

COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION SERIES

Evaluation of FAO's contribution to the Myanmar Country Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. Introduction

- 1 This evaluation is part of a series of Country Programme Evaluations (CPE) launched by the Office of Evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The purpose of the CPE was to help orient FAO's programme in Myanmar, and to make it more relevant to the country's needs and priorities. Moreover, the evaluation sought to identify lessons learned and make recommendations that will be useful for both FAO's future engagement in the country and the design of the next FAO Myanmar Country Programming Framework¹. The evaluation is intended to provide accountability to government and non-government partners, communities and resource partners in Myanmar, as well as to all member countries.
- 2 The evaluation assessed the achievements of the FAO Myanmar Programme at the strategic, technical and operational levels, and identified potential areas for future interventions in line with FAO's comparative advantages.

Evaluation context and process

- 3 The evaluation was carried out with reference to FAO's corporate Strategic Framework and took into account Myanmar's status as a focus country for SO5, "Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises".
- 4 The evaluation preparatory phase revealed that FAO's Myanmar Country Programming Framework (CPF) 2012–2016 did not represent the optimal evaluation framework for the Country Programme Evaluation. To optimize reporting, the seven CPF outcomes were reorganized into the following four key priority areas (KPAs):
 - KPA 1: "Agricultural production to enhance food and nutrition security sustainably increased and rural livelihoods strengthened" (including CPF Outcomes 1 and 6);
 - KPA 2: "Food safety and quality enhanced" (CPF Outcome 2);
 - KPA 3: "Sustainable management of land and natural resources enhanced" (CPF Outcomes 3 and 4);
 - KPA 4: "Preparedness for and mitigation of disasters enhanced and resilience improved" (CPF Outcome 7).
- 5 The evaluation team used outcome harvesting² to assess changes in a determined area of work, region or target group, and then determined FAO's specific contributions to these changes. Three case studies were conducted to further inform the evaluation results.
- 6 The evaluation was structured to answer the questions "Strategic positioning: Are we doing what is needed?" and "Programme contribution: Are we making a difference?" Sub-questions were developed to further define the objectives of the evaluation.

Country context

- 7 Myanmar is the largest country in continental Southeast Asia, with one of the lowest population densities. The country has abundant natural resources, including fertile and diverse agro-ecological land areas (the largest land area in continental Southeast Asia), water, forests, and a coastline of over 2 000 km. The irrigated area covers about 16.2% of total sown area.

1 FAO Country Programming Framework (2012-2016) was covered under this evaluation.

2 <https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/Outome%20Harvesting%20Brief%20FINAL%202012-05-2-1.pdf>

- 8 Although Myanmar is positioned at an important geopolitical crossroads, with the large economies of China and India on its borders, the country remained relatively poor and isolated from the 1960s until recently. Myanmar has been undergoing a rapid political transition since 2012, and the government is moving slowly toward greater democracy.

- 9 The country is transforming from an agricultural to an industry- and service-oriented economy. Over the past four years, the country's economy has been steadily opening up and foreign investment and development assistance to Myanmar have increased. Although the economy has been growing rapidly, income per capita was estimated at only USD 1 161 in 2015, one of the lowest levels in East Asia.

2. Findings

Findings on strategic positioning

Alignment with national policies and frameworks

Finding 1: The evaluation found strong alignment of most FAO interventions with government priorities. This includes FAO interventions in policy support, nutrition, rice and oil seed, integrated pest management and food safety. Emergency and relief interventions clearly responded to government priorities.

FAO's work in crop diversification, although very relevant for national priorities, did not address important priorities such as production and conservation of plant genetic material, including pulses. Similarly, FAO addressed a number of priorities in the fisheries and forestry sector. However, other equally important national challenges in the sectors were not addressed.

Finding 2: Other key areas were only marginally addressed due to limited in-country capacity, including areas in which FAO has a comparative advantage and those identified as priorities in national strategies and in the CPF (such as reduction of post-harvest losses). According to the government and international partners, FAO could have provided more support for extension services.

Coherence with FAO's Strategic Framework

Finding 3: The FAO programme in Myanmar contributed to reach the organization's strategic objectives. However, climate change and gender (two cross-cutting issues under the current FAO Strategic Framework) were not adequately addressed. The team also found that, except for several interventions that directly addressed irrigation and improved water practices, many interventions neglected water and its role in agricultural production systems. Interventions launched under the public-private partnership framework were not consistent with SO4 or FAO's mandate.

