

Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project (MERP)

Project Review



December 2022

Project Title	<p>Strengthening the Long-Term Resilience of Subnational Authorities in countries affected by the Syrian and Iraqi Crises.</p> <p>The Lebanon component: Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project (MERP)</p> <p>USD 17,025,488.90 (Lebanon)</p>
Document	MERP REVIEW REPORT - February 2023
Timeframe of the Review	January 2019 - October 2022
Date of the Report	February 1, 2023
Country of Intervention	<p>LEBANON -</p> <p>Unions of Municipalities of Tyre, Al Fayhaa, and Metn North</p>
Name of Consultant / M&E Expert	Layla G. Moubayed

TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF ACRONYMS		
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY		
I-	INTRODUCTION	
	Background - Context	
	Project Summary and Status Update	
II-	REVIEW PURPOSE OBJECTIVES & QUESTIONS	
	Purpose and Objectives	
	Criteria and Questions	
	Evaluation Methods	
	Data Collection Limitations	
III-	MERP REVIEW FINDINGS	
	Relevance	
	Coherence	
	Effectiveness	
	Efficiency	
	Cross-Cutting: Participation & Inclusion	
IV-	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BOQs	Bill of Quantities
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
DGLAC	Directorate General of Local Administrations and Councils
DoA	Document of Action
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
IoF	Institute of Finance
KII	Key Informants Interview
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP)
LED	Local Economic Development
LHSP	Lebanon Host Communities Support program
MERP	Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project
MoIM	Ministry of Interior and Municipalities
NCE	No Cost Extension
QINs	Quarterly Information Notes
RF	Result Framework
RMF	The Rene Moawad Foundation
ROM	Result Oriented Monitoring
RTO	Regional Technical Office
SO	Specific Objective
SPOs	Standard Operating Procedures
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNEG	Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background-Context. The impact of the Syrian Crisis on Lebanon has reached an unprecedented scale in the history of complex, displacement-driven emergencies. With an estimated 1.5 million refugees, Lebanon's public institutions, sub-national authorities including municipalities are facing increased pressures to deliver basic services to both refugees and vulnerable host communities. Alas, the ability of these sub-national governments to address these needs is hindered by several structural factors the most important of which are highly centralized / bureaucratic systems, overlapping and unclear mandates between various subnational actors, limited financial resources among others.

This dire situation was further exacerbated by an unprecedented economic and financial crisis, hyper-inflation and a drastic devaluation of the Lebanese currency, a health pandemic that broke out in early 2020 and called for a general mobilization, and a political stalemate that still stand in the way of financial and economic rescue plans.

Project Summary and Status Update as at September 30, 2022. Within this highly challenging program context, MERP -a three-years joint initiative by UNDP and UN-Habitat-is implemented in partnership with the MoIM with funding from the EU through the 'Madad Fund'. The project aims to strengthen the long-term resilience of sub-national authorities in Lebanon as well as host communities, refugees and displaced persons affected by the Syrian Crises. This overall project objective is planned to be realized through the achievement of three Specific Objectives (SOs).

SO1	Subnational authorities have enhanced capacities to engage in holistic, area-based planning and consider different scenarios that respond to the needs of host, refugee and IDP populations.
SO2	Service delivery is increasingly responsive, and generates greater social stability outcomes, based on the needs of host, refugee and IDP populations.
SO3	Subnational authorities are empowered to facilitate local economic development and have better access to municipal investment that benefits the extension of safe public services and economic opportunities for host, refugee and IDP populations.

MERP's geographic areas of intervention cover three Unions of Municipalities (UoMs) namely, the Urban Community Al Fayhaa (North Lebanon), the Federation of Municipalities of the Northern and Coastal Metn (Mount Lebanon), and the Union of Tyre (South), and all of their 92 member municipalities.

Launched in January 2019, the project which has experienced delays, the majority of which caused by the country emerging context, is currently awaiting approval of its 2nd no cost extension. When approved, MERP's implementation period will be extended till early 2024. MERP underwent multiple changes / amendments to initially planned activities. These changes affected project' delivery on some of its planned outputs and related outcome / results.

Most notable of the project achievements to-date are:

- Finalization of the DGLAC Review and implementation of some of its recommendations such as: DGLAC communication strategy, Web Portal and automated call centre, developing DGLAC organizational and individual Terms of Reference, roles and Codes of Conduct, carrying out quarterly Talk Shows and drafting of policy papers;
- Training of Mediation Units in each of the 3 target regions;

- Finalization of 11 municipal - financial assessments, a policy paper and on-going procurement for e-solutions;
- Development of 3 municipal training curriculum and training of master trainers (ToTs);
- Establishing and refurbishing of 3 RTOs, setting up of a hotline in Bourj Hammoud municipality; capacity assessment and development of an organizational and RTO capacity development strategy;
- Capacity building of municipalities and Unions on planning, and local economic development, and funding for implementation of 10 small-scale projects and drafting of relevant operations and management plans;
- Finalization of 3 LED assessments for the three targeted areas and development of a policy paper;
- Selection and funding for 10 Basic Services and LED projects and drafting of relevant operations and management plans.

Review Purpose, Scope and Methods. The purpose of the MERP Review is to appraise the Lebanon component of the Action - MERP approach, activities, and outputs- to assess extent of achievement of its objectives, extract lessons learned, and generate recommendations for both the final phase of the project, and the design of a potential MERP follow-up phase.

The MERP' Review, which covers the project' implementation period from January 2019 till October 2022, applied a participatory approach using a multi-methods of mostly qualitative data collection tools, to gather and analyse data, and generate insights corresponding to the MERP review objectives and evaluation questions. Research and data collection methods included: (a) a Desk Review of project' documents and other reports as relevant; (b) Key Informant Interviews conducted with a total of 33 stakeholders selected based on their role in, and involvement with the project; (c) 2 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) implemented with UoMs, municipal staff and CSO/community members in the 2 regions of Tyr and Tripoli; (d) 14 structured questionnaires that provided insights into the extent of MERP's streamlining of GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion); (e) Field visits and a closing brainstorming and de-briefing sessions with MERP Team, UNDP and UN-Habitat Management and government stakeholders. A total of 44 stakeholders (25 males + 19 Females) were reached by the various data collection methods.

Main Findings. Reported by evaluation criteria, herewith is a summary of the MERP Review findings which resulted from the analysis of collected information and data.

Relevance. MERP project overall is still relevant to the resilience needs of national and sub-national governments. MERP's interventions are planned on the basis of an integrated set of capacity assessment research, targeted institutional strengthening -capacity development, training, mentoring and coaching, and concurrent investments in solutions that addressed identified gaps and or supported basic service delivery, small or medium economic development projects. Most of the research reports produced under MERP constitute a roadmap for system strengthening of government institutions, specifically DGLAC and sub-national governments and should be considered in future project plans. Though relevant, the drastic change in MERP's operating context -country financial crisis, devaluation of public sector salaries, political stalemate... is putting MERP's interventions at risk of 'missing' the government support necessary for their implementation, and later institutionalization, specifically for systems' strengthening at the national level.

Coherence. MERP's goal and specific objectives are overall coherent with the resilience and stabilization requisites of the EUTF Syria, they are aligned with the framework of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plans, are coherent with national priorities and support implementation of pertinent policies. Project ownership and commitment is strong, with national and sub-national stakeholders confirming their commitment and ownership of both the project's process and management of its end results. The MERP project is well coordinated with other development actors and projects active in the governance sector, addressing complementarity issues as opportunities arise e.g. in the development of a unified training curriculum for municipal trainings with the Bureau Technique des Villes Libanaises (BTVL).

Though a government-led coordination mechanism is a demand of DGLAC, the prospects of its feasibility under the current context are slim. This assessment is based mainly on the general outlook of the international donor community towards the existing political landscape, and as a way to pressure the government to endorse the necessary reforms.

Effectiveness. MERP was very effective on the Activity level with the past project period witnessing a surge of activities implemented and finalized such as the DGLAC Communication Strategy, Mission, Vision, Web-Portal, Automated Call Center, Talk Shows, Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct, Training of Trainers...municipal finance assessments, RTO assessments...

Project effectiveness varies across objectives, outputs and activities. Based on desk review of project documents and analysis of stakeholders' feedback, **MERP was mostly effective in:** Capacity development on the subnational level when integrated with coaching and investment support such as Municipal Finance, RMF training on project assessment and planning, RTOs...; Design and implementation of small and medium municipal projects; Assessment research and plans; and design of institutional strengthening for DGLAC - a niche value of MERP- provided implementation of plans can be effectively supported with the needed human and other resources.

MERP was least effective in: The economic development and employment opportunities' activities mostly due to cancelling the large LED projects, challenges of PPP, country economic downturn, banking & financial crisis; Institutionalization of the Mediation and RTO units within UoMs in light of hiring freeze and potential trend towards a downsized public sector; and improved interface between different levels of government and coordination mechanism.

Efficiency. MERP's efficiency improved, but is still in need of additional enhancements to streamline work, procurement and technical approvals in a more efficient way. Whereas some efficiency issues are outside of the project direct control, such as country contextual limitations, others can be addressed now that the cause of these delays are flushed out.

Sustainability. MERP has improved its sustainability rating since its last review -ROM assessment. Still, while sustainability of project's interventions on the sub-national level is high such is the case of basic services, small and medium municipal projects and municipal finance, the sustainability of institutional strengthening plans for DGLAC are less than average, and the Mediation Units and RTOs to be embedded within sub-national governments organizational structure is a high risk.

Cross-Cutting: Participation & Inclusion. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) were integrated into project's interventions to the extent relevant and relatively possible. MERP emphasized

gender equity and the inclusion of marginalized groups, such youth and people with disabilities, among others. However, the project range of action in support of gender balance and social inclusion is limited to some extent as it works chiefly with current staff at the central and subnational level. Integrating needs of People with Disabilities (PwD) were the most challenging mostly due to technical / procurement issues.

Recommendations. Following is a summary list of recommendations based on the analysis of findings and lessons learned from the implementation of the MERP project.

Relevance. MERP is recommended to consider a scenario planning approach whereby:

- 1) Some of its objectives and ensuing activities can respond to emergent needs - such as basic procurement (equipment, tools and services), small and medium municipal infrastructure and economic development projects, also expanding geographic and population reach to other more rural areas; and
- 2) Other objectives and ensuing activities can respond to a long term vision of capacity building and institutional strengthening of national and sub-national government institutions.

Effectively, this will allow MERP flexibility in operations and an active waiting period till circumstances change, all the while using this time to undertake the necessary assessments, the result of which will constitute a solid foundation for institution building and government reforms.

Coherence. MERP should devote more efforts in the short term to the local / municipal support- while maintaining its positioning and engagement efforts with national government, pending a more enabling environment. Should UNDP decide to pursue a 2nd follow up phase for MERP, it's advised that such an engagement is coordinated and planned within the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, and coordinated first and foremost with the UNDP Country Program *portfolio approach and local area development initiatives* presently under planning and development.

Effectiveness. Based on the lessons learned from the current project, it is recommended that MERP hedge future risks by:

- Scaling up what worked best in the current project such as capacity development on the subnational level when integrated with coaching and investment support, and institutional strengthening for DGLAC provided implementation of plans can be effectively supported with the needed human and other resources.
- Expanding the project' geographic coverage to other areas on the sub-national level. This expansion will extend the benefits of the 'effective project' interventions' to other areas, which are similarly in need of such capacity development and investment support.
- Integrate institutional strengthening with capacity development *as a condition* for concurrent investment support in infrastructure, social and economic projects to target municipal actors.
- Continue support to RTOs for the foreseen period as their technical skills are much needed to support local governments in outreaching to donors, project assessments and technical designs... while also developing their capacities and initiating an exit plan.
- Review and customize the mediation training approach to the conflict management needs of municipal leaders, municipal staffs and mukhtars as part of their own work with communities.
- Pilot higher risk initiatives such as LED projects and public private partnerships on a small scale, if effective, apply learning to replicate and or scale up.

Efficiency. For enhanced efficiency, MERP is advised to organize its administrative processes for reviews, approvals, technical requirement possibly in a written manual that takes into consideration and accommodates the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of both UN Agencies, and establishes time deadlines for approvals, authority for reviews and approvals and other administrative and procurement processes. Efficiency can also be improved with a preliminary market research and an appropriate management structure that takes into consideration the lessons learned from the past implementation period.

