

**Cooperation programme for capacity development of  
Engineering Laboratories in Portuguese-speaking  
African countries**  
*Evaluation study*  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **Introduction**

This evaluation study is intended to assess the contribution of the Portuguese Cooperation for the acquisition and systematic development of competencies in the Civil Engineering Laboratories of Portuguese-speaking African Countries (LabPALOP), resulting in sustained improvement of their performance. From a broader perspective, the study also aims to examine how the Programme under evaluation materialises, over time, the objectives and principles of the Portuguese Cooperation (presently under the framework of Portuguese Speaking Countries Community - CPLP). This Programme operates in very important sectors and regions for the Portuguese economy and international relations, and, despite its small financial scale, could be an interesting case study of cooperation for development practices. The analysis focuses on the latest decade of implementation of the Programme (2002/2003 to 2012/2013).

## **Brief presentation of the Programme**

Portuguese cooperation with LabPALOP started in 1977, year of signature of the first agreements between Portugal's LNEC and its homologous institutions in Angola (LEA) and Mozambique (LEM). In the following decade, bilateral agreements with no time limitation were also signed with Cabo Verde (LECV), Guinea-Bissau (LEGUI) and São Tomé and Príncipe (LECSPT). LNEC has been responsible for the Programme coordination since the beginning.

Fundamental objectives of the Programme are defined as contributing to reinforce LabPALOP capacity to grant quality control in civil engineering, construction industry and materials in their countries. To attain such objective, the Programme supports activities like human resources qualification (training in Portugal and local seminars and courses), technical assistance through joint teams, equipment and documentation supply and maintenance.

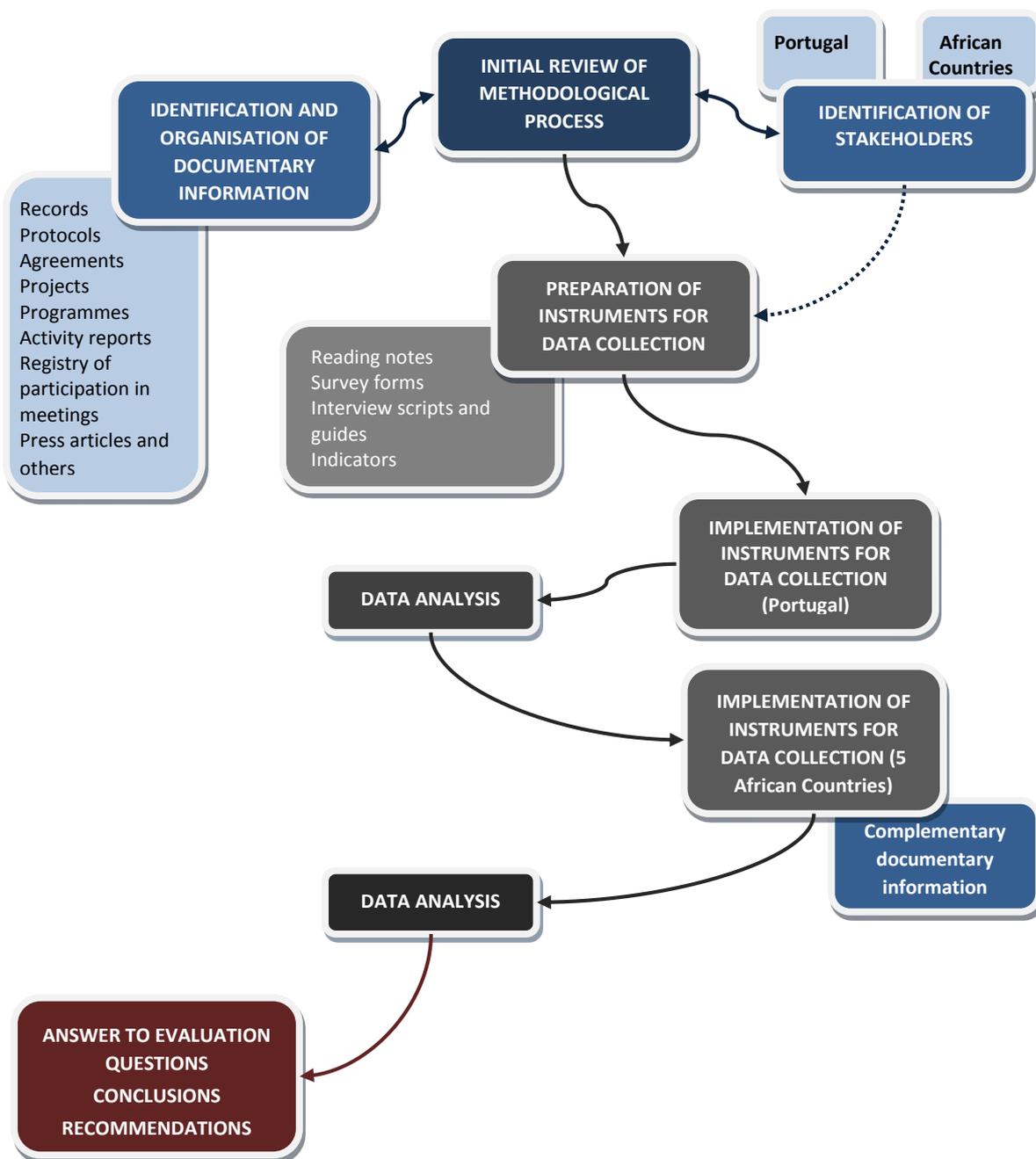
The Programme had no interruptions until present, keeping a rather stable format (in terms of participants, typology of activities, calendar, etc.). The only significant change occurred in 2008, when the budget provided by Portuguese authorities was transferred to Cooperation Special Fund of CPLP, the current financing instrument. Portuguese official development assistance (ODA) is carried to Programme in two ways:

