Management response

**Final Evaluation of the *“Strengthening the Role of Local Communities/Mjesne zajednice in Bosnia and Herzegovina”* Project**

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| Date:  | 10 May 2019 |
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**Overall reflection by UNDP on the Final Evaluation Findings**

* UNDP is pleased to see that **the Final Evaluation affirms the positive achievements** resulting from the Project work, its **structural role in reviving and giving a voice to communities** in partner local governments, as well as the recommendation for the Project next phase, all of which are substantiated by data and feedback from various Project counterparts.
* UNDP is also pleased that the Final Evaluation has unambiguously confirmed the **strong relevance of the Project to the overall political, social and institutional country context,** not only in terms of the scope of work, but also from viewpoint of its citizen-oriented approach.
* UNDP agrees with the finding that **the Project has an important contribution to both local governance changes**, as well as in the future – to the **wider public administration reform professionalisation process,** particularly from viewpoint of **transparent, accountable local governments and citizen-centred public service delivery**.
* UNDP is pleased to see that **the wider impacts and changes felt at the local level as a result of the Project work are mainly positive**, manifested through pro-active and empowered MZs, more alert and responsive citizens, behavioural changes within communities, increased agency of women, reinstated connections between MZs and local governments, increased citizen interest and participation in community life, increased inclusion of marginalised people, restored people’s hope that change is possible, etc.
* The Final Evaluation **captures the prevailing “system errors”** that need to be considered and addressed for sustainable and systemic change in this domain, alongside some critical observations linked to the lack of united front among local government leaderships in relation to the concrete direction of potential MZ-related legal reform. These aspects will be taken into consideration in the forward-looking thinking.
* UNDP takes note of the finding related to the **positive influence of sound and diverse partnerships during the Project implementation and multiplier effects achieved through these partnerships** – e.g. with MZs, communities, local governments, civil society organisations including women’s groups, institutions and policy-makers, and importantly alliances with people themselves - and will ensure that the underlying principles of *bottom-up approach,* gender sensitivity and inclusiveness when it comes to partnerships and the resulting gains of the first phase are embedded in all future efforts.
* UNDP regrets to see that **the Final Evaluation neither investigates nor assesses, in any systematic manner, whether and if so - then to what extent system changes or transformations have occurred in relation to downward responsiveness of local governments and improved public services** (Outcome 2), which is central to this intervention.
* UNDP does not agree with the finding of the Final Evaluation report that “***there is no direct, planned collaboration between different projects*** (e.g. local governance interventions, such as the Integrated Local Development project and the Municipal Environmental and Economic Governance Project) ***at this stage***”, based on the fact that the Project has been programmed as part of the wider local governance portfolio and has concrete programmatic synergies and joint approach to transforming the local governance system, acting from various angles (i.e. systemic link of MZ plans with development strategies, voicing out MZ in Municipal Councils, etc.) that together construct a wider complementary approach among relevant interventions.
* UNDP expected **that the Final Evaluation would provide more critical, analytical and constructive findings** that go beyond the well- established facts. It was expected that the Final Evaluation would assess, for example, ***the used approaches*** – what has worked and what not; ***relevance of the impact hypothesis*** and need for its adjustment, especially as we look forward; ***linkages between the forward-looking vision and the already set in the Project Document end-of-first phase of the project pathway, systemic changes***, etc.), which would have been useful in informing strategic recommendations and charting the way forward.
* UNDP regrets to see that **the Final Report provides only partial generic findings in relation to gender equality and social inclusion**, which are not then adequately embedded in the forward-looking vision and approaches. The two distinct topics are in fact treated jointly and/or interchangeably and not in the needed depth, despite a very nuanced approach by the Project. Furthermore, in treating social inclusion and gender equality issues, the report failed to differentiate between vulnerable groups and vulnerabilities, and between gender equality, parity, gender mainstreaming and women as *agents of change* approach. Especially, the gains of applying women as *agents of change* approach – that resonated well with both people and authorities and that has in a way become a distinct project “brand“ was not adequately captured. This is a pity, as capture and proliferation of this experience would have been useful for replication as a good practice elsewhere.
* UNDP finds that the **proposed forward-looking vision is rather generic and rests on the approach of “doing more of what has been done”**, while a linkage with a wider success model and scaling-up strategy towards the end-vision is missing.
* Finally, UNDP regrets to find that **the Final Evaluation does not** fully synchronize **with the Project results measured through its results framework**, capturing measurable and substantiated achievements against the main indicators and their targets (outcomes and output levels).

