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Evaluation of FAO's contribution to the Smallholder Commercialisation Programme and to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme in Sierra Leone

**Programme Evaluation Series
07/2020**

**Evaluation of FAO's contribution
to the Smallholder
Commercialisation Programme
and to the
Global Agriculture and Food Security
Programme in Sierra Leone
Project code: UTF/SIL/038/SIL**

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Acronyms and abbreviations

ABA	Agricultural business associations
ABC	Agricultural business centres
CAHWs	Community animal health workers
CPF	Country programming framework
DAO	District agricultural offices
FBO	Farmer-based organisation
FBS	Farmer business school
FFS	Farmer field schools
FSA	Financial services associations
GAFSP	Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme
GALS	Gender Action and Learning System
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
IVS	In-valley swamp
JICA	Japan International Corporation Agency
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
NaFFSL	National Federation of Farmers of Sierra Leone
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSADP	National Sustainable Development Plan
PEMSD	Planning Evaluation Monitoring and Statistics Division
PMU	Programme Management Unit
SEED	Seed Enterprise Enhancement Development Project
SCP	Smallholder Commercialisation Programme
SRI	System of Rice Intensification
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UTF	Unilateral Trust Fund

Map of Sierra Leone



Map No. 3902 Rev. 6 UNITED NATIONS
September 2014

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Cartographic Section

Source: Map No. 3902 Rev. 6 UNITED NATIONS September 2014

Executive summary

1. This report presents the results of the evaluation of FAO's contribution to Sierra Leone's Smallholder Commercialisation Programme (SCP). The SCP is at the core of the National Sustainable Agriculture Development Plan (NSADP), the guiding document for the agricultural sector. In 2011, the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP) provided USD 50 million in support to the SCP programme. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was appointed as supervisory entity for the overall funding and FAO received USD 7.6 million. FAO's contribution mainly focused on intensifying production through the implementation of farmer field schools (FFS), improving commercialisation by supporting the agricultural business centres (ABCs), and enhancing technical capacity of district agricultural offices (DAOs) and the SCP/GAFSP Programme Management Unit at central level.
2. The evaluation was organised during the last year of the project and covered all activities implemented since the beginning (April 2012). The purpose of the evaluation was two-fold: i) to provide accountability, presenting evidence on resource utilization and main results achieved; and ii) to draw lessons to improve the work of FAO related to smallholder commercialisation in Sierra Leone and in other countries where the Organization is working. The team was composed of two independent consultants: a team leader, expert in agro-business and rural finance, and a team member, expert in evaluation. The main missions took place in August 2017. The project team met with key stakeholders in the capital and at the decentralised level and with participants of the FFSs and members of the farmer-based organisations (FBOs) and ABCs in a sample of sites selected in consultation with the project team.
3. After six years of implementation, SCP/GAFSP is firmly established in Sierra Leone as an effective national level smallholder commercialisation promotion mechanism. At the same time, it has to contend with challenges, including high staff turnover and inadequate staff capacity at the district MAF level and at the ABC level. In spite of this, the programme made good progress in proactively advancing its objectives. However, it is important to note that the programme was implemented during 2014-2015 when Sierra Leone experienced the Ebola virus outbreak. Also, during this time, IFAD suspended disbursement to the support programme activities, bringing activities to a halt. These factors had an impact on the achievement of the outcomes.
4. The FFS approach promoted by FAO was successful in transferring knowledge about rice production techniques to farmers. National ownership of the FFS approach is strong, and FAO training and capacity-building efforts through the FFS have been commendable. While farmers clearly understand the technology transferred and the potential benefits of using it, very few farmers are adopting the technology because it is labour intensive. At the start, there was no rice value chain analysis of the intervention conducted. This study would have helped to understand the emerging issues along the value chain, including labour constraints, lack of quality inputs, and financing shortcomings, in order to develop strategies to address them. The support and development of private sector agro-dealers for the effective and timely delivery of inputs to farmers remains critical to the success of this intervention. Lack of certified seed is an impediment to the adoption of the technologies transferred. While FAO did support the Seed Enterprise Enhancement Development (SEED) project that addressed rice seed quality and markets access, the project should have been better linked with the SCP-GAFSP in order to create synergies.

5. Highly relevant to the Sierra Leone context, the ABC model is being scaled-up nationwide. It was proposed by FAO as a decentralized structure owned by farmers and providing aggregation and processing facilities as well as joint marketing of products. ABCs and project activities have reached some of the most remote parts of Sierra Leone. The ABC model used by the project has proven to be effective; however, they still require support to become sustainable. Most of the ABCs visited did not have functioning production and processing equipment, and there is low processing capacity due to low production. Focusing efforts on the transformed ABCs with additional equipment and capacity support has been an effective strategy to increase production capacity and diversification of produce, and to contribute to their sustainability.
6. While most of the support so far has gone to ABCs as service providers to the FBO members, efforts to link ABCs to markets have been more limited. ABCs still depend largely on MAF to manage access to markets, and instead, need to proactively undertake contractual arrangements. In addition, ABCs' access to financial services is limited and mainly revolve around two types of services; i) group savings and loan arrangements known as "Osusu" among members, and ii) the village savings and loan association. There are a lack of financial products adapted to the needs of rural farmers.
7. ABCs have a governance structure in place. However, the election process for the leadership positions tends to be weak. In some cases, there is "elite capture" or "entrepreneurial capture" of the boards. Both ABCs and FBOs need support to improve the governance of their institutions, which in turn will ensure proper representation of their members. Good governance will enable ABCs to achieve their main objectives; i.e. to promote aggregation and to improve marketing and incomes for their members.
8. The major outcome of the programme has been the recognition of the ABC/FBO/FFS as an effective model for delivering extension services and supporting smallholder commercialisation in Sierra Leone, as well as promoting its adoption by other development partners. While measuring impact was not possible given the time and resources allocated to this evaluation, anecdotal evidence collected during the evaluation shows that adoption of this model has contributed to increased productivity and intensification, and has helped stimulate local economies.
9. Female-headed enterprises promoted by the programme, such as small ruminants, vegetable and groundnut production, contributed to household budgets and was beneficial to household food security. Thanks to gender mainstreaming activities introduced through the Gender Action and Learning System training promoted by IFAD there was greater consultative decision making and more women getting involved in income generating activities.
10. FAO has been effective in the development of the programme and in supporting its implementation. It was able to tap into the institutional pool of expertise as needed to respond to the technical needs arising throughout the life of the programme. The strong commitment by most of the districts to support the operations undertaken by FAO has accelerated the effectiveness of FAO efforts. FAO did not have a good knowledge management system in place and with the staff turnover it has been difficult to keep track of implementation achievements and to manage data. This has limited the potential for lessons learnt from the FFS/FBO/ABC model.

11. The project has adopted a sustainable approach, investing in institutions likely to be left behind after the project ends (FFS, FBOs ABCs). The transfer of knowledge to MAF staff at national and district levels has been effective. However, lack of resources for extension services (including high staff turnover, limited extension staffing and logistic capacities) could constrain the continuation of activities after the end of the programme. Sustainability of the approach will depend on both the availability and the enhanced technical skills of staff at all levels. In addition, there is a need to invest in private extension services to complement MAF efforts. Given the growing interest by public and private sectors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the FFS approach, a more structured partnership strategy should be considered, one that engages with those identified as well positioned to support the programme achieve its objectives and goal.
12. In order for the FFS/FBO/ABC model to work, it is necessary to effectively address the systemic constraints facing the sector, such as farmers' limited access to credit, poor infrastructure, and difficulty in marketing. While these constraints have been addressed under different components of the overall SCP programme, due in part to delays in the delivery of activities tied to various components, synergies among these components have not worked. This is for example the case of activities related to improved roads and development of in-valley swamps. As a result, farmers face challenges related to bad roads to and from their farms, storage (high post-harvest losses), and transportation facilities to move their produce from the farms to market.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Intensification of production

- i. For the future, a value chain analysis should be conducted at the beginning of the intervention to identify major constraints. On the basis of the analysis, FAO should introduce the relevant labour-saving technologies that will improve adoption of the technologies transferred through the FFS. This would be key for increasing rice productivity.
- ii. FAO should use its international reach to provide technical assistance to MAF to develop quality seed multiplication/certification systems in Sierra Leone. FAO should support the capacity building of the Sierra Leone Seed Certification Agency (SLESCA) to make it more internally compliant.
- iii. It is clear that given the challenges of staff turnover and for sustainability reasons, private extension services need to be supported in order to complement MAF efforts.
- iv. Farmers should be sensitized using various media (radio, print, mobile telephones, etc.) on the benefits of cultivating in the in-valley swamps.

Recommendation 2. Capacity development of agricultural business centres

- i. For capacity development activities targeting ABCs, FAO and PMU should increase the focus on business and marketing to mentor the ABCs to become independent. There is a need for a change of mind-set; ABCs should start thinking like businesses.
- ii. The more enterprising the leadership is, the more successful the ABC and FBO will be. At the same time there is a need to address the governance and representation challenges within the ABCs. FAO and PMU should place more emphasis on governance in capacity development activities benefiting ABCs. Among the solutions that could be adopted is the transformation of the ABCs into shareholding companies (like the financial services association (FSA) where people could buy shares up to a certain ceiling (with no one taking majority shareholding).

- iii. For the ABCs to become sustainable, there is a need for further support required to strengthen the governance structure, marketing and business approach using farmer business schools (FBS). FAO should continue to leverage resources from development partners to continue this support, There is a need to carry out a resource mapping of equipment already distributed, before additional equipment is provided to the ABCs. FAO should simplify the training modules and demonstration packages that are delivered in order to motivate all participants, especially those with low literacy levels, to actively participate in capacity building trainings.
- iv. FAO and PMU need to work with other partners such as the Japan International Corporation Agency (JICA), the World Bank (WB), the European Union (who have developed smallholder commercialisation projects) and the private sector, to further strengthen ABCs to provide more services to its members – services that include farm inputs, technologies and financing.

Recommendation 3. Access to financial services

- i. FAO and PMU should develop better linkages among the different components necessary to support the ABCs and FBOs - in particular among the ABCs and the FSAs and community banks. In the meantime, VSLAs should be promoted since the farmers already use it.
- ii. There is a need to assist microfinance institutions and community banks to develop and design financial products and packages that are better suited to rural farmers and ABCs, and in particular to address labour constraints and access to technologies.

Recommendation 4. Capacity development of MAF and other partners

- i. As an exit strategy, FAO should support the Government to develop private extension services that can complement the MAF efforts, given the staff turnover and capacity challenges.
- ii. Capacity building of the MAF at both central and the decentralised levels takes time and will require on-going support, given the existing capacities. This includes support to PEMSD staff to handle data monitoring and analysis of activities implemented. It would also require capacity development activities targeting MAF and DAOs to enable them to provide extension support to ABC/FBOs”.
- iii. FAO could explore the possibility of training and certifying other partners – partners who adopt elements of a franchising approach in order to ensure further standardization of the methodologies and tools. This would ensure uniformity as well as continuity in the implementation of the FFS approach.

Recommendation 5. Coordination across components

- i. In the future design of the value chain interventions, where there are inter-linkages, FAO should ensure better coordination across components so that identified challenges can be quickly addressed to enable more coherence and effectiveness in the implementation of the FFS, FBOs, and ABCs.

Recommendation 6. M&E, knowledge management and learning systems

- i. FAO and MAF need to put in place a knowledge management and learning systems for tracking the lessons learnt from implementation of the various projects;
- ii. FAO should invest in a robust M&E system and rely on the country office servers to store information collected, in order to ensure that data is available for various interventions.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

1. The FAO Governing Bodies have stressed the importance of the systematic evaluation of extra-budgetary work of the Organization. Since 2007, it has been a requirement that all projects with a budget above USD 4 million undergo a dedicated independent evaluation led by the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED). Project UTF/SIL/038/SIL, with a total budget of USD 7.6 million, therefore required an independent dedicated evaluation.
2. The purpose of the evaluation is two-fold:
 - i. On the one hand, the evaluation aims to provide accountability, by presenting evidence on resource utilization and main results achieved. Accountability is provided to the donor (GAFSP), as well as other stakeholders involved. In particular, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), the main national counterpart, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the supervising entity, and the farmers, who have been involved in the activities.
 - ii. On the other hand, the evaluation focuses on drawing lessons to improve the work of FAO, related to smallholder commercialisation in Sierra Leone and in other countries where the Organization is working.

1.2 Intended users

3. The main audience and intended users of the evaluation are:
 - i. FAO country offices, regional offices and technical divisions (including the technical networks on value chain, gender, rural employment) that could use the evaluation results and implement the lessons learnt in future initiatives at national and global levels;
 - ii. Government, particularly the MAF, which was the main national partner for this intervention, that could use the evaluation results and lessons learnt to continue work initiated under this project as well as in other initiatives to support small-holder commercialisation at the national level as well as the current government's agricultural development aspirations;
 - iii. IFAD, which was the supervising entity of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP) funding for the Smallholder Commercialization Programme (SCP) in Sierra Leone, that could integrate the lessons learnt in its own programmes in Sierra Leone and in other countries;
 - iv. GAFSP, the multi-donor financing facility, which could use the evaluation results and lessons learnt to inform future funding.

1.3 Scope and objective of the evaluation

4. The evaluation covered FAO's contribution through the SCP that was funded by the GAFSP facility. The assessment covered all activities implemented under this project since April 2012 as well as further activities added through a second amendment signed in 2017. In

terms of geographical coverage, all the 13 rural districts targeted by the project were part of the scope of the evaluation. The evaluation team selected a sample of sites to be visited in consultation with the project team (see section 1.4).

5. The main objectives of the evaluation were:
 - i. assess results achieved by the project and to the extent possible the impact they had on the production levels and commercialisation capacities of beneficiary farmers;
 - ii. assess whether the capacity of MAF improved as a result of activities implemented;
 - iii. identify weaknesses and strengths related to project design and implementation, as well as lessons learnt for future projects in support of smallholder commercialisation.
6. To elaborate the objectives of the evaluation, the assessment was based on six key questions, that guided the work of the evaluation team (see Box 1). During the preparatory phase, the evaluation team developed an evaluation matrix (see Appendix 4).

Box 1: Key evaluation questions

To what extent was FAO's intervention relevant to national priorities, strategies and needs and to what extent was the project design appropriate for achieving the expected results?

To what extent did the project contribute to increased production, intensification, value addition, and marketing and reduce rates of post-harvest losses (Outcome 1)?

To what extent did FAO contribute to strengthening SCP/GAFSP Management Team (contribution to Outcome 4)?

To what extent has FAO's project contributed to the overall goal of the SCP-GAFSP project: reduction of rural poverty and household food insecurity (SCP-GAFSP Development Goal)?

To what extent are the results achieved by the project sustainable?

To what extent were management arrangements appropriate to deliver the programme efficiently?

1.4 Methodology

7. The team was composed of a team leader, an expert in agro-business and rural finance, and a team member who is an expert in evaluation.
8. The evaluation started with a preparatory phase where the team conducted a desk review of project documents and preliminary interviews with FAO staff involved in the programme. The aim was to discuss the nature of the SCP-GAFSP project and jointly define objectives of the evaluation. This phase permitted finalization of the ToRs and the development of an inception report to guide the evaluation. The inception report included an evaluation matrix, stakeholder analysis, sampling design, and data collection tools. The study 'The Smallholder Commercialization Programme in Sierra Leone - The Sustainability of ABCs' provided by the project team proved to be an important reference document.

