

FINAL EVALUATION

MLI/802

Revival of the local economy
and community support in Northern Mali I
(RELAC I)

PROJECT SUMMARY DATA

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| Country | Mali |
| Long project title | Revival of the local economy and community support in Northern Mali I |
| Short project title | RELAC I |
| LuxDev Code | MLI/802 |
| Version of the Report | March 2018 |

RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

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| Global rating (Effectiveness) | 3 On a scale of 1 (excellent results, significantly better than expected) to 6 (the project was unsuccessful, or the situation has deteriorated on balance) |
| Rating using other evaluation criteria | Relevance: 2 Efficiency: 3 Sustainability: 3 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RELAC I project (MLI/802), "Revival of the local economy and community support in Northern Mali", with funding of EUR 5 million from the European Union through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, was launched in January 2016 for a period of 24 months (following a six-month extension). It covered 12 municipalities in the Gao and Timbuktu Regions. Set up in 2015, it continues on from the RELAC project (MLI/801) – "Support Programme for Mali" through the European Union's Instrument for Stability and Peace, "Rapid support for the Malian authorities and essential social services in post-conflict areas" (Part 2).

LuxDev commissioned ARTEMIS in December 2017 to carry out a final evaluation over a six-month period of the RELAC I project and an intermediate evaluation of the RELAC II project (reinforcement and extension of the RELAC I project, launched in September 2017, funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund and scheduled to cover 30 towns over a 36-month intervention period). The two evaluations were carried out concurrently by the same team. The field mission ran from 6 to 24 February 2018 at Bamako and in the Timbuktu and Gao regions. It was agreed that the final evaluation of RELAC I would focus on the achievement of results and its effects/impacts. The main results expected in terms of this evaluation were as follows:

- **R1** A description of the results achieved/not achieved and the area covered;
- **R2** An analysis and assessment of the project management and methods;
- **R3** An evaluation based on DAC-OECD criteria;
- **R4** An assessment of the project's impact and suggested solutions for the stabilisation of Northern Mali (MLI/802);
- **R5** An analysis of a list of specific issues;
- **R6** A list of lessons learned and recommendations for the continuation of RELAC II (MLI/803) and similar future projects.

The RELAC I project aimed to "*continue the stabilisation of post-conflict areas by helping to regenerate the local economy and improve the services provided by local authorities*" (global objective). Its specific objectives are: 1. the local economy is regenerated and the standard of living of the supported households is improved; 2. the supported local authorities are able to better fulfil their responsibilities to the populations. RELAC I is halfway between a humanitarian project and a development project. It was completed on 15 January 2018.

In respect of **the overall objective**, the evaluation concluded that the project has helped to stabilise the post-conflict areas of 12 municipalities in the Timbuktu and Gao regions by: (i) equipping local authorities with the resources to fulfil their responsibilities (rehabilitation of infrastructures, facilities, training of elected representatives and local officials). At present, these local authorities have resumed operation and are providing services to their populations as a result of the support received from RELAC I and other partners working in these local authorities; (ii) improved access for vulnerable populations to basic social services; (iii) support for vulnerable households through seasonal safety nets; (iv) contribution to regeneration of the local economy through various initiatives such as funding of economic microprojects led by local organisations and contribution to development of the local private sector through contracts with local providers of goods and services.

The evaluation found that the project helped to achieve **specific objective 1** by funding local economic microprojects on the one hand and by supporting development of the local economic fabric on the other. The populations delivered a positive appreciation on the contribution of the RELAC I project to improvement of the local economy. However, the evaluation team believes that the objective of regenerating the local economy was ambitious for a two-year project. The regeneration of the local economy assumes the implementation of programmes backed by large-scale resources that cannot be achieved through one Cooperation alone, despite the commitment of a substantial budget of EUR 5 million.