Sustainability. MERP is advised to carefully plan its interventions based on what is 'doable' and can be institutionalized under the current enabling environment. Specifically, MERP' interventions should be planned when the following factors can be guaranteed (a) existence of need based on assessment research; (b) partners' commitment, ability and willingness to dedicate the necessary resources for operations and maintenance; and (c) users and / or stakeholders' support for these services or public amenities.

Gender & Inclusion. MERP is advised to work more closely with the UNDP Gender Advisor to:

- Develop a checklist to cover gender, youth, PwD requirements per type of activity to guide both project' staff and contractors;
- Include more gender and inclusion awareness to overcome cultural misconceptions ...
- Research and prepare a list of vendors / suppliers of equipment that cater to PwD needs.

I- INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to present the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Midterm Review of the 'Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project' (MERP) which was carried out during the months of November-December 2022.

The Midterm Review report starts with an introductory section that summarizes the context under which the project was first conceived and then implemented, and the country developments that occurred throughout and which impacted its implementation course. Following this contextual background, the report presents a summary of the MERP Theory of Change (ToC), Results Framework (RF), planned outcome results, current status and achievements to date.

The second section introduces the Midterm Review Framework, overall purpose and specific objectives, and the evaluation criteria and review questions which guided the data collection and later analysis. Following, the report summarizes the midterm review process, the research methods which were applied to collect data -mainly inputs and feedback of project stakeholders- and the analysis methods/evaluation matrix used to analyze data to respond to the Midterm review questions.

Last, the third section provides an overview of the main findings corresponding to each of the review questions organized under each of the main evaluation criteria of (a) relevance, (b), effectiveness, (c) efficiency, (d) sustainability, and (e) cross-cutting: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI). Each of these sub-sections include suggested recommendations that can provide guidance for the remaining project period and a potential second MERP phase.

BACKGROUND - CONTEXT

The impact of the Syrian Crisis on Lebanon has reached an unprecedented scale in the history of complex, displacement-driven emergencies. By October 2018, the Government of Lebanon estimated that the country was hosting an estimated 1.5 million refugees, a quarter of the total Lebanese population¹.

Lebanon's public institutions, sub-national authorities including municipalities are facing increased pressures to deliver basic services to an increasingly high number of refugees, displaced, and vulnerable host communities. Municipalities and Union of Municipalities (UoMs) are facing challenges to provide adequate housing, ensure quality public services, and create jobs for communities and refugee/displaced populations. Localities with the highest concentration of displaced and refugees' experience heightened risks of violence, intermittent tensions and insecurity. Many factors affect the host population's acceptance of displaced and refugees, including limited access to basic services, fewer hours of electricity, reduction of water provision, unmanaged solid waste and sewage as well as competition over livelihood opportunities².

This complex situation was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The first case of the coronavirus in Lebanon was confirmed on 21 February 2020. By March 2022, the cumulative number of

¹ Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, *Lebanese crisis response plan 2017-2020 (2019 Update)*, Beirut, (<https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2019/04/LCRP-EN-2019.pdf>), Accessed December 2019

² ARK Group for UNDP Lebanon, Regular Perception Surveys on Social Tensions Throughout Lebanon; Wave I narrative report, August 2017.

cases has reached 1,084,114 cases with 10,200 reported³ deaths. The general mobilization decreed by the Government of Lebanon (GoL) on March 15, 2019, puts increased pressure on subnational authorities to respond to the health crisis while also addressing the fallback of the displaced Syrians' situation and delivering quality services to their communities.

The ability of municipalities and UoMs to address these issues is hindered by several structural factors, including highly centralized/bureaucratic systems; overlapping and unclear mandates between various subnational actors; weak donor coordination around municipal engagement; limited financial resources for municipalities and UoMs and outdated municipal finance processes; weak planning; lack of staff and skilled human resources, and weak accountability.

The above situation is further exacerbated by an unprecedented economic and political crisis with nationwide protests that resulted in the resignation of Saad Hariri's government in October 2019. Since then, Lebanon's economy is on a rapid downhill track with the compounded negative effects of the COVID-19 lockdowns and the August 2020 Beirut port explosion that nearly destroyed half the capital and led to the resignation of yet another government -that of Hassan Diab.

A new government -headed by Prime Minister Najib Mikati- was finally formed in September 2021 after 13 months, during which a caretaker government with limited powers and authorities was in charge. The May 2022 parliamentary elections brought some changes to the traditional political landscape, unfortunately not enough to effect significant changes in the pre-existing balance of political powers ruling the country. These elections resulted in a divided parliament unable to elect a new country president and to subsequently form a new government able to undertake the much needed financial, economic, and institutional reforms needed to bring the country back from the brinks of financial, economic, and social disasters.

Meanwhile, a continued devaluation of the Lebanese Pound, - up to around LBP 55,000⁴ to the US Dollar from an initial LBP 1,500 at the beginning of the crisis in 2019- resulted in increased poverty, stagnating economy and a looming social crisis. The depreciated real value of staff salaries triggered multiple strikes of the public sector, which ultimately led to intermittent operations of some of the main government institutions where staff are required to work 2 to 3 days a week, instead of the usual 5 to 6 week working days. This decision was recently revoked, and public sector staff are now confronted again by transportation issues due to rising fuel prices.

The economic situation also puts additional pressure on the sub-national authorities and affects the quality of services delivered to their communities. Many municipalities have, for instance, not received IMF allocations in more than a year and when they do receive allocations it is usually two years delayed⁵. Other dues, such as taxes collected by national institutions on behalf of the municipalities (telephone-fixed and mobile lines, electricity, water, etc.) experience delays as well. With the decrease (or absence) of local municipal tax revenues -due to loss of income and increased poverty levels-, rising fuel costs, breakdown of the national electricity grid and restrictions on staffing, municipalities and unions of municipalities in Lebanon are facing increased challenges to deliver essential services to their communities, and to cover operation and maintenance costs of municipal equipment and machineries.

³ WHO Lebanon COVID-19 Daily Brief 7 March 2022

⁴ At the time of writing this report.

⁵ Last IMF transfer to municipalities was approved in August 2022 to distribute IMF revenues for the year 2020.

This multifaceted crisis is happening within a context of deep and structural gender inequalities. With a score of 0.644, Lebanon ranked 119th in the world in the 2022 Global Gender Gap Index⁶. According to the Human Rights Watch 2022 report⁷ women in Lebanon continue to face systematic discrimination and violence due to the archaic nationality law, and multiple religion-based personal status laws. Discrimination includes inequality in access to divorce, child custody, inheritance, and property rights. In refugee and displaced communities, women are the most food insecure and significantly more likely to not have a legal residence or access to adequate shelter.

It is within this context that MERP' activities are carried out. While some of these challenges were taken into consideration during project planning, other unforeseen events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, enduring government political paralysis, and continuous devaluation of the Lebanese Pound⁸ have negatively impacted project implementation, causing time delays, and necessitating adjustments to address the emerging situation. These 'adjustments' and their effect on project' initial plans will be detailed later in the report.

PROJECT SUMMARY AND STATUS UPDATE (September 30, 2022)

The 'Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project' (MERP) is a joint initiative by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat). The Project is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) and is funded by the European Union (EU through the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the 'Madad Fund'). It was initially planned to be implemented over a three-year period (2019-2021).

The Project aims "to strengthen the long-term resilience of subnational authorities in Lebanon as well as host communities, refugees and displaced persons affected by the Syrian Crisis." This overall project objective is planned to be realized through the achievement of three Specific Objectives (SOs). MERP Intervention Logic/Results Framework is structured along these main objectives designed to produce outcomes/results that would impact MERP's Overall Objective of "strengthening the long-term resilience of sub-national authorities.

⁶ <https://economics.creditlibanais.com/Article/211167#en>

⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/lebanon>

⁸ In December 2022, the Lebanese Pound was traded in the black market for an average of 45,000 LBP to the US Dollar, and is currently (early March) traded for 80,000 LBP to the US Dollar.

Overall Objective: Strengthen the long-term resilience of targeted subnational authorities and their host/refugee populations in countries affected by the Syrian crisis.

Specific Objective	SO1: Subnational authorities have enhanced capacities to engage in holistic, area-based planning and consider different scenarios that respond to the needs of host, refugee and IDP populations.	SO2: Service delivery is increasingly responsive, and generates greater social stability outcomes, based on the needs of host, refugee and IDP populations.	SO3: Subnational authorities are empowered to facilitate local economic development and have better access to municipal investment that benefits the extension of safe public services and economic opportunities for host, refugee and IDP populations.
	<p>O 1.1: Efficient & timely municipal work processes to address impact of crisis are strengthened through an enhanced administrative interface.</p> <p>O 1.2: Greater Understanding and awareness by all local actors of their role in managing the impact of the crisis achieved.</p> <p>O 1.3: Strengthened sub national government capacity on raising revenues and financial management.</p>	<p>O 2.1: Strengthened local capacity to develop, design, coordinate and implement strategic projects that will alleviate the impact of the crisis</p> <p>O 2.2: Priority basic services interventions are identified and implemented.</p>	<p>O 3.1: An Enabling Economic Environment is Created with active engagement of Local Authorities, the private sector and LED associations.</p> <p>O 3.2: Capacity at local level to identify develop, design, and implement interventions with an economic multiplier impact improved.</p>

MERP's geographic areas of intervention include three Unions of Municipalities (UoMs): The Urban Community Al Fayhaa (North Lebanon), the Federation of the Northern and Coastal Metn Municipalities (Mount Lebanon), and the Union of Tyre Municipalities (South), and all of their 92 member municipalities.

District	# Of Municipalities in the district	Targeted Union	# Of municipalities in the Union
Tripoli	4 (Qalamoun, Mina, Beddaoui, and Tripoli)	Urban Community Al Fayhaa	4 (Qalamoun, Mina, Tripoli, and Beddaoui)
Metn	54	Federation of Municipalities of the Northern and Coastal Metn	33
Tyre	62	Union of Tyre Municipalities	55

Overall, the Project aims to contribute to achieving the indicators of the below-mentioned frameworks:

Country Programme Document (CPD) ⁹	<p>(CPD 2023-2025) Outcome 2: Strengthened security, stability, justice, and social peace.</p> <p>(CPD 2017-2022) Outcome 3.1 Productive sectors strengthened to promote inclusive growth and local development, especially in the most disadvantages areas.</p>
United Nations Strategic Framework (UNSF) (Lebanon):	Core UN Priority 3: Lebanon reduces poverty and promotes sustainable development while addressing immediate needs in a human rights/gender sensitive manner.

⁹ https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3998937/files/DP_DCP_LBN_3-EN.pdf?ln=ar

Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP):	Outcome I: Strengthen the ability of municipal, national, and local institutions to alleviate resource pressure, reduce resentment, and build peace
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	<p>Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere <u>Target 1.4:</u> By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.</p> <p>Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls <u>Target 5.5:</u> Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.</p> <p>Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels <u>Target 16.6:</u> Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels <u>Target 16.7:</u> Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.</p> <p>Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable <u>Target 11.3:</u> By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.</p>

Slated to start in January 2019, the project experienced initial delays of around one year. These delays were reportedly due to challenges in recruiting the project team, most particularly its Chief Technical Advisor (CTA). Meanwhile, and due to the evolving country context with the nationwide protests and government resignation, the project carried out an inception process, which resulted in an inception report¹⁰ later¹¹ approved to guide project implementation. The inception phase led to the review, re-orientation, or cancellation of previously planned activities or procurement contracts, such as the municipal capacity assessment contract which was cancelled and replaced in part with the assessment of the DGLAC and municipal finance assessments. The municipal finance/procurement training underwent a similar re-assessment starting with plans for training on the new proposed procurement legislation with the Institute of Finance (IoF) during the inception phase, later abandoned due to IoF's withdrawal from the bid and the proposed procurement law failing to receive parliamentary approval¹².

To offset the initial delays experienced in year-one, UNDP requested in October 2020 EUTF to grant the project a one-year no-cost extension (NCE). Pending approval of the NCE request, the project underwent a EUTF ROM (Result Oriented Monitoring) assessment to evaluate project status and impending challenges. EUTF approved the NCE request in March 2021, thereby effectively extending

¹⁰ The inception report accounted for the one-year time delay, and its work plan included an additional one-year extension from the initial project end date of December 2021.

¹¹ Inception report approved by EUTF in February 2020.

¹² Public procurement later received parliamentary approval and training is now implemented by another project.

project timeline till end of 2022. Now a second NCE is being negotiated with EUTF to extend project period for yet another year -till early 2024- to provide adequate time for the project to fulfil all its planned and sub-contracted commitments.

The following summary review, achievements and status update of the MERP project main activities is presented here below to provide the background for the later analysis and evaluation review findings.