9. Given the high-level of staff turnover, an internal reference group was established at the beginning of the evaluation comprising FAO officials who had been involved in the activities implemented. The group was to provide insights on the project, review the ToRs and the inception report, and comment on the final draft.
10. The evaluation adopted a qualitative approach. The data collection phase, which took place in August 2018, included interviews with key informants at the central and decentralised levels identified by the team through stakeholder analysis. The list of key informants met is available in the appendixes.
11. In addition, field missions were organised to a sample of ABCs, the size of which took into account resources and time available for the evaluation. The SCP-GAFSP project was implemented in all rural districts of Sierra Leone. In consultation with the country office, the evaluation team selected one district for each region. The districts were randomly selected to eliminate bias, with the exception of Western Area Rural, which was purposefully selected, since it was the only district in its region that implemented the SCP-GAFSP intervention. In the other regions, the randomly selected districts included Kailahun from the Eastern region, Bo from the Southern region, Bombali from the Main North region, and Kambia from the Northwest region.
12. After identification of the districts for site visits, a maximum of four ABCs were visited in each district. The selection of the ABCs took into consideration several aspects:
 - i. on the site mapping and sampling, the selection process took into account the fact that FAO supported activities along several value chains. The evaluation team ensured that the ABCs selected included all value chains supported;
 - ii. ABCs located in remote areas as well as more accessible areas (closer to main cities – market concentrated locations) were included in the sample to enable comparison in terms of performance in varying contexts;
 - iii. the sample included ABCs led by women to compare experiences and challenges with those of ABCs led by men;
 - iv. during the project, the project team decided to focus attention on 50 ABCs out of the existing 193. These ABCs went through a transformative process, which aimed to reinforce their capacities. The sample selection ensured the presence of both transformed and non-transformed ABCs to enable comparison;
 - v. finally, the sample selection took into account the activity level of the ABCs (low, medium or none) based on the assessment carried out in 2013 (D. Alabi and L Gandi).
13. Following the selection of ABCs and taking into account time available, four farmer-based organizations (FBOs) and FFSs were randomly selected for each ABC and visited in each selected district. To ensure a balanced representation of value chains supported, two FBOs/FFS in livestock and two in food crop production were selected.
14. In the sites visited, the team conducted focus group discussions with ABCs, FBOs, FFSs and community animal health workers who had received training. The number of participants ranged from five to ten per group (see table below). Separate focus group discussions were conducted for women and men to ensure ample discussion of gender issues and dynamics.

The discussions centred on overall perceptions regarding project relevance; impacts on livelihoods in terms of access to agricultural farming services and commercialisation of farming products; improved production; capacity development; and increased income and food security.

15. In total, the evaluation conducted 55 focus group discussions. Considering that each focus group was composed of five to ten people, the team met with more than 275 beneficiaries.

Region and district	Chiefdom and community	Focus group discussion ABCs	Focus group discussion FBOs	Focus group discussion FFS
South, Bo	Bo Town Bo/Freetown Jaiama, Koribondo Valunya, Mandu Kakuwa, Fengehun Lugbu, Upper Saama	4	4	2
Main North, Bombali	Sanda Loko, Kamalo Paki Masabong Gbindembu Sella Limba Makeni Town	4	4	2
East, Kailahun	Luawa, Kailahun Yawei, Bendu Jawei, Benduma Peje Bongre	4	4	2
North-West, Kambia	Samu, Bamayangeh Magbema, Mabeseneh Masongbala, Kawula Malboro Brimaya, Kukuna Samu, Bamayangeh	4	4	2
Western Area Rural	Newton Glouster Koya Rural, Kwama village Waterloo, Cambell Town Waterloo, Matindi	4	4	4
North-West Karene	Sella Limba	1	1	1

16. At the end of the data collection phase, a workshop was organised in which the evaluation team presented the preliminary results to FAO and other key stakeholders to review and validate findings, conclusions and recommendations.
17. The draft report was shared with FAO staff involved in the programme – notably the internal reference group – and at a later stage, it was shared with IFAD, SCP/PMU team and MAF for validation.
18. The evaluation process supported the triangulation of information gathered and the validation of the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. This process

specifically involved the collection of information from different sources, the presentation of the preliminary results to main stakeholders, the involvement of the internal reference group, and the circulation of the draft report for comments internally and externally.

19. The evaluation was conducted according to UNEG guidelines (2016). OED guidelines for the assessment of gender mainstreaming (2017) were used to analyse the gender aspects. The FAO capacity and development framework, based on the three dimensions of capacity development (individual, organisational, and enabling environment) was used as a framework for analysing project efforts in this area.

1.5 Risks and Limitations

20. The greatest limitation has been the lack of knowledge management systems at the FAO country office. As a consequence, there has been a lack of data on the activities implemented and hence their results. This was largely due to high staff turnover in both the FAO Country Office and PMU-GAFSP, leading to a loss in institutional memory. Due to their busy schedules, collaboration with the FAO country office staff in Sierra Leone consisted mainly of the exchange of reports and email discussions. The FAO country office staff also attended the presentation of the preliminary results at the end of the mission and shared their inputs. The availability of technical partners and stakeholders at the national and decentralised levels, who were initially involved in the implementation, was also limited. These factors combined resulted in weak ownership of the evaluation process.
21. Other challenges included: i) weather conditions that hindered visits in the targeted districts; ii) inability to get gender-disaggregated data for analysis; iii) limited availability of studies on the impact of the intervention (although specific thematic studies have been undertaken including yield analysis, however, at the time of the evaluation they had not yet been validated); and iv) inability to get benefit and cost analysis of the various interventions.

1.6 Structure of the report

22. Chapter 2 of the report provides an overview of the programme. Chapter 3 summarises the findings of the mission and is organised around the main evaluation questions. In particular, Section 3.1 analyses the relevance of FAO's intervention, Section 3.2 assesses support provided to FFS, FBOs and ABCs, MAF extension services and NAFFSL, Section 3.3 provides a short analysis of the impact of the programme, Section 3.4 discusses sustainability of the results achieved, Section 3.5 covers the efficiency of the implementation approach adopted and management arrangements, and Section 3.6 analyses gender mainstreaming. The report closes with conclusions and recommendations.

2. Background and context of the project

2.1 Context of the project¹

23. Sierra Leone is a Least Developed Country (LDC). It ranked 184 out of 189 countries according to the Human Development Report (UNDP 2017). Its population is estimated at 7.8 million (2019) with an average annual growth rate of 2.1 percent. About two-thirds of the population live in rural areas and about 70 percent live below the poverty line, most in severe poverty. About 60 percent of youth (non-school going 15-year olds to 35-year old adults) are either unemployed or under-employed. In 2016, life expectancy at birth was 51.8 years and adult literacy was 48.4 percent of the adult population, while female literacy rate was 39 percent (World Data Atlas, 2015).
24. In 2002, Sierra Leone emerged from a civil war that lasted almost eleven years, with devastating social and economic consequences. Since the war ended, a substantial evolution in social, economic and political terms has taken place. However, some aspects of post-conflict remain. For instance, large parts of the rural infrastructure, especially feeder roads, have yet to be rehabilitated. Social and community organisations are still weak and the rural economy has yet to catch up.
25. Agriculture accounts for 46.1 percent of GDP (2009). Food insecurity remains important in rural areas with more than 50 percent of the rural households experiencing food insecurity in the month of August. Rice is the main staple crop and heavily dominates the food ratios. Currently, smallholder crop and livestock production in Sierra Leone is mostly operating at subsistence level.
26. Among the constraints farmers face, access to inputs is considered a major hurdle preventing production increase. Improvement in yields is also hampered by limited access to knowledge and technologies resulting from scarce extension services and training. In addition, production volumes are further constrained by the lack of storage facilities, which generates high rates of post-harvest losses. Only five percent of farmers have access to proper storage. Value-addition is low in the absence of modern processing equipment and rural infrastructure constrains farmers' access to market. More broadly, farmers suffer from limited rural services, including financial services, which prevent farmers' investments in modern inputs, as well as rural enterprises development. As a result, agricultural products tend to be of low quality, and also to lack the necessary diversification. Finally, most value chains are still underdeveloped.

2.2 Project background²

27. In 2009, MAF developed the National Sustainable Development Plan 2010–2030 (NSADP) under the umbrella of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) with the broad involvement of all stakeholders. The NSADP sets out ambitious targets: (i) Increase in agricultural sector growth from its current 4 percent to 7.7 percent

¹ The context is based on extracts from the project design document of the SCP-GAFSP, IFAD (2011).

² The section on project background is based on FAO's project document.

per year by 2015 and (ii) increased incomes of farming households by 10 percent and increased household food security by 25 percent.

28. At the core of the NSADP is the SCP. MAF has developed a USD 403 million National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP) for implementing the SCP covering the years 2010–2014 that has six components: (i) Improving smallholder production and commercialisation by setting up 2 750 FBOs and building 650 ABCs nation-wide; (ii) developing small scale irrigation to boost rice production on 18 000 ha of land; (iii) improving access to markets by rehabilitating and maintaining 4 000 km of feeder roads; (iv) providing better access to financial services specifically tailored to rural farming groups or individuals through the creation of 130 new FSAs; (v) providing a social protection safety net to vulnerable households to increase food security and nutrition for 1.5 million people; and (vi) Implementation and support. FAO contributed to the development of the overall SCP.
29. In June 2010, the GAFSP, a multi-donor financing facility, approved a USD 50 million proposal presented by the Government of Sierra Leone. The facility was to support Components 1 (smallholder agriculture commercialization: production intensification, diversification, value addition and marketing); 2 (small scale irrigation development); 4 (access to financial services); and 6 (SCP Planning, Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation) of the SCP.
30. IFAD is the supervising entity for the overall programme. FAO was selected as the technical support entity for Components 1 and 6. In total, FAO received USD 7.6 million for the implementation. The project is operated on the basis of a Unilateral Trust Fund (UTF) arrangement, agreed upon by MAF and FAO, and approved by IFAD.
31. Table 1 below shows the six components of the SCP, the components supported by the GAFSP (light and dark brown) and FAO's contribution (dark brown).

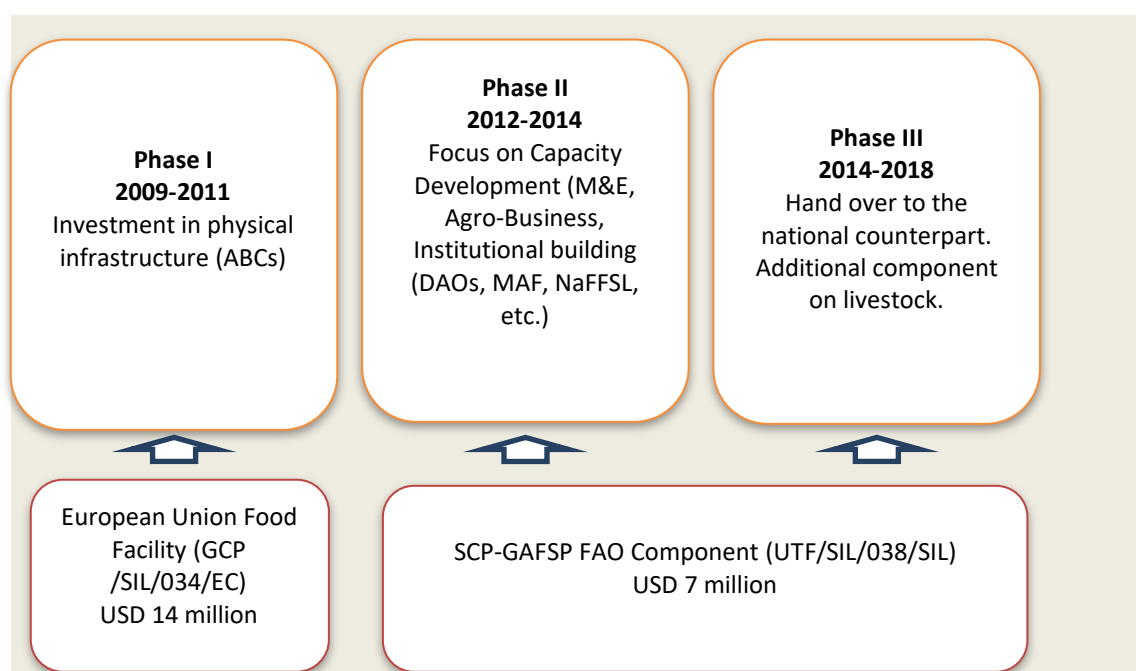
Table 1: Smallholder Commercialization Programme (SCP)

Development Goal	Rural poverty and household food security reduced on a sustainable basis leading to stronger national economy										
SCP Components	Component 1: Smallholder Agriculture and Commercialisation			Component 2: Small scale irrigation development	Component 3: Enhancing Market Access through the Rehabilitation of Priority Feeder Roads	Component 4: Enhancing Smallholder Access to Adapted Rural Financial Services			Component 5: Social Security and Safety nets	Component 6: Programme Strategic Planning, Coordination, Monitoring & Evaluation and Knowledge Sharing	
SCP-GAFSP Outcomes	Smallholders have increased production, intensification, value addition, marketing, and reduced rates of post-harvest losses			Small scale irrigation development raises levels of smallholder rice production and increases foods security, incomes and employment	Access of smallholders and the rural poor and their organisations to rural financial services			Effective strategic, operational planning, efficient coordination and monitoring the SCP is ensures			
SCP-GAFSP Outputs	Intensified production through FFS and FBO development	Improved access to market and inputs	DAO are fully functional and NaFFSL strengthened	Lowland Developed/ rehabilitated	Financial Service Associations developed Community Banks Supported Institutional support in place			Strategic planning, coordination and management	M&E, Information and Knowledge Sharing		
	FAO Contribution								FAO Contribution		
SCP-GAFSP : Light FAO contribution to SCP-GAFSP: Dark											

Source: Table prepared by FAO Office of Evaluation based on information provided in the project document

32. The GAFSP project was formulated for a period of five years with the financing agreement signed in August 2011. The FAO project agreement was signed in December 2011 and the project started in April 2012, with the project team arrival in Sierra Leone. A first amendment of the agreement was signed in 2014 and a second one in June 2017 for 15 months ending in September 2018.
33. This project follows a previous FAO intervention funded by the European Union Food Facility. Indeed, most of the ABCs had been established under the previous Programme. With respect to the GAFSP project, FAO's role was more focused on capacity development activities, less so on the physical aspects.
34. FAO's overall intervention can be divided into three phases. Phase I is the one financed by the European Union Food Facility once the ABCs were established, Phase II is the beginning of the SCP-GAFSP programme once FAO provided the main part of the technical support, and Phase III came after 2014 once there was a hand-over to the SCP/PMU team of some of the activities (such as M&E) and the livestock component was added. The evaluation focused on Phases II and III.

Figure 1: Phases of FAO's support to the agricultural business centres (ABCs) and SCP programme



Source: Evaluation team

35. The programme has been implemented in the 13 rural districts of Bo, Bombali, Bonthe, Kailahun, Kambia, Kenema, Koinadugu, Kono, Moyamba, Port Loko, Pujehun, Tonkolili and Western Rural. The key implementing partner is the MAF, and divisions within the ministry were involved as needed, based on project components.

2.3 Intervention Logic

36. The overall development goal of the SCP/GAFSP was to reduce rural poverty and household food insecurity sustainably. To this end, FAO activities included the following:

- i. *Promoting production intensification* by enhancing technical knowledge of farmers through the FFS approach;
- ii. *Improving commercialization* through access to agro-services and value-chain development. After graduating, farmers were grouped into FBOs and linked to ABCs. The role of the ABCs was to facilitate farmers' access to inputs, processing facilities, and marketing opportunities by linking the farmers with national traders and exporters. The programme supported ABCs by providing equipment and training to members on a number of topics. In addition, the programme promoted linkages with CBs to access financial services;
- iii. *Enhancing long-term technical support provided to farmers* by strengthening FAOs' capacity to provide technical support to farmers and manage an efficient M&E system;
- iv. *Enhancing farmers' representation* by facilitating the institutionalization and strengthening of FBO networks at district and national levels and by supporting the NaFFSL;
- v. *Strengthening the SCP/GAFSP Programme Management Unit (PMU)* through the provision of technical expertise and the set-up of an M&E information and knowledge sharing system.

