releasing and publicising research has meant that policy influence has been very difficult to trace, with the exception of where RDPP has filled gaps in already ongoing programming, most notably the gender-related advocacy efforts of the Lebanese civil society organisation, ABAAD. Document review was used to establish an understanding of expectations in programme plans and then to triangulate with the data emerging from the interviews and reporting.

2.2 Evaluation process

The evaluation began with (a) review of RDPP reporting, related policy documents, selected RDPP research reports, (b) initial interviews in Copenhagen and Brussels with MFA, EU and CSO staff, and (c) portfolio desk review.

A *portfolio desk review* provided both an overview of the projects and components according to the following criteria: country, size and emphasis, including the different 'mixes' of research, advocacy and service provision. One aspect of the review was to bring out an understanding of how the actual content of the four components appears to demonstrate a flexible application of these four areas of intervention in creative ways. Advocacy, for example, was not just analysed as a component, but also as a mainstreamed activity across much of the portfolio. There were also significant synergies between protection and livelihoods that could be overlooked if attention was only given to the category in which a given project was placed. For each of the three countries, and for the regional initiatives, project summary fiches were used to structure the findings of the evaluation. These fiches are very brief summaries produced by the PMU as part of their reporting that provide an overview of the individual projects.

In addition to the analysis undertaken in the portfolio review, the evaluation analysed a range of EU, Danish and other policies, including the recently emerging discussions on new ways of working, refugee compacts, and localisation (including WHS and GB documentation).

National response and recovery plans in the three countries were reviewed. Research related to protection and livelihood issues in the three countries was collected and analysed. The objective of the document review was to obtain an initial overview of the political economy factors in the three countries that impinge on the refugee response, and parameters of relevant policies, with particular attention to livelihoods and protection issues.

The *document review, initial interviews and the portfolio review* were analysed to establish an understanding of the expectations underpinning the overall programme and how these have evolved over time. In the course of the evaluation, this was used as a point of departure for interviews gathering qualitative data which was coded in relation to factors²⁴ that contribute to developing a more nuanced understanding of the implicit programme theory of change, and the assumptions that different stakeholders have had about RDPP goals.

Field missions were undertaken to Lebanon and Jordan, and due to obstacles to entering Iraq Skype interviews were undertaken for Northern Iraq, to interview stakeholders and informed observers (see Annex 4). In addition, a sample of 10 projects was selected for more in-depth analysis (see Annex 5). The team decided during the field mission to include interviews with partners involved in a few additional projects in order to maximise the use of time. Some were visited individually and other RDPP project partners joined a focus group discussion held in Jordan. Additional data on the sample projects was gathered through documentation and interviews. One field visit was made where three focus group discussions were held with project beneficiaries, both refugees and host populations. In total 82 persons have been interviewed over the course of the evaluation period.

The sample of projects was selected in order to have a reasonable spread across the different components and countries. Initial sampling criteria were:

- Major projects that are pivotal to and/or are highly prominent in the overall programme;
- Priority to projects where there are indications that partners are committed to innovative and/or evidence-based programming;
- At least three projects in Lebanon and two in Jordan, two in Iraq and three regional;

24 Emergent categories: Added value, Advocacy and Policy Dialogue, Capacity Development and Localistaion, Consortia issues and Madad, Durable Solutions, Humanitarian-Development Nexus, LIvelihoods, Outcomes, Partnership Management, Regionality, Research, Visibility and Working with National Strutures.

2 METHODS

- Coverage of all four components;
- Balance of rural and urban focus;
- Balance of local civil society, INGO, UN and research institution partners, both with and without direct engagement from government institutions; and
- Projects that include elements from the other three components and projects with a narrower scope.

However, the difficulties of contacting many stakeholders meant that use somewhat of a convenience sample was unavoidable and that the evaluation ended up meeting and including experiences from additional projects beyond the initial sample size. For example, for the Northern Iraq Skype interviews all possible interlocutors were contacted so as to obtain a sample of sufficient size to understand the dynamics in Northern Iraq. Donor interviews in Beirut, Amman, Brussels and by Skype were with contributors to RDPP and related institutions such as Madad. A limited number of interviews were undertaken with informed outside observers, including NGO fora in Lebanon, Jordan and Brussels. The resulting sample may include considerable biases due to the hopes of some partners in obtaining future support from a possible additional RDPP phase. However, the evaluation was struck by the open and largely self-critical tone in most interviews. Another limitation has been the variable extent to which many interviewees were able to reflect on RDPP based on their sometimes narrow engagements and admitted ignorance of how RDPP operates. This limitation most notably includes some donors at national levels.

Projects have been analysed to understand their contributions to the overall aims of RDPP and for lessons regarding the issues raised in the evaluation questions. No attempt was made to undertake 'mini-evaluations' of the individual projects as agreed with the MFA. Most interviews were undertaken one-on-one using a combination of forced choice and open-ended questions. Among project partner staff, some questions reflected a 'most significant change' approach focused on innovation in programming, advocacy and 'jointness'.

A debriefing in Beirut²⁵ at the end of the fieldwork and a brief *preliminary findings report* were used to generate feedback on emerging hypotheses. Further verification interviews were undertaken with RDPP donors and key observers in Denmark to verify emerging findings.

25 RDPP staff were physically present and MFA representatives on video call.

3 FINDINGS

The following sections, 3.1-3.3, present the findings of the evaluation structured by the three sets of issues outlined in the evaluation questions namely 1) documenting outcomes on programmatic level including assessing synergies; 2) demonstrating the added value of RDPP; and 3) documenting lessons learnt for the future. Throughout the findings chapter, examples from the sample projects are presented which substantiate findings as well as highlight interesting factors. Annex 5 presents an overview of the 10 selected projects, including the thematic area, the duration of project, geographical coverage, the project aim and some relevant findings from the evaluation regarding implementation.

3.1 EQ 1: Programme level results

This first set of findings looks at programmatic results in the components of research and advocacy, livelihoods and protection. In addition, the evaluation has presented findings from the Durable Solutions Platform Project specifically as it is illustrative and of particular strategic importance to the overall objectives of RDPP in analysing the conditions for refugee return, integration and resettlement. This is followed by an analysis of synergies across the components and also of the implication of timeframes for programmatic results, as this emerged as a central factor affecting achievements.

EQ 1: WHAT PROGRAMME-LEVEL RESULTS HAVE BEEN GENERATED IN RDPP?

The evaluation finds that the programme has produced impressive outputs, with achievements primarily deriving from its careful selection of partners, close follow-up, ownership and foresight.

Selection of projects to support has been careful and iterative, based on both the calls for proposals and extensive dialogue with potential partners. Particularly in the start-up phases of projects, a range of informants described in detail how 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, where several contrasted RDPP with more mechanistic and often non-transparent procedures in other funding mechanisms.

Over the course of the programme, five calls for proposals have been made: one on child labour, three on livelihoods and a fifth one which covered the four themes. The scope and nature of the calls has varied

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and appears to have reflected emerging priorities and concerns as recognised by the RDPP PMU. In the calls for proposals between 2014 and 2016 five selection criteria²⁶ were used. In the calls for proposals in 2016 and 2017, RDPP presented seven criteria including the two new ones ‘innovative’ and ‘integrated approaches’ (in the 2017 call for proposal) indicating an increased attention to these particular issues.

Some interviewees added, however, that selection process sometimes became too intensive, and drawn out over time, with long discussions before actual implementation. Although it was recognised that this enhanced both the quality of the project designs and the mutual understanding of objectives, trade-offs were mentioned, wherein this dialogue inevitably reduced what they perceived as an already very tight timeframe for project implementation.

Follow-up has also been close, and highly constructive. RDPP staff have a deep understanding of the processes within the individual projects that has generated trust. Most RDPP partners interviewed in Lebanon and Jordan were effusive in describing how their extensive dialogue with PMU staff was not like that of most donors but had actually helped them to reflect upon and import their plans²⁷. This, in turn, has allowed flexibility and the pursuit of innovation and recognition of the nexus as a ‘moving target’ where needs and opportunities – as well as obstacles – to support more developmental outcomes are constantly shifting.

“What was interesting compared to other call for proposals is that we could enter a negotiation process. Rather than be approved or rejected we could actually improve the proposal. It wasn’t annoying as it was for our benefit. RDPP worked closely with us.” (Jordan partner)

Several partners highlighted that they felt that RDPP trusted their capacities and judgement and allowed them to address emerging priorities and strategic gaps. A few specified that they were enabled and encouraged to follow their own core mandates and institutional strategies and were not pressured into following a donor agenda.

For these reasons, partners feel strong ownership of the projects, and there is no indication that they view themselves as ‘implementing partners’ or service providers on behalf of RDPP or its donors. Most of the projects have been developed to build on partners’ past experience and contribute to their future plans, which has also encouraged ownership.

26 The five criteria were: 1. Relevance of the action; 2. Link with RDPP priorities and national strategic documents; 3. Coordination and synergies with national and international actors; 4. Design and logic of the intervention; and 5. Previous experience with similar activities and capacity of implementation.

27 It appears that this has been less so in KRI due to the much more limited contacts.

This ability of partners to use RDPP funding flexibly within a longer trajectory of related past and future programming has enabled them to apply learning and mitigate some of the problems related to short-term funding in responding to what has clearly become a protracted crisis. As most of the programming is ongoing, it is premature to confirm that this is leading to stronger results than would be the case if the projects were entirely 'one-off', but the partners deemed this to be likely and the evaluation concurs. Findings indicate that this has been particularly true with regarding to operational protection and livelihoods initiatives. In relation to research-related policy advocacy, where there are few other donors present, this longer trajectory is not always present. The work of ABAAD with gender-based violence and ILO with child labour are successful examples of this ability to mix different funding sources in a longer process. It is as yet too early to assess whether support to University of Saint Joseph (USJ) through UNHCR, and the Forced Migration Review to undertake and publicise empirical research on refugee conditions, or UNDP on policy options for host countries and refugees will have similarly successful outcomes.