SO1: “Subnational authorities have enhanced capacities to engage in holistic, area-based planning and consider different scenarios that respond to the needs of the host, refugee, and internally displaced persons (IDP) populations.” Based on the amended DoA and MERP Inception Report, this objective will be achieved by way of fulfilling three main outputs and their planned activities.	
Output I-1: Efficient & timely municipal work processes to address impact of crisis are strengthened through an enhanced administrative interface.	
Planned Activities	Status
I-National Policy Advocacy	
I.1: The Director General of Local Administrations and Councils review is conducted.	<p>Achieved. The DGLAC Review was conducted and based on its findings, some of its recommendations are either already implemented or currently on-going such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing DGLAC logo, drafting its vision, mission, and values statements; • Developing DGLAC organizational and individual Terms of Reference, roles and codes of conduct; • Designing DGLAC Communication Strategy and implementing some of its recommendations such as the Web Portal and automated call centre (underway); <p>On-Going Base research to develop a proposed Municipal Strategy - contract signature is pending approval of the NCE.</p>
I.2: Donors coordination mechanism is established.	Under assessment
I.3: Policy Advocacy dialogue is ensured	<p>On-Going</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 Quarterly Talk Shows were implemented and others planned; • 4 Policy Advocacy papers were drafted and 3 national events organized; • On-going meetings and communication with MoIM and DGLAC;
Output I-2: Greater Understanding and awareness by all local actors of their role in managing the impact of the crisis	
Planned Activities	Status
2. Social Stability	

2.1. Mediation Units are established at union level	<p>Achieved. Mediation trainings were provided by CPM - 'Centre Professionel de Mediation (CPM)' of the Saint-Joseph University of Beirut (USJ) in all three areas of engagement¹³.</p> <p>Mediation Units are in process to be established pending institutionalization of the Units within UoMs' organizational structure, or potentially other forms of engagement.</p>
2.2: Involvement of the Subnational Government structures in the Syrian Crisis Response coordination mechanism is facilitated	<p>On-hold</p> <p>Coordination needs at national level were provided by the MERP Team and locally by the project coordinators.</p> <p>A WhatsApp-based municipal Hotline was established at Bourj Hammoud Municipality</p>
Output I-3: Strengthened sub national government capacity on raising revenues and financial management	
Planned Activities	Status
3- Procurement and Financial Management training 4- Municipal Finance Assessments and Solutions	
3.1: Procurement and Financial Management training for municipalities are provided	<p>Deleted.</p> <p>This activity was deleted from project plans initially due to the delayed parliament approval of the 'proposed Public Procurement Law' and then the withdrawal of the Institute of Finance (IoF) from the bidding. Public Procurement Training and certification is currently provided by another project.</p>
4.1: Municipal Finance Assessment for municipalities and Unions of Municipalities are conducted.	<p>Achieved</p> <p>11 Municipal Profiles and Municipal Assessments with proposed solutions were completed, and a policy paper drafted.</p>
4.2: Municipal Finance Solutions are designed and implemented.	<p>Procurement</p> <p>Contracting of the Municipal Finance Solutions -which have been proposed by the municipal assessments- are currently pending approval of the NCE.</p>
Capacity Development: ToT- Training of DGLAC master trainers.	<p>Achieved</p> <p>This capacity development initiative was introduced into project plans to build DGLAC training capacity targeting municipal stakeholders by way of Training of Trainers in Strategic Planning, GIS and Resource Mobilization. Training implemented with MASAR and delivered training curriculum, training manuals and materials.</p>

SO 2: "Service delivery is increasingly responsive and generates more significant social stability outcomes based on the needs of the host, refugee, and IDP populations." Based on the amended DoA and MERP Inception Report, this objective will be achieved by way of fulfilling two main outputs and their planned activities.

¹³ For two Unions of Municipalities and the Bourj Hammoud Municipality in lieu of the Union of Metn

Output 2-1: Strengthened local capacity to develop, design, coordinate and implement strategic projects that will alleviate the impact of the crisis.	
Planned Activities	Status
5. Basic Services	
5.1: The Regional Technical Offices (RTOs) are strengthened	<p>Achieved Strengthening of the Regional Technical Offices was implemented through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a Regional Technical Office at Bourj Hammoud Municipality; • Refurbishing the Regional Technical Office of the Urban Community of Al-Fayhaa; • Conducting of Capacity Assessment for the Regional Technical Offices of Al-Fayhaa and Tyre; • Developing Standard Operating Manual, Capacity Development Strategy and Exit Strategy for the Regional Technical Offices. <p>On-Going Remaining project period will entail implementation of assessment recommendations.</p>
Deliver training on planning and public service delivery and local economic development to municipalities and Unions of Municipalities	<p>Achieved This activity was included to strengthen local municipal capacities to assess, plan and submit proposals to MERP for the basic services, small and medium projects.</p>
Develop 20 Basic Services /LED project proposals for 20 municipalities	<p>Achieved Coupled with the training, coaching and mentoring of selected municipalities enabled them to submit project proposals that complied with MERP requirements ...to be potentially funded under the basic services component.</p>
Output 2-2: Priority basic services interventions are identified and implemented	
Planned Activities	Status
5. Basic Services	
<p>5.2: Municipal Basic Services/Procurement interventions (small scale) are implemented.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement 10 small-scale projects for 10 municipalities; - Developing Operation and Management plan for 10 projects; 	<p>Achieved & On-Going 4 projects were implemented and remaining are on-going.</p> <p>Selected projects include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 public bus projects (Deir Kanoun El Naher, Deir Kifa, and Abbasieh municipalities) and business development plans for said projects; • 4 agricultural / infrastructure projects (Cornet Chahwan, Ain Aar, Beit El Kikko & Hbous; Teirdebba; Toura, and Jbeil El Botom municipalities); • a business centre project (Nabay municipality), • a solar project (Srifa municipality), • a library project (Tripoli municipality).

SO3. “Subnational authorities are empowered to facilitate local economic development (LED) and have better access to municipal investment that benefits the extension of safe public services and economic opportunities for the host, refugee, and IDP populations. Based on the amended DoA and MERP Inception Report, this objective will be achieved by way of fulfilling three main outputs and their planned activities.	
Output 3-1: An Enabling Economic Environment is Created with active engagement of Local Authorities, the private sector, and LED associations.	
Planned Activities	Status
6. Local Economic Development Assessment and Strategy	
6.1: LED assessment is conducted	Achieved Three Local Economic Development (LED) assessments for the three targeted areas were conducted, reports issued and a policy paper drafted;
6.2: Public-Private Partnership (PPP) assessment is conducted	Cancelled
6.3: Strategic Plan for each Union of Municipalities is developed or updated	Procurement Project plans initially included ‘development or updating of three strategic plans for the three unions. MERP is now proposing to change from strategic plans to ‘Developing Economic Crisis Response and Recovery - LED Framework
Output 3-2: Capacity at local level to identify develop, design and implement interventions with an economic multiplier impact improved.	
Planned Activities	Status
7. Basic service / LED interventions	

<p>7.1: Basic service/LED projects are implemented</p>	<p>Procurement & on-Going Awareness sessions around partnerships for municipalities were delivered; 10 Basic Services and LED projects for 10 municipalities and 1 Union were Selected. Projects include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment and rehabilitation of the Al-Fayha'a Union's Fire Brigade; • Large-scale on-grid solar system and streetlights LED lamps in Deir Qanoun El-Naher; • Qana Popular Market; • Al Boustan agricultural project - rehabilitation of roads and restoration of the main water pond; • Implementation of the sewage line of the northwestern area of Teir Debba; • Rehabilitation of Souk El Hesba for the Tyre District (Caza); • Nabay Solar Project; • Restoration of the market and historical area of the Bickfaya-Mhaydseh town; and • Support to agricultural initiatives and setting up a new business incubator in Al-Beddawi. • Rehabilitating the existing well and installing solar panels and a pump to feed the SLWE grid with water for the HH in Almaa Chaab. <p>Development of Operation and Management plan for 10 projects on-going;</p>
<p>7.2: Complaint mechanism for Basic Service/LED interventions is established</p>	<p>On-Going Under implementation along with the above Basic Services and LED projects.</p>

II- REVIEW PURPOSE OBJECTIVES & QUESTIONS

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the MERP Review is to appraise the Lebanon component of the Action - MERP approach, activities, and outputs- to assess extent of achievement of its objectives, extract lessons learned, and generate recommendations for both the final phase of the project, and the design of a potential MERP follow-up phase. Specifically, the objectives of this MERP Review aim to:

- Improve future project design and implementation;
- Appraise UN joint collaboration / added value in the implementation of MERP;
- Ensure accountability; and
- Increase knowledge and understanding of the benefits and challenges of similar interventions in the future.

This MERP Review was built on the underpinnings of a previous Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) exercise, which was implemented on behalf of EUTF¹⁴ in March 2021¹⁵. The Review further expanded the scope of its assessment to focus on the achievements of the last project period (since March 2021), to appraise what worked and what did not work so well, and what are factors both internal and external that affected initial project plans. The MERP Review used an onward perspective to determine what can be replicated, scaled up, amended, and or piloted to develop the initial achievements of MERP, while simultaneously taking into consideration the emergent challenges of the country operating context and the UN Country Program for Lebanon (2023-2025)¹⁶.

MERP' Review covered project' implementation period from January 2019 till October 2022, and is intended primarily for the MERP team, UN-Habitat/UNDP management, and the project steering committee. In addition to the project partner and beneficiaries; the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, and the Directorate General of Local Administrations and Councils (DGLAC).

CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS

The MERP Review applied OECD evaluation criteria and utilized a gendered lens as a framework for the Review questions, data analysis and review findings. Moreover, the review abided by the principles of Gender Responsive Evaluations stated in UN Women Policy for Gender-Based Evaluations, by collecting to the extent possible reliable evidence-based information regarding progress made by the program towards gender equality and women empowerment and integration of human rights principles.

An initial desk review of the MERP project documents and preliminary meetings with UNDP/UN-Habitat management provided the basis to assess and refine the review questions proposed in the Terms of Reference (ToR). Following, an amended set of questions and sub-questions to cover the main OECD evaluation criteria of 'Relevance', 'Effectiveness', 'Efficiency', and 'Sustainability' were proposed in the Review Inception Report, and later approved to constitute the framework for the MERP Review data collection and analysis.

Table I that follows lists the MERP Review criteria and questions that guided the analysis and provided the framework for the review findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Table I: MERP REVIEW - EVALUATION QUESTIONS

CRITERIA	CORRESPONDING QUESTION
RELEVANCE	Q1: Given the uncertain operating context under which the project is implemented, to what extent are the project interventions <i>-originally planned and currently implemented-</i> still responding to the <i>needs and existing capacities</i> of key national and sub-national partners and project beneficiaries?

¹⁴ EU Trust Fund - EUTF

¹⁵ ROM Report included in the annexes section.

¹⁶ United Nation Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Lebanon

COHERENCE	Q2: Given the on-going political paralysis and stalled government reforms, what are national policies, plans and priorities that MERP can support to maintain project' coherence?
EFFECTIVENESS	<p>Q3: To what extent is the MERP project on track to achieving planned outputs? To realize project objectives? And what's the likelihood of impact to be generated in the long term? What are factors that supported or impeded achievement of planned objectives.</p> <p>Q4: Which project interventions proved more effective in delivering planned outputs? In supporting the achievement of intended objectives? Can they be scaled up and replicated in other regions and with other local partners?</p> <p>Q5: Based on the knowledge gained from MERP' engagement with MoIM, DGLAC, Unions and Municipalities, what are suggestions, recommendations for improved strategies, approaches and interventions which are likely to improve effectiveness in achieving project objectives?</p>
EFFICIENCY	Q6: To what extent was MERP able to address the 'efficiency' issues flagged earlier, and what are recommendations that can enhance project efficiency in future follow up programs?
SUSTAINABILITY	Q7: What is the likelihood of sustainability of project' outcomes and projected impact under the limitations and constraints - financial and staffing- currently facing its key national and sub- national partners?
CROSS-CUTTING Participation & Inclusion	<p>Human Rights: To what extent have poor, and physically challenged, women, men and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from this project?</p> <p>Youth and Gender: To what extent has MERP fulfilled the youth and gender-integration requirements? To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women? Did any unintended effects emerge for women, men, or vulnerable groups?</p> <p>Disability: To what extent were the rights of People with Disabilities (PWD) considered and respected in project design and implementation?</p>

Ethical Considerations: The MERP Review was conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation'. Data was collected with the consent of beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders, including local authorities and government officials, and anonymized to ensure confidentiality and adherence to the Do No Harm Principle. At the start of each interview and focus group, participants were informed of the purpose of the evaluation, what will be done with the information received, what participation involves (including the time burden), and other information useful to understanding the risks and benefits of involvement. They also were informed that participation is voluntary and that all collected data will be kept anonymous and confidential, and will not be shared or used except for the purpose of the analysis.

