

Executive Summary

Endline Evaluation of the Adolescents and Youth Life Skills Programme (Maharati)

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UNICEF Jordan Country Office**
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Evaluation timeframe:
June 2023 - June 2024



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background & Context

1. Jordan has one of the youngest populations globally and youth unemployment has been a significant challenge, reaching a rate of 46.1% in 2022.¹ This high unemployment rate is compounded by a decrease in access to education, training, and employment opportunities for young individuals, impacting their transition to higher education and the labour market. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges, with school closures widening disparities in education access and negatively affecting the overall labour market. Refugees and women, in particular, face additional barriers, with half of Syrian youth refugees lacking access to secondary education.²
2. To address these challenges, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Jordan Country Office (JCO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth (MoY), with their implementing partner Generations for Peace (GFP) implemented a life skills programme, the Maharati programme, from 2018-2022. This programme seeks to develop adolescents' (10 to 18 years) and youth's (19 to 24 years) life skills, linking them to opportunities, and developing social cohesion and civic engagement. The programme focused on the most vulnerable participants and geographies in Jordan, including girls, out-of-school children, refugees, adolescents with disabilities, and young persons not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET).
3. Divided into two phases (2018-2020 and 2020-2022), the programme aimed at addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Jordanian youth. To enhance sustainability, the second phase saw the integration of the programme within the MoY, with plans to expand its reach to over 200 youth centres nationwide.

Evaluation Objectives, Scope, Users

4. This endline evaluation, commissioned by UNICEF JCO and conducted by Samuel Hall, had two main objectives:
 - **From an accountability perspective** – to measure the extent to which the planned results were achieved and the overall goal and objectives met.
 - **From a learning perspective** – to determine why planned and intended results were attained or not, to draw lessons and propose good practices and recommendations for learning, scale-up and replication.
5. The evaluation focuses on the Maharati programme's activities from January 2018 to June 2022, implemented by the MoY in its youth centres across all governorates in Jordan (see map in [Annex 1.3](#)).
6. The findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations aim to inform decision-making and programme improvement for UNICEF and MoY.
7. The intended users of this evaluation include MoY and technical staff from the Ministry of Youth, UNICEF Jordan CO, UNICEF MENA regional office, trainers and facilitators, learning and training centers, technical staff involved in the Life Skills and Citizenship Education framework, parents, caregivers, business owners, communities, and youth involved in the programme.

Methodology

8. This endline evaluation used a mixed methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods, including primary and secondary data.
9. The evaluation team adhered to UNICEF, UNEG, and OECD/DAC norms and standards, integrating human rights, equity, and gender principles into all evaluation phases, from tool development to report writing.

¹ World Bank, "The World Bank in Jordan," 2023.

² UNESCO, "Norwegian Refugee Council Youth Programme, Jordan," 2022.

10. **A gender and inclusivity lens** was used throughout to ensure that the voices of girls and boys, young people with disabilities, and youth from diverse backgrounds were considered.
11. **A participatory and youth-centred approach** was adopted and ensured an inclusive evaluation process, with the **creation of UNICEF's Youth Advisory Board (YAB)** participating in the Most Significant Change planning and workshops. A Steering Committee and an Evaluation Reference Group, composed of internal and external stakeholders, were also formed, with members involved throughout the evaluation process.
12. An evaluation matrix was developed to respond to the objectives and evaluation questions ([Table 2](#)).
13. Information was gathered from a wide range of actors, including UNICEF, partners, MoY staff, volunteers, coordinators, youth beneficiaries, and their parents and caregivers. Mitigation strategies were applied to address evaluation limitations.
14. **Primary data collection** included 34 Key Informant Interviews (KIs), 24 Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs), 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), three Most Significant Change (MSC) workshops, and one survey with 762 respondents (425 F/337 M). Secondary data collection included desk and literature reviews, analyzing existing documentation, including programme and financial documents, thematic reports, guidelines, research, studies, among others.
15. **Two case studies** were developed based on narrative stories from youth participants in the Maharati programme, captured through semi-structured interviews with adolescents (ages 13-17) and youth (ages 18-24), including three young people with disabilities. One case study focused on the inclusion of youth with disabilities ([Box 1](#)), while the other case study explored transformative change from Maharati ([Box 2](#)).
16. **An auto-ethnography video** ([Box 3](#)), co-created with young researchers trained by UNICEF and youth participants, was also produced.
17. Additional methodology details can be found in [Section 2](#) and [Annex 2](#).

Key findings

Relevance

Q1. To what extent was the programme relevant to the needs and interests of the targeted beneficiaries?

18. The programme met participants' expectations and is highly valued among all groups of stakeholders. Its flexibility to adapt to needs and various environments ensures continued relevance. However, the lack of accredited certificates limited the programme's ability to help beneficiaries secure jobs.

Q2. To what extent were gender-related objectives and adolescent girl empowerment objectives taken into consideration in the intervention's design, the results framework and theory of change?

