

**GCP/SYR/006/ITA**

**ASSISTANCE IN INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING AND  
AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

**REPORT OF THE FINAL EVALUATION MISSION**

**DECEMBER 2000**

## Table of Content

I. Executive Summary .....	3
II. Introduction.....	5
III. Background and Context.....	6
Agriculture Sector .....	6
Agriculture Policies .....	7
IV. Assessment of Project Objectives and Design.....	10
V. Assessment of Project Implementation, efficiency and Management .....	12
A. Project Budget and Expenditures.....	12
B. Activities and Outputs.....	13
C. Government Support.....	23
D. Project Management .....	23
VI. Assessment of Results and Effectiveness .....	27
A. Impact of the Project.....	27
B. Sustainability of Project Results .....	28
C. Cost-Effectiveness .....	29
VII. Conclusions and Recommendations .....	30
A. Conclusions.....	30
B. Recommendations.....	35
VIII. Lessons learned.....	40
Annex 1: Persons Met.....	41
Annex 2: Programme of the Mission .....	42
Annex 3: Terms of Reference for the Evaluation Mission.....	43
Annex 4: Quality Assessment of Individual Policy Studies Made Available to the Mission.....	47
Annex 5: Detailed Training Activities.....	50

## **I. Executive Summary**

### **Conclusions**

In the current policy reform environment, there is no doubt that the present project aiming at strengthening the capability of the Government of Syria in agricultural policy analysis, formulation and monitoring in a market-oriented economy is highly relevant.

However, the project concept reveals three limitations: an exclusive focus on the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, a limited involvement of the public and private actors potentially concerned and too ambitious immediate objectives in terms of Project lifetime and budget constraint.

The shortfalls in the budget have required substantial modifications to the workplan, thus jeopardising the project achievements during the remaining period.

A few months after it started operations, the project suffered from a severe management crisis, which had a significant impact beyond the period of the crisis.

The project also suffered from too many changes in management and management structure.

Despite the high-quality technical inputs provided by advisory bodies to the project, the superimposition of layers in the management structure has not facilitated clear channels of communication, and has contributed to confusion on respective roles and responsibilities among those involved in the project management.

The studies for the establishment of the National Agriculture Policy Center (NAPC) and the Restructuring of the Ministry have been well prepared. They are well appreciated by the Government.

Not independently of the initial management crisis, the Policy Advice and Support component has progressed slowly over the first two years of the project. However, the current workplan gives a high priority to the completion of activities under this component.

The training component is considered as having achieved good results although it is not completed. However, it is recognised by all that the level of competence and skills acquired through the training programme achieved so far is insufficient for the trainees to conduct proper policy research and analysis with a high degree of autonomy.

Most of the conditions for a well-functioning and autonomous NAPC are unlikely to be realised during the remaining lifetime of the project and it is felt that external assistance will still be needed for the initial years of the Center in order to consolidate the results achieved by the present project, to ensure better impact and prepare the ground for long-term sustainability.

### **Recommendations**

A series of concrete measures are suggested to be taken before the departure of the international staff on the project in order to establish a well-functioning National

Agriculture Policy Center. These measures concern the selection of the core staff of the Center and the full commitments of those selected, the need for a highly qualified economist to be nominated as technical adviser of the Center and a well-defined programme of activities.

It is recommended that all the operational arrangements for the completion of the strategy be established and operational. This includes an operational national task force, a network between the international consultant working on the strategy and international consultants working on individual policy studies, and stronger technical support and co-ordination from the project.

Several measures are proposed to improve the quality, the delivery and the internalisation of the policy work by nationals. They involve an increased participation from nationals (consultants and trainees) with also stronger technical support and co-ordination from the project.

In view of the expected outflow of policy reports in the coming months, a strong and articulated effort to raise the level of awareness and information in all potential stakeholders (public and private) will be required by the project. The components of this effort should consist in: selective distribution of the policy reports within the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, followed by seminars led by the National Project Director and the Project's staff, selective distribution of the policy reports to interested stakeholders, public and private, production of concise "policy notes" on the subject matter addressed by the available and future studies, preparation and diffusion of various outputs from the studies adapted to various targeted audiences at national as well as at sub-national levels, enhancing the publicity of the project with appropriate media and active participation to activities related to policy debates promoted by other institutions.

Ensuring these conditions will require considerable additional efforts from all those involved in the project (project staff, government, national consultants, trainees, international consultants). It is therefore proposed to:

- i) Increase the technical support and backstopping to the project during its remaining lifetime.
- ii) Reconsider the workplan with specific attention to the re-scheduling of the sequence of individual policy studies in order to avoid an unsustainable bottleneck of the project.
- iii) Reconsider the budget for the remaining lifetime of the project.

Even if the rest of the project accelerates its production of outputs, it is unlikely that sufficient capacity will be created for long-term sustainability by the end of the present project. Thus there is a need for external funding to support a new phase of the project to consolidate and build sustainability in the results achieved by the present project.

It is therefore recommended to launch a formulation mission as soon as possible in order to (i) respect, to the extent possible, the constraint imposed by the donor's programming cycle and (ii) avoid a substantial gap between the present phase and the start of a next one.

## **II. Introduction**

In line with the provisions in the project document and decisions taken by the Steering Committee at its third meeting, a final evaluation of the project was undertaken from 3-15 December 2000. The evaluation was intended, as the project draws to a close, to provide a well-informed assessment on the project's achievements and results, including lessons and issues, as the basis for determining the future of the project. The mission had a one-day briefing meeting in Cairo before it went to Damascus where it stayed for the entire balance of the mission. The mission had extensive discussions with project staff and conducted interviews with key persons directly concerned by agricultural policy issues and training.

The mission members were: Mrs. R. Bedouin, FAO Evaluation Officer and mission leader, and Mr. Mohamed Khazma, Director of Agricultural Economics of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform nominated by the Government of Syria. The Mission was accompanied by Professor Michele De Benedictis, who served as a Resource Person.

The mission wishes to thank all Project and Government staff who patiently answered our many enquiries.

### **III. Background and Context**

#### **Agriculture Sector**

The agriculture sector plays a major role in the economy of SAR. It is one of the most important sectors of the economy in terms of contribution to the total GDP. Its contribution has been erratic over the years because of the importance of rainfed farming and consequently the high dependence of agriculture performance on the vagaries of the climate. In 1999, the contribution of the agriculture sector to the GDP was estimated at 30 percent<sup>1</sup>. The importance of the sector in the economy is also reflected in the fact that most of the Syrian industry is dependent on agricultural raw materials. The share of agriculture export in total exports is significant and has increased from about 15 percent in 1988 to 16.4 percent and 21.8 percent in 1990 and 1997 respectively.

The total population of Syria is estimated at 17.460,000 in mid-1999. Syria used to have one of the highest rates of population growth in the world with 3.4 percent in 1994. This rate decreased in the past few years to 2.6 percent<sup>2</sup>. In 1999, agriculture and forestry employed 28.6 percent of the total active labour force. In addition, roughly 50 percent of the employment in the manufacturing sector is associated with the production of food; beverages and textiles based on agricultural raw materials.

The total land area of Syria amounts to 18.5 million ha, out of which about 6.2 million ha are cultivable. The actual cultivated area amounts to 5.7 million ha out of which 1.4 million ha or 24 percent of cultivated area are irrigated and 4.3 million ha are rainfed. Syria is divided into five agro-ecological zones defined essentially by rainfall patterns. The average farm size is 9.2 ha but the holdings are fragmented into 3-4 parcels<sup>3</sup>. The 1981 census of agriculture showed that over 50 percent of the landholdings were less than the 2 ha and occupied only 3 percent of total land. On the other hand, less than 1 percent of the holdings had an average size of more than 50 ha and occupied 30 percent of the total land.

Winter crops, mainly wheat and barley and winter vegetables account for 77 percent of the total cultivated land. Another 13 percent is under fruit trees and the remaining 10 percent is used for summer crops, mainly cotton (the main cash crop) and vegetables. The wheat acreage is estimated at 1.6 million ha, of which 40 percent are irrigated. Crop yields in rainfed areas are erratic due to variations in the weather. For irrigated crops, the increases in yields have been fairly impressive. Between 1984 and 1994 the annual growths in yields have ranged from a low 0.6 percent for pulses to a high of 3.3 percent for sugar beet and 7.5 percent for wheat. During recent years, there has been a significant upward trend in the acreage devoted to fruit trees in general and olives and citrus in particular. However the potential of expansion of fruit production is hampered by marketing and post-harvest marketing and other constraints.

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<sup>1</sup> Annual Report of Activity – FAO Representative in the SAR, July 2000.

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA 2000 Yearly Book

<sup>3</sup> World Food Summit Follow-Up: Draft Strategy for National Agricultural Development – Horizon 2010

## Agriculture Policies

Agricultural development strategy in Syria is articulated around the following objectives:

- Securing a very high degree of food self-sufficiency for staples in particular for basic foodstuffs and grains;
- Ensuring availability of surplus for exportation to foreign markets whenever possible;
- Providing adequate supply to domestic processing plants;
- Promotion of livestock production to capitalise on the vast area of rangeland and to improve the daily food intake of animal protein;
- Utilising fully and improving productivity of natural agricultural resources.

To realise these objectives, the country adopted instruments that give a central role to the state in guiding both the allocation of resources and the distribution of the agricultural outputs. The first of these instruments, the institutional framework, is characterised by a high fragmentation of the decision-making process and of the policy implementation. Another feature is the central and crucial role of a certain number of governing bodies<sup>4</sup>. The Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR) has a key role, but not exclusive, in deciding and implementing public actions related to the production and distribution of agricultural goods. Quite a few economic and social interventions relating to the agriculture sector come in fact under the technical and operational domains of other Ministries or Government agencies such as for instance, the Ministries of Irrigation, of Industry, of Supply and Internal Trade, of the Economy and Foreign Trade, of Finance, and the State Planning Commission. The Agricultural Supreme Council was established in 1975 with a clear mandate for overseeing the production plans, marketing plans, price fixation and the credit policy. Above all other Ministries, the Council serves as a unified framework for agriculture policy-decision making. The second instrument adopted by the Government to realise its strategy was central planning for the allocation of resources in the agricultural sector. During the 1960s, Syria adopted a socialist economic system of centralised planning and, until 1986, implemented several “Five Year Development Plans”.

In line with overall framework of centralised planning, the Government adopted a set of various forms of direct and indirect Government interventions, which consisted in the following measures:

- Compulsory production targets and allocation of areas at the farm level for strategic crops.
- Grant of subsidies for farm inputs such as machinery, seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and sacks.
- Measures to facilitate access to land and water through legislative action (distribution of public land), price measures (subsidized rental of public land), investment programs (collection of water resources and public irrigation schemes).
- Favorable fiscal regime for agricultural production.
- Institutional and financial measures to secure short-term credit to farmers.

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<sup>4</sup> Report on Agricultural Strategy – 1<sup>st</sup> Mission Professor M. De Benedictis – February 2000.

- Legislative regulation of land and agricultural labor markets.
- Public systems of agricultural research and extension particularly strengthened in the 1990's.

Conceived and implemented in the context of a closed and deficit economy, these measures have led to a large extent to significant results in terms of achieving the strategy objectives. Syria has made good progress in improving its national diet. The per caput daily calorie intake has increased by 25 percent since the early 1970's and the status of nutrition in Syria is globally satisfactory (3240 calories per caput per day in the 1992-94 period). In terms of basic staple, wheat, Syria has moved from a consistent negative trade balance to a positive balance from 1997. Price support for staples and the supply of technological innovations have certainly contributed to these impressive results. Accomplishments have also been obtained in terms of poverty alleviation and in the improvement of living conditions in rural areas, certainly contributing to slow down the flow of rural urban migration. Yet there is still concern for the landless and small farmers in the rainfed areas which call for special attention with respect to their income level and food security. Finally, the contribution made by agriculture to the balance of payments has been substantial although the exported products consist mainly of raw materials rather than processed ones.

