



EVALUATION BRIEF



# SUPPORTING WOMEN AND YOUTH'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN GUINEA-BISSAU

Photo: UNFPA

## Evaluation Brief

The final evaluation of the Peace Building Fund (PBF) funded project known as 'Supporting women and youth's political participation for peace and development in Guinea Bissau' and implemented by UNFPA, UN Women and WFP, covers the full implementation period of the project from December 2017 to July 2020.

The project benefited from two No Cost Extensions (NCE). The 1<sup>st</sup> reviewed the project end date to 31 March 2020, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> revised end date was 31 July 2020. The project's general objective was 'empowering women and youth to engage in the political life of the country to consolidate peace and socioeconomic development' through two expected outcomes. Outcome one was formulated as 'leaders and members of women and youth organizations actively participate in democratic processes and contribute to peace and stability through implementing change/dialogue initiatives. And outcome two as 'women and youth effectively participate, accompany and ensure fair and equitable electoral processes.'

The main purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether the project has contributed to improving the quality and quantity of women and youth's political participation throughout the country, and whether it has yielded peacebuilding results. The outcome of this project's evaluation is for learning purposes and could potentially inform the planning and implementation of women and youth's political empowerment and peacebuilding activities in Guinea-Bissau more generally. The evaluation adopted

a utilisation-focused and participatory approach, mixing qualitative and quantitative methods through primary and secondary sources respectively. Qualitative data was primarily gathered from project stakeholders and beneficiaries to inform the evaluation findings and recommendations. In total the evaluation team reached 107 individuals (62 women and 45 men) through Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and evaluation workshops.

**When assessed against OECD/DAC criteria**, in addition of being **relevant** to the needs of Bissau Guinean women and youth, the project was found to align with the national legal and policy frameworks, namely the National Youth Policy and the National Policy for Gender Equality and Equity, which the government has not been able to implement for various reasons.

Limited design and cohesion have affected the project's ability to deepen its benefits. The project was designed with an open-ended scope and failed to prioritize in a more realistic fashion, and thus dispersing its benefits. The program also lacked a clear exit strategy to ensure continuation of its outputs and outcomes when funding ended.

The theory of change responded to some of the identified limitations of women and youth's political participation such as functional and political literacy, information on opportunities for democratic participation and skills building to participate in electoral processes. However, it did not clearly define the pathways of change envisioned by the intervention. The different levels and hierarchies of expected changes are not clearly established (long term, intermediary

and short term) and therefore the causal links between them are not elaborated in detail. Additionally, the theories developed, seem to be incomplete in the sense that they don't consider the full extent of the sources and drivers of women and youth disempowerment in Guinea Bissau, such as existence of institutional discrimination and deep rooted gendered and culturally power dynamics. The monitoring system had a number of shortcomings affecting the overall ability to understand social change, if any. Most of the indicators identified focus on activities rather than results and hardly any gender qualitative indicators were found.

As per **efficiency**, the bureaucratic processes in the functioning of the recipient United Nations organizations (RUNOs), frequently slow, was a risk that, not sufficiently identified and mitigated, negatively affected the time efficiency of the project. For instance, it took a year just to secure the project coordinator and, long-lasting negotiations to establish partnership with a public institution affected achievement of a key output of the project. These long initial delays made the implementation of the project activities coincide with the electoral periods and the covid-19 pandemic also had a negative impact leading to the cancellation of some outputs. A single project coordinator has proved to be insufficient for the number of simultaneous activities that would have needed to be carried out in order to ensure timely implementation of the project.

The project then generated a successful implementation structure for such a complex single donor/multi-agency/multi-beneficiary intervention and created synergy with other donor interventions in the country and actors not necessarily envisioned in the project design. The implementation structure created vertical and horizontal synergies between participants and actions at all levels.

In general, for the implementing partners, the financial resources allocated to the components they implemented was enough when coupled with their highly valued contribution to the project, covering, among other things, unforeseeable costs with infrastructure and resources (activists, volunteers, offices) to the achievement of the project results. Although disbursements from the RUNOs to the implementing partners were often delayed which was challenging for the management of their resources and those of individual beneficiaries.

In terms of **effectiveness**, the project achieved output 1.2 – 'Youth and Women leaders at the grassroots level are trained in political leadership and peacebuilding skills', output

1.3 – 'Grants Facility for Youth and Women-led Dialogue or Change Initiatives that promote peace and stability developed and implemented with training and on-going accompaniment for effective implementation of initiatives', output 1.4 – 'Rural women advocate more effectively for their rights and needs', output 2.3 – 'Women and youth contributed to monitoring the electoral process and solving incidents that may arise through the Election Observatory', and partially achieved output 2.2 – 'Women and youth's participation in the elections enhanced through stronger representation as candidates and voters'.