**SPECIFIC COMMENTS by UNDP on the Final Evaluation Recommendations**

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| **Evaluation recommendation 1. An effort should be made to institutionalise the establishment and official endorsement of the new vision of mjesne zajednice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Various platforms, such as the entity associations of municipalities and cities (AMCs), should be utilised to share mjesne zajednice methodology and examples of substantial improvement in local government (through amendment of local government and/or mjesne zajednice statutes or decisions).** |
| **Management response: UNDP agrees with this finding. UNDP agrees that efforts should be invested to further advocate and support the process of institutionalisation of the new vision of mjesne zajednice, until its full and official endorsement** |
| **Key action(s)** | **Completion date** | **Responsible unit(s)** |  |
| **Comments** | **Status****(initiated, completed or no due date)** |
| 1.a UNDP concurs that a continued cooperation with all reputable strategic institutions, including Association of Municipalities and Cities (AMC), should take place to further diffuse products and tools developed by the Project (such as MZ methodology) with the aim to modernize MZs and improve their efficiency. The focus may be targeted towards popularizing new Vision of MZ and its benefits, as well as making adequate structural arrangements to support the transformation. | 9/2020 | UNDP, MZ Project |  | Initiated |
| **Evaluation recommendation 2. Implement a structured advocacy campaign aimed at the endorsement of systemic legislative change that will build on the work done and the lessons learned during Phase 1 of the Project. Various innovative approaches should be applied including a) familiarising the presidents of the AMCs and their respective members in Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the introduced changes and using the AMCs platform to raise public awareness, b) organising workshops for mjesne zajednice to discuss the various legal implications of the legislative changes and c) establishing partnerships with the media in order to increase public awareness regarding the recommendations and the need for systemic legislative change.** |
| **Management response: UNDP agrees with this recommendation.**   |
| 2.a Innovative advocacy campaign that takes on board all relevant stakeholders with the aim to back and promote should be put in place.  | 9/2020 | UNDP, MZ Project | To this end, the Project has already developed an advocacy plan that lays out the specific roles for AMC in connection to this issue- with both immediate and far-reaching roles and targets. | Initiated |
| **Evaluation recommendation 3.**  I**mprove financial mechanisms of legislative and planning processes located at local governments and mjesne zajednice to support citizens’ initiatives.** |
| **Management response:** In principle, UNDP agrees with the rationale behind the proposed intervention as a long-term strategic objective. However, systemic and structural interventions are needed to support citizens’ initiatives. |
| 3.a Ensure an enabling environment such as adequate legislative framework to secure firm obligation towards MZ by LGs. This needs to be backed up by a corresponding criteria and capacity building for LGs.  | 9/2019 | UNDP, MZ Project | The Project has already taken steps in this direction by developing relevant legislative amendments. | Initiated |
| **Evaluation recommendation 4.**  **Redesign local government. Support new profiling and restructuring of local government administration by helping the existing staff to become a more responsive resource for improved and effective work with mjesne zajednice. This can be done in many ways, including changing job descriptions, the creation of operational teams, setting up a specific department or identifying individuals who will be responsible for improving and standardising methods of work with mjesne zajednice.** |
| **Management response:** UNDP agrees that significant reforms to cut the red tape and improve efficiency of BiH administration are indeed needed at all levels. Even though an actual redesign of local government cannot be influenced directly, UNDP agrees to continue supporting partner LGs in their process of re-inventing themselves, in line with its mandate and engagement in the Project. |
| 4.a The Project will support LGs in setting up ‘operational teams’ that are composed of existing staff, to deepen LG support to MZs.4.b As a complementary effort, new channels of communication and tools for citizen engagement are being introduced through technologies in order to modernise workflow and processes and foster interaction with citizens.  | 9/2020 | UNDP, MZ Project |  | Initiated  |
| **Evaluation recommendation 5.**  Systematize incentives for mjesne zajednice through the allocation of grants by local government for various initiatives to support change at the local level. This could include a small grants scheme to support citizen initiatives for mjesne zajednice and CSOs, support for community hub initiatives and committing to the creation of incentives for mjesne zajednice staff. |
| **Management response:**  **UNDP fully agrees with the underlining principles of this recommendation. This recommendation is tied in and correlates strongly to the evaluation recommendation number three, as the former is related to securing a systemic arrangement, and the latter one is an extended arm at the local level contributing strongly to its realisation.**  |