Faced with economic difficulties and sharp decline in the flow of financial assistance from the rich countries of the Gulf, Syria started a process of gradual economic reform in the 1980s. A number of measures have been taken, replacing the various forms of government interventions in the economy and paving the way towards domestic liberalisation. These measures include the replacement of central planning by a more indicative planning, the adoption of a price support only for crops considered as strategic from the point of view of food security and export potentiality as well as the partial but consistent elimination of input subsidies. The Government approach to economic reform is however very cautious and the transition process is going on gradually. This cautiousness may be explained by the key role of the agriculture sector in ensuring food security and contributing to poverty alleviation and consequently the possibility of a sudden emergence of economic and social adjustment costs linked to a too quick liberalisation of the economy. However, in the past few months, it seems that the commitment and willingness of the government to accelerate the pace of reform towards liberalisation have increased. Major opening measures are currently being taken such as the authorisation of private banking, the re-adjustment of the exchange rate, etc.

The main problem faced in Syria by public intervention is the difficulty encountered in trying to identify the new role of the Government and the new policy instruments to be used for public policy action. Therefore, some of the major constraints to the reform process clearly relate to the substantial adjustment in the institutional framework needed to deal with a market economic environment and the limited capacity of policy makers to perform short and medium term agricultural policy analysis.

Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA

Against this background, a mission was sent to Syria in January 1997 with the objective of formulating phase II of the Project GCP/SYR/002/ITA aiming at assisting

the Government of Syria in agricultural planning, policy analysis and statistics. The project document was signed by the three parties in June 1997. An inception mission visited the country in early 1998 to define a detailed workplan for the project. The latter started operations in April 1998 with the appointment of the first CTA and the agricultural economist. Another important date for the project is linked to the management crisis through which the project went during the summer 1998 and described in the section V.D. The crisis led to a change of project CTA in February 1999. It is also at the same period (summer 1998) that the management of the project by FAO was transferred from Headquarters to Cairo.

#### **IV. Assessment of Project Objectives and Design**

In light of these developments, the overall objective of the project as stated in the project document is: “to strengthen the capability of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform in agricultural policy analysis, formulation, implementation and monitoring in a market oriented economy and to enhance the institutional capacity of the Syrian Government to undertake comprehensive reviews and analyses of policies, strategies and programmes aimed at the achievement of sectoral goals”.

The project is conceived primarily as a *capacity building* project assisting the government to shape and to face a new economic and institutional environment. The project is articulated around four pillars, each with a specific immediate objective. These are:

- *Institutional Development*

The immediate objective is “to enhance the MAAR’s agricultural policy analysis and formulation capabilities and overall institutional performance and delivery capacity of essential services to end users, by supporting the establishment of the National Agricultural Policy Centre and making proposals for the re-organisation of the Ministry.”

- *Policy Advice and Support*

The immediate objective is “to strengthen the capacity of the MAAR to perform agricultural policy analyses and to formulate, implement and monitor agricultural policies by developing a strategy, options and plans for transition to a market oriented economy.”

- *Training Programme*

The immediate objective is “to establish a cadre of specialised staff for the NAPC of MAAR and of other Ministries and Institutions concerned, trained to cope with the required policy analysis, formulation, monitoring, and evaluation functions under the new economic environment.”

- *Statistical Information*

The immediate objective is “to assure availability of and facilitate use of the basic statistical information needed for agricultural policy analysis purposes.”

The project continues the efforts started with the project GCP/SYR/002/ITA “Assistance in Agricultural Planning, Policy Analysis and Statistics”. However, while the project document pretends to build-upon the previous project, it does not provide an analysis of past constraints to achieving outputs and issues encountered during that period and how it is planned to overcome these constraints and to address issues in the new project. These would have given stronger justification and rationale for proposing another similar project.

The strategy envisaged by the project document concentrates on the establishment of the NAPC, which the government intends to create to perform agricultural policy analysis and training. Although the NAPC is conceived as an independent body, there is no consideration in the project document to ensure a certain degree of autonomy of the NAPC and independence from the MAAR. Furthermore, the project document

highly focuses on support to the MAAR. In a context of a very fragmented decision-making process with the MAAR being only one of the various decision-making bodies, there is a high risk of promoting a confined sectorial vision, potentially ignoring the multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary linkages of agriculture with other sectors.

The capacity building element of the policy advice and support component is not well reflected in the outputs. Indeed, the strategy, the plan of action and the policy studies are all planned to be prepared by the project team of “international experts”. There is no mechanism conceived in the project document to involve nationals all along the policy process from formulation, to dissemination and implementation. The project document does not call for a participatory process that would permit a better internalisation and ownership of the results of the strategy and of the various policy outputs. This lack of a comprehensive and participatory vision of the policy process in the project document has not facilitated the policy dialogue with and among the national stakeholders, highly needed during this transition period.

The training programme is well conceived but the output is too ambitious for a 30-month project taking into account the initial level of relevant competence among the targeted beneficiaries of the programme. Indeed, the programme starts with basic training in economics and related disciplines and aims at constituting a pool of full-fledge researchers able to conduct high quality policy analysis in a rather complex and changing environment as well as capable of providing training. This represents an overly ambitious endeavour in the timeframe allocated by the project.

Unlike the other components, the statistical information component has a rather limited scope. It was conceived as such in view of the expected linkages between the present project and the JAICA funded statistical development project. However, there is no mechanism built into the project document to ensure these linkages.

The project is adequately designed around four well-integrated components. There are various elements in each component built-into the project allowing effective synergies between the components:

- The establishment of the NAPC provides an institutional framework for policy analysis and a concrete incentive for successful trainees.
- The policy advice and support component offers “case studies” for the NAPC and was expected to have a demonstrative effect on what the Center would do in the future.
- The training component was supposed to “supply” the necessary core staff of the NAPC and to improve the professional qualifications of the MAAR’s functionaries participating in the program.
- The statistical component was conceived so as to serve the information needs emerging during the strategy and policy work.

Finally, the project budget has been initially clearly under-estimated for the training component, in particular for training activities abroad. An allocation of only US\$ 231,000 was planned to cover for the cost of five trainees to be involved in formal post-graduate training abroad and 8 to 10 fellowships in foreign institutions.

The project budget did not take into account possible modifications in the programme of activities under the policy advice and support component. This lack of flexibility in the project design has forced the project management to prioritise some activities to the detriment of other activities equally important for the full achievement of the outputs.

## **V. Assessment of Project Implementation, Efficiency and Management**

### **A. Project Budget and Expenditures**

The total donor budget for the project was US\$ 3,226,433 for 30 months. 35 percent of the budget was initially allocated for project management, covering the costs of international and national staff (Senior Project Advisor, the CTA, Economist, National Project Director and national administrative support staff). The budget was unequally distributed among the four project components reflecting the difference of volume of activities planned to be carried out under each of them: 2 percent for the institutional development component, 1 percent for the statistics for agriculture policy analysis component, 17 percent for the agriculture policy advice and support and 19 percent for the training component (within which 7 percent was allocated for fellowships and local training expenses). The remaining 26 percent cover other expenses and the support cost.

In addition to the project budget, remaining funds of a total of US\$ 118,053 (Electricity generator, colour photocopy, national consultants, SPS, expendable equipment) from project GCP/SYR/002/ITA were transferred to the present project. During the first two years of the project, five budget revisions were submitted to the Donor, maintaining the initial total budget, but reallocating funds to the policy advice and support component to accommodate additional time and missions necessary to complete some of the studies. The project budget revisions also proposed an extension of the NTE and re-phasing of activities.

In May 2000 a sixth budget revision was requested, implying an additional funding of US\$ 487,224 to cover the costs of additional policy studies suggested in the road map for a national strategy developed by the first international consultant (see section V.B) as well as the costs necessary for completing the training activities, in particular the overseas programme. There is no supporting document providing a strong and detailed justification for such an increase in the budget. As a result and not surprisingly, the Donor did not accept the budget revision.

A new zero-budget-increase proposal has been submitted again to the Donor (the proposal is currently under review by the donor). A new NTE of 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2001 has been proposed. This implied substantial modifications to the workplan. Firstly, the international staff will remain only until May 2001, leaving a gap of five months without international management presence on the project. Secondly, with regard to the activities planned to achieve the output relating to the national strategy, three additional studies planned to contribute to the formulation of a national strategy have been dropped. Finally, the formal postgraduate training and the field trip have been left aside and the overseas training will involve no more than 8 trainees.

## **B. Activities and Outputs**

### **• *Institutional Development***

#### *The National Agricultural Policy Center*

An international consultant conducted three missions (a total of 7 weeks) between June and September 1999 to prepare a detailed study on the role and functions of the NAPC. The study has been presented at the recently held national workshop (November 2000, Damascus) and has been well received by the Government.

The study has been well prepared and presents a sound and realistic picture of what a Policy Analysis Center could be in the context of Syria. The report underlines the timeliness of the establishment of the Center in view of the positive attitude of the Government with regard to structural economic reforms and innovations in the fields of scientific research and higher education. Furthermore, the current and accelerated changes stress even more the need for an agricultural policy analytical support. The Center is described as an organisation for applied economic research which should be established as a public institution, affiliated to the MAAR, and possessing scientific, organisational, administrative and financial autonomy.

During the mission, the Government took two important steps, legally establishing the Center:

(i) Resolution No. 51/T signed by the Minister of MAAR establishes the Center and describes its objectives and tasks. They essentially take up the functions proposed in the study and include:

- Carry out policy studies related to the agriculture sector and meet the long and short-term needs.[...];
- Conduct reviews of the impact of agricultural policies in general and food commodities in particular in the light of the reform process of macro-economic policies and international agreements;
- Act as a highly qualified forum for policy dialogue for the identification of current policy concerns and the timely formulation of research lines as a basis for policy reviews and proposals;
- Disseminate the results of the studies [...]
- Conduct training courses with a view to helping capacity building in agricultural policy analysis and planning within the MAAR as well as other related Ministries and institutions;
- Collect and update data on the state of agricultural affairs at the local, national and regional and international levels.

(ii) Resolution No. 1379 also signed by the Minister of MAAR gives a structure to the NAPC. The structure is also based on the proposals made in the study. It gives a predominant role to the MAAR without excluding other Ministries involved in agriculture sector. The NAPC will be managed by a Management Board chaired by the Minister of Agriculture and be composed of five divisions, distinguishing functions of research, assessment monitoring, training and administrative and financial matters.

While these resolutions represent a concrete first step towards the establishment of the Center and reflect the government's will to do so, the establishment of an operational Center will require other "standard" measures. These include: (i) a proper budget allocation and/or a financial plan; (ii) the selection of the core of experts that will constitute the staff of the Center; (iii) the definition of a work programme in line with the functions and role attributed to the Center.

The budget allocation is presently under discussion in a committee composed of the Legal and Financial Directorates of the MAAR set-up for that purpose. The main issues currently discussed relate to the necessity to align salaries of the staff of the Center with the government salary scale while not excluding incentives to attract high-qualified experts. However, the government budget allocation is likely to be insufficient to sustain activities of the Center at a level that will allow the Center to fulfil its terms of reference and to respond to the needs of the clients that the Center is meant to serve. The staff of the Center is planned to be selected among the trainees. No criterion for selection has been defined yet. Furthermore, the level of expertise of the potential staff is still not adequate for the experts to conduct high quality research and to provide training. No workplan for guiding activities of the Center has been formulated yet.

### *Restructuring the MAAR*

An international consultant prepared a detailed study on a feasible restructuring of the MAAR. The consultant conducted two missions of one month each in August 1999 and April 2000. The report has been completed and cleared by the Government. The report is essentially meant to provide guidelines on an effective organisational structure for MAAR to increase its effectiveness and efficiency in performing its duties in the new market oriented scenario. The report also covers the human and financial aspects of the restructuring.

The study has also been well received by the government. Its limit lies in its partial vision, itself linked to the existing fragmented set-up of institutions dealing with agriculture. Indeed, the report (as specified in the terms of reference) deals with the restructuring of one ministry among others dealing with agriculture sector. Although the MAAR is a key institution, the report lacks a comprehensive view of the institutional restructuring relating to agriculture sector. Some of the measures proposed are already being considered by the government such as the creation of a Directorate of Scientific Agriculture Research. However the full implementation of the restructuring of the MAAR is subjected to a broader restructuring of the various institutions linked to the sector.

### • **Policy Advice and Support**

Overall, this component has progressed slowly over the first two years of the project. Indeed, until April 2000 (or 2 years after the starting date of the project), the first missions on the strategy had just been completed, and only four out of thirteen policy studies were completed (not even all cleared and available for dissemination). However, the current workplan gives a high priority to the completion of activities under this component.