37. The box below summarizes the outputs of the programme under FAO's responsibility.

Component 1: SCP-GAFSP Outcome: Smallholders have increased production, intensification, value addition, marketing, and reduced rates of post-harvest losses

Output 1.1 – Intensified production through FFS and FBO development.

Output 1.2 – ABCs further developed.

Output 1.3 – MAF Agricultural Services are strengthened.

Component 4: SCP-GAFSP Outcome: Effective strategic, operational planning, efficient coordination and monitoring of the SCP is ensured

Output 4.1 - Strategic planning, coordination and management structures are established.

Output 4.2 - M&E Information and Knowledge Sharing system is developed.

38. Parallel to the FAO intervention, IFAD and MAF provided support under the other components of the SCP including rehabilitation of lowland, feeder roads, and the development of rural finance institutions. The logic of the intervention meant all these components work together to achieve the ultimate goal of reducing rural poverty and food insecurity.
39. The programme focused on the rice value chain, the main food crop in Sierra Leone. Rice production was the main activity for most of the FBOs supported by the project. Other value chains on which the programme worked included tree-crops: mainly palm oil and cashew nut, but also cassava, groundnut and vegetables.
40. In the beginning, the project supported the total number of existing ABCs (193). However, the number was too large to really have an impact and make a difference. The project

decided to scale down support and focus on 52 ABCs, which were later known as the transformed ABCs. This decision was taken to assess the potential of the ABC model, i.e. how the model could work with the right amount and quality of support and training. The aim was to focus on a few ABCs to consolidate the gains for lessons learnt. The selection was done on the basis of an assessment conducted in 2012. Several criteria were used for the selection.¹

41. Training and technical support was provided to both transformed and non-transformed ABCs with a stronger focus on the transformed ABCs. The training modules were delivered on topics including: crop production, nutrition, cropping calendar, business planning/model, land preparation, technology transfer, crop protection, group formation and management, gender and records keeping.
42. While the non-transformed ABCs during this phase did not receive any additional equipment, equipment provided to the transformed ABCs included refurbishment of the ABC, larger milling machines, power tillers (for in-valley swamp rice), tractors and implements (for bolliland rice and other food crops), other value addition machines (such as, cassava graters) and solar panels. In addition, the transformed ABCs received financial support for the payment of the ABC managers. The support was phased and at the time of the evaluation not all the transformed ABCs had received the full package of support.
43. A livestock component was added in 2016 that targeted 25 transformed ABCs. FAO established and trained community animal health worker groups and provided equipment (feed mills for processing food for ruminants and solar refrigerators), start-up kits, drugs and vaccines.

2.4 Management arrangements, financial and human resources

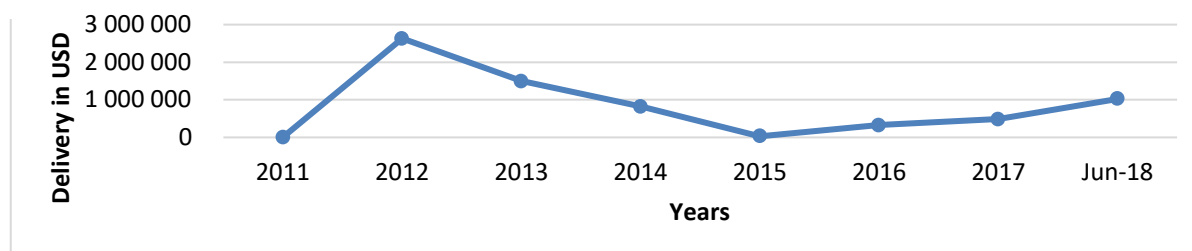
44. A SCP-GAFSP/Programme Management Unit (PMU) was established under MAF. FAO as technical partner provided three experts for one year to support the PMU (rural institution building specialist; agri-business development specialist; and M&E specialist). Short-term consultants were also employed, including project and administrative assistants, three drivers serving all the FAO SCP-GAFSP components, and a data analyst who specifically assisted the M&E expert.
45. Activities under Component 1, for which FAO was responsible, were implemented through letters of agreements signed with extension services and NGOs, notably: ACIDI-VOCA (Koinadugu, Bombali, Port Loko and Tonkolili); CARD (Moyamba, Bonthe and Pujehun); WHH (Kenema and Bo); COOPI (Kambia and Western Area); HELP (Kono and Kailahun) and PADECO (across the country for adult literacy training). The NGOs were service providers involved in capacity building that delivered on various training modules in their operational areas across the districts. In addition, the Njala University was contracted for the

¹ The selection criteria used included: i) activity level: ABCs with medium and low level of activity (although preference was given to the medium ones, not all districts had four ABCs with medium level of activity); ii) business model; iii) existing or potential market linkage based on location of ABC; iv) effective governance and management skills; and v) level of participation and commitment of members.

development of a Climate Smart Agriculture Training manual and MOVE SL and SLIBA for operator training with assistance from WINGIN (the machine supplier).

46. The graph shows that project delivery has declined over time. In 2014, IFAD suspended the project's activities due to some ineligible expenses incurred by the former PMU, which resulted in changes within the PMU. The delay brought disbursement to zero by the end of 2015.

Figure 2: FAO's project delivery



Source: FAO Office of Evaluation (OED)

47. During this time, as a result of the Ebola scourge, project implementation was further delayed. The overall impact of the Ebola crisis on Sierra Leone was estimated at USD 1.9 billion according to the World Bank (2016). The Ebola outbreak coincided with the end of support from FAO's technical team. The FAO activities were re-started again from 2016 after the Government of Sierra Leone met the IFAD suspension conditions with a reduced team. In 2017, as already mentioned, a second amendment was signed and an additional output was added: 'Support for Livestock at the FBO/Community level through the establishment of 25 Livestock ABCs'

3. Evaluation findings

3.1 Question 1 - To what extent was FAO's intervention relevant to national priorities, strategies and needs and to what extent was the project design appropriate for achieving the expected results? (Relevance)

Main findings:

- i. The programme is aligned to the National Sustainable Agriculture Development Plan, which is the binding document for agricultural development, and responds to the decentralization strategies of the Government of Sierra Leone. The intervention addresses the development capacity needs of MAF, ABCs and farmers. It builds on the results of the previous phase (European Union food facility) ensuring continuity of activities.
- ii. The ABC model proposed by FAO as a decentralized structure owned by farmers and providing aggregation and processing facilities as well as joint marketing of products is very relevant to the Sierra Leone context and has been adopted by the Government of Sierra Leone and other development partners as the preferred development model.
- iii. No value chain analysis was undertaken in the selection of rice as the crop to be supported. This analysis would have identified some of the labour requirements and constraints in the context of Sierra Leone and would have analysed the opportunity cost of labour, with an important impact on the design of the interventions.
- iv. ABCs and project activities have reached very remote areas of Sierra Leone. While the programme defined specific criteria for the location of the ABCs, the location was in some cases influenced by political considerations and therefore not always ideal for aggregation and marketing considerations.
- v. Although the design was relevant, there was a mismatch in the provision of equipment provided and the crops produced by the FBOs and ABCs.
- vi. The introduction of the GALS approach was a useful innovation for increasing inclusiveness.

3.1.1 Alignment with national strategies and the needs of MAF, ABCs and farmers

48. The main document for agricultural development in Sierra Leone is the National Sustainable Agriculture Development Plan (NSADP) for 2010–2030, which was designed under the umbrella of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). FAO as a technical partner to MAF on agricultural policy issues provided technical and financial support to the development of the NSADP through its technical cooperation programme (TCP). FAO played an important role in shaping the SCP discourse by introducing the ABC model and the FFS approach to the Government of Sierra Leone.
49. The SCP-GAFSP programme is well aligned to the NSADP; indeed, the smallholder commercialisation programme is a core part of it. The SCP-GAFSP was developed in a consultative manner through a series of workshops and bilateral discussions with the participation of the Government of Sierra Leone and the development partners. The

process ensured the alignment of the programme with national agricultural priorities and objectives and with the needs of main actors involved in the agricultural sector (MAF, farmers etc.).

50. Decentralisation is well established in Sierra Leone. The district and local government play an important role in defining priorities for local development. The SCP-GAFSP has taken decentralisation into account and is working well within the devolved structures. FAO's intervention, in particular, by developing the capacity of the FBOs and ABCs, contributes to local economic development, employment creation, and generation of revenues at the district level. During the implementation, FAO worked directly with the Decentralised Agricultural Offices and local actors. It has been notably present at the decentralised level conducting several missions – which was much appreciated by partners.
51. It is important to note that there was no value chain analysis on the selection of rice for the intervention. As a result, the implementation faced challenges such as labour constraints in the adoption of the technologies. However, all the various actors interviewed during the evaluation emphasized the relevance of the intervention in responding to their needs, in particular:
 - i. MAF: FAO technical support to MAF was most welcome. It was indicated that FAO support helped MAF to address several capacity challenges. These included lack of technical expertise, weak management skills, and insufficient training opportunities. The international staff made available by FAO at the beginning of the programme contributed to bridging the shortage of expertise. MAF expressed that they still rely heavily on FAO technical support given its vast experience in agricultural policy issues.
 - ii. ABCs: The ABCs physical structures were set up by FAO under a previous European Union funded project. The ABC model was included in the new GAFSP in order to strengthen their capacities. GAFSP has built on the gains of the previous phase and it was expected that the large investment in capacity development under this current phase would potentially provide the ABCs with sustainability.
 - iii. Farmers: The project aimed to address the farmers' knowledge gaps in the improvement of production and processing techniques through the FFS and the limited access to markets by linking them to the ABCs. In addition, it also focused on strengthening the extension services provided by MAF to the farmers.
52. Despite challenges in the implementation of the models due to capacity issues in the district and at the farmer levels, almost all interviewees (including farmers, development partners and government) did not see any better alternative to the proposed FAO model of delivering extension services to farmers using FFS, organising farmers in FBOs, and linking them to the ABCs. It is a model well adapted to the rice value-chain in which the Government is investing. Other partners (including NGOs and development agencies) are adopting it. For instance, JICA is building on this model introducing some innovations. JICA has noted the challenges faced in the FAO FFS implementation and is incorporating some of the farmer's suggestions (such as supporting the farmers' preference to plant in their traditional way and not in rows as taught in the FFS).
53. Throughout its lifespan, the project incorporated additional activities which contributed to increasing its relevance, in particular:

- i. The Gender Action and Learning System (GALS), introduced when a gender expert joined the PMU and was part of the training delivered by FAO (See Section 3.7 on gender).
 - ii. The inclusion of youth entrepreneurs in the in-valley swamp. Indeed, farmers working in rice production are mainly women and some of the equipment – power tillers for example – is not women-friendly in terms of handling and technical expertise required to operate them. The inclusion of youth who are able to use the equipment can contribute to increased productivity and save women’s time. At the same time there is a need to consider availability of financing opportunities to pay for these services. It is also an opportunity for youth to earn an income.
 - iii. More recently, the addition of the livestock component can be considered an innovation given that it contributes to diversification of agricultural activities of the FBOs/ABCs. Indeed, most of the FBOs supported by the project are primarily or exclusively producing rice. Diversifying sources of income could contribute to increasing farmer resilience.
 - iv. The distribution of vegetable seeds is another source of diversification that also contributes to increased availability of vegetables in rural areas, which in many districts is very limited.
54. Overall, the GAFSP is well designed with the different components reinforcing one another. However, different actors were in charge of different components, which has generated some challenges during the implementation. The components have not been implemented in a coordinated manner. For instance, the development of the capacities of the ABCs should go hand in hand with the intensification of rice production. However, this depends on the rehabilitation of lowland (Component 2 of the SCP) and FBOs capacity to access financial resources to afford labour-saving equipment (Component 4 of the SCP). The programme requires that all the components work together without delays for maximum benefits to achieve the intended impact. Partners indicated that there was lack of coordination among the different actors involved reducing synergies among the different components. In addition, high staff turnover in GAFSP was mentioned as another challenge. Most of the staff of the GAFSP PMU is relatively new and as a result there is lack of institutional memory about the implementation of activities.

3.1.2 Geographical and individual targeting

55. Individual targeting was based on a self-selecting process. Farmers volunteered to participate in the FFS. The requirement was access to land and willingness to participate in the training programme. The project was able to reach vulnerable farmers especially with food crops such as rice and vegetable production. This is due to the fact that the project worked in extremely remote areas. Meanwhile in terms of tree crop production, including cashew nuts and palm oil, the beneficiaries were better-off farmers who are landowners.
56. It was confirmed through interviews with ABC leaders, clients and discussions with project staff that the ABCs used a combination of strategies to reach a diverse group of potential beneficiaries. This included: (i) using media and community leaders at community level to get interested people to register with the ABCs; (ii) identifying existing FBOs through local farmer associations; and, (iii) visiting specific communities and involving them in the process of identifying potential entrepreneurs, or through networking with ABC founding members. While these consultations resulted in a wider coverage area of SCP-GAFSP

intervention, facilitating the inclusion of marginalized communities and households, some of the ABCs faced difficulties due to political interference from those with vested interests in the project. The DAOs and the PMU are addressing these governance issues through capacity building and by promoting elections of board members.

57. The project design prescribed some criteria with regards to the location of the ABCs (such as production hubs, easy accessibility by most or all the FBOs, and periodic market proximity). The evaluation team found that the location of some ABCs was motivated by other reasons including political considerations. This has led to some FBOs/FFS having limited access to the ABCs. For instance, Mulegloma ABC (in Jawei Chiefdom) is more than 30 km from FBOs in Nyeyama Town (within the same chiefdom). Also, in Bo district, several FBOs in Bagbeh chiefdom prefer to do business with Holima ABC located in Kakua Chiefdom due to proximity.

3.2 Question 2 - To what extent did the project contribute to increase production, intensification, value addition, and marketing and reduce rates of post-harvest losses (Outcome 1)? (Effectiveness)

58. The outcome of the first component of the SCP supported by FAO was "Smallholders have increased production, intensification, value addition, and marketing and reduced rates of post-harvest losses". The achievement of this outcome has been analysed in the following sections through its three main components: i) Intensified production through FFS and FBO development; ii) ABCs further developed; and iii) MAF Agricultural Services strengthened. A discussion on the overall achievement of the outcome is discussed in the section on impact (3.4).
59. It is important to note that the SCP GAFSP implementation faced some major disruptions. The first was in 2014-2015 due to the outbreak of the Ebola scourge and second was the suspension of the activities by IFAD. This period also coincided with the end of the support of the FAO technical team. This brought the disbursement for the programme activities to zero in 2015. The programme restarted again in 2016 after the issues raised by IFAD were addressed by the Government of Sierra Leone.

3.2.1 Farmer field schools and FBOs

Main Findings:

- i. The FFSs were successful in transferring knowledge on rice production techniques to farmers. However, the adoption of the technologies transferred is still low due to labour intensive requirements in a labour scarce environment hence the need for labour-saving technologies.
- ii. The FFS approach has been adopted and is now being used as the extension model all across Sierra Leone.
- iii. There was no value chain analysis undertaken to identify the issues surrounding the rice value chain. A value chain analysis, conducted at the start, would have identified the labour constraints along the rice value chain, thus enabling more targeted support to the ABCs and FBOs.

60. The FFS mainly focused on transfer of technologies related to rice intensification, rice being the main staple crop in Sierra Leone. On the basis of this consideration, the evaluation met principally with FBOs that were producing rice and assessed how well (or not) farmers have adopted the new technologies transferred to them by MAF and FAO.