In terms of **specific objective 2**, the rehabilitation of municipalities' infrastructures and facilities helped to restore the image of the municipal councils and their working conditions. These municipalities are now better equipped to cater to their populations and provide them with services. After receiving training, local elected representatives have a better understanding of their responsibilities. The education-apprenticeship conditions in schools have been improved, the intervention capacities of health personnel have increased and lastly services providing access to potable water have been restored and improved.

As planned, the project covered 12 municipalities, six in the Timbuktu region and six in the Gao region. Given that each of the 43 funded microprojects covers at least 15 households as set out in the technical and financial document, the project provided direct support to at least 645 households by contributing to their economic regeneration microprojects. RELAC I supported 3 839 very poor households by means of safety nets compared to the 2 400 very poor households initially targeted in the technical and financial document.

Result 1: Local economic projects are supported. 43 local microprojects were selected following community workshops and were approved at community meetings. At the end of 2017, 43 local economic microprojects were implemented at a total cost of EUR 780 000. 21 of these 43 supported microprojects were in the Gao region and 22 in the Timbuktu region. The identification and formulation process were rigorous and inclusive. Trilateral implementation agreements without assigned funding were signed by the microprojects' leaders, the municipalities and the project. Deeds of transfer of ownership of the assets acquired by the project were signed with the different project leaders. Microprojects' leaders were trained in various agricultural techniques, mainly by the relevant local technical departments. There was no post-training follow-up on the training courses however, making it difficult to assess their usefulness or effects.

Result 2: The most vulnerable households are supported by safety nets. As planned, this result relates to five towns in the Gao region. A total of 3 839 households benefited from the project against a target of 2 400. The increase in the number of beneficiaries is due to alignment with the *Jigisemejiri* programme, which recommended 120 000 francs per household rather than 200 000 francs as stated in the technical and financial document. This change was approved by the European Union delegation at the beginning of the project. The beneficiaries were selected and the transfers were made based on a rigorous procedure. It is only regrettable that these were not made contingent, for example, on regular medical examinations for children under 5, their attendance at school or antenatal medical check-ups for pregnant women.

Result 3: The most urgent material needs of the local authorities in order to fulfil their responsibilities towards the populations are covered. Following the mandate given to the project by the municipal councils to acquire services, goods and works based on LuxDev contract award procedures, the project devoted 2017 to meeting all the priority material needs of the local authorities. To this end, all the facilities acquired by the project were transferred by property transfer deeds to the 12 beneficiary municipalities. The municipalities' elected representatives and officials as well as the educational management committees, water source users' associations and community health associations of the various municipalities were also trained in the management and maintenance of infrastructures and helped formulate maintenance plans that would sustain the investments made by this project.

Result 4: The local authorities are helped to fulfil their responsibilities towards the populations. Based on the training requirements identified together with the municipalities' elected representatives and officials in 2016, a training programme was prepared and then implemented in each of the 12 project municipalities. An implementation agreement without assignment of funding was signed with the local and regional authorities training centre, which mobilised its regional focal points (private consultancies) to provide training. A total of 3 839 households benefited from the project against a target of 2 400. In addition, in 2017 the Malian Institute of Research and Action for Peace held public debates in 12 municipalities, organised under the responsibility of the municipal councils. These debates resulted in practical measures to meet the expectations of the populations and the elected representatives, some of which were incorporated into results 1 and 3 of the programme, while others were implemented.

Project evaluation

Relevance: In general, the project responded to a critical problem: improving the living conditions of the beneficiaries in the intervention area. The objectives of RELAC I were aligned and totally consistent with national, sectoral and local policies. The project's design met the priority needs of the targeted populations, and its initiatives were particularly relevant in that they were designed to provide solutions to these problems by establishing production infrastructures to meet the population's food requirements, rehabilitate social and health infrastructures and thereby make living conditions more secure. The "safety nets" component is aligned with the national *Jigisemejiri* programme.