### *The Long-Term Sustainable Agriculture Strategy*

The main outputs under this component, that is, the preparation of a long-term sustainable agriculture strategy and a plan of action have not been achieved yet.

A first international consultant conducted two missions in December 1999 and January 2000 and prepared a clear and concise report. Chapter Three, the most important chapter, provides a detailed roadmap for the preparation of the strategy. It provides recommendations on (i) studies to be undertaken, (ii) identification of national institutions to be involved in the preparation of the strategy and (iii) timetable and signpost for the completion of the strategy.

The consultant identified five themes/ studies to be added to the list established at the time of the inception mission. These additional studies were viewed as important preliminary analysis or inputs to the strategy. These were : (a) Land tenure systems: structural features and policies (b) Financial and fiscal sustainability of the agricultural policy regime (c) Inter-sectorial relations and macro-economic sustainability of Syrian agricultural development: past performance and future prospects; (d) Historical evolution of the agricultural sector performance and policies and (e) Syrian comparative advantages for the main agricultural products.

One essential component of this roadmap is an appointed and operational Strategy *Task Force* to interact with the international consultant and to closely follow-up the preparation of the strategy. The report makes some suggestions on the possible national institutions to be involved in the Task Force stressing the need to involve other institutions than the MAAR. The task force is conceived as one of the key mechanisms to promote the policy dialogue among all stakeholders at an early stage of the strategy formulation as well as to ensure a large degree of internalisation or ownership of the results of the strategy work by the national stakeholders. The concept of the Task Force was discussed by the international consultant with and agreed by the Minister and the Deputy Ministers of the MAAR.

Another component of the proposed roadmap is a close interaction between the international consultant for the strategy and the international consultants for the individual policy studies so as to ensure adequate and timely inputs from individual studies to the strategy. The idea was to set up a network between international consultants to facilitate direct communication.

Because of other commitments, the international consultant (Professor De Benedictis) could not carry out the second phase or the implementation of the roadmap. Another international consultant (Professor Sarris) carried out two missions of two weeks each, in September and November 2000. These two missions took place without a Task Force put into place. It is only now that a Task Force has just been nominated by the Minister of the MAAR. The Task Force is composed of 14 members all from the MAAR, Directors of the Directorates of the MAAR and is chaired by the Vice-Minister. In addition, a small working group composed of the Director of Planning and Statistics, the National Project Director and the Vice-Minister will closely work with the international consultant.

The proposed network among international consultants has not been satisfactorily established yet. The international consultant working on the strategy has not contacted the other international consultants and some of them are not fully aware of the linkages between their work and that of the strategy and related and planned arrangements. This is regrettable as the work on policy studies is progressing relatively quickly now and some of the consultants will have completed their work without any collaboration with the international consultant working on the strategy. The consolidation of inputs provided by the individual studies for the strategy will become even more difficult.

In his first mission, the consultant devoted quite some time to the elaboration of a questionnaire for a farm household survey perceived as essential to fill up the information gap faced in the preparation of the strategy. It was only much later once his mission report was prepared that the consultant was told that a household survey was not feasible under the present project and its budget and time constraints. Obviously, the international consultant was not properly briefed on the agreed arrangements for the preparation of the strategy (National Task Force and the network). He was also not well informed on the limit of project budget that did not permit additional collection of information.

Overall, the timing of the work on the strategy has not been well managed. It is recognised that the first mission of the international consultant for the preparation of the strategy framework should have taken place at the very beginning of the project so that all studies benefit from the guidelines it provides on both the content and the operational arrangements for the preparation of individual policy studies. Furthermore, the change in the international consultant has certainly created delays in the preparation of the strategy.

Because of the budget constraints, three studies proposed by the first consultant have been dropped. These are the ones relating to fiscal and financial sustainability, macroeconomic sustainability and comparative advantage. They are only partially compensated by the addition of the study on “Explicit and Implicit Taxation of Agriculture and Implications for Net Transfers to Agriculture” proposed by the new international consultant on the strategy. This will certainly affect the preparation of the strategy. Particularly serious for the strategy could be the impact of the absence of the comparative advantage analysis.

Furthermore, in the time allocated for the preparation of the strategy and taking into account the shortcomings relating to data availability and inputs from individual policy studies, one can not realistically expect the project to produce in its remaining lifetime a comprehensive strategy together with an Action Plan which will have been the subject matter of a thorough policy dialogue and the results of which will have been fully internalised by all stakeholders.

### ***Policy Studies***

In addition to the Country Profile, only six policy studies out of fourteen planned have been prepared. Three are currently under preparation and five others are planned to be completed by the end of April 2001. The six policy studies completed are:

- Efficiency of the Olive and Olive Oil Sub-sector

- Situation and Outlook Analysis of Citrus Fruits in Syria
- Structure, Constraints and Imperfections, Operations and Policy Options for Improvements of the Main Livestock Products
- Implications for the Agricultural Sector and Recent Developments in Private and Public Agricultural Marketing and Processing Activities in Syria
- Implications for Consumers and for Food security of the Policy Reform Process Towards a Market Oriented economy
- Constraints, Opportunities and Policy Options for Improving the Main Strategic Crops Production and Distribution System.

The five policy currently under preparation or planned are:

- Environmental impact of agricultural production practices, in terms of soil erosion, desertification, aquifer depletion and salination, contamination of water resources and the regulatory framework protecting common resources.
- Land Tenure Systems: Structural Features and Policies
- Implications for the agricultural sector of the liberalisation of input markets.
- Explicit and Implicit Taxation of Agriculture in the Syrian Arab Republic, and Implications for Net Transfers to Agriculture
- Implications for the agricultural sectors of the current agricultural credit system and policies to be pursued in order to mobilise savings and enhance self dependence and create viable and sustainable rural credit institutions.

### *Operational Arrangements*

Operational arrangements to prepare the studies have been well conceived with a view to (i) involving nationals and ensuring a better internalisation of the results of the studies and (ii) providing on-the-job- training opportunities to trainees. For each study, a Task Force is set-up composed of one or two national consultants and a group of a minimum of five trainees.

However, the implementation of these arrangements is not always effective and the role and contribution of national consultants seem to have been variable. Time availability was mentioned as the major constraint to a significant contribution from national consultants who are very much occupied with their office duties (many of them appeared to be high ranked government officials). The mission interviewed three international consultants present on the project during the evaluation mission. Two consultants completed their first mission without the national consultants being recruited before they left. One of the two did not even have the opportunity to discuss a work programme between the two missions with national consultants. The other international consultant who was completing his second mission was satisfied with the participation of the national consultants attached to the studies (two Directors of the MAAR) although their contribution consisted essentially in a number of interviews with the international consultant.

Furthermore, the supervision of trainees in-between the missions of the international consultant have not always been adequate. Most of the trainees interviewed did not have much interaction with the national consultants.

### *Quality assessment*

Out of the six, four were available to the mission and have been assessed in terms of their quality. The study on food security is not available in English yet and the study on strategic crops has not been cleared yet.

Within the overall methodological approach adopted by the project, each individual study was expected to produce a “joint output”: a) the identification and the analysis of policy issues with specific relevance for the modernization of the agricultural sector and the ongoing reform process; b) analytical inputs specifically aimed at the elaboration of a strategy for the agricultural sector. A brief assessment of the policy studies available so far has been conducted particularly having in mind these joint objectives and is presented in Annex 4. However, with regard to the second objective, it is important to point out that at the time the studies were conceived and executed the Project had not yet produced any significant output with regard to the strategy and with which to provide guidance to the International Consultants responsible for the studies.

Overall and in spite of the evident variability in the analytical quality of the studies, one can say that the four available policy studies provide a useful but incomplete foundation of analytical materials needed for the strategy, as also pointed out by the international consultant responsible for the strategy.

One weakness of the studies conducted so far lies in the editing area. All reports could have benefited from further editorial work to improve the readability of the studies and, to a certain extent, also their contribution to capacity building. The incorporation in the report of a summary with a homogeneous format would have been a first step in this direction.

### *Delivery Mechanism*

Each international consultant conducts a workshop at the end of her/his last mission. These workshops have been well-attended with an audience varying from 25 to 70 people from essentially the government institutions but also from other interested horizons: processing industry, marketing. These workshops are useful in providing the international consultant with a first feedback from nationals on preliminary findings and proposals and certainly represent a constructive input to the preparation of a first draft. However, they do not represent a delivery mechanism of a completed and cleared study.

A national workshop took place at the beginning of November 2000 where all the studies prepared under the project so far were presented and discussed with a large audience. The workshop was the opportunity to disseminate studies that had been prepared under the project. It is also recognised from participants met by the mission that the workshop enhanced a policy dialogue among a broad range of stakeholders. However, the workshop is a one time national event and does not replace a delivery mechanism that allows proper dissemination of the results of individual studies and to enhance dialogue necessary for follow-up actions.

For some of the studies, the delay between the last mission of the international consultant and the availability of a full report ready for dissemination has been considerable. These delays are attributed to consultant's delays in producing a first draft and then a final report in certain cases as well as the delays taken for the clearance of the reports by FAO. Furthermore, the Project has not been systematically requested to provide comments on the first drafts and did not intervene systematically in the final clearance of the studies. All these factors certainly do not facilitate the timely and effective delivery of the policy studies.

- **Training programme**

The training component is the most important in terms of budget allocation. Training activities carried out since the start of the project have been substantial. The implementation of the training component has been well advanced compared to other components of the project and it is considered as having achieved relatively good results although it is not completed. The training activities are organised in three phases and complementary activities.

Phase 1 or *Extended Basic Training* was implemented from May to December 1998. It involved a total of 80 trainees, organised in three groups. Following a number of voluntary dropouts, 65 trainees have completed the first training phase, which was intended to provide the essential practical skills and conceptual background needed to being effectively involved in agricultural policy training. The essential practical skills were computer use and English language. Courses have been delivered on microeconomics, macroeconomics, descriptive and agricultural statistics, quantitative methods and econometrics. The details on the number of hours of training by subject matter are provided in Annex 5. Courses have been added to the initial detailed plan drawn during the inception mission and the total length of the courses has been extended.

At the end of the extended basic training phase on-the-job training was provided for 4 weeks. It was mainly intended to provide an occasion for applying concepts learnt during previous months and introducing the next training phase by examining some policy issues as they emerge from secondary data collected through trainees' visits to various institutions and from field farm surveys.

Phase 2 or *Specialised Training* was conducted from January 1999 to August 2000. Out of the 65 trainees who completed the extended Basic Training, 52 were enrolled in this phase and 49 completed it. Trainees were reorganised in two groups, each one working with the project for three days each week, during which they attended 10 hours training in agricultural policy and 3 hours of English. 13 courses on various subject matters relating to agricultural policies. Details on specialised training courses are also provided in Annex 5.

The *Individually Tailored Specialised Training* is the third phase of the programme. It started in September and is planned to last until April 2001. All of the 49 trainees who completed phase 2 are engaged in a research project supervised by an international expert. 8 research groups have been formed, each dealing with a policy-related theme. This research phase called on-the-job training is expected to not only enhance trainee's capacities but also to produce inputs for the strategy.

Other or *Supplementary Training Activities* included:

*Seminars:* in order to familiarise trainees with policy debate on both methodological and applied issues, a total of 35 seminars has been offered, including: (a) seminars given by training consultants and trainees and their research activities, (b) methodological seminars on studies conducted under the project (c) seminars presenting preliminary findings of the policy studies and (d) seminars given by national and international experts on different aspects of agricultural policy making. Seminars proved to be quite effective in stimulating trainees' active participation in policy debates.

*Participation in Policy Studies:* Trainees have been involved in task force supporting the international consultants on individual policy studies. 35 trainees have been involved in this activity in data gathering, preliminary elaboration and formulation of interpretations. This activity proved to be important in offering trainees an introductory experience to policy analysis work.

*Participation in Database Establishment:* All trainees have also collaborated to the building-up of the statistical database for agricultural policy analysis, assisting the international consultant in gathering, entering and validating the data.

