

PROJECT EVALUATION SERIES

**Evaluation of the Benefit-sharing Fund
second project cycle
International Treaty on Plant Genetic
Resources for Food and Agriculture**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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For further information on this report, please contact:

Director, Office of Evaluation (OED)
Food and Agriculture Organization
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 1, 00153 Rome
Italy
Email: evaluation@fao.org

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Acronyms and abbreviations

BSF	Benefit-sharing Fund
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
ITPGRFA	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PGRFA	Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Executive Summary

- 1 This report outlines the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the independent evaluation of the second project cycle of the Benefit-sharing Fund (BSF II) of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA). The evaluation focused on the 19 concluded projects funded between 2011 and 2015¹ under the first batch of BSF II. The evaluation covers the two funding windows of the second project cycle.
- 2 The Operational Procedures for the use of resources under the direct control of the Treaty's Governing Body stipulate that *"at the conclusion of each project cycle of the BSF, a final evaluation should be conducted"*. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess *"the extent to which the concluded projects funded through the second cycle of the BSF have helped increase food security and community resilience among vulnerable farmers and the rural population in developing countries through the management and conservation of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA)"*. The evaluation findings are presented in Chapter 3 of the Evaluation Report.
- 3 The scope of the evaluation covers the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the first batch of the BSF II projects completed up to 2015.
- 4 The objectives of the evaluation were to: i) identify the main outputs and outcomes of the 19 concluded projects under Windows 1 and 2 toward the achievements of BSF II objectives; and ii) identify the lessons learned and best practices that can be used to support the effectiveness of projects funded under future project cycles and the overall enhancement of the BSF mechanism.



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Community seed bank at Olopa Chiquimula, Guatemala



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Meeting with farmers in Rio San Juan, Guatemala

1 The first batch of 19 projects was approved at the Fourth Session of the Governing Body in 2010 with a total value of almost USD 5.5 million. A second batch of three projects with a total value of USD 1 million was approved in 2013 to directly support UNDP programmes. A third and final batch of six projects with a total budget of over USD 2.5 million was approved in 2014.

- 5 The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the following evaluation questions:
- **Relevance:** To what extent was the BSF project portfolio filling a gap in the management and conservation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture?
 - **Effectiveness:** What were the intended and unintended results achieved by the concluded projects?
 - **Efficiency:** To what extent was the institutional and implementation set-up conducive to achieving the intended results?
 - **Sustainability:** Are the projects' main activities and outcomes sustainable beyond project closure?
 - **Cross-cutting objectives:** Were gender, human rights and intellectual property rights for farmers/indigenous populations, as well as environmental and other cross-cutting objectives, fully integrated into the design and implementation of the projects?

Background to the BSF II portfolio

- 6 The purpose of the BSF II portfolio was to contribute to food security and climate change adaptation by funding high impact activities on sustainable use and conservation of PGRFA to the benefit of the vulnerable communities in 33 targeted countries across Africa, Asia, Near East, and Central and South America.
- 7 The BSF II featured two types of project windows: Window 1 focused on the development of strategic action plans to support the adaptation of PGRFA to climate change on a regional, sub-regional, eco-regional or other basis. The strategic action plans had the objective of establishing priorities, targets and milestones for future action to identify information exchange, technology transfer and capacity building. Window 2, referred to as immediate action projects, focused on strengthening on-farm conservation and management of PGRFA through actions primarily at the farm and community levels.
- 8 Based on a synthesis report of the Secretariat of the Treaty² on the execution of the BSF II, the beneficiaries of the 19 completed projects under the BSF included a total of 336 177 farmers who have participated in the formulation of the strategic action plans under Window 1 and 340 000 farmers who have benefited under Window 2.
- 9 More than 222 partnering institutions among universities, institutes for biodiversity conservation, international organizations, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), gene banks and national and international research institutes have been involved in project execution by bringing in complementary expertise on the management and development of PGRFA.
- 10 Implemented activities included, but were not limited to:
- participatory varieties selection, collection and documentation of local crops;
 - characterization and evaluation of varieties of crops, as to identify adaptability potential and incorporate preferable traits for further development, training and capacity building;
 - establishment of community seed banks to conserve accessions in order to improve farmers' access to and availability of greater agrobiodiversity;
 - training sessions and workshops on characterization, evaluation and breeding of crop varieties;
 - training sessions (310) and workshops for farmers, extension agents, researchers and governmental officials in on-farm conservation and management of PGRFA

2 The data presented from paragraph 8 to 10 are based on figures in the Draft Report on the execution of the second project cycle of the Benefit-Sharing Fund submitted to the Sixth Session of the Governing Body of the ITPGRFA. The sources of the statistical data presented is based on progress reports submitted by the implementing agencies throughout the implementation period. See <http://www.fao.org/3/a-bb353e.pdf>, paragraph 6 and 7. The evaluation team could not check the validity of this data.