- Financial assistance.
- Technical assistance, through LNEC training and capacitation services.

The global budget assigned to this Programme has been, along the years, quite modest, both in bilateral cooperation period and after integration in CPLP framework. The cumulative value in the last decade was 2.289,026 euros, representing 0.11% of total Portuguese bilateral ODA to these African countries.

### Methodological itinerary

Evaluation works were carried according to the following itinerary:



### Evaluation findings and conclusions

In general terms, the evaluation considers that this Programme, besides from intervening in a very important theme for the involved countries, also favours multilateralism in Cooperation (being understood as a partnership in a community of practices) as well as ownership by beneficiaries in several aspects of the process. Thus, it has great potential to represent a double relevance: to

improve a specific sector of social and economic development and to improve the institutional empowerment and good governance in Portuguese-speaking African countries.

The results achieved in capacity development of LabPALOP were conditioned by two types of factors: those related to local contexts, historically marked by political and social instability; and those related to some limitation of the scope of activities, more focused on human resources qualification than in other capability dimensions (technological or organisational, for example).

These general aspects are explained in the conclusions framework of the study, which are organised according to different evaluation criteria.

*Relevance: to which extent the objectives of cooperation correspond to the needs identified by partner countries and the internationally agreed priorities?*

The Programme is critical for the maintenance of a skills transferring network among institutions whose mission is similar: to ensure, in an independent and technically recognised approach, the quality control of construction sector in countries where infrastructures building and urbanisation processes are growing, as it is the case of most of the involved African countries. In addition to the aspects directly related to quality and safety, there is also a value associated with the States' sovereignty. These are contexts where the strong presence of external financing favours the involvement of foreign companies in the development of major projects of public works.

From the Portuguese point of view, the strategic and economic interests of this Programme should also be recognised, because the construction and engineering sector is especially important in the national economy. African markets are very significant for the internationalisation of Portuguese companies, some of them being leaders in these markets. In this sense, the existence of a properly regulated sector in these countries, in terms of quality and of the existence of standards and control mechanisms compatible with the Portuguese ones, is a positive contribution to the competitiveness of national companies.

*Effectiveness: were the defined objectives and results actually achieved?*

The analysis focused on results shows that, in the period under evaluation, the Programme had a visible contribution to the human resources qualification in partner laboratories. This conclusion emerges firstly from the number of actions undertaken, and secondly, from the interest and quality that participants recognise to these actions. The increasing qualification of the technical staff of LabPALOP has become evident through the constitution of technical teams with professionals from LNEC, LEM and LEA, providing services in partnership in the African countries. The cumulative effect of empowerment is different among laboratories. It may be considered relatively stabilised in Angola and Mozambique laboratories, but with some problems in other cases.

*Efficiency: were the means employed by the Portuguese Cooperation adequate to achieving goals and results? Could these results be achieved at lower cost? Or could the Cooperation achieve better results with the same allocation of resources?*

A direct indicator of efficiency results from the analysis of the financial implementation of ODA amounts provided per year. The execution deviations (financial and in terms of undertaken activities) from the programmed values were significant in the period from 2007 to 2012. In this period, the implementation was systematically under the programmed values, and the deviations increased in the last two years under analysis. These deviations are largely explained not only by the political crisis in Guinea-Bissau, but also by a significant drop in São Tomé and Príncipe.

