

Project Evaluation Series

Evaluation of the project “Developing capacity for strengthening food security and nutrition in selected countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia”

Project code: GCP/GLO/674/RUS

Follow-up report

Follow-up report to the Evaluation of the project "Developing Capacity for Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Selected Countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia"				10/2022	
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<p>Recommendation 1.</p> <p>Results.</p> <p>While the project has been successful in providing good results in raising awareness, developing enabling environment, and demonstrating good results from pilot initiatives, the achievement of the project's main objectives requires more time to achieve high-level coordination, strategic policy dialogue and the implementation of results-oriented policies and legislation". A second phase of at least 1-2 years is recommended to consolidate and expand achievements. (Cf. Conclusion 2)</p> <p>The project has a strong focus on policy engagement and development, governance improvement, capacity development and change in behaviour, which are known to take time to develop and stick and need to undergo different stages of change.</p> <p>The evaluation finds that the project has reached mostly stable "intermediate stages" (see figure 3 with the reconstructed TOC), such as increased awareness, demonstrated evidence for the scaling-up of the pilots, while work on the project outcomes still needs further consolidation. More specifically, the project</p>	Accepted	<p>The management agrees that the project has been successful and that some objectives will require time to be fully achieved. This recommendation is accepted but the response is pending fully on the availability of funds for a second phase.</p> <p>The project team is already working on the concept for the second phase and incorporating the recommendations of the External Evaluation.</p> <p>The concept for the second phase will build up on the success stories concentrating on scaling up and the bridging across of the successful pilots as the main focus. This shift from pilots to scaling up operations is possible since most of the groundwork to build an enabling environment was conducted during the first phase. From the conceptual point of view, the project will strengthen its approach of linking food security, nutrition, social protection and agricultural production by a strong focus on the stimulus of agribusiness and food value chain development and, on support the inclusion of smallholder farmers and small rural food enterprises for the benefits of the schools. This will include developing sustainable food value chains, public-private partnerships or public-private-producer partnerships, encouraging small and medium enterprise development and institutional procurement programs.</p>		None/poor	The recommendation could not be implemented because of the donor decision to close the project and not to fund a second phase.

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<p>needs more time to: (i) consolidate the pilot results before scaling-up; (ii) systematize the lessons/findings from the pilots and consolidate the already conducted normative work; (iii) further support the on-going behaviour change and application of acquired operational capacity and focus on enhancing strategic capacity; (iv) strengthen the high level cross-sector coordination and policy dialogue to turn political commitments into plans of action; and (v) raise the prospects for ownership & sustainable impact.</p> <p>Before starting with the second phase, the project should, in consultation with the resource partner, steering committee and key partners, conduct a long-term strategic visioning exercise. This exercise should help to map out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Where and which activities/achievements need consolidation through direct support (paying attention to assumptions and drivers), and when/where the project could provide a back-stopping role; ii. How to work with FAO and non-FAO partners to consolidate and scale-up results; 		<p>The proposal for the second phase will focus on linking the three models – School Food and Nutrition, Cash+, and matching grants to develop a food supply chain for the schools. This will be possible by establishing all pilots in the same region and by improving agribusiness competitiveness, and food value chain and food system performance, including fostering greater public-private collaboration and linkages among business partners and farmers.</p> <p>Once the concept for the second phase is approved, the Project team will start to work on the addendum to project document that will guide the second phase. During the consultation meetings there will be an opportunity to hold a long-term strategic vision exercise.</p>			