All of these factors reflect a strong degree of relevance and foresight. RDPP has demonstrated a clearly unique commitment, underpinned by a readiness to support research, capacity development and the wisdom of its partners in the field, to consider what will be strategic needs 'tomorrow'. There has been an explicit focus on avoiding procedural constraints and other demands that would force partners to work within either strictly humanitarian or development structures. This has enabled 'nexus thinking', i.e., escaping from often donor imposed siloes between humanitarian and development initiatives, and recognition of the protracted nature of the crisis. Together with the flexibility to respond to changing needs, opportunities and obstacles, this has meant that RDPP has been able to apply foresight in ways that other more rigid donor mechanisms have not accomplished. Some interviewees contrasted RDPP with other support modalities in that RDPP was actually better designed to reflect the nexus, with the exception of the short timeframes, whereas other narrower donor modalities had yet to be restructured to reflect coherence with new nexus priority goals.

This relates to RDPP's ability to ensure relevance to the protracted crisis, which has been key to mobilise efforts that are:

- Appropriate in fostering (and adapting to) institutional change in relation to the 'rules of the game' and roles of different stakeholders for refugee protection and livelihoods in a dynamic period;
- Addressing risks facing refugees and vulnerable host populations based on awareness of windows of opportunity to respond amid what are often severe and changing political constraints; and

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- Responding to what is a three-way nexus of humanitarian-development-conflict/social stability efforts.

Relevance in relation to '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 original programme document²⁸. The evaluation has been informed that this has not been an objective of RDPP, even though this is also stressed in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020, with which RDPP is intended to be aligned. It is also a clear priority in Denmark's strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action stating that no one should be left behind, including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people and communities, particularly refugees and IDPs²⁹. This is one area where the evaluation judges that a 'nexus mind-set' has been weaker since inclusion of more developmental analyses and conflict sensitivity would seem to suggest a need to apply more nuanced and critical vulnerability criteria (and the results of research into risk and vulnerability) in operational programming. Interviews in Lebanon and Jordan showed that most of RDPP's partners have not been able to escape getting locked into responding to government targets regarding proportions of refugees and host populations receiving assistance. This is less so in KRI where there are fewer government targets of this kind. The evaluation is concerned that this may overshadow the need to anchor programming more in vulnerability analysis (i.e. of which refugee and host populations are most vulnerable and to what?). This may be a factor in the limited research uptake described below when research findings about vulnerability either contradict or provide more granular findings about vulnerability than those to be found in government targets – and indeed even conventional aid narratives about, e.g., 'all women and girls being a vulnerable group'.

Research and advocacy

With regards to the the objectives of the research and advocacy components, the programme document states that:

The RDPP will work with international and national institutions to generate policy-oriented research information, in many cases producing primary data. This information will not only guide the development of the RDPP, but also provide useful inputs to guide the design and implementation of other refugee-assistance programmes as well as programming in other sectoral development interventions in the region and beyond. It is also expected

28 According to the RDPP Programme Document: *The programme will defend the rights of the most vulnerable among the refugee population...* but the evaluation was informed by the PMU that the programme was not intended to reach 'the most vulnerable'. Source: RDPP. (2013). Revised Programme Document following Inception Phase. *The Regional Development and Protection Programme*. p.13.

29 Danida. (2017). The World 2030: Denmark's strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action. *Danida*. p. 2.

that this information will help inform the political dialogue between the EU (delegations and relevant member states) and involved governments in the region as well broader strategy and policy development in terms of the development-displacement nexus and protracted displacement at the EU level. At the same time, it will use the partnerships established through the programme in order to generate public debate and discussions through targeted dissemination of research findings. As a result of this, it is also expected that recommendations will be proposed for policy-makers³⁰.

As can be seen, RDPP was designed with high ambitions for what should be achieved through the research and advocacy components. Major research outputs under RDPP include:

1. Forced Migration Review published a special issue³¹ on displacement and protection (status: published);
2. Durable Solutions Platform produced a study on returns to Syria (status: *internal document only disseminated to selected actors*);
3. UNDP published a multi-country economic opportunity assessment report³² 'Jobs Make the Difference' (status: *published*);
4. The World Bank undertook a study called 'The Syrian displacement crisis and a Regional Development and Protection Programme: Mapping and meta-analysis of existing studies of costs, impacts and protection' (status: *not published*);
5. Lebanese Center for Human Rights produced a report³³ on 'Legal challenges faced by refugees from Syria in Lebanon' and 'shadow report on torture'³⁴ (status: published).
6. Saint Joseph University (with funding channelled through RDPP's UNHCR support) produced a 'Survey³⁵ on perceptions of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon' (status: published).

30 RDPP. (2013). Revised Programme Document following Inception Phase. *The Regional Development and Protection Programme*. p.16.

31 The issue can be found here: <http://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/syria/syria.pdf>

32 The report can be found here: <https://www.jobsmakethedifference.org/full-report>

33 The report can be found here: http://rdpp-me.org/RDPP/files/legal_1499124284.pdf

34 The report can be found here: http://rdpp-me.org/RDPP/files/unhcr_1499124355.pdf

35 The survey can be found here: http://rdpp-me.org/RDPP/files/unhcr_1499124355.pdf

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Research outputs have been described by those interviewees who were aware of them as being impressive, including projects other than those in the evaluation sample. With the notable exception of the long-delayed World Bank studies, outputs have been timely and (based on a limited perusal by the evaluation) appear to be of high quality and relevance (see example in Box 2). The outputs have also, in some instances, been leveraged to enhance capacities that may be used in the future, well beyond direct RDPP efforts (see Box 3 on USJ). Opportunities to engage with small independent think tanks (especially in Lebanon) appear to exist, but have been pursued to a very limited extent.

Overall, however, the research has thus far been insufficiently 'put to use' and disseminated (e.g., the World Bank study, Durable Solutions Platform outputs). In some cases, this is due to the obstacles and sensitivities mentioned above, and in other cases it is due to publication of the outputs being delayed. Intended outcomes of the component have not been achieved. This indicated the inherent risk in funding research that may require both partners and RDPP itself to 'stick their necks out' in a volatile political atmosphere. Despite PMU efforts, there is very little awareness of the specific research projects funded by RDPP among the partners not directly involved in the studies. There is some sharing of studies with project partners (particularly market research) but broader sharing is rare.

Advocacy has also had patchy results, despite some notable successes. A few donor informants felt that RDPP, either the PMU or the donors, could potentially leverage its EU affiliated status to play a more vocal advocacy role, drawing on the practical field experience of its partners. In many cases advocacy has been planned to occur as a follow-up to project implementation, which has resulted in delays and a risk that this objective may be left for a rushed dissemination event, or forgotten altogether, particularly if this is the last output of the projects. Overall, the evaluation has found that there is insufficient clarity regarding the intentions for how evidence and advocacy should contribute to overall objectives and advocacy has remained a 'tacked on' objective in many projects, rather than an ongoing responsibility. Protection partners such as the Lebanese Centre for Human Rights (CLDH) and ABAAD recognise that advocacy is central to all their work, whereas livelihoods partners tend to describe advocacy as an added component on top of their service provision role. One livelihoods partner acknowledged that, even though their project plans made reference to advocacy, they "have not thought about it much". The sensitivities about promoting livelihoods within a somewhat ambiguous policy space for refugee access to job markets in Lebanon may also discourage some actors from vocal advocacy, even though the need is obviously strong.

Government representatives interviewed in Jordan and Lebanon were positive about receiving advice, but not advocacy per se. Modest advo-

BOX 2 - RESEARCH OUTPUT EXAMPLE

UNDP 'JOBS MAKE A DIFFERENCE'

The major output of the UNDP project has been a research report entitled 'Jobs Make the Difference' which was conducted by UNDP together with ILO and WFP. The study, which focuses on how host governments, international actors, and private sector partners can create new economic opportunities and expand access to existing economic opportunities, was launched globally on the sidelines of the 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region Conference' in Brussels in April 2017. Interviews suggest that UNDP has remained cautious about publicising the report actively due to the sensitivities in the individual countries around granting refugees access to the labour market. As such, although the evaluation found that the research was of high quality and very timely, very few interviewees knew of it or had used it.

cacy expectations among government and livelihood partners stand in contrast with the quite high ambitions laid out in the RDPP programme document. UN agencies interviewed highlighted that their relations with governments gave them good entry points for RDPP-related advocacy. The evaluation observes that this is evident with regard to ILO advice, but less so in terms of regional advocacy efforts where recent evidence of receptiveness to regional messages is limited and deemed as unlikely to achieve results given the “Lebanon First” and “Jordan First” policies that have recently come to the fore. The volatile situation in Northern Iraq and limited interview data make it hard to draw conclusions there. It appears that RDPP is now initiating programming that is likely to contribute to advocacy via UNFPA and UNICEF. A challenge in Northern Iraq may be that of identifying to whom advocacy should be directed, given shifting responsibilities between central and regional government and other concerns may distract government attention.

The political sensitivities around advocacy have meant that some partners acknowledge their preference to rely on – and perhaps hide behind – joint NGO networks to engage at that level. RDPP currently lacks a clear stance on if and how it intends to encourage these joint approaches.

RDPP has been most effective in advocacy when it has supported organisations that already have a clear advocacy profile to continue and expand their activities. This is the case with ABAAD, which was able to use RDPP support as part of their overall evolution from a “naming and shaming” organisation to one that supports government actors to recognise and implement needed policy changes to counteract patriarchal systems by “finding common ground”.

