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**“Program for Women’s Economic Empowerment and
Participation in the Governance of Local-Regional Development”
UNIFEM - MEX-00045602**

**Mid-Term External Evaluation of Phase II (2008-2010)
of the Regional Program:
“Women and Local Economic Development, MyDEL”**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
July 5th, 2010**

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Executive Summary

The Mid-Term External Evaluation of Phase II (2008-2009v) of the regional Program for “Women’s Economic Empowerment and Participation in the Governance of Local-Regional Development”, known for short as the “Women and Local Economic Development, MyDEL”, was carried out from December 2009 to May 2010. This evaluation was conducted according to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System (2005), Article 31 of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Evaluation Policy (2006), and in line with the principles and criteria established in the United Nations Fund for the Development of Women (UNIFEM) Evaluation Policy.

The evaluative approach was based on the guidelines and definitions adopted by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), whose criteria are generally used as reference to evaluate development projects, programs, and processes. Considering the peculiar nature and complexity of the MyDEL Program, elements of institutional analysis were also included to evaluate its performance from the organizational structure viewpoint.

Phase II of MyDEL covers four countries—Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua—and is financed by Italian Cooperation, which, in turn, is the main partner in the execution of strategies and activities. The Program is managed or coordinated at the regional level by UNIFEM’s Liaison Office in Guatemala, which liaises with the UNIFEM Regional Office for Mexico, Central America, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, which base is in Mexico. MyDEL’s coordination is supported by a regional advisory team, through national and departmental coordination offices within the Program’s target areas. The Program receives administrative support from the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in Guatemala.

Phase II of MyDEL (2008-2010) seeks to **consolidate and institutionalize the achievements reached in Phase I** by carrying out actions at three levels:

- **Local/transnational:** This involves **institutionalizing the model of recognition of female entrepreneurship**, with its different components: (i) inventory and georeferencing of initiatives of women entrepreneurship, and analyzing value chains using a territorial approach; (ii) platform of entrepreneurial services—access to ICTs, appropriation, organization, incidence, financial services, and access to networks; (iii) negotiations and agendas coordinated with territorial entities, promotion of spaces for women entrepreneurs, and sharing of their knowledge and products.
- **National/regional:** This involves institutionalizing the model of recognition of women entrepreneurs by **validating and disseminating applied methodologies** in governmental decision-making and consensus-building entities of both the public and private sectors as well as in national and regional educational institutes linked to territorial development and competitiveness.
- **International/multilateral:** This involves the **transfer and dissemination of concepts, methodologies, and lessons learned** in a new scenario of opportunities for innovation, access to information and communication technologies, and sharing of experiences under the modality of decentralized South-South collaboration.

This way the Program seeks to prove the intervention model and its corresponding conceptual and methodological framework based on four routes for empowerment: (i) recognition; (ii)

valorization; (iii) entrepreneurial development; (iv) empowerment, which focus is to repositioning female empowerment as an activator of the local economy with potential global chain.

For this evaluation, two dimensions of analysis were proposed. The first consisted of an **evaluative-retrospective** dimension, based on accountability, where the following four evaluation criteria were examined: (i) relevance and coherence; (ii) effectiveness; (iii) managerial efficiency; and (iv) sustainability. The second dimension involved **systematization and learning**, allowing to identify the “best practices” and the lessons learned, using a participatory approach, as a way of knowledge transmission and appropriation.

Findings according to Evaluation Criteria

1. Relevance and coherence

1.1. Relevance to the local and regional context and to identified needs and interests

Finding No. 1: As in the past, MyDEL continues to be highly relevant to the lives of women entrepreneurs as it helps transform factors causing inequality in the economy-work relationship and improves the conditions of women involved in these corporate sectors.

1.2. Coherence with UNIFEM's Vision and Strategy

Finding No. 2: MyDEL has not only been coherent with but also aligned with UNIFEM's mandate and strategic priorities at several levels. The Program has strengthened UNIFEM's position in the Central American region.

1.3. Coherence with the Italian Cooperation's Vision and Strategy (DGCS-MAE)

Finding No. 3: MyDEL's approach is highly coherent with the objectives and strategies of the Italian Cooperation, which in turn contributes important approaches that enhance MyDEL's performance.

2. Effectiveness

2.1. Overall effectiveness

Finding No. 4: MyDEL has advanced significantly in achieving the general objective of consolidating the strategy to potentiate empowerment of women entrepreneurs as well as the local/regional development model in all target territories, although some differences have been observed among participating countries and there has been a notable dominance of strategies at the local level.

2.2. Effectiveness in achieving Objective 1: Local/transnational level

Finding No. 5: There is evidence that significant advances have been made in achieving the objective of supporting the MyDEL strategy at the local level; effectiveness was higher in associative actions and lower in capacity building for governance and organizational development.

2.3. Effectiveness in achieving Objective 2: Regional/national level

Finding No. 6: The incorporation of MyDEL into national and regional actions has been slow because of its innovative and multi-dimensional character and the breakdown of traditional schemes. Efforts such as the formation of partnerships, actions of political incidence, and knowledge management to facilitate the shift in paradigms are to be highlighted.

