Evaluation of the STP- and G2G-component of the Shiraka Programme (2016-2021), RVO
Executive Summary

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BHAP	Back Home Action Plan
G2G	Government to Government
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFA-DAM	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands – Department for Nord Africa and the Middle East
IAK	
PSD	Public Sector Development
RoL	Rule of Law
RVO	Netherlands Enterprise Agency
STP	Shiraka Training Program
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TmT	Tailormade Training

Executive Summary

Purpose and approach of the evaluation

This evaluation relates to the *Shiraka Training Program* (STP) and the *Government-to-Government* (G2G) cooperation program as part of the broader Shiraka program, launched by the Dutch government in 2016 following the MATRA-South program. The STP is a training program aimed at civil servants in the MENA region, while the G2G program consists of tailor-made training (TMT), exchange and capacity development projects between government entities in MENA countries and the Netherlands. The implementation of the STP and G2G program is in the hands of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).

The evaluation focuses on the program period from 2016 to 2021 and took place between December 2021 and May 2022, with the aim of gaining insight into:

- the relevance and the short- and longer-term results achieved by the STP and G2G programs,
- how RVO, in cooperation with its key partner institutes, has implemented the program; and
- how these results relate to Shiraka's overall policy objectives.

The evaluation also looks at the extent to which the global COVID pandemic has affected the activities and results of the STP and G2G programs.

The evaluation structures its findings based on a new *Theory of Change,* specifically designed for the STP and G2G program, in which the various assumed change trajectories with intended results are incorporated. Data collection in response to the specific evaluation questions took place through a document study, survey and focus group discussions (FGD) among participants of STP and G2G learning trajectories, and interviews with various stakeholders in the Netherlands and program countries. This data was then processed and analysed in consultation with the steering committee, consisting of employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and RVO, on the basis of which the evaluation team formulated its final conclusions and recommendations.

Key findings and conclusions

Overall, the evaluation considers the STP and G2G components of the Shiraka program as successful. With relatively limited resources, important competencies were developed, including strengthened self-confidence in the field of good governance among a large group of civil servants in MENA countries. This has built up a widespread network of government employees with affinity and a positive image of the Netherlands. This network can be of great value for the bilateral relationship and diplomatic efforts of the Netherlands in the region, a potential that, however, is still underutilized. The STP and G2G interventions share the joint and relevant ambition to contribute to improved quality of, and trust of citizens in, public services in the program countries. However, this requires institutional developments that go beyond the sphere of influence of the often relatively small interventions. Consequently, the results at the institutional level attributable to the program remain limited, although there are certainly examples of institutional effects where the STP/G2G

interventions have been important catalytic contributions, which can serve as inspiration for the next phase of the program.

More specific findings and conclusions are organized below by evaluation criterion: relevance, effectiveness, spin-off/impact, gender equality, quality of program management and collaboration, and sustainability of results.

Relevance

The STP training courses respond to a clear need for competence-strengthening of government employees in the region. This is evident from the strong interest in these training courses from the intended target group (mid-career civil servants), also during the COVID pandemic, and confirmed by (former) participants and embassies in the region. In addition, **G2G projects are relevant, but more difficult to conceive, especially in times of Corona.** There is sufficient interest given the number of ideas for G2G projects from various actors involved, but the development of a good project design requires a time-consuming effort: gaining support within the receiving organization in the MENA, finding a suitable counterpart in the Netherlands with sufficient capacity, and aligning with Shiraka and embassy objectives. However, this investment is justified because the development process alone proves valuable in improving bilateral contacts and in creating mutual understanding. Even if this ultimately did not lead to a G2G project, which happens regularly.

STP and G2G-TMT interventions have a (too) narrow focus on individual government employees given their broad ambitions in the field of organizational development and improved public services. Strengthening the knowledge, skills and motivation of individual civil servants plays a vital role in this, but it requires additional efforts to enable the use of new knowledge and skills (e.g. adjustments in procedures, division of tasks, management style and culture).