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iii. When and how hand-over strategies should be shaped (see also recommendation 8 on sustainability); iv. The necessary cost for the consolidation of results and scaling-up initiatives.					
<p>Recommendation 2.</p> <p>Design.</p> <p>The project should update its logical framework to address some methodological shortcomings with definitions, logical linkages and missing indicators and conduct participatory TOC exercises to identify pathways of change and proper assumptions and impact drivers. (Cf. Conclusion 1)</p> <p>The logical framework should be corrected for some inconsistencies and shortcoming with regards to proper definitions of the results chain: activities, outputs, outcomes and impact(s) as indicated in section 3.1. Each component of the results chain should be assigned a properly defined indicator (See also recommendation 6).</p> <p>To facilitate this, the project should conduct a participatory TOC exercise together with project teams at all levels and selected key partners. An overall project TOC as well as individual pilot TOCs should be developed for a better</p>	Accepted	<p>Due to the complex project's approach, the logical framework is extensive and includes many indicators. Some of the important indicators such as nutrition indicators and most of the base-line indicators are missing in the framework since the elaboration of the initial project document. Some of the indicators have been identified and added during the project implementation. However, the annual reports included the result chain with project deliveries based on the logical framework. So effectively the logical framework has grown organically with the project implementation, but it has not necessarily been updated in the system.</p> <p>For the new phase the design of the logical framework will be revised accordingly, and efforts will be made to have less detailed information but more aggregated data. The lessons learned from the current project's stage and availability of necessary data will help to introduce such improvements in no time.</p>	None/poor	<p>The recommendation could not be implemented because of the donor decision to close the project and to not fund a second phase.</p>	

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understanding of the different change pathways, as well as the implications of any changes made to them. Moreover, it would allow to identify relevant assumption, general and context specific risks and impact drivers. The pilot TOC exercise should help the project in defining clear end-goals for the pilots (which are currently missing).					
<p>Recommendation 3.</p> <p>Risk analysis.</p> <p>Based on the outputs of the TOC exercise, the project should design a risk analysis framework that can be monitored and updated for any new significant information that may adversely affect the likelihood or the magnitude of the risk factors. (Cf. Conclusions 1, 3)</p> <p>The assumptions which are beyond the direct control of the project (which will be identified provided by the TOC exercise) should be used to define risks. A risk framework should be prepared including the description of undesirable events (including their individual characteristics and magnitude) and the probability of occurrence. Special attention should be given to the operational and institutional risks for the pilots, highlighted in the evaluation report.</p>	Accepted	<p>The project in all countries has been characterized by major unprecedented events starting with the changes of a political situation, military escalation of conflict, and the covid pandemic lockdowns. None of them could had been predicted with the best risk analysis. Nevertheless, the project has managed to overcome all the risks without major negative consequences on the implementation of the project and delivered of results.</p> <p>The Management team accepts that the original risk framework in the Project Document should be updated to reflect all factors that have been affecting the project implementation. This will help to identify the bottlenecks for the next phase.</p> <p>To have regular monitoring and updating, the project will need to allocate time and funds to have enough human resources for the design of the next phase, its implementation and the continuing M&E. It should be taking into account that a group of experts should prepare the risks analysis during the</p>		None/poor	The recommendation could not be implemented because of the donor decision to close the project and not to fund a second phase.

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Both parameters should be regularly monitored and updated for any significant new information. The risk framework should be integrated into the progress reporting format and the significant risks and their effects on the project performance should be reflected in the report narrative.		project design and at least one expert should be full-time employed (HQ level) to monitor, reflect and report to all necessary changes.			
<p>Recommendation 4. Project management and implementation arrangements.</p> <p>In the second phase, the project should maintain the three-level management structure (HQ-Regional-National) and further enhance the capacity of FAO decentralized offices. The project should pay attention to the recruitment and retention of highly skilled and qualified national personnel and HQ should start sharing a part of responsibilities with REU in national staff supervision and administrative support. (Cf. Conclusions 3, 4)</p> <p>Since the recruitment and retention of the highly skilled and qualified national personnel remains a critical problem in all three countries, this needs special attention moving forward. The recruitment of highly skilled project personnel at the country FAO offices (such as National Project Coordinator, Project Technical</p>	Accepted	<p>The project has been using all channels for the staff recruitment, including international job advertising platforms and international exchange alumni networks, especially during the project first phase for identification of the key personnel at country levels. The project also involved professionals and experts of FAO from various divisions on TSS basis. The FAO Representation offices in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have providing services of selected specialists (e.g. monitoring, communication, procurement, administration) on cost-sharing basis. The project has been involving young professionals into the project implementation.</p> <p>The retention of qualified staff is a general problem in FAO as the salary scale is lower than other international organizations at country level.</p> <p>In the case of over-use of National Coordinators, the Management Team supports that a clear definition of tasks should be agreed between the</p>		None/poor	The recommendation could not be implemented because of the donor decision to close the project and not to fund a second phase.