EVALUATION METHODS

MERP's review applied a **participatory approach using a multi -methods** approach of mostly qualitative data collection tools to gather and analyse data, and generate insights corresponding to the MERP review objectives and evaluation questions. Research and data collection methods included:

Desk Review of project' documents and other reports which included the amended Document of Action (DoA), MERP Inception Report; Theory of Change (ToC), M&E Plan, Communication and Visibility Plan, Annual Progress Reports, Quarterly Information Notes (QINs), ROM Reports, DGLAC Review, Communication Strategy, LED Assessments, List of Municipal Projects, Municipal Training inception and curriculum, project' ToRs and related assessment reports, UNSDCF¹⁷ and LHSP¹⁸ project documents ... Full list of documents consulted in the process of this review is provided in the annex section of this report.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). A total of 33 semi-structured interviews - 16 in-person & 17 remotely over Zoom- were conducted with key informants selected based on their role in, and involvement with the project -MERP staff, EUTF, Steering Committee members, MoIM focal point, DGLAC Interim Director, municipal leaders and staff of selected municipalities, key contractors - implementing partners, UN-Habitat, UNDP -LHSP program, other donors/organizations implementing a comparatively similar program.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD): 2 FGDs were implemented with UoMs, municipal staff and CSO/community members in the 2 regions of Tyr and Tripoli. These meetings / discussions mostly involved staff of the Regional Technical Offices (RTOs), UoMs / municipal staff, and CSO volunteers' / community members who attended the mediation training or engaged in one or another of the project activities. Data collection plans initially included one FGD to be conducted with DGLAC staff. This meeting was overlooked due to time constraints.

Brainstorming Session: To conclude the data collection / field phase, a brainstorming session was planned and implemented with MERP' project staff- leadership, senior staff and field coordinators. The session discussed data collection preliminary findings, debated solutions for current challenges and brainstormed suggestions for the remaining project period and recommendations for a potential follow-up phase.

Questionnaire: In addition to the initially planned data collection methods, a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) structured questionnaire was drafted and emailed to relevant MERP stakeholders- project staff and contractors. The purpose of the GESI questionnaire was to collect information and provide insights into the extent to which the project was able to integrate Gender, Youth and PwD- Human Rights issues within its project interventions. A total of 14 questionnaires

¹⁷ United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2025 Lebanon

¹⁸ Lebanon Host Communities Support Project 2019 - 2022

were collected and analyzed for stockholders' feedback as to the extent gender and inclusion issues were considered and included within MERP activities and related benefits.

Copy of all data collection guides / instruments is included in the annexes section of this report.

Field Visits: Field visits were conducted to two (out of the three targeted regions) UoMs where most of MERP's interventions - capacity development, small and medium scale projects- were implemented. Field visits included work sites of some these on-going projects.

De-Briefing Session: The field - data collection phase concluded with a de-briefing session which was held at UNDP premises on January 13, 2023. This session invited MERP Review intended stakeholders: MERP team, UN-Habitat/UNDP management, and project government' partner/beneficiary- namely representative of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) and DGLAC Interim Director General. The purpose of the de-briefing session was to present the preliminary findings of the MERP Review, and to provide the space for participants to discuss these findings, and to provide additional information where data gaps exist.

A list of all the people reached for their feedback, inputs, and insights throughout the review data collection phase is included in the annex section of this report. Furthermore, table 2 that follows provides a bird's eye view of the review phases, tasks, timeline, milestones, deliverables, and total number of people reached.

Implementation of the MERP Review			
	Tasks	Time Period	Milestone- Deliverable
Inception Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preliminary meetings and desk review of project documents; - Drafting and submitting an Inception Report, Work Plan and Data Collection Guides; 	Nov 16 - Dec 13	Approved Inception Report (December 13, 2022)
Data Collection Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An in-depth desk review of project documents and other reports; - Implemented KIIs, FGDs, site visits, survey, brainstorming session, and Debrief - preliminary findings; 	Dec 14, 2022 - Jan 13, 2023	Total # of people reached: 44 (25 male + 19 Female) Debriefing PPT - January 13, 2022
Analysis / Reporting Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analyse data based on review questions and Evaluation matrix; - Draft Review Report (on-going) - Respond to MERP and stakeholders' comments (planned); - Submit final Review Report (planned). 	December 27 - February 6, 2023	1 st draft report submitted

DATA COLLECTION LIMITATIONS

The Data Collection Phase of the MERP Review - proceeded as planned without impediments apart from the need for more time than originally planned to reach the intended groups of stakeholders. Nevertheless, it's relevant to highlight here couple of issues that affected and limited the review process:

- **Monetary concerns:** Almost all interviewed government stakeholders - municipal leaders and staff were mainly concerned about 'money' issues, budgets and salaries. In light of the drastic devaluation of the Lebanese currency, municipal taxes, municipal budgets and staff salaries (paid in Lebanese pounds) lost a great deal of their 'old' value. Municipal leaders complained about local taxes and budgets, and staff about salaries, up to the point where it was very challenging to steer them away from this topic towards other project-relevant issues.
- **Economic and political uncertainties.** In light of the economic and political uncertainties, most interviewed national and sub-national government stakeholders were challenged when asked to provide insights, or to respond to 'a future perspective' assessment questions. Most responses circled back to immediate and or short-term concerns as 'the future is yet to be determined' by other political, and or regional powers.
- **End of Year Holidays:** The timing of the data collection coincided with the month of December and the end-of-year holiday season. Reaching out to the targeted stakeholders or conducting face-to-face interviews proved to be quite the challenge as some of them were already on vacation, or had travelled abroad. Still, we managed to reach the most relevant of the identified review stakeholders', and to conduct remote interviews when necessary.

These limitations were primarily addressed through planning and implementing two end-of-data collection group meetings namely (a) the brainstorming session that included all project management and field staff, and (b) the de-briefing session that invited -in addition to MERP management and staff-, other UNDP and government stakeholders. These meetings aimed to cover data collection gaps (if any), to triangulate information across groups, to test preliminary findings, and to open the space for additional discussions and possibly new information to be made available.

Analysis Methods

A systematic process of organization, comparison and synthesis of the collected data was undertaken. Data analysis was guided by the Evaluation Matrix, triangulating in the process information generated through the various data collection methods and instruments. Qualitative data analysis methods included content analysis, description, comparison, explanation, etc.

Data analysis comprised a systematic assessment of information and data as relevant to each of the main evaluation questions. Data analysis findings were clustered under the main evaluation questions and criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and cross-cutting issues, which enabled the generation of robust conclusions and proposed recommendations.

III- MERP REVIEW FINDINGS


The purpose of MERP' Review is to assess the extent of MERP's achievement of its objectives, to extract learning and to generate recommendations for future project design and implementation. To meet this purpose, and fulfil the Review specific objectives, the following section will report on the review main findings organized by evaluation criteria and questions.

RELEVANCE

Project' relevance is defined as “The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to global and national needs, policies and priorities and those of beneficiaries and partner, and continue to do so as circumstances change.”¹⁹ Under the relevance criteria, this review is reporting on the analysis findings that respond to the below review question #1:

Question 1: Given the uncertain operating context under which the project is implemented, to what extent are the project interventions -*originally planned and currently implemented*- still responding to the *needs and existing capacities* of key national and sub-national partners and project beneficiaries?

MAIN FINDINGS

 **An integrated approach to 'system strengthening' is more appropriate for the long term within a reform agenda, than the present political and economic landscape, particularly for national level systems.** Previous ROM reports rated MERP's relevance to 'resilience needs' of targeted national and sub-national government partners, hosts communities, refugees and IDP populations as 'good' and 'very good'. MERP's interventions are planned on the basis of an integrated set of capacity assessment research, targeted institutional strengthening -capacity development, training, mentoring and coaching, and concurrent investments in solutions that address identified gaps or support basic service delivery, small or medium economic development projects. Such was the approach implemented with the DGLAC review that provided concrete, short, medium, and long-term reform recommendations, some of which are already under implementation. System strengthening of sub-national governments -Unions and member municipalities- applied the same integrated approach of assessments, followed by targeted solutions as is the case with the Municipal Finance, RTOs strengthening, and municipal basic services, small and medium projects.

Though this approach is appropriate for system strengthening and relevant for institutionalization of change, it usually requires a longer-term engagement than a three years' project and an effective government fully committed to system reforms, able to support and integrate these enhancements. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the current sharply divided political landscape, under a caretaker government with limited authorities and burdened with high public debts. The financial crisis and drastic devaluation of the 'real value' of public sector salaries resulted in 'fragile' government institutions working intermittently with a diminished number of staff, and under a government hiring freeze.

 **Support for basic services, municipal small and medium projects were reportedly the most relevant of MERP's interventions to the present municipal context.** Grappling with

¹⁹ Criteria as defined in the UNDP Evaluation handbook

an increasingly complex situation, national authorities are relying more and more on sub-national governments to address the gaps in its own services. The Syrian refugee crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, electricity and water shortages, currency, and transportation issues all of which created increased pressures on local governments to respond to people's basic needs. Considering the 'added burden' delegated to local governments -water, pumps, electricity, solar, health and safety...- coupled with diminishing budgets (if any), the 'basic services, small and medium projects' were reportedly the most relevant to the present municipal context. MERP's approach in capacity development of municipal staff through training and coaching in 'planning and public service delivery, local and economic development', enabled municipalities and Unions to submit project proposals -compliant with MERP's requirements- for basic services, small and medium projects which were selected for funding and later implementation. These projects -listed earlier under MERP's summary- covered transportation buses, solar power and street solar lights, incubator and business centers, agricultural projects and others. Municipal finance solutions also proved to be very relevant to municipal institutional needs, and have been implemented using a similar approach. This approach consisted of a finance assessment for a select number of UoMs and municipalities financial systems to identify threats and weaknesses of its supporting systems, and then proposed recommendations that will integrate e-solutions with training and capacity development of relevant staff. These recommendations are currently under bidding for later implementation.


✚ **Research and Assessment reports established a solid evidence-based foundation for strategic engagement with national and sub-national municipal actors, specifically applicable to a potential follow-up phase.** MERP's approach to institutional strengthening is built on start-up research assessments and strategy development that identifies concrete, short, medium, and long-term action plans to address institutional gaps and system strengthening needs of targeted institutions. Such is the case of the DGLAC Review, Communication Strategy, LED and RTO assessments...etc. These documents constitute a roadmap for strengthening the systems and processes of the target institutions. MERP is / will be implementing few of the short term recommended interventions that proved to be feasible within the current project scope and operational context such as the DGLAC Web Portal and Automated Call Center, ToRs and code of conduct... Still, to be effective, it is imperative that the remaining recommendations are carried forward for implementation in a potential follow up phase when a more stable and supportive political and financial environment is availed.

✚ **Relevant but at Risk: Integration or institutionalization of MERP's capacity development interventions vary.** Integration or institutionalization of MERP's 'system reforms' and capacity development interventions is highly dependent on 'government(s)' ability, and at times willingness, to devote the necessary resources -mainly human resources needed for training and later operation:

- Mediation Units and the Regional Technical Offices are not likely to be integrated within sub-national governments' organizational structure as originally planned, at least not in the immediate and short term. To clarify, this shortcoming is not due to UoMs reluctance to integrate these units but rather due to the public sector hiring freeze, depleted budgets and municipal financial resources still collected in Lebanese Pounds.
- Municipal capacity development -'finance' and 'planning, public service delivery, local and economic development' is likely to be integrated as these interventions do not require hiring of (new) staff

or municipal investments, and directly benefit local governments by improving their abilities to comply with external donors' requirements.

- Institutionalization of MERP's interventions with DGLAC is / will depend to a great deal on the national government's ability -and at time willingness, to allocate the necessary resources: Human, physical premises, and support logistics such as the Web portal, hotline. communication strategy, municipal training curriculum, Code of Conduct.

 **Emerging more basic needs and gaps than originally planned due to the 'contextual environment'.** Last but not least, though MERP's interventions were deemed as relevant to needs and institutional gaps - confirmed in the inception report and various assessments- other more basic needs have meanwhile emerged due to the deteriorating contextual environment. Main concerns voiced by national and sub-national government stakeholders is the financial situation (salaries and budgets) and the more pressing need for tangible support such as the case of DGLAC with computers, and complaints of the time it needed till the "visible projects" are up and running.