Other factors highlighting the relevance of the project were the targeting of vulnerable male and female social groups. Some of the microprojects developed have helped boost the economy of the beneficiary municipalities in sectors such as fish farming, sheep fattening and market gardening. However, caution is still needed because it is not clear at this stage whether the effects of the project will impact significantly on poverty reduction, and in particular whether such a reduction will be sustainable. The implementation of microprojects and the strengthening of the local authorities are not sufficient on their own to eradicate the vulnerability of the populations. No costed data is available concerning the increase in income of the populations. The final evaluation finds that the relevance of the project is above average, with better performances than predicted (score 2), although the targeting of organisations of young people would have benefited from a proper strategy.

Effectiveness: The project was effective overall in terms of the number of microprojects selected, approved and implemented in the two regions, and the funding provided for each microproject. The non-governmental organisations *Groupe de Recherche Actions pour le Développement* and Action Against Hunger - Spain, whose services were made available to the microprojects' leaders, provided technical training to the beneficiaries of these microprojects, with support from the relevant local technical departments. However, only brief technical and socio-economic reviews were carried out on the microprojects, which may account for the problems experienced in their implementation. In view of the delays observed in the identification and formulation of the microprojects and the provision of input, these microprojects received little support. The RELAC II project aims to rectify this deficiency. Lastly, the project monitoring system did not provide economic data on the implemented microprojects to help determine their cost effectiveness and their impact on the beneficiaries and intervention areas.

In addition, the non-governmental organisation Action Against Hunger - Spain carried out various initiatives to select recipients of safety nets and cash transfers, without conditions, benefiting 3 839 vulnerable households, i.e. 28,34% of beneficiary women and 19% of households registered as poor. The project was effective in achieving this result and the socio-economic and nutritional criteria used to select beneficiaries were appropriate. The project provided direct financial support to the most vulnerable households to ensure they had immediate food security and short-term socio-economic protection during the pre-lean, lean and post-lean seasons.

The priority needs of the municipalities were identified using a participatory approach involving the local authorities and officials in the technical departments. The main beneficiaries of this support are the district councils (*conseils de cercle*), the municipal councils and the social services managed by the community health associations. This result was also achieved using a participatory approach. The project purchased equipment and rehabilitated municipal infrastructures. The equipment purchased was transferred to the municipalities by transfer of ownership deeds. Under these transfer deeds, the mayors committed to maintain the equipment provided to them. In respect of the indicator "frequency/coverage of supported social services has increased", an increase was recorded in the frequency and coverage of the basic social services in all the project municipalities. It should be noted that the target of 80% of the municipalities budgeting for management of the works and equipment was not achieved, with the municipalities struggling to mobilise financial resources.

Lastly, various training courses were organised for local elected representatives and officials. The training was considered to be appropriate because it was provided in French and the local languages and covered topics of particular interest to the local elected representatives. Those who attended the training found it useful but without post-training monitoring it is not possible to measure its effects. Public or community debates were organised in the 12 intervention municipalities under the responsibility of the municipal councils with the assistance of Malian Institute of Research and Action for Peace, covering issues such as local development problems, management of basic social infrastructures, management of natural resources, combating insecurity, etc. However, the debates were not followed by concrete actions seeking to resolve the problems identified.

They did not focus on issues around the improvement of services provided by elected representatives to the populations, the transparency and rendering of accounts, inclusive democracy, citizens' dialogue, etc.

Despite the project being extended by six months, it proved too short given the ambitious nature of its objectives. In addition, the project had to contend with objective-related constraints such as the bureaucracy of the recommended participatory approach, the insecure situation and the complexity of some of the activities to be implemented.

The final evaluation found that the results of the project were achieved with room for improvement (score 3).