Comparative advantage

Finding 4: Most partners within Myanmar recognized FAO's authority and status as a global intergovernmental organization, and its role as the world's agricultural knowledge agency for policy support, integrated capacity building and technical cooperation. As a global organization with a long history of delivering technical cooperation programmes in Myanmar, FAO has considerable credibility with the government. FAO is also viewed as a technical agency that provides valuable agricultural information as well as technical and policy guidance. This enabled the close alignment of mutual priorities while also helping FAO to play an important role in informing and influencing policy-making at the national level.

Finding 5: FAO's close relationship with the government, as well as the political context and background in Myanmar, sometimes led to tradeoffs. This caused civil society and other stakeholders to question FAO's ability to act as a neutral partner. On some occasions, FAO was unable to involve all relevant partners in open discussions on food security, nutrition and poverty alleviation.

Partnerships and coordination

FAO partnerships with government agencies

Finding 6: FAO is perceived as a valued institutional partner with established and effective government relationships, particularly with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation and many of its line agencies, as well as the Forestry Department, Fisheries Department and Department of Rural Development. FAO was not always effective, however, in coordinating multi-sectoral work in nutrition with less traditional government partners, such as the Ministry of Health.

FAO partnerships

Finding 7: There were some missed opportunities that FAO should consider for future planning: FAO was absent from key platforms such as the Myanmar Fisheries Partnership and the Myanmar Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

Finding 8: FAO's efforts to build partnerships with key development partners in its sectors of intervention were limited. For example, there was no collaboration on rice-related issues with the International Rice Research Institute, the Japan International Cooperation Agency or the Korea International Cooperation Agency.

Finding 9: FAO had fairly good cooperation with civil society at project level, but a low level of interaction with civil society organizations in specific sectors, such as land tenure. This has undermined FAO's leadership in those sectors.

Finding 10: Benefits to smallholders under partnerships with the private sector remain uncertain.

Findings on programme contributions

Programme Relevance, Impact and Effectiveness

Key Priority Area 1: Agricultural production to enhance food and nutrition security sustainably increased and rural livelihoods strengthened.

Finding 11: FAO influenced the formulation of agricultural policies, strategies and programmes in Myanmar. The results were visible but fragmented in crop diversification, plant genetics, plant protection, seed production, overall contribution to the seed system and varietal diversification.

Finding 12: FAO's work on transferring technology and knowledge through Farmer Field Schools (FFS) resulted in increased income, confidence and resilience of direct beneficiaries. However, FFS used a rather conservative approach, often delivering standard extension advice rather than creating a dynamic adaptive learning institution or community. Furthermore, FFS had a limited focus on empowering the poor and landless.

Finding 13: Although FAO's support to the dairy sector was limited, the school milk feeding programme was appreciated. The current LIFT project on livestock could serve as a model for future livestock interventions.

Finding 14: Water issues were not adequately considered during interventions addressing livestock, including in the dry zone.

Key Priority Area 2: Food safety and quality enhanced.

Finding 15: FAO is recognized as a leader in supporting standards for country food safety. Although FAO conducted well-designed food safety interventions in Myanmar, the organization achieved limited results. A more continuous, long-lasting presence is required in the country, coupled with an increased focus on capacity development and technical assistance.

Finding 16: FAO contributed to improving food safety-related practices in supply chain interventions. This resulted in improved husbandry practices in the smallholder dairy sector, improved practices in the post-harvest fisheries sector, and improved food safety practices for mango producers and traders.

Findings 17: FAO Myanmar's activities in natural resource management directly responded to government requests, and helped to implement key policies and decisions tailored to the government's needs.

Finding 18: FAO's work on the co-management of natural resources in community fisheries and community forestry targeted poor and marginalized communities, and contributed to reinforcing equality in the utilization of natural resources. The work in community fisheries yielded significant results in this respect.

Emergency Center for Transboundary Animal Diseases

Finding 19: Through ECTAD, FAO Myanmar addressed the continuing need for stronger surveillance, prevention and control of highly pathogenic avian influenza in Myanmar. It responded to the evolving nature of zoonotic diseases, changing circumstances and priorities.

Finding 20: Risk management and bio-security improvements in poultry farms and live bird markets were less effective and require further work. While bio-safety and bio-security practices have developed into common knowledge, the application of these practices at individual farms and live bird markets has been hindered by cost and perception constraints.

Finding 21: Working in partnership with the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department, ECTAD achieved positive results in the control and surveillance of zoonotic diseases, especially in the poultry sector. The consistent improvement and proficiency rating of the diagnostic laboratories demonstrated the impact of ECTAD's investment in equipment, technical support and capacity building work.

