Agile Human Rights Organisations for a Democratic Constituency in the Arab Region

Ex-Post Evaluation

Executive summary

1   This evaluation report presents the results of the ex-Post evaluation of the project, '*Agile Human Rights Organisations for a Democratic Constituency in the Arab Region*' that was coordinated by Karama in the period March 2017-February 2018 (further labelled as 'Karama project'). The project aimed at contributing to human rights -with a focus on women rights- and democratisation processes in the MENA region.

2   The evaluation seeks to account for the subsidy spent on the Karama project through the Dutch Human Rights Fund. The objective of the evaluation is to assess the effectiveness, relevance, sustainability and efficiency of the project.

Brief introduction of the Karama project

3   A general Theory of Change was developed, consisting of three pathways of change: (i) capacity development for collective mobilisation, (ii) mobilisation and campaigning and (iii) multi-stakeholder level communication for advocacy and lobby. The project has four outcomes:

1.   Regional human rights networks and human rights defenders involved in writing new electoral laws and constitutions as well as the implementation of international laws
2.   The institutional capacity of key organisations in the human rights network is strengthened
3.   Mutually supportive relationships, including with online space providers, are established in the human rights network and with other key actors
4.   Contribution to a compelling regional narrative on the cultural and religious compatibility of human rights

4   The project was implemented in 13 countries, involving 19 CSO's (and their partners and network partners). Focus was put on capacity development of human rights defenders and their CSOs, institutional development of CSOs, network building, community dialogues, strengthening advocacy and lobbying at local, national, regional and international level. Activities ranged from the provision of technical assistance and trainings, the implementation of (regional) campaigns, (regional) network meetings, round tables and direct lobbying. The project had an important technology component in providing save (online) spaces for human rights defenders. The project target groups (direct and indirect) were CSOs, communities, local councils, religious leaders, national government, police, military, international and multilateral spaces and institutions. The project also involved advocacy and lobbying of policy targets in The Netherlands and looked for collaboration with Dutch embassies located in the MENA region. The project was coordinated by Karama, having an office in Egypt and in The Netherlands.

Methodology

5   The evaluation was conducted in four phases: an inception phase, resulting in an inception report, a desk study phase, a phase of primary data-collection, an analysis and reporting phase (resulting in an evaluation report). Two country-based case studies (Lebanon and Egypt) and an analysis of the Netherlands L&A work constitute the backbone of the evaluation. Case studies were

complemented with desk-study and skype interviews with implementing partners in the non-visited countries. The combination of the case study approach, the desk study and the virtual interviews enabled the evaluators to make an overall assessment of the Karama project.

6   During field studies, for triangulation purposes, a combination of methodologies was applied: self-assessment workshops, bilateral visits to implementing partners, semi-structured interviews with human rights activists involved in the project, target groups of the project interventions and external stakeholders. The evaluation was conducted in the period January 2020 – June 2020.

Effectiveness

7   The Karama project was successful in delivering the planned outputs and contributing to the envisaged outcomes. Important results were realised at the level of capacity development of the Karama members. Karama members have enhanced their knowledge on national and international human rights laws, on constitution drafting, on international accountability mechanisms and enhanced their skills in monitoring human rights violations and documenting thereof. Karama members improved their social media advocacy skills and learned how to secure their digital security. Furthermore, Karama members have increased their capacity and expertise to organise, mobilise and assist their constituencies in defending their rights.

8   The Karama project enabled continuation of Karama members in L&A processes at local, national and international level. A smart mix of L&A strategies was often applied, combining advocacy meetings with formal and informal lobby, supported by online media campaigns and community mobilisation. Organising community dialogues, round-tables, and events contributed to increasing awareness of policy makers on the issues at stake. In many cases, local and national level lobby was linked to international L&A. Karama was a leverage for many of its members to engage with high-level policy makers at different international L&A spaces.

9   These strategies have already contributed to putting or keeping several human rights topics on the agenda of policy makers, and in a few occasions to policy changes, in terms of policy makers integrating human rights in laws, policies and legal frameworks. A small number of Karama members also realised having more women – and more attention to women's rights - in peace building dialogues, constitution drafting and transition or reconstruction processes. These processes often had started before the Karama project and continue after the end of the Karama project. Evidently Karama members are not the sole contributors to this agenda setting and these policy changes.