Both project outcomes (Outcome 1 – 'Leaders and members of women and youth organizations actively participate in democratic processes and contribute to peace and stability through implementing change/dialogue initiatives' and outcome 2 – 'Women and youth effectively participate, accompany and ensure fair and equitable electoral processes'), were partially achieved following the failure to achieve output 1.1 – 'Women and youth leaders trained in functional and political literacy' and output 2.1 – 'Top members of political parties, governors (specially youth and women) are trained in political leadership and peacebuilding skills'. The non-achievement of the outputs affects contributions to one of the major limitations to Bissau Guinean women's access to political participation forums, which is access to literacy and/or education. The second output which was not reached affects the capacity and/or opportunity to promote change in social norms that limit women and youth's political participation from within the parties.

The project introduced innovative approaches to the Bissau Guinean context to address the inequalities it had identified. It facilitated access to small grants for community-based organizations interested in addressing pressing issues in their communities. This approach was innovative in the sense that it managed to reach groups that usually do not qualify for project funding by donors because they do not have the administrative and financial requisites and allowed them to 'promote their own concept of development' with relatively small funds, tapping into local stakeholders, methods and interests. It allowed the community-based organizations (CBOs) to practise peacebuilding in their communities by solving issues that could be or are sources of conflict locally.

Another innovation is related to the support given to the Electoral Observatory cell which integrates gender-based violence indicators in the kit of indicators to be observed by the electoral monitors. This allowed for the mitigation of one of the risks of interventions to promote women

empowerment (GBV) as well as to mainstream GBV issues into main interventions in electoral processes as an important stream of political participation and decision making.

And the third innovation is related to the facilitation of advocacy forums for rural women to dialogue and express their needs and interests to politicians and decision makers. Due to rural women's systemic exclusion from most of the benefits generated in the country, this output created precedence and ground for strengthening rural women's participation in decision making forums. Although the forum created under the project is not sustainable, it was a one-off event, the rural women have been trained on advocacy and those skills can be capitalized on to facilitate more inclusive local decision-making forums.

With regard to **sustainability**, UN agencies' intention and resource mobilization to continue supporting work with women and youth, and strengthening of public institutions, makes it possible to give continuity to the outcomes of the project. The work of UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP around the issues of political participation, women and youth political participation, women empowerment, coupled with the likeliness of larger NGOs securing funds for their regular activities, some similar to their role in the project, contribute to the sustainability of project goals.

For the rest of the stakeholders, including the government institutions and the CBOs, the continuity of their work around the project goals is highly unsustainable without external financial support. Women's groups are also likely to continue with their awareness raising activities and advocacy which can contribute to the sustainability of achievements in terms of gender equality. For these reasons, women and young women's increased awareness of their rights is likely to sustain as they continue discussing these issues in their associations, although their ability to turn that awareness into improvement in their status and their control of the resources that affect them is yet to be seen.

The built capacity of NGOs and CBOs in terms of project and financial management increased their opportunities to apply for funds they found inaccessible before, thus contributing to their interest in maintaining them. Through the dialogue and peace building initiatives by CBOs applicants to the small grants, environments conducive to peacebuilding have been created through opportunities for solving local problems and conflicts with local stakeholders via locally created solutions.



Photo: UNFPA

In relation to the **impact**, the project has had an important impact in increasing the awareness and knowledge of the target population about their internal powers to change their circumstances, the social construct of the unjust norms that govern them, of diverse forms of discrimination – all of which have an effect in building human capital to create the environment for further changes in the direction of peacebuilding and creating inclusive development processes.

The project's facilitation to access to resources such as discussion forums, training on political processes, dialogue with politicians and candidates, electoral observation forums, for example, had an impact in creating a culture of political dialogue, in increasing women and youth's participation in political processes and in the visibility of women and youth as political actors.

The project's limited impact on the social norms that create the gendered power relations that influence women and youth's political participation namely, women's dependence of a male authorization to participate in public life, perception of marriage as women's life priority, influence of elder men in decisions taken by youth and women, might be influenced by aspects discussed earlier about the project's shortfalls in challenging gendered power relations and gerontocracy. None of the project's outputs, nor activities, nor approaches are conducive to challenging discriminatory social norms around gender and ageism.

**When assessing the integration of gender equality and human rights**, they were successfully integrated in the design and implementation of the project in terms of selection of stakeholders, beneficiaries, quantitative indicators and addressing pressing needs and limitations to women and youth's political participation, identified by national actors.

However, the focus on quantitative indicators limited the scope of detecting qualitative changes in gendered power relations the project could have addressed.