| 5.a Support change at the local level through jointly addressing the identified priorities to support citizen-led initiatives, foster cooperation between MZs and civil society, MZ staff incentives, etc. is fully in tune with the bottom-up-approach applied by the Project. The strength of this approach is in investing in ideas of people and relying on resources of people in communities - which directly develops ownership and builds human capital. | 9/2020 | UNDP, MZ project |  | Initiated  |
| **Evaluation recommendation 6.**  Support social inclusion and gender mainstreaming by strengthening development capacities of local government and mjesne zajednice in terms of addressing the lack of understanding on what constitutes and how to address social exclusion. Combine this with a strategic gender sensitive planning and monitoring process, which is critical for ensuring sustainable gender-sensitive mjesne zajednice. This can be effectively done by further widening opportunities for women to act as agents of change in their communities and by expanding the potential for women’s leadership and activism. |
| **Management response: In principle, UNDP agrees with this recommendation but within boundaries of the legal opportunities and limitations of MZs.** |
| 6.a Regarding social inclusion, the Project commits to continue being involved in raising awareness about socially excluded groups, data mapping and analysis derived from findings and recommendations of Human Development Report on Social Inclusion. 6.b Regarding gender equality and empowerment of women, UNDP commits to work on several parallel tracks. The first is gender mainstreaming of all project interventions. Secondly, monitoring and evaluation will be fully gender-sensitive and the Project will collect sex disaggregated data that are in turn regularly analyzed to achieve parity on all fronts. Thirdly, gender specific activities will be implemented where the need is or where gaps prove to be too high. Women as drivers of change will continue to be applied as an overarching approach- whereby underutilized resources of women at the community level are being tapped into, and spaces and opportunities provided by the project- to create a multiplier effect, and ultimately contribute to social change. 6.c In particular, synergetic actions aiming at further strengthening of leadership of women through Women in Elections project will be jointly designed and implemented for multiplier effect. | 12/2019 | MZ project |  | Initiated |
| **Evaluation recommendation 7.**  **Contribute to development. Future Project interventions should aim to localise further the Sustainable Development Goals (in particular SDGs 5 and 11) by linking them to planned systemic changes at the local government and mjesne zajednice level.** |
| **Management response: UNDP agrees with this recommendation.**  |
| 7.a Continue supporting 2030 Agenda and implementation of SDGs (in particular SDGs 5, 11 and 16) by raising awareness and mobilising action for structural or soft changes and transformation of processes at the LG and MZ levels.7.b Community Hubs will be utilised as a platform for information sharing, dialogue, sourcing ideas and forging action. UNDP commits to pursue this as a cross-cutting theme for all activities. | 12/2019 | MZ Project |  | Initiated  |
| **Evaluation recommendation 8.**  Develop a strategic framework for cooperation with civil society. In accordance with the findings of the 2018 European Commission Progress Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, develop a strategic framework for cooperation with civil society at all levels of governance. Utilise the potential of the Project to contribute to this new strategic approach by building on the achieved results in terms of working closely with civil society and by utilising a participatory approach. |
| **Management response: UNDP partially agrees with this finding.**  UNDP agrees with this recommendation but only with its aspect of offering continued support to civil society organizations and community-based organizations. We do not quite understand what specific reference the evaluator is referring to, nor do we understand what strategic framework for cooperation with civil society means especially from the perspective of ‘all levels of government. UNDP agrees with the continued need to support civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, developing a formal strategic framework for cooperation with civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina is somewhat beyond the scope of this Project, and should be tackled as a primary target of a dedicated initiative. |
| 8.a Support CSOs to foster more substantive involvement of citizens in decision making on one hand, and on the other to better engage MZs in identifying priorities of citizens. 8.b Deepen cooperation with the CSOs to gain momentum for implementation of the four MZ vision models.  | 12/2019 | UNDP, MZ Project |  | Initiated Initiated  |
| **Evaluation recommendation 9.**  Strengthen horizontal and vertical linkages. Local government has access to IPA II funds as part of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s progress towards EU candidate country status. Strengthening horizontal and vertical linkages at the local level would provide local government with increased opportunities to access IPA funds under the sectors of Democracy and Governance, Social Policy, Environment and Climate Change (which have been the focus of local priority projects to date). The centralised government finance system distances local government and as a result financial sustainability is among the top concerns of local government. Addressing this issue is essential for the sustainability of the Project and its activities. |