The relative success of the training can be attributed to the following features:

- *The appropriateness of the curriculum of the courses.* The basic training phase appeared to have been an essential prerequisite for the students to be able to follow specialised courses in the phase 2. However, the variety of initial levels in English and in Economics among the trainees has slowed down progress for some of the trainees. The 13 specialised courses were highly relevant to the needs of the students. However, they have been too intensive for the students to fully benefit from them. Despite the changes induced by the project management on the length of these courses, the intensity of the course prevented extensive contacts between the international consultant and the trainees.
- *The quality of the training* (teaching and training materials). Most of the courses have been of good quality. An assessment of the quality of the training is provided by the trainees themselves through their replies to questionnaires that had to fill up at the end of each course. In a grading from 1 to 5, grade 3 or higher have been given to each course by a minimum of 80% of trainees<sup>5</sup>.
- *The innovative approach* combining systematic academic training (phase 1 and 2) and participative and applied training (phase 3 and supplementary activities)
- *An incentive system* including a direct monthly incentive to trainees to compensate for heavier concentration of workload during their presence at the office as well as the perspectives of being selected as staff members for the NAPC and/or the possibility of being involved for training abroad.
- *A strong support from the project staff*, in particular from the agricultural economist who provides individual supervision to trainees and short training sessions on data elaboration and analysis.
- *A gender balance* in the training beneficiaries with 41 percent of the trainees being female.
- *A proper monitoring system* allowing a close follow-up of the achievements of the training programme. There is a considerable amount of information available on the training component, including statistical data and qualitative information relating to trainees background, assessment and performance, on training

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<sup>5</sup> Presentation of the Project's Training Activities By Ciro Fiorillo, Agricultural Economist during the First National Agricultural Policy Workshop.

courses, training materials and auto-assessment of the programme by the Project management.

Despite this overall positive picture, it is recognised by all that the level of competence and skills acquired through the training programme achieved so far is insufficient for the trainees to conduct proper policy research and analysis with a high degree of autonomy. Major problems faced by the trainees relate to the tremendous time pressure due to the cumulation of too many tasks, the lack of computer equipment availability for them to practise and prepare reports. It is obvious that trainees will continue to need the strong support of the project staff to complete their research.

Finally, the dropping of some essential activities of the training programme, namely overseas training and fellowship, is not without consequences on the level of outputs achievements (level of skills and competence acquired by the trainees) which in turn will have also implications on the degree of operational capacity of the Center.

- **Statistical Information Support**

An international consultant carried out a four-month consultancy and defined a detailed scheme for data collection and data entry on computer. The consultants produced two outputs: (i) crop production data for the majority of agricultural enterprises, crop budget, and commodity prices and other physical and economic data and (ii) a series of appendices on data tables. After completion of the data computerisation by the trainees, the consultant organised the database in an accessible and updated form. The consultant conducted short training for the trainees on the organisation of data, access and up dating and worked very closely with the project computer expert.

An electronic database has now been set up. It comprises time-series production data on most of the farm enterprises in Syrian agriculture as well as national level production and economic statistics and recent farm budgets of the major crop enterprises. Almost all farm production data was desegregated according to agro-ecological zones. A Technical Handbook has been prepared compiling tables on available information. The Technical Handbook has not been disseminated yet.

While providing a considerable amount of information, the database has limits that are linked to those of the data themselves. It contains secondary, national and average data. In this respect, it is certainly not sufficient to fulfil the information needs of individual policy studies as well as those needed for the strategy. One important information gap concerns farm household data.

Finally, the programme used, although user-friendly, is not the most appropriate software to manage a huge and complex amount of data.

### **C. Government Support**

As per Project document, the Government inputs consisted of:

- Taking necessary steps toward institutionalising and establishing the NAPC
- Appointing a full-time Director of the Center
- Assigning of a National Project Director (NPD)
- Providing adequate office accommodations.

The Government fulfilled only partially its obligations. The project is located in what will be the NAPC facilities. Office space for the project is adequate. The establishment of the NAPC was to be done within six months of the EOD of the project. The NAPC was given a legal status only lately during the Mission (see section B). One can say that the NAPC so far did not have any existence beyond that of the project.

The NPD has also been nominated as the Director of the NAPC and works full-time for the project. His role is essentially to liaise with the Government and the project. While the NPD has effectively facilitated project activities, his lack of limited economic background does not make him the ideal choice for assuring the scientific guidance of adequate quality to a research Center in economics and compensating measures will have to be taken.

### **D. Project Management**

The project went through a severe management crisis a few months after operations started. The CTA and the Agricultural Economist started duties on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1998. In July 1998, the Government of Syria withdrew its clearance for the two international staff of the project. After a closer inspection by the Government of Italy, the Donor intervened to maintain the Agricultural Economist on the project. The CTA left the country in December and a new CTA was recruited first as a consultant during the month of February and as a full project staff from April 1999.

The mission was not able to fully understand the circumstances that led to the crisis. On the contrary, from the few documents available for that period (April to July 1998, mission reports, exchanges of correspondence), it is difficult to find evidence of an emerging crisis of such a nature. In particular, the minutes of the meeting of the first Steering Committee meeting dated of 29 April give the impression that all parties involved at that time were very satisfied by the action taken and the proposed workplan presented by the project CTA.

The actual impact of this crisis on the project has been substantial. First, the project environment resulting from this conflict was not conducive to a trusty atmosphere and project management had to devote time to re-build a collaborative spirit among the project team and counterparts. Secondly, it delayed implementation of the project and the realisation of activities that should have been carried out at the beginning of the project. In particular, the strategy framework suggesting changes and additional policy studies to be conducted and proposing a roadmap for the development of the strategy should have been undertaken at an earlier stage of project implementation. Thirdly, the project certainly did not function in a very effective way for a period of about 7 to 8 months. This period includes: 4 to 5 months during which the CTA remained in a difficult position until he left the country (December 1998), one month

during which the project was left without a CTA and finally 2 months during which the new CTA familiarised himself with the project and its environment. The resources not effectively used during this period of reduced effectiveness has certainly contributed to the recent budget shortcomings.

### *The Overall Management Structure*

The management structure of the project is quite complex and unusual when compared to similar projects. In addition to the standard management structure for trust-fund projects (Tripartite Steering Committee, FAO Backstopping Operational and Technical units, and project CTA), two additional management mechanisms have been included at the request of the Donor: a three-member Technical Committee (TC) and a Special Project Adviser. These two mechanisms were put as funding conditions by the Donor with a view to closely monitoring the project, and arose from the Donor's poor assessment of the previous project (GCP/SYR/002/ITA).

The complex management structure also responded to the high technical content of the project and an equally complex technical and operational co-ordination required by a considerable amount of international and national consultancies to be implemented in a relatively short period of time.

### *The Steering Committee*

The steering committee examines progress and provides guidance to the Project. The Committee includes representatives of the Donor Government (Representative of FAO/Italy Technical Review and Monitoring Panel), the Government of Syria (Vice Minister of MAAR) and FAO (Director of TCA/ Chief TCAS). "Its main functions are to: a) review the progress of the project in accordance with the plan of operation and recommend corrective actions as may be necessary; b) ensure that all inputs required for the orderly implementation of the project are timely provided by the parties concerned; and c) approve annual programme of work and budget"<sup>6</sup>. Since the beginning of the project, the SC met three times for one full day, twice in Syria and once in Rome. The minutes of the SC meetings reflect quite formal discussions on the progress of the project and key issues. It is worth to note that no SC meeting took place from April 98 to May 99 or during the period of the crisis and its aftermath.

### *The Technical Committee*

The Technical Committee is composed of three experts, indicated by the three parties involved (the recipient and donor countries and FAO). Until its fourth meeting, the TC was composed of the Representative of FAO/Italy Technical Review and Monitoring Panel, the Senior Policy Officer (first TCAS and then RNEP), and the Director of Planning and Statistical Department of the MAAR. From the fourth meeting, the Representative of the Government of Syria changed to become the National Project Director. His involvement in an external and advisory body to the project has certainly reduced the "independence" and the "advisory" role of the TC and has also not helped to clarify roles and responsibilities in this complex management set-up.

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<sup>6</sup> Project Document page 26

“The main functions of the Committee are :

- to review progress and recommend required modifications in project activities;
- to assist in identifying proper professional capacity for project execution;
- to bring to the attention of FAO any issue that may require timely & ad hoc action for the proper implementation of the project.”<sup>7</sup>

The TC has carried out 7 meetings over the life of the project. The minutes of the meetings reveal that the TC has functioned as a close monitoring tool, discussing progress made in project implementation, budget issues and the workplan. The TC has regularly raised important technical issues (as for instance delivery and dissemination of the policy work, technical support and briefing to international consultants etc.). In this respect, the TC plays a key role in ensuring a good co-ordination of all resources involved in the project and has certainly contributed to the quality of outputs achieved so far.

At times, the TC has gone beyond its terms of reference to discuss operational matters (ex. renewal of car licence of project staff). This is partly the result of the crisis that created certain mistrust between the three parties and led to expectations for increased transparency from all. The high frequency of the TC meetings (once every four months) has imposed an additional and non-marginal workload to the project team and RNER through the preparation of support documentation to the meetings. While this is justified in the present project context (see below, weak project management), it is certainly not a cost-effective model of management.

Furthermore, the interruptions of the TC meetings from March 98 to March 99 casts some doubts on the capacity of the TC as a management mechanism and its relative ineffectiveness in solving important crisis.

#### *The Senior Project Adviser*

The role of the Senior Project Advisor (SPA), appointed by FAO, was initially to provide technical support to the CTA. The SPA, in collaboration with the CTA and the NPD, was expected to keep up-to-date the project's overall programme of work, and the work plans for the training activities. The first appointed SPA resigned in June 98 for personal reasons. A second SPA replaced him although not before February 99. The terms of reference of the SPA changed at that time to support not only the CTA but also RNER and RNEP in planning, monitoring activities of the project and to provide "FAO technical inputs". From then, all communication between the SPA and the CTA went through the Cairo office.

Initially the SPA was allocated 75 days per year. The quality of his inputs to the project is recognised of high level, providing technical comments on policy reports but also providing technical guidance on implementation issues. The SPA conducted several short missions to the project, four field missions in 1999 and six field missions in year 2000 including four missions to attend the technical committee meetings, in addition to office work. Despite the very high quality of his inputs, the distinct role of the SPA vis-a-vis the FAO officers and the project management is unclear. Finally the absence of direct contact between the SPA and the project CTA (indirect communication through Cairo) has not contributed to transparency and dialogue among the key players in the project management.

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<sup>7</sup> Project Document, page 26.

### *The Project Management (CTA, NPD)*

The present project management is unsatisfactory. The serious lack of co-ordination for the preparation of the strategy (late appointment of the Task Force, the absence of a network between the international consultants, weak follow-up of the international consultant missions and work<sup>8</sup>), the very limited technical briefing provided to international consultants upon arrival to the project, the absence of systematic terms of reference for national consultants and their unclear role/ contribution and the weak follow-up of the policy teams attached to each individual study between missions of international consultants are various indications of an insufficient technical support and co-ordination provided by the project management. These weaknesses in the project management are amplified by confusion as to the respective role of the CTA and the NPD on a number of management functions. For instance, while the mission was there it was not possible to understand the responsibilities for the appointment, recruitment and briefing of national consultants between the CTA and the NPD. The role of the project management has not been facilitated by unclear channel of communication and duplication of roles and responsibilities between the various bodies of the project management structure. It was not possible to clarify to whom the CTA reports and/or requests support on technical matters (SPA, FAO Technical Officer, TC members?) in practise.

### *FAO Technical and Operational Backstopping*

Under the project management arrangements, FAO provides backstopping to the project through the SPA and its operational and technical units.

FAO backstopping responsibilities have changed during the life of the project. Initially both technical and operational backstopping was the responsibility of an officer of the TCAS at Headquarters. This was clearly a too difficult task assigned to one individual, in particular considering the high technical content of the project and the particular and complex management structure designed in the project. FAO backstopping responsibilities were transferred during the Summer of 1999 to the Near East Regional Office in Cairo with FAO standard distribution of assignment between the Operations Office and the Policy Branch as Lead Technical Unit. Again, operational responsibilities were moved to another Country Programme Officer in early 2000. These changes in backstopping responsibilities have certainly not facilitated a smooth communication and a strong team spirit among the people involved in the project during the first 18 months of the project.