Overall, it also appears that advocacy related to protection is stronger than livelihoods, due to a greater political acceptance of critical discussions, e.g. the drivers of GBV, and because support to refugee livelihoods is strongly discouraged in Lebanon and constrained in Jordan. Where it has been effective in livelihoods, e.g. child labour, it is also due to political acceptance of these goals in Jordan and Lebanon. The recently initiated support to the Norwegian Institute for Labour and Social Research (FAFO) collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) on “Research on the education, skills, work experiences and work preferences of Syrians in Jordan” appears to be an astute approach to delicately widening the space for future evidence-based advocacy on livelihoods. It exemplifies how RDPP can build on host government commitments and interests by generating a stronger evidence-base for their own decisions on how to implement policies.

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Livelihoods

With regards to the livelihoods component, the programme document states that:

“...it is necessary to give a prompt response to prevent further deterioration of assets of the affected population, to relieve stress and adapt to the changing environment. This will be done through short-term job creation schemes that will help improve social infrastructure. In addition to this, it is important to provide more viable employment opportunities that can sustain affected families in the mid-long-term to be able to maintain their coping mechanisms and also to widen them.” (p.13)

The RDPP livelihoods portfolio consists primarily of support to small enterprises, vocational training, coaching and matching employers and potential employees, and limited support to cash for work and small enterprises.

Most of the livelihoods projects analysed, particularly in Jordan and Northern Iraq, are in early stages of implementation and it is therefore difficult to assess results at output and outcome levels. This has also meant that advocacy efforts have thus far been limited, which is in turn related to the perception among some partners that advocacy is an activity that occurs after the main phase of project implementation³⁶. In Jordan, one informant stressed that the space for livelihoods efforts was extremely constrained until the changes in policies that were made at the Supporting Syria and the Region Conference held in London in February 2016³⁷.

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.

36 See concerns about this assumption above.

37 One of the commitments made at the conference was “Lack of economic opportunity is damaging for refugees and their host communities. We welcome the bold commitment of host governments to open up their labour markets to refugees, alongside their determined efforts to create new jobs for their own populations, and to improve regulation and the investment climate in their countries. In recognition of this, participants agreed to support them in areas such as access to external markets, access to concessional financing and increased external support for public and private sector job creation. Donors will support employment creation programs, such as the ‘P4P initiative’ and we encourage municipalities and communities in our countries to strengthen collaboration with municipalities and communities in host countries for example by sharing know-how through a network of experts. Leading private sector partners added their commitment to these efforts, and their willingness to help bring new investment that will create jobs and decent work. With these efforts, we estimate that up to 1.1 million jobs will be created for refugees from Syria and host country citizens in the region by 2018.” Source: Supporting Syria and the Region Conference Website: <https://www.supportingsyria2016.com>

Issues such as standards, accreditation and harmonised curricula are recognised as important. RDPP partners have found entry points, primarily with sub-national institutions, to contribute in various ways to developing these capacities. But there are evident risks that the increasing flow of resources is sometimes encouraging local authorities to act as service contractors on behalf of INGO project holders rather than exerting leadership and coordination. The RDPP partners are aware of these risks, while having various views on whether the status of these relations could be described as a 'glass half full' or a 'glass half empty'. A need for advocacy to overcome these challenges may be apparent, but some informants deemed the channels for influencing local authorities to be limited. Outside RDPP, there were examples of INGOs that had completely bypassed local training institutes to implement directly. Only two RDPP funded livelihoods projects – both in Northern Iraq – appear to have involved direct implementation without strong involvement from local partners (RI and DRC).

As noted above, the requirements placed on all agencies for meeting certain proportional targets for refugee/host beneficiary participation have often overshadowed concerns with using vulnerability to target livelihoods programmes, especially in Jordan. One partner (FCA) noted that they were making efforts to include people with disabilities, but with limited success thus far. In Jordan, interviewees noted that in their overall programming the exclusion of Palestinian, Iraqi and other non-Syrian refugees from these targets has been an obstacle to focusing on needs. In general, targeting includes explicit efforts at gender inclusion, youth and children, but little else.

RDPP projects are making significant investments in the knowledge base for targeting genuine livelihood opportunities, both in regional research and in labour market and/or small enterprise assessments. Interviewees repeatedly stressed that this knowledge base was essential, not only for project design, but particularly to generate empirical evidence about actual job market realities and thereby help to counteract wide-spread but frequently misleading narratives about refugees competing with host populations for jobs and/or pushing down wages.

Protection

RDPP's focus on protection is largely framed within a focus on institutional capacity development. The programme document states that:

“... although Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq are countries with a long history of reception of refugees, they lack effective capacities in dealing with protection or asylum issues, to plan or respond to refugee crisis, or to treat asylum seekers different from other migrant or foreign nationals. If they are able to manage better refugee issues, this will revert directly and positively on the protection of refugees. This will also be reflected in the way national systems respond to GBV survivors, refugees or host

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population... Therefore, the programme will defend the rights of the most vulnerable among the refugee population (and also partly host communities) through legal aid, conflict mitigation and community empowerment, capacity building of local actors to deal with protection and asylum issues, and capacity building to protect working children.”

Compared to livelihoods, protection programming has advanced further in implementation. This is partly due to RDPP support building on partners’ existing plans and programming (ABAAD, CLDH, ILO, UNFPA). It is also because the protection component has been primarily concentrated in Lebanon, where programming was initiated earlier, perhaps due to such a strong base in ongoing partner efforts. As mentioned above, there are notable policy outcomes related to ABAAD’s work. Agencies providing ongoing protection services, such as CLDH have been able to strengthen and expand their existing activities. UNFPA was able to leverage RDPP support to return to a pre-existing more ‘developmental’ agenda of engaging with policy-makers, after a period where they had shifted to humanitarian service provision when these activities had constituted a greater need and donor priority. Mercy Corps has effectively promoted protection through joint host and refugee community based activities that have already generated considerable results regarding enhanced social cohesion. Overall, it appears that protection has been effective when focused on the following areas:

- Building national systems within the police, municipalities and ministries with social welfare responsibilities for undertaking tasks that respond (primarily) to the needs of the host population (ILO, UNHCR, UNICEF, Mercy Corps, UNFPA, ABAAD)
- Financing direct service provision by national NGOs (CLDH, ABAAD)
- Enhancing social cohesion (Mercy Corps)

Durable solutions objectives and the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP)

The challenge of promoting durable solutions and the experience of the DSP exemplify several aspects of how research and ‘soft’ advocacy are being used to move the agenda forward towards more evidence-based policy and praxis. This subsection first describes the emerging policy context for the pursuit of durable solutions and then the ways that RDPP, through the DSP, has found entry points for responding. The programme document states that this pursuit of durable solutions is the first goal of the programme:

The ultimate goals of the programme are 1) to support refugees from Syria so that they are able to find a durable solution to their displacement through voluntarily return, local integration or resettlement; 2) in order to do this, it is also very important to support host countries, especially

*their most vulnerable population, to mitigate the negative impact and build upon the positive impact arising from the displacement of 1.8 million refugees into Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq*³⁸.

This responds to emerging global refugee and migration policy agendas. On 19 September 2016, the UN General Assembly made commitments within the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which was part of a process leading towards a Global Compact on Refugees to be proposed in 2018 to the General Assembly. In the first thematic session working towards this process, held in Geneva on July 10, 2017, the UN stated that: “{Regional approaches} show that protection and asylum are not just national-level issues but require regional and global engagement. Regional level processes can be key to formulating context-specific strategic visions on durable solutions, exchanging best practice and setting ambitions.” These ‘ambitions’ are starting to enter the field level discourse in Lebanon and Jordan. In Iraq, some interviewees expressed concerns about efforts to rapidly resettle displaced populations as part of geo-political agendas.

Nonetheless, many of those interviewed were not aware of the durable solutions concept or terminology, or confused it with protracted response and sustainability rather than the ‘three solutions’ of integration, return or resettlement. Many humanitarian and development generalists not specialised in refugee protection are unaware of the definitions and their implications. This suggests that, at least currently, the durable solutions concept may be primarily useful to frame engagements with agencies specialised in these issues. However, there is a risk of semantic confusion and misunderstanding if used in the broader discourse as actors may find themselves ‘talking past each other’, particularly if the concept of durable solutions is conflated with the broader discourse on ‘resilience’.

The issue of returns as part of a durable solutions framework – as opposed to spontaneous or forced return without well considered ‘solutions’ – has a very different character in Iraq given the predominant focus on IDP returns and the danger that these processes may be abused for justifying territorial claims in the shifting geopolitical realities. The one KRI government official interviewed indicated that they have a far more constructive stance on integration than in Jordan and Lebanon, and this could provide a more neutral setting for exploring this aspect of durable solutions in the future.

38 RDPP. (2013). Revised Programme Document following Inception Phase. *The Regional Development and Protection Programme*. p.11.

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Regarding the other two 'solutions', integration and resettlement in a third country, in Jordan and Lebanon, integration as a solution is severely constrained by host governments. Some interviewees noted donor hypocrisy in ignoring how resettlement in Europe as an additional 'solution' should be given more attention in addition to return and integration.

The DSP has been RDPP's (low key) flagship project to provide constructive input into the durable solutions discourse, and the experience of the DSP illustrates both potentials as well as pitfalls in this area of work.

Despite the 'three solutions' described above, the overwhelming majority of discussions that the DSP has been involved in to date relate to return alone. The evaluation judges that this is an area where results have so far been limited, as described above, but where a useful foundation for future efforts has been laid. Interviews indicate that, due to cautious optimism that opportunities for return may soon improve, potential voluntary return – amid continued risks of forced return – are suddenly being discussed in an increasingly open manner among some stakeholders. This indicates good foresight by RDPP in supporting DSP through cautious but appropriate first steps to promote research and evidence based thinking. The evaluation found that This is highly controversial with UNHCR in Jordan and Lebanon, who raise questions about the DSP mandate (which UNHCR sees as its own) and data (which UNHCR claims is insufficient). However, the few observers other than UNHCR who are aware of the programme regard it as positive due to the need for solid research and a 'second opinion' in addition to UNHCR.