2.4. Effectiveness in achieving Objective 3: International/multilateral level

Finding No. 7: The Program has managed to disseminate the approach of Local Economic Development/Territorial Economic Development (known as DEL/DET) and its application to the reality of women in target territories through Centers for Entrepreneurial Services for Women (CSEMs) in the Local Economic Development Agency (LEDA). However, greater attention must be paid to linking the Program with decentralized cooperation processes and with mechanisms of North-South and South-South methodological and technological transfer.

2.5. Effects

Finding No. 8: MyDEL has had both planned and unplanned effects on the lives of participating women entrepreneurs, on the LEDAs, and on other society organization, which are now beginning to show interest in the economic rights of women.

3. Managerial Efficiency

3.1. Strategic Directions

Finding No. 9: The Program's regional management, the regional advisory group, and national directorates have formed an efficient and coordinated work team. The relationship with territorial entities, at the local level of execution, is a bit more distant.

3.2. Organizational Structure

Finding No. 10: The Program has validated an organizational structure that incorporates various levels, countries, and territories, and can be adapted to other regions. It can be complemented with a precise characterization of functions to avoid possible duplications in the intervention.

3.3. Process Management

Finding No. 11: Program management and the leadership team enjoy a solid relationship, with good communication. Although there is a relationship and communication with territories, these are weaker.

3.4. Inter-organizational links

Finding No. 12: The MyDEL has developed an important strategy to create alliances with a diverse array of entities, including community-based, social, and sectoral organizations. The Program must still be institutionalized in national and regional entities with competence in gender and economy issues to further MyDEL's actions in participating countries and expand them to other territories.

4. Sustainability

Finding 13: MyDEL can be sustainable because it has incorporated solid methodological processes and has a theoretical basis that proves to be relevant to similar social contexts, mainly at the local level. MyDEL has the foundations required to achieve a consistent delivery strategy to local, national, and regional entities in the final stage of Phase II of the Program.

Conclusions

1. The MyDEL Program is **novel** and **innovative**, with a high potential to generate changes in women empowerment.
2. The Program has allowed UNIFEM to **operationalize** its regional and global strategies.
3. The Program has a novel approach that will contribute to the new UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) with strategies to reach women's autonomy working from the local economic level, through links with the different levels that intervene in national and regional economic development. This is an important change moment, thus this is an opportunity to contribute to the sustainability of UNIFEM's development strategy.
4. The Program is **highly relevant** to both partner organizations and external entities as it:
 - addresses the economic needs of women of the region;
 - has a dimension that surpasses the local level; and
 - contains decisive aspects for the empowerment and recognition of women entrepreneurs.
5. Overall, the Program's **effectiveness** is **satisfactory** as it ranks:
 - **high** in terms of effectiveness at the local/transnational level (consolidation of the strategy);
 - **low** in terms of effectiveness at the regional/national level (institutional capacity building); and
 - **intermediate** in terms of effectiveness at the international/multilateral level.
6. Phase II of MyDEL has had:
 - **positive effects** on the situation of women entrepreneurs in terms of credit facilities, technical assistance, and training; and
 - **a quite visible effect** is the promotion of associative forms of work, which increase the group power of these women to recognize themselves and to be recognized by others as women entrepreneurs and as development actors.

The limited development of a **strategy to access markets** pertinent to the enterprises of these women reduces the successful dynamics of making the model operational.
7. There is no evidence that any agreements were established in Phase II to **incorporate gender issues into training materials**, particularly regarding:
 - gender relationships within the family and household and within business structures;
 - obstacles to the appropriation of women's rights.
8. **Strategic partnerships** with entities for productivity and competitiveness are proving to be **key in the strategy's success** at all three levels of intervention. Actions should focus more on actors who can facilitate the incidence on national policies in all countries, using aggressive strategies to transcend spaces traditionally exclusive to women.
9. **MyDEL's organizational structure operates satisfactorily**. Having a mixed, multidisciplinary Regional Coordination team as well as advisors on different issues favors the synergies for identifying opportunities, threats, and niches of intervention. The team has showed flexibility within a changing context.

10. Not having a system of indicators to **monitor results** based on the logframe is proving to be a limiting factor to increasingly improve the Program's intervention and draw lessons from achievements and difficulties.
11. **Knowledge management** was weak during the period covered by this evaluation report. Efforts are being made to improve this aspect in the future.
12. A **satisfactory level of sustainability** has been envisaged in view of:
 - the important institutional factor, especially the role played by the CSEMs in the LEDAs;
 - the validity of methodological processes and the proven relevance for similar social contexts.

The fundamental challenge is to streamline the interconnections between levels to reach the required sustainability.
13. **Solid foundations have been laid** to advance toward the consolidation of a model that will have the expected impact, once the pending phase of this reporting period has culminated (**satisfactory sustainability**). To achieve this consolidation, an additional period will probably be required.

