



Management Response to the independent external evaluation report North Africa and Western Asia Transformation Program (NAWAT 2010-2014)

Assessment of the Evaluation Process

Stamm Prozesse submitted the final report of the external evaluation of the above named program on March, 25th 2015. NAWAT was jointly developed by the Human Security Division (HSD) and the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva (CFG). The evaluation process has enabled the HSD to pinpoint various strengths, opportunities, and challenges of the NAWAT programme and related projects. The process has been very useful in supporting the program management in its ongoing reflections (such as the organizational development process following the external evaluation of CFG). The participatory approach chosen by the evaluator generated knowledge and learning based on the findings of the evaluation already during the process. The two workshops facilitated by the evaluator were useful for testing her hypotheses as well as to form a collective shared understanding of the program architecture among HSD and FCG staff. Due to the high turnover in HSD almost all relevant stakeholders in HSD had changed since the inception of the programme. Due to the high complexity of the program and project architecture as well as the participatory nature of the process, more resources of all involved stakeholders (HSD, CFG, evaluator) were used than planned. In the future, more time and financial resources should be allocated to such an evaluation process. During the process it was made clear that due to the particular complexity of the architecture of the programme and the broad scope and numbers of activities, the evaluation could only review a certain share of total activities. Empirical evidence was gathered for two initiatives (Cordoba Now Forum CNF and detainees in Morocco) which only represent a small part of NAWAT. The information provided by the report is relevant and useful for the decision-making of the HSD as well as CFG.

Assessment of the Evaluation Report

The evaluation process has stressed different strengths and opportunities but also weaknesses and challenges, which are addressed in a total of 21 recommendations.

Strengths highlighted by the report:

- Clear program relevance and sustainability
- Strategic opportunity to uphold a dialogue with those who are difficult to reach
- Case study shows that the stakeholders of NAWAT “have had important roles as actors for peace in decision-making processes that would otherwise have led to violence”
- Successfully applied diapraxis model and showed its appropriateness and potential to intervene in conflicts
- Successful trainings and workshops where shared knowledge was established

Weaknesses highlighted by the report:

- Due to lack of data available, it was not possible for the evaluation to attribute impact on socio-structural changes that occurred in the region directly to the program
- Unsatisfactory valorization of NAWAT’s activities
- Weak communication of the activities and outcomes to interested services in the FDFA
- Questions with regards to the application of the principle of inclusivity of the NAWAT activities.
- Broader and more stable integration of NAWAT into the organizational structure of the HSD is needed.

Nevertheless, the HSD has decided to continue to work with the FCG in North Africa and the Middle East (among other regions) and to conduct the activities while taking into account most of the recommendations in the program design and management of the future phase.

Position of the Steering committee towards the Recommendation

Relevance

1. *The organizational structure enabling the co-acting of a Western governmental with a non-governmental actor – perceived as “local” in the MENA region – has enabled NAWAT to identify timely responses to volatile circumstances. It is recommended to continue working with the basic parameters of this format.*

The partnership between RPC and FCG is successful and mutually beneficial. HSD will continue to work with FCG on different projects and programs.

Effectiveness and Impact

2. *The majority of participants involved in the NAWAT projects today do not share a common reality on the ground because they are flown in for workshops from different countries. The building of groups that can act jointly would appear to be an important strategic opportunity that could increase both the effectiveness and the efficiency of the NAWAT program and should be addressed in a future program phase.*
3. *NAWAT does not currently have an operational structure that would allow the hands-on technical support to local conflict transformation initiatives in the field. The overwhelming focus of the design is on the production of research, the formation of inclusive groups and the deliberations that happen in these spaces. The operational capacity needed for the implementation of concrete activities is largely left to the individual ability of local actors. The program design of a future phase of NAWAT could build in an operational support structure to ensure operational opportunities are seized.*
4. *There are some open questions with regards to the application of the principle of inclusivity of the NAWAT activities. While the CNF has a number of people representing liberal-secular and non-Islamic constituencies, most other groups formed by NAWAT have an overrepresentation of the conservative Islamic currents. There appears to be a shift of the NAWAT focus on fault-lines occurring within this segment of the MENA societies that could be better communicated and explained.*

It is important to differentiate between the different groups that were formed and supported by NAWAT. One “group”, the Cordoba Now Forum, was set up incrementally in order to gather and train actors from different (but not all) backgrounds relevant to the “Arab Spring” contexts, in order to help identify, design and implement projects aiming at addressing political conflicts with religious dimensions. The evaluation has reinforced the assumptions of the project management that due to the changed contexts the Cordoba Now Forum cannot fulfil its intended role anymore. Therefore, the next project phase will not allocate financial resources to the Cordoba Now Forum anymore. The viability and continuity of the forum will rely on the activeness of its members.