DSP generally has very low visibility. The reasons for this are recognised by stakeholders interviewed and include the wish to avoid that discussions may be 'hijacked' by those with political rather than humanitarian agendas as a way to promote rapid returns. However, as the discourse comes out into the open, this risk averse stance is likely to become less appropriate. The need for evidence and facts has been noted by informants as important to nuance discussions and avoid the dangers of 'too much advocacy', for or against return by different actors. One observer stated that "we need research to help get this conversation going."

One observer commented that there are Syrian research institutions (in Syria) with economic analyses that may be highly relevant for future planning on return and that linkages have yet to be established with these institutions. Another mentioned that they wanted to ensure that their livelihood programming would be relevant for the skills needed back in Syria. These suggest the need for an even broader regional discussion on durable solutions in the near future to avoid return processes that do not represent well analysed 'durable solutions' that utilise data and knowledge from within Syria.

Synergies across the components

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 has recognised and drawn attention to how legal challenges to refugee livelihoods feeds into the tensions that contribute to gender-based violence (GBV). Action Against Hunger (ACF) in Northern Iraq has also emphasised the importance of incorporating mental health expertise in the design of livelihoods efforts. This encouragement to ‘link the dots’ between programming areas is a clear strength of RDPP. Within livelihoods programming, there is also due attention being given to avoiding programming that reproduces constraining gender roles (FCA, JRF), even if the actual results are thus far hard to assess. However, there is little cross-project exchange between those working with livelihoods and protection respectively.

Here again though, there is little evidence that research and advocacy have been used to bring issues to a higher level. A notable exception to this is the successful efforts related to child labour (this is explored later).

Implications of timeframes for results

Overall findings indicate very good results at output level, good potential for outcomes (some already achieved), but significant concerns about sustainable results. The main causal factor behind the squeezed timeframes is the slow start-up of the programme, especially in Jordan and Northern Iraq, which in turn led to a far shorter implementation window at the end of the programme. The evaluation judges that RDPP had not sufficiently considered the likelihood and consequences of these delays, and therefore has not been able to ensure appropriate timeframes. There is a clear danger that bringing together humanitarian and development efforts within RDPP sometimes runs the risk of framing ‘the nexus’ as ‘doing development in humanitarian timeframes’ with significant challenges to viability. As noted above, some programming that involves gap filling or modest scaling up of ongoing services can be managed within limited timeframes. But launching entirely new projects that have ambitious outcomes related to, e.g., creation of institutions that can generate and promote access to livelihoods over time, or establish new platforms for policy dialogue, are far more problematic. A factor of particular importance, raised by some of the partners, has been the challenge of recruiting appropriate staff quickly and retaining them when contracts are often for less than a year. Some observers have noted that there are initial signs that donors are starting to make more multiyear pledges, but that this has not translated into changing conditions for those applying for support from funds such as RDPP. The implications of these findings for programming are explored further in the conclusions and recommendations below.

3.2 EQ 2: RDPP added value, innovation, localisation and capacity development

The following findings unpack some of the core underlying added values of RDPP that emerged in the evaluation. The evaluation has found that these added values, over other modalities, can be characterised as consisting of different aspects of innovation, localisation and commitments to capacity development.

EQ 2: WHAT IS THE SPECIFIC VALUE ADDED OF RDPP AND HAS RDPP BEEN INNOVATIVE IN ITS WORK TOWARDS DURABLE SOLUTIONS AND ADDRESSING THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS?

Key added values

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 making the nexus work, especially knowledge and capacities.

In light of the trends towards large scale funding windows, RDPP has an added value in being able to fund smaller initiatives and organisations without the transaction costs and exclusionary tendencies of consortia and with minimal extra burden for donors. Some informants noted that RDPP has avoided tendencies to force agencies to justify programming with large, and perhaps even exaggerated, beneficiary numbers and has concentrated on quality instead. The evaluation judges that this has been essential to support the evidence based and innovative programming that has been the objective. It has also contributed to good progress towards localisation, even if the results in this area remain somewhat mixed.

Readiness to support research and evidence based programming is a clear and largely unique added value, as mentioned above, but the extent to which this has translated into effective advocacy and learning thus far is mixed. Strikingly few interviewees were aware of the "Jobs Make a Difference" report, the Forced Migration Review special issue or the outputs of the DSP. INGO partners largely emphasise the use of surveys and other evidence gathering within individual projects, rather than their contributions to broader learning. The evaluation recognises that this may be reflective of broader weakness in research utilisation among agencies in the field, but partners did refer to other research that they had used.

An exception to this was the use of ILO's work with child labour where local (mostly government) partners were aware of the studies undertaken and were actively engaging with ILO to integrate these findings into their institutional structures, work routines and procedures. This

example illustrates the importance of focusing on a recognised knowledge gap and a set of issues that is seen as universally applicable for both host and refugee populations.

Box 3 below shows the particular experiences and case of the UNHCR project which was implemented in partnership with USJ. It illustrates how flexible partnerships can contribute to national capacities and ownership of a more evidence-based discourse on the refugee situation.

BOX 3 - UNHCR (USJ) PROJECT

UNHCR AND UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH (USJ) COLLABORATION

The ET regards the collaboration between UNCHR and USJ in Beirut as a success story under the RDPP. Prior to the project in 2015, there was no work in the university on refugees or migration, either in the course content or amongst student dissertations. The first activity in the project was a pilot field survey conducted for two weeks by 20 students. The students spent two months designing the survey and covered the country within two weeks. The survey was presented in a press conference with invitations disseminated by UNHCR.

In November 2016, 116 students participated in week-long module on refugee studies and a course on human rights protection of vulnerable groups was taught in March and April 2017 for masters students. USJ drew heavily on contacts with the Oxford Refugee Studies Programme, a process that began with the first special issue of the Forced Migration Review at the start of RDPP.

As an outcome of this project, USJ has now initiated an undergraduate course on human rights protection and vulnerable groups, which is open to all students. 19 students have chosen to do research papers on a topic related to refugees and a doctoral candidate just registered the first PhD dissertation on refugees. There is also evidence that the work of USJ in this project is starting to yield interest from other actors (German Embassy, Norwegian Research Council, Princeton and Yale). USJ furthermore made sure the student research papers could be adapted to the upcoming second special issue of the Forced Migration Review in case any of the students would like to submit. USJ mention that the project has provided students with hand-on experience as well as access to a large network.

The evaluation considers the collaboration with USJ as highly relevant and positive considering the previous non-existence of the topic of refugees both amongst the university professors as well as students, something which is surprising considering the many years of recurrent refugee crises Lebanon has faced.

Policy dialogue on how to adapt programming to evolving needs and policy frameworks has been strong in Lebanon and Jordan, between RDPP and government, but has been weaker in Northern Iraq due to the late start, the smaller portfolio and the lack of a permanent pres-

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ence. No significant evidence was found of RDPP contributing to policy dialogue between RDPP donors and the local host government in KRI, though this may be due to the evaluation's inability to visit Northern Iraq. 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.

Overall, the evaluation finds that the lower level of engagement in Northern Iraq has meant that RDPP's added value here is less than elsewhere. It has a niche in retaining a focus on Syrian refugees, when other actors have shifted to IDPs, but the conditions are not in place for a significant role in research and advocacy. Also, it is unlikely that RDPP will emerge as an 'actor' as it has in Lebanon and Jordan unless it can invest in a considerably stronger field level presence.

Innovation

Throughout this assignment the evaluation has been informed, particularly by EU actors and donors, that an underlying expectation is that the RDPP's assumed status (to quote one informant) as a "laboratory" for innovation was an added value. However, the concept and scope of innovation related intentions are poorly defined. For this reason, the evaluation has analysed innovation within an analytical framework using four different aspects that have emerged from the evidence collected: scaling-up of innovative ideas, foresight, creativity and emergence of 'innovation systems'.

Innovation in the sense of unique programming that can then be scaled-up is perhaps the de facto assumption that has been referred to by partners, i.e. the "laboratory" metaphor. Interviews with representatives of the European Union Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the 'Madad Fund'³⁹ (referred to in this report as 'Madad') indicated that they saw a potential future relationship with RDPP by using their larger funding structure to provide a vehicle for such scaling up. Mechanisms are not currently in place to directly facilitate or follow through on this process of applying lessons from small projects on a larger scale, since there are significant differences between these mechanisms with implications for what existing partners can propose and implement. Good

39 *The primary objective of the Trust Fund is to provide a coherent and re-inforced aid response to the Syrian and Iraqi crises and the massive displacement resulting from them on a multi-country scale. In pursuit of this objective, the Trust Fund shall address the needs of three groups: refugees, internally displaced persons, and returnees, and provide assistance to the communities and the administrations in which those groups find themselves, as regards resilience and early recovery.* Source: EUCOM. (2016). Agreement Establishing the European Union Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis 'The Madad Fund', and its Internal Rules. *European Commission*. p. 5.

small projects may be good because they are small and therefore it may not be possible to simply scale-up without losing essential qualities of e.g. developing trust with community organisations and beneficiaries. One interviewee expressed concern that there may be pressure to explicitly 'innovate' that could distract from more important but perhaps less visible learning about successful efforts. Another interviewee expressed concerns that scaling up of 'best practices' could actually conflict with the need for creative responses based on critical reflection regarding who these practices are actually best for.

Findings indicate that results in this respect are somewhat limited. The evaluation judges that a linear scaling-up process is an unrealistic expectation given the time required for trial and error and testing before the scale-up of such innovations versus the limited timeframe of most projects. Examples where this has occurred tend to be related to RDPP financing one step in a longer trajectory of partners testing new ideas, in the region and globally, which began before RDPP and may be used in learning related to partners' future programmes.