19. Incorporating a gender-related objectives and adolescent girl empowerment objectives in the programme design, Theory of Change (ToC), results framework, and programming activities was not done at the design phase. This oversight was partly due to the late development of a tailored Gender Action Plan and the late recruitment of a Gender Specialist, which limited the programme's ability to comprehensively address specific gender needs.
20. Despite this, the Maharati programme aimed to integrate gender-related activities and adolescent girl empowerment by ensuring young girls were equally prioritized, making up more than half of the participants. The programme also aimed to dispel misconceptions about gender equality and provided vital social interaction opportunities for girls, in addition of involving youth, adolescents and parents in mixed-gender activities. This was mainstreamed among the programme activities, without being formally formulated as an outcome/output in the ToC or the results framework.

Coherence

Q3. How coherent was the programme intervention with the policies, frameworks, priorities, and guidelines of other actors in the context?

21. The Maharati programme aligns with Jordan's National Youth Strategy, supporting youth development through comprehensive policies that address education, employment, health, and civic engagement. It also adheres to UNICEF principles and standards. Demonstrating alignment with global standards of integrated approaches, the programme fostered effective inter-ministerial collaboration with various ministries, in addition of the Ministry of Youth.

22. Maharati programme coherence and inclusive design reflects a shared understanding of key concepts of life skills and civic engagement among consortium partners, ensuring alignment with national and partner priorities for youth development.

Efficiency

Q4. To what extent is the programme cost-efficient, in terms of the use of funds, expertise, and time for the programme implementation team and implementation partners to achieve the expected outcomes?

23. The Maharati programme benefited from flexible budgeting processes with UNICEF, allowing quick responses to emerging needs, robust financial management, and efficient budget reallocations, ensuring continuity in training delivery.
24. By implementing the Core Team Model and utilizing online platforms, the programme significantly reduced costs associated with external trainers and physical infrastructure, thereby expanding the reach and accessibility of trainings.
25. Additionally, a new tracking system has improved fund utilization monitoring, offering detailed insights into resource allocation and expenditure, which enhanced transparency and accountability.
26. However, the programme faced operational and financial challenges, such as fragmented budgeting, payment delays, administrative burdens, and staffing shortages, impacting overall efficiency and effectiveness.

Effectiveness

Q5. To what extent did the programme achieve the expected outcomes and results?

27. Alignment between the ToC and results framework is crucial for effective programme management, enabling performance tracking and strategy adjustments. For this programme, the high-level Maharati ToC and results framework do not fully align, with the results framework outlining lower expected outcomes than the ToC. Therefore, to measure achievements against targets, the evaluation team looked at the programme results framework indicators and targets. The Maharati programme's monitoring framework faced challenges such as inconsistent performance indicators and changes across different programme cycles, complicating the measure of long-term achievement of outcomes.
28. As a mitigation measure to enable the evaluation team to assess the effectiveness questions, the team reconstructed and segmented the program results framework into two parts: results and targets for 2018-2021, and results and targets for the transition phase from 2021-2022. These are presented in two separate tables in [Annex 3](#).
29. Overall, most targets related to improvement in soft skills were achieved, except in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to online activities. Afterwards, some targets were revised and subsequently met.
30. The below following summarizes the main results achieved:
 - **Structured Capacity Development and Civic Engagement:** Participants benefited from structured capacity development, mentoring, networking support, and opportunities for civic engagement and leadership, leading to increased empowerment and enabling youth to act as positive change agents in their society.
 - **Main Improvements in Life Skills:** Participants, particularly females, exhibited significant behavioral changes, including increased self-confidence, improved communication, and enhanced problem-solving skills due to the training. The programme also enhanced young people's financial literacy and civic engagement while fostering their creativity, problem-solving abilities, and leadership skills.
 - **Educational and Skill Development Contributions:** An unexpected outcome of the Maharati Programme is the renewed educational aspirations among participants. While not always leading to concrete opportunities, the programme significantly contributed to youth education and skill development, reigniting educational ambitions, imparting practical skills, fostering financial literacy, and encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives.
31. **What worked well?** The programme has facilitated access to structured capacity development, provided mentoring and networking support, and facilitated participation in civic engagement and leadership experiences to its participants. This has resulted in increased empowerment of young people as positive change agents, who more effectively engage socially, civically, and economically in their society and support a tolerant and inclusive society.

32. **What did not work well?** The evaluation of the Maharati programme highlighted several challenges, including scheduling conflicts with school commitments, financial barriers, and inadequate infrastructure, particularly affecting young female and youth marginalized group, including those living with a disability. Technical issues with online sessions and extensive administrative requirements further hindered effectiveness, while inadequate marketing limited outreach to marginalized groups. Additionally, limited private sector involvement and logistical challenges in mixed-gender interactions underscored the need for better cultural sensitivity and engagement strategies.

Sustainability

Q6. To what extent is the programme and its outcomes likely to continue, in particular after UNICEF's involvement ceases?