For other groups (involving religiously inspired political leaders and constituencies) there is a clear added value of creating a safe space for discussions around the notion and practices of citizenship in concrete contexts and situations. In order to promote political participation and inter-group conflict transformation, it is at times necessary to work more specifically with one type of participants who share a similar worldview and the same challenges to participation in public life. In the workshops aiming at promotion of constructive political participation, the actors, mostly adhering to the “participative” Salafi currents, were carefully selected by experts on the basis of a continuous monitoring stressing on the importance of their genuine will, to participate politically, and verifying that they are not involved in violent action. This is then followed by a secondary process that is more inclusive when the group is “ready” to engage with people of different worldviews. The regional scope of such meetings enables them to share concrete experiences, to learn from other actors and situations and to enlarge their horizon of experience. This approach will be continued when appropriate.

The missing resources for operational support structure have been duly noted and human as well as financial resources will be allocated specifically for process support with future projects.

Sustainability

5. *A broader and more stable integration of NAWAT into the organizational structure of the HSD (Human Security Division of the FDFA) could be designed to increase the sustainability of NAWAT in the Swiss context.*

The evaluation shows that the program itself has a high sustainability. Stakeholders who participated in NAWAT activities have introduced and embodied logics and methodologies of conflict transformation in their work environment. Local organizations have been established by CNF members in Egypt or Tunisia.

Because of change of persons and working conditions, among other reasons, the North Africa desk

was not at all times integrated in the process design in a satisfactory manner. In the future, the joint planning and regular exchange that took place in the first part of the NAWAT process will be resumed. Synergies with the existing North Africa Program will be reinforced proactively in the future. Additionally, the systematic sharing of concepts of activities with the concerned Swiss embassies will be strengthened.

Coherence, Synergies and Risk Management

6. *A better working consensus within the FDFA on the particular Swiss interests and goals in NAWAT should be established.*
7. *If specific synergies of NAWAT with other FDFA policy goals are desired, they would need to be integrated into the program design of the next phase. As such, it would then be important to define Swiss goals within NAWAT and make them transparent to all participants.*
8. *There is a need to study and monitor the – possibly unintended – impacts of PCPP projects in order to understand if and how these workshops are reaching the goal.*
9. *NAWAT will need to both clarify and simplify the communication about its program within the FDFA. This also applies to the management of “red lines”.*

Working consensus on NAWAT goals and the related Swiss interests have been developed from the beginning with the relevant FDFA structures. The program has been approved by the direction of the Directorate of Political Affairs. The HSD looks for synergies with other departments of the FDFA whenever possible, informs the relevant stakeholders in the MENA division of the PD or the SDC and has invited them to participate in different activities. Whereas staff of the SDC (headquarters and local) has been present in some activities, HSD cannot influence the allocation of resources (time) of the different departments to activities of NAWAT. Given the fact that the turnover is relatively high in comparison with the needed time frame of implementation of projects such as NAWAT, it is nevertheless important to allocate sufficient time and efforts to brief and involve colleagues again and again.

Risks related to the PCPP projects (less than 10% of all projects) have been assessed and discussed (HSD, PD, State Secretariat). Due to the deep knowledge of the field and the understanding of the actors, the FCG has an active and successful risk management practice. As the FCG program office stated: “Demining is a very risky job for the average person; but when you have the know-how to do it, it can be performed in a reasonably safe way.” The Theory of Change and red lines have been communicated transparently on the highest level¹. Given the fact that the program has clear red lines², the evaluation has shown the need for HSD to regularly communicate its methodological guidelines³ and its red lines also within the FDFA.

Efficiency

10. *It will be necessary to define an administrative structure of NAWAT that allows for a comprehensive management of funds related to NAWAT according to defined program goals.*
11. *The reporting system should be revised so that the information provided is useful for the management of the program.*
12. *It would be beneficial for the FCG to work towards greater programmatic and financial independence from the HSD. To this end, there should be an agreement as to how – and how not – the HSD will contribute to an organisational development process at the FCG.*
13. *In the on-going reorganisation process at the FCG, it will be important to define roles and responsibilities to empower staff members to take effective decisions.*

The FCG functions with HSD de facto (although not nominally) as a strategic partner. Hence FCG should have the necessary flexibility to perform this role.