G2G projects focus on the priorities of the receiving organization and not necessarily on those of the country as a whole. The demand-driven approach requires initiative from the receiving organization that strengthens the support and chance of success of projects. The downside of this demand-driven approach is that it does not automatically mean that the most pressing issues, where the need for improved trust in public services is greatest, arise. The **relevance of G2G projects compared to other ongoing initiatives** is often verified during the inception phase. In the absence of regular and systematic donor coordination, this is a difficult exercise, leaving the risk of overlap or limited coherence. This risk is less important in STP projects and G2G training projects, because these concern individuals and contribute more explicitly to the creation of a network of alumni with affinity with the Netherlands. Nevertheless, in this broader donor context, both **STP and G2G are unique in strengthening the image of the Netherlands as a flexible and pragmatic partner country**, especially because of the conscious combination of theory and practice, in which the Dutch 'model' serves as example but not as a norm.

Effectiveness

STP and G2G interventions are both effective in strengthening individual knowledge and skills and in inspiring and initiating new ideas among civil servants. Important success factors are 1) a good mix of participants with similar context, seniority, and absorption capacity, 2) interactive learning

methods, with room for exchange and practical applications, and 3) careful detailed design in which the learning needs of participants are central. However, the short duration and increasing diversity of participants limit the depth and therefore the value of the STP training courses, while participants sometimes experience the intensity as too high to internalize the subject matter sufficiently.

Effectiveness in strengthening regional networks is less strong because these networks are not well-maintained and eventually dilute. The same applies to the alumni networks within countries, where efforts to maintain them are insufficient to keep them active and energetic. A positive exception to this can be found in a few national and regional G2G projects, where the longer duration and the clear substantive interaction led to stronger connections. **The strengthening of relations with the Netherlands, in particular through embassies, is limited, but the program did manage to improve the perception of the Netherlands.** More than 60% of the STP participants experience little or no change in contacts with embassies. This is a missed opportunity, because **more than 70% of them developed a much more positive image of the Netherlands** and are looking forward to further cooperation with the Netherlands.

The COVID pandemic has hardly hampered the implementation of STP interventions, but it has had a limiting effect on certain result areas. Planned STP interventions have been adapted and have been able to continue, with good results in terms of improved knowledge and skills. However, results in terms of inspiration, new ideas and improved networks lag behind, leading to lower satisfaction level and a decrease in the extent to which course participation leads to a more positive image of the Netherlands. **The development and implementation progress of G2G projects has been severely limited due to the COVID pandemic.** On the one hand, because of changing priorities and reduced capacity on both the Dutch and receiving sides, and on the other hand because the national counterparts' reduced interest in having activities taking place online.

Spin-off effects / impact

STP and G2G interventions have a convincing impact on individuals given the many examples of behaviour change of ex-participants. Course participation empowers participants to put new ideas and insights into practice, even though they realize that it is often not easy to get their colleagues on board. **Institutional effects are less widespread but certainly no exception.** This is mainly due to the complexity of translating individual learning effects into broader institutional effects as this requires, besides resources, a broadly supported willingness to change among people who were not part of the STP/G2G intervention. This is often discussed but not always ensured, which makes it difficult to realize the intended institutional effects. Nevertheless, there are more than a few examples of projects that successfully impacted institutions (see box below).

Illustrative examples of successful institutional effects:
- Increased efficiency due to improved systematics in legal division of labour in Tunisia.
- Online self-development program for female employees at the Ministry of Justice in Iraq.
- Renewed working methods to improve food quality control in Egypt (peanuts), Iraq, Palestinian territories, Algeria (dairy) and Sudan (Mangoes).
- Introduction of the *Integraal Afwegings Kader* (IAK) method in Libya.
- Improved IT systems for the digital exchange of documents between various government agencies (Morocco and Palestinian territories).

- Introduction of results-based budgeting (Tunisia).
- Creation of a business network for trade promotion (Lebanon).
- Organization of various export promotion and branding activities (Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria).
- Changes in different policy processes (Jordan, Libya, Tunisia, and Oman)

Whether this is **sufficient to consider the programme as a whole as successful in having impact is difficult to determine in the absence of quantitative objectives and given the complexity of institutional change processes on which the program only has limited level influence. Looking at the considerable number of STP participants and G2G initiatives, the amount of documented success cases is relatively small and too limited to consider the STP/G2G program as a significant contribution in** making progress towards enhanced public services. However, the success cases are a potentially valuable source of information to further strengthen the program.