Innovation in the sense of creating an enabling environment for foresight has been quite successful, thereby contributing to the broader nexus processes. This has been especially true in research projects such as DSP, UNDP, etc., and also some advocacy and protection programmes such as the work of ABAAD and ILO with child labour. In several instances, this foresight was related to enabling a timely shift across the nexus through capacity support for local partners. One partner described how they found it innovative that, although other donors had shifted their funding from institutional support to direct service provision due to the crisis, RDPP encouraged them to return to their core mandate of supporting the government to respond better.

Partners interviewed have described the facilitation and space for them to develop creative responses to emerging problems as the main way that innovation emerged through RDPP. They described, and where possible the evaluation observed, how seemingly conventional programming was implemented in innovative ways due to the flexibility that allowed such adaptive programming to occur (e.g. Mercy Corps, FCA). Some of the most promising examples have yet to feed into widespread concrete results however given the timeframe for research to feed into policy.

Innovation in the sense of encouraging creative adaptation at field level has been quite successful. The evaluation was struck by the readiness to learn and adapt even in what appear to be rather conventional projects (e.g., Mercy Corps, FCA, JRF) due to dialogue, local ownership and flexibility.

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“RDPP was very good in terms of timeliness as could fit together with Danida grant by aligning both. We liked that RDPP had a flexible and hands off approach in activities that allowed us to try different modalities and improve our procedures and outreach. They didn’t create a straight-jacket for activities that were outside of the grant. RDPP is 10 times better than the UN. Both contracting timelines and otherwise.” (Northern Iraq partner)

Innovation in relation to fostering ‘innovation systems’ wherein researchers, practitioners, policy makers, etc. engage together has been less successful as the links between projects and utilisation of research remain weak, with some exceptions (e.g. ILO). This was not an explicit objective of RDPP, though the desire to link field level programming with research and advocacy can be interpreted as suggesting a potential desire to move in this direction.

Localisation and capacity development

RDPP has not been explicitly designed to respond to the localisation goals in the Grand Bargain⁴⁰ and the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit⁴¹ as the programme preceded these commitments. Indeed, localisation is absent in the programme document. However, the RDPP annual reports make reference to capacity development in ways that suggest an implicit commitment to ensuring that local partners gradually expand their role as international agencies scale-down, which is in turn reliant on strong national and local institutions.

The context for localisation in Lebanon and Jordan is that of increasing calls from government to assume more comprehensive leadership of the refugee response, paired with demands for rapid replacement of international with local staff within international agencies. In Jordan, this involves a demand for a stronger direct role for national institutions. In Lebanon this is being driven, in many respects, by a decision by UN agencies to pressure their INGO partners to rapidly hand over caseloads to national NGOs. In both countries, there have been requirements to reduce the proportion of international staff. In Northern Iraq, the overall situation is less clear, but some interviewees described how they were planning for a shift to development efforts where localisation would be an integral part. In all three countries, there is a recognition that the main paradigm for localisation remains that of ‘using’ national NGOs as ‘implementing partners’ for projects designed by international agencies.

40 “Achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25 percent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs.” The Grand Bargain: A Global Commitment to Better Serve People in Need (2016). p.5.

41 World Humanitarian Summit website: <https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/summit>

BOX 4 - ILO PROJECT**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION**

One of the characteristics of the ILO project in Lebanon and Jordan is the involvement of many different stakeholders essentially because there is no independent unit responsible for child labour. To strengthen this area it is necessary to engage a range of stakeholders as well as enable collaboration and synergies between their work.

One of the challenges faced by ILO has been to get different national bodies such as the ministries to work together. In Jordan ILO has worked on enhancing the capacities of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Social Development on child labour monitoring systems. In addition, ILO has worked with CSOs to build their capacities.

Prior to the project, the old system consisted of referrals between the three ministries. The project's intention is to bring together NGOs and the three ministries to work on integrated case management and include NGOs in electronic referrals.

Within RDPP, the evaluation could observe some positive indications of efforts to break out of this paradigm by encouraging local partners to determine their own priorities, but the evaluation's overall impression is that this is not universal – with less progress in livelihoods than in protection programming.

In Box 4, the specific case of the ILO project is presented, which is an example of localisation and capacity building.

Over time, there has been a shift within the RDPP portfolio to have a greater proportion of national NGOs. This was slow at first due to the desire to establish some projects quickly among known (i.e., international) partners. In the entire period nine national NGOs have been funded directly in the RDPP portfolio⁴². In addition to direct RDPP support to national partners, there are many examples of RDPP partners supporting national partners, including government (UNFPA Northern Iraq, UNHCR Lebanon), academia (UNHCR support to USJ in Lebanon), local government (Mercy Corps Lebanon) and local vocational training institutions (virtually all livelihoods partners).

The relations with local government authorities are increasingly seen as an important element of localisation. The evaluation was able to observe how Mercy Corps in Lebanon was able to develop innovative approaches that refugee and host community members described as far more responsive and relevant for contributing to social cohesion than support from other agencies that seemed to apply the 'implementing partner' paradigm. With regard to livelihoods programmes, however, these relations were more problematic with local authorities falling into acting as sub-contractors to INGOs, as described above.

RDPP is almost universally seen as being responsive to partner plans to invest in capacity development within their own organisations and among those institutions with which they work. One (ACF) described how they have had to do major retraining of their own staff to manage the shift from humanitarian to more developmental modalities. One partner noted that they were able to handle the donor requirements and could thereby avoid inappropriate pressures to train local partner organisations to "be like us". However, there are some conflicting views. One interviewee noted that localisation and capacity development were not proactively encouraged by RDPP, and that direct INGO implementation roles were accepted without question as well. Others noted that though they were encouraged to provide capacity development support, limited timeframes made this difficult.

42 ABAAD, SHIELD, Amel, AJEM, CLDH, JCLA, BEYOND, Dar al Amal and JRF.

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Regarding broader trends in localisation, the national NGOs now scaling-up tend to be relatively large, well established organisations. Particularly in Lebanon some actors have noted a possible pending ‘crunch’ wherein international support is shifted to them, overburdening them while failing to reach more grassroots agencies. The thresholds of capacity demanded by donors are seen as unattainable for these smaller organisations and even inappropriate in terms of allowing them to develop on their own terms. Two RDPP partners stated that even if they wanted to try, a one-year project is not enough to capacitate a local community based organisation to access international support. One national NGO stressed that, in general, they would refuse funding that would result in an unsustainable scale-up of services within their organisation. Another described a feeling of unease with what they saw as a looming future role as “gatekeepers” in relation to becoming a channel of funds for projects implemented by small community partners.

National NGOs are not the only local partners. Some projects support national government agencies, such as those led by FAFO, UNFPA and UNHCR. Livelihoods programming is often undertaken in conjunction with efforts to strengthen the capacities of vocational training centres. In a few projects there are also links with municipal government. Box 5 presents the experiences of Mercy Corps and their cooperation with municipalities in Lebanon.

3.3 EQ 3: Management of joint programming and lessons learnt

This section of the evaluation looks beyond the programmatic aspects to focus on the extent to which RDPP has worked as a mechanism for bringing together joint multidonor programming, and has been able to generate more effective donor efforts across the nexus. This includes the shift, promoted by RDPP, towards more evidence-based and concerted efforts to influence policies, both in Europe, and in the affected region and among host governments.

EQ 3: HOW HAS THE JOINT PROGRAMMING BEEN MANAGED AND WHAT LESSONS ARE LEARNED FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING?

Within RDPP, informants stressed that the problematic aspects generally associated with joint donor mechanisms, and EU support in particular, have been avoided. Indeed, partners frequently emphasise that RDPP is unique in this regard. Problems that have been avoided include rigidity, lack of feedback regarding the reasons for approval/disapproval, general lack of transparency, heavy reporting requirements, and reliance on inappropriate quantitative indicators (e.g., number of beneficiaries) rather than quality in prioritising recipients of support. The collegial relationship between partners and the RDPP PMU – one informant described this as “organic” – is credited with avoiding some of these

BOX 5 - MERCY CORPS PROJECT

MERCY CORPS

Mercy Corps has produced a study called “From Tension to Violence: Understanding and Preventing Violence between Refugees and Host Communities in Lebanon”. The findings have been incorporated into this project. One of the key findings of the research was that municipalities are the most effective dispute resolution actor.

Municipalities are also the key actors in Mercy Corps’ RDPP project and nine municipalities in the Bekaa Valley have signed MoUs with MC. The project has worked on establishing local community groups consisting of Syrian and Lebanese members (10 of each) embedded within the municipalities. The members have been trained in mediation, negotiation and protection. These groups were engaged in identifying community needs, which led to identifying small community-rehabilitation projects. In one example the community decided to work on supporting agriculture and farmers and accessing land and building water irrigation channels to reduce conflicts over water. Another municipality wanted to transform the old train station into a museum of train history, a garden and public space that can attract economic investments.

negative characteristics commonly associated with joint programming. Several stressed the opportunity to enter into an extended dialogue with RDPP about how to improve and refine their proposals as being unique and highly beneficial. As noted above, this had a downside in terms of delays and ultimate shortening of an already over-optimistic window for project implementation.

Potential additional benefits inherent in a joint programme from facilitating what may become emergent ‘communities of practice’ among partners have only very recently begun to be pursued. Partners know very little about each other’s work. Although the ‘hub and spokes’ relationships via the RDPP PMU may be sufficient to avoid overlaps or crowding, they do not encourage cross-learning or synergies.

Relationships at country level with other donors also remain limited. Bilateral donors interviewed in the field are positive, but not very aware of RDPP’s work. As noted above, this is largely due to RDPP being governed by donor representatives in Brussels and/or ministries in capitals rather than those based in the three countries. Despite proactive efforts from RDPP and the Danish MFA, some EU delegations, including Madad representatives, expressed frustration with the communication between RDPP and the EU delegations, including Madad representatives. This may be partially due to the fact that RDPP has been under DG DEVCO responsibility in Brussels, whereas the EU delegations are under DG NEAR⁴³.

