

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Evaluation of APPEAR projects (programme periods I and II)

on behalf of the Austrian Agency for International  
Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD GmbH)

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APPEAR is a programme of  
the Austrian Development Cooperation



## Executive summary

### Introduction

In February 2018, the Austrian Agency for International Mobility and Cooperation in Education, Science and Research (OeAD-GmbH), mandated a project-level evaluation of the Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development (APPEAR). APPEAR is conceived and financed by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and implemented by OeAD-GmbH. The programme contributes to the realisation of the 'Higher Education and Scientific Cooperation' strategy in support of Higher Education and Research for Development on an academic institutional level in the priority regions of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC). Since 2009 the APPEAR Selection Board selected 43 academic partnership projects for funding of which 18 were already completed and 25 are still ongoing.

Purpose of the evaluation was to assess granted projects, while not examining meso and macro levels of the APPEAR programme. The following three claims were analysed (i) APPEAR projects consider the programme's guidelines and principles, (ii) APPEAR projects are results-oriented and contribute to the objectives of the programme and (iii) APPEAR projects are relevant, effective, efficient, sustainable and have educational, institutional and societal impact.

To do so, the evaluation applied a theory-based approach, with an exemplary Theory of Change guiding the analysis. Further, a multi-method approach was pursued, making use of primary and secondary data sources as well as qualitative and quantitative data. Specific evaluation questions were provided in the ToR and structured in an analysis grid, to determine respective indicators, data collection instruments and analysis methods. The evaluation applied a systematic document review to analyse secondary data, such as project applications, annual reports, monitoring documentation, among others. To collect primary data in-depth interviews with project team members (48) and Austria-based OeAD-, ADA- and BMEIA-staff (6), a qualitative questionnaire to ADA staff in partner countries (8 responses), observations at university departments and stakeholder sites, a focus group discussion with current project-bound APPEAR scholars and two online surveys directed to (i) project team members and (ii) APPEAR scholars were implemented.

While retrieving data from all 43 projects through documents and surveys, nine projects were selected as case studies and interviews and discussions were held with project team members and stakeholders involved. Field visits took place in Ethiopia and Uganda and projects in Nicaragua were included via Skype® interviews.

Findings are presented according to the three claims (i.e. consideration of principles, result and programme objective orientation and fulfilment of OECD/DAC criteria) examined in the evaluation.

### Principles

The evaluation found evidence that the majority of projects is participatory and demand-driven. Preparatory Funding and the option for Southern project team members to coordinate the project are crucial to support participation. Further, it was found that both empirical and practical orientation of projects is high with the latter varying in terms of means to establish linkages to practice and external stakeholders, such as the community. In respect to a culturally open-minded knowledge exchange, the evaluation found that the majority of projects has operationalised this principle through its project work. Nevertheless, according to project documents, measures to enable Austrian universities to be knowledge recipients are not always sufficiently articulated.

Project team members are aware of added values, i.e. disability mainstreaming, alignment to the ADC country strategy and the inclusion of young researchers, but actual implementation varies substantially across projects.

### **Result-Orientation and consideration of programme objective**

Answers to this question are based on the analysis of projects' logical frameworks, which, according to the evaluation teams' understanding, are the basis for results-orientation and are an important planning tool. However, it needs to be acknowledged that – in practice – the logical frameworks received are discussed by the APPEAR selection board only to a limited extent and are rather no exclusion criterion for selection; other aspects are more in the focus. Examining projects' logical frameworks reveals certain weaknesses in terms of conceptualization (i.e. defining outputs, outcomes and impacts) as well as in terms of formulation of SMART indicators. The programme objective is often not considered completely in the logical frameworks.

### **Relevance**

#### *For participating institutions and/or departments*

Evidence suggests that APPEAR projects are considered relevant by project team members, external stakeholders as well as ADA staff. Austrian project team members perceive the project to be less relevant in comparison to their Southern counterparts. The study further revealed that the thematic relevance for either Austrian or Southern institutes might differ substantially. While projects are relevant from a development perspective for institutions in the Global South (due to e.g. lack of well-trained staff or limited data availability), relevance for Austrian institutes rather lies for instance in new research opportunities or the practical application of research methods in the field.

#### *For the development of the participating countries and beneficiaries*

According to project team members and ADA staff, APPEAR projects are relevant from a country development perspective and for final beneficiaries. Case Study interviews revealed that some projects are aligned to national or regional government strategies and have an innovative character, targeting a relevant niche and drawing attention on specific issues. The relevance for beneficiaries is assessed as high in the online survey and document analysis, but nevertheless there are projects that have a strong research character, where direct benefits for final beneficiaries remain unclear.

### **Effectiveness**

#### *Achievement of outputs and outcomes*

The evaluation found that, in general, main outputs were achieved, but not always on time, and exceptions (often one or two single activities that could not be realized) were articulated and explained. Reasons for non-achievement include the difficulties for Ethiopian universities to comply with the ten percent pre-financing before the final disbursement, the short time frame, or lacking commitment by external stakeholders. Project team members perceive the achievement of outcomes as high with the 'development of individual capacities', 'increased cultural awareness' and 'mutual knowledge exchange triggered' being rated the highest. However, completed projects have rated the 'improvement in research quality' significantly lower than ongoing projects.