The project benefited from ample technical backstopping from RNER judging by the number of missions. In the year 2000, the CPO and the LTU Officer undertook 5 and 4 missions respectively. Despite of this, one must say that the weaknesses of the project management have not been compensated by sufficient backstopping. Missions have been too short, the officer concentrating on the participation to the TC meetings and the relationships between the CTA and the FAO units are too distant.

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<sup>8</sup> It is not before the international consultant completed his first mission that he was informed about the non feasibility of his proposal to conduct a survey (see V.B). At the time the mission took place, there was apparently no plan to follow-up on the information requirements and inputs from individual studies defined by the international consultant during his second mission.

## **VI. Assessment of Results and Effectiveness**

### **A. Impact of the Project**

The expected *impacts of the project* are institutional building, policy decision-making and capacity building. Considering the present level of achievements of the project and the amount of activities that remains to be carried out, it is premature to assess most of the actual impacts of the project.

#### *Institutional Development*

The two studies prepared under this component are presently forming the basis for (i) the establishment of the NAPC and (ii) the restructuring of the MAAR. In this respect, the use of these studies by the Government is a clear indication of the concrete contribution of the project to shaping the needed new institutional environment.

#### *Policy decision-making*

While there is a general appreciation on the part of the Government of the relevance of the policy output produced so far, the too recent dissemination of the few policy studies does not permit to assess their real contribution to current policy decision-making. Their presentation in the First National Workshop involving a large audience has certainly enhanced the beginning of a policy dialogue.

The likely impact of the strategy and the policy studies on national policy decision-making depends on the quality of the outputs and lies in the degree of ownership or internalisation of the results of the studies by national stakeholders.

From the few policy studies available so far, the quality is satisfactory (see section V.B).

The degree of ownership depends, in turn, on the capacity of the project to fulfil the following conditions:

- (i) make policy recommendations available and delivered in a timely manner so as to respond to a rapidly evolving context;
- (ii) adapt its work so as to act on demand and to respond to emerging needs;
- (iii) fully involve nationals during the preparation phase of the study; and
- (iv) to enhance and support the policy dialogue among all stakeholders.

With regard to point (i) there has been tremendous delays in delivering some of the policy studies. The lack of clarity of procedures related to report production, review and clearance at the beginning of the project has certainly not facilitated an effective and rapid delivery of outputs. Regarding point (ii), the limited flexibility to modify the policy research work programme relates largely to deficiencies in the project design. The pre-defined list of studies in the project document and the limit of the budget allocation to do so did not give much flexibility for major changes in the number and on the additional selection of policy studies to be carried out. Points (iii) and (iv), in fact, involve the capacity building elements of the policy work discussed below.

### *Capacity Building*

Capacity building is present in essentially two out of four of the immediate objectives of the project: capacity building through policy advice and support and through the training programme.

The policy work contains two elements of capacity building. The first one, for which the project has been quite successful, concerns the contribution offered by the policy studies in term of *technical capacity building*. While it is impossible at this stage to assess the real contribution, the involvement of the national consultants has certainly represented an appropriate move. However, there is no reliable indication of the progress made in this direction. Equally important is also the involvement of trainees in the preparation of the policy studies.

There is also a second category of capacity building that relates to the objective of *raising the level of awareness and information* in all potential stakeholders (public and private). This second component of capacity building is particularly relevant for the present Syrian situation, i.e. in a context in which the debate about the appropriate road and speed toward a market oriented economy is apparently gaining momentum. From this angle one must recognize that the potential contribution offered by the completed studies has not been exploited at the maximum level: invitation to a limited number of actors to the seminars offered by the international consultants at the end of their second mission has been basically the only action taken in this direction. This is more than surprising since a larger and systematic involvement of the various categories of potential stakeholders would have been possible with a very low cost in terms of financial and human resources.

Capacity building through the training component has been achieved to a certain extent though certainly not to the expected level for several reasons that relate to time constraints and the misperception of the objective time needed to form full-fledge researchers, but moreover for reasons that relate to the dropping of key activities necessary to achieve the full output.

### **B. Sustainability of Project Results**

The *sustainability* of the results of the project<sup>9</sup> can be defined by the extent to which the project will result in a well-functioning and autonomous NAPC with a core of high qualified experts ready to perform policy research work and provide sound policy advice and support to decision-makers as well as to contribute to enhancing capacities for sound economic analysis and management.

The likely sustainability of the NAPC depends on the realisation of the conditions that prevail to the establishment of a well-functioning and autonomous NAPC. These conditions include: a legal status, sustainable financial resources, a well-motivated

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<sup>9</sup> In the FAO Evaluation Mission Brief, (Rome, January 1998), "Sustainability of results" is defined as "Prospects for continued use of project results by beneficiaries: their receptivity to, and adaptation of, project outputs for further development activities, maintenance of acquired capabilities at local and institutional levels [...]."

and high-qualified cadre of experts and a well defined work programme within the policy framework set by the strategy that meets and foresees the needs of multiple stakeholders.

While some actions are being taken for providing the Center with a proper legal status, other conditions are most likely to be insufficiently realised to ensure sustainability of the Center in the near future. The major shortcomings to sustainability can be found in the still insufficient level of expertise of the trainees from whom the staff will be selected. Moreover, it is most likely that the level of funding will be insufficient for the Center to perform in a competitive way. It is therefore very unlikely that the full sustainability of the project outputs be achieved during the present phase of the project.

Furthermore, considering the insufficient level of capacity building achieved through the project and the expected limited financial allocation from the government, it is obvious that external assistance will be needed for the initial years of the Center. This will contribute to consolidate the results achieved by the present project, ensure better impacts and prepare the ground for sustainability.

### **C. Cost-Effectiveness**

While it is difficult to assess the overall cost-effectiveness of the project, the mission has already pointed out, in the previous sections, two sources of cost-ineffectiveness:

(i) The management crisis faced by the project at its beginning had a cost expressed in terms of project activities slowed down and delayed during which project fixed costs had to be maintained.

(ii) The heavy management structure of the project (TC meetings, SPA for a total period of 7.5 months) has also a cost for which the accrued benefits are only expressed in terms of compensation for the project management weaknesses and other FAO institutional shortcomings. However, as already stressed above, it is certainly not a cost- effective model of management.

(iii) In spite of (i) and (ii), if the potential project outputs fully realise by the end of the project, the project would certainly generate a satisfactory benefit/cost ratio expressed in qualitative terms.

## **VII. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **A. Conclusions**

#### **General Conclusion**

Although the Mission was initially planned to carry out a final evaluation of the project, the level of achievements of the project outputs so far and the large amount of activities that are now planned to be undertaken over the remaining lifetime of the project did not allow the Mission to assess the project as a nearly completed project. It is now planned to terminate the project in October 2001. The remaining 10 month-period of the project is perceived as determinant for the realisation of the immediate objectives of the project and for ensuring a greater impact of the project in the short as well as longer run. Furthermore, the project activities to be conducted during this period together with some key actions from the government counterparts are viewed as essential prerequisite for considering another phase. This initial finding has driven the evaluation of the Mission and underpins the findings and recommendations.

#### **Project Relevance**

Agriculture maintains a major role in the economy of the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria thereafter). The Syrian economy has been for thirty years centrally planned with the Government intervening heavily in all economic activities. Faced with economic difficulties, Syria started a process of gradual economic reform in the mid 1980s. A number of measures have been taken, replacing the various forms of government interventions in the economy and paving the way towards domestic liberalisation. Although the Government approach to economic reform can be characterised as being cautious, it seems that during the two years and half life of the project, the commitment and willingness of the government to accelerate the pace of reform have increased. Some of the major constraints to the reform process clearly relate to the substantial adjustment in the institutional framework needed to deal with a market economic environment and the limited capacity of policy makers to perform short and medium term agricultural policy analysis. Against this background, there is no doubt that the present project aiming at strengthening the capability of the Government in agricultural policy analysis, formulation and monitoring in a market-oriented economy is highly relevant.

#### **Project Concept and Design**

Despite its relevance, the project concept reveals three limitations:

- An exclusive focus on the MAAR, likely due to fragmented institutional setting and to its complex implication in the transition process, induces a confined sectorial vision, thus potentially ignoring the multidimensional and multidisciplinary linkages of agriculture with other sectors and society at large.
- Capacity building through policy advice and support can be achieved only with a high level involvement of those concerned all along the policy process, from policy identification, to formulation to dissemination and implementation. (Stakeholders' involvement weakly built-into the project design).

- Capacity building especially in the context of a gradual reform process is a long process in itself. In this regard, the project immediate objectives are too ambitious to be realised over a three-year period.

The project is adequately designed around four well-integrated components, namely: institutional development, policy advice and support, training and statistical support. There are various elements in each component built-into the project allowing effective synergies between the components.

The project budget has been initially clearly under-estimated for the training component. The project budget did not take into account possible modifications in the programme of activities under the Policy advice and support component. This lack of flexibility in the project design has forced the project management to prioritise some activities to the detriment of other activities equally important for the full achievement of the outputs.

### **Project Budget**

The shortfalls in the budget that have become evident in the mid-2000, have required substantial modifications to the workplan, thus jeopardising the project achievements during the remaining period. Firstly, the international staff will remain only until May 2001, leaving a gap of five months without international technical and managerial presence on the project. Secondly, with regard to the activities planned to achieve the output relating to the national strategy, some additional studies planned to contribute to the formulation of a national strategy have been dropped and most of overseas training activities have been deleted and fellowships reduced.

### **Project Management**

A few months after it started operations, the project suffered from a severe management crisis, which had a significant impact beyond the period of the crisis. Over its lifetime, the project also suffered from too many changes in individuals involved in the management of the project in the various layers of its management structure (changes in the CTA, in the SPA, in the national membership of the TC, in the FAO backstopping responsibilities).

It is recognised that the additional technical advisory bodies (SPA, TC) to the project have been instrumental in guiding and co-ordinating the project implementation in a technically sound manner. They were essential in the context of the complex management implied by the nature of the project. It is also admitted that they have compensated for some shortcomings from the project management. They also provided strong support to FAO responsible units.

However, the superimposition of layers in the management structure has not facilitated clear channels of communication, and has contributed to confusion on respective roles and responsibilities among those involved in the project management. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this complex management structure has shown its limit in its incapacity to manage a severe crisis.

## **Project Results**

- ***The Institutional Development Component***

The study for the establishment of the National Agriculture Policy Center (NAPC) has been well prepared. Based on the project achievements and the status of the establishment of the Center so far, it is unlikely that the Center be fully and *independently* operational in the near future. Firstly, the government budget allocation is likely to be largely insufficient to sustain activities of the Center at a level that will allow the Center to fulfil its terms of reference and to respond to the needs of the clients that the Center is meant to serve. The level of expertise of the potential staff is still not adequate for the experts to conduct high quality research and provide training and will remain so if no additional support is provided in this domain.

The study on the Restructuring of the Ministry is also considered well prepared. Meant to provide a preliminary vision on what could be a reformed structure in the context of a less interventionist role of the government, the document is actually being used by the Government in its current internal discussion on the restructuring of the MAAR.

- **Policy Advice and Support**

Not independently of the initial management crisis, this component has progressed slowly over the first two years of the project. However, the current workplan gives a high priority to the completion of activities under this component.

### ***The Long-Term Sustainable Agriculture Strategy***

The main outputs under this component, that is, the preparation of a long-term sustainable agriculture strategy agriculture and a plan of action have not been achieved yet.

The report of the first international consultant has been extremely well received by the Government and the project. It is a clear and concise report that provides a detailed roadmap to the preparation of the strategy. One essential component of this roadmap is an appointed and operational Strategy Task Force to interact with the international consultant and to closely follow-up the preparation of the strategy. Furthermore, the task force is conceived as one of the key mechanisms to promote the policy dialogue among all stakeholders at an early stage of the strategy formulation as well as to ensure a large degree of internalisation or ownership of the results of the strategy work by the national stakeholders. Two missions of the new international consultant for the phase 2 of the strategy have already taken place without a task force into place. The Task Force has been formed officially during the present mission.

Another component of the proposed roadmap is a close interaction between the international consultant for the strategy and the international consultants for the individual policy studies so as to ensure adequate and timely inputs from individual studies to the strategy. This network does not seem to have been satisfactorily established yet.