33. **Successful Transition to Ministry of Youth (MoY):** The Maharati programme's transition to the MoY has been completed successfully, with the programme now integrated into MoY's regular operations and budget. This transition was supported by a well-structured plan, cost-sharing arrangements, and the establishment of a Programme Management Unit by UNICEF.
34. **Ongoing Challenges in Sustainability:** Ensuring the programme's long-term sustainability beyond funding remains uncertain due to financial constraints and limited resources at the MoY.
35. The phased handover approach also raised concerns about marginalised groups, particularly young women and individuals with disabilities. Scaling down the model could reduce opportunities for these groups, potentially perpetuating existing disparities.
36. The transition has had mixed impacts on trainers. While job security has improved, trainers face increased workloads and reduced resources, affecting their motivation and the overall quality of programme delivery.

Impact

Q7. What intended and unintended effects has the programme generated on adolescents and youth, boys and girls, including from hard-to-reach areas?

37. The Maharati programme's broader and longer-lasting **intended effects** are multifaceted, significantly influencing gender dynamics, improving adolescents and youth empowerment and behavioural change, livelihoods readiness, social cohesion and community dynamics.
- **Gender Norms and Confidence:** The Maharati programme has challenged traditional gender norms, boosting participants' confidence in questioning and changing these norms and improving understanding between genders.
 - **Empowerment and Behavioural Change:** Maharati has empowered girls to aspire beyond traditional roles, increasing self-confidence, communication skills, and life satisfaction. Boys also showed increased willingness to engage with female family members and contribute to household tasks.
 - **Livelihoods Readiness:** While most respondents did not directly attribute their current jobs to the Maharati programme, the life skills acquired prompted proactive approaches to livelihoods.
 - **Social Cohesion and Inclusivity:** The programme has fostered a strong sense of belonging and social cohesion among participants, though acceptance of diversity varied across locations.
38. The programme generated several **unintended positive** effects, such as engaging parents and younger siblings in learning, inspiring peer education, providing a safe space for emotional healing, and fostering new friendships.

Conclusions

39. The evaluation of the Maharati programme (2018-2022) highlights its relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact on youth empowerment in Jordan.
40. The programme addressed educational, financial, and socio-economic challenges, meeting diverse beneficiary needs while demonstrating cultural sensitivity and empowering girls beyond traditional roles.
41. The programme aligned with UNICEF principles and ensured collaboration with government and inter-Ministerial entities, in alignment with national policies.

42. The cost-efficient design of the programme shows scalability potential, though operational inefficiencies and financial constraints need adjustments.
43. Maharati achieved outcomes in civic engagement, problem-solving, confidence, and leadership skills, particularly among female and non-Jordanian participants. It significantly increased girls' soft skills and confidence, fostering inclusivity and gender equality, and celebrates girls as change agents.
44. Transitioning Maharati to the MoY highlights sustainability efforts, though questions about programme sustainability and long-term impact on vulnerable groups remain.
45. The programme positively impacted gender dynamics and perceptions towards individuals with disabilities, empowered adolescents, challenged socio-cultural norms, and fostered inclusive development in Jordan.
46. Addressing operational inefficiencies, financial constraints, and sustaining inclusivity and gender equality efforts are crucial for continued impact of Maharati programme in the future.

Lessons Learned

47. The below summarize the key lessons learned extracted from the evaluation findings, to improve accountability and learning across seven key areas. The lessons learned are outlined in full in [Section 4.2](#):
 - Flexibility in programme design enables responses to changing circumstances, aligning with participant needs and community dynamics.
 - Regular data collection against consistent indicators is critical for assessing progress, ensuring accountability, and making informed decisions.
 - Streamlining administrative processes, timely payments, and addressing logistical challenges are crucial for programme efficiency.
 - Collaborative partnerships with ministries, international organizations, and civil society enhance reach and effectiveness.
 - Providing practical life skills enhances economic prospects, while mentoring and civic engagement empower youth to drive positive change.
 - Long-term sustainability requires various actions to ensure a successful transition to government ownership. Programmes challenging traditional gender roles and promoting inclusivity should integrate culturally sensitive, specialized content in a participatory manner.

Recommendations

48. The below presents an overview of the recommendations formulated as part of this evaluation. The recommendations are more extensively developed in [Section 4.3](#).

Recommendation 1: UNICEF to provide technical support to the Ministry of Youth to address improved access to programme delivery sites for hard-to-reach communities, and people with disabilities.

Recommendation 2: UNICEF to provide technical support to the Ministry of Youth to integrate and invest in disability, inclusivity, and equity in design and programme implementation.

Recommendation 3: UNICEF to provide technical support to the Ministry of Youth to integrate gender equality and gender-transformative approach to programme design and implementation.

Recommendation 4: UNICEF to provide technical support to the Ministry of Youth to address potential administrative bottlenecks.

Recommendation 5: UNICEF to provide technical support to the Ministry of Youth to re-construct the Maharati Theory of Change, based on the evaluation findings.

Recommendation 6: UNICEF to provide technical support to the Ministry of Youth to elaborate a SMART monitoring and evaluation system.

Recommendation 7: UNICEF to provide technical support to the Ministry of Youth to formalize a Maharati alumni network.

Recommendation 8: UNICEF to provide advice to the Ministry of Youth to mitigate impact of funding constraints and ensure the quality and uniqueness of the programme.

Recommendation 9: Advocate to institutionalise the Life Skills Curriculum.