Methodology

- 11 The evaluation methodology comprised three phases: inception, field and synthesis of findings to produce the Evaluation Report. The inception phase commenced with a review of projects' documents to assess the overall performance of projects in relation to the planned objectives and expected results.
- 12 The field phase consisted of field visits to six projects representing different regions, sub-regions and ecological zones in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The field phase involved semi-structured interviews, workshops, site visits and focal group meetings with beneficiary farmers, implementing partners, government organization and key project stakeholders. In total, there were 97 interviews with internal and external key informants and stakeholders (full list in Appendix 4).
- 13 The last phase of the evaluation consisted of the synthesis of findings to produce the Evaluation Report.

Conclusions

Overall conclusions

- 14 The concluded 19 projects reviewed have successfully contributed to raising awareness and building consensus among vulnerable farming communities and implementing partners, particularly on the role that PGRFA plays in maintaining the food and nutrition security of farmers that are vulnerable to the growing effects of climate change. As such, these projects have made an important contribution to the implementation of the objectives of the Treaty.
- 15 This achievement has been supported by the formulation of strategic action plans which have resulted in the production of a large amount of scientific, geographical and technical material, facilitated delivery of new accessions to gene banks and on-farm conservation and enhancement of around 1 000 crop varieties.



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Meeting with female farmers in Badaun District, India



@FAO/John Kamthungo

A female farmer showing sweet potato variety in Lisungwi, Malawi



@FAO/John Kamthungo

Local varieties of sorghum, millet, cowpea and yams tolerant to drought displayed by farmers in Salima District, Malawi

Conclusion 1. Relevance

- 16 All 19 projects addressed important gaps both at the regional/national and local/agro-ecological zone levels, in particular the need to enhance the linkages between *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation of PGRFA and its sustainable use to safeguard the food security of vulnerable communities. This included preliminary analyses, vulnerability assessments and field trials to identify appropriate actions and target groups in both, strategic action plans and immediate action projects. As a result, all projects were found to be aligned with both the provisions of the Treaty and other international agreements and conventions including Millennium Development Goals, Convention of Biological Diversity and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. However, the call for proposals focused primarily on food security with insufficient emphasis on nutrition; also gender differentiated approach in project execution has not been sufficiently prioritized. The main shortcoming affecting the relevance of the projects evaluated was the decision to fund a large number of projects through two different funding windows at the same time. This contributed to atomized funding, increased the risk of overlaps and affected the possibility of building mutually reinforcing synergies.

Conclusion 2. Effectiveness

- 17 The strategic action plans represented an effective means through which a large number of different stakeholders linked to PGRFA could exchange information, carry out research and analysis, and develop consensus on the actions needed to advance *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA. Lead farmers trained by the immediate action projects made significant contributions to: i) *in situ* conservation of PGRFA through seed transfer of local/improved varieties of PGRFA from the national gene banks; and ii) recognition and valorization of farmers' knowledge and capacity to conserve local varieties that are highly adapted to local conditions.

Conclusion 3. Efficiency

- 18 The decision to fund a large number of strategic action plans and immediate action projects with a duration of one and two years and budget ceilings of USD 400 000 (strategic action plans) and USD 300 000 (immediate action projects) was an efficient mechanism to attract high numbers of pre-proposals and full project proposals. Taking into account the above-mentioned results, the evaluation considers that the immediate action projects represent good value for money, especially when average expenditure per project was USD 221 000. However, the formulation of a large number of strategic action plans without clear funding sources identified before project closure is not considered good value for money. Furthermore, some overlaps were identified among projects (in terms of the countries covered) and the strategic action plans were formulated without information and data flows from the immediate action projects. Furthermore, the vast majority of immediate action projects did not monitor the adaptability and productivity performance of PGRFA. This represents a major shortcoming of the immediate action projects considering the high productivity rates of local varieties of beans, maize, millet, potato and sorghum, which could have been of great interest to other immediate action projects (especially

in the same regions), and decision makers in building awareness at national level on the importance of PGRFA for sustainable livelihoods and climate change adaptation. Such awareness is considered crucial to mainstream PGRFA into major national development plans to ensure sustainability of projects funded. The monitoring of PGRFA performance is also important to upscale and replicate the interventions funded in different regions.

