

## MID-TERM EVALUATION

### MLI/803

Revival of the local economy  
and community support in Northern Mali II  
(RELAC II)

#### PROJECT SUMMARY DATA

Country	Mali
Long project title	Revival of the local economy and community support in Northern Mali II
Short project title	RELAC II
LuxDev Code	MLI/803
Version of the Report	March 2018

#### RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

Global rating (Effectiveness)	<b>3</b> On a scale of 1 (excellent results, significantly better than expected) to 6 (the project was unsuccessful, or the situation has deteriorated on balance)
Rating using other evaluation criteria	Relevance: <b>2</b> Efficiency: <b>3</b> Sustainability: <b>3</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RELAC II project (MLI/803), “Revival of the local economy and community support in Northern Mali II”, with funding of EUR 10 million from the European Union through the Emergency Trust Fund, was launched in September 2017 for a period of 36 months. It covers 30 municipalities in the Gao, Timbuktu, Menaka and Taoudeni regions. It continues on from the RELAC I project (MLI/802), whose 12 municipalities in the Timbuktu and Gao regions are still covered by RELAC II.

LuxDev commissioned ARTEMIS in December 2017 to carry out a final evaluation over a six-month period of the RELAC I project and an intermediate evaluation of the RELAC II project (reinforcement and extension of the RELAC I project, launched in September 2017, funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund and scheduled to cover 30 municipalities over a 36-month intervention period). The two evaluations were carried out concurrently by the same team. The field mission ran from 6 to 24 February 2018 at Bamako and in the Timbuktu and Gao regions. It was agreed that the final evaluation of RELAC I would focus on the achievement of results and its effects/impacts. The main results expected in terms of this evaluation were as follows:

- **R1** A description of the results achieved/not achieved and the area covered;
- **R2** An analysis and assessment of the project management and methods;
- **R3** An evaluation based on DAC-OECD criteria;
- **R4** An assessment of the project’s impact and proposed solutions for the stabilisation of Northern Mali (MLI/802);
- **R5** An analysis of a list of specific issues;
- **R6** A list of lessons learned and recommendations for the continuation of RELAC II (MLI/803) and similar future projects.

As regards the intermediate evaluation of RELAC II, it was agreed to focus on reorientations and recommendations.

The RELAC II project aims to “*continue the stabilisation of targeted post-conflict areas by helping to regenerate the local economy and improve the services provided by local authorities*” (overall objective). This project aims to consolidate the progress made in terms of rehabilitation of the facilities/equipment of the municipalities and support for microprojects / income generating activities implemented in the municipalities targeted by RELAC I, but also to help reinforce the skills of the local authorities in terms of the quality of services provided to the populations. Its specific objectives are: 1. the local economy is regenerated; 2. the supported local authorities are able to better fulfil their responsibilities towards the populations.

At the halfway point, the evaluation mission does not have sufficient reliable data to give an opinion on the project’s contribution to achievement of **the overall objective**. However, after drawing on the experience of RELAC I, the project initiated a process that should allow the expected results to be achieved. From this perspective, it should make at least a partial contribution to achieving the overall objective, which remains ambitious and complex due to the institutional and security situation in the north of the country.

In relation to the two effect indicators defined for **specific objective 1**, “*improved assessment of the populations of the local economy*” and “*improved asset scores for all the supported households*”, at the halfway point the evaluation mission believes that at this stage the conditions are not yet in place to give an opinion on the achievement of this specific objective. There is a good prospect that this objective will be achieved by the end of the project however, due to the relatively high number of microprojects funded and in particular the support provided by the project. However, although the funding of a larger number of microprojects and extension of the intervention area of the project were necessary, this is still inadequate in the context of the project’s intervention. The regeneration of the local economy assumes the implementation of structuring programmes backed by significant resources long term, which cannot be achieved by cooperation alone, despite the commitment of a substantial budget. It should be pointed out that simply identifying microprojects and establishing a support system for microprojects’ leaders cannot by itself bring about a regeneration of the local economy.

As regards **specific objective 2**, the project's results at the halfway point are satisfactory because: (i) the needs of the municipalities have been identified, invitations to tender have been launched and the acquisition process is underway; (ii) discussions have been initiated with the populations concerning their assessment of the services provided by the local elected representatives in the 18 new municipalities. These two components are important but are still not sufficient overall to enable the local authorities to better fulfil their responsibilities towards the populations. For example, the local and regional authorities must have their own resources so that they can contribute long-term to the funding of the social, economic and cultural development plans of the municipalities.

The project covers 30 municipalities including the 12 already covered by RELAC I and 18 new municipalities in the Timbuktu, Gao, Menaka and Taoudeni regions. Out of a total of 76 municipalities, this represents coverage of 39,5% of the municipalities in these intervention regions. The number of municipalities covered at the time of the evaluation in the Taoudeni and Menaka regions is insufficient but is justified by the insecurity prevailing in these two regions. In relation to RELAC I, as well as increasing the number of municipalities (+60%), RELAC II has also increased the number of households covered (+70%). While RELAC I supported 43 microprojects, RELAC II has identified and formulated 99 microprojects (at the time of the evaluation). Lastly, RELAC II plans to include the most vulnerable populations, such as young people, women and nomad populations, which were not adequately taken into account in RELAC I.