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<p>Assistant, M&E officer, and other fulltime project personnel) should be conducted with a strong intention to find highly qualified and motivated candidates. International job advertising platforms and international exchange alumni networks (available at the corresponding exchange program office in each country) should be used with an effort to reach out to high-profile applicants residing outside the country and willing to return. Internship programs should be also encouraged to attract highly talented and motivated students or recent graduates of the universities with an acumen and interest in international development work and agriculture. FAO country offices where such experience is available should be consulted through REU office.</p> <p>As the capacity of the REU in technical expertise and administrative support increased, thanks to the project, the regional office could be more actively engaged in the team coordination encouraging cross-country collaboration and assisting the HQ in that role, who is significantly overstretched and frequently had to micromanage. To encourage experience sharing and learning, also providing possibilities for coaching or support as needed,</p>		<p>project management and the country Representatives.</p> <p>REU is fully involved in the key decisions and strategic direction of the project, directly and through the Steering Committee playing in fact, a coordination role. To further enhance the capacity of REU and FAO decentralized offices, funds for training and TSS are being requested for the second phase.</p>			

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<p>cross country working groups composed of the National Project Coordinators (at least) should be created, which and could be facilitated by REU and coordinated by HQ.</p> <p>The technical capacities created at the FAO country offices with introduction of new operating functions will enable the country teams to assume more responsibilities. However, further capacity-building is required for policy dialogue, high level advocacy and coordination as well as agricultural and specific technical expertise for some pilot activities (see section 3). The over-use of National Project Coordinators outside project activities should be avoided (this should also contribute to more retention of staff) and the national project teams should increase their involvement in national policy dialogue processes, working groups and meetings – once this capacity has been enhanced/ expanded. This should ultimately enhance stronger ownership and sustainability prospects on the ground.</p> <p>To clarify current and new responsibilities and reporting lines, the project should make an organogram describing positions, reporting lines and key functional relations at the overall project, and each individual level (global, regional, and country). The organogram should</p>					
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be accessible to each team member and updated for any major changes. It is also recommended to have a similar organogram for all committees, working groups or commissions that are created and functioning within the project. The organograms of the working platforms not established by FAO, should be requested (if it is available) or reconstructed based on their functional duties and involved parties.					
<p>Recommendation 5.</p> <p>Monitoring and evaluation.</p> <p>The project should have its own M&E plan and system with well-defined performance indicators, monitoring plans, data collection methods, responsibilities and quality assurance. The system should allow the project to track progress, identify corrective actions in a timely and transparent way and document evidence to support policy recommendations. (Cf. Conclusion 5).</p> <p>The project should design a detailed M&E plan with clear responsibilities for monitoring (data collection, quality assurance and storing) and internal evaluation of the project's key milestones. An M&E system, which could be a centralized master file, should be designed and</p>	Accepted	<p>The project has a solid Logical Framework Matrix, which has served as a tool for planning, monitoring and evaluation to track the progress and achievements in accordance with end targets and indicators. In addition, the FAO country offices have a CPF monitoring logframe matrix, within which the progress of the work plan is monitored regularly against project indicators. The project regularly reported to FAO relevant indicators and agenda.</p> <p>Furthermore, the developed operational manuals for Cash+ and Matching Grants pilots included the criteria and indicators that were regularly analysed and reported.</p> <p>Overall, the annual reports include regularly updated results chain analysis for each level and the monitoring of the overall deliveries (see Recommendation 1 response). Each year the project coordinators revised the workframe</p>		None/poor	The recommendation could not be implemented because of the donor decision to close the project and not to fund a second phase.

