



# Management Response

## External Evaluation of the Integrated Urban Development Project – Phase II

By Pablo Vaggione

2025

### 1) Background

The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO has mandated Pablo Vaggione for the External Evaluation Mission of the Integrated Urban Development Project in Sousse, Tunisia – Phase II (PDUI II). The assignment consisted of 40 working days, including a one-week field trip undertaken to Tunisia in September 2025 covering meetings in Tunis and Sousse.

The PDUI II started in September 2022 and has the following components:

#### Development objectives (impact):

The population of the city of Sousse and its metropolitan area benefits from better economic, environmental, and social conditions due to integrated and climate-responsive urban development.

#### Project objectives (outcomes):

1. Governance: strengthened capacity to formulate a comprehensive and integrated urban planning framework, from strategic vision to project feasibility
2. Resilience: enhanced adaptation to the impacts of climate change
3. Mobility: improved understanding of mobility concepts and implementation of anchor interventions in public transport and mobility infrastructure
4. Energy management: identification and application of demonstration measures to reduce energy consumption
5. Dissemination and capitalisation: development of Sousse as a reference in integrated urban development, with transfer of concepts to Grand Sousse municipalities

Project outputs include capacity building on different topics of urban development, support for strategic planning and project preparation, implementation of pilot projects to demonstrate impact

The purpose of the evaluation was learning for project steering and continuation.

## 2) Appreciation of the report: Structure, methodology & process

The evaluation report is appreciated. It is well structured and addresses all points outlined in the Terms of Reference for the external evaluation. The methodology is robust and appropriate for a mid-term evaluation of a complex, multi-sector project. The evaluators apply an OECD DAC-based framework, triangulating data across document review, interviews, field mission, and qualitative content analysis. The explicit use of an evaluation matrix ensures a systematic link between evaluation questions, indicators, sources, and limitations. The report is also transparent about constraints such as moderate evidence quality, limited specificity in interview responses, and timing challenges around the delayed field mission. In terms of process, the evaluators demonstrate a good understanding of SECO's urban development approach and the Tunisian institutional context. Stakeholder engagement was broad-based and balanced. The report highlights how context changes influences project implementation and presents constructive reflections on project management processes.

Overall, the report is methodologically sound, well-structured, and process-aware, providing SECO with a credible evidence base for decision-making on the remaining implementation period and design of a potential next project phase.

## 3) Key findings and lessons learnt

PDUI II has positioned Sousse as a reference for integrated urban development in Tunisia. The project is highly relevant, addressing municipal priorities in energy, geo-information, and urban planning, and has already supported innovations that are now applied in municipal routines. Several national firsts underline the project's pioneering role. Together with the practitioner network across Grand Sousse, these illustrate the value of PDUI II as a laboratory for approaches that may inform other municipalities and national actors.

Main findings according to DAC criteria:

Relevance: The evaluation finds that PDUI II is highly relevant, strongly aligned with the municipality of Sousse's priorities and with SECO's integrated urban development approach.

Effectiveness: Effectiveness is rated moderate, as some outputs are beginning to influence municipal routines, but uptake remains unsystematic.

Efficiency: Efficiency is low, with a disproportionate share of resources absorbed by project management and execution delays that mean several activities will extend beyond the current timeframe.

Sustainability: Sustainability is moderate, as energy and some GIS<sup>1</sup> practices are increasingly used in operations and supported by municipal financing, but continuity in mobility and resilience remains uncertain.

Lessons learnt include:

- Integrate sustainability and operations early. Future activities should include a clear sustainability strategy from the start, for example, requiring that any pilot infrastructure

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<sup>1</sup> Geographic Information System

comes with a maintenance plan, and that capacity-building efforts result in institutionalised roles (not only individual skills).