Non-ECTAD emergencies

Finding 22: Emergency responses³ were appropriate to the needs of the Government of Myanmar, and to the type of disaster and the needs of beneficiaries. The targeting of vulnerable households was consistent across all FAO Myanmar emergency responses. However, a deeper analysis is needed on the role of women in agriculture during an emergency to improve the relevance of the response.

Finding 23: FAO Myanmar's emergency responses targeted both displaced and host communities, and clearly articulated the desire to prevent further displacement or migration through the resumption of agricultural activities.

However, the use of standard community labels and a standard (blanket) approach to delivering inputs and training resulted in lost opportunities to deliver a tailored response, bridge recovery and development, or introduce more resilience or peacebuilding components.

Finding 24: When FAO Myanmar responded promptly to emergencies, it contributed to early recovery and in some cases prevented beneficiaries from spiraling further into poverty and indebtedness.

Finding 25: FAO Myanmar contributed to building beneficiaries' resilience through input distribution and complementary capacity building activities. In areas where FAO had a long-term, continuous presence and connected projects, results on resilience were evident.

There is a need for FAO Myanmar to develop a unified resilience programme to connect fragmented projects, build on its past success and participate more in the "resilience space" in Myanmar.

Sustainability

Finding 26: Signs of sustainability were observed in areas in which FAO Myanmar worked at both the community and national policy levels. Conversely, sustainability was weak in areas where the link between knowledge and policy was unclear.

³ Unless stated otherwise, "emergency responses" pertains to Non-ECTAD emergency responses.

Programme coherence and synergies

Finding 27: FAO Myanmar benefitted from its proximity to FAO RAP and from technical assistance from FAO headquarters. Until recently, however, the FAO Myanmar country team sometimes had limited or no involvement in regional programmes. The evaluation team noted changes and closer cooperation and communication between RAP and the country office.

Programme monitoring and knowledge management

Finding 28: Monitoring at the project level was satisfactory for emergencies and major interventions, with dedicated staff at country level including those in the Environmental Sustainable Food Security Programme; monitoring was weak, however, for national and regional TCPs. Monitoring at programme level was not carried out. This contributed to weak institutional memory.

Finding 29: Limited monitoring at the programme level led to limited capacity to produce knowledge products and share them with development partners.

Cross cutting issues: Gender and other equality issues

Findings 30: The CPF 2012-2016 did not demonstrate a commitment to gender and social inclusion. About 53% of the projects analyzed showed no evidence of gender equity considerations at the design level, nor information about different social and ethnic groups in the target populations. Emergency interventions were better at including disaggregated information in the project documents.

The recording and documentation of gender and social inclusion was generally poor, and there were no follow-up of activities to understand the benefits received by the target populations. Moreover, there were many missed opportunities for developing the resources and capacities of women.

Prior to the recent partnership with UN Women, FAO had not been proactive in developing partnerships for supporting gender integration in Myanmar. The recently completed country level gender assessment study for Myanmar was a good start for further work on gender and social equity in the country.

Cross cutting issues: Climate change

Finding 31: FAO carried out fragmented activities targeting climate change adaptation through its work in community forestry with the Environmentally Sustainable Food Security Programme in the dry zone, and through its limited work on water management and resilience. Recent Global Environment Facility-approved projects showed a strong focus on climate change.

3. Conclusions

Conclusion 1: In the context of Myanmar's sensitive social and political environment, FAO has established a solid partnership and cooperation with the government. Through its continuous engagement, FAO has played a leading role in supporting and advising the government on agriculture, rural development and food security issues. Development actors recognized FAO's role in securing the government's commitment to initiatives such as the National Zero Hunger Challenge. FAO's interventions are well-aligned with national goals and priorities and broadly aligned to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

Conclusion 2: Through its continuous technical support, FAO contributed to Myanmar's national transition by i) responding to the country's needs and challenges in agriculture and food and nutrition security; ii) guiding the implementation of improved agricultural policies and strategies; and iii) supporting the launch of important renovation processes, such as those related to the national seed system. FAO had limited outreach with less traditional government counterparts (such as the Ministry of Health) in discussions related to nutrition and food safety.

Conclusion 3: FAO's 2012-2016 Country Programming Framework did not allow a coherent approach and synergetic and complementary use of FAO resources. The CPF lacked a theory of change and logical, well-structured connections between outcomes and outputs. Furthermore, the CPF design could not support the implementation of FAO's strategic vision as defined under the revised Strategic Framework. Although the achievements were in line with government priorities, FAO's positioning was not sufficiently strategic; it relied on multiple and fragmented entry points rather than focusing on the areas of FAO's core competence.