Main factors for the achievement of outputs and outcomes include (1) proximity through face-to-face interaction in temporary spaces as well as frequent communication, (2) context experience in both Northern and Western academic environments and (3) the network of OeAD scholars as basis for affiliation and ownership towards the project. Hindering factors centre around (1) external influ-

ences such as political turmoil and instability, (2) bureaucratic barriers at Southern institutions clashing with stringent administrative requirements by the APPEAR Programme, and (3) staff turnover jeopardizing sustainable capacity development.

#### *Influence of Participatory Funding*

Twelve projects out of 45 received Preparatory Funding, enabling them to build up a close working relationship between actors involved, which was appreciated throughout. Case studies showed that the opportunity to meet face-to-face before project proposal submission, led to truly participatory approaches in project design and lasted until implementation.

#### *Enrichment of project-bound scholarship holders*

While project-bound scholarships are considered as very relevant by team members to develop capacities and build new academic networks, their instrumentalisation varies across projects – especially in terms of project engagement of scholarship holders. A part of current scholarship holders expressed the wish to be more involved during their stay in Austria to feel greater commitment and ownership towards the project, considering that they should sustain project activities upon their return.

### **Efficiency**

#### *Management of cooperation*

Project teams in both Austria and the Global South assessed the collaboration to be fruitful, effective and participatory. Team members stated to have coped adequately with difficulties. Conflicts rarely occur, but if so, mediation by the APPEAR team is required and provided.

#### *Budget distribution*

Project team members showed satisfaction with the budget allocation and emphasized the importance of the rise in budget (to 20 %) for non-priority partners, who form part of regional partnerships some projects are aiming at. Project teams further balanced out uneven budget distribution between priority and non-priority countries through cross-financing through other funds or in-kind working hours put in.

#### *Cost-benefit ratio*

About two thirds of survey respondents from project teams perceive the cost-benefit ratio as satisfactory. High motivation among project team members involved contribute to the achievements of valuable benefits. The administrative efforts needed are considered as high by some project team members, especially when considering the comparably small project volume (in contrast to other donor-financed projects), but support and guidance by the APPEAR Office is highly appreciated to cope with administration and scholarships.

### **Impact**

#### *Sustainable development of institutional and individual capacities and improvement of scientific / teaching potential*

Project team members confirmed that APPEAR projects contribute to the generation of transnational and transcultural spaces of knowledge, the creation of long-term academic partnerships and that they have the potential to contribute to poverty alleviation. Yet, respondents from completed projects give lower ratings in these regards. In addition, the evaluation poses the hypothesis that con-

sidering the nature and scope of APPEAR projects, the most significant impact is achieved at institutes and with persons involved that have little experience with international cooperation projects. The comparably small project volumes enable relatively new and less experienced project partners to gain valuable know-how and assure high commitment and ownership among them. Lastly, allocating the project coordination in the South leads to additional impacts, such as empowerment of the department and persons involved, strengthened south-south relationships (when more than one institution is located in the South) and intensified regional knowledge exchange.

#### *Dissemination of results*

Means to disseminate projects' results range from conventional research papers and books, to websites, social media, radio and television to stakeholder workshops and summer schools and webinars. Furthermore, data shows that projects share newly generated knowledge and data to a great extent.

#### *Perceived association to Sustainable Development Goals*

Project team members mostly associate their project to SDG 4 – *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*, SDG 1 – *End poverty in all its forms everywhere* and SDG 5 – *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. The results coincide with APPEAR main programme objectives and emphasize upon their gender mainstreaming strategy.

### **Sustainability**

#### *Likelihood of outcomes to continue*

While the majority of project members state that outcomes are likely to continue, with completed projects showing less positive assessments than ongoing projects, the document review suggests that sustainability measures are insufficiently documented. In partner institutions, academic and administrative staff is available to continue initiated change, but financial resources appear to be missing. The sustainability of project outcomes for final beneficiaries is not assured, especially for research-focused projects, which require other actors to implement (suggested) changes.

#### *Incorporation of capacities and achievements and application of knowledge*

The survey suggests that partners in the South have made greater use of project results (e.g. in research activities, teaching and in strengthening curricula) than Austrian partners involved with the difference being statistically significant. Favouring factors to ensure sustainability of project measures include the constant inclusion of local stakeholders in the project process, the formalization of partnerships by using MoUs and the successful re-integration of scholarship holders after finalising their studies, supported by contractual agreements between scholars and their home universities. Eventually, upon project end, a digital or physical platform as go-to-point to continue and enhance project-related activities is beneficial to keep up the momentum of change initiated by the partnerships.

### **Gender**

#### *Equal contribution of women and men to project implementation*

A gender-disaggregated analysis of project coordinating position suggests a higher share of male team members and coordinators. Thereby, 44 % of projects are coordinated by Austrian men. Qualitative information retrieved that during project implementation, on the ground, projects attempt to equally integrate men and women by e.g. setting up a gender-balanced trainer team.