The potential value of G2G and STP interventions for improved public diplomacy is evident but only exploited to a limited extent. Through the STP trainings an ever-growing network of alumni is created, who have a positive image of the Netherlands. However, this network is neither deliberately maintained, nor systematically used for diplomatic purposes. Main reasons for this are the limited capacity and continuity at the embassies, the lack of a practical online alumni platform, and insufficient specific expectations (including budget). The value of the G2G instrument lies mainly in its potential to initiate a bilateral dialogue on sensitive issues. This potential is used, although this does not always lead to an actual G2G project. The G2G projects themselves offer the opportunity to demonstrate Dutch expertise, which in turn strengthens the interest in further cooperation with the Netherlands.

Unforeseen effects are limited given the broad objectives of STP and G2G. An important positive unforeseen effect concerns the increased understanding of the importance of data for effective policy making. Less positive are the (unintentionally created) unmet expectations of continued contact with the Dutch embassy connections and/or Dutch initiatives following STP or G2G-TMT participation. In addition, the STP selection criteria and procedures, especially in Gulf states but occasionally also in other countries, have led to a lack of understanding about the limited participation of recipient governments in the selection of individual participants, which does not help the bilateral relationship.

From the above it can be deduced that **the validity of the Theory of Change is sufficient regarding individual changes, but incomplete regarding institutional change.** Important explanatory factors for the limited institutional change are 1) insufficient mutual clarity regarding longer-term expectations and requirements to enable institutional change, 2) interventions with a too narrow focus on individual competence and motivation of a select group of participants, 3) little attention to change-management in G2G projects, 4) varying quality of the G2G project leader at the receiving organization, and 5) capacity and continuity within the embassies to facilitate processes effectively for a long time. Notwithstanding these factors, institutional change processes remain complex and subject to developments beyond the sphere of influence of projects, such as: shifting political priorities/interests and unpredictability in public resource allocations in programme countries.

Gender equality

The program has been able to promote gender equality by increasing the number of female participants in STP and G2G-TMT projects. Male and female participants are equally positive about the applicability and effectiveness of the STP training courses. However, gender equality is less evident in other G2G projects, while apart from steering by number of female participants, especially in the first years of the programme there have been only a few cases where gender equality is pursued by specifically aiming or adapting interventions to women. These cases illustrate that a more emphatic and broader focus on gender equality within this program is possible and desirable, which resulted in increasing attention for this in the more recent years.

Quality of program management and collaboration

Successful development and implementation of STP and G2G interventions depends (on the Dutch side) on four key actors (MFA/DAM, RVO, embassies and implementation partners), each of which has a clear complementary role. The division of tasks between these four actors is clear but only translated into measurable expectations from RVO and the STP implementation partners. The expectations from MFA/DAM and the embassies are less specific, so the required capacity to meet these expectations remains less clear as well.

MFA/DAM sets the policy frameworks and actively adjusts them. In this way, efforts were made to continuously improve the program and to keep it in line with developments within the broader Foreign Affairs policy. Some of these adjustments (in particular changes in the list of countries) are prompted by Dutch politics, but are not always clear to implementation partners, who have limited insight into the background of these decisions. At the same time, **MFA/DAM is not sufficiently visible** to participating organizations and trainees, while a few embassies need MFA/DAM to play a more prominent role – adding on to RVO's efforts -in supporting / encouraging them in making effective use of the potential of the STP and G2G instruments.

RVO is a pragmatic and flexible program manager and largely meets the expectations in accordance with the agreements in the offer 2016 - 2021, but its central role in G2G project development is based on expectations that are partly beyond its control. RVO does not play a decisive but mainly an enabling role in this process, which is not in line with the quantified expectations from RVO in terms of number and volume of G2G projects as laid down in its contract with MFA. On another note, RVO provides a good insight into the results achieved, including a useful annual overview of STP spin-offs, while the G2G reports are limited to the more direct results.

Embassies are willing partners and believe in the potential of the program, but limitations in capacity and continuity lead to varying levels of involvement. The role and importance of the STP/G2G program for embassies are largely clear, although some struggle with the "how" question. Previous capacity-building commitments are proving insufficient to enable embassies to fully fulfil their role and to exploit the potential of STP and G2G.