The CPF did not provide a clear programmatic logic, nor a rationale for the individual and outcome level interventions. The absence of a strong programmatic framework created confusion with regard to FAO's scope of intervention, weakening FAO's advocacy capacity with the government and with other actors. Due to the CPF's opportunistic design, FAO compromised its capacity to influence the government to align with the organization's corporate strategic vision. During the CPF design process, FAO did not sufficiently involve all relevant government partners.

Conclusion 4: Given the national political context and FAO's close relationship with the government, the evaluation team recognized FAO's challenges in liaising with civil society in delicate matters, such as those related to land. However, the FAO country office did not appreciate the vital importance of civil society in the process of drafting the National Land Use Policy. This limited the ability of FAO's country office to lead within the sector, and had direct repercussions on FAO's relationship with resource partners, fundraising and the long-term sustainability of some FAO interventions. During 2016 and under the new government, FAO started changing this perception by working closely with the leading land sector network in Myanmar and actively including civil society in its land tenure activities.

Conclusion 5: FAO supported urgent in-country needs and requests, such as those following disasters, by fielding high-level experts and senior officers from headquarters or the regional office. Until recently, however, FAO did not show sufficient in-country capacity to continuously support activities within the organization's food security mandate. As a result, FAO did not participate in platforms that were developing Myanmar's reform processes, such as those underlying the formulation of a climate change strategy. This trend seemed to be changing under the new regional leadership in FAORAP. FAO is gradually improving its capacity at country level.

Conclusion 6: There was a lack of attention to needs assessments, context and gender analysis, and an overall lack of baseline and monitoring data. Projects often lacked a proper exit strategy to phase out or upscale project outcomes.

Conclusion 7: FAO supported community-led interventions, with promising immediate results in community forestry and innovative results in community fisheries. However, FAO missed opportunities to create an enabling environment for changes through government policies, which could have contributed to the growth and proliferation of community-led fisheries.

Conclusion 8: Limited knowledge management combined with the absence of a communication plan restricted FAO's ability to influence platforms and policies. FAO did not adequately share important results achieved with key partners. This limited FAO's capacity to harmonize approaches, build effective synergies with partners, create an enabling environment and mobilize resources that could have led to long-term changes.

Conclusion 9: With regard to strengthening rural livelihoods and increasing food security, FAO's results were affected by poor targeting of vulnerable groups and lack of commitment to gender integration and social inclusion. Emergency interventions fared better in this regard.

In its effort to meet the expected outcomes and deliver against plans, FAO did not systematically consider the complexity of the beneficiary population and often failed to design gender and socially inclusive interventions. There was a lack of institutional capacity to address gender and social issues in policy, programmes and projects at the country level. FAO was also unable to systematically target the most vulnerable layers of the community in its interventions.

Conclusion 10: FAO contributed to important resilience building work through ECTAD, and contributed to decreasing vulnerabilities through its emergency responses. Through strong partnerships with the government, FAO was able to enter less accessible areas, build technical capacities of the government, respond to important disasters and reach a significant number of beneficiaries.

Through ECTAD, FAO achieved transformative results in animal transboundary disease control and prevention. The programme continuously built upon its successes to evolve from an emergency response to a resilience programme, with capacity development support in three dimensions: community level, institutions and enabling environment.

Other emergency responses were found to be adequate and had short-term positive effects on the beneficiaries. However, the fragmented nature of emergencies across the country, absence of an umbrella resilience programme, and the 'silo' nature of emergency and development work limited the transition from emergency results to resilience.

Conclusion 11: Until recently, FAO was not sufficiently present in key locations outside Yangon to liaise with government partners and other stakeholders during responses to protracted crises, such as those in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan State. This affected FAO's capacity to participate actively in decision-making processes launched outside Yangon and it compromised awareness, access and use of FAO's products and technical support.

FAO headquarters and RAP technical support to FAO Myanmar significantly increased the country's project portfolio. However, the one-time or short-term technical and project support activities did not lead to adequate ownership, monitoring and follow up at country office level, nor to sufficient use of results achieved through FAO's global and regional projects.

4. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Alignment and coherence

FAO should consolidate its interventions into a programmatic approach and identify selective entry points for its work in Myanmar. FAO should ensure that the next CPF in Myanmar is developed based on a solid theory of change linked to a well-structured logical framework, including a logical result chain and indicators for the measurement of results against targets.

FAO should ensure that any future intervention is aligned to its strategic framework and mandate, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals. The CPF and separate interventions would benefit from a more rigorous design, including a thorough analysis of context, gender and capacity needs to ensure the inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

FAO should identify strategic pathways for maximizing its influence on national food and nutrition security. In doing so, the organization should carefully analyze its areas of comparative advantage in Myanmar, considering FAO's strategic vision and objectives, the government's requests and capacities, and critical synergies with other partners operating in Myanmar in the food security and rural development area.