The recognition of the Programme's merits (its thematic focus and the community of practices nature) by the beneficiary countries' authorities, by Portugal and by CPLP contrasts very favourably with the financial amounts allocated. In the period under evaluation, the Programme's weight in the Portuguese ODA was very low, but its visibility was very significant. From this strategic point of view, this Programme represents an efficient allocation of resources.

*Impact: what are the effects and impacts of the Programme, intended or not, in different areas and sectors of the participant countries?*

The evaluation concludes that the Programme's effects are confined to the sphere of the various LabPALOP. Effects are not so frequent at other levels: in the quality and safety of the construction sector in general, or in other institutions. This modesty of results arises from the lack of a systematic strategy concerning the external articulations of the Programme.

This conclusion does not undermine the identification of some examples that show actual effects of training (although modest, especially in recent years) in other public and private entities in several countries.

*Sustainability: are there conditions for making durable results and effects of the Programme, in LabPALOP and in the areas where they operate?*

The principle of ownership, which is a necessary condition for sustainability, is one of the Programme's guidelines. The practices' community model adopted ensures this principle. However, there are progress margins in all LabPALOP, in subjects such as management, monitoring and documentary record of the activities and processes related to the Programme. These are essential conditions to find out the persistence and dissemination of the empowerment effects in organisations.

The evaluation concludes that, from all LabPALOP, only in Angola and Mozambique laboratories were created true local conditions for sustained empowerment, resulting from their size, organisation (existence of structured internal procedures which outline the proposed activities to be developed) and 'market positioning' (regulatory frameworks and dynamic industry that require intense mobilisation of capacity). In other cases, due to organisational and infrastructural weaknesses of laboratories and/or lack of external dynamics, it has been very difficult to ensure that persistence. The case of Guinea-Bissau is an extreme example.

Sustainability of competences and means in laboratories is seriously threatened by the difficulty, registered in all analysed cases, to resist to the predatory competition from the private sector and even other public entities, in terms of recruitment of LabPALOP professionals that benefited from capacity development activities.

## **Recommendations**

Taking into consideration the two evaluation approach dimensions (the Programme specific sphere and the framework of Portuguese and CPLP Cooperation), this study makes two types of recommendations:

- those that aim to contribute to improving the Programme and raise its levels of effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability;
- those that are intended to raise the Programme to a higher level of relevance, yielding more significant potential impact;

In the first case, the recommendations acknowledge that the model will remain close to the current, resting in the community of practices of civil engineering laboratories. The suggestions made exploit the existing margin for manoeuvre in order to improve the effects and the needed conditions for its achievement. In the latter case, the recommendations foresee a Programme that, whilst keeping the focus in the engineering laboratories training, will have different format and framework, demanding changes at several levels. In this case, the recommendations are mostly aimed at the various national and CPLP authorities, who must ponder them according to Cooperation policy criteria.

Both levels are not mutually exclusive, and some of the recommendations are compatible and could be performed simultaneously.

All recommendations, whether they belong to a level or another, result in a general recommendation that should be implemented, according to possibilities of the stakeholders in the Programme:

Demonstrated the relevance of the Programme, it is recommended its continuation, although following a renewed model. This renewal must draw attention to the introduction, by all stakeholders, of more systematic management proceedings, the widening of the activities of the Programme, not only from the perspective of the type of actions supported, but also from their recipients' viewpoint, as well as the revaluation of the financial amounts made available.

The recommendations are the following:

- I. Improve the multilateral model of the Programme, intensifying the use of resources and the expertise from all participant laboratories, when these are recognised by the community.
- II. Promote strategic and operational planning processes of the organisations (LabPALOP) within the network.
- III. Create an adequate monitoring system and improve the Programme's follow-up and evaluation mechanisms.
- IV. Implement planning for an extended period, based on the strategic plans of each LabPALOP, resources available on the network and ODA and other supports.
- V. Extend the scope of the activities and adjust them to each specific case, using LNEC expertise in areas which are emergent in some African countries, adding new training domains outside the expertise areas undertaken by LNEC.
- VI. Promote systematic proceedings for the internal dissemination and consolidation of the acquired knowledge and skills in each LabPALOP.
- VII. Promote the involvement and participation of other entities from each African country in the Programme's activities (seminars, workshops), making it an affirmation instrument of LabPALOP in the respective national scene.
- VIII. Undertake efforts to reinforce the Programme's financial support conditions.
- IX. Incorporate in the community other entities to foster the expertise transfer to LabPALOP in domains of technical and transversal capacitation.
- X. Extend, formally, the Programme's scope to CPLP, allowing the admittance of other countries/laboratories, provided they compromise to the same work logic.