The administrative structure of the management of the programme as well as the monitoring and reporting system is currently being revised (see also comment under program design). The HSD supports the internal re-organization process of FCG, a process that will end in summer 2015.

¹ **Note au Secrétaire d'Etat (Précisions complémentaires)** ; 12.11.2012 : On redlines, theory of Change and message to be communicated in the framework of the Joint Working Group CH-US (November 2012)

² **Note au Secrétaire d'Etat** ; 06.11.2012 : “Accompagner et encourager l’entrée dans le jeu démocratique des salafis « participatifs » (non-violents), et prévenir (ou contenir) l’extrémisme : éléments de stratégie de promotion de la paix de la Suisse avec ces nouveaux acteurs politiques d’Afrique du Nord et au-delà. » The official approval by the Secretary of state makes it a recognised Swiss policy framework. Red lines are stated in this document (*non-violence, respect de l’autre et des autres communautés, respect des normes internationales*), *no political training*).

And cadre du Joint Working Group Suisse - USA

³ “**RPC’s methodological guidelines for engaging in conflicts involving worldview differences**”, as specified in the RPC strategy 2013-2017.

Gender and Conflict-Sensitivity

14. The current gender policy co-produced with the CNF is not inclusive and should be rectified.
15. It would be beneficial for NAWAT to reach out to external professionals who have already been engaged in this particular conflict so as to avoid reproducing a debate that has already been extensively had elsewhere.
16. There are many competent and engaged women in the Arab world who could be integrated in NAWAT program. The absence of women weakens the overall performance of the program because important contributions are missing.

The HSD will pay special attention and monitor the gender policy of the future activities co-developed with CFG. Gender will be applied as a transversal theme in the next phase. A significant effort will be made to include more women as participants in future activities, in a way that is culturally acceptable.

NAWAT Program Design

17. In the event of a future program phase, NAWAT staff should simply and clearly communicate the architecture of the overall program, thereby revealing its programmatic assumptions, operational procedures and decision-making processes.
18. This would include the definition of a goal that is recalibrated to the size of its implementers, a Theory of Change that explains how activities are conceptually linked, as well as the formulation of expected outcomes that indicate how the activities converge towards concrete change on the ground.
19. In doing so, the controlling bodies in the HSD will have to commit to upholding the flexibility for a process-design that allows NAWAT to adapt to local developments, as will – in all likelihood – continue to be an important requirement for a relevant and effective program in the MENA region.
20. A monitoring system should be introduced to provide information on important change indicators so as to make transparent if and how progress occurs on the ground.
21. The management of the NAWAT program would benefit from the clarification of the standards according to which programs are managed in the HSD, in particular the basic PCM requirements. This would enable them to manage their program according to both process and results-based standards.

Program Design: The HSD will make sure that its future programs and projects with the FCG are comprehensive and adequately explained in the programme proposal. If any project linked to one of its core project will be designed, specific attention will be put into the communication of its assumptions in regards to the main project and program. As stated above, all projects will explicitly show how the intended processes and interventions will contribute to a positive change in a given context. The Theory of Change will also be the basis for operative decisions.

HSD is committed in upholding the flexibility for a process-design that allows the future projects to adapt to local developments. The above-named issues will be formulated in the programme proposal (programmatic assumptions, operational procedures and decision-making processes, clear goal, expected outcomes) Simultaneously the process design will continue with a significant factor of flexibility within the program in order to best adapt the processes to the local situations and developments.

If the **monitoring of the program** is done properly, the process will support both the HSD and the FCG in keeping on track the effectiveness and relevance of the programme (steering) and accounting for results (reporting). The monitoring will be done on different layers:

- Monitoring of assumptions: It will be part of the monitoring process to check the validity of the chain of results and to take decision if needed.
 - Context update in the progress reports (bi-yearly)
 - Ad hoc information and monitoring
- Context monitoring: The monitoring of the fast changing contexts is a key determinant of the continuous adaptions of progress activities. The CFG is doing different context monitoring activities such as:
 - Cordoba update (bi-weekly)
 - Context update in the progress reports (bi-yearly)
 - Ad hoc information and monitoring
- Monitoring of results: Efforts will be made to better monitor the results.

Concerning the **clarification of standards** for programme management at HSD, the programme will benefit in the very near future from newly established procedures, including project discussions amongst the concerned HSD section. These discussions will make sure that future project proposals and their implementation follow criteria officially approved by the HSD, such as those described in the *Wegleitung zur Wirkungsorientierung in der AMS*.