61. The FFS promoted the use of the System of Rice Intensification methodology. According to Cornell University, Centre for Agriculture and Life Sciences:

The System of Rice Intensification (SRI) is not a fixed technology, but a set of principles and ideas that translate into a combination of agro-economic practices. These practices might differ depending on agro-ecological and cropping system conditions, and can have widespread benefits. This methodology can reduce water requirements, increase land productivity, and promote less reliance on artificial fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and other agro-chemicals, all while buffering against the effects of climate change and reducing greenhouse gases.

62. The evaluation team realized that farmers have acquired a good knowledge of the rice farming techniques. They can elaborate on the various stages involved in rice cultivation. For example, they can perfectly explain the methods of nursing and planting rice, as well as the application of fertilizer for increased productivity. However, the adoption of the new practices transferred through the FFS in their individual farms was noted to be slow. The key reason advanced by the farmers for this lack of adoption was that the technique is time consuming (special reference was made to the spacing measurement and row planting). As a result, it is labour intensive, which costs money that they don't have, as well illustrated by farmers in focus group discussion: "We have actually received training from FAO and we are gradually practicing it. But because it is too slow, and you know farmers have several other activities to do, we are currently practicing it on some portion of the land and then continuing with the old method which is a lot faster." (FFS beneficiaries' Kailahun and Western Rural). Therefore, if the linkage with financing had been made it would have provided the funds needed to hire the labour for rice intensification and expansion.

63. On the contrary, some extension officers reported that quite a few farmers (who have personal access to finance) have completely adopted the row planting. However, some of them still have not fully adopted the one seedling per hill planting. They still hold that if they plant two seedlings per hill, in the event that one seedling dies, the other will continue to grow.

64. Another key technology that has been adopted by almost all the farmers is the method of determining the viability of seeds. The farmers informed the evaluation team that before the trainings, they were not testing the seeds for viability, which they admitted was one of the reasons for poor yields. All those interviewed were able to clearly explain two methods of testing seeds for viability. During discussion in focus groups, farmers explained: "We were taught two methods of seeds testing that we are now practicing: i) soak the seeds in water. All those that float, are removed because they cannot germinate and ii) take a counted sample of the seeds usually ten, and nurse them. If seven of them germinate, then the seeds are viable. But if less than that germinate, we consider the seeds not viable" (Most FBOs clients across the districts).

65. It is important to note that the techniques transferred through the FFS did not work in all areas. This was the case, for example, in Matimpeh ABC, in Kambia district, where rice is

planted on mangrove swamps. Apparently, the mangrove areas have a unique ecosystem and the local community have mastered the art of growing rice in these areas. The ABC did an FFS experiment using the FAO technology and their own. The farmer's own variety and methodology produced better results. FAO will need to document these experiments and learn from the local farmers to adapt the agricultural practices promoted by the FFS to mangrove areas. In Mafabo in Western Rural the farmers reported that their own vegetable seed was performing much better than the certified seed provided by MAF. MAF and FAO will need to better understand these cases in order to help find solutions for the farmers.

66. The technologies transferred through the FFS for increasing production and productivity require specific equipment (such as tractors and power tillers) especially in the in-valley swamps and boliland cultivation. The equipment is not locally available in the market and too expensive for individual farmers to own and that which was distributed to the ABCs under SCP had broken down, with spare parts not readily available. If the Government of Sierra Leone would like to promote the use of tractor and power tillers, they will need to ensure they are available for rent in rural areas through tractor hiring services by setting up mechanization stations countrywide and equipping them, or alternatively by encouraging the private sector to invest in tractor hiring services (a more sustainable option). The aim is to reduce the price of hiring and make it affordable for the rural communities to use them. Alternatively, animal traction should be promoted as an intermediary solution, which is cheaper and more affordable for rural communities. The willingness to pay for these services was clear from the focus group discussion but the availability of affordable financial services is another challenge. This would have been addressed with better linkages with other components, such as the support and development of the community banks and FSAs.
67. Upon graduation from the FFS training, farmers were assisted by the programme to form FBOs and to legally register them. Once the FBOs have been formed, the programme also facilitated their linkage to the ABC present in the same area. FAO provided the capacity building for the FBOs, for example, group dynamics and marketing and business development through their various ABCs.
68. The Mission met with several FBOs supported by the programme. A good number of the FBOs have been allocated group land in varying acreages by the local government. As one of the main constraints, FBOs indicated limited access to quality seeds and fertilizers. Although most of the FBOs know they can get inputs from the MAF, they described receiving seeds very late in the rainy season, which affects cropping intensity. In addition, FAO supported the Seed Enterprise Enhancement Development (SEED) project that was addressing rice seed quality and markets access, however, synergies between the SEED project and the SCP-GAFSP have not been established.
69. Most of the FBOs visited are duly registered and manage group farms both in the uplands and in the in-valley swamps (IVS). The upland group land is used by the FBOs to grow upland rice, groundnuts and cassava. The IVS is used in the production of rice using (SRI) and in vegetable growing. Most of the IVSs visited are not well planned in terms of drainage of water. This is because most of the FBOs lack power tillers that are used in the IVS.
70. Most FBOs prefer upland cultivation where they produce several crops. The FBO members explained that they only cultivate the swamps after completing the upland. The FBOs indicated that land preparation in the IVS is labour-intensive and labour scarcity further

compounds it. The farmers should be sensitised using various media (radio, print, mobile telephones, etc.) on the benefits of cultivating in the IVSs.

71. Meeting with key informants revealed that the FFS approach has been adopted as a national extension approach and several partners (such as JICA, COOPI, Brac and other local NGOs) besides MAF are applying it in their agricultural interventions. FAO contributed to create national capacity on the FFS approach through the training of master trainers that will be able to continue trainings on FFS after the end of the programme (See Section 3.2.3) and the contribution to the development of a manual on FFS.

3.2.2 Agricultural business centres (ABCs) further developed

Main findings:

- i. Most of the ABCs visited did not have functional production and processing equipment. As such, they have limited capacity to provide agro-services to their member FBOs. Rice milling was the only service generally done by all ABCs. Other services (for example, input supply, marketing, financing, etc.) are still weak or non-existent, even in some of the transformed ABCs.
- ii. Farmers are not accessing financial services from the FSAs or community banks as was envisaged. This is also due to the lack of agricultural financial products tailored to farmers' needs.
- iii. ABCs have a governance structure in place. However, the election process for the leadership positions seems to be weak. In some cases, there is "elite capture" or "entrepreneurial capture" of boards.

72. The establishment and strengthening of the ABCs was a highly relevant approach. The ABCs are the main delivery channels for business development services in the districts. In all the districts visited there appears to be no other institution providing these services, with the exception of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in a few districts, which however are only located in the regional capitals. Most of the ABCs visited by the mission (12 out of 16 including both non-transformed and transformed ones) were still operational, though to different extents, with only a minority inactive.

3.2.2.1 Provision of agro-services by the ABCs

73. Providing access to agro-services to farmers was one of the key objectives of the SCP. The ABCs were to be strengthened by FAO to provide various forms of agro-services to FBOs and FFS, these included: i) provision of labour-saving equipment for both production and processing; ii) sharing market information, making it available to farmers, and linking farmers with profitable markets, iii) provision of quality inputs for cultivation; and iv) access to financial services. The following section presents the findings in relation to these different services.

Labour-saving equipment for production and processing

74. In the transformed ABCs visited, the new equipment was functioning. At the time of the mission, the PMU had already purchased and shared the additional support to the first batch of two ABC's per district and the mission was informed that the remainder were

expected to receive them shortly. The mission was able to see that the ABCs were engaging in the preparation of larger tracks of land.

75. For the non-transformed ones, in many cases the equipment provided was no longer functioning and most of them were finding some difficulties to repair or replace it. The equipment was procured in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, since it is not available in rural areas. Once broken, it was difficult to find replacement parts outside the capital and there were no after sales services. In addition, often the ABCs did not know where to find the replacement parts since the equipment was procured directly by the project. The project did not establish a revolving fund for maintenance and the ABCs in many cases did not generate enough profit to cover these costs.
76. The programme supplied ABC's with value addition equipment (such as cassava graters, rice millers, and destoners), but a needs assessment was not conducted. Some ABCs visited received the wrong items. For example, MAFABO received a cassava grating machine even though they do not produce cassava, and many did not receive some of the equipment: Sellar, a women's development association ABC in Kerene district, requested a cassava grater but did not receive it. The Magbema ABC rents destoners and yet there is a destoner in Matimpeh lying idle. The ABCs noted that even after several requests to the MAF there have been no attempts to carry out stocktaking or to address these anomalies.
77. The project initially trained some machine operators who were hired by a company right after the training. There were no other operators trained to replace them and as a result some of the ABCs were unable to operate some of the machines provided. For example, the ABCs like Matimpeh in Kambia received a destoner that was still in its original packaging, as they did not know how to operate it. In addition, the capacity building of ABCs on the use of machines provided was not well coordinated with the equipment supplied, and the after sales service support was not provided to the ABCs.
78. As mentioned, several ABCs visited did not make sufficient profit to repair or replace the equipment provided. This can be explained by a limited production of rice by ABCs members that does not allow for the utilisation of the equipment to its full capacity. While the project focused on intensification of rice production through the FFS, increasing production does not depend only on this component. The rehabilitation of infrastructures such as roads and IVSs and the availability of quality seeds and equipment in rural areas are other factors, not under FAO's control, that should be ensured in order to have an impact.
79. To get produce from the IVS to the ABC for storage is difficult due to poor roads. At the ABC the storage of the produce was not done properly (in some cases the produce was kept directly on the floor). The storage rooms were not treated correctly and prone to attack by weevils. As such, the farmers were experiencing high post-harvest losses.

Market information sharing and linking farmers to profitable markets

80. Most of the capacity support thus far has gone to the ABCs as the focal point for the FBO members mainly on governance, increased productivity and processing, whereas the emphasis on market linkage has been limited. The mission noted selective proactivity by some of the MAF DAO offices in terms of linking farmers to markets. For example, in the

district of Kambia the DAO actively created opportunities for farmers, while no similar experiences were observed in the other districts.

81. In Kambia, DAO assisted in linking the ABCs to the WFP initiative Purchase for Progress that buys produce from smallholder farmers for the WFP school feeding programme. The positive aspect is that ABCs can agree on the price ahead of time and so better plan how much they can spend on production (inputs, processing etc.). Another option the ABCs have is to sell to the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Company.¹ In addition, the proximity of the district along the border gives additional opportunities for marketing the rice produced. According to discussions held during the mission, if the ABCs find better prices on the market, they tend to side sell even if they have committed with a formal contract. If this practice continues unabated, it could lead to loss of confidence by the private sector in providing forward contracts with the farmers.
82. For the other districts, the mission did not observe difficulties faced by farmers in selling the rice produced. Indeed, there is a local market for rice as it is the main crop consumed. However, efforts should be made to guarantee better prices to producers and expand market opportunities in view of an increased quantity due to production intensification.
83. Another problem noted from discussion with the farmers was the time lag between delivery of farm products to the buyers and payment (in the case of private buyers and the WFP). Farmers face financial pressure and timely payment is important. The mission noted because of the delays, farmers are compelled to side sell outside the contracts signed by FBOs to meet their immediate financial needs. There is need to incorporate some partial payment to farmers immediately after they deliver their produce. A financial product such as invoice discounting could be developed by financial institutions to enable farmers to get paid immediately upon delivery of produce. In most cases, the farmer's side sold their produce in two instances: i) when prevailing prices were higher than that in the contract and ii) when the private buyers delayed their payments.
84. The mission noted that most of the ABCs are still dependent on MAF to manage their access to markets. Most of the ABCs that have entered into marketing contracts have limited capacity to negotiate them, which forces FAO/MAF to play more active brokering role. Through capacity building it is possible for the ABCs to be more proactive in undertaking contractual arrangements to reduce this dependency. Some ABCs in Kambia district are already doing it alone and they should be encouraged to continue. Capacity development activities should focus more on marketing for empowering FBOs to identify market opportunities and negotiate contracts on their own.
85. In many of the ABCs visited, farmers were working as groups; this was true in all the transformed ABCs visited but also in a few of the non-transformed ones (for example in Kambia district). The group farm approach provided the critical mass of produce for the FBOs. As a result, the ABCs were able to estimate and were assured of a certain amount of

¹ The contract with the WFP established some requirements for the quality of the rice (the rice must go through some value addition, for instance, with the use of destoners), while the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Company had lower requirements in terms of quality. The ABCs examine the cost of improving the quality of rice and the market price for low quality rice, and they decide on this basis.

produce unlike from individual farms. In some cases, the FBOs used group farms to diversify into other food crops such as cassava and groundnuts. In addition, the FBOs group farms ensured there was production of rice both upland and in the IVSs all year. Thanks to this, the ABC could do more value addition, enabling the machines to operate at full capacity. Some of the transformed ABCs were also involved in tree crops, which provided another variation of marketable surplus to the ABCs. This crop diversification and commercialization is certain to increase income to farmers as well as enable the ABCs to become operationally sustainable.

86. The ABCs indicated that more produce was being produced and processed. The aggregation of a sizable amount of produce at the ABCs is creating interest among larger buyers such as SLMMP and WFP. The large buyers are operating with some level of certainty and are able to maximize the economies of scale both in transportation and purchase of produce from the ABCs. As a result of the volumes, the ABCs are able to negotiate better prices for the farmers.

Provision of quality inputs for cultivation

87. The project distributed seeds and fertilizer and, in some ABCs, there was still some stock of fertilizer ready to be used in this planting season. The mission noted that the use of one-size-fits-all has not worked well. Indeed, some ABCs (like MAFABO in Western and Laminaya in Kambia) complained that the seed and fertilizer provided was not adapted to their needs.
88. ABCs were supposed to be linked with agro-dealers to further enhance access to quality inputs and services. However, the evaluation found that no ABC (transformed or non-transformed) had been linked with any agro-dealer. Slow development of the agro-dealer network implemented under one component is causing problems with the implementation of other components. In addition, free distributions of seeds by MAF and other development partners discourage the private sector from investing in the rural areas. The lack of a private sector agro-dealer network has left farmers with no alternatives for purchasing inputs. This is exacerbated by lack of access to financing by the farmers, FBOs and ABCs.
89. The availability of good quality inputs (certified seeds and appropriate fertilizer) in rural areas of Sierra Leone is limited and ABCs are still relying on FAO and MAF for the provision of seed and fertilizer. Limited provision from MAF/FAO is not enough to serve the farmers effectively. Some of the FBOs visited also indicated that their own seed performed better than what they received. Lack of quality inputs is a major limitation to increasing production. The Government of Sierra Leone needs to partner with the private sector to invest in the sourcing and procurement of quality seed. In the long term, it will be necessary to invest in the development of a seed certification system.

Linking farmers to financial services

90. Another key objective of the SCP-GAFSP was to link farmers with rural financial institutions (FSAs and community banks) to enhance their access to steady agricultural loans. The evaluation found that FAO supported various trainings for ABC boards and management to strengthen them to be able to negotiate loan agreements for themselves and their allied FBOs, with the supervision/support of the MAF. However, the evaluation found that only

very few ABCs and FBOs (only transformed ABCs) were noted to have negotiated and secured loans from the financial institutions with support from the Programme. The programme is proactively linking the transformed ABCs to link to the CBs and FSA. The ABCs and FBOs complained that the CBs and FSAs do not have tailored financial products for them. There is a need to support agricultural product development for the CBs and FSAs.