COHERENCE

Project' coherence is defined by the question "How well does the intervention fit? The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution."²⁰ Under the coherence criteria, this review is reporting on the analysis findings that respond to the below review question #2:

Question 2: Given the on-going political paralysis and stalled government reforms, what are national policies, plans and priorities that MERP can support to maintain project' coherence?

Implemented in March 2021, the ROM report assessed MERP coherence as relatively good. This assessment was based on the following issues:

- MERP's goal and specific objectives respond directly to the resilience and stabilization requisites of the EUTF Syria: "To address longer-term resilience needs of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, as well as supporting host communities and their administrations".
- The project is aligned and coherent with the framework of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP, 2018-2019) and the related Lebanese crisis response plan 2017-2020 (2019 Update). It specifically addresses the "3RP Resilience/ Stabilisation component" and its Livelihoods/ Social Cohesion sector.
- Project interventions are directly coordinated with the relevant government leaderships, are aligned with national priorities and support implementation of pertinent policies. MERP is hosted at the premises of both MoIM and DGLAC. This positioning is particularly relevant as the project seeks to strengthen local/regional multi-level governance systems based on current laws (such as Decree 4082 regulating MoIM, Access to Information Law, municipal finance,

²⁰ Criteria as defined in the UNDP Evaluation handbook


procurement...) and to enhance donors' coordination around municipal engagement and capacity development.

- Project ownership and commitment is strong both at the central as well as sub-national level. Stakeholders acknowledged project' relevance to their needs and confirmed their commitment and ownership of both the process and management of the end results.
- The project has been addressing complementarity issues with other donors and projects as opportunities arise e.g. the Municipal Training curriculum under development by the Bureau Technique des Villes Libanaises (BTVL).

However, since then, the project context has changed drastically, thereby affecting project coherence. At the risk of repeating ourselves, it's relevant to mention that the stalled political landscape (inability to elect a country president, to form a new effective government, and to implement the requested reforms), the free downfall in the value of the Lebanese currency and the various public sector strikes erupting every now and then, has seriously affected project' coherence specifically as it relates to government partners' ability to support, integrate, and later operate some of the planned and proposed institutional strengthening initiatives mostly at the central level. Due rising cost of transport and the depreciated value of public sector salaries, public sector staff are hardly attending to their functions, also some of the main public services are lacking or intermittent, (such as such driving permits, family or personal civil record). Subsequently, government ability to invest in, or support new initiatives is seriously constrained.


Following are the main analysis findings under the coherence criteria

MAIN FINDINGS

 **One of the MERP' main drive is to strengthen institutional systems' and processes of national and sub-national governments, also with plans for when a more enabling environment can be available.** Primarily, the MERP project aim at:

- **Maintaining** provision of municipal services, and potential support for economic opportunities to Lebanese host communities, Palestinian refugees and displaced Syrian. Acting on the local level, and in partnership with sub-national governments, MERP is delivering on this objective via strengthening sub-national governments' ability to maintain provision of municipal services with the small and medium scale municipal projects, and strengthening systems with capacity development in municipal finance, local and economic development-project assessment, studies and design, RTOs and Mediation units.
- **Enabling** government(s) institutions to potentially deliver on their legal mandate through provision of capacity development, support systems, and tools. Acting on the national level, and in partnership with DGLAC, MERP is establishing a foundation which will strengthen DGLAC systems and processes to enable the directorate to deliver on their national and legal mandate.

With this approach MERP is addressing the ‘resilience needs’, which are very relevant to the present circumstances, and coherent with EUTF and other international donors’ efforts to support ‘resilience and stabilization objectives’ in a period of economic and political uncertainties. At the same time, MERP is setting a foundation for institution strengthening that goes beyond ‘resilience and stabilization’ to local development and accountable governance more appropriate to a ‘reforms perspective’ for when ‘a new government’ has the will and mandate to implement the necessary comprehensive reforms demanded by the IMF (currently under negotiation) and other international donors. Moreover, both of the project aims are coherent with ‘the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework’ (UNSDCF) 2023-2025 for Lebanon, and the UNDP Country Programme Document for Lebanon 2023-2025.

 **Project plans for a government-led coordination mechanism for municipal support are unrealistic under the present conditions.** By Law, DGLAC is supposed to play a crucial role in providing administrative oversight, capacity development, and evidence-based planning support for Lebanese municipalities and Unions of Municipalities. In addition to managing the Independent Municipal Fund (IMF), DGLAC is also entrusted with managing the Municipal Observatory, to generate and publish data about municipal affairs. However, since its inception in 2000, DGLAC has been facing chronic challenges. Most of these challenges, which include underfunding, understaffing, lack of digitization, and internal governance gaps, are directly correlated with the overarching conditions and the broader political environment affecting the Lebanese civil service and the public administration²¹. Of note, a previous attempt by the World Bank to institute a Municipal Observatory was not successful.


With reference to the MERP project, original plans under “output 1.1: Efficient & timely municipal work processes to address impact of crisis are strengthened through an enhanced administrative interface”, included the establishment of a ‘Donors’ Coordination Mechanism’ for municipal support. The ROM report of March 2021 mentioned plans by MERP “to fast track and combine the implementation of a Municipal Observatory -one of the potential recommendations of the DGLAC assessment- with the ‘Donor Coordination Mechanism’ via hosting it on the IMPACT²² platform.” MERP’s plans have changed meanwhile, and the project is currently planning to undertake the development of a Municipal Support Strategy via research and related data collection, to set the stage for the operationalization of the Municipal Observatory (contract signature for this research is awaiting EUTF approval of the NCE), and thereby also supporting a government led-coordination mechanism.

Though a government-led coordination mechanism is a demand of DGLAC, the prospects of its feasibility under the current context are slim. The justification for this assessment is based mainly on a general climate of distrust and perceptions of government’ corruption and inefficiencies by the donor community. Also as a way to pressure for government reforms, the international donors’ community is and will be reluctant to get involved in a government-led donor coordination mechanism. This position was clearly expressed following the Beirut Port Blast with the establishment of “The Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) - November 2020” designed as a collaborative platform that is based on the participation of the government, civil society, the private sector as well as development partners. Other supportive evidence in reference to this assessment lies in the MERP

²¹ Review of the Directorate General for Local Administrations and Councils - September 2021.

²² Inter-Ministerial and Municipal Platform for Assessment, Coordination and Tracking.

project experience itself, when the project attempted to include municipal leaders in the UN cluster coordination meetings at the local level, and were not successful in doing so.

 **The MERP project is well coordinated with other development actors active in the governance.** Numerous national and international donors and projects are active in the municipal sector -capacity building, social cohesion and investments to address the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on subnational governments. MERP interventions are coordinated with many of these actors based on area of intervention, potential complementarity or overlap. The most recent and relevant of which are VNGI' (International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands) Local Governance MASAR Project, and BTVL (Cités Unies Liban / Bureau Technique des villes Libanaises) in the development of a unified training curriculum for municipal trainings. So far, three training curriculum packages were developed and piloted, and a ToT of Champions - Master Trainers conducted.

Within UNDP, MERP is mainly coordinated with the LHSP project where both projects work at the local level to address the effects of the Syrian crisis in communities, with MERP differentiated by its 'systems strengthening' approach also at the national level.

EFFECTIVENESS

Project' effectiveness is defined as “The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.”²³ Under the effectiveness criteria, this review is reporting on the analysis findings that respond to the below review questions #3, 4, & 5:

Question 3: To what extent is the MERP on track to achieving planned outputs? To realize project objectives? And what's the likelihood of impact to be generated in the long term? What are factors that supported or impeded achievement of planned objectives.

Question 4: Which project interventions proved more effective in delivering planned outputs? In supporting the achievement of intended objectives? Can they be scaled up and replicated in other regions and with other local partners?

Question 5: Based on the knowledge gained from MERP' engagement with MoIM, DGLAC, Unions and Municipalities, what are suggestions, recommendations for improved strategies, approaches and interventions which are likely to improve effectiveness in achieving project objectives?

Project Variance since Inception: Prior to presenting the effectiveness analysis of the MERP, it's relevant to point out here that some of MERP's originally planned activities, and for various reasons, have either been cancelled, or reframed into a changed focus. These deviations from, or adaptations to original plans are listed here as they provide some insights into why results in certain areas were limited. Most notable of these changes are:

²³ Criteria as defined in the UNDP Evaluation handbook


- Training on the then proposed and now adopted Public Procurement Law, initially planned as part of institutional strengthening of sub-national governments, was cancelled (refer to project summary).
- Planned assessment to promote Public Private Partnerships at the sub-national level was cancelled from the initial project plans as the new PPP Law was deemed too complex for this level of government.²⁴
- An 'Enhanced Administrative Interface' was reconsidered with plans first underway to potentially replace it with a Municipal Observatory, and then changed again to an assessment designed to develop or a Municipal Strategy. Donors' Coordination Mechanism, a main activity under objective I, is under assessment and should be reconsidered, as a government-led coordination is not presently acceptable by international donors due to a climate of distrust.
- The devaluation of the Lebanese Pound compelled MERP to a direct implementation approach of the small scale projects/ municipal projects, initially planned to be in the form of grants to sub-national governments. This change entailed additional time and technical assistance efforts on the part of the project to deliver on planned outputs.
- Implementation of large LED projects was cancelled.

MAIN FINDINGS

To appraise the effectiveness of the MERP in achieving its planned objectives, we will first review the effectiveness of implemented activities, then the likelihood of achieving its outputs and subsequently realizing planned objectives, and then infer on the likelihood of impact on the project goal.

On the Activity Level. Review of project' documents and interviews with stakeholders revealed a surge of activity implementation during the past period. Activities which were carried out and finalized during the past year include: DGLAC Communication Strategy, Mission, Vision, Web-Portal, Automated Call Center, Talk Shows, Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct, Training of Trainers...

On the sub-national level, activities completed and finalized include the Mediation Training; LED assessments and Policy Paper, RTO assessment inclusive of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and recommendations for Capacity Development and Exit Strategy, the municipal financial assessment was completed and procurement of e-solutions underway, procurement and implementation of basic services, small and medium projects are on-going

 **MERP overall is very effective on the Activity level.** Implementation is designed in an integrated and sequenced way from assessment to activity design, training / coaching (when relevant), procurement and then implementation. Such was the case of the DGLAC Review, Communication Strategy, small and medium projects, RTO assessment.

²⁴ See page 13 of https://transparency-lebanon.org/Uploads/Library/257/download/de1e724c-dccc-43a1-9a05-d22f84a3d921_257.pdf

✚ **Project’ assessments incorporated recommendations and at times action plans.**

Project assessments, in addition to an in-depth analysis of the ‘area under consideration’, included specific recommendations and action plans for implementing these recommendations organized for the short, medium and long term. These reports provide a set of guiding documents that can be considered as a roadmap for future engagement with national and sub-national governments, provided the political will and economic environment is permissive to such developments.

✚ **Overall effective, still some activities need to be revisited for improved outcomes.**

Such activities include: (1) the Mediation Units which, though the training was very effective, should have considered the challenges of creating or integrating a new unit within UoMs when hiring of staff is suspended; (2) ToT of champions on Strategic Planning, GIS and Resource Mobilization, proved to be effective in creating a training curriculum, training manual, and the implementation of training workshops on these topics for municipal staff in Metn and Al Fayha’a. These trainings are planned to be carried forward by DGLAC later in implementation of the MoIM mandate to train municipal leaders and staff. Though the training of trainers was effective, it seems that these champions still need additional skills or field experience to be able to effectively train others on these subject matters; and (3) Quarterly Talk Shows provided a good channel to initiate a dialogue and prompt an exchange between DGLAC and sub-national governments. Still, the project needs to improve its outreach to a larger number of municipalities and to cover subject matters more oriented towards issues of concerns to the daily work of these municipal leaders such as ‘Municipal Taxes & fees’, land issues, Activating Municipal Committees...²⁵

✚ The effectiveness of MERP’s approach, which was mainly due to an integrated and sequenced set of actions from assessment to activity design, training / coaching, procurement and then implementation also meant:

- A lengthy and time-consuming process unlikely to deliver on all planned results within its set timeframe;
- Project adaptations to ‘changed context’ make it look like ‘a set of interrelated activities’ of ‘what can be done’ in light of partner government limitations;
- Research documents and strategic recommendations will be at high risk of staying on paper if MERP is unable to secure funds for a follow up phase and government political will and commitment do not materialize.