| **Management response:** UNDP agrees that strengthening horizontal and vertical linkages at the local level would provide local governments with increased opportunities to access IPA II funds however it would be useful to define whether we are talking about institutional, human or legal linkages are being explored. UNDP agrees that more broadly the Project may be geared to contribute to this goal. However, capacitating stakeholders for IPA II absorption is a complex, costly and long-term endeavour that requires a significant investment, undivided attention and focused action- and would be best treated by a separate programmatic intervention and a distinct funding source. |
| **Evaluation recommendation number 10 (specific for phase 1):** Operationally, the Project should continue to work on Outcome 3 and explore avenues to amend the legal frameworks that regulate local self-governance in Republika Srpska, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District. This effort should in particular target potential influencers who would be willing to push the reform agenda on the table of members of parliament and other relevant institutional bodies (some already cultivated). |
| **Management response:** UNDP agrees that the completion of Outcome 3 requires perseverance and continuous cooperation with the opinion makers and influencers to jointly promote the benefits of amending legal framework that regulates local self-governance across board- while fully taking into account the political realities and noting that completion of this milestone will stretch beyond the first Project cycle.  |
|  10.a In this respect, UNDP is fully reliant on co-creation, cooperation and support in strategic advocacy efforts from Swiss Development Cooperation and Government of Sweden in months to come.  | 10/2019 | UNDP, MZ Project  | Legal reform should not be happening for the sake of legal reform and our most recent experiences come to show that we need to continue working on structural solutions that can be used for system change. | Initiated  |
| **Evaluation recommendation 11 (specific for phase 1):** The members of the Project Institutional Partners Board recommended that UNDP alongside the Government of Sweden and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation should use their resources, reputation and contacts for a subtle outreach campaign among newly elected members of Parliament in order to familiarise them with the Project results and intention to instigate legislative changes. |
| **Management response:**  UNDP agrees that amending local self-governance legal framework in BiH will require a concerted effort. |
| 11.a UNDP will join efforts with Swiss Development Cooperation and Government of Sweden targeting newly elected members of Parliament in order to familiarise them with the Project results and to instigate legislative changes. | 10/2019 | UNDP, MZ Project |  | Initiated  |
| **Evaluation recommendation 12 (specific for phase 1):** Given that the Project does not have a comprehensive communication strategy where outreach activates could be embedded, the evaluation recommends the development of an advocacy or communication plan for Phase II and the appointment of a specialist as a permanent team member to lead this important aspect of the new vision for local governance and its improved impact. |
| **Management response:** UNDP agrees with the recommendation.  |
| 12.a Communications efforts will be identified in a strategic manner for possible next phase of the Project.  | 10/2019 | UNDP, MZ Project | The project communication strategy is already in the advanced draft stage. | Initiated  |
| **Evaluation recommendation 13 (specific for phase 1):** Additional donor funds and co-financing arrangements should be sought in order to increase the number of positive grassroots initiatives and diffuse good practices across the country. This could possibly involve other international donors such as the EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, bilateral donors and actors such as USAID, UK, Switzerland, OSCE, etc. Co-financing and in-kind contributions in particular should be sought from institutional partners, but out-of-the-box institutional arrangements and implementation modalities need to be set up at the senior level in order to make such arrangements possible |
| **Management response:**  UNDP agrees with the commendable proposition to increase the number of positive grassroots initiatives and diffuse good practices across the country to the extent possible**.**  |
| 13.a In the future, new co-financing arrangements and opportunities for additional donor funds will be investigated. | 9/2020 | UNDP senior management  | Being highly dependent on both strong political will and ample resources, it is to be explored whether, in a foreseeable future, a united front could be formed between donor community and relevant authorities to pursue this issue. | Not initiated  |
| **Evaluation recommendation 14 (specific for phase 1):**  The last phase of the Project should further pursue building mechanisms for synergy with projects supported by the Government of Sweden, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation as well as UNDP. Such projects could consider, for instance, expanding the eligibility criteria of their funding schemes to include actions specific to non-project mjesne zajednice and/or issue calls to mjesne zajednice for locally implemented projects.  |
| **Management response:** UNDP agrees with the relevance of the recommendation.  |
| 14.a UNDP gives its undivided attention to synergies wherever made possible by complex organisational procedures, donor arrangements and systems, as well as diverse project dynamics, and/or locations- that tend to impede synergies despite the apparent complementarities. In light of this, an extra mile and additional resources are required to fully succeed in this. | 12/2019 | UNDP |  | Initiated  |