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<p>contain at least the following elements (that could be tracked and updated when necessary according to defined and transparent rules): inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes; and SMART indicators with clear definitions and calculating methodology. It is important to have an internal data collection methodology and assigned responsibilities with ensuring data reliability and integrity. The project should design a simple (possibly a spreadsheet-based), secure and reliable database to store all data for M&E. The project should recruit a full time M&E consultant to set up and execute the plan and system. If necessary, M&E training should be provided to those external consultants or persons from the project and partners involved in data-collection and entering.</p> <p>Ideally, the M&E system should function in (near) real time, to facilitate the project in collecting and documenting important evidence and lessons that can timely inform project management decisions and better support policy recommendations.</p> <p>The project should consider developing specific indicators to enhance monitoring based on gender-disaggregated and other relevant data, to better assess the degree of targeting men,</p>		<p>according to the actual situation and the approved changes by the Steering Committee, the donor and the FAO internal clearances.</p> <p>Despite not being gender-focused in the project document, the project has been developing, collecting and reporting gender disaggregated data in relation with the Cash+ pilot and capacity building initiatives in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. The operational manual for the matching grants in Tajikistan included indicators and procedure that supported the transparency of the beneficiary selection process and gender equality.</p> <p>The project team will revise the number of indicators for the second phase of the project and develop missing indicators, especially those of the school food and nutrition pilots.</p> <p>For the second phase of the project, an M&E data collection plan, methodology, responsibilities, reporting templates and simple database should be developed. This however will depend on the availability of funds for a full-time monitoring expert. This expert should be implementing the M&E activities and guiding the M&E experts based on cost-sharing approach in FAOR offices (see Recommendation 4 response).</p>			

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women, youth, and most vulnerable groups of the population.					
<p>Recommendation 6.</p> <p>Knowledge management.</p> <p>The project should set up an overall knowledge management strategy. (Cf. Conclusion 2, 5).</p> <p>The project would benefit by setting up a knowledge management strategy, to strategically support further outreach and knowledge sharing within the three countries and in between the 3 levels, in order to (i) guide the production of communication activities and outputs; (ii) systematize the lessons learned/findings from the pilots; (iii) consolidate the already conducted normative work and make a concrete plan how project results and lessons can further permeate and influence FAO work globally (and that of other players in FSN, SP and migration); (iv) enhance evidence building and documentation of lessons learned that can support policy recommendations; (v) systematically track the usage of the communication outputs (supported by M&E system); and (vi) support sustainability.</p> <p>The adoption of systematic knowledge management and streamlines information</p>	Accepted	<p>The elements of the knowledge management have been included in the ProDoc and successfully implemented throughout the project timeframe. The suggested improvements can be implemented thanks to the accumulated experience and lessons learned in the development of certain templates and databases where information could be faster accessible. However, it will require to have two full-time experts - on communication and monitoring for the overall project and six cost-sharing positions at country levels (see Recommendation 4 and 5). This is of course a recommendation for a much larger project.</p> <p>The Management Team will introduce this when the preparation of the addendum to the project document starts.</p> <p>.....</p>		None/poor	<p>The recommendation could not be implemented because of the donor decision to close the project and not to fund a second phase.</p>

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sharing mechanisms/formats (e.g. progress reports) should also be promoted amongst all the project's partners, to facilitate cross-analysis the information.					
<p>Recommendation 7. Partnerships.</p> <p>The project should enhance cross-partnership collaboration with project partners during and beyond contracts by creating space for informal collaboration. (Cf. Conclusion 6)</p> <p>Cross-partnerships and (informal) post-contract prospects should be stimulated to gain additional benefit to the project and enhance sustainability. In the future, the project should use its database of implementing partners who successfully completed the project activities under their LOAs and provided significant value to the project. The project should create a pool of the most active actors, which provided valuable inputs through their reports and informal communication and form an informal group. There could be many creative options of setting this group which is recommended to be formalized through an MOU and linked to a lead agency arrangement (discussed further in Recommendation 8). The created groups in</p>	Partially accepted	<p>The project has been actively working with the key partners prior, during and after the LOAs, those who were identified and included in the ProDoc and logical frameworks (e.g. SIFI, ECFS and MSU - Russia, Roza Otunbaeva Foundation - Kyrgyzstan, RHLSC-Tajikistan). The partners, who have been assigned with LOAs through the FAO standard selection process, were involved in the direct activities of the project and in the follow up events. The Government partners acting under MOUs or LOAs have been involved in joint conferences, workshops, round tables, awareness campaigns and online policy dialogues, which were beyond the agreements.</p> <p>The national, regional and global stakeholders, including national and international institutions, have been regularly invited to project events or the project team contributed to the stakeholders' events. To conclude, the communication and collaboration with the key partners and stakeholders have been maintained throughout the project life.</p> <p>The project at country level has a stakeholder mapping matrix which contains a database of key</p>		None/poor	The recommendation could not be implemented because of the donor decision to close the project and not to fund a second phase.