**Result 1:** Local economic projects are supported. Following a rigorous process of identification and approval of the microprojects and a four-stage participatory approach, with the support of three national partner non-governmental organisations: (i) 99 microprojects were selected and formulated for the Gao and Timbuktu regions; (ii) 78 trilateral implementation agreements without financial assignment were signed between the managers of the beneficiary organisations, the mayors of 16 municipalities in the Gao and Timbuktu regions, and the project; (iii) 11 additional implementation agreements were signed for five microprojects in the Gao region and six microprojects in the Timbuktu region, led exclusively by young people.

**Result 2:** The most urgent material needs of the local authorities in their missions to support the populations are covered. In keeping with the material support activities implemented as part of RELAC I, community diagnostic sessions allowed discussion of the needs of the municipalities and identification of the population's priorities in terms of reinforcing the public services that can be supported by the project, using a participatory approach. Following on from RELAC I, the RELAC II project has funded the rehabilitation of buildings in the municipalities of Lafia, Alafia, Bourem Inaly, Tienkour, Tindirima and Tinguerguift. The rehabilitation of water sources identified and approved for the 12 municipalities was also managed by the RELAC II project. For the 18 new municipalities, the lists of priority material needs underwent technical analysis by the local committee in charge of orienting, coordinating and monitoring development actions, followed by final approval by the municipal councils, and the lists of equipment and rehabilitations of municipal infrastructures were approved and the contract award processes initiated. Several security and institutional obstacles are hindering interventions in Menaka and Salam.

**Result 3:** The local authorities are supported in the fulfilment of their responsibilities towards the populations. The training requirements of the elected representatives and officials of the project's intervention municipalities were identified using a participatory approach. To supplement the training requested at local authority level, RELAC II organised a second training cycle session for the elected representatives and officials of the regional authorities of the 12 RELAC I municipalities. For the municipalities in the Timbuktu region, supplementary training of 80 municipal elected representatives and officials covered the judicial and administrative police, writing of administrative documentation and financial management. For the municipalities in the Gao region, training for 44 participants covered administrative archiving and writing techniques.

## **Project evaluation**

Relevance: In general, the project is providing a response to a critical problem of improving the living conditions of the beneficiaries in the intervention areas. The objectives of RELAC II are aligned and totally consistent with national, sectoral and local policies. Its design fulfils the priority needs of the targeted populations in areas that are amongst the most deprived in Northern Mali. It also includes regions where insecurity is more marked and whose populations are consequently even more vulnerable. RELAC II's interventions are all the more relevant in that they are designed to help provide solutions to the pressures faced by the municipalities: (i) by establishing production infrastructures to meet the food needs of the population and (ii) by rehabilitating social and health infrastructures to make living conditions less precarious.

The project's relevance is also evident in the targeting of the different social components and greater inclusion of young people compared to RELAC I. However, caution is still necessary because at this stage it is impossible to tell whether the effects of the project will have a significant impact on poverty reduction and in particular whether this impact will be sustainable. The establishment of microprojects and the strengthening of the local authorities are not sufficient on their own to eradicate the vulnerability of the populations. Costed data on the increase in income of the populations is not available. **At the halfway point, the evaluation believes that the project has above-average relevance, with better than predicted performances (score 2)**, although insufficient consideration has been given to local absorption and implementation capacities and the technical departments have not had sufficient input as regards identifying and formulating the microprojects.

Effectiveness: The progress of the activities connected to result 1 at the halfway stage is encouraging in terms of this result being achieved by the end of the project: the number of funded microprojects has increased, based on more complete quality selection criteria than was the case for RELAC I. However, the activities have not yet started, while the training of the managers of the microprojects' lead organisations, and the technical and socio-economic studies were relatively brief. Once implemented, these microprojects may make a significant contribution to achieving the result. The project is thus on track to improve the performances of the selected management structures, inasmuch as the leaders will receive adequate assistance. Special attention is required on three issues: the land status of the microprojects, the environmental risks and the partnership agreements with the technical departments. Lastly, the official non-existence of the municipalities in the Taoudeni region has caused problems for the site identification strategy.

Identification of the priority needs of the communities has been based on a participatory approach involving the local authorities and the populations. The 18 new target municipalities of RELAC II have not yet benefited from rehabilitation of infrastructures and equipment, but the evaluation mission believes that there has actually been an improvement in the coverage and frequency of the social services supported for 12 municipalities of the 30 municipalities targeted by the project.