It is recognised that the first mission of the international consultant for the preparation of the strategy framework should have taken place at the very beginning of the project so that all studies benefit from the guidelines it provides on both the content and the operational arrangements for the preparation of individual policy studies. It is also believed that the change in the international consultant has certainly created delays in the preparation of the strategy.

The dropping of the three studies (fiscal and financial sustainability; macroeconomic sustainability; comparative advantage), only partially compensated by the addition of the study on “Explicit and Implicit Taxation of Agriculture and Implications for Net Transfers to Agriculture”, may affect the preparation of the strategy. Furthermore, in the time allocated for the preparation of the strategy and taking into account the shortcomings relating to data availability and inputs from individual policy studies, one can not realistically expect the project to produce in its remaining lifetime a comprehensive strategy together with an Action Plan which will have been the subject matter of a thorough policy dialogue and the results of which will have been fully internalised by all stakeholders.

### ***Policy Studies***

In addition to the Country Profile, only six policy studies out of fourteen planned have been prepared. Three are currently under preparation and five others are planned to be completed by the end of April 2001.

Out of the six, four have been assessed in terms of their quality. In spite of the evident variability in the analytical quality of the studies, one can say that they provide a useful but incomplete foundation of analytical materials needed for the strategy, as also pointed out by the International consultant responsible for the strategy.

One weakness of the studies conducted so far lies in the editing area. All reports could have benefited from further editorial work to improve the readability of the studies and, to a certain extent, also their contribution to capacity building. The incorporation in the report of a summary with a homogeneous format would have been a first step in this direction.

Operational arrangements to prepare the study, consisting in the setting up of a Task Force composed of one or two national consultants and a group of a minimum of five trainees, is well conceived. However, in practise, the effective contribution of the national consultants has been impossible to ascertain and apparently quite variable and the supervision of trainees especially in-between the missions of the international consultant have not always been adequate.

Another lesson learned from this first group of studies concerns the preparation of the final draft of the reports. For some of the studies, the delay between the last mission of the international consultant and the availability of a full report ready for dissemination has been considerable. This is certainly detrimental to the necessary dialogue that should accompany the final draft as well as to the enhancement of follow-up actions.

- **Training**

The training component is considered as having achieved good results although it is not completed. The success of the training activities conducted so far can be measured in various ways. First, 49 trainees completed successfully phase 1 (basic training) and phase 2 (specialised training) with the obtention of a certificate based on scores obtained for each course and are now involved in the third phase of training (individually tailored training) or on-the-job training. The Government, in recognition to the high level of training received by its employees, assigned advanced responsibilities to eight of them. Finally, from the point of view of the beneficiaries, the trainees have evaluated very positively the training received so far.

However, it is recognised by all that the level of competence and skills acquired through the training programme achieved so far is insufficient for the trainees to conduct proper policy research and analysis with a high degree of autonomy.

The basic training phase appeared to have been an essential prerequisite for the students to be able to follow specialised courses in the phase 2. However, the variety of initial levels in English and in economics among the trainees has slowed down progress for some of the trainees. The 13 specialised courses were highly relevant to the needs of the students. But they have been too intensive for the students to fully benefit from them. Over the short period of implementation of phase 3 of the training programme or individually tailored training, some benefits are already well appreciated by the trainees. The research task assigned to the trainees provides them a sense of autonomy and enhances new and more effective methods of working through teamwork.

There are great actual and potential synergies between the training component and the other project components that are not all fully exploited. The participation of the trainees to the task forces attached to the policy studies is of great mutual benefits. The participation of the trainees to the seminars organised by each policy study consultant at the beginning and end of her/his assignment is also a good opportunity for students to link academic (or theoretical) knowledge to practical issues relevant to the Syrian economy. The subject matters selected for the research groups are relevant to policy issues to be addressed. Linkages with policy study preparation could be strengthened, provided that time constraint is relaxed. They could form the basis of the work programme of the Center.

The major issues regarding the achievement of the training components are the following:

- (a) The specialised training provided to the trainees is not sufficient by itself to form full-fledged researchers and need further consolidation.
- (b) The trainees face a tremendous time constraint because of the cumulating of too many tasks.
- (c) Computer equipment availability for trainees is insufficient for them to practise and perform reporting.
- (d) The trainees will continue to need the strong support of the project staff to complete their research
- (e) The dropping of some essential activities of the training programme, namely overseas training and fellowship, is not without consequences on the level of

outputs achievements (level of skills and competence acquired by the trainees) which in turn will have also implications on the degree of operability of the Center.

- **Statistical Information**

The setting-up of a user-friendly excel database has been recently completed and is available to all project staff. The limitations of the database are linked to those of the data themselves (secondary, macro and incomplete data) and the programme used is not the most appropriate software to manage a huge and complex amount of data. On the other hand, the use of such software would have implied further effort to make the database adequately user-friendly.

### **Impact and Sustainability of Project Results**

The expected impacts of the project relate to institutional building, policy decision-making and capacity building. Considering the present level of achievements of the project and the amount of activities that remains to be carried out, it is premature to assess most of the actual impacts of the project.

The current use of the two institutional studies by the Government is a positive sign of the project's contribution to the institutional reform taking place in the country.

The expected impact of the policy work will be optimised only if a number of conditions are fulfilled. These conditions relate to ensuring a higher quality of the studies and an increased internalisation of their results. This, in turn, implies to take a number of measures aiming at increasing the involvement of nationals in the preparation of studies as well as improving the delivery mechanism and the overall policy dialogue with all stakeholders.

The training component has greatly contributed to capacity building of a pool of experts although not to the extent expected. It is unlikely that, in the remaining period of the project, the level of competence and skills acquired through the training programme will be sufficient for the trainees to conduct proper policy research and analysis with a high autonomy.

Finally, a well-functioning and autonomous NAPC is considered as a crucial indicator, synthesising the sustainability of the various results of the project. The likely sustainability of the NAPC depends on the realisation of the conditions that prevail to the establishment of a well-functioning and autonomous NAPC. Most of these conditions are unlikely to be realised during the remaining lifetime of the project and it is felt that external assistance will still be needed for the initial years of the Center in order to consolidate the results achieved by the present project, to ensure better impact and to prepare the ground for sustainability.

## **B. Recommendations**

The following recommendations represent a series of conditions that are believed necessary to reach adequately the substantial potential outputs that the project could produce and to prepare the ground for their sustainability in the future.

### **Establishment of a well-functioning NAPC**

In addition to the decree establishing legally the Center, the following measures should be taken in the short-run before the departure of the international project staff:

1. The government budget allocation to the Center is defined.
2. The selection of the core staff of the Center is undertaken in an appropriate and timely manner. In particular, the criteria for selecting the staff among the trainees should include a weighted score on performance of the trainee all along the various training phases, giving more importance to performances achieved on individually tailored training and structured specialised training and little or no weight to contribution to the policy studies task force (providing that a proper assessment system has been put into place) and to basic training. Motivations, age and attitudes should also be taken into account in the selection of candidates.
3. The potentially selected candidates are full-time engaged in activities of the Center as soon as possible.
4. With a view to assuring the scientific guidance of adequate quality to the research centre, the role of the Scientific Committee should be strengthened in such a way that the Committee is more directly involved in the programme of activities.
5. The programme of activities is prepared. The present policy issues covered by the trainees research groups could be well considered as a basis for defining the research programme of the Center together with the frame set by the strategy. In addition, policy studies that have been dropped in the new workplan, in particular the comparative advantage analysis study should be given priority. Furthermore, the possibility of offering research and training services to other institutions than MAAR should be carefully explored.

Other measures that could be envisaged only in the medium-term will contribute to increase sustainability. These include putting the NAPC in a condition to obtain external funds for research project. These additional funds may contribute to increase staff motivations and may give a solution to ensuring full participation of the staff in the research Center.

### **Successful Completion of the Strategy**

It is recommended that the Strategy Task Force be made operational before the international consultant next mission to Syria. Ideally this task force should have been composed of focal points from various institutions or those "to be directly involved" in the strategy as proposed by the first international consultant in his roadmap for the preparation of the strategy.

It is also urgent that the network of international consultants be effective. The international consultant for the strategy should have the possibility to be in direct contact with the international consultants for the individual policy studies.

All efforts should be given to strengthen the technical co-ordination from project management to ensure the appropriate and timely contribution of the trainees and the national consultants to the work on the strategy as well as to facilitate the linkages between the international consultant for the strategy and the other consultants. This

will involve regular meetings on technical matters between the project staff and the team attached to the strategy.

### **Successful Completion of Policy Studies**

For the ongoing and future policy studies, the following measures should be ensured:

- 1) *National consultants*: they should be selected and appointed at the very beginning of the first mission of the international consultant, with a direct involvement of the latter. They should work full-time on the consultancy on the basis of clear terms of reference proposed by the international consultants. There should be evidence of concrete contribution of the national consultants to the studies (e.g., production of a report). National consultants could be asked to be co-authors of the final report.
- 2) *Adequate participation of the trainees*: the deadline for the completion of the research work should be extended so as to reduce the pressure of work on the trainees relating to the third phase of training and the international consultant missions for training should be adjusted accordingly.
- 3) *Means to reduce the delays* between the end of the last mission of the international consultant and the availability in Arabic of the final report should be explored. Realistic and clear timeframes and deadlines should be set for all stages of finalisation of the report. These stages include: production of the first draft, first translation, comments from project staff and FAO technical divisions, production of final draft, final review by project staff and FAO technical divisions, FAO clearance, final translation and final clearance by the Government.
- 4) *Technical supervision of the trainees and the national consultants* during the absence of the international consultant should be strengthened by regular weekly meetings of the team and the project staff at the project site.
- 5) A *standard format* aiming at improving the clarity and the overall quality of the reports should be provided to international consultants.

### **Optimised benefits from the remaining training programme**

In order to complete satisfactorily the third phase of the training, trainees should be given more time to carry out their research work. (See recommendation above).

### **Increased Project Impact on Capacity Building and Policy Decision-Making**

In view of the expected outflow of policy reports in the coming months, a strong and articulated effort to raise the level of awareness and information in all potential stakeholders (public and private) will be required by the project. The components of this effort should consist in:

- a) selective distribution of the policy reports within the MAAR, followed by seminars led by the NPD and the Project's staff
- b) selective distribution of the policy reports to interested stakeholders, public and private
- c) Production of concise "policy notes" on the subject matters addressed by the available and future studies and their distribution to a wider audience respect to a) and b). A policy note should also cover the nature and results of the First National Workshop.

- d) Preparation and diffusion of various outputs from the studies adapted to various targeted audiences at national as well as sub-national levels
- e) Enhance the publicity of the project with appropriate media.
- f) Active participation to activities related to policy debates promoted by other institutions.

Clearly this effort, especially points iv), v) and vi) would put a further substantial demand on the technical resources available during the residual life span of the Project. But, at the same time it should be realized that the continuation of the present state of affairs it would undoubtedly represent a significant and unjustifiable missed opportunity, with non marginal impact in terms of the sustainability dimension.

### **Reduced Risks Attached to Project Achievements**

Ensuring these conditions will require considerable additional efforts from all those involved in the project (project staff, government, national consultants, trainees, international consultants).