91. The main reasons advanced by the ABCs and FBOs were:
- i. Farmers lack the collateral required by the financial institutions (mostly land documents or house plans). Indeed, participants in focus group discussions confirmed this: "Most of us here are living in family houses, built by our fathers or grandfathers. How can we give out the documents as collateral? (focus group participants in Holima ABC).
 - ii. Financial institutions are more inclined to loan to private businesses (SMEs, motorbike riders, etc.). The community banks prefer to lend to businesses for which they have ready products and have demonstrated capacity to repay the loans given the high economic turnover of the activities. The farmers indicated to the mission that the FSA and Community Banks do not have the right agricultural products to finance farmers. In addition, the farmers do not keep records to demonstrate their cash flows. The mission noted that there are concerted efforts from PMU based on recommendations from the IFAD missions to link the community banks and FSAs with the transformed ABCs. The variety of activities (mix of food crops (rice) and tree crops (oil palm and cashew nuts)) is certainly going to provide more bankable opportunities.
 - iii. The financial institutions themselves did not design financial products that suit the agriculture calendar. It should be assessed if this is deliberately done to scare away farmers or if it is a capacity problem on the part of the financial institutions.
92. Transformed ABCs benefited from training on farming as a business during which they became familiar with the business planning process. They were then supported to develop business plans to be used to get funding from community banks. The transformed ABC visited have developed bankable business plans which are ready to be presented or already presented to the community banks. Not one transformed ABC encountered during the mission has yet received a loan. It is expected that this link will enable the ABCs to access the much-needed financing.
93. Further investigations are needed to understand well why the uptake of loans is low among farmers. At the moment, ABCs access to financial services mainly revolve around two types of services: i) contributory credit and loan arrangements known as "Osusu" among members, and ii) the village savings and loan association. These types of services are ways in which the farmers organise themselves spontaneously. Even if on a small scale and in a simple way, farmers participating in these types of arrangements are already familiar with basic concepts of financial literacy. The programme can build on this existing knowledge which could, in turn, facilitate the uptake of more advanced financial services.

3.2.2.2 Governance and management of the ABCs

94. Although there have been efforts to strengthen the governance of the ABCs, some challenges remain. Problems stem from the original implementation of the programme.

The locations and leadership selection of the ABCs were in some cases politically driven. In addition, some ABCs exhibited “elite capture”² or “entrepreneurial persons capture” or personalization of the ABCs.

95. The presence of elites in ABC boards has both negative and positive aspects. Indeed, often these strong personalities have broad networks and are dynamic leaders. These qualities have improved the performance of the ABCs. Indeed, young and dynamic members can address the district authorities and development partners to look for opportunities to receive support for their communities. The negative side is the possible hijacking of development agenda by the elite normally called “elite capture”. There is always a challenge, and possibly trade-offs, between economic and social objectives, in terms of how farmer groups are organized. On the one hand, an organizational format based on one farmer, one vote in day to day decision making (as one extreme) may lead to strong social capital and high levels of inclusion. On the other hand, it may have a negative impact on overall economic performance of the group (for example, decision making that is too slow to interact effectively with markets). There is therefore always a need to evaluate this trade-off to ensure it is a win-win in terms of the overall developmental effort.
96. Rotation in the governance structure of ABCs is limited. In almost all the districts visited, elections took place for the board members of the ABCs. However, even where there have been elections, in many cases members of the board remained the same. The main reason for the non-rotation is that there are few qualified people in the rural areas to provide leadership options. There is a need to promote rotation within the boards but in order to do so, it is necessary to reinforce the capacity of ABC members. The mission found it difficult to separate the chairpersons from the ABCs, they tended to project the ABCs as their own private businesses. There is a need to broaden the leadership of the ABCs and hold regular elections to ensure the membership remains content with its leadership.
97. As a suggestion to FAO and MAF, it would be interesting to conduct a study on ABC governance and ownership structure (type of leadership, power relations, how resources are allocated) and the impact on ABC performance. The mission was not able to establish this given the time limitation.
98. Strengthening the FBOs, which form the membership of the ABCs, is key to better governance. Indeed, strong FBOs will demand accountability and they will redirect the priority of ABCs to serve the FBOs. The mission noted that some of the ABCs visited had only one or two FBO members. This was the case especially for non-transformed ABCs.³ Having few members does not give ABCs the diversity required to ensure good governance. The more FBOs are added the better the possibility of improved leadership for the ABCs with options for rotation. There are other FBOs in the areas served by the ABCs that could be supported, but there is not enough sensitisation to make people understand what an

² With elite capture it is intended the presence of elites in the ABC board, that is the highest management organ. The members of the board define the strategic direction for the ABC, check the performance of the manager, and may also carry out resource mobilization and use their experience and contacts to link the ABCs to a larger market.

³ This is because initially when the ABCs had been established they had only one or two FBOs. Additional FBOs were added under the SCP-GASP programme as more FFS were trained and linked to the ABCs and as explained under the SCP-GASP FAO, mainly focused on the transformed ones.

economy of scale can provide if they work together. It would be useful to indicate what the critical number of FBOs is that would make the governance structure of an ABC strong.

99. Most of the non-transformed ABCs visited had volunteer managers. Only the transformed ABC management is paid by the project. Voluntary service does not augur well with the idea of driving commercialization of the ABCs. A volunteer will report to work only when he or she is free. Rather, the ABC needs to recruit professional managers who can dedicate their time to the management of the ABCs and grow them. Thus, in order to be sustainable, an ABC needs sufficient income to pay for a manager.
100. The case study below is an example of a well-managed and resourced transformed ABC visited by the mission. It provides a clear demonstration of the ingredients necessary for a successful ABC. The chairman is youthful, highly enterprising and resourceful in connecting the community with initiatives available from the DAOs and partners.

Case Study - SAPA agricultural business centre

Gbendembu Chiefdom in Bombali District

SAPA ABC is one of the transformed ABCs in Bombali district. Registered in January 2010, it is a farmer institution with a vision to become a business centre of excellence. The ABC is engaged in commercial rice, groundnut and cassava production, and group marketing. It also offers agricultural services to its farmers. The respective FBOs are registered entities with a membership of 30 farmers. The ABC consists of four FBOs. The FBOs use the ABCs aggregation and agro-processing services for a fee. The ABC also provides services to non-member farmers for a higher fee than for members.

ABC's dynamic chairman, who is also the area counsellor, has managed to attract support from FAO, MAF, and COOPI NGO. They have acquired various machinery (such as tractors and implements) for expanding their boliland, power tillers to expand IVS, as well agro-processing equipment for rice and cassava. With their current machinery, the commercial farming approach is now possible for these ABCs. This will involve hiring a tractor/power tiller (initially for ploughing and cultivating rice on boliland); processing and handling; input distribution services; and transporting farmers' produce to the market. In addition, the FBOs have benefitted from the livestock support provided by the programme. The ABC has developed a bankable business plan that was submitted to the community bank. New support, such as for the tractor and power tillers, received by the FBOs and the ABC, is expected to be repaid through the FSAs and Community Banks.

The ABC is a good example of how a sustainable ABC should be structured. The chairman embodies youthful leadership and good governance. They have all the necessary equipment to increase production and intensification both in the boliland and IVS. The ABC is able to provide agro-processing services to its member FBOs and some of the FBOs, like the one involved in cashew nuts, will be establishing its own processing plant. COOPI NGO has provided them with solar panels, which they use to provide charging services to the community.

3.2.2.3 Livestock component

101. FAO identified a total of 25 transformed ABCs to benefit from the livestock component. As already discussed, adding the livestock component was a relevant step contributing to the diversification of the ABCs activities. However, it is still too early to assess the result of this component.
102. Among the activities conducted on the animal healthcare support, youth were trained across the districts, including women, as Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) to

run the vet input shops/clinics. However, at the time of data collection, medical kits and refrigerators (to store the vaccines) for the veterinary clinics had only been supplied to Bo district. Nevertheless, all the kits had been procured, and awaited distribution to the other districts.

103. A first set of funds for livestock were disbursed to the targeted ABCs. The ABCs used the funds provided to purchase the livestock at the local level and to construct goat pens using local materials. The local purchases were made to reduce the incidence of ruminant diseases. The mission saw that the structures had the same design even though FBOs used different available materials to construct them. The clinics were renovated and located within the ABCs.
104. The purchasing and distribution of the animals by ABCs was not well organised with the district veterinary officer. Although the CAHWs explained the process of coordinating the purchase of goats and the implementation of a quarantine period, this was not done. In Tawupane ABC in Kambia for example the purchases were made by the ABCs without the involvement of the District Livestock officer, and all 21 livestock died.
105. The programme introduced the concept of passing on of the goat kids to the FBOs that did not benefit from the first group. The idea is to ensure the continuous replication of support. The proceeds to the FBOs that have benefited earlier from the project will continue to benefit other FBOs as the mechanism is rolled out. If it is managed well, this will ensure sustainability and continuity of the support.

3.2.2.4 Strengthening ABCs soft skills

106. FAO used several NGOs as service providers to deliver trainings to all ABCs (both non-transformed and transformed). The training included crop production, cropping calendar, land preparation, technology transfer (including the adoption of modern agricultural practices), crop protection, nutrition, business planning/model, group formation and management, and governance (including leadership and conducting and managing meetings), gender mainstreaming, and records keeping. Additional trainings were also provided to the ABCs targeted under the livestock component. The trainings included animal feed production and management, cool-chain management and disease surveillance, and management of livestock component at ABC level. The FFS and FBOs involved in the tree crops activities that were later introduced by the project were also trained on the management of tree crops.
107. FAO contributed to the development of the materials being used in the various trainings, providing support for the continued refinement of the training modules to incorporate relevant topics and to address gaps.
108. As already discussed, the training provided through the FFS was successful. For the other trainings, the mission did not have the time nor the means to assess the uptake of knowledge. Overall, the ABCs and FBOs appreciated the training provided, as illustrated by this comment: "Before the FAO training we were not keeping written documents about our operations. However, after the trainings, we now have improved records keeping. As you can see, all our activities: meetings, financial transactions, correspondence etc. are all documented. This has brought a lot of transparency in our operations and hence motivated members to even pay their monthly contributions". It was interesting to note that all those

interviewed knew about the FFS but there was no mention of the farmer business schools (FBS). This might be explained by the limited time that was spent in the development of the FBS concept when formulating business plans.

3.2.3 MAF agricultural services are strengthened and farmers representation is increased

Main findings:

- i. The capacity development of extension agents on the FFS by FAO has been successful, but extension staff still have low capacities because of high turnover and inadequate staffing. There is need to explore private extension service development to complement MAF efforts.
- ii. The programme did not provide sufficient support to increase farmer representation through the establishment of networks at district and national level.

- 109. The objective of this sub-component was to establish/create long term and sustainable support to the farmers and their FBOs by strengthening: (i) the MAF extension services at district level and (ii) commodity-focused FBO networks at district and national levels.
- 110. Under this sub-component, the nine MAF DAOs were rehabilitated and provided with office equipment, furniture, motor vehicles and motorbikes. The support has enabled the DAOs and staff to reach and supervise their extension staff and ensure that more farmers receive extension services. In addition, various professional officers received substantial professional trainings in their various areas of expertise. In particular, the extension officers have been trained on FFS and group dynamics. The training delivery mechanism entailed training of master trainers who in turn pass on the training to extension agents who have direct contact with the farming community. This approach proved to be cost effective and to enhance the transfer of knowledge and skills in a practical way.
- 111. Extension services were mainly involved in the FFS and in supporting FBOs to register as legal entities, define their governance structure, choose the value chain, and link them to the ABCs. In some districts, they have also been active in creating market opportunities for the ABCs. Capacity development activities targeting ABCs (such as training on business planning and governance) were instead delivered mainly by NGOs.
- 112. The training on FFS was both on technical aspects as well as on how to set up the FFS (group development, how to locate the farmer fields, how the farmer was supposed to learn from the small plot and then transfer the knowledge to his or her own plot). FAO contributed to the development of an FFS manual that could be used as a guide by trainers. The manual was revised over time to further adapt it to specific needs.
- 113. The field missions showed that for the FFS the knowledge had been successfully transferred. All farmers encountered by the team had a very good understanding of what had been taught during the training. The farmers who had undergone training were also peer training other fellow farmers, another sign of successful capacity development. The results observed at the field level clearly indicate that the extension services reflected a good understanding of the FFS approach and that the ToT were successful. However, as previously mentioned, in the absence of the necessary equipment, the knowledge was not fully utilized, since techniques transferred were labour intensive.

114. Discussions held during the field missions indicate that overall the training and deployment of FFS facilitators to the farming communities improved the presence of MAF in those communities, thus improving extension services to farmers. Given the challenges facing MAF in sustaining the extension services, there is a need to explore private extension service providers who can complement the MAF efforts. The challenge is that private extension, like other private sector driven services, are still nascent in Sierra Leone. FAO should invest time and effort in supporting private extension services on a pilot basis.
115. In general, the capacity for extension services remains low. This is due to lack of adequate staffing by the Government of Sierra Leone and high staff turnover. There is need to ensure continuous capacity building for the DAOs and the staff. In addition, the Government of Sierra Leone needs to increase the extension staff in the field and reduce the use of volunteers who have low motivation and commitment to carry out extension work.
116. The key role of the NaFFSL is to represent the interest of the farmers in Sierra Leone in national forums. FAO provided technical assistance to the NaFFSL to develop their strategic planning. Initially FAO was supposed to undertake more activities to support the Federation. However, the financial support was suspended by IFAD. According to NaFFSL staff encountered during the mission, the NaFFSL was facing a leadership crisis at the national level. Therefore, IFAD was questioning their operations and representation as a farmers' organisation in Sierra Leone. As a result, FAO contributed to the development of the ToR to support the review processes of the constitution. FAO also provided support to PEMSD/MAF to prepare the ToR for the development of database for NaFFSL membership across the country. Currently, the NaFFSL is in the process of reconstituting itself. They received support by the WB to strengthen their presence at the district level and to increase their representativeness (through, for instance, the organisation of elections).
117. The Programme was supposed to encourage ABCs to aggregate at district level (to form umbrella organisations) and at national level. The aim was to have a district representation or national organisation to enable the ABCs to address the Government with one voice, to channel their requests, to help to ensure lessons learning and sharing of experiences, and to contribute to increase the overall sustainability of the model. The mission noted that this is yet to happen.

3.3 Question 3 - To what extent did FAO contribute to strengthen Smallholder Commercialisation Program (SCP)/Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP) management (Outcome 4)? (Effectiveness)

Main findings:

- i. Technical support provided by FAO was considered relevant to strengthen the capacity of the PMU. FAO was able to tap into the institutional pool of expertise as needed to respond to the technical needs arising throughout the life of the programme.
- ii. FAO was involved in the development of M&E capacities and the establishment of a database. However, the database was not accessible to the team. Since then, the PMU has moved to a more advanced open data system allowing for the collection of data at the field level using tablets and direct transmission to the central level.