- Anticipate administrative and legal hurdles. Time-consuming approvals require proactive management by engaging key ministries early. While project design established the initial framework, evolving governance conditions highlighted the importance of maintaining roles, responsibilities, deliverables, and expected outcomes throughout implementation.
- Keep a compact number of outputs. The multi-sector scope of PDUI II is timely, but too many studies diluted effort and, in a context of cautious approval, burdened validation processes. Streamlining objectives, making outputs concrete and verifiable, and reducing overlapping indicators help maintain focus on results.
- Anchor specialised project management locally. The addition of a local coordinator was appreciated and made project support more responsive. However, for complex undertakings, a resident manager with decision-making power is more effective than remote leadership, particularly where decision making requires intensive follow-up. In addition, effective project coordination requires that municipal staff have sufficient dedicated time, authority to engage across departments, and institutional backing. Limited time allocation and insufficient seniority can constrain a coordinator's ability to mobilise teams, review outputs, and maintain strategic oversight.
- Quick-wins create momentum but need to be maintained. In study-heavy projects, early tangible outputs generate enthusiasm and proof of concept. In PDUI I, parks and public lighting pilot projects generated visibility, but weak maintenance and OPEX<sup>2</sup> planning reduced their lasting value. Quick-wins need to consider both its physical design and how they will be operated to be “wins” and not just “quick”.
- Use inter-municipal collaboration and peer learning as multipliers. Engaging neighboring municipalities amplified impact at low cost.

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<sup>2</sup> Operating expenditures



#### 4) Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
<p><b>Recommendation 1</b></p> <p>Adjust the project timeframe and set a countdown calendar. Several activities now extend beyond the current end date, requiring an extension of the PDUI II implementation period. It is recommended that the AMO<sup>3</sup> prepares a countdown calendar with specific output delivery dates to PDUI II completion, including fixed review windows and set time for approvals. The calendar should specify a light escalation path if deadlines are missed. To facilitate review time estimation, deliverables could be grouped into three categories according to expected review length, as suggested by</p>	<p><b>Fully agree</b></p>	Partially agree	Not agree	<p><b>Priority: high</b></p>	
	<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>For almost one year, project activities had to be slowed down pending solutions for administrative hurdles. On this background it is evident that the originally planned timeframe is no longer realistic and a no-cost extension of the PDUI II is the logic next step once solutions for the bottlenecks have been implemented. Careful planning including appropriate monitoring and management instruments as well as clear responsibilities will be key.</p>				
	<p><u>Measures</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Initiate the re-planning process once the administrative situation has been clarified.</li> <li>2. Replan and agree on activities and budget within the new time frame, receive non-objection by SECO.</li> <li>3. Sign no-cost extension including clear activity and budget plan for the remaining project.</li> </ol>			<p>SECO</p> <p>AMO/Sousse, all</p> <p>AMO, Sousse</p>	<p>Asap</p> <p>03.2026</p>

<sup>3</sup> Assistance à maîtrise d'ouvrage (AMO) refers to the consortium of implementing partners, which accompany the implementation of PDUI II

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<p>the UGP<sup>4</sup>. The UGP would be expected to formally approve this calendar, while SECO and the Ministry of Interior may provide no-objection.</p>					
<p><b>Recommendation 2</b></p> <p>Streamline reporting and oversight. The introduction of bi-annual reports was a positive step. However, given the need for efficient project management to finalize implementation, the evaluation recommends replacing them with concise quarterly progress reports to provide more frequent oversight, minimizing excessive narrative to focus instead on key project management data. Quarterly reports should include an updated Gantt chart showing progress against milestones, expected completion dates, and any deviations; a RAG (Red-Amber-Green) status for each activity to highlight areas needing attention; and a clear indication of corrective actions being taken to address</p>	Fully agree	<b><u>Partially agree</u></b>	Not agree	<p><b>Priority: high</b></p>	
<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>In principle, SECO is equally convinced that thorough project management and especially planning and follow-up including SECO's punctual involvement is productive. This is why SECO has recently introduced concise half-yearly project follow-up reports against agreed plans including activities, milestones as well as budgets. This comes in addition to the yearly narrative report, where project progress is more deeply analysed.</p> <p>The responsibility for the implementation oversight and monitoring of the PDUI II has been awarded to the AMO. They are responsible and accountable vis-à-vis SECO. On this background it is not the role of SECO to be involved in detail in the project management and follow-up of single activities.</p> <p>Monthly calls already take place between SECO and the AMO to discuss bottlenecks as well as solutions. SECO welcomes the suggestion that the project coordinator from Sousse participates in these calls in addition to the regular contacts that take already place between SECO representatives of the Swiss cooperation office at the Swiss Embassy in Tunisia and Sousse.</p>					

