

Evaluation summary

Partnership for effective and sustainable African Union Liaison Offices – External evaluation

January 2017

Evaluation theme

Governance and state-citizen relations

Introduction

This external final evaluation summary assesses our work to support the African Union's Liaison Offices (AULOs) to be a better source of information and analysis on governance and increase the relevance of the African Union (AU) in national affairs through the sharing of values and the dissemination of one of its key legal instruments in favor of governance, elections and democracy. The project ran from 2012 – 2017 and was evaluated in January 2017.

The evaluator recorded an increase in the AULO's delivery of objectives and better-quality work produced as a direct result of Alert's capacity building. Nonetheless, the programme also faced its share of challenges, which reduced its long-term impact.

Background to the project

The AULOs are intended to be the face and voice of the AU on the ground in the states where they are established. The aim of this project was to strengthen the capacity of AULOs to deliver on their stated objectives and country-specific mandates, emphasizing their role in promoting the ratification and domestication of one of AU's legal instruments – the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Additionally, the project aimed to promote a result-based monitoring approach within the AULOs (as well as the regional economic communities (RECs) and the African Union Commission (AUC)), accompanying them in strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting and providing training as necessary.

The project proposal outlined the following four expected results:

1. AULOs provide qualitative and timely information on conflict trends and fragilities to AUC, contributing to the running of the Continental Early Warning System.
2. AULOs become an essential partner for host governments, international and national actors for the promotion of peace and security in the countries where they are deployed.
3. Shared Values and the provisions of the African Charter on Democracy, Election, and Governance (ACDEG) are disseminated leading to ratification and domestication of AU instruments into national legislations in three pilot countries.

4. Peacebuilding and post conflict recovery plans contribute to the social and economic inclusion of women and vulnerable people.

The programme experienced a slow start as the AUC and Alert came to a common understanding of mutual goals and aspirations for this project. The Ebola epidemic in West Africa and rising violence in South Sudan forced a shift from the initially approved pilot countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan to Sudan and Côte d'Ivoire. However, Sudan's re-registration campaign of non-governmental organisations and the reluctance of the AULO to lead the advocacy of its instruments forced Alert to place its activities in Sudan on hold. Thus, the bulk of the activities were held in Ethiopia where the AUC is headquartered and in Côte d'Ivoire. Following a mid-term evaluation, a further decision was made with the donor and partner to expand the project to all AULOs and to include Results Based Management (RBM) as one of the training topics.

Methodology

The evaluation consultant reviewed the key project documents and conducted a survey of participants, stakeholders and AUC and Alert staff via telephone and email in addition to 19 key informant Interviews and two focus group discussions with members of the Alert working group and participants in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

The main challenges to conducting this evaluation stemmed from the fact that some information seemed to exist only in the institutional memory of employees and not in the formal record. Given the high turnover of staff at the AUC and the departure of some project staff at Alert prior to the project ending, some sources were not available to answer or confirm questions regarding the early strategies in the programme.

Summary of findings

- The project was successful in overcoming a few key hurdles in the short term, such as increased effectiveness in the delivery of objectives and mandates in the participating AULOs as a direct result of capacity building efforts of Alert. In one account, Results Based Management (RBM) has allowed for report writing to be directed at a given expected outcome, making the content more directed and more relative to their mission and mandates. AULOs that participated in Alert-facilitated training sessions on conflict sensitivity, peace economy, gender mainstreaming and results-based management self-reported that their offices have since submitted reports with greater details, more gender contents, derived from a wider array of sources, and with longer conflict analyses.
- A strength of the programme was its reliance on local working groups and national focal points – composed of civil society, media, and government representatives – who have a keen understanding of their country's political dynamics and facilitated access to social and political networks. The working groups designed and implemented professional quality activities intended to promote or increase awareness of the AULOs and the ACDEG and its application in the promotion of women and girls in politics which were captured through a range of press publications.
- However, not enough time was devoted to the early relationship-building and learning stages before launching the program's design. The result was a programme that produced short-term benefits for the AULOs operational efficiency but missed several opportunities to leave a lasting impact such as supporting Sudanese civil society and engaging stakeholders unfamiliar with AULOs.

- Most achievements in the programme are attributed to the training workshops and there was little evidence that Alert's activities improved the visibility of AULOs. A poll showed no significant difference in terms of awareness compared to the initial baseline assessment of April 2013.
- Civil society organisations did not receive adequate support to conduct advocacy activities around the African Charter. However, one human rights group in Côte d'Ivoire credits Alert with its decision to use the ACDEG to plead their case before the African Court of Human Rights.
- Monitoring processes were inconsistent, and reporting was infrequent. This impeded the ability to assess the programme's successes and failures or make timely and relevant adaptations. The AU has a system to monitor and evaluate the activities and goals of AULOs; however, this tool is not widely implemented and does not have buy-in across the institution.
- The early project changes due to contextual issues made the data collected during the baseline evaluation irrelevant. The lack of specific baseline data makes it difficult to judge improvement in the capacity to promote AU gender policies, inclusion of women into ratification and domestication processes, and monitoring the development of the AULOs strategy.

Recommendations

- **Focus on the African Union Strategic Plan and Road Map recommendations to avoid eclipsing the AULOs** - The Strategic Plan identified inefficiencies in the AULOs operations which subsequently hindered Alert's activities. Consequently, Alert chose to implement the programme activities separately from AULO sponsored activities. There must be a collaborative effort to navigate existing bureaucratic obstacles to develop a more resourceful strategy for moving forward after the programme has concluded.
- **Work within the African Union Monitoring and Evaluation system** - It is normal for donors and international partners to continue to use their own institutional tools but efforts should be used to align these systems as much as possible to ensure that all information is being shared and to determine if all are reaching the same conclusions.
- **Conduct a thorough baseline assessment before proposing a way forward** - The baselines that were conducted in this project employed a sampling methodology that was not informative enough to set program parameters. Broader consultation and thorough assessments in all countries of operation would have made programming more relevant and effective for more marginalised stakeholders.
- **Conduct a mapping of all stakeholders involved with the AULOs** - to establish a clear idea of the field of activities being conducted but also to construct a theory of change based on calculated capacities and levels of influence over the areas targeted. The main goal is to ensure that the project is sound, will provide the best value for the money and will avoid duplication.
- **Explore the use of consultants and interns** – these can be used in very cost effective and pinpointed areas to boost the internal capacity of the office. In recognition of the need to retain capacity within the offices, consultants should be partnered with local staff in such a way that it builds in-house capacity.

- **Adopt an Outcome Mapping model for project design** which can yield a very specific detailed list of the types of support the programme will need and types of progress that can be expected at each stage.
- **Use annual and semi-annual meetings of stakeholders to review progress markers** - AUC and AULO should be the main actors to report on progress and define parameters of success. When stakeholders set their own progress markers, they become responsible for meeting those markers and reporting on what efforts are being made to achieve the levels they themselves have set.

Lessons

- Alert has used the experience from this project to assist in the continual development of its programmes. Project staff recognise that the programme could have conducted a more robust baseline assessment that began with a consultative process to allow for greater participation of the AULOs in the programme design. Alert continues to make internal efforts to prioritise more robust monitoring and evaluation instruments across all its programmes.
- Alert has since leveraged the experience of working with multilateral institutions to strengthen its collaborations with other regional actors. The recommendations and lessons learned from this project were valuable in the successful development and coordination of these actions.