Ownership by government has been effectively fostered in Lebanon and Jordan.⁴⁴ The evaluation was struck by the RDPP PMU’s ability to build trust and dialogue with governmental contacts. The lack of political ‘baggage’ associated with UN, EU or large bilateral donor initiatives, together with the avoidance of the often confrontational stance of civil society and perceived vested interests of INGOs, appear to have engendered this trust.⁴⁵ There may be an opportunity for RDPP to use this ownership and trust to be more vocal.

Added value from being a regional programme has been quite limited. The evaluation judges that this may partially be related to the lack of a clear theory of change about how to ensure that the discourse on regional issues can impact on national discussions where domestic priorities are crowding out regional concerns. The UNDP Sub-regional research and DSP are potential exceptions, but as yet have not had

43 This may be somewhat of a simplification, but the evaluation was not able to obtain a comprehensive and nuanced overview of these inter-institutional dynamics.

44 This may be less so in KRI, where the one government official interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the information received from RDPP.

45 This finding cannot be confirmed.

significant outcomes. One interviewee noted that if and when programming inside Syria becomes part of the portfolio the dynamic is likely to encourage more regional perspectives along with pursuance of durable solutions across borders.

Compared to the findings of the RDPP mid-term review⁴⁶, the evaluation has found that confusion over the association of RDPP with the Danish MFA has been solved, but informants are somewhat unclear and unconcerned about what RDPP is instead, apart from recognising that it has multiple donors and an association with the EU. In general, the evaluation assess that in Lebanon and Jordan, RDPP is sufficiently well known to attract the partners it needs and to maintain a dialogue with host governments. It has a lower profile in Northern Iraq due to the lack of a permanent presence and the small size of the portfolio.

3.4 EQ 4: Comparative advantages of RDPP and coordination

The following findings show the comparative advantages of RDPP in terms of addressing the protracted refugee situation as well as the nexus, mainly in relation to the Madad fund. It also shows RDPP in the light of more recent trends of establishing trust funds and promoting consortias. Finally, it unpacks the issues around coordination.

EQ 4: WHAT ARE THE COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE OF RDPP VIS-À-VIS OTHER JOINT PROGRAMMES IN ADDRESSING THE PROTRACTED REFUGEE SITUATION IN THE REGION? HOW WELL HAS COORDINATION AND OVERLAP BEEN AVOIDED?

General advantages in relation to protracted crises and the nexus

Partners stated that the RDPP team differs from more bureaucratic and top-down mechanisms in having stronger normative commitments and the 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 with field level programming to work on what they see to be relevant issues. One interviewee strongly emphasised how RDPP was unique in being prepared to help their organisation to fill very important small gaps in their programming, which most donors refused to do as they demanded neat packages. In a protracted crisis, where modalities that link humanitarian and development efforts are generally poorly synchronised, this strategic gap filling is especially important. Some INGO partners made

46 Voluntas Advisory. (2016). Mid-Term Review of Regional Development and Protection Programme. *The Regional Development and Protection Programme*.

explicit reference to comparisons with the UN in this regard, with one INGO stating that RDPP was “ten times better”.

”For us it is about flexibility and inclusion. RDPP were willing to have different unconnected outcomes to fill gaps, which is usually really problematic with other donors who want a clear package. RDPP was willing to do bits where there were important small gaps. Even though gap filling sounds ad hoc, it enables us to base work on evidence with both working groups and real surveys, etc. We are not doing stable development work. In humanitarian contexts you need to be flexible.” (Lebanon Partner)

Regarding the strategic gaps, readiness and flexibility in supporting capacity development has been a comparative advantage in terms of a nexus focus, but the lack of explicit guidelines has meant that a broader vision and strategy for localisation are not in place. At the start of the programme, RDPP had more of a unique position with regard to readiness to finance capacity development. It appears that other joint donor mechanisms are now recognising the importance of capacity development, but needs are still greater than resources.

Some observers note that RDPP is better suited to the realities of protracted crises, in contrast to other donor efforts that have not adapted procedures/funding windows to reflect new nexus policies. RDPP achieves this through greater flexibility, dialogue and transparency than others. One interviewee emphasised that these qualities led to a good degree of sustainability, despite short funding windows. Another highlighted how RDPP could really generate broader synergies between humanitarian and development efforts, in contrast to the tweaking of standard programming mechanisms that she referred to as “resilience-based humanitarian assistance”. In general, interviewees recognised that RDPP was one of the first initiatives to have an explicit protracted crisis focus, even if others have increasingly adopted similar goals.

The RDPP allows us to sit nicely in the space between humanitarian and development. A lot of donors talk about this, but are not comfortable with it in practice, particularly the UN. (Lebanon partner).

RDPP gives us the opportunity to respond to the nexus, with a gender focus, while others are still more humanitarian. Overall there is still a humanitarian and development division, but there is more space to include the hosts and refugees. (Jordanian partner)

I do not know about the history, but for us RDPP has enabled us to work at the nexus rather than resilience based humanitarian assistance. (Regional partner)

One informant in Jordan described the nexus challenge as increasingly being related to a shift towards inclusion of all vulnerable sectors of the

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population in national social protection systems. This may be an aim in Lebanon and Northern Iraq as well, but the capacities for this to occur are limited. In Jordan, however, government plans overwhelmingly situate international support to the refugee situation within plans and policies for economic development (rather than social protection). There are linkages between these two sets of concerns, as an emerging social protection system is likely to need to be anchored in schemes for employers to cover social security payments in an increasingly formalised economy.

RDPP, trust funds and consortia

In describing the comparative advantages of RDPP in relation to other joint mechanisms a clear point of reference was that of the growing trend towards pooled funds, particularly trust funds in the EU. A recent study of such mechanisms highlights the importance of confidence and openness in the management of these funds⁴⁷, qualities noted above as characterising RDPP.

EU trust funds were introduced in 2013 after adjustments in the EU Financial Regulation. Madad was launched in December 2014 and despite RDPP's status as a programme rather than a fund, Madad is the obvious point of comparison to RDPP for many observers, particularly as it is expected that there will be a new relationship between RDPP and Madad in the future. The Madad Fund is seen by some as RDPP's 'big brother' due to both the overall scale of funding and most notably the minimum size of the grants that are allocated.

When RDPP partners were asked about comparing RDPP with Madad they stated that they did not intend to apply for funds from Madad for example as a way to 'scale-up' due to what were seen to be much higher transaction costs and lower transparency. These problems were associated with the large size of Madad and the consequent need to develop cooperation procedures with other agencies in order to form consortia. Concerns were expressed that within these consortia smaller national NGOs (and even INGOs) could be even further isolated from direct donor support due to their inability to have a voice in consortia discussions and lack of administrative capacity to manage cumbersome EU procedures. Also, the long period between application and disbursement and uncertainty around strategic criteria for decisions were raised as significant concerns. Madad representatives interviewed acknowledged that localisation has been a lessor priority than overall coordination of EU support and ability to provide support on a large scale. Interviews with Madad and a range of observers indicated a widespread awareness that Madad is 'not for everyone'. In sum, this divergence of foci between

47 Thomas, M. (2017) Understanding Humanitarian Funds: Going Beyond country-based pooled funds. NRC.

RDPP and Madad can be seen as an indication of different, and even potentially complementary, specialisations⁴⁸, but not a ladder for scaling up from smaller projects.

Interviewees presented diverging views on the relationship between RDPP and Madad. Findings are also inconclusive due to what may be individual opinions expressed that may not reflect broader institutional positions. RDPP claims to have made considerable efforts to inform Madad and the EU delegations about its activities, but this is disputed by other interviewees. In Brussels RDPP is under the Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), whereas Madad and the EU delegations are under DG NEAR. This appears to be the source of at least some of the communications problems.

Also, the complicated process to create RDPP and ensure initial ownership in Brussels meant that the EU delegations were left out of planning discussions from the start. This may have been a contributing factor to the lack of shared ownership later. Regardless of the reasons, it is apparent that relations between the two programmes have not been strong and in some cases not amicable⁴⁹. Views were expressed that, if RDPP was to have a tighter relationship with Madad, efforts from the PMU would need to be strengthened. The evaluation cannot confirm or deny this opinion.

It appears that RDPP does not have strong links with other trust funds and pooled funding mechanisms. The OCHA administered Emergency Response Funds in Lebanon and Jordan were very rarely mentioned in the interviews, and conclusions cannot therefore be drawn. The World Bank administered Lebanon Syrian Crisis Trust Fund is only directed towards the government and therefore cannot be compared with RDPP.

Coordination

Very few examples were noted of programmatic crowding or coordination issues (apart from claims by UNHCR that DSP infringes on their mandate). Interviewees noted that 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

48 The Madad fund has a broader geographical scope than RDPP encompassing *Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt or any other country in the wider region affected by the Syrian crisis, including the Western Balkans*. EUCOM. (2016). Agreement Establishing the European Union Regional trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis 'The Madad Fund', and its Internal Rules. *European Commission*. p. 6.

49 This is in contrast to the relations with DG DEVCO, which are reported to have been very strong and positive throughout the programme.

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general, this avoidance of coordination problems is due to RDPP being a relatively small but proactive donor that has recognised and respected the ability of partners to carve out appropriate scopes for their programming.

In a notable exception to this, insufficient attention has been given to coordinating research across partners who appear to conduct research (within and outside their actual protection and livelihood programming) in parallel with little awareness of each other's work. In some cases, the partners have coordinated themselves, partially through cluster structures and NGO forums. But there appear to be missed opportunities to find great efficiencies and synergies if RDPP is to play a more proactive role. The evaluation judges that there has been a missed opportunity to encourage greater coordination among RDPP's research partners (and potential research users among other partners). RDPP's potential is less in relation to stimulating coordination and sharing where partners undertake their own smaller-scale data collection.