The project centred on a 'Women in Development' approach, through which, women and youth were integrated in areas they are usually excluded from, without changing the norms that affect that exclusion. A 'gender and development' approach that addresses the gendered limitations of political participation would have been more appropriate.

In regard to human rights, the project adopted a promotion of human rights approach, supporting work on advocacy for adoption and compliance of national, regional and international codes of respect for human rights. For instance, the project indirectly supported the preparation of a code of conduct aimed at electoral candidates to avoid electoral-based conflicts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this final evaluation, the following recommendations are drawn:

### 1. Adopt other power relations-transformative approaches

It is recommended that when the **RUNOs** implement projects with a gender marker 3, that approaches that couple strategies for gender equality and women empowerment are adopted. Approaches with focus on (i) work around power relations with men, addressing 'toxic' masculinities; (ii) facilitating action learning processes based on individual and collective (particularly at household level) reflections to change unjust power relations, (iii) challenging and questioning structural causes of women and youth's participation in peacebuilding and decision-making processes in households, communities and political parties, such as discriminatory social norms, hierarchy and discipline within parties and lack of resources for women and youth to fund own electoral campaigns. Suggestions of such approaches include the Gender action learning systems developed in Uganda, gender action learning developed by Gender at Work or Household Gender Analysis for Gender Transformation developed in Ethiopia.

### 2. Stronger theory of change needed

**PBF** should ensure that IRF projects have stronger Theories of changes. Particularly due to the limited implementation time assigned to such projects, it is unlikely the TOC will be reviewed during project implementation. Therefore, the ToC should develop clearer causal links between the different levels of project's outputs, so the relationship between what needs to happen between each output for the outcome to be achieved is enhanced. Additionally, qualitative gender indicators, that show changes in gendered power relations and in the status of women and youth need to complement quantitative indicators of change. It is limiting to measure empowerment solely with numbers or representation. The funded projects should include indicators that also assess women and youth empowerment in terms of changes in relationships, values, norms and status. **PBF** should ensure projects clearly comply to **PBF's** criteria to establish the project's gender marker, such as having a Theory of Change that "clearly articulates the causal link chain that will lead to greater gender equality and improve peacebuilding outcomes" and including a "strong Do No Harm approach and an analysis of gender-specific risks and mitigation strategies" to reduce negative impacts related to gender inequality.

**RUNOS** should in the projects they submit for **PBF** funding, identify clear pathways to ensure the sustainability of project outputs and outcomes when the funding ends. Either as integration into other interventions by the **RUNOs** or by connecting implementing partners with other donors or strengthening the capacity of implementing partners to raise funds to continue pursuing the outcomes of the project.

### 3. Continue support to small grant schemes

**PBF** and **RUNOs** should continue supporting small grants schemes to CBOs. The use of approaches to support political participation and peacebuilding through addressing other social issues of discrimination and exclusion that contribute to instability in the country, should be continued. This approach allows for funds to be accessible to small organizations faster than through regular project funding mechanisms. On the other hand, CBOs in rural and remote

areas can easily design conceive projects that require little funding and allows them to promote peacebuilding by contributing to solving burning issues in their local areas, with the local stakeholders. As in this project, priority can be given to women and youth led organizations and to initiatives that seek to solve issues related to women and youth exclusion from decision making forums.

#### **4. Address the risks related to slow bureaucratic process of RUNOs leading to delays in project implementation**

During project design, **RUNOs** should clearly assess the risk of their bureaucratic processes to a timely project implementation. This analysis should determine if their bureaucratic systems will be able to establish the necessary conditions for a **PBF** project to initiate when planned to, and if not, necessary measures to address this risk should be identified. PBF should include the assessment of these types of risks in the criteria and selection process leading to funding a PBF funded project. Perhaps, a question can be included in the application form, requesting the UN agencies applying for the fund to explain how they would prevent delaying the hiring of a coordinator or coordination team and if they would appoint a staff from the organizations to co-coordinate the project.

#### **5. PBF funded projects including many stakeholders and beneficiaries should be rethought**

**RUNOs** should rethink peacebuilding projects with multiple stakeholders, beneficiaries and outputs to (i) having more depth rather than spread - supporting deeper processes with higher potential of transforming social norms around political participation, women and youth's rights, access and control of resources, rather than support many 'superficial' processes and work with fewer groups of beneficiaries to avoid dispersion of benefits; (ii) Integrate the project design as a complement to existing initiatives or to a component of an existing long-term project, in order to increase the likewise of sustainability and long-term impact. And if it is a joint UN agencies' project, the agencies at stake should assign one staff member to work with the project to enhance effectiveness, ownership and inter-agency collaboration.