118. Outcome 4 of the programme included the provision of technical support to strengthen the SCP/GAFSP management team. In particular, FAO was to provide three experts for one year: a rural institution building specialist; a business development specialist; and an M&E specialist. A core activity was to provide assistance for the development of an M&E system for the programme and for strengthening M&E capacities at the central and district levels to implement the M&E plan. In addition, FAO was to provide technical capacity on specific identified areas during the implementation of the programme.
119. The three specialists provided by FAO at the beginning of the programme largely contributed to facilitate the set-up of the programme. They assisted the PMU in conducting capacity needs assessment, identifying service providers, developing training material, etc. Discussion with key informants indicated that the expertise provided by the three specialists was appropriate and relevant.
120. The project addressed diverse aspects and areas of agricultural enterprises and FAO staff has been able to tap into the institutional pool of expertise as needed. This was the case in institutional development, agribusiness, horticulture, crop production, livestock management, and post-harvest handling among others. FAO was able to respond to technical needs arising during the life of the project. For example, once the livestock component was added the FAO Office recruited a livestock expert to backstop the implementation of activities.
121. It should be noted that the evaluation mission was conducted four years after the period when most of the technical support was provided. Due to high staff turnover it has been difficult to assess this component. This was the case in particular for the M&E support provided.
122. In line with the project document, an M&E framework was developed, and complemented by a computer-based Management Information System (MIS). The MIS system consisted of a database, which was supposed to collect and store all information existing on ABCs, FBOs and FFS. At central level the database was developed using the STATA software while an excel file was used at district level by M&E officers to collect the information and transfer it to the central level. Training had been conducted by M&E staff at central and district level on how to update the system. The evaluation team could not access the database. However, the mission noted that PMU has since then invested in a more robust M&E system that is using open data kit (ODK) handheld devices to collect real time data from the field including GIS location of the interventions. The M&E officers in the field are using the ODK to collect and relay the data to the centralized server at the PMU. This has enabled them to develop maps and a database of the various interventions.
123. Throughout the period MAF also received support from FAO through the Country Stat initiative. Training was provided along with IT devices for collection of data (mobile phones etc.). Capacity developed at the level of PEMSD senior staff and district M&E officers through the Country Stat initiative (knowledge and IT devices) is used by MAF for the monitoring of the SCP programme.

3.4 Question 4 - To what extent has FAO's project contributed to the SCP outcomes and overall goal (reduction of rural poverty and household food insecurity)? (effectiveness/impact)

Main findings:

- i. The major outcome of the programme has been the recognition and adoption of the ABC/FBO/FFS model by several partners. While measuring impact was not possible given the time and resources allocated to this evaluation, evidences collected during the mission demonstrate that the project contributed to the SCP outcomes and overall goal of reduction of poverty and food insecurity. In addition, the programme helped to stimulate local economies and has had a net positive impact on the physical and financial assets of the districts through the construction and on-going operation of ABCs, IVS and CB/FSA development structures.
- ii. There are new programmes from other development partners such as WB, JICA and NGOs that are leveraging on the investments on smallholder commercialization along the rice value chain.

124. The results achieved by SCP-GAFSP over the last six years of implementation have started to show some impact on the target groups. The reports indicate the programme has so far reached 59 395 direct beneficiaries comprising 31 777 males and 27 618 females, representing 60 percent of the target.
125. Several thematic studies have been conducted by the PEMSD, FAO and PMU including yield studies on an on-going basis. The validation of the results of these studies will be one of the main tasks of PMU M&E. A comprehensive terminal evaluation of the programme is also foreseen. Concerning ABCs, there are no data available over time to assess their impact (how much produce is milled compared to before, how much is marketed, etc.). It would be important to allocate some resources to collect this data if the Government would like to continue investing in this model. There is interest from other development partners such as WB, JICA and NGOs in the context of their new programmes on the MAF smallholder commercialisation efforts focusing on the rice value chain.
126. As already mentioned, one of the major outcomes of the programme is the recognition by several partners of the high potential of the ABC/FBO/FFS model for supporting development in rural areas of Sierra Leone. The wide adoption of the model by other development partners and NGOs is a demonstration of such achievement.
127. Although measuring the impact of this intervention is not possible given the time and resources available for this evaluation, there is positive evidence to suggest that the programme has contributed to some extent to the SCP outcomes and overall goal of rural poverty and household food insecurity reduction in the district visited. Generally, beneficiaries interviewed were able to articulate benefits that had made a difference in their quality of life. Evidence of results achieved by the programme collected by the evaluation team is the following:
 - i. Despite the slow adoption of the new technologies (a key challenge), farmers indicated that transfer of knowledge conducted through the FFS resulted in the intensification of food production that has improved moderately.

- ii. DAOs and most extension officers reported that large areas of IVS that were idle a few years back are now all under cultivation, mostly by ABC, FBO and FFS members, either individually or in groups.
 - iii. Most farmers reported that they now harvest enough, and that they hardly participate in the in-kind loan seeds for the next planting season. Most of them also reported they can sell some surplus to buy food condiments. A focus group discussion participant confirmed that: "Before we received the FAO support, my household had to borrow money to buy most of the food condiments we needed. But now we just sell part of our rice harvest to buy condiments and are still left with enough to eat right round the year." (A beneficiary in Western Rural).
 - iv. The executives of one ABC reported additional evidence in Kailahun district that: "Before now, we have always been called-in to settle police cases involving farmers who defaulted on repaying their loans from businessmen. But this has significantly reduced in the last two years, even though farmers still take those loans. This means their capacity to repay has increased. In fact, we have not received any such case this year. We really thank God".
 - v. ABC members indicated that they are processing and marketing more produce than before.
 - vi. The transformed ABCs have become a centre of aggregation of farmers. There are some examples of ABCs, which thanks to solar panels have television and also stations where people can charge their phones. In addition, farmers who are not members of the ABCs bring their rice to be processed at a higher fee than that charged to members.
 - vii. There is anecdotal evidence on the reduction of poverty and food insecurity from beneficiaries who feel that they are more food secure now compared with the past years given they have food throughout the year.
 - viii. The distribution of vegetable seeds to the beneficiaries increased the consumption of vegetables as well as income to the household. Indeed, vegetables have more potential for income earning than other food crops given their short-term nature and higher return per acre planted.
128. Increased farm activities constituted a stimulus to the local economies, which are agri-based. There are strong indications that the programme has had a net positive impact on the physical and financial assets of the districts through the construction and on-going operation of ABCs, IVS and CB/FSA development structures. The operations of CBs/FSAs will enable some clients to expand their farms and business, purchase equipment, vehicles and motorbikes, and construct their own houses. Anecdotal evidence collected from beneficiaries during the Mission indicates that beneficiaries are using increased income flows to build schools and pay school fees, purchase motorbikes and invest in increasing IVS rehabilitation as well as replacement of productive assets.
129. Finally, a major long-term impact of the SCP-GAFSP programme has been the MAF institutional strengthening at the national, the district and the local levels to promote smallholder agricultural commercialisation for increasing productivity and reducing poverty. There is substantial potential for a follow-on project to build on SCP-GAFSP gains in institutional development.

3.5 Question 5 - To what extent are the results achieved by the project sustainable? (Sustainability)

Main findings:

- i. The programme has adopted a sustainable approach investing in institutions that will remain after its end.
- ii. The transfer of knowledge to MAF staff at national and district levels has been effective. However, lack of resources for extension services could limit the support provided to farmers at the end of the project. There is a need to invest in private extension services to complement the MAF efforts.
- iii. Overall, the FBOs and ABCs are not yet self-sufficient. Transformed ABCs have more chance of becoming self-reliant than non-transformed ones.
- iv. Lack of linkages with financial institutions and agro-dealers are two major constraints on expanding ABCs activities.

130. The overall approach adopted by the programme had a clear long-term development objective for sustainable growth. The approach consisted in investing in: training MAF staff through ToT to ensure that master trainers could then continue to form other staff (and investing in best practice manuals to support them); strengthening the capacity of institutions at all levels (MAF at the district level and FFSs, FBOs, and ABCs at the national level); and supporting ABCs by creating linkages with the formal market and facilitating their access to financial services through the establishment of CB/FSAs. Indeed, the logic of the programme was to invest in institutions that would be left behind to continue the work after its end. However, evidence shows that all the elements to make these institutions sustainable are not yet in place.
131. Investment in MAF capacity development: By strengthening the capacity of MAF staff at district and national level, the programme set up a sustainable structure for extension services. The capacities include FFS, FBOs, ABC extension delivery model and the M&E framework support. Knowledge has been successfully transferred at all levels of MAF; however, there will be a need for refresher courses also considering staff turnover. The extension services have been heavily supported by the programme. For the livestock component FAO is still supporting them. The ABCs and FBOs are not independent yet. If no project comes in, support will not be ensured given the lack of MAF resources especially at district level. MAF extension staff are young, they are growing in their profession, and they will look for other opportunities.
132. Sustainability of the ABCs. The exit strategy indicated in the project document was:
to build self-reliant and self-governed FBOs and ABCs with profitable income generating activities including production, processing and marketing dimensions. The most successful ones are expected to pay for services they require for their upkeep in the future. The economically less successful ones will still play an important role in labour saving techniques in cultivation and processing and deliver some basic services to the communities. At the end of the project, the Government will not have recurrent commitments to the beneficiaries and the beneficiaries will become long-term human resources for the delivery of services to their communities.

133. Findings and evidence discussed in the previous sections show that, overall, the FBOs and ABCs are not yet self-sufficient. To be self-reliant an ABC needs to produce sufficient profits to be able to invest in labour saving and processing equipment and pay for professional management. Substantial differences were noted between transformed and non-transformed ABCs. Thanks to the support received, the transformed ABCs are scaling up processing activities, they have been provided with labour saving techniques that contribute to intensification of rice production and therefore economies of scale, they are run by professional managers and they have also developed business plans that have been submitted to community banks for funding. With all this in place there are chances for them to increase their profits and become self-reliant. Among the non-transformed ones, only few are generating profits and will be able to run by their own. The majority of the non-transformed ABCs will need further support to ensure they will continue their activities. Transformed ABCs have in general more affiliated FBOs and are more business oriented and are using FBSs to share their lessons. This allows for diversification on different value chains and a better governance representation given that more FBOs mean more voices and more leadership options.
134. Limited access to credit and the absence of linkages with agro-dealers are the two main constraints to the sustainability of the ABCs. As previously discussed, the programme invested in the establishment/development of CB/FSA, but the linkages with the ABCs have not yet been established. At the moment, ABCs access to financial services mainly revolve around two types of services; i) contributory credit and loan arrangements known as "Osusu" among members, and ii) the village savings and loan association. The project has not succeeded in creating linkages with agro-dealers and the ABCs are still dependent on MAF for the provision of quality inputs. Free distribution of inputs is limiting the interest of the private sector. Attracting agro-dealers could also be a response to the limited availability of spare parts in rural areas.
135. In many of the ABCs visited, machines are not used to their full capacity due to low production levels of members. As a consequence, earnings from services provided are not sufficient to reach the breakeven point after which the activity becomes profitable. This limits ABCs capacity to make investments or even to replace the existing equipment when needed. The Government and other development partners are involved in the support for the intensification of rice production. An increased production of rice by FBOs will allow for increased use of processing machines and therefore more financial resources for the ABCs.
136. The FFS methodology has been adopted by MAF as the preferred extension methodology in Sierra Leone. As discussed, the methodology is labour intensive in a labour scarce environment and while farmers understand the methodology well, adoption levels are low. There is need for labour saving technologies such as tractors, power tillers and agro-processing machines to ease labour constraints and contribute to intensification of rice production. Government is committed to continue find means to ensure that the FBOs and ABCs acquire the necessary technologies. However, without the involvement of the private sector for the provision of agro-services to farmers it will be difficult for the MAF to sustain the support to all the farmers. Currently, only a few farmers are able to access these inputs.
137. While ABCs and FBOs are not self-reliant yet, the fact that MAF and other development partners have adopted this model recognising its potential for generating growth in rural areas of Sierra Leone indicates that funds will be invested to further support what FAO has promoted. FAO is demonstrating commitment to further support the ABC model in Sierra

Leone. In Bo district, the agency is currently implementing a project funded by USAID supporting the ABCs for introducing the livestock component. There are also on-going discussions and proposals to other development partners to support elements of the FFS and ABC model. Currently, the WB and European Union have designed and developed a smallholder commercialisation project through which it is expected that the ABCs will be supported.

138. There are several challenges faced by farmers that go beyond FAO control limiting sustainability of this intervention. These include: i) limited and timely availability of quality inputs e.g. certified seeds and appropriate fertilizer (currently available only through MAF); ii) labour saving technologies; iii) spare parts for repairing equipment in rural areas; iv) limited resources of the extension services due to lack of extension capacities in all the districts; and v) limited access to financial services. While efforts are being made to address these challenges by the Government of Sierra Leone in the meantime, it is important to explore ways to adapt the model as much as possible to fit the context.
139. The table below summarizes the elements observed by the mission in favour of sustainability of the ABCs, and the ones that are undermining it.

Elements in favour of sustainability	Elements undermining sustainability
<p>Transformed ABCs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Labour saving equipment available and functioning to effectively support dual system of upland and IVS rice production. With the new equipment, ABCs are scaling up quality and quantity of processing activities with larger rice mills and destoners. This is helping them to reach the break-even point. ii. More FBOs affiliated, working on diverse value chains including food and cash crops. <p>MAF is committed to continue working using this model and to find funding opportunities to support the ABCs.</p> <p>Extension services and MAF staff who are familiar with the FFS approach as a result of the trainings conducted but the transformed ABCs and FBOs are more business oriented and are using FBS to share experiences.</p> <p>Intensification of rice production will allow for economies of scale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Government of Sierra Leone is pushing for the intensification of rice production. ii. Infrastructure work is on-going (IVS and feeder roads). iii. The rice value chain is receiving support from other partners. <p>FAO is committed to further support the model.</p> <p>Other development partners are supporting FAO's model.</p>	<p>Non-transformed ABCs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Volunteers running the ABCs. ii. Processing and other equipment not functioning. iii. Low profit that does not allow for replacement of equipment. iv. Few FBOs affiliated with the ABC. <p>Low turnover on ABC boards.</p> <p>Limited infrastructure development (IVS and feeder roads).</p> <p>Despite the establishment of CB/FSAs, access to credit remains limited.</p> <p>Limited capacity of MAF at the field level.</p> <p>Absence of linkages with agro-dealers for provision of quality inputs and spare parts.</p> <p>Weak presence of private sector in rural areas for providing services (e.g. tractor services) preventing farmers to effectively use upland and IVS for rice production.</p>

3.6 Question 6 - To what extent were the implementation approach and management arrangements adopted appropriate to efficiently deliver the programme? (Efficiency)

Main findings:

- i. Service providers often worked directly with the ABCs and FBOs without informing the DAOs. This limited DAO capacity to monitor the implementation of activities.
- ii. Due to lack of resources, the number of extension agents was not sufficient to cover the areas targeted by the programme, and support was decreasing: moving away from the main towns. While choosing to work with MAF is clearly a sustainable approach, the lack of resources could become a constraint for continuing the activities after the end of the programme.
- iii. Coordination meetings involving PMU, FAO and MAF technical units were not held regularly.
- iv. Delay in the procurement process has negatively impacted the implementation of some interventions, including inputs and fertilizer, adversely affecting effectiveness of the activities.
- v. Among the enabling factors that contributed to the achievement of results, are adequate technical support provided by FAO, frequent FAO visits at district level that ensured coordination with partners, a comprehensive training scheme, the ToT approach that allowed for the building of capacities that will remain in the country, and the adoption of the FFS approach that is well adapted to the local context.
- vi. The strong commitment by most of the districts to support the operations undertaken by FAO (by allocating district staff to work on FAO supported activities and district supplementary budget support) has accelerated the effectiveness of FAO efforts. However, the limited extension staff capacity remains a challenge in most districts.
- vii. Although FAO was responsible for the development of the M&E database, the ET was not able see the database to determine its effectiveness. It was clear however that the absence of an internal knowledge management system (lack of data and studies documenting lessons learnt) limited FAO's internal learning and institutional memory. There is a need to document the good work that the team noted on the ground and for FAO to share it more widely.