Recently, RDPP has started bringing partners together for joint learning and sharing best practices, which is appreciated by partners. This suggests a recognition of past weaknesses in this regard. The evaluation notes that this would not have to be managed by RDPP directly as it should ideally be driven more by the partners themselves.

Overall, RDPP's focus on bilateral engagement with partners and generally not being a 'big donor' (paired with the lack of permanent presence in Iraq and only a more recent presence in Jordan) have meant that RDPP has not had the capacity to become a proactive 'actor', promoting coordination. There might be a latent potential to engage in a more concerted manner based on active use of research findings for policy dialogue.

3.5 EQ 5: Strength and weaknesses of the joint programming

This section presents findings around the strength and weaknesses of the RDPP as a joint programme and the potential added value of this jointness that can be capitalised on in the future.

EQ 5: WHAT STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES DOES A JOINT PROGRAMME PRESENT? WHAT HAS BEEN THE ADDED VALUE OF THE JOINTNESS? WHAT ARE LESSONS TO BE LEARNT ON JOINT PROGRAMMING FOR THE FUTURE?

The evaluation has found that 'jointness' is a lessor factor in RDPP's strengths and weaknesses as a programme than other qualities and constraints. As described above, there are limited strengths derived from being a regional programme, apart from perhaps some efficiencies in having a single management structure. Regional research efforts

have yet to be disseminated, so the results cannot be assessed, but the evaluation judges that success is likely to be reliant on clearly defined entry points and modest expectations.

Some donors noted that they lacked capacity to pursue engagements with smaller local national NGOs, particularly in terms of certification and audit processes, and that they see RDPP as a way to reach these agencies and achieve localisation objectives through a unit outside of their embassies. One informant mentioned a disconnect between their agency's localisation goals and the unchanged demands for elaborate steps required to certify a local partner, a difficult equation that RDPP could help to address.

RDPP's 'low key' presence has meant limited in-country added value from being a multi-donor/EU initiative. One informant noted that there are trade-offs for a donor between being part of a joint effort – lower transaction costs and perhaps stronger policy influence – and having a close bilateral relationship with partners – direct learning and donor-level ownership. Overall, the transparent and communicative RDPP PMU, and also the high quality of reporting, have meant that donors feel that a 'happy medium' has been found between being directly engaged and avoiding undue transaction costs.

The successful elements of RDPP relate to its status as a 'model' that has avoided the transaction costs, rigidity and weak field level transparency associated with other joint efforts. The evaluation judges that RDPP could become a strong(er) model for joint programming that contributes to evidence-based advocacy if it had a clearer strategy and more appropriate (longer-term) timeframe for achieving this.

3.6 EQ 6: Using RDPP results in communication and policy

This section presents findings relating to how RDPP has been used by Denmark, as well as other donors, as a model programme in policy development and dialogue.

EQ 6: HOW HAVE DENMARK AND THE OTHER DONORS TO RDPP USED RESULTS EMANATING FROM RDPP?

In the inception phase, the evaluation recognised that this evaluation question could involve looking at the extent to which Denmark, EU institutions and other donors perceive – and have actually used – RDPP as (a) a modality that can be extended to other crises and/or scaled up in the three programme countries, (b) an 'incubator' of innovations that can then be applied in other programmes in the current crisis, (c) a research/advocacy/piloting mechanism that can inform partners and headquarters offices about 'what works' and what priority needs and

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viable modalities are available, and (d) a modality to select a portfolio (and adapt ongoing programming) so as to support evidence based learning about how to adapt to the factors in the political economy that frame and constrain effective response. Some interviewees in Denmark and Brussels stressed that when RDPP was created, 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.

Overall, the findings of the evaluation suggest that these objectives have all been successfully met to varying degrees, though the extent to which this learning has diffused within donor organisations as a whole is not possible to confirm within the scope of this evaluation. 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. RDPP communications have improved considerably over time, with an attractive website and better branding, but it remains difficult for some observers to discern the (programmatic) forest from the (individual project) trees. The findings showed that the RDPP visibility generally is low.

Overall, donor learning and application of lessons from RDPP fall into two categories. The first is RDPP as 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. The second is learning and application of lessons from the specific projects and types of interventions, i.e., diffusion of programmatic innovations.

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 have been accepted as vital. It is not possible to verify, but it appears that the relative mix of autonomy (from Brussels) while also retaining a status as an EU-wide initiative has also been recognised as an area where RDPP has shown that 'it can be done'. The evaluation assesses that RDPP has potential for influencing future humanitarian and broader nexus programming and that it will continue to be a relevant programme. Particularly in a Danish context, RDPP is highlighted publicly as one of the approaches to working across the nexus that Denmark is proud of and interviews indicate that it has been widely used as an example.

Our vision is having a new and comprehensive approach looking forward at the next decade, saving lives and helping people build a future. RDPP is a key pillar in our work in responding to the Syrian Refugee Crisis. It aims at strengthening resilience and creating livelihood opportunities

through skills development and job creation. The Danish contribution is at the forefront by addressing humanitarian needs in Syria while addressing more long-term development efforts in the neighboring countries.
(Ulla Tørnæs⁵⁰, Minister for Development)

Limited 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 divisions and to use research to promote more evidence-based programming and advocacy.

Also as in Denmark, these elements led to some controversy at first, but have now been accepted as appropriate. Most notably, RDPP has been a model for exploring a different relationship between DG DEVCO and DG ECHO. This has been spurred by recognition that past efforts to link relief, rehabilitation and development have been insufficient. Relations between DG DEVCO and DG ECHO are now said to be excellent, and the RDPP experience may have been a small contributing factor in this.

In Copenhagen, Brussels and other donor capitals another major driver is that RDPP (and perhaps also the 'other RDPPs' in the Horn of Africa and North Africa, though this cannot be confirmed) has been a way to explore how aid modalities need to change in recognition of the centrality of migration in the EU development and humanitarian agendas. RDPP has been seen as a way to move from talk to action within a complicated and not always conducive institutional environment. The evaluation cannot, however, draw wider conclusions regarding how much this experience is likely to influence inter-institutional relationships in the future. As noted above, the relationship between RDPP and DG NEAR has been somewhat problematic, but there is potential for more positive learning in the future.

Regarding the second category of learning, donor interviewees expressed optimism regarding RDPP contributing to application of results through innovations being scaled-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 aid architecture may need to be modified to function better in the nexus. There is, however, a lack of clearly defined pathways and strategy for achieving such influence. The RDPP projects focused on creating an enabling environment for foresight (DSP, UNDP Sub-regional, ILO, ABAAD) appear to have good potential for future influence. In general,

50 Ulla Tørnæs' speech at a Danish Red Cross Conference in Copenhagen on the 14th of December 2017.

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the ET judges that a more proactive effort would be needed to apply lessons from RDPP more broadly in the three countries. Given the work required by the small PMU team to manage the programme itself, this would require a somewhat different strategy and structure, with mechanisms to engage at higher levels.

The evaluation has not been able to assess the extent to which either category of learning from RDPP has been applied in advocacy towards the governments in the region. Interviews provide some indications that dialogue with the PMU has contributed to a more constructive environment. In the limited interviews undertaken at donor level, and due to turn-over in some key positions, it has not been possible for the evaluation to trace how donors have used learning from RDPP in their dialogue with the host governments. Interviews did not yield clear examples of this. One donor interviewee acknowledged that “we need to be better at collecting advocacy points.”

Finally, a clear advantage of the RDPP model that has been noted by donors is that it effectively transfers risks and transaction costs in supporting national NGOs to a unit with good capacities to assess partners without undue and rigid bureaucratic procedures. This is allowing donor agencies to work towards localisation goals even when their own agency audit and certification procedures have not been modified to recognise and reduce the enormous effort needed to certify local partners.

4 CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

This chapter of the report emphasises higher level conclusions regarding the implications of the findings. To briefly summarise, the evaluation has found that RDPP has developed strong systems for flexible and constructive engagement with partners, which stems from the ‘thoughtful’ and unbureaucratic way that the PMU has worked with partners and also due to a readiness to focus on strategic gap filling. 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 between the projects/partners. Synergies with research and advocacy outside of the projects are limited thus far. This partly relates to pressured project timeframes, which have led some partners to struggle to achieve outputs and have in some instances undermined potential for greater contribution to capacity development and policy dialogue. RDPP largely functions as a regional funding structure for national projects, and the added value of regional perspectives has been difficult to realise, primarily due to the different political trajectories in the three countries.

Most importantly, RDPP has proven to be a very effective modality for practical response to a protracted crisis. 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’.

There is potential for greater return on investment in research and advocacy if linkage issues and pathways to influence were more explicit and strategic and if RDPP and its partners were more savvy in predicting potential political obstacles to bringing evidence to the attention of policy makers. It may be advisable to ‘think out of the box’ in addressing this in the future as systems would be most effective if they could be driven by the partners themselves and not rely on a ‘hub and spokes’ relationship with the RDPP PMU offices in Beirut and Amman. This could involve, for example, funding a national think tank (perhaps one in each country), with policy research experience and credentials, to manage networking and coordinate use of research to inform and advocate. These nationally owned ‘hubs’ could initiate policy influence activities,

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advise partners on potential synergies in their work, and provide evidence-based advocacy points for RDPP donors.

The relations between the NGOs and the UN with regard to research and advocacy are perhaps inevitably fraught with tensions given the different mandates, as exemplified by UNHCR concerns with DSP. It may be possible, however, to look specifically at where the UN has a less contested normative role in order to achieve synergies where possible. The UNHCR support to USJ, the UNDP work on the “Jobs Make a Difference” report and ILO’s work on child labour norms are examples of where synergies could have been – and may still be – achieved with modest additional ‘nudging’ from RDPP.