Recommendations

General recommendations

1. Extend the Program to include a Phase III once Phase II culminates in view of:
 - the preliminary results in the consolidation of the strategy to strengthen women entrepreneurship;
 - the capacity of the Program to help eradicate poverty and promote gender equality; and
 - the potential impact that the termination of the MyDEL Program could have on the success of change processes that require more time as well as more prolonged accompaniment.
2. Take advantage of the opportunity to scale-up actions, capitalizing on the experience gained so far to play a more visible, strategic, and institutionalized role in the region, promoting greater articulation and improving the capacity to address greater challenges, helping share South-South experiences. For this, it is required to document the strategy in a process of analysis and systematization that will complement MyDEL's publication.

Specific recommendations

a. Recommendations for the final stage of Phase II

1. Strengthen the **interconnectivity between levels**, identifying links to transmit achievements from one level to another as a basis of sustainability and desired impact. Several factors that could help strengthen this interconnectivity between levels include the following:
 - strengthening of public-private alliances;
 - linking of entities involved in economic development at each level;
 - more actions directed to have incidence on public policies;

- increased incorporation of women and feminist organizations into the process;
 - increased dissemination of knowledge and success stories of women entrepreneurs among decision makers; and
 - actions demonstrating what happens at the local level and their projection to other levels.
2. **Establish a Knowledge Management Committee** that defines guidelines that not only facilitate the flow of the knowledge generated by MyDEL/UNIFEM, but also learning, innovation, and exchange as a basis to further impact. This can be achieved by:
 - improving the design and effectiveness of programs and policies for the economic empowerment of women and their associativity;
 - generating discussion forums that support the positioning of MyDEL in the region, taking maximum advantage of ICTs;
 - proposing strategies for the transmission and dissemination of the knowledge generated by MyDEL to other UNIFEM actions as well as to women and society in general.
 3. **Improve MyDEL's monitoring and evaluation system** by complementing the current planning (logframe) and reporting system to donors with a methodology that identifies and ranks Program actors or partners, and displays the desired impacts, with qualitative and quantitative indicators that are achievable, practical, independent, targeted, and objectively verifiable. An on-line monitoring system should be implemented. The system should be aligned with the regional characteristics of the Program and facilitate virtual communication and inputs.
 4. **Establish a rigorous and reliable information system** that provides statistics and quantitative and qualitative data on the services provided by the CSEMs/LEDAs of the MyDEL Program in terms of training, advisory services, financial services, etc. It is recommended that Management provide these data for the 2008-2009 reporting period and extend it to the end of the Program, especially regarding credits; authorized amounts; terms; interest rates, and interest on late payments; number and type of training; consolidated data by territory, country and region, for women participating in the Program.
 5. Regarding **capacity building** in Gender and Local Development, recommendations are to:
 - **Strengthen existing partnerships** and form new alliances to include UN agencies, thus facilitating the institutionalization of MyDEL, as well as intensify the **mapping of actors linked to the strategy**.
 - **Give continuity to the work with the academic community** to build knowledge on Gender and Local Development at educational centers, governmental and nongovernmental institutions, and society in general.
 - **Help consolidate the training school (ECCA, its Spanish acronym)** for CSEMs and LEDAs and feed it with the knowledge generated by MyDEL in the territories.
 - Offer routine training and refresher **courses on gender-related issues to LEDA personnel and members of their Executive Boards**.
 - Improve **qualifications and training on gender-related issues to CSEM managers**, with a continuous support for their knowledge updating and exchange.
 6. **Review training materials** as part of the formation strategy in women entrepreneurship. Business plans and business-related training should address the topic of gender relationships

of women in the family and household, in business structures, and in the community, as well as the appropriation of their rights.

7. Promote and implement out participatory processes of designing and implementing a **Policy on Gender Equality within each LEDA**.
8. Include, within the services offered by MyDEL, **advisory services on marketing and markets** for the products of women entrepreneurs; expand **regional and international opportunities** for women to meet, form alliances, coordinate, and learn from other women entrepreneurs.
9. Prepare the Program's **turnover strategy**, indicating the conditions of delivery to responsible entities to ensure future sustainability. The strategy should:
 - Document the status of existing alliances, their interrelationships and the role the different actors play in the execution of the MyDEL Program;
 - Establish the conditions for the delivery of results; and
 - Design the conditions for a transition phase of 2-3 years.

b. Recommendations for the designing and strategic planning of Phase III

1. Use **conceptual maps and results chains** for greater clarity and precision during the planning process.
2. **Build a Theory of Change** for the MyDEL, identifying the conditions necessary to ensure the desired change in the future, based on accumulated knowledge and experience.
3. **Identify and prepare the Vision and Mission statements of the “MyDEL model”**, using a participatory approach. These should indicate why the Program strives to contribute to development.
4. Conceptualize, revise, and adjust each of the Program's subtopics: **territorial approach to development, gender approach, women entrepreneurship, empowerment, incidence, governance, and economic rights**.
5. Design a simple and practical **knowledge management** system that facilitates the flow of information and knowledge generated by the Program, using modern ICTs.

WOMEN PARTICIPANTS OF THE MYDEL REGIONAL PROGRAM CONTRIBUTING TO THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

February 2010