*Inclusion of gender mainstreaming, raising of gender awareness, attitudes toward gender changed*

Gender has been crystallized as an important analytical category in research with 62 % of survey respondents stating that gender is integrated in APPEAR research. The share of scholarship holders integrating gender issues in their thesis is substantially lower with 22 % barely or not at all integrating it. 63 % of survey respondents (project bound scholarships) state that gender was part of their studies / training in both Austria and home country.

The evaluation results suggest that gender mainstreaming differs across projects, disciplines and regions. In most projects located within Social Science or Education departments, gender mainstreaming is incorporated throughout, whereas some projects from technical disciplines lack profound understanding. Eventually, case studies showed that learning processes on gender issues during the project cycle take place and suggestions / feedback received are adopted and applied in the field.

**Project-level Recommendations (Directed to project team members)**

*Ongoing projects*

Recommendation 1: Involve external stakeholders, such as government officers, related NGOs, community leaders, among others, to the best extent possible in project activities, as they potentially carry on the changes induced at societal level. Thereby, underlying concepts and theories applied by researchers involved that might be very abstract should be translated into tangible and accessible knowledge to ensure that the same language is spoken during stakeholder workshops and consultations.

Recommendation 2: In some projects it remained unclear whether research findings, guidelines or other final products are actually used or implemented. Project teams should thus draw / continue to draw on contextualized approaches to share project-related findings and knowledge. Especially in the Global South, where often the internet is accessed via smart phones, new means of communication, such as Social Media, but also Webinars and Massive Open Online Courses, among others, might yield potential to reach out to further target groups. Moreover, ICT solutions, such as mobile-based monitoring could be explored further. For Austrian project partners it should be clear that the APPEAR project they are engaged in is not only a research fund with the aim to achieve publications. The core development objective of the project should be also put as priority among Austrian partners involved. Project teams in Austria should equally advocate their cause within their context and come up with adequate dissemination methods to share project knowledge and results. Lecture series, public stakeholder symposiums, newspaper articles or advocacy measures, as identified in several projects, could be replicated across different projects. Eventually, when disseminating information, APPEAR projects should join the discourse on the Sustainable Development Goals and communicate connections between projects and the 17 goals.

Recommendation 3: A share of project-bound scholarship holders articulated the wish to be more frequently informed about project activities. Project teams should, therefore, try to update and involve current students as much as desired to increase their ownership of the project. Means to inform scholarship holders comprise (i) including them in the email list, (ii) engaging them in conferences, workshops and symposia, (iii) set up a WhatsApp® group to share updates from field work, among others.

### *Future projects*

Recommendations 4: Project teams should allocate time and resources in defining a detailed exit strategy for their project i.e. long term financing options and/or the takeover of project activities by target group or beneficiaries, ideally already at project proposal phase. In some cases, external support and consultancy might be necessary and could be accounted for within the projects' budgeted activities.

Recommendations 5: Draft a logical framework (or any similar tool) that can be realistically applied and that includes SMART indicators. Particular attention should be given to outcome level indicators. It is recommended to also set (learning) targets for the Austrian institution in the logical framework to further strengthen the aspect of mutual knowledge exchange. It is recommended to accommodate time for peer-learning on results-oriented project management, especially for those team members who are inexperienced in that regard, to emphasize on the importance of logical frameworks and related tools.

### **Programme Level Recommendation (Directed to OeAD/ADA)**

Recommendation 6: Foster communication and exchange between projects. Learnings on achieving gender mainstreamed projects, results-oriented project management or measures to integrate the community should be broadly shared among project teams to build on the experiences made. OeAD provides comprehensive information on their website through blog posts and podcasts and sets up project presentations. In addition, regional, more informal forums could be set up, where challenges could be discussed and jointly solutions could be found.

Recommendation 7: To further support the OeAD/ APPEAR alumni network, both digital and physical alumni platforms should be set up to foster continued exchange of knowledge and expertise. Platforms for alumni and cooperation projects with the APPEAR programme are rarely present so far, considering that other donors spend much higher resources on cooperation and mobility projects. OeAD should make use of these tightly knitted links between alumni and support the realization of further initiatives. For example, funding could be provided for supporting – upon application – thematic focused workshops hosted by alumni.

Recommendation 8: Re-discuss the inclusion of the logical framework in the application documents or consider alternative tools to facilitate the illustration of pathways of change. If the logical framework is kept, it is strongly advised to (i) review the terminology used, (ii) pursue a clearer separation of output, outcomes and impact and (iii) foster its usage among project team members.

Recommendation 9: Sustain and extend the two APPEAR intrinsic mechanisms of Preparatory Funding and the option of project coordination by southern partners to achieve high participation and ownership by all actors involved. Further, it should be considered whether the programme already determines that coordination of AAPs must occur in the South. Seeing success stories from the case study projects, AAPs seem appropriate to pass on main responsibilities to departments in the South for leveraging on the additional impacts mentioned above.