140. FAO signed partnership agreements with MAF and with several NGOs to implement the project. These partnerships were strong and functional in providing capacity building. The evaluation team noted that service providers adhered to their terms of reference to a large extent. The quality of partnerships with the government and NGOs is overall positive. However, the evaluation team found that the actual field implementation most often left out the DAOs. Indeed, given that service providers had direct contracts with the PMU and FAO, they often worked directly with the ABCs and FBOs without informing the DAOs. As emphasised during discussions with the team, "Most often, FAO only informs us about pending activities. But when the time comes, they go straight to the beneficiaries without involving MAF. This caused a lot of monitoring constraints for us leaving most activities unmonitored" (MAF staff, National and District). In order to better manage the field activities, the DAOs indicated there is need for improved coordination and information

sharing among partners. However, discussions with FAO indicated that sometimes the timely delivery of services forced them to deliver the inputs directly.

141. In terms of human resources, FAO deployed adequate human resources to this project with sufficient numbers of dedicated staff to implement the project activities. NGO service providers also deployed adequate and dedicated staff for the implementation. On the other hand, MAF did not have sufficient extension agents to cover all the sites targeted by the project. Block Extension Officers (BES) faced challenges covering all or even most of the project activities within their blocks, given that there is only one BES per block (some of the block comprises two to three chiefdoms). There was supposed to be at least one extension agent for 35 villages, but this was not always the case. Indeed, the further away from the district main town, the less support was provided. MAF itself indicated a lack of capacity that in some cases was filled by volunteers. However, they could not ensure the same performance as a trained extension agent. In addition, the late payment of salaries and inadequate funds for operational expenses for the field extension staff delayed implementation of activities.
142. M&E officers also had challenges monitoring the FAO-supported activities because of a combination of lack of mobility and, like with the BES, there was only one M&E staff per district, until recently when MAF deployed one or two other staff to the districts.
143. On the one hand, reinforcing a national institution like the MAF is clearly a sustainable approach. On the other hand, the lack of resources faced by extension services will present a problem for the continuation of activities at the end of the programme. As already mentioned the model has been adopted as the main extension model in Sierra Leone, and other partners including NGOs and development agencies are using it. These entities recruit staff directly from MAF to implement the activities creating a high turnover.
144. Delays in the financial support provided by the PMU to the district were causing delays in the payment of the extension services. The Mission encountered cases where the extension agents had not been paid for three months. "Effective implementation can be done if the funds are received in a timely way -For us it is good when the money is received late as you receive lump-sum but the work is not done" (Extension Officer at district level). This is clearly a constraint to the effective implementation of activities.
145. On material resources the evaluation team found that all the equipment supplied to the M&E units is still functional, an indication that it was handled with care. The desktops and tablet phones are in good working order. In the livestock division, the medical kits and refrigerators supplied to the CAHWs are all in good order and in use. At field level, all the assets inspected by the evaluation team were labelled, indicating that an asset tracking system was in place, though the assets register was not reviewed.
146. Coordination among the key players exists but was limited in effectiveness. It was expected that MAF technical units (PEMSD, extension, and recently Livestock) PMU and FAO would have had a well-established calendar of coordination meetings. But this was rarely the case as many partners complained of impromptu meetings. In addition, as already mentioned, the project design implied that all components of the SCP were to be implemented simultaneously. For instance, the development of FBOs and ABCs capacities was supposed to go in parallel with the rehabilitation of infrastructures (IVS and feeder roads) and the establishment of linkages to financial Institutions. Some of these components had

challenges in their implementation and experienced some delays, affecting the overall impact of the intervention.

147. The funds disbursement from PMU to FAO has progressed well depending on the activities. Discussion with the FAO team indicated there were enough commitments in the livestock activities to absorb the remaining funding. There were complaints in the field about disbursement delays from PMU to the DAOs and funds accountabilities from the DAOs (delays in providing support documents and information by the districts, which are requisites for receiving other tranches of support). The districts receive funds from PMU to support the annual work plan and at the time of the mission they were experiencing three to four-month delays. Discussions also showed there were some problems in terms of delays experienced at the MAF national level in submitting the documents received from DAOs to the PMU on time.

148. Although the evaluation did not assess matters pertaining to efficiency, issues related to procurement were raised with such frequency that they could not be overlooked. The FAO and SCP-GAFSP procurement procedures have hampered the pace of implementation of some interventions and might have compromised the effectiveness of the projects. Funds were provided to the ABCs to procure livestock and distribute to the FBOs. This was noted to be a good strategy to ensure beneficiary participation and enhanced ownership. However, prolonged funds disbursement procedures were experienced in the livestock purchase and in acquiring kits for the CAHWs. The government procurement procedures have also impacted negatively. For example, farmers reported delays in the delivery of inputs and in some cases the delivery of the wrong seeds and fertilizer, which have still not been used.

149. The team identified a series of enabling factors that influenced achievement of the results. These include:
 - i. Initially, the pool of expertise provided by FAO fitted well in backstopping technical issues, despite the diverse topics and areas covered by the programme.
 - ii. Frequent visits from the FAO staff at district level has led to a close working relationship with MAF and other stakeholders and has contributed to the coordination of actors involved.
 - iii. The contents of the trainings, which were covering all the different aspects related to the FBOs and ABCs activities (farming practices, agro-business, marketing, finance), and the way it was delivered through ToT and then training of farmers (ToF) allowed for an efficient transfer of knowledge. In addition, the ToT contributed to build national capacities that can continue supporting capacity development activities after the end of the programme.
 - iv. The FFS approach was successfully implemented. The use of demonstration plots gave a practical demonstration of the technologies of reference and the use of farmer groups minimized the administrative cost of the trainings.
 - v. Most of the districts visited have made efforts to integrate the FAO FFS approach as their extension delivery modality. The DAOs have become champions and are even encouraging other partners for example COOPI (providing solar panels to the ABCs) and JICA (using SRI to adapt and improve on the FAO FFS technology) to improve on what FAO has implemented.

- vi. The SCP targeted the use of existing groups/farmer organisations, which increased the pace of implementation as well as the likelihood of success. On the other hand, this increase in the pace of implementation meant that the low numbers of extension staff at the district level meant they were not able to cope with the increased training requirements for the additional FBOs.
150. Based on the ABC assessment study undertaken by FAO and confirmed by the field visits, the establishment of strong farmer organizations do take time and a good deal of training to prepare them to manage and facilitate projects and related interventions. To some extent, the SCP used existing FBOs, which increased the pace of implementation. This, however, came with its own challenges as groups form for different reasons.
 151. It is important to note that FAO has been working in the agriculture sector with the Government of Sierra Leone for a long time and has gained much goodwill given the honest brokerage role it plays in the sector. The projects and interventions promoted by FAO have thus been given due attention and support within the districts. This is another important enabling factor as FAO leverages its existing relationship with MAF to effectively implement project activities.
 152. The team noted a lack of data and lesson learning from the implementation of the project activities, which is the greatest impediment to the justification of the positive work FAO conducted – evident on the ground. There is need to develop a robust knowledge management system for internal learning and institutional memory.
 153. There were certain risks that were identified as important. First is the need to avoid duplication of effort by development partners in the implementation of the FFS. Indeed, several development partners are going into FFS and it will become difficult for MAF to ensure implementation that conforms to FAO standards in a systematic way. Secondly, there is the risk of inadvertently creating a dependency cycle among beneficiaries. The ABC has its own in-built exit strategy. An ABC can become independent if the initial equipment works, if farmers see the ABC as an aggregation unit they can use to access the market, and if they start to actively participate to make it stronger. The mission observed that not all the ABCs viewed it this way and in some cases (in particular the four that were not operational) the ABCs were seen as development activities attracting aid/money. At the same time, it is also important to note there were some non-transformed ABCs receiving limited support that have been successful.

3.7 Gender

Main findings:

- i. The contribution to the household budgets from income generated from women-led enterprises such as small ruminants, vegetable production and groundnut is beneficial to household food security.
- ii. Thanks to gender mainstreaming activities introduced through the GALS training there is increased consultative decision making and more women getting involved in income generating activities.

154. In 2013 FAO published its "Policy on Gender Equality - Attaining Food Security Goals in Agriculture and Rural Development" with the goal "To achieve equality between women and men in sustainable agricultural production and rural development for the elimination of hunger and poverty". The policy identifies five objectives, the first four of which are useful in assessing FAO's programme at field level: i) women participate equally with men as decision-makers in rural institutions and in shaping laws, policies and programs; ii) women and men have equal access to and control over decent employment and income, land and other productive resources; iii) women and men have equal access to goods and services for agricultural development, and to markets; and iv) women's work burden is reduced by 20 percent through improved technologies, services and infrastructure. This section presents findings and evidence from the mission on how the programme contributed to these objectives.
155. The project worked on value chains in which women are highly represented. For instance, when it comes to rice production women play a major role, like they do in vegetable and groundnut production which are mainly female activities. Most probably tree crops are the only value chains supported by the project where the participation of women is more limited. In targeting value chains that are specific to women, the project created benefits for this group. The women were able to create their own FBOs, aggregate their produce, and get income from their group activities. This income was used to address household needs such as school fees and food.
156. Despite the fact that FAO was not focusing on gender mainstreaming in the structuring of ABCs, around 50 percent of the ABCs met during the mission were led by women. The FBOs were noted to have a strong female leadership. Gender representation on the boards of these institutions was in most cases balanced. The evaluation team noted that the gender mainstreaming emphasis in the ABCs was heavily influenced and supported by the NGO service providers.
157. Access by men and women to the ABC facilities was equal. Indeed, at the level of the FBOs and ABCs, produce was aggregated, processed together, and sold together. In this case, there was no difference between men and women. Income generated by these activities was shared among the members. No complaints were registered during the mission concerning unequal distribution.
158. The mission also confirmed that the training approach adopted for conducting the training took gender needs into account. For example, the training was conducted in the demonstration field nearby homes and in the afternoon when more women are available after taking care of their household chores.
159. Considering the reduction of women's work burden, most of the equipment introduced by the project was to save labour for both men and women (for instance the milling machines for rice, the destoner, etc.) however the power tillers and tractors were difficult for the majority of women to operate.
160. The PMU had a gender and youth expert (whose existing position is not funded by FAO) who contributed to ensure gender mainstreaming in the activities implemented. An important effort was the adoption of the GALS approach. In the community, there are activities that are traditionally reserved for women or for men. Men's and women's roles in the different value chains are clearly divided. By introducing the GALS approach the project

wanted to look at how gender roles were allocated and on how to make them more equitable. Through this approach the programme facilitated discussions among men and women at community level on how tasks were divided and how the workload could be shared to ensure a more equitable distribution. In the community visited, beneficiaries still had flip charts on the wall. Men indicated that thanks to this process they realised that women's workload was very high (given that they were in charge of the housework and also had to conduct field work). The discussions contributed to a more equitable redistribution of tasks. The women interviewed by the mission indicated that they were involved more in decision-making and income generating activities as a result of the project support.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall Conclusion

161. After six years of implementation, SCP/GAFSP is firmly established in Sierra Leone as an effective national level smallholder commercialisation promotion mechanism. At the same time, it has to contend with challenges, including high staff turnover and inadequate staff capacity at the district MAF level and ABC levels. In spite of this, the programme made good progress, proactively, to advance its objectives. However, it is important to note that the SCP/GAFSP was implemented during the 2014-2015 when Sierra Leone experienced the Ebola virus outbreak. Also, during this time, IFAD suspended disbursement to the support programme activities, which brought activities to a halt. These factors had an impact on the achievement of the outcomes.
162. The programme remains relevant in the Sierra Leone context and has performed moderately well. The SCP/GAFSP was designed based on the gaps in the agriculture sector at the time in Sierra Leone. FAO has been effective in the development of the programme and in supporting its implementation. The FFS/FBO/ABC model introduced by FAO is recognised as an effective model for delivering extension services and supporting smallholder commercialisation in Sierra Leone and, given its relevance, it has been adopted by other development partners. Through its technical support and knowledge, FAO has contributed to the establishment of a sustainable foundation for current and future poverty reduction approaches in the agricultural sector.
163. Anecdotal evidence collected during the evaluation shows that the adoption of this model has contributed to increased productivity and intensification and, by extension, to poverty reduction and food security in the districts where it was functioning. However, for the FFS/FBO/ABC model to work, it is important to effectively address the systemic constraints facing the sector, such as farmers' limited access to credit, poor infrastructure, and difficulties in marketing.

Conclusion 1. National ownership of the FFS approach is strong. The FAO training and capacity-building effort through the FFS has been commendable. The farmers clearly understand the technology transferred and the benefits that would result through its use; however, very few farmers are adopting the technology because it is labour intensive. At the beginning, FAO should have focused on undertaking a rice value chain analysis to understand the emerging issues in order to develop strategies to address them, for example issues such as labour constraints and financing shortcomings. FAO needed to acknowledge these shortcomings and appropriately tailor the approach.

In addition, the support and development of private sector agro-dealers for the effective and timely delivery of inputs to farmers remains critical to the success of this intervention. Lack of certified seed is an impediment to the adoption of the technologies transferred through the FFS, and therefore, there is a need for the Government of Sierra Leone to support the private sector to invest in seed multiplication. While FAO did support the SEED project that addressed rice seed quality and markets access, the project should have been better linked with the SCP-GAFSP in order to create synergies.

FFS should be documented and included in MAF's policies/strategies as an approach adopted as extension strategy at the national level.

Recommendation 1. Intensification of production

- i. For the future, a value chain analysis should be conducted at the beginning of the intervention to identify major constraints. On the basis of the analysis, FAO should introduce the relevant labour-saving technologies that will improve adoption of the technologies transferred through the FFS. This would be key for increasing rice productivity.
- ii. FAO should use its international reach to provide technical assistance to MAF to develop quality seed multiplication/certification systems in Sierra Leone. FAO should support the capacity building of the Sierra Leone Seed Certification Agency (SLESCA) to make it more internally compliant.
- iii. It is clear that given the challenges of staff turnover and for sustainability reasons, private extension services need to be supported in order to complement MAF efforts.
- iv. Farmers should be sensitized using various media (radio, print, mobile telephones, etc.) on the benefits of cultivating in the in-valley swamps.

Conclusion 2. The ABC model used by the project has been effective and is being scaled-up nationwide. It has proven to be an effective vehicle for aggregation, but ABCs still require support to become sustainable. Among the factors limiting their sustainability, is low processing capacity due to low production. The focus of effort on the transformed ABCs with additional equipment and capacity support has been an effective strategy to increase production capacity and diversification of produce, thus contributing to sustainability.

While most of the support so far has gone to ABCs as service providers for the FBO members, the efforts to link ABCs to markets have been more limited. ABCs should be proactive in undertaking contractual arrangements but still largely depend on MAF to manage their market access.

Beyond human resources and logistics, both ABCs and FBOs need support to improve the governance of their institutions so that members are properly represented. Good governance will enable them to achieve their main objectives; that is, to promote aggregation and to improve marketing and incomes for their members.

Recommendation 2. Capacity development of agricultural business centres

- i. For capacity development activities targeting ABCs, FAO and PMU should increase the focus on business and marketing to mentor the ABCs to become independent. There is a need for a change of mind-set; ABCs should start thinking like businesses.
- ii. The more enterprising the leadership is, the more successful the ABC and FBO will be. At the same time there is a need to address the governance and representation challenges within the ABCs. FAO and PMU should place more emphasis on governance in capacity development activities benefiting ABCs. Among the solutions that could be adopted is the transformation of the ABCs into shareholding companies (like the financial services

association (FSA)) where people could buy shares up to a certain ceiling (with no one taking majority shareholding).

- iii. For the ABCs to become sustainable, there is a need for further support required to strengthen the governance structure, marketing and business approach using farmer business schools (FBS). FAO should continue to leverage resources from development partners to continue this support. There is a need to carry out a resource mapping of equipment already distributed, before additional equipment is provided to the ABCs. FAO should simplify the training modules and demonstration packages that are delivered in order to motivate all participants, especially those with low literacy levels, to actively participate in capacity building trainings.
- iv. FAO and PMU need to work with other partners such as Japan International Corporation Agency JICA, the World Bank (WB), the European Union (EU) (who have developed smallholder commercialisation projects) and the private sector, to further strengthen ABCs to provide more services to their members – services that include farm inputs, technologies and financing.