Implementing partners provide professional services. Training evaluations give a positive picture of the quality of services provided by the training institutes. The few critical voices concern the lack of a visit to the Netherlands during corona and unanswered follow-up expectations. The quality of Dutch

counterparts in G2G projects is good, although differences in the quality of experts are noted. **The most important challenge remains the availability of the right experts at the right time.**

Sustainability of results

Sustainability of results lies mainly in the extent to which individual results were successfully scaled up into institutional effects. As mentioned earlier, there is insufficient explicit attention for this in the G2G project design, which complicates the management of expectations and requirements towards achieving sustainable results. Acquired personal skills, given their broad applicability, are sustainable, which is less certain for technical skills, as they can lose relevance – depending on the sector an individual is working in. Networks of STP alumni prove insufficiently sustainable as they are not adequately maintained, which does not mean that it is too late to revive them.

Recommendations

The evaluation makes the following recommendations.

1. **Identify the greatest need for strengthened trust in public services, as inspiration for new G2G project ideas** by giving more explicit attention to this in the context analysis that underlies the multi-annual strategic plans of embassies. In this way, both the interest of the requesting organization and the country can be considered in project appraisal. This also gives the embassy and RVO more insight into where and with whom to explore, proactively, initiatives to improve the quality of public service delivery.

2. **Broaden the scope of training interventions to align them with the ambition of strengthened public institutions and improved public services**. On the one hand, through a closer involvement of managers with learning trajectories that focus on multiple hierarchical layers within an organization or more broadly endorsed BHAP concepts as a selection criterion for training participation. On the other hand, this concerns interventions that focus not only on competencies but also on other organizational components that enable / stimulate the use of new competencies.

N.B. the evaluation recognizes that in some cases only a limited intervention (like a training or study visit) is feasible to initiate a bilateral cooperation process and therefore we would not want to discourage such projects as long as this is done consciously.

3. **Increase attention for expectation / change management within G2G interventions** and incorporate a longer-term vision into the project design, including an explicit institutional change plan going beyond the project's duration, to increase the chance of success on institutional effects.

4. **Invest in gender expertise within the program design and management**, so that the focus on gender equality in G2G and STP interventions can be broadened and strengthened from the first inventory of needs onwards, and, in addition to numbers of participants, increasing efforts are made to develop interventions that specifically target or adapt to the diverse needs of (various groups of) women.

5. **Build on and learn from spin-off reporting** by pursuing more uniform reporting from implementation partners that extends to the G2G projects, coupled with an 'appreciative' learning approach of successful interventions (i.e. systematically analyse success factors to draw lessons to strengthen the institutional effects of future interventions).

6. **Reduce intensity and strengthen depth of STP training through by relying more on *blended learning*** (= deliberate mix of online and offline learning modalities) **and less diversity in participants from a limited number of more similar countries per training,** creating room for country-specific attention with more participants from the same country and / or the same organization.

7. **Improve the balance between the expectations of participants and the capacity of embassies and RVO** to follow up on previous interventions. On the one hand, by delineating the STP and G2G efforts more clearly and placing the responsibility for follow-up more explicitly on participants. On the other hand, by making further agreements about what can and may be expected of an embassy and offering more practical support on the "how" question. **In addition, create more clarity about the enabling role that RVO can play and adjust expectations accordingly,** whereby

the development and implementation of G2G interventions is treated more explicitly as joint responsibility of MFA/DAM, embassies and RVO, than something outsourced to RVO.

8. **Incorporate new insights into an updated ToC** for the 2nd phase of the STP/G2G program. In particular, this requires paying more attention to broadening support and the role of management within the receiving organization and leads to the following suggestions for adjustments in the *pathways of change:*

- Increased involvement and interest from relevant senior employees/administrators within receiving organizations, who are not directly involved in the STP or G2G intervention, but who do have decision-making authority regarding broader organizational development.
- Linked to this, clarified insight into the longer-term vision of projects, as well as agreements / commitments regarding efforts and resources for realizing this vision.
- Increased support and willingness among colleagues and executives of STP/G2G participants to undertake or support efforts to strengthen institutional capacity.
- Networks are actively facilitated and maintained.
- Improved reputation of the Netherlands as a reliable and capable partner country.

Besides, two additional assumptions / conditions for success are recommended for inclusion into an updated ToC, being:

- Sufficient capacity at embassy and seniority among participants to establish and maintain contact.
- Thorough insight into where improved services are most necessary to increase trust in the public sector.

An updated ToC should serve as the basis for a fitting M&E framework, which can capture immediate results as well as less predictable non-linear changes on the way to higher result areas (institutional effects and improved public diplomacy).