On the Output and Objective Level. To assess MERP’s effectiveness in achieving planned objectives and related outputs, this review analysis and subsequent findings were based on the project’ Results Framework using a comparative analysis of planned objectives and outputs, associated indicators, set targets versus achieved²⁶. Findings from this comparative analysis were also triangulated with feedback from relevant stakeholders to elaborate, support and or explain project’ achievements or lack thereof.

Prior to presenting the review findings, it’s important to offer here two explanatory notes: (1) data used in the comparative analysis of indicators’ results is based on the QIN report that cover information up

²⁵ Please refer to the M&E data and Poll Results for additional details.

²⁶ Analysis is based on indicators’ numbers reported in Year3 - Quarter3 which provides data up till September 30, 2022.

till September 2022. Meanwhile, this data might have changed / improved with the on-going implementation of project' activities; and (2) changes / adaptations to the project' original plans (listed earlier) should have been associated with adaptations to the project' Results Framework, as major activities were reconsidered and thus, will not be reporting data on their relevant indicators²⁷.

Specific Objective 1: Limited to Average achievements and project effectiveness under this objective. Based on the project ToC, this objective is planned to be realized through the achievement of its three outputs. The detailed analysis that follows provides the supportive data for this finding.

SO1: Subnational authority have enhanced capacities to engage in holistic, area-based planning and consider different scenarios that respond to the needs of host, refugee and IDP populations (SO 1 target systems reforms and capacity improvement)		
Indicator: # of weeks required to proceed with approvals of municipal requests between all level of government.	Target (s)	Achieved
	Duration of process reduced by 50 %	0
Indicator: # Subnational authorities display improved and more transparent financial management practices	At least 5 Municipalities publish budgets and hold public consultations and 3 Union/Cluster of Municipalities publish budgets	0
Highly unlikely to achieve any data for indicator #1 as some of its supporting activities and related output will not be realized. Likely to achieve the target for indicator #2 based on the activities and related outputs already realized or which will be attained by the end of the project timeline.		
Output 1.1: Efficient & timely municipal work processes to address impact of crisis are strengthened through an enhanced administrative interface		
Indicator: # of subnational authorities benefiting from improved interface between different levels of Government -	Target (s)	Achieved
	At least 10 municipalities and 3 unions/clusters of municipalities	0
Indicator: # of subnational authorities staff/officials and DGLAC staff trained on municipal administrative process (sex disaggregated)	At least 10 Staff from the DGLAC	3 (2F, 1M)
Likely to achieve sufficient results on the 2 nd indicator as most of MERP's implemented activities under this output were concerned with enhancing DGLAC institutional capacity. Unlikely to achieve any results on "the improved interface" as the project will not be implementing the donor coordination mechanism, Policy dialogue covered so far couple of policy papers, the Web portal will provide a communication window rather than an interface, and MERP is still researching its approach for a "Municipal Observatory" or a Municipal Strategy.		
Output 1.2: Greater Understanding and awareness by all local actors of their role in managing the impact of the crisis achieved		
Indicator: # of Municipal Council members and civil society actors attending training sessions (sex disaggregated)	Target (s)	Achieved
	At least 80 Municipal council members and civil society actors from 30 Municipalities and 3 Unions / clusters of Municipalities are trained	54 persons (32F; 22 M)
Indicator: # of Curricula developed on issues associated with managing impact of the crisis and other conflicts, including guidance notes targeting local level leaders	1 Curricula developed and 1 guidance note developed	1 curricula
Indicator: # of mayors, RTO staff engaged in the Crisis Response coordination structures at the local level	6 mayors, 3 RTOs	1 Mayor / 1 RTO

²⁷ MERP submitted a revised Result Framework for EUTF approval along with its second NCE request.

Likely to achieve sufficient results on the 1 st indicator with the Mediation Training now completed. It's unlikely that the two other indicators will change from the data reported here as future plans do not cover any activity that correspond to these 2 indicators and "involvement of Subnational Government structures in the Syrian Crisis Response coordination mechanism" proved to be non-feasible.		
Output 1.3: Strengthened sub national government capacity on raising revenues and financial management. (SO2 seeks improved basic services delivery)		
Indicator: # Subnational authorities published budgets	Target (s)	Achieved
	At least 5 municipalities and 3 union / cluster of municipalities publish budgets	0
Indicator: # of subnational authorities with additional sources of local revenues	At least 5 Municipalities and 3 union of Municipalities	0
Indicator: # of subnational authorities staff/officials trained on Municipal Finance, including subjects such as budgeting, revenue collection, transparency and gender sensitive budgeting (sex disaggregated)	At least 23 staff from 20 Municipalities and 3 Unions / clusters of Municipalities are trained	0
Indicator: # of technical guidance documents on public advice developed – (COVID-related, to align with EUTF KPI 43)	1 guidance document	1
Though still reported as zeros, MERP is likely to achieve significant results on these indicators as municipal finance assessment is completed and e-solutions and other trainings are underway. Still, the second indicator should be reconsidered as "additional sources of local revenues" will not likely be generated under the current financial context, within the project timeline.		

Specific Objective 2: Above Average achievements and project effectiveness under this objective. Based on the project ToC, this objective is planned to be realized through the achievement of its two outputs. The detailed analysis that follows provides the supportive data for this finding.

SO2: Service delivery is increasingly responsive, and generates greater social stability outcomes, based on the needs of host, refugee and IDP populations. (SO 3 supports Local Economic Development LED).		
Indicator: # of vulnerable Lebanese and refugees have access to improved services (sex disaggregated)	Target (s)	Achieved
	137,500 vulnerable Lebanese 24,375 Syrian Refugees 27,750 Palestine Refugees	126 Persons - Women: 64 - Men: 62 (Lebanese 71, Syrian 9, Palestinian 46)
Very likely to be achieved by the end of the project timeline with the on-going implementation of the basic, small and medium scale projects. Beneficiary numbers reported might be less though as the large LED projects were cancelled.		
Output 2.1: Strengthened local capacity to develop, design, coordinate and implement strategic projects that will alleviate the impact of the crisis.		
Indicator: # of subnational authorities staff/officials received on-the-job training on planning and public service delivery and local economic development (sex disaggregated)	Target (s)	Achieved
	at least 80 staff from 20 municipalities and 3 unions/clusters of municipalities staff are trained.	Total: 82 persons / 18 municipalities and 2 UoMs.
Indicator: # of Regional Technical Offices established and operational	3	3
Already achieved planned results under this output with the RMF training that coached and supported sub-national governments to assess and draft projects which will be funded by MERP under the basic, small and medium scale projects, the Bourj Hammoud RTO and the RTOs assessment and plans for capacity building.		

Output 2.2: Priority basic services interventions are identified and implemented.		
Indicator: # of basic services/Procurement interventions implemented	Target (s)	Achieved
	11	3
Indicator: # of Operation and Maintenance plan for Basic Services/Procurement interventions	11 O&M plan	0
Highly likely to be achieved by the end of the project extended timeline as some of these projects are already completed and others on-going or under procurement.		

Specific Objective 3: Limited achievements and project effectiveness under this objective.

Based on the project ToC, this objective is planned to be realized through the achievement of its two outputs. The detailed analysis that follows provides the supportive data for this finding.

SO3: Subnational authorities are empowered to facilitate local economic development and have better access to municipal investment that benefits the extension of safe public services and economic opportunities for host, refugee and IDP populations		
Indicator: # of Strategic development plans developed/Updated at the Union of municipality level to respond to the needs of host and refugee populations	Target (s)	Achieved
	3 Strategic Plans -Develop 1 strategic plan for Metn UoM; - Update the strategic plan of Tyre UoM; - Update the strategic plan of Al-Fayhaa UoM	0
Indicator: # of vulnerable Lebanese and refugees have access to employment opportunities (sex disaggregated)	1000 (Exact # to be identified during the 1st year of implementation)	0
Highly unlikely that indicator #1 will be attained as strategic plans are now replaced with “Economic Crisis Response and Recovery LED Framework” Highly unlikely that indicator #2 will report any significant data when compared to target -1000 as the LED projects have been cancelled. Only the LED assessment was completed and its findings do not really support economic -private sector investments and partnerships.		
Output 3.1: An Enabling Economic Environment is Created with active engagement of Local Authorities, the private sector and LED associations.		
Indicator: # of partnerships initiated between public and private sector	Target (s)	Achieved
	At least 1 initiative per union of municipalities is developed and implemented	2
Indicator: # of awareness sessions with subnational authorities to promote public - private partnership	At least 5 Awareness sessions conducted for 15 Municipalities and 3 Unions	6
Not likely to be attained as ‘Enabling Economic Environment’ though some numbers are reported under the specific indicators. Still worth it to highlight that the 2 initiatives reported here are of a public sector and civil society (NGO) partnership implemented by the Beddawi municipality.		
Output 3.2: Capacity at local level to identify develop, design and implement interventions with an economic multiplier impact improved		
Indicator: # of Basic Services/LED interventions implemented	Target (s)	Achieved
	7	0
Indicator: # of gender sensitive Basic Services/LED interventions identified, developed, and implemented	3	0
Indicator: # of Operation and Maintenance plan developed for municipal Basic Services/LED interventions	10	0


Though numbers are still reported as zeros, these indicators are likely to be reached by the end of the project timeline with the implementation of basic service projects and development of O&M plans currently underway. Still, indicator # 2 and 3 should have been amended and “LED” deleted as the large LED projects were reconsidered and deleted from the project plans.

Based on this overview, feedback from stakeholders and review of research reports, **MERP was mostly effective in:**

- Capacity development on the subnational level when integrated with coaching and investment support such as Municipal Finance, RMF training on project assessment and planning, RTOs...
- Design and implementation of small and medium municipal projects;
- Design of institutional strengthening for DGLAC - a niche value of MERP- provided implementation of plans can be effectively supported with the needed human and other resources;
- Assessment research and plans;

Least effective were:

- The economic development and employment opportunities' activities mostly due to cancelling the large LED projects, challenges of PPP, country economic downturn, banking & financial crisis (refer to the LED assessment).
- Institutionalization of units within municipalities and UoMs in light of hiring freeze and potential trend towards a downsized public sector.
- Coordination mechanism, improved interface between different levels of government; Policy Dialogue;

 **Analysis of MERP Results' Framework and Quarterly Reporting Notes (QINs) provided insights into a 'bias' that affected timely reporting on MERPs outcomes.** The project M&E plan, which was submitted along with the inception report, provides an overview of the project Results Framework (RF), and identifies a set of indicators for each result level including for MERP's Overall Goal (impact), Specific Objectives (Outcomes) and Outputs. Each indicator is associated with a specific definition that describes what the indicator will measure, which data will be counted, and how data will be collected and analysed. Overall, MERP's RF indicators are clear, well defined and directly linked to the result they are supposed to measure.

Still, when we review project' QINs we note that many indicators have reported for quite some time zeros, and some are still reporting zeros up till now, though multiple activities have been implemented, activities that should have reported some numbers on the output indicators' level. An in-depth analysis of this issue uncovered a fundamental weakness that account for this shortcoming namely: What has been listed under 'activities' is really an output level result for example “Donors' coordination mechanism is established”, “Policy dialogue is insured” since multiple tasks / activities should be implemented before this 'activity level' is reached. The same is valid for the project' outputs which are set on an intermediate outcome level such as “efficient & timely municipal work processes to address impact of crisis are strengthened through an enhanced administrative interface.” This fundamental gap produced 2 misgivings: (1) the project will not be reporting any significant outcome/result before a long time, and (2) the 'general' phrasing of some activities allowed MERP to interpret or misinterpret activities differently

such as 'interface' for 'municipal observatory' or municipal strategy, 'policy dialogue' for talk shows or policy papers

Last but not least, as noted earlier, changes / adaptations to the project' original plans should have been accompanied by a concurrent change in the results framework, related indicators and targets, specifically when major activities are cancelled, activities that would have had an impact on the relevant output and outcome indicators.

EFFICIENCY


Project' efficiency is defined by the question "how well are resources being used? The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way."²⁸ Under the efficiency criteria, this review is reporting on the analysis findings that respond to the below review question #6:

Question 6: To what extent was MERP able to address the 'efficiency' issues flagged earlier, and what are recommendations that can enhance project efficiency in future follow up programs?

The previous ROM monitoring report had rated MERP's efficiency as 'poor' on the basis of 8 questions and sub-questions, the result of which was a 'problems' rating (yellow color). This 'poor' 'efficiency' rating was due to a large extent to extensive time delays, the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound which compelled MERP to shift to direct management of some of its procurement and a complicated implementation mechanism that involves a regional program and two UN organizations with different implementation, reporting and procurement procedures.