There is also a need for a more reflective and broader conceptualisation of ‘innovation’. The plausibility of the default notion of finding unique ideas that can be scaled-up is judged by the evaluation to be overstated. The evaluation does not expect that many RDPP projects can simply be scaled-up, but the lessons from these projects can contribute to more innovative thinking based on stronger foresight. RDPP has a latent potential to tie together its practical implementation experience with research and advocacy in creating more enduring ‘innovation systems’. As noted above, it may be appropriate to contract a partner research institution to lead such an effort though.

Creation of an enabling environment for foresight has emerged as one of RDPP’s strongest qualities, and in the future, it is likely that the central focus of foresight may be that of contributing to ‘durable solutions’ – in a broad sense. It is therefore important to proceed, but with due caution, with continued support to DSP, cognisant of the issues surrounding the three types of solutions of integration, resettlement and return, and also the very different dynamics at play in the three countries. Exploration of integration may be possible in Northern Iraq and could be a relatively low risk way of expanding beyond the return focus.

It is too early in the implementation of many projects and the evaluation has not been able to undertake a sufficiently granular analysis to make an empirically based assessment regarding RDPP’s contribution to the nexus at household level, i.e. how refugees and vulnerable host communities have been able to move beyond being recipients of humanitarian assistance to being proactive in pursuing economically viable livelihoods and accessing needed social protection within national systems or as a result of greater social cohesion. The progress observed and the relevance of programming suggest that these outcomes are plausible if RDPP partners are able to access support to continue programming and empower local institutions to take a leading role in future services and advocacy. For some types of programming this will require longer funding timeframes and greater acknowledgement of how the neces-

sary start-up and confidence-building phases of the projects currently often reduce actual implementation windows to less than a year.

Finally, RDPP has not been able to overcome barriers to generate a regional discourse and sharing of experience. The evaluation sees this as perhaps inevitable given the diversity in the region and the growing focus on domestic political concerns. However, if a process of returns begins in earnest in the coming years the programmatic dynamics and need to take into account livelihood opportunities and protection risks inside Syria when designing support in Lebanon, Jordan and Northern Iraq may become very different. A regional perspective may assume far greater importance.

In sum, the evaluation draws the following conclusions:

Relevance to the context has been strong, particularly in focusing programming on emergent opportunities and strategic gaps in a dynamically changing environment. RDPP has drawn on research and effective listening to remain aware of the political economies of the three countries, identifying approaches that are salient in light of the interests and incentives of different national/local and state/civil society stakeholders.

Effectiveness and impact have benefitted from the RDPP design and structure. 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.

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. However, the evaluation has doubts about the extent of plausible future programmatic sustainability due to unrealistic timeframes. It is recognised that this deficiency is not related to a lack of awareness of the problem, but rather practical circumstances in implementation. It is, however, a clear lesson for the future phase.

4.2 Lessons learnt

Below the main lessons learnt from the evaluation are presented.

Successful programmatic outcomes can be built upon by:

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- Focusing efforts on interlinkages and synergies between protection and livelihoods programming, wherein some of the most innovative programming can be found.
- Continuing to accept that a measure of strategic gap filling is part and parcel of efforts to find more effective nexus modalities, even recognising that core funding may be an appropriate entry point to give partners space to apply their local knowledge in a rapidly shifting context.

Weaknesses in achieving programmatic outcomes can be overcome by:

- Greater realism regarding inevitable start-up delays and ensuring that subsequent narrowing of project implementation timeframes is not merely accepted as an inevitable consequence of working in a volatile context.
- 'Appropriate timeframes' will vary according to each project, but need to be related to organisational and institutional processes, i.e. not just looking at the service provision or study produced, but rather at the time required to mobilise staff and partners and to (hopefully) integrate these activities into partners' ongoing systems and services and research.
- Rethinking current accountability relations to Brussels and Copenhagen so as to better incentivise ownership from donors and EU delegations in Beirut, Amman and Erbil/Baghdad and enable them to better use lessons from RDPP in dialogue with host governments.
- Recognising that the link from research to advocacy and policy dialogue is not a 'coordination' issue, but is rather one of 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 and built upon in the future by:

- Recognising the strengths in small-scale programming developed in close dialogue with partners, even if that does not necessarily feed into scaling-up.
- Recognising complementaries, and hopefully finding synergies, with large-scale modalities such as Madad.
- Continued emphasis on the qualities that have emerged from the 'added value of jointness'; i.e. flexibility and use of the RDPP PMU

to provide space to develop relations with national NGOs and host governments.

- Recognising that RDPP may not be able to produce sustainable outcomes alone, but it can and should focus on processes that contribute to sustainability through capacity development for partners that are able to provide relevant services and policy advice, now and in the future.

4.3 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, for example:

- This should include undertaking proactive efforts to inform the other RDPP initiatives of the lessons that have been learnt.
- Particular attention should be given to extracting lessons regarding practical and evidence-based responses to protracted migration crises.
- Although the use of research within RDPP has sometimes been problematic, the value and possibilities to use research have been clearly demonstrated, and this is another experience that can be replicated elsewhere as well as further strengthened in this programme.

As emphasised above, RDPP management should redesign Phase Two support to be based on more realistic (i.e., multiyear) timeframes. Many of the initial investments needed to develop trust and understanding with past and potential future partners have now been made, so it should be possible in some instances to shorten the start-up period of designing projects. If some 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. This should give more time for actual implementation, while building on existing trust in partners' abilities to respond to changing needs and opportunities. Therefore, it is recommended that the RDPP Steering Committee refine overall goals to reflect a more comprehensive perspective on how to jointly address humanitarian, development and social cohesion aims, ensuring that timeframes and modalities are conducive to capacity development and localisation through the following:

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- Some resources should be used for a specific call for proposals that involve extensions, expansions or modified reworking of projects from the first phase.
- This call for proposals may even give priority to programming that addresses capacity development needs and partnership building with small local national NGOs and local government.
- Calls for proposals and subsequent follow-up should explicitly emphasise outcomes related to enhanced organisational capacities among weaker partners and/or institutional relationships (rather than just outputs). Partners should be encouraged to explain how their RDPP-funded work is feeding into these developmental processes, even if the RDPP support only constitutes a specific set of tasks within these longer-term trajectories.
- Further background analysis is needed to gain a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics of relationships between large national NGOs and smaller civil society partners. RDPP should commission a study, involving a local research institution. One objective should be to obtain a deeper understanding of possible 'gatekeeper' functions and the challenges that are emerging with the growing role of large consortia being formed to access large trust funds. Findings may even be useful to inform the broader international discourse on localisation and the nexus.

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 next phase. The RDPP Steering Committee and RDPP management should discuss how to ensure that in the next phase these qualities are enshrined in more explicit programming policies and praxis designed to encourage innovation through:

- Staying the course, i.e. RDPP should not try to pressure its partners to scale-up rapidly, but rather ensure that the RDPP PMU maintains its current capacity and commitment for ongoing dialogue and to encourage partners to define their own preferred scale and scope.
- Depending on the scale of the next phase, further investments in monitoring capacity may be needed to maintain the qualities of the current relationship and to continue to reach small partners that cannot access support from most bilateral and multi-donor funding windows.
- Localisation efforts should be focused on ensuring that local partners are given the space and the capacity development resources they need to innovate, i.e., they should continue to be

encouraged to work closely with community based organisations and local government agencies to respond to emerging market opportunities, protection threats, etc.

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

- RDPP should bring in expertise to assist the programme to conceptualise putting research into use in terms of 'communities of practice' rather than as a 'coordination issue'.
- RDPP should issue a request for proposals to identify a local academic or think tank partner in each country that can host these communities of practice and advise the PMU, RDPP donors, other partners and policy makers on research relevant to their needs.
- An annual regional policy research conference, led by RDPP partners, may be considered to identify and encourage exchange within the region. This could be thematically focused, e.g., on future livelihood opportunities and protection risks inside Syria.
- Advocacy efforts should also include a more explicit approach (and perhaps financial inputs) for joint NGO networks and national think tanks to enable them to play an appropriate role in this regard. This could, in effect, avoid a situation of many NGOs making weak and fragmented attempts to influence governments and also enhance RDPP partners' awareness and application of the research and evidence being gathered by others.

In the coming years the role of the state 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 Lebanese and Jordanian governments. In the next phase RDPP management needs to retain a high degree of flexibility in responding to this, with what may be divergent strategies in the three countries. This implies the following:

1. Northern Iraq is most notable in this regard, with a presumable need for some form of engagement in Baghdad and a strategy to respond in contested geographical areas and perhaps IDP issues. It is recommended that RDPP rethinks its Northern Iraq portfolio with an intention to have a more clearly defined profile that reflects the shifting priorities but focuses on an area with clear added value in relation to the work of other agencies.

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2. The Durable Solutions Platform has constituted an appropriate basis for 'testing the water' with regard to the sensitive topic of returns (less so in relation to integration and resettlement in third countries). It is recommended that future efforts cautiously identify opportunities to draw on and engage with researchers in Syria to establish an evidence base for understanding livelihood trends and determine what 'solutions' are likely to be 'durable'.
3. RDPP's added value as a regional programme has been somewhat vaguely defined and some regional studies have had difficulties in obtaining traction among governments (e.g., 'Jobs make a difference') that are focused on domestic concerns. RDPP should therefore be very strategic in identifying and focusing on issues where regional cooperation will be essential, e.g., the preceding recommendation regarding possible engagement with Syria on return processes.

Currently RDPP is 'owned' by the Steering Committee consisting largely of representatives based in Brussels. In order to better facilitate policy dialogue, it is essential that accountability relations are restructured in the next phase so as to ensure that donor embassies and EU delegations in Beirut, Amman and Erbil/Baghdad also see RDPP as theirs and use it for their own advocacy.

The RDPP PMU 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, in the next phase the PMU will need increased staffing capacity to more effectively take a 'seat at the table' in coordination and policy dialogues.

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