<sup>4</sup> Unité de gestion du projet (Project Management Unit at the Municipality of Sousse)

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<p>issues. The reports should be complemented by brief monthly updates between SECO, the AMO lead, and the UGP coordinator to troubleshoot bottlenecks. COPIL<sup>5</sup> meetings should focus on unblocking strategic issues and realigning with the logframe as needed.</p>	SECO fully agrees on the strategic role the COPIL takes within a project.				
	<p><u>Measures</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evaluate the readiness of the project coordinator of the municipality of Sousse to participate in the monthly calls with the AMO and SECO in addition to the exchanges with local SECO representatives, Sousse's daily contact with the local AMO coordinator and the ad hoc calls taking place between SECO, the Ministry of Interior in Tunisia, Sousse and the AMO.</li> </ol>			AMO	01.2026
<p><b>Recommendation 3</b></p> <p>Strengthen the project management function. Whilst recognising the AMO's technical calibre, feedback concurred that project management inefficiencies have increased coordination overhead. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of distinguishing more clearly between technical leadership and administrative coordination. They considered that the management function would benefit from greater focus and pointed to the need for a specialised project manager based locally.</p>	<p><b>Fully agree</b>    Partially agree    Not agree</p>			<p><b>Priority: medium-high</b></p>	
	<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>SECO fully agrees that technical assistance projects need strong project management, facilitation and decision making, that are anchored locally. It should be oriented to act adapted to local context but also to be guided by international experiences and standards. During the first phase of PDUI, the current project management set-up seemed to work well. However, SECO agrees that during PDUI II, the project may benefit from suggested adaptations.</p>				
	<p><u>Measures</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SECO will assess with all partners involved the need to strengthen local project management.</li> <li>2. AMO to present a possible solution. Thereby, financial possibilities need to be balanced as a shift of competence may also go</li> </ol>			SECO	01.2026
			AMO	02.2026	

<sup>5</sup> Comité de Pilotage (Project Steering Committee)

RECOMMENDATIONS	MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
	along with an increased budget.				
<p><b>Recommendation 4</b></p> <p>Rebalance the budget. The current imbalance between management and technical expenditures requires correction, especially as no additional funding is foreseen. Streamlined reporting, clearer validation processes, and stronger local project management should contribute to improving the balance of resource use. The UGP and AMO could review the rationale and scope of activities with unclear uptake, focusing resources on logframe core outputs with the concurrence of the Ministry of Interior and SECO.</p>	<p><b>Fully agree</b></p>	<p>Partially agree</p>	<p>Not agree</p>	<p><b>Priority: high</b></p>	
<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>As soon as the administrative hurdles blocking the continuation of PDUI II are solved, detailed replanning of the remaining activities and budget will be initiated. This exercise shall culminate in the signing of the no-cost extension for PDUI II. The reassessment of priorities and the consequent sorting of activities are integral part of this exercise.</p>	<p><u>Measures</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Suggest a sound plan for reorganizing activities and budget for the remaining project time.</li> <li>2. Consultation of the plan with all stakeholders involved and present a final joint plan.</li> <li>3. Signing of no-cost extension including adapted plan.</li> </ol>				
<p><b>Recommendation 5</b></p> <p>Update the approach to communications and develop a communications plan. The lack of visibility of study-based project achievements has been identified by the Municipality as a major gap that needs to be addressed. PDUI II should respond with a concise, deliverable-based plan for the remaining period. Suggested</p>	<p>Fully agree</p>	<p><b>Partially agree</b></p>	<p>Not agree</p>	<p><b>Priority: medium-low</b></p>	
<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>SECO fully agrees that communication on the project and especially on the successes is very important and should be an integral part. However, PDUI II is designed as a capacity building project, which guides dedicated staff members of the municipality of Sousse but should not replace their effort. Balance also needs to be found between providing ready-made input by the AMO and thus increasing the project budget line for communication, and engagement in the activity of Sousse.</p>					
				<p>AMO/Sousse</p>	<p>03.2026</p>