Training requirements have also been identified and dialogue between elected representatives and populations was initiated during participatory diagnostic sessions. Skills reinforcement activities in the 18 new municipalities have not yet started, but the project organised a second cycle of training sessions for the elected representatives and officials of the local and regional authorities of the 12 municipalities covered by RELAC I. Post-training monitoring has not yet been completed. At the halfway point, the evaluation mission believes that the project will not be able to guarantee an improvement in the performance of the local authorities' tasks on behalf of the populations. Organising public discussion workshops, training elected representatives and officials of the local authorities, initiating dialogue between populations and administrative and social services and introducing measures to improve the service provided to the populations is not sufficient to immediately ensure an improvement in the performance of the local authorities' tasks on behalf of the populations. **At the halfway point, the evaluation believes that the results predicted for the halfway point have been achieved but with room for improvement, in particular (score 3).**

Efficiency: The project has made efforts to ensure the efficiency of its interventions through various initiatives: reducing the project launch time and pooling certain human resources. After a slow start, the execution rate rose in February 2018 to 21,9% of the programmed funds out of 44,9% of the funds committed. The project's efficiency is limited by factors connected with the insecurity and accessibility of some municipalities, such as those in the Diré and Goundam districts. **At the halfway point, the evaluation believes that the project has been efficient, with room for improvement (score 3)**, particularly as regards the delays in implementing activities and the increased cost of the monitoring operations due to the security situation. All these factors place constraints on the project

Sustainability: At the halfway stage of the evaluation, it is still too soon to talk about achievements and therefore also too soon to talk about the sustainability of these achievements beyond the end of the project. However, there are some factors that favour the sustainability of the project: (i) the community rootedness of the development actions implemented; (ii) the strong mobilisation of the stakeholders/partners at national, regional and local level with their engagement in the policies and strategies for local development, shared governance and consideration of socio-cultural inequalities and socio-specific aspects; (iii) the institutional portage of the municipalities and the "hands-on" policy at local level; (iv) the contributions of the beneficiaries (in cash and kind) towards implementation of the microprojects, a sign of commitment; (v) the trilateral agreement between the microproject's leader, the municipality and the project; (vi) the organisational diagnostic sessions and the strengths and weaknesses of microprojects.

However, other factors could limit the sustainability of the project: (i) the establishment of some microproject / income generating activities on sites for which the beneficiaries have no solid documentation underpinning land security; (ii) lack of transition from associations to cooperative societies; (iii) municipalities with no financial resources; (iv) relatively brief feasibility studies; and (v) climate factors, such as the wide variability in the water levels of the Niger river and the decrease in rainfall. **At the halfway point, although it is too early to give a verdict on the project's sustainability, the signals are fairly positive and the objectives might be achieved (score 3).**

Coordination: The project is on track to improve its achievements in terms of coordination. The quality of the coordination of the project can be assessed both internally and externally. Internally, the project teams have organised regular coordination meetings both at Bamako and in the regions. All meetings have been recorded in detailed minutes. Externally, the quality of coordination with the European Union delegation was satisfactory. The annual report was forwarded. The project played an active role in the meetings of the Rehabilitation Commission for Post-Conflict Areas and the clusters of which it is a member. Regular coordination meetings with the local authorities were also organised. The mission recorded several positive results directly related to this good coordination, although the security situation prevented the project stakeholders from providing information on their travel movements, which may limit synergies. **The final evaluation found that coordination shows excellent results, significantly better than predicted (score 1).**

Various specific supplementary issues are analysed in the evaluation report, including the relevance and quality of the public debates, complementarity and compatibility with the direction taken by Luxembourg Cooperation in Mali, communication and visibility, security issue, procedures, specifically the competitive negotiated procedure, links between the project and the migration phenomenon in the Northern region and comparison with other projects implemented in post-conflict areas and between the Timbuktu and Gao regions.

**The final evaluation focused on 4 lessons learned:**

1. It is possible to implement development initiatives even in an insecure environment.
2. Consolidating peace and regenerating the local economy require substantial financial resources and sustained long-term efforts.
3. A participatory, iterative, flexible approach that is adapted to the local situation contributes to the success of the project.
4. The need to fund microprojects led by young people.

**12 recommendations were issued and developed in the report:**

1. Improve the way projects are formulated.
2. Reflect strategically on the opportunity of implementing two controversial microprojects in the municipality of Salam.
3. Assist those associations who wish to convert into cooperative societies.
4. Hold information meetings for service providers and goods suppliers on the guidelines for the competitive negotiated procedure of awarding contracts.
5. Give more funding to unifying projects targeting the development of employability, networking and employment of young people.
6. Improve mobilisation and contractualisation conditions with officials of the State's technical departments.
7. Continue efforts to secure partnerships with Economic Regeneration and Reconstruction Programme, MINUSMA, PROMAN, French Development Agency, etc.
8. Carry out environmental and social impact studies for certain microprojects.
9. Assist microproject leaders to mobilise internal and external resources.
10. Secure the land on which the microproject sites are located.
11. Review the training and post-training monitoring system for the local elected representatives and officials of the local and regional authorities.
12. Improve the system of monitoring and leveraging RELAC II in terms of the mechanics of implementing the project.