Conclusion 3. ABCs' access to financial services is limited and mainly revolves around two types of services: i) group savings and loan arrangements known as "Osusu" among members and ii) the village savings and loan association. There is a need for increased credit opportunities and better banking arrangements, while currently there is a lack of financial products adapted to the needs of rural farmers.

Recommendation 3. Access to financial services

- i. FAO and PMU should develop better linkages among the different components necessary to support the ABCs and FBOs – in particular, among the ABCs and the FSAs and community banks. In the meantime, the VSLAs should be promoted since the farmers already use it.
- ii. There is a need to assist microfinance institutions and community banks to develop and design financial products and packages that are better suited to rural farmers and ABCs, and in particular to address labour constraints and access to technologies.

Conclusion 4. At the district and national levels, the MAF has shown strong commitment to the ABCs, but faces both resource and capacity constraints (including high staff turnover, limited extension staffing and logistic capacities) that must be addressed.

The reliance on public sector institutions to oversee the ABCs, FBOs, and FFSs was supposed to increase the sustainability of the intervention. However, sustainability of the approach will depend on availability and enhanced technical skills of staff at all levels.

Given the growing interest from the public sector, the private sector and NGOs in the FFS approach, a more structured partnership strategy to engage with actors positioned to support the programme achieve its objectives and goal should be explored.

Recommendation 4. Capacity development of MAF and other partners

- i. As an exit strategy, FAO should support the Government to develop private extension services that can complement MAF efforts, given staff turnover and capacity challenges.

- ii. Capacity building of MAF at both the central and the decentralised levels takes time and will require on-going support, given the existing capacities. This includes support to PEMSD staff to handle data monitoring and analysis of activities implemented. It would also require capacity development activities targeting MAF and DAOs to enable them to provide extension support to ABC/FBOs”.
- iii. FAO could explore the possibility of training and certifying other partners – partners who adopt elements of a franchising approach in order to ensure further standardization of the methodologies and tools. This would ensure uniformity as well as continuity in the implementation of the FFS approach.

Conclusion 5. To optimize the objectives of the SCP-GAFP there is a need for strong linkages between all the components in order to maximize synergies. This has not worked well because of delays in the delivery of activities linked to the other components, such as improved roads and development of IVS. The farmers face challenges ranging from bad roads to and from their farms, to inappropriate storage that leads to high post-harvest losses, to inadequate transportation facilities to move their produce from the farms to market.

Recommendation 5. Coordination across components

- i. In the future design of the value chain interventions, where there are inter-linkages, FAO should ensure better coordination across components so that identified challenges can be quickly addressed to enable more coherence and effectiveness in the implementation of the FFS, FBOs, and ABCs.

Conclusion 6. Technical support provided by FAO was relevant and appreciated by the national counterpart. FAO did not have a good knowledge management system and with the staff turnover it has been difficult to keep track of the implementation achievements and data management. This has limited the potential for lessons learnt from the FFS/FBO/ABC model.

Recommendation 6. M&E, Knowledge management and learning systems

- i. FAO and MAF need to put in place a knowledge management and learning system for tracking the lessons learnt from implementation of the various projects.
- ii. FAO should invest in a robust M&E system and rely on the country office servers to store information collected, in order to ensure that data is available for various interventions.

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Appendix 1. Profiles of the team members

Miriam Cherogony is an independent consultant in rural and development finance, financial inclusion and knowledge management. Based in Nairobi, she brings over 20 years of local, regional, and international experience in rural and development finance, financial inclusion, and knowledge management. Previously, she worked for Africa Regional Manager of the Initiative for Smallholder Finance. She was the team leader for the Rural Finance Knowledge Management Partnership (KMP), an IFAD funded grant project. She has also worked with the Africa Rural Agricultural and Credit Association (AFRACA), K-Rep Development Agency and the Ministry of Agriculture of Kenya. Miriam developed several knowledge products for IFAD, notably on community based financial organizations, credit guarantee schemes, and rural youth finance. Miriam holds a BSc and MSc in Agricultural Economics from the University of Manitoba, in Canada.

Baimba Koroma is a development planning, policy, management, research, and monitoring and impact evaluation expert. He is based in Sierra Leone and currently serves as the Managing Director at the Management for Sustainable Development (MSD) Consulting Limited. He also works as a lecturer, teaching economics and management courses in the Department of Economics, School of Social Sciences and Law, Njala University, Sierra Leone. He has previously worked respectively as Project Officer and Project Manager on Agricultural Development and Livelihoods projects at the Counterpart in Rehabilitation & Development Sierra Leone (CORD SL), a locally based NGO in Sierra Leone. He has led several consultancies on donor funded interventions (European Union, UK DFID, the World Bank, UNFPA, USAID, UNICEF, Irish Aid, GIZ, etc.) through international NGOs (CRS, Plan International, Save the Children, CARE International, World Vision, Marie Stopes International, ChildFund, Oxfam, CAFOD International, etc.), as well as Ministries and allied Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Local Councils, and private sector institutions in Sierra Leone. Baimba holds M. Sc. Impact Evaluation for International Development from the University of East Anglia in United Kingdom (UK), as well as MBA in Project Management, and M. Sc. Renewable Energy and the Environment, both from Njala University in Sierra Leone. He also holds B. Sc. degree in Physics and Mathematics from the University of Sierra Leone.

Appendix 2. List of people met

Name	Surname	Name of organisation	Role	Region and District
Peter J.	Aruna	BUFAAS ABC	Head of ABC	Western Area Rural
Mohamed A.	Bah	MAFFS	DAO	Main North, Bombali
Saidu	Bamayengeh	MAFFS	DAO	North-West, Karene
Mary	Bangura	Kwacoma ABC	Head of ABC	Western Area Rural
Lahai	Bangura	MAFFS	AG. DAO	East, Kailahun
Haja Isata S.	Bangura	Magbema Women Cooperative ABC	Head of ABC	North-West, Karene
Desmond	Bangura	SAPA ABC	Head of ABC	Main North, Bombali
Mohamed	Bawoh	Mulegloma ABC	Head of ABC	East, Kailahun
Morie J.	Bockarie	Kayeingewoma ABC	Head of ABC	South, Bo
John	Coker	Cambell Town ABC	Head of ABC	Western Area Rural
Mohamed M.	Conteh	Nyawa-Kama-Baimba ABC	Head of ABC	South, Bo
William I.	Conteh	Tama Tuma ABC	Head of ABC	Main North, Bombali
Gladys	Dugba	Torlu ABC	Head of ABC	East, Kailahun
Alie	Fofana	MAFFS	M&E	Main North, Bombali
Kadiatu	Fofanah	Laminaya ABC	Head of ABC	North-West, Karene
Agnes Mamie	Gbanie	Nyalima ABC	Head of ABC	South, Bo
Fedrick	Hansons	MOFABA ABC	Head of ABC	Western Area Rural
Santigie D.	Kabba	MAFFS	Block Extension Supervisor	Main North, Bombali
Jane Sea	Kabba-Seh Sillah	MAFFS	DAO	Western Area Rural
Zainab	Kabia	Matepeh ABC	Head of ABC	North-West, Karene
Sorie. M.	Kamara	MAFFS	Director	Livestock Directorate

Name	Surname	Name of organisation	Role	Region and District
Alpha	Kamara	MAFFS	Extension Officer	North-West, Karene
Rashid	Kamara	MAFFS	DAO	South, Bo
Lamarana	Kamara	MAFFS	M&E Officer	Western Area Rural
Waren Kargbo	Kargbo	MAFFS	Tree Crop Officer	Main North, Bombali
Mariama	Koroma	Holima ABC	Head of ABC	South, Bo
Salamatu Korah	Kurama	Dim Din ABC	Head of ABC	Main North, Bombali
Fannah, Lansana, & Francis	Mansaray, Marrah & Kelie	MAFFS	M&E, Extension & Livestock Officers	South, Bo
Giacomo	Mencari	COOPI	Head of Mission Sierra Leone	COOPI Sierra Leone
Denis	Paul	MAFFS	Director	Extension Directorate
Theressa	Saccoh	Sella Women ABC	Head of ABC	Main North, Bombali
Theresa	Sanccoh	Sella Women Development Association ABC	Head of ABC	North-West, Karene
Essa & Momodu	Sannoh & Soriba	Yawei Woyeahungbatae ABC	Head of ABC & Adviser to the ABC	East, Kailahun
Moses A.S.	Sellu	CASTI ABC	Head of ABC	East, Kailahun
Lathiff	Sesay	MAFFS	M&E	North-West, Karene
Mohamed Ajuba	Sheriff	MAFFS	Deputy Director	PEMSD Directorate
Imurana K.	Sows	WHH	SCP-GAFSP Supported Project Coordinator	South, Bo
Mariama	Turay	MAFFS	Head of Gender in Agriculture	Gender Department
Kadidatu	Turay	Tawopaneh ABC	Head of ABC	North-West, Karene
Kazusa	Yoshimura	JICA Sierra Leone	Consultant	Main North, Bombali
M&E, Livestock and Extension Officers		MAFFS	M&E, Livestock & Extension Officers	East, Kailahun

Appendix 3. Evaluation matrix

Evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Main sources of information	Methods of data collection
<p>Relevance and adequacy of the design</p> <p>To what extent was FAO's intervention relevant to national priorities, strategies, and needs and to what extent was the project design appropriate for achieving the expected results?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent was the technical support provided by FAO relevant to the MAFFS existing needs in terms of capacity development? 2. To what extent were the approaches adopted by the project (FFS, FBO and ABC) relevant to the context and the needs of beneficiaries? 3. To what extent were FAO's comparative advantage and existing complementarities with other partners taken into account in the project design? 4. To what extent were gender equality considerations reflected in project design to address the needs, priorities, and constraints of both women and men? To what extent did the project ensure the inclusion of vulnerable people, people living in remote areas, and youths? 5. To what extent was the geographical targeting of the programme pertinent? Were ABCs established in sites where there was a need and where the conditions existed to make them functional? Were the ABCs adapted to the context and needs of the beneficiaries? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAO programme management staff and partners • Government of Sierra Leone and FAO policies and strategic documents • FAO SCP-GAFSP project beneficiaries including; ABCs, FBOs, FFS, and trained community animal health workers. • MAFFS staff at national divisional level and those at district level, including; district agricultural officers, extension officers, and M&E Officers • Programme Management Unit of the SCP/GAFSP • District council M&E officers • SCP-GAFSP project narrative documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant in-interviews (KIIs) • In-depth individual-interviews with beneficiaries • Focus group discussions • Desk review
<p>Effectiveness</p> <p>To what extent did the project contribute to increased production, intensification, value addition, and marketing as well as</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent have beneficiaries intensified production through FFS and FBO development (Output 1.1)? 2. To what extent have beneficiaries improved their access to agro-services through the ABCs? Did the improved access facilitate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAO programme management staff and partners • FAO SCP-GAFSP project beneficiaries including; ABCs, FBOs, FFS and trained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant in-depth-interviews (KIIs) • In-depth individual-interviews

Evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Main sources of information	Methods of data collection
to reduced rates of post-harvest losses (Outcome 1)?	<p>commercialisation of their products (Output 1.2)?</p> <p>3. To what extent have beneficiaries increased access to extension services thanks to the project's investment in capacity development of the MAFFS district agricultural offices (DAOs) (Output 1.3)?</p> <p>4. To what extent was assistance provided by FAO to NaFFSL successful in reinforcing the Federation's capacity to SCP-GAFSPresent and support farmer organisations?</p> <p>5. To what extent were gender equality considerations reflected in the identification of beneficiaries? To what extent have gender equality considerations been reflected in the implantation of the project and how? Have gender relations and equality been or will be affected by the project (Gender mainstreaming)?</p> <p>6. What are the elements that contributed to the successful or unsuccessful functioning of the ABCs?</p>	<p>community animal health workers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAFFS staff at national divisional level and those at district level, including; district agriculture officers, extension officers, and M&E Officers • Programme Management Unit of the SCP/GAFSP • District council M&E officers • National farmers federation • SCP-GAFSP project narrative documents • SCP-GAFSP project progress, annual and M&E SCP-GAFSPorts • Detail implementation plan • Training SCP-GAFSPorts 	<p>with beneficiaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group discussions • Desk review • Field observations
<p>Effectiveness of coordination</p> <p>To what extent has FAO contributed to ensure effective strategic and operational planning of the SCP programme, efficient coordination and management and overall monitoring of progress and evaluation of impacts (Outcome 4)?</p>	<p>1. To what extent has FAO contributed to strengthen capacities of the MAFFS SCP Coordination Team and SCP-GAFSP management unit on strategic planning, coordination, and management (Output 4.1)?</p> <p>2. To what extent has the project contributed to develop the M&E, Information, and Knowledge Sharing system (Output 4.2)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAO programme management staff and partners • MAFFS staff at national divisional level and those at district level, including; district agricultural officers, extension officers, and M&E Officers • Programme Management Unit of the SCP/GAFSP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews (KIIs) • Desk review • Field observations

Evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Main sources of information	Methods of data collection
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCP-GAFSP project narrative documents • SCP-GAFSP project progress, annual and M&E SCP-GAFSPorts <p>Detail implementation plan</p>	
<p>Progress towards impacts</p> <p>To what extent have FAO's project contributed to the overall goal of the SCP-GAFSP project: reduction of rural poverty and household food insecurity (SCP-GAFSP Development Goal)?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent have improved farming practices adopted by farmers enhanced agricultural production, processing and marketing? 2. To what extent have farmers increased their farm income and household food security? 3. To what extent have farmers had access to and utilized agricultural inputs, extension services, and processing facilities? 4. To what extent has the SCP-GAFSP intervention strategic and operational plan been adopted and implemented by project implementing partners, MAFFS, FBOs, ABCs and FFS? 5. To what extent has the growth of the agricultural sector increased? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAO programme management staff and local partners • FAO SCP-GAFSP project beneficiaries including; ABCs, FBOs, FFS and trained community animal health workers. • MAFFS staff at national divisional level and those at district level, including; district agricultural officers, extension officers, and M&E officers • Programme Management Unit of the SCP/GAFSP • District council M&E officers • SCP-GAFSP project narrative documents • SCP-GAFSP project progress, annual and M&E SCP-GAFSPorts • National and other relevant survey SCP-GAFSPorts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews (KIIs) • In-depth individual-interviews with beneficiaries • Focus group discussions • Desk review • Field observations

Evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Main sources of information	Methods of data collection
<p>Sustainability</p> <p>To what extent are the results achieved by the project sustainable?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the prospects for MAFFS to sustain the results achieved by the project after the completion of FAO's assistance? 2. To what extent has the project created the conditions for the sustainability of the FFS, FBOs and the ABCs? 3. To what extent is the Monitoring System developed by the project still in place and is there is enough national capacity to continue this activity? 4. To what extent have the strategic changes that were taken (as described to some degree in section 2.5 of the ABC transformation document), and for which FAO was instrumental, contributed to increase impact and sustainability? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAO programme management staff and local partners • FAO SCP-GAFSP project beneficiaries including; ABCs, FBOs, FFS and trained community animal health workers • MAFFS staff at national divisional level and those at district level, including; district agricultural officers, extension officers, and M&E officers • Programme Management Unit of the SCP/GAFSP • District council M&E officers • SCP-GAFSP project narrative documents <p>SCP-GAFSP project progress, annual and M&E SCP-GAFSPorts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews (KIIs) • In-depth individual-interviews with beneficiaries • Focus group discussions • Desk review • Validation meeting /workshop

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