Efficiency: The project made efforts to ensure that its interventions were efficient through various initiatives: (i) a resource pooling policy; (ii) direct investment in initiatives to benefit the populations; (iii) 18,34% of the project's resources went to employees and the operation of LuxDev, which is acceptable given the high costs related to security and monitoring expenses on the ground, distances between intervention towns and the motivation of the team, with a high workload in an insecure environment; (iv) a high financial execution rate; (v) good use of resources; and (vi) flexibility in the management of the project. The efficiency of the project was limited by three factors: 1. the execution time of 24 months, which was short in relation to the ambitious aims of the project, 2. underestimation of costs of the feasibility studies for some microprojects, and 3. increase in the costs of monitoring project interventions due to insecurity.

The final evaluation found that the results were achieved in terms of efficiency, with room for improvement (score 3).

Sustainability: Several institutional, technical and socio-economic factors may contribute to the sustainability of the results of RELAC I. Implementation was largely based on the institutional portage of the towns, the "hands-on" policy of the local non-governmental organisations and State public services, collaboration with the State's local technical departments at the level of the municipalities, districts and regions, the strong involvement of the local organisations such as the basic community organisations and non-governmental organisations and lastly contracts placed with local suppliers and service providers. The infrastructures rehabilitated or built at community level do not require a high level of technical expertise to maintain and are built by local companies employing local labour force. The project's initiatives are rooted in the community. The chances of the investments being economically sustainable were considered to be high overall, especially for productive investments that have already added value or have a strong likelihood of achieving a good return. However, the sustainability of the investments made has certain challenges to contend with: insufficient resources of the local and regional authorities and local technical departments to provide advisory support to the target groups after project completion, lack of financial resources in the municipalities to support the skills transferred to them. In addition, the evaluation did not study investments made by the beneficiaries of the safety nets, but the resources provided were mainly spent on household consumption during the lean period. Lastly, the method used to manage the microprojects could jeopardise their sustainability: the vast majority of the microprojects are led by non-profit associations rather than cooperatives. These associations have a social vocation, unlike cooperative enterprises which are governed by market logic.

The final evaluation classifies the results in terms of sustainability of the project as achieved, with room for improvement (score 3).

Coordination: The quality of the project coordination can be assessed both internally and externally. Internally, the project teams organised regular coordination meetings both at Bamako and in the regions. All the meetings were recorded in detailed minutes. Externally, the quality of coordination with the European Union delegation was satisfactory. The six-monthly reports were produced and delivered. The project played an active role in the meetings of the Rehabilitation Commission for Post-Conflict Areas and the clusters of which it is a member. Regular coordination meetings with the local authorities were also organised. The mission recorded several positive results directly linked to this good coordination, although the security situation prevented the project stakeholders from providing information on their travel movements, which may limit synergies.

The final evaluation finds that the coordination results were excellent, and significantly better than expected (score 1).

Impact: The impact of the project can be measured in terms of support in revitalising the municipalities, improvement of access to basic social services, contribution to development of the local private sector and job creation, strengthening of public organisations and the community dynamic and contribution to social cohesion. Lastly, the results of the second survey on cash transfers, finalised at the beginning of 2017, revealed that 76% of beneficiary households increased their number of daily meals, 15% improved and diversified the quality of their meals, 7% reduced their food expenditure, but only in the short term.

Various additional specific issues are analysed in the evaluation report, such as the relevance and quality of public debates, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks of the “safety net” component, complementarity and compatibility with the direction taken by Luxembourg cooperation in Mali, communication and visibility, security, procedures, specifically the competitive negotiated procedure.

The final evaluation focused on 3 lessons learned:

1. It is possible to implement development initiatives even in an insecure environment.
2. Consolidating peace and regenerating the local economy require substantial financial resources and long-term sustained efforts.
3. A participatory, iterative, flexible approach that is adapted to the local situation contributes to the success of the project.
4. The need to fund microprojects led by young people.

No recommendations were made in connection with the final evaluation of RELAC I. The evaluation team focused its recommendations on the intermediate evaluation of RELAC II, considered as an extension of RELAC I.