There are presently high risks attached to a number of conditions that generate uncertainties on the overall achievements of the project during the remaining period. The following recommendations aimed at reducing these risks. It is proposed to:

i) *Increase the technical support and backstopping to the project during its remaining lifetime.* There is evidence that there is a great need of technical competence to reduce the risk of unsatisfactory fulfilment of the conditions. This additional technical support can be provided through:

- Increasing backstopping missions of the Responsible Officer from RNEP. These missions should be carried out at some key points of the remaining lifetime of the project: selection of the staff of the Center, definition of a work programme, delivery of key policy studies and between the missions of the international consultant on the strategy.
- Increasing the length of the missions of the SPA. The SPA could contribute in the preparation of policy notes and other outputs for improving the delivery of the results of the policy studies. He could also concentrate on ensuring better input and consolidation of the individual policy studies to the strategy.
- Reconsidering carefully the decision taken by the Steering Committee on its third meeting to have all international staff leaving the project before the end of the project life. It is recommended to maintain the Agriculture Economist until the end of the Project. His role would be to support the research work of the trainees until completion, support task forces attached to individual policy studies and assist the international consultant on the strategy in liaising with the national task force and co-ordinating with the international consultants working on individual policy studies.

ii) *Reconsider the workplan* with specific attention to the re-scheduling of the sequence of individual policy studies in order to avoid an unsustainable bottleneck of the project (including unbearable pressures on trainees involved in Task Forces) which is caused by the simultaneous presence of several international consultants and teams attached to them. As an indicator of the

pressure imposed by the workplan, it is worth to note that from January to April, a total amount of 71 person-weeks of international consultancy (or an average of 4 to 5 per week) is planned to visit the project in addition to the national consultants and the trainees.

iii) *Reconsider the budget for the remaining lifetime of the project.* Reducing the risk of not achieving optimal results of the projects, ensuring a greater impact of the results of the project and setting the ground for sustainability in the future represent substantial additional costs. The recommendations proposed above imply additional costs on which decisions must be taken. Two possibilities may have to be combined. One is to request additional funding from the Donor to implement specific recommendations (i.e.: maintain the Agriculture Economist for an additional five months, additional field backstopping from the SPA). The other is to postpone to another phase the individual policy studies for which no contract has been established yet. This could finance additional field backstopping from Cairo and allow the trainees to complete their research work on a more reasonable time frame).

### **Some considerations for a next phase**

Even if the rest of the project accelerates its production of outputs, it is unlikely that sufficient capacity will be created for long-term sustainability by the end of the present project. Thus there is a need for external funding to support a new phase of the project to consolidate and build sustainability in the results achieved by the present project.

It is therefore recommended to launch a formulation mission as soon as possible in order to (i) respect, to the extent possible, the constraint imposed by the donor's programming cycle and (ii) avoid a substantial gap between the present phase and the start of a next one.

The mission was provided with a project outline for a second phase that has been submitted to the donor for consideration. This proposal is well articulated and can form a sound starting base for the formulation mission.

The mission would like to stress the following points on the proposed outline:

- Recommendations made above should be taken into account in the formulation of the next phase.
- *Support to Policy Analysis Activities to the NAPC:* The policy dialogue should not be neglected and should be built-into the project design. In this respect, the recommendations aiming at increasing capacity building through policy assistance, and at promoting a better internalisation and increased ownership should be given careful attention. The challenge will be to shift from studies prepared by international consultants with national involvement to studies prepared by the NAPC with international support. Responding to emerging needs will also have to be a driving force of the research programme of the Center.
- *Support to Training Activities in the NAPC:* It seems unrealistic to plan to train 200 trainees or four times more than the number trained during the present phase.

Furthermore, the Center should clearly have an open strategy and involve a substantial number of trainees from outside the MAAR.

- *Support to Database and Library of the NAPC*: Taking into account the current information gap, this component deserves to be more ambitious, including the possibility of appropriate surveys, the setting-up of an integrated data system that promotes macro and micro links (based on the IFPRI model for instance) and that permits the development of economic models needed for policy analysis. This 'Policy Information Support/ Base' could include two sub-components: (i) a *statistical support* aiming at enhancing a survey and modelling capacity in the Center and (ii) an *integrated Policy Information System*, of which the library would be one element.

Finally, with regard to the management structure, it is recommended that for the next phase, careful consideration be given to the selection of a highly qualified CTA. It may not be consequently necessary to maintain a TC, thus, avoiding some cost-inefficiency attached to the present project management structure.

### **VIII. Lessons learned**

- Combining training programmes together with concrete policy analysis and formulation is an effective way of achieving capacity building relating to policy. Such an approach creates synergies between theoretical skills and practical experience. This also contributes to motivate trainees by providing them the opportunity to apply their skill for a useful and concrete purpose. Finally for the institutions to which the trainees belong to, such an approach can provide tangible results of their investment in human resources.
- To be effective, policy advice support should be integrated in a comprehensive policy process from awareness raising on policy issues to analysis, formulation, and delivery of results. Dialogue with stakeholders is a fundamental element all along the policy process. This is only with such an approach that internalisation and ownership of the results of the policy work by nationals can be ensured. When designing a policy advice support project, mechanism should be established to ensure the involvement of key national (or regional) stakeholders right at the beginning of the process. This can be done for instance by associating Task Forces at different stages of the process.
- Agriculture policy work obviously concerns other institutions than a ministry of agriculture and related institutions at sub-national level. This is particularly true in the case of Syria where some of the key constraints to the progress towards liberalisation in the agriculture sector are the responsibilities of other institutions than the MAAR. Opening up agriculture policy work to other concerned institutions and stakeholders better ensures the integration of an agriculture strategy and policies into the overall national priorities.

**Annex 1****List of Key Persons Met****Persons Met in RNE**

Mr. Ahmed Chikjaoui, Chief of Middle-East Operations  
 Mr. Saad El Medani Ahmed, Senior Policy Officer  
 Mr. Mostafa Nosseir, CPO, RNE

**Persons Met in Damascus****Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform**

Mr. Asaad Mostafa, Minister  
 Mr. Orfan Alloush, Deputy Minister  
 Mr. Hassan Al-Hamed, Deputy Minister  
 Mr. Nahi Al-Shibani, Director Statistics & Planning  
 Mr. Zein El.Deen, Director of the Economic Sector/ National Consultant

**Faculty of Agriculture**

Dr. Rafeek Saleh, Dean Faculty of Agriculture  
 Dr. Mahmoud Sammak, Professor of economics and Head of the Agriculture economics section

**Agriculture Chambers' Federation Bureau**

Mr. Omar M. Al Shalet, Chairman

**FAO**

Mr. Mahmoud M. Taher, FAO Representative  
 Mr. Salim Zahoueh, FAO Programme Officer

**Project Staff**

Mr. Emad Zaki El Hawary, CTA  
 Mr. Attieh El Hindi, National Project Director  
 Mr. Ciro Fiorillo, Agricultural Economist  
 Mr. Nasouh Keilani, Computer Technician

International consultants on the project:

Mr. Parthasarathy  
 Mr. Edward-Jones  
 Mrs. Nadia Forni

**Annex 2****Programme of the Mission**

- 3 December: Arrival of international mission members in Cairo
- 4 December: Briefing with the CPO, RNE  
Briefing with the Chief of Operations, RNE  
Briefing with the Senior Policy Officer, RNE  
Travel to and arrival in Damascus
- 5 December: Meeting with Project Staff  
Meeting with FAO Representative and National Programme Officer  
Meeting with Project Staff
- 6 December: Meeting with Deputy Minister of Agriculture  
Meeting with Director Statistics and Planning  
Meeting with National Consultant having participated into the policy work  
Meeting with Project Staff  
Diner at the Italian Embassy
- 7 December: Meeting at the University  
Meetings with Project staff  
Meeting with trainees
- 8 December: Meeting with Project CTA
- 9 December: Meeting with the Minister of Agriculture  
Meeting with the Chairman of the Chamber of Agriculture
- 10 December: Meetings with project staff  
Wrap-up Meeting of the evaluation team before departure of the representative of the Donor
- 11-12  
December: Preparation of Draft Findings and Recommendations  
Meetings with project staff
- 13 December: Wrap-up session with the Government Representative on the mission  
Distribution of Draft  
Debriefing meeting with Deputy Minister of Agriculture
- 14 December: Debriefing meeting with FAO Representative and Project Staff
- 15 December: Travel to Rome

Project: GCP/SYR/006/ITA

## **Assistance in Institutional Strengthening and Agricultural Policy**

Terms of Reference for  
Joint Evaluation Mission by  
The Government of Italy, FAO and the Government of Syria

### **1. Background**

This project is the second phase of the Italian funded project GCP/SYR/002/ITA entitled: "Assistance in Agriculture Planning, Policy Analysis and Statistics". The overall objective of the project is to strengthen the capability of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR) in agricultural policy analysis, formulation, implementation and monitoring in a market oriented economy and to enhance the institutional capacity of the Syrian Government to undertake comprehensive reviews and analyses of policies, strategies and programmes aimed at achievement of sectoral goals.

The project is designed around four immediate objectives:

- to enhance the MAAR agriculture policy analysis and formulation capabilities and overall institutional performance and delivery capacity of essential services to end users, by supporting the establishment of the National Agricultural Policy Center (NAPC) and making proposals for the re-organization of the Ministry.
- to strengthen the capacity of the MAAR to perform agricultural policy analyses and to formulate, implement and monitor agricultural policies by developing a strategy, options and plans for transition to a market oriented economy.
- to establish a cadre of specialised staff for the NAPC of MAAR and of other Ministries and Institutions concerned, trained to cope with the required policy analysis, formulation, monitoring, and evaluation functions under the new economic environment.
- To assure availability of and facilitate use of the basic statistical information needed for agricultural policy analysis purposes.

This second phase started in April 1998. Activities that have been implemented so far can be summarized as follows.

#### **Institutional Development** (Immediate objective 1):

The studies for the establishment of the National Agricultural Policy Center as well as for the restructuring of the MAAR have been completed.

#### **Agriculture Policy Advice and Strategy Component** (Immediate objective 2):

The preparation of a strategic framework for agriculture development has been initiated and the elaboration of the strategy will be completed by September 2001. Various sub-sectors and policy advice studies have been conducted and their findings will be presented during the forthcoming national workshop at the end of October 2000. The completed policy advice studies and those to be undertaken during the remaining life of the project will provide an important input to the preparation of the

strategy. A second national workshop will take place towards the end of this project (September 2001) to discuss the strategy.

**Training Component** (Immediate objective 3):

Various training activities have been carried out, including seminars (high level seminars involving top government officials, policy advice seminars, methodological and on-the-job seminars), structured courses (extended basic training, specialised training programme) as well as individually tailored made training.

**Statistical information** (Immediate objective 4):

A detailed scheme for data collation and data entry on computer was provided by the Project international consultant/ Statistician. Two outputs have been produced: 1) crop production data for the majority of agricultural enterprises, crop budget, commodity prices and other physical and economic data, 2) a revised and updated version of the appendices already prepared, which will be integrated in the Electronic Database in a summarised and accessible version. The consultant conducted short training for the project trainees on the organisation of data, access and updating.

All project activities –except the training activities- to be implemented during 1998 accumulated delays. The project in its initial phase during 1998 encountered severe problems, resulting in termination of the contract of the ex-CTA. The implementation of the project within the current budget entails sacrificing implementation of some of its major activities. The project's Technical Committee in its 6<sup>th</sup> meeting, which convened in Damascus (4-5 September 2000) decided to proceed with the implementation of the Agricultural Policy Advice Studies and Strategy while reducing the additional policy advice studies from five to three. It was also decided to leave aside the “formal post graduate training” and the “field trip” and to limit the overseas training to three months training in Italy for no more than 8 trainees. On the administrative side, the contracts of the international and national staff will be terminated in May 2001 while the project activities will be completed by October 2001.

A request has been made by MAAR to the Government of Italy to extend further support and fund a new phase of the project which will be directed mainly to consolidating the capacity of the National Agricultural Policy Centre (NAPC) and its effective functioning.

## 2. Purpose of the Evaluation

The evaluation is intended, as the project draws to a close, to provide a well-informed assessment on the project's achievements and results, including lessons and issues, as the basis for determining the future of the project. Findings and recommendations of the evaluation will be considered jointly by the Government, FAO, and the donor in deciding the further steps as appropriate.

## 3. Scope of the Evaluation

The mission will assess the following aspects:

- a) Relevance of the project to development priorities and needs.

- b) Clarity, and realism of the project's development and immediate objectives, including specification of targets and identification of beneficiaries and prospects for sustainability.
- c) Quality, clarity and adequacy of project design including:
  - ☐ clarity and logical consistency between, inputs, activities, outputs and progress towards achievement of objectives (quality, quantity and time-frame);
  - ☐ realism and clarity in the specification of prior obligations and prerequisites (assumptions and risks);
  - ☐ realism and clarity of external institutional relationships, and in the managerial and institutional framework for implementation and the work plan;
  - ☐ Likely cost-effectiveness of the project design.
- d) Efficiency and adequacy of project implementation including: availability of funds as compared with budget for both the donor and national component; the quality and timeliness of input delivery by both FAO and the Government; managerial and work efficiency; implementation difficulties; adequacy of monitoring and reporting; the extent of national support and commitment and the quality and quantity of administrative and technical support by FAO.
- e) Project results, including a full and systematic assessment of outputs produced to date (quantity and quality as compared with workplan) and progress towards achieving the immediate objectives. The Mission will, in particular, examine the following points:
  - The impact of the training
  - The usefulness of the policy studies
  - The implementation arrangements and the monitoring of project implementation.
- f) The prospects for sustaining the project's results by the beneficiaries and the MAAR after the termination of the project.
- g) Key factors affecting the project's achievement as well as strengths and weaknesses.
- h) Overall cost-effectiveness of the project, to the extent possible.