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each country could be connected to the FSN forum platform.		<p>partners and LoAs including their role, budget, dates of collaboration. To follow the Evaluation Recommendation, this matrix will be further used to identify potential partners for the second phase. In addition, the project maintains a separate database matrix of key partners in the country from public, private, civil society and academia sectors for possible partnership and collaboration. The databases and contact lists have been regularly updated by each country team and the overall information has been maintained by the HQ team. Furthermore, the engagement of stakeholders has also been supported via the FSN Forum, REU, SEC and ECFS professional networks.</p> <p>The consolidation of available information on successful partnerships, including the identification of new potential partners should be discussed and organized according to the second phase objectives and activities.</p>			
<p>Recommendation 8. Sustainability of the pilot results.</p> <p>For each pilot subject at the national level, the project should i) prepare a hand-over strategy; and ii) identify and work with a lead agency, in addition to the government implementing partners, to strengthen policy dialogue and ownership of project results. Applying a</p>	Accepted	<p>The project had all relevant instruments included into the hand-over processes of the pilots. In particular, the property has been handed-over according to the FAO rules, and the responsibilities to continue the oversight of the pilots' beneficiaries (schools, vulnerable people, migrants) stay either with the Ministries (Social protection, Education or Migration) or with the established observing committees and community-based organizations</p>		None/poor	<p>The recommendation could not be implemented because of the donor decision to close the project and not to fund a second phase.</p>

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<p>community-based approach could provide effective solutions to address the lack of service provision mechanisms for the target beneficiaries. (Cf. Conclusion 3)</p> <p>The project should start preparing for the sustainability of the project pilot results. Based on clear end-goals for the pilots, the project should work out a detailed hand over strategy for the pilot projects which should include a proper SWOT-analysis, risk mitigation plan (for identified institutional and operational risks) and institutionalization mechanisms build on the already created MOUs and supervisory board framework.</p> <p>The project's non-state implementing partners should be considered a valuable source for providing several improvements in the areas of social work case management, extension service support and policy-dialogue. A lead agency could be selected from these non-state actors (local NGO, or locally based / international CSO working in FSN, SP and Migration) with advocacy experience and vested interest in these topics. Through this partnership arrangement, the project can establish an advocacy and policy dialogue platform, which will be more continuously focused on the coordination and enabling</p>		<p>under the pilots (e.g. for the matching grants for migrants and the logistic center). The sustainability of the Logistic Center is ensured through an MOU: seven years after the signing of the MOU, the entity will be transferred to a local entrepreneur.</p> <p>The school garden's pilots ensure that all gardens are set up in the territory of schools and considered as property of schools. Furthermore, the beneficiaries (matching grants pilot) sign contracts. Additionally, FAO has MOUs with the key ministries and commitments in national policy dialogue working groups. The country teams have been working with responsible institutions and main stakeholders on the integration of pilots into the relevant national institutions.</p> <p>The project considers the pilots' sustainability as a very important step for the next phase. Thus, the first phase has been testing and identifying the most sustainable models. For this, the project is conducting socio-economic analysis, which will be ready by the end of September 2021. However, the impact analysis are to be conducted by the end of 2021.</p> <p>The project agrees that the identification of lead agencies and the integration into the national platforms are required for the second phase based on the objectives and activities involved. However,</p>			

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<p>environment. The platform should be open for all interested stakeholders and have a specifically defined agenda. The lead agency can be instrumental in monitoring the pilot process and directly bringing the issues for policy dialogue. Moreover, collaboration with a specialized lead could not only provide a platform for policy dialogue at the community level, but also with the government ministries.</p> <p>At the regional and global level, the FSN Forums are well functioning and useful platforms of knowledge sharing, and the project should continue to use them for more effective policy dialogue and advocacy.</p> <p>Involvement of local community-based organizations (such as women's centres, local farmers groups etc.) will allow to make project intervention more community focused and provide solutions for the lack of service provision mechanisms.</p>		any related hand-over process requires allocated budget, human resources and expertise.			

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