10   Karama also contributed to a growing understanding and internalisation of human rights concepts among religious and community leaders that begin to influence norms and practices that share daily life. This social norm change, supported by the development of an alternative narrative on the cultural and religious computability of human rights, is an important dimension of the theory of change and is a precondition to obtain sustainable policy change and - implementation. Changes in narratives could be observed among constituencies but remain rather modest, due to the limited funding and limited outreach of the re-granted projects.

11   The project combined a regional approach (regional campaign, regional and international conferences) under coordination of the Karama Headquarter with a re-granting approach supporting small and larger scale projects, in eleven countries. This two-layered approach was conducive for linking local, national L&A to international L&A but at the same time limited the amount of the budget for projects at country level, and as such the outreach.

Sustainability

12   Institutional sustainability is strong as the project aligned to the vision, mission, strategies and ongoing activities of the Karama members and follow-up was given to the delivered results. Human rights activists showed huge commitment to continue providing training to their constituencies, advocacy and lobbying interventions, even on voluntary basis. Financial sustainability, however, is weak, which also hampered upscaling of the project results.

13   In several countries, the institutional context makes it difficult for civil society organisations to access external donor funding. The majority of the Karama members have sufficient capacity in mobilising funding as demonstrated by their track record in attracting both national funding (where available) and foreign donor funding, but continuation of this external funding is not always guaranteed. Project funding often results in stop-and-go programming.

Relevance

14   The project has been highly relevant, both for Karama as for the Dutch Human Rights policy. Karama is one of the few transnational women's grassroot movements in the MENA region and unique in its kind. It is a loose, informal movement facilitating access to funding, brokering knowledge exchange and network building and enhancing moral mutual support among its members. By funding a regional network like Karama, the Dutch Human Rights Fund has managed to keep pace with new forms of activism, that are often more informally organised, more fluid and operating more locally.

15   The project's focus on defending security of human rights activists, fighting impunity and documenting human rights violations, and enhancing women's participation in international peace negotiations is aligned to the Dutch Human Rights Policy. Furthermore, research about women's participation in international peace negotiations has shown that women's participation contributes to the quality and durability of peace after civil war. As such, the support provided by the project to enable access of women activists from Yemen, Libya and Syria to access international lobby fora, document violation of human rights and bring these to the peace talks is highly relevant

Efficiency

16   Organisational efficiency has been assessed as good. Sufficient procedures and management systems have been put in place enabling profound management of the project. Governance systems of the Karama movement could be improved. The decision making processes regarding the use and distribution of the available funding could be made more transparent. Internal communication and information exchange can be improved. Typical for this kind of informally

structured networks are their informal structures and informal leadership, which also come with visible or invisible power imbalances. The time and objectives of the evaluation did not allow for further investigating the functioning of the Karama movement/network. Furthermore, there have been communication challenges between the Karama Headquarter, the Karama Netherlands office and MFA causing confusing in reporting and accountability expectations and frustrations among all parties involved.

[17] M&E capacities of the Karama members was enhanced, though several of the members still need further support to that end. An attempt was made to evolve from activity-based to result based management, which succeeded to a varying degree. The logframe was well developed, including clear indicators. Though narrative reporting at Karama member level is clear and based on good project-based logframes, the overall narrative reporting is less straight forward and complicates getting a good understanding and overview of results achieved.

[18] The input-output ratio at re-granted project level is good and efficiency considerations were made, though not explicitly. Linking Karama members to international lobby fora is the added value of the Karama movement (besides mobilising funding), however, as this international traveling consumes a large share of the budget, it is needed to make the link between national and international L&A more explicit so to enable follow-up and monitoring thereof.

[19] Project implementation knew several delays, firstly because of delays in fund disbursement at the side of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, secondly because of national governments giving late approval for the release of the project funding. This resulted in an effective project implementation period of only 8 months.

[20] Three sets of recommendations were formulated for Karama, with regard to:

1. Making the link between national and international L&A levels more explicit, for example by including the international L&A in the national lobby trajectories so to enable follow-up and monitoring thereof;

2. Investing further in strengthening the Karama network, among other its governance. More in particularly, reflections might take place on the level of participation and internal democracy, structure and control, and the localisation of the leadership function;

3. Further investing in building M&E capacity of the Karama members, so to enhance their own funding mobilisation capacity.

One recommendation was formulated for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project showed the difficult institutional contexts in which human rights organisations operate in the MENA region. This situation asks for flexible funding schemes, taking into account the multiple factors that cause delays in implementation of projects implemented by civil society (e.g. conflict, shrinking civic space, …).