Each FAO intervention should logically fit into the programmatic framework and its achievement should explicitly contribute to the achievement of higher level results. The CPF should be designed through a highly participatory and inclusive process. FAO should make sure to involve all relevant government partners in the formulation of the CPF, particularly for interventions requiring a multi-sector perspective such as those related to nutrition, gender, climate change and food safety.

The CPF should support the promotion of inclusive and sustainable agricultural development and poverty alleviation through the mainstreaming of social protection, gender, decent work, consideration of the indigenous population and other equity issues. Projects formulated under the CPF should comply with the recently approved FAO environmental and social standards.

Recommendation 2: One Health

FAO should continue its support for ECTAD, food safety, nutrition and integrated pest management under RAP's One Health Strategy. These are areas of recognized comparative advantage for FAO in Myanmar.

FAO should continue to lead the development of Myanmar One Health and coordinate its implementation, building on its comparative advantage, success and broad recognition in the sector.

Recommendation 3: Food safety

FAO should continue its policy support to further develop food control systems and formulate a comprehensive food safety policy and strategy. The food safety policy should define the roles, responsibilities and coordination of standard regulations among ministries and regulation bodies.

FAO should also endeavor to strengthen market and food chain biosafety, develop a CODEX manual, and address the effects related to intensive industries (poultry and pigs) in the private sector, as well as the large and growing export of live animals through and from Myanmar to China.

Recommendation 4: Gender

FAO should prioritize integration of gender considerations in its country programme, based on sound gender analysis and development of systematic approaches to integrating gender equality and women's empowerment.

Recommendation 5: Climate change

FAO should proactively and continuously engage in the climate change debate by participating in the implementation of the Climate Change Strategy, and in the diffusion of climate change adaptation strategies such as climate smart agriculture.

FAO's efforts in climate change should include a long-term and programmatic approach in the co-management of natural resources, such as community fisheries and community forestry supported by an enabling policy environment.

Recommendation 6: Land use and governance of land tenure

Considering the importance of the land sector in Myanmar, as well as FAO's comparative advantage in the sector and good relationship with the government, FAO should further assist Myanmar in planning land programmes, developing land policy and maintaining a partnership with civil society for coordinating activities in this sector. FAO should support the government in developing a comprehensive long-term development plan for land administration as a major institutional reform.

Recommendation 7: Resilience

FAO should continue its positive work on emergency and resilience, and develop a coherent resilience programme for Myanmar. This umbrella programme should be part of the CPF and inform the CPF interventions. FAO should ensure adequate arrangements for the continuous management of a long-term resilience programme in Myanmar.

Recommendation 8: Monitoring

The FAO Myanmar Country Office should make efforts to enhance programme design, monitoring and reporting practices, as well as effectively documenting and using lessons learned for prioritizing programmes and developing strategic partnerships. In addition, the office should establish adequate systems and resources for monitoring progress in programme and project implementation, and support adaptive programme management regarding the allocation of human and financial resources.

Recommendation 9: FAO country office capacity

In order to guarantee a continuous presence in strategic sectors and platforms, FAO should consider the fielding of international staff in Nay Pyi Taw, or areas with a significant presence of relevant development actors (e.g. areas with protracted crises management operations).

The FAO country office, FAO headquarters and RAP should continue the positive cooperation established to respond to urgent government and partner needs. FAO Myanmar should coordinate the flow of information among stakeholders, thus enabling the country office to make rapid and informed decisions on issues of strategic importance.

Recommendation 10: Capacity development

FAO should develop a capacity development strategy in Myanmar. The strategy should have the explicit aim of empowering target beneficiaries, and should be based on an accurate capacity needs assessment informed by historical and cultural contexts.

FAO should make sure to address the three dimensions of capacity development by targeting communities and organizations, and by creating the enabling environment for long-term change.

In the emerging context of Myanmar, people are being asked for the first time to make decisions concerning how their lives and livelihoods should be shaped. As such, they do not always have the ability to respond as individuals or communities. Thus, future needs assessments should adopt approaches that support beneficiaries in formulating their needs and aspirations.

Recommendation 11: Knowledge management and communication

FAO should develop a Knowledge Management and Communication Strategy and Action Plan in Myanmar. This strategy should support greater application of FAO's global knowledge and experience at the programme and project levels. FAO's comparative advantage as a repository of relevant global knowledge should be used to create synergetic partnerships with a range of stakeholders, promote innovations, maximize results and attract resource partners.



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