Hence, this review of MERP's efficiency has focused on assessing to what extent was MERP able to address the 'efficiency' issues flagged in the ROM monitoring report, to enhance its implementation efficiency in the last project period, and what are recommendations to apply in the future to avoid similar shortcomings.

MAIN FINDINGS

 **Project' efficiency improved recently, but is still less than the required level.** The project is currently awaiting EUTF approval of its second No Cost Extension²⁹, negotiating an additional one-year time period to fulfil all of its on-going and planned project commitments. Project initially slated to conclude in January 2022 is now extended, when NCE is approved, till early 2024 .

Noted earlier, the project realized during the last period major achievements with the completion of main activities, procurement and planning of numerous others. Reportedly, some of the initial factors that affected project efficiency and delayed its implementation schedule were addressed to some extent. Ways to tackle the different procurement requirements and compliance procedures between the two

²⁸ Criteria as defined in the UNDP Evaluation handbook

²⁹ MERP's NCE was approved during the process of drafting this report, extending project timeline till early March 2024.

UN agencies (after some missteps) were addressed to some extent, and actions taken to speed up the timespan needed to issue a 'contract' effectively reduced.

Another major factor that accounted for time delays was the absence of engineering and legal advisory staff within the MERP structure. Such technical skills are needed to review and approve the compliance of engineering designs and legal documents of the basic services, small and medium scale projects, which will be funded under the project. This issue was partly addressed by embedding two UNVs engineers with the engineering staff of the UNDP LHSP (Lebanon Host Communities Support Project) to speed up this review and approval process. The legal compliance differences between the two agencies - UN Habitat and UNDP- are still cause for debate at times, depending on the specific project. Whereas the Rene Moawad Foundation (RMF) was tasked with reviewing and ensuring all legal approvals and supportive documents were ensured prior to the final approval of the municipal project, different legal viewpoints or sometimes compliance requirements between UNDP and UN-Habitat caused additional documents' requests, and time delays till a consensus is reached on the 'legal aspect of said municipal projects.

Another feature that needs to be reported here, and which affected project' efficiency is the multiple layers of approvals needed before an initiative can be launched on the ground. Depending on the specific task, approvals are needed from both UNDP and UN Habitat for ToRs, BoQs, designs, legal compliance. Another set of approvals is needed from government partners -DGLAC and MoIMs depending on the document under review and the endorsement it requires. Such would be the case for example for the DGLAC review, the communication strategy, the Web Portal and its hosting ...etc. Translation of documents to Arabic is yet another factor that requires time and is cause for delays for quality assurance, specifically when translation needs to conform to the Arabic legal and sector language, and 'specific terminology' used in the Lebanese state. This multi layered approval processes, and by so many actors, can account for lengthy delays till a project is finally up and running, specifically if time deadlines are not set, or previously agreed upon to receive comments or final approvals / endorsements.

Other contextual factors that affected MERP's efficiency is the disruption in the market supply, and supply chain for construction materials, equipment, tools and professional expertise. Due to an unstable foreign currency exchange market and the unofficial (black) exchange market, numerous materials equipment and tools, which used to be in ample supply, are currently unavailable or available pending time delays. Moreover, professional experts, with the appropriate experience and technical knowhow, have left the country looking for better economic opportunities outside Lebanon. Both of these issues rendered procurement a time consuming and at times a difficult process. This situation was further compounded by the intermittent operations of state institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic and the financial crisis, where much needed legal documents from the cadastral areas needed extensive time to be secured.

SUSTAINABILITY


Project' sustainability is defined by the question "Will the benefits last? The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue."³⁰ Under the sustainability criteria, this review is reporting on the analysis findings that respond to the below review question #7:


Question 7: What is the likelihood of sustainability of project' outcomes and projected impact under the limitations and constraints - financial and staffing- currently facing its key national and sub-national partners?

ROM monitoring report assessed MERP' 'sustainability' on the basis of 5 questions, the result of which was one rating as 'very good/good' and the remaining 4 as 'problems' (yellow color). Basically, sustainability is built-in within the project design, but the financial crisis that the Lebanese government is facing has created critical sustainability issues. Hence, this review is focused on assessing to what extent was MERP able to address these emergent financial and staffing limitations within its national and sub-national partners.

Appraisal of the sustainability of MERP' interventions with national and sub-national government stakeholders took into consideration multiple factors, the most relevant of which are (a) extent of institutional commitment to the proposed or implemented enhancements, (b) the stage at which 'the project' is handed over to the beneficiary institution and (c) most importantly, the ability of said institutions to operate 'the project or unit' (skilled human resources and operational costs) and maintain the provision of benefits it generated.

MAIN FINDINGS

 **Sustainability of basic services, small and medium municipal projects is high.** Though municipal projects vary in (a) type and monetary investments (solar power, water and agricultural infrastructure, markets, transport, business incubators...); (b) technical skill requirements; and (c) operational and maintenance costs, these issues were carefully taken into consideration during project selection, and addressed in project designs. Business and operational plans (to be) drafted, market assessments conducted, skills training integrated (if needed), and maintenance costs of technical equipment³¹ for the first couple of years included within the procurement contract. Thus, it is highly likely that municipal governments will maintain operation of these projects as long as needs exist for such services, benefits are derived by users, and operational costs are self-generated by the services the project is providing or producing.

 **Sustainability of capacity development in Municipal Finance is high.** MERP's integrated approach to capacity development in municipal finance -assessment, activity design, procurement of e-solutions, and then implementation and training / coaching of municipal staff- is very likely to be sustained after project closure. This assessment is based on multiple factors including (a) skills training is integrated in the scope of MERP's intervention; (b) maintenance costs for technical equipment³² are covered for the first years in the procurement contract of e-solutions; (c) municipalities are committed to such improvements in municipal work as it increases their compliance with government financial

³⁰ Criteria as defined in the UNDP Evaluation handbook

³¹ Or covered under equipment guarantees.

³² Or covered under equipment guarantees.

regulations; and (d) similar interventions in the past and the applied learnings that addressed some of their shortcomings.

✚ **Sustainability of ‘units’ to be embedded within sub-national governments**
organizational structure is a high risk. MERP’ sustainability plans for “strengthened long-term resilience of targeted subnational authorities” included embedding two units within the organizational structure of Unions of Municipalities, namely Regional Technical Offices (RTOs) and Mediation Units. Whereas RTOs’ salaries are presently supported by UN -Habitat till the end of the project period, Mediation Units were supposed to be newly instituted within UoMs at the end of the training, capacity development and other instructional plans.

Again, considering the current public sector financial situation -diminished local and national resources still collected in Lebanese Pounds, and a long-standing public sector hiring freeze, it is highly unlikely that UoMs will be able to (a) establish the Mediation Units and (b) support the salaries and operational costs of the established RTOs at the end of the project period. Still, it’s relevant to report here two givens that might revise the sustainability assessment of RTOs: (1) prior to the financial crisis some other UN Habitat supported UoMs undertook to cover around 35% of the operational costs of these units, and (2) MERP undertook an in-depth assessment of the 3 RTOs involved in the project, and proposed a set of organizational plans and capacity development along with an exit strategy which, if and when implemented, can increase the RTOs’ sustainability prospects.

✚ **Sustainability of institutional strengthening plans for DGLAC are less than average.**
Though MERP is implementing a similar integrated approach for the institutional strengthening of DGLAC as with sub-national governments, DGLAC has to grapple with an additional set of challenges due to national context factors namely: (a) Political will and commitment to endorse and integrate such upgrades or additions; (b) DGLAC is presently lacking the necessary human resources to fulfill its legal mandate and mobilization of such resources is a challenge; and (c) ‘users’ or ‘customers’ of such services i.e. sub-national governments have either to abide or make use of such improved systems, which is not guaranteed within the current political divide. MERP has so far implemented interventions that seek to establish an organizational foundation such as the DGLAC Review, Mission Vision and Logo, ToRs and Code of Conduct, Communication Strategy, Web Portal and Call center. MERP current plans include research to propose - a Municipal Support Strategy which would later (in a follow up phase) support the institution of a Municipal Observatory, - setting the foundation for a uniform capacity development of sub-national governments (leaders and staff) through empowering Master Trainers, and developing municipal training curricula. These organizational foundations run the risk of coming to a standstill if ‘government’ does not fully commit to support their implementation, and or does not devote the proper human and other resources for their later operations.

CROSS-CUTTING: PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is a concept that addresses unequal power relations experienced by people on the grounds of gender, wealth, ability, location, caste/ethnicity, language and agency or a combination of these dimensions. It focuses on the need for action to re-balance these power relations, reduce disparities and ensure equal rights, opportunities and respect for all individuals regardless of their social identity. GESI are core development objectives, fundamental for the realization of human rights and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes.

Alternatively, Gender Integration or Mainstreaming is a method that addresses the women and men, in a programming activity, meant to ensure that societal inequalities are not perpetuated throughout the activity, and Inclusive Development refer to development activities that include marginalized people in social, economic and political processes.

Under the cross-cutting issues, this review is reporting on the analysis findings that respond to the below 3 review questions:


Human Rights: To what extent have poor, and physically challenged, women, men and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups benefited from this project?

Youth and Gender: To what extent has MERP fulfilled the youth and gender-integration requirements? To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women? Did any unintended effects emerge for women, men or vulnerable groups?

Disability: To what extent were the rights of People with Disabilities (PwD) considered and respected in project design and implementation?

Before we address these questions, it's important to point out that 'Gender Equality and Social Inclusion' is not the main focus of the project, and what we're assessing here is the extent to which MERP streamlined and was able to integrate gender and social inclusion issues into its programming and potential benefits.

MAIN FINDINGS

 **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) were integrated into project interventions to the extent relevant and relatively possible.** MERP emphasized gender equality and social inclusion in almost all of its activities: Municipal teams were trained on gender and inclusion issues, municipal projects integrated gender in proposals' design and later selection, municipal projects included facilities for gender and inclusion of PwDs' access as feasible, MERP' research and assessments involved women when possible. However, due to the scope and technical nature of these assessments, gender and inclusion issues were only marginally considered. The following provides a more detailed picture of MERP's streamlining of GESI.

GENDER

- **On the project' management level:** MERP emphasized gender in all of its ToRs issued for procurement, for example, the LED assessments ToR identified specific groups such as women, youth, people with disabilities to be considered as part of the assessment, the DGLAC review ToR considered gender at DGLAC... M&E data is collected and reported as sex-disaggregated data for the relevant indicators. In the design of the municipal projects, municipalities were trained on gender and requested to form teams that includes both men, women, and youth, for the research and design of these projects. Additionally, selection of municipal proposals included a scoring criterion that assessed gender inclusion and participation. In Communication, gender topics were covered in the Talk Shows, and women were featured in communication products, quarterly newsletter, content and visuals.

- **On the project / activity level:**

For the basic services / municipal projects, whereas some of these projects benefit men more directly such as agriculture or markets, others may more directly benefit women's groups such as the Bickfaya- Mhaydseh rehabilitation project, and still others benefit all community groups equally, such as the Solar Power, Nabay Business Centre, Water & Sewage projects, and the fire brigade project.

Capacity development / Training activities interventions worked toward ensuring to the extent possible equal participation of men and women such as the selection of candidates to attend the Mediation trainings, champions to participate in the ToT trainings on Strategic Planning, GIS and Resource Mobilization and to facilitate sessions within their localities, RTO staff ...etc.


For the research assessments, streamlining gender was more constrained than in trainings or municipal projects. According to the contractors surveyed for this review, couple of factors limited gender parity, the most relevant of which are (a) limited number of women in the public sector (DGLAC Review) (b) very few women mayors (LED assessment) - addressed by inviting female associates and local development agents. Also the fact that couple of contractors did not see the issue of gender integration as relevant to their assessment, such was the case of the municipal assessment and DGLAC communication assessment, and felt that gender is needlessly pressed without any significant relevance to the assessment issues under consideration.



YOUTH

MERP's efforts at youth participation and integration in project' interventions included: Coordination with UNDP Youth Leadership Program and youth participation in panel discussions for the LED research in the three UoMs, youth volunteering in launching the Bourj Hammoud hotline after the Beirut Blast through graffiti, workshops and awareness, the Nabay Business Center which benefits mostly youth, the Qana Market offers a platform for youth entrepreneurs to sell their products, and will be including around 15 youth volunteers to support in the promotion of the market, Deir Qanoun El Naher solar project which included training youth -5 females and 5 males- on PV Solar Energy, and the Baddawi project which specifically targets youth and young people.