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<p>elements to be developed by the AMO include short success stories and infographics highlighting achievements (such as energy savings and GIS-enabled service improvements), posted regularly; monthly internal briefs and talking points for UGP and municipal staff to maintain message consistency; and support for media engagement or public-facing events organised by the Municipality, including site visits for local journalists and press notes tied to milestones such as PAU<sup>6</sup> validation, training cycles, or the roll-out of new tools. Making communications an urgent deliverable will require the Municipality to appoint a focal point with sufficient time availability and the AMO to revise the budget to cover communication activities.</p>	<p><u>Measures</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarify and balance communication needs of Sousse as well as the possibility for its own contribution and match it with possibilities PDU II is able to offer, including budget wise.</li> </ol>			AMO	01.2026
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b></p> <p>Intensify engagement with national stakeholders to unblock delays. Mobilise the Ministry of</p>	<p><b>Fully agree</b></p>	<p>Partially agree</p>	<p>Not agree</p>	<p><b>Priority: high</b></p>	
	<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>Engagement and involvement of all project partners, including on na-</p>				

<sup>6</sup> Plan d'aménagement urbain (Urban Development Plan)

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<p>Interior and other central bodies to accelerate pending decisions. Examples include convening a dedicated multi-ministry review to expedite PAU approval, issuing a ministry note to clarify the VAT exemption procedure for future procurements, facilitating inputs for resilience such as data from environment authorities, and smoothing the pathway for metropolitan mobility arrangements. Inviting the Municipal Development Fund (CPSCL<sup>7</sup>) and relevant ministries to technical workshops would help build ownership and encourage their engagement in supporting and financing uptake after the project. This dual track of local delivery supported by national facilitation reduces municipal hesitation and contributes to sustainability.</p>	<p>tional level, is key to advance PDUI II and reach the planned objectives. Whereas the municipality of Sousse and the AMO are the main actors to approach, address and bring together the different stakeholders, SECO (often via the Swiss Cooperation Office in Tunis) shall be selectively instrumental to intervene, connect and deblock if these channels have been exhausted.</p>				
	<p><u>Measures</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. AMO to establish a list of pending issues, which need to be addressed with different stakeholders.</li> <li>2. Remind partners to ask SECO to exchange with national stakeholders for selected issues where communication channels of AMO and the municipalities were not successful.</li> <li>3. Use the COPIL for strategic discussions and use the presence of all stakeholders to address bottlenecks.</li> </ol>	<p>AMO</p> <p>SECO</p> <p>All</p>	<p>01.2026</p> <p>continuous</p> <p>continuous</p>		
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b></p> <p>Institutionalise the uptake of key outputs. As outputs are completed, they should be anchored</p>	<p><b>Fully agree</b></p>	<p>Partially agree</p>	<p>Not agree</p>	<p><b>Priority: medium-high</b></p>	
<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>Institutionalization of outputs in a capacity building project is key.</p>					

<sup>7</sup>Caisse des Prêts et de Soutien des Collectivités Locales (Municipal Development Fund)



Place, Date

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Anne Schick  
Program Manager

Place, Date

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Philipp Keller  
Head of Section