Based on the above analysis the mission will draw specific conclusions and make proposals for any necessary further action by Government/ FAO and/or donor to ensure sustainable development, including, if appropriate, any need for additional assistance and measures. The mission will draw attention to any lessons of general interest. Any proposal for further assistance should include precise specification of objectives and the major suggested outputs and inputs.

#### **4. Composition of the Mission**

The mission will comprise:

- Team leader (FAO): Mrs. Rachel Bédouin, Evaluation Officer with experience in economic policy and strategy analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and institutional capacity building.
- (Government of Syria) Specialist in policy and strategy analysis (to be nominated)
- Donor; Specialist in Institutional Development(to be nominated)

Mission members should be independent and thus have no previous direct involvement with the project either with regard to its formulation, implementation or backstopping. They should preferably have experience of evaluation.

The team leader will be responsible for the finalisation of mission report with inputs from the team members: the final report will be submitted to FAO as soon as possible, but not later than two weeks after the completion of field work.

## **5. Timetable and Itinerary of the Mission**

- 01/12 Briefing of mission members in Rome (FAO & Donor) - meeting with Mr. Zaremba ,TCDM .
- 03/12 Travel from Rome to Cairo
- 04/12: Travel from Cairo to Damascus
- 04/12- 14/12 Evaluation exercise in the country.
- 15/12 Departure to Rome

## **6. Consultations**

The mission will maintain close liaison with the Representatives of the donor and FAO and the concerned national agencies, as well as with national and international project staff. Although the mission should feel free to discuss with the authorities concerned anything relevant to its assignment, it is not authorised to make any commitments on behalf of the Government, the donor, or FAO.

## **Annex 4**

### **Quality Assessment of Individual Policy Studies Made Available to the Mission**

The following assessment was made by Professor DeBenedictis and discussed with the Mission Leader.

#### **Olive oil sub-sector study**

The objective of this study was to analyze the main features of the economics of the olive oil sub-sector (and table olives) in Syria and to identify its constraints and potential in relation to the domestic and international markets. The structural surplus that increasingly characterizes this sub-sector as well as the complex marketing problems related to it, are likely the main reason for the timewise priority assigned to the study within the policy component, reflecting also a strong and manifest interest on the part of the Government to receive sound analytical inputs and policy recommendations. The potential audience is undoubtedly wide involving, in addition to the MAAR, several other actors such as producers, processors and exporters.

Considering the very limited analytical information available in the country, the study, though not particularly rigorous from a technical viewpoint, provides an useful contribution to the ongoing debate on the appropriate instruments with which to accelerate the modernization process and, to a more limited extent, also to the elaboration of the agricultural strategy.

The content of the study and its conclusions reflect the initial methodological choice of concentrating the analytical and empirical attention on two relevant but partial issues: a) production and processing quality; b) agents' propensity to integration. The empirical information contained in the study illuminates adequately these two aspects, but other issues, particularly relevant from the point of view of the strategy, such as the economics of production at the farm level, are inevitably ignored.

From a policy angle, the study reveals three weaknesses. The main one concerns the overall strategy suggested: the proposal of concentrating the efforts on the promotion of Syrian olive oil as high quality oil is not convincing, since it is unlikely that in the short run Syria will be able to change radically its capacity to improve the quality of the olive oil it produces. A mixed strategy, incorporating the quality objective, but aimed also at improving the marketing of all categories of Syrian olive oil seems more potentially effective.

The second weakness concerns the policy recommendations: the long list of recommendations (23) does not give any indication of priorities within the list and many of them are too general to be implemented.

A third weak point concerns the absence in the report of project profiles, on which to base further analytical explorations of the sub-sector. This drawback limits the capacity building potentiality of the report.

The results of the study and its recommendation have been presented and discussed in the first National Policy Workshop.

### *Citrus sub-sector study*

Basically the same considerations advanced for the olive oil sub-sector are also relevant for justifying the priority assigned to this study within the policy component: the presence of considerable instability of export surpluses and export quantities, as well as the considerable instability of domestic market prices explain the strong governmental interest for obtaining from the Project analytical insights and policy recommendations for this important segment of the Syrian agricultural sector.

The objectives of the study, more focused than those of the olive oil report, were essentially to provide a description of the structure of the citrus sector and to advance practical policy recommendations for improving the efficiency of the citrus sector and ensuring its optimal development. The results are fully coherent with these objectives and the report is to be commended for its comprehensiveness and analytical quality. In synthesis, the study provides a very useful overview of the Syrian citrus economy, it arrives at significant conclusions and provides relevant recommendations. These are particularly useful also in the strategy framework, identifying key issues and bottlenecks to be addressed in a long-term strategy. From this analytical angle, it raises appropriately, among others, the crucial issue of the accuracy of the production, yield and export statistics, in which it is likely to lie the explanation of the apparent paradox of the supposed “surplus” of citrus based in the official data, it advances relevant hypotheses about the questionable comparative advantage of Syrian citrus production and about the lack of apparent product differentiation at the consumer level, with its strong negative implications on the efforts to establish grades and standards.

It seems also appropriate to stress the further potential capacity building incorporated in the study: in fact the statistics and analytical information it contains, as well as the Project Profiles identifying relevant research themes, could serve as the basis for future work by NAPC staff.

The findings and recommendations of the study have been presented and discussed at the First National Policy Workshop.

### *Main livestock products*

It is more than evident that the subject matter of the study identifies a major and obligatory component of the long-term agricultural strategy. Also in this case the scarcity and the fragmentary nature of the available information has made it necessary to devote a substantial portion of the report to a description of the present situation, both with regard to the structure of the sector and its performance and to the main features of the present policy regime.

The report could have benefited from further editing (the inclusion of a table of contents as a first step) and from a clearer separation between descriptive and analytical material: in several cases the reader is compelled to distillate the analytical content, undoubtedly present, from a heavy going text.

In spite of this limitation, the content of the report responds adequately to its objectives. The recognition of the increasingly tight constraints of natural resources and their impact on the further pursue of the extensification model leads to a clear identification of the long term strategy in the intensification of production, which in turn must occur through improvement of the feed segment and the services provided

to producers. The study appropriately points out the protection accorded to the sector by the present policy regime with the end in result of prices of the final livestock products that are above international prices and its distributive implications. A relevant analytical observation is the one pointing at the causal relationship of the government land policies in Badia and their impact on livestock development and land deterioration. Within this context, a crucial hypothesis, with strong political implications, is that the liberalization of state services, allowing the participation of private service providers in all aspects of the livestock chains, might lead to significant improvements.

A positive component of the study is the identification, though in schematic terms, of relevant areas for further investigation, thus offering a useful potential contribution to the definition of the research agenda for the NAPC.

The content of the report and its recommendations have been presented and discussed at the First National Workshop.

### *Agricultural marketing and processing activities*

The subject matter of the study, dealing with the marketing and processing components of agribusiness in Syria, addresses a complex and crucial area of the transition process toward a more market oriented economy, involving not only appropriate policy decisions but also significant changes of the role of public and private agents. The potential audience of the study is therefore particularly wide and articulated.

The broadness and the complexity of the subject matter made it necessary to modify and delimitate the initial formulation of the TOR, concentrating the attention on non-strategic crops. Within this delimitation, after a general overview of market environment conditions, structural elements and market actors identification, a finer level of analysis has been addressed to fresh fruit and vegetables, processed fruits and vegetables and dairy products.

The findings and recommendations appear analytically sound and represent also an useful input to the elaboration of the strategy, highlighting features relevant for the policy process and its reform: the nature of the specific instruments used to ensure protection to the agribusiness sector and the varying degree of public control in the various level of marketing. The study stresses the fact that, though the public sector dominates most processing of agricultural products, there is also the presence of a dynamic private sector that has been enhanced with the benefits introduced by the investment laws.

The analytical acquisitions produced by the study, though useful for the elaboration of the strategy, are certainly not sufficient: an obvious area in which further work is needed is that of the ascertainment of internal market efficiency and its implication for desirable and feasible policy changes.

In terms of capacity building, it would be important to ascertain whether the substantial list of public and private companies interviewed through structured questionnaires (Annex III) has been informed of the existence of the study and have been invited to the First National Workshop where the report has been presented and discussed.

## Annex 5

### IMPLEMENTED TRAINING ACTIVITIES

#### Phase 1: Extended Basic Training

33 weeks including 2 weeks break from 2 May until 17 December 1998

<b>Microeconomics</b>	<b>206h total (68h per group)</b>
<b>Macroeconomics</b>	<b>148h total (49h per group)</b>
<b>Computer use</b>	<b>75h total (25h per group)</b>
<b>Descriptive agricultural statistics</b>	<b>84h total (28h per group)</b>
<b>Quantitative methods</b>	<b>64h total (21h per group)</b>
<b>Econometrics</b>	<b>72h total (24h per group)</b>
<b>English language</b>	<b>84h total (28h per group)</b>
<b>On-the-job training</b>	<b>4 weeks</b>

#### Phase 2: Specialised Training

From 6 February 1999 until 10 August 2000

1. **Economics of Agricultural Markets**, 4 weeks from 6/2 to 4/3/99, taught by Mr. Cistulli (2 weeks) and Mr. Bellú (2 weeks).
2. **Agricultural Policy**, 5 weeks from 6/3 to 22/4/99, taught by Mr. Callegar (3 weeks), Mr. Fiorillo (1 week) and Mr. Hawari (1 week).
3. **Applied Agricultural Policy**, 8 weeks from 24/4 to 17/6/99, taught by Mr. Abdel Aziz (4 weeks), Mr. Perali (2 weeks) and Mr. Faki (2 weeks).
4. **Assessing Farm Level Impacts of Agricultural Policy**, 5 weeks from 3/7 to 5/8/99, taught by Mr. Faki.
5. **Agro-Industrial Policy Analysis**, 4 weeks from 14/8 to 9/9/99, taught by Mr. Canali.
6. **Macroeconomic and Agriculture Sector and their Impacts on Vulnerable Groups**, 3 weeks from 18/9 to 5/10/99 taught by Mr. M. Rao.
7. **Trade Policy and Domestic Policies in an Open Economy Setting**, 5 weeks from 23/10 to 25/11/99, taught by Mr. McCatchy
8. **Sustainable Agriculture and Water Resource Policies – Part (A) Sustainable Agriculture**, 3 weeks from 15/1 to 3/2/2000, taught by Mr. Romano. **Part (B) Water Policies**, 3 weeks from 12/2 to 2/3/2000, taught by MR. Ahmad.
9. **Changing Public and Private Roles in a Decentralisation Process and Perspectives for Food Security. Part (A) Changing Public and Private Roles in a Decentralisation Process**, 3 weeks from 25/3 to 13/4/2000, taught by Mr. Santucci. **Part (B) Perspectives for Food Security**, 3 weeks from 15/4 to 4/5/2000, taught by Mr. Conforti.
10. **Investment Planning and Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) of Projects and Policies**, 5 weeks from 13/5 to 10/6/2000, taught by Mr. Abdel-Aziz.
11. **Comparative Analysis of Agricultural Policies in Developed and Developing Countries**, 4 weeks from 24/6 to 20/7/2000, taught by Mr. Salvatici.

12. **Training Methods** (optional course), 2 weeks from 29/7 to 10/8/2000, taught by Mr. Lai to one group full time (20 hours per week).

In total, 57 weeks of structured training (excluding breaks between courses).

**English training**, 3 hours per week for the entire duration of the Specialised Training Phase plus intensive sessions during breaks (taught by National Trainers). Each trainee attended more than 200 hours during this phase (417 hours in total).