However, the project deals mostly with public institutions thus, participation and involvement of youth is limited to some extent due to the specificity of the targeted stakeholders.

Persons with Disabilities

 **Integrating needs of People with Disabilities (PwD) were the most challenging mostly due to technical / procurement issues.** Similar to gender and youth, MERP's interventions included and integrated to the extent possible the needs and concerns of PwDs where relevant, specifically reference accessibility issues in the municipal projects. Such was the case of the Qana market that included a lift to ensure access to PwD, the Bickfaya- Mhaydseh road safety rehabilitation was designed to facilitate the movement of PwD including ramps from the street to the sidewalk and parking slots, the Beddawi Castle which integrated a ramp to facilitate PwD' access to the ground floor. However, the project was not able to address all accessibility issues such as:

-  in the procurement of buses for physically disabled - reportedly due to expensive technical fittings and later maintenance;
-  accessibility of infrastructure to people with visual disabilities - impairments (blinds).

IV- CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Project Relevance

In conclusion, MERP's project overall is still relevant to the 'resilience needs of national and sub-national government' though its operating context has drastically changed meanwhile, which makes some of its interventions at risk of 'missing' the government support necessary for their implementation, and later institutionalization, specifically for systems' strengthening at the national level. Most of the research reports produced under MERP constitute a roadmap for system strengthening of government institutions, specifically DGLAC, and should be considered in future project plans if and when a more enabling political and financial environment is insured.

To enhance project relevance in a potential follow-up phase, it is recommended that MERP on the level of:

Activities: Continue and expand the scale of activities that responded to the institutional strengthening needs of sub-national governments such as municipal finance, project planning, and subsequently to the needs of host, refugee, and IDP populations such as small and medium scale projects.

Implementation Approach: Replicate successful approaches of integrating capacity development, systems reforms and investments to other 'vulnerable geographic areas'.

Geographic Areas: Expand range of operations to other areas - sub-national governments with similar needs (hosting refugees, displaced and vulnerable population groups) such as municipalities in rural areas relative to the present project' focus on urban areas and sub-national governments enrolled in UoMs.

Long Term Vision- Maintain project' vision of institutional strengthening / system reforms, and implement such improvement plans when these plans are jointly agreed upon with national government, who confirms both willingness and ability to support the institutionalization of such reforms- prior to implementation.

Scenario Planning:- Planning a MERP Phase II under the present context of uncertainties and country financial meltdown is quite the challenge. Thus, it is recommended that MERP consider a scenario planning approach whereby:

- (1) Some of its objectives and ensuing activities can respond to emergent needs - such as basic and small municipal procurement of equipment, tools and services.³³; and
- (2) Other objectives and ensuing activities can respond to a long term vision of capacity development and institutional strengthening of national and sub-national government institutions.

Effectively, this will allow MERP flexibility in operations, while still maintaining its commitment to institution building and government reforms.

Implementing Party: The MERP Team and UNDP.

³³ Such interventions need to be coordinated with similarly oriented programs where relevant

Project Coherence

In conclusion, the project overall is still coherent in spite of the ‘changed context’. Working at both the national and local level, this coherence is mostly challenged at the national level with the impediments faced by DGLAC in providing a suitable ‘context’ for MERP’s interventions. Coherence will surely improve *if and when* the government agrees and endorses the reforms demanded by the international community, thus setting Lebanon on the road to recovery, good governance, accountability and transparency.

MERP’s interventions are well coordinated at both the national as well as the local level. Meanwhile, coordination of municipal support under a government-led initiative is assessed to be ‘unrealistic’ in light of the present outlook of the international donor community towards the existing political landscape. Still, it’s important for the international community to maintain the resilience and stabilization efforts of MERP and other projects when the Madad fund expires, as there is an inherent risk of forced returns of displaced Syrians, or civil unrest in case of dwindling resources to support host, refugee, and displaced communities.

To enhance coherence, MERP is advised to:

On the strategic level: Devote more efforts in the short term to the local / municipal support- while maintaining its positioning and engagement efforts with national government, pending a more enabling environment.

On the action planning level: Undertake preliminary research / assessment with the main international donors and projects active in the governance sector and other relevant stakeholders - **once the framework for this coordination mechanism is better defined**, to assess their readiness to cooperate and to participate under such a mechanism. Assessment results can then guide MERP’s decision with reference to this ‘government-led coordination mechanism’ and its operational framework.

For a MERP Follow-up phase: Such an engagement should be planned within the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, and coordinated first and foremost with the UNDP Country Program portfolio approach and local area development initiatives presently under planning and development. This coordination will aim to ensure division of ‘actions’ and complementarity with other on-going UNDP programs, most particularly LHSP, based on each projects strength areas and proven achievements.

Implementing Party: The MERP Team and UNDP.

Project Effectiveness

In conclusion, project’ effectiveness is affected by both external as well as internal factors. The external factors - contextual in nature, were detailed extensively in the ‘background’ section of this report, and includes the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2019 popular uprising, the Beirut Port explosion, a political stalemate and the ensuing country financial and economic crisis. The internal factors - management in nature, were presented in the project summary section, and includes delays in recruiting the Chief Technical Advisor and an inception process that led to the review, re-orientation, or cancellation of previously planned activities or procurement contracts.

Project plans - initially ambitious for a 3 years' project under 'normal circumstances', fell short of achieving its economic employment component, also due to lack of an enabling environment. Project effectiveness varies across objectives, outputs and activities. MERP Theory of Change (ToC), Result Framework and M&E plan should have been reviewed and amended (a) when important activities were cancelled or reconsidered as they will potentially affect MERP reporting on planned results, and (b) when strategic contextual factors proved to stand in the way of implementing initially planned and strategic activities.

Based on the lessons learned from the current project, it is recommended that MERP hedge future risks by:

Continuing and expanding what worked best in the current project:

- Such as capacity development on the subnational level when integrated with coaching and investment support e.g. Municipal Finance, RMF training on project assessment and planning, design and implementation of small and medium municipal projects.
- Geographic coverage to other areas on the sub-national level. This expansion will extend the benefits of the 'effective project' interventions' to other areas, which are similarly in need of such capacity development and investment support. The geographic expansion will extend the project reach to a larger number of sub-national governments, thus providing more opportunities in the identification and selection of municipal governments both open, willing and able to be involved in such partnerships

Improving what needs to be tweaked for improved effectiveness by:

- Customizing the mediation training approach to the conflict management needs of municipalities and providing such trainings -if needed, to municipal leaders, municipal staffs and mukhtars as part of their own work (instead of instituting a mediation unit), since they are the ones on the frontline of conflict between people, their own constituency and refugee groups.
- Devising plans for institutional strengthening of DGLAC during the project design phase and implementing these plans when effectively supported with the needed human and other resources.
- Undertaking additional assessment research, when this research can lead to specific plans that can be implemented under the present country challenges.
- Integrating institutional strengthening with capacity development *as a condition* for concurrent investment support in infrastructure, social and economic projects to target municipal actors;
- Maintaining and improving support to the Regional Technical Offices for the foreseen period as their technical skills are much needed to support local governments in outreaching to donors, project assessments and technical designs..., specifically during these times when (a) municipal staff is hardly attending to their duties because of salary issues, and (b) most municipal projects are donor supported rather than from their own resources. Still, the organizational issues, gaps and weaknesses identified in the RTO workshop and RTO assessments should be previously addressed for improved RTO effectiveness, and effective support to municipal governments. A potential RTO exit strategy that can be piloted in a MERP 2nd phase is to institute a non-governmental community-

based organization to be associated with the municipal council. This NGO will aim to pursue donors as well as private contributions to support municipal infrastructure and development projects, it can receive and spend grant funds, and it can hire the trained RTOs as staff (thus addressing some of the limitations inherent to municipal management). The effectiveness of the RTO staff will then be determined by their ability to raise funds, to develop and implement projects on behalf of the municipality, and to cover operational expenses including their salaries. To ensure the association of this NGO with the said municipality, the municipal leadership will be heading the board of this community based organization and will be changed when new elections bring a new leadership.

Piloting higher risk initiatives on a small scale:

- Such as LED projects and public private partnerships. If effective, then apply learning to replicate and or scale up. PPP can take several forms starting from a simple service contract or a management contract, which are more suitable to sub-national governments, and which do not necessarily have to apply the more complex PPP Law. It's also advisable to research already existing municipal PPP projects e.g. the cases of Jezzine Union of Municipalities, Municipality of Qabrikha, Fayhaa Union of Municipalities, Bikfaya-Mhaydseh municipalities, to assess factors of success and inherent challenges, to extract learning that can apply to the future pilot LED initiatives.

Implementing Party: The MERP Team, UNDP and UN Habitat

Project Efficiency

In conclusion, MERP' efficiency improved, but is still in need of additional enhancements to streamline work, procurement and technical approvals in a more organized and efficient way. Whereas some efficiency issues are outside of the project direct control, such as the country contextual limitations cited above, others can be addressed now that the cause of these delays are flushed out.

Should UNDP and UN Habitat decide to join forces again in the implementation of a MERP follow up, it is recommended that the lessons learned from the implementation of this MERP be put to good use in improving efficiency and administrative coordination. Suggested recommendations are:

On the administrative level: Processes for reviews, approvals and technical requirements are clearly delineated from the beginning, possibly in a written manual that takes into consideration and accommodates the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of both UN Agencies, and establishes time deadlines for approval, authority for reviews and approvals and other administrative and procurement processes.

On the management level: To assess the technical requirements and projected workload of each project position, and design an adequate management structure and staff positions -technical and management- to effectively and efficiently (a) coordinate with the relevant departments of both UN Agencies and (b) deliver on the planned project tasks and activities.

On the procurement level: To undertake a market research that identifies and list all providers of equipment, materials and tools that might be procured in the scope of the municipal projects, and outreach to them when needed.

Implementing Party: The MERP Team, relevant administrative, financial and technical departments within UNDP and UN Habitat.

Project Sustainability

In conclusion, MERP has improved its sustainability rating since its last review -ROM assessment. While improved, sustainability issues are still a risk factor for some of MERP' interventions. Sustainability is a risk factor in all development projects but is especially relevant in 'system strengthening' of national government interventions that require partner' commitments to institutionalization and the longer term. Still, these risks can be addressed with careful assessments, designs and a joint partnership approach again, provided the political climate is suitable for such reforms.

MERP is advised in the next project phase to carefully plan its interventions based on what is 'doable' and can be institutionalized under the current enabling environment and expand its engagement with government stakeholders if and when circumstances improve. Specifically:

On the national level: MERP' interventions should be planned to be implemented when the following factors can be guaranteed (a) existence of need based on assessment research (already done in most areas); (b) a confirmed commitment with reference to the government' ability and willingness to dedicate the necessary resources for operations and maintenance (premises, staff, and operational expenses); and (c) willingness of sub-national governments to cooperate / make use of these services / provide the necessary information OR national government authority and ability to enforce this cooperation down to the sub-national level.

On the sub-national level: MERP's interventions should be planned to be implemented when (a) needs exist, as is the case with the on-going municipal finance assessments and municipal projects; (b) a confirmed commitment as to sub-national governments ability and willingness to dedicate the necessary resources for operations and maintenance (premises, staff, and operational expenses), as is the case with the on-going municipal projects; and (c) users of these services in addition to willingness and ability to pay for such public amenities (municipal solar power) .

Implementing Party: The MERP Team, UNDP and UN Habitat.

Cross Cutting: Participation and Inclusion

To conclude, MERP emphasized gender equity and the inclusion of marginalized groups, such youth and people with disabilities, among others. However, the project range of action in support of gender balance and social inclusion is limited to some extent as it works chiefly with current staff at the central and subnational level.

It is recommended that MERP, in a follow up, work more closely with UNDP Gender Advisor to address the constraints that were faced in the present phase, maybe through:

- Researching and preparing a list of vendors / suppliers of equipment that cater to PwD needs;
- Developing a checklist to cover gender, youth, PwD requirements per type of activity to guide both project' staff and contractors;
- Include more gender and inclusion awareness to overcome cultural misconceptions ...

Implementing Party: The MERP Team, UNDP Gender Advisor

ANNEXES - MERP Review

ANNEX I: Terms of Reference

ANNEX II: Evaluation Matrix

ANNEX III: Data Collection Guides

ANNEX IV: List of People Met

ANNEX V: Desk Review Documents

ANNEX VI: ROM Report