ROLES AND FUNCTIONING OF REGIONAL TECHNICAL OFFICES

Assessment report

December 2020

RTO

Contents

List of Acronyms

CBO	Community-based organization
CSO	Civil society organization
GIS	Geographic information system
LED	Local economic development
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MERP	Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project
PESTEL	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental
RTO	Regional Technical Office
TEDO	Tripoli Environmental and Development Observatory
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UFC	Urban Community of Al-Fayha'a
UoM	Union of municipalities

Executive summary

Background

Regional Technical Offices (RTOs) were established by UN-Habitat in 2007 in order to empower unions of municipalities (UoMs) in emergency responses, planning, and development, and specifically to support reconstruction and development in Lebanon. RTOs were established under the framework of Article 122 of Legislative Decree no. 118/1977, which states that "the engineering unit in the Union shall be in charge of certain tasks on behalf of member municipalities, including: assisting in the approval of applications for construction permits, preparing any required technical studies and consultations, preparing the specifications of the supplies, works and services, and developing plans."

The aim of the RTO is to guide the union to move from emergency response to recovery planning by providing technical and engineering assistance in municipal projects, as well as by supporting decision-making processes, enhancing service delivery, and addressing governance issues at the regional level.[1]

UN-Habitat provides financial and technical support in the operation of RTOs, while UoMs cover the remaining portion of staff salaries as well as operating expenditures. Although established by UN-Habitat, RTOs are to be gradually handed over to the concerned unions. Despite the success to date, however, RTOs face challenges.

The Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project (MERP) is a joint initiative by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN-Habitat. As part of its project activities, MERP provides financial support to the RTOs of the UoM of Tyre and the Urban Community of Al-Fayha'a (UCF). This support serves two purposes. First, MERP aims to empower UoMs in emergency responses, planning, and development. Second, given that RTOs in all

three areas are expected to play a major role in the implementation of MERP activities, it is crucial that RTOs are functional and sufficiently capacitated. For these reasons, MERP conducted a functional assessment of the RTOs of the UoM of Tyre and UCF between May and August 2020.

The purpose of the assessment was to propose recommendations to strengthen RTOs and to support the replication and sustainability of the model over the longer term, while also identifying measures and good practices to strengthen and enhance the RTO's daily operations and functioning. Geographical focus of the assessment was on the RTOs of the UoM of Tyre and UCF. The assessment focused on the following aspects of the RTO:

- Organization and structure
- Roles and responsibilities
- Resources, capacity, and accountability
- Internal and external coordination
- Team values and staff motivation
- Strengths and weaknesses

Key findings RTO in Tyre

- The RTO of Tyre UoM is a unit comprised of four full-time staff, all four of whom are male.
- In Tyre the RTO falls under the technical division of the UoM.
- RTO staff in Tyre reported a well-established organizational structure that is not always followed in practice.
- There appear challenges around reporting within the RTO and between the RTO and the various departments of the UoM.
- While RTO staff are clear on how the RTO fits into the UoM organogram, staff also reported

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1   UN-Habitat, "Regional Technical Offices Assessment Report" (2018).

that there is no organogram that specifies reporting lines within the RTO and that defines reporting lines and coordination with other UoM departments.

- There are limited to no mechanisms in place to track RTO and staff performance.

- RTO staff in Tyre reported a variety of projects over the past 24 months. These are small-scale projects that primarily focus on local infrastructure, such as municipal and rural roads; green projects, such as around clean energy; as well as a variety of projects in support of basic services, including the construction or rehabilitation of health centres, schools, community centres, sport facilities, public gardens, and sewage/drainage projects.

- RTO staff stated that projects are implemented on behalf of the UoM of Tyre and UN-Habitat, rather than individual municipalities.

- All RTO staff mentioned the need to have a clear/standard process in place to manage requests for RTO support.

- RTO projects implemented over the last 24 months were reported to have specifically taken into consideration children, women, refugees/displaced people, and vulnerable Lebanese and youth. However, while all four RTO staff in Tyre reported the primary beneficiaries of their work being the UoM and UN-Habitat, none reported communities as beneficiaries.

- RTO staff in Tyre reported that the RTO is sufficiently resourced.

- In Tyre no standard onboarding process for RTO staff was implemented, and Tyre RTO staff received limited training.

- The RTO reported strong coordination with the UoM, UN-Habitat, and municipalities. However, very limited to no coordination has been established with other external actors, including development partners in the area.

Key findings RTO in Al Fayha'a

- The RTO of UCF is a unit comprised of three staff, two of whom work on a full-time basis. One staff is male, two are female.

- While the RTO has clear linkages to other

departments within UCF, it is unclear how the office formally fits within the UCF structure.

- The RTO in Al-Fayha'a is well-established on paper, but processes are not always followed in practice

- In Al-Fayha'a there are limited mechanisms in place to track RTO and staff performance.

  ° UCF RTO has been playing a strong role in supporting partner municipalities, particularly in terms of the design and supervision of small-scale infrastructure and construction projects. The projects primarily focused on local infrastructure, such as municipal roads and building construction and/or rehabilitation; 'heritage projects' and projects around clean energy; as well as a variety of projects in support of basic services, including the construction or rehabilitation of community centres, sport facilities, public gardens, and water, sanitation, and hygiene related projects. In Al-Fayha'a the RTO also reported to work on the construction and/or rehabilitation of markets.

- RTO staff reported that projects are implemented on behalf of the Union and specific municipalities in the Union (two staff) and on behalf of UN-Habitat (one staff).

- Projects implemented by the RTO over the last 24 months are reported by RTO staff to have specifically taken into consideration children, youth, women, refugees/displaced people, and vulnerable Lebanese, people with disabilities, and the elderly. All three RTO staff in UCF reported that communities, the UoM, and UN-Habitat are primary beneficiaries of their work, while one staff mentioned that municipalities also benefit.

- RTO staff in Al-Fayha'a reported that the RTO is in need of additional resources and capacity.

- In Al-Fayha'a an onboarding process for RTO staff was implemented, but RTO staff received limited training.

- The RTO reported limited coordination with the UoM, but strong coordination with a wide range of external actors.

General recommendations – short/medium term

- Enhance inclusion and internal functioning of the RTO
- Strengthen the integration of the RTO within the UoM
- Build and develop RTO capacity
- Support resource mobilization and financial support for the RTO
- Strengthen strategic partnerships and external collaborations
- Enhance data collection, management, and community consultation
- Meet RTO equipment needs

General recommendations for longer-term sustainability and scale-up of the model

- Develop an RTO manual with clear/standardized tools and processes, including:
  - Organogram that outlines accountability relationships between UoM/municipality and the RTO;
  - Standardized set of RTO positions and related ToRs;
  - Work plan template and process for the development and review of the work plan, including roles and responsibilities of the UoM/municipality and RTO;
  - Standardized onboarding programme for RTO staff, including training and handbooks;
  - Standardized training programme for RTO staff consisting of general training as well as tailored training for each RTO staff position;
  - Standardized engagement processes for community/civil society and private sector;
  - An implementation/exit plan template that clearly identifies the different implementation phases and hand-over steps;
  - A reporting and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, including annual reporting template for the RTO.

- Develop a long-term strategy for RTO together with UoMs and municipalities. The strategy should:
  - Clearly position the RTO as a UoM/municipal department and communicate accordingly with the UoM/municipality as well as external stakeholders, such as public institutions and other development partners;
  - Define the mission and vision of the RTO as well as its core functions and positions, which can be added to according to the local situation, while also considering the size of the municipality/UoM and the running cost of the RTO;
  - Establish a standardized implementation plan that identifies different implementation phases over a specific time-duration and connected to specific levels of technical and financial support provided by UN-Habitat, and that establishes a clear exit plan;
  - Define a financial strategy for the long-term sustainability of the RTO sources of municipal revenue that can sustain the RTO, taking into account the current financial constraints;
  - Develop a replication strategy for the scale-up of RTOs across Unions, including through:
    - Dissemination of annual reports/ achievements of RTOs
    - Organization of exchange meetings/study visits among UoM and muniwwcipalities;
    - Raising awareness at the national level (Ministry of Interior and Municipalities and Directorate General of Local Administration and Councils) on the RTO by sharing reports and by inviting them to above mentioned exchange meetings and by organizing study visits;
  - Create a communication plan aimed at various stakeholders, such as the publication of manuals and other materials showcasing RTOs' strategic role and added value for both UoMs and municipalities;
  - Provide an M&E plan that clearly outlines outcomes, outputs, and key indicators as well as means of verification.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Regional Technical Offices (RTOs) were established by UN-Habitat in 2007 in order to empower unions of municipalities (UoMs) in emergency responses, planning, and development, and specifically to support reconstruction and development in Lebanon. RTOs were established under the framework of Article 122 of Legislative Decree no. 118/1977, which states that "the engineering unit in the Union shall be in charge of certain tasks on behalf of member municipalities, including: assisting in the approval of applications for construction permits, preparing any required technical studies and consultations, preparing the specifications of the supplies, works and services, and developing plans." As such, the aim of the RTO is to guide the union to move from emergency response to recovery planning by providing technical and engineering assistance in municipal projects, as well as by supporting decision-making processes, enhancing service delivery, and addressing governance issues at the regional level.[2] While established by UN-Habitat, RTOs are to be gradually handed over to the concerned unions.

Formal activities of the RTO include:[3]

- Enhancing the participation of local authorities and actors towards better decision-making and local stability;

- Promoting technically sound and cost-effective