Conclusion 4. Sustainability

- 19 Supporting vulnerable farming communities in marginal rural areas is an effective and sustainable way of conserving PGRFA, as well as increasing the availability to facilitate its sustainable use.
- 20 The evaluation identified only two cases where the strategic action plans had secured adequate funding to implement their main actions in the post-project period (2014-2016). In the case of most of the other strategic action plans, partial funding had been secured, mainly in the form of funds for projects executed by farmers' associations and NGOs. As a result, the strategic action plans in most cases could not be fully implemented. However, the evaluation did identify cases where funded projects are helping to forge new alliances between farmers, NGOs and breeders in the interests of reducing dependency on traditional actors in PGRFA (namely public institutions that have diminishing resources). Immediate action projects have experienced difficulties in securing adequate funds since project closure. This has resulted in a large number of farmers discontinuing the use of PGRFA distributed. Nevertheless, the evaluation found a large number of lead farmers were continuing to conserve the PGRFA promoted by the projects. Furthermore, there were cases in some of the farming communities visited in Guatemala, Malawi and Peru where crop diversity had increased and production of local varieties was actually registering higher productivity rates than at the end of the immediate action projects.

Conclusion 5. Cross-cutting issues

- 21 The call for proposals did not provide explicit guidance on the gender focus to be integrated into the projects, or on the integration of other cross-cutting objectives relating to the management of natural resources, the rights of farmers and of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. In the case of gender equality, project proposals and implementation reports mainly focused on reporting the number of female participants, which in 11 of the 12 immediate action projects averaged only 12 percent.³

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 on improving project design

- 22 All project proposals solicited through call for proposals for future funding cycles of the BSF should take into account the sustainability (not just effectiveness) of main actions from the design phase.

Recommendation 2 on increasing project effectiveness

- 23 Target funding in fewer projects in order to ensure that adequate finance and quality supervision and monitoring can be conducted at the project and Secretariat levels to support the delivery of intended outputs and outcomes.

Recommendation 3 on improving project efficiency

- 24 Future funding cycles should consider either combining or staggering the timing of immediate action projects in order to support strategic projects directed at national PGRFA stakeholders and complement each other and, where possible, enhance the added-value of new or ongoing national-lead projects. The focus on strategic projects directed

³ When PR-113-India is included the average participation of women rises to 48 percent.



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A farmer peeling a local variety of potato, Andahuaylas-Santa Elena, Peru



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Evaluation workshop in Andahuaylas-Kishuara, Peru

at the regional level should be on supporting specific cases where the conservation of PGRFA can be advanced through regional associations/partnerships that are likely to be more effective than government-led initiatives. In addition, strategic projects should also consider supporting research-oriented projects that demonstrate the socio-economic, environmental and cultural benefits of conserving and promoting agro-biodiversity. To facilitate this process, the call for proposals should promote project proposals that do not have to comply with a specific budget ceiling but rather assess projects in terms of their design, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability on a case-by-case basis.

Recommendation 4 on improving the sustainability of projects

- 25 In line with Recommendation 1 public, non-governmental and/or private enterprises should be encouraged to participate in project design, implementation and monitoring. The final reports should provide evidence that letters of agreement (or equivalent) have been concluded with the public, private and/or non-governmental sectors to fund the continuation of these activities. The BSF should include a contingency fund to support cost extensions in specific cases where there are delays or difficulties in finalizing the letters of agreement before closure. To support the sustainability process, the communication strategy of the Secretariat and its partners should report on developments in the post-project period of at least a selection of projects.

Recommendation 5 in relation to cross-cutting objectives

- 26 In line with the above recommendations, all projects should explicitly integrate a gender focus in their design, implementation, monitoring and reporting, to ensure women are recognized as major knowledge holders of PGRFA. Projects should include indicators that explicitly address equal access for men and women to resources provided through the projects and their engagement in project design, implementation, monitoring and reporting.
- 27 In relation to other cross-cutting objectives, the call for proposals should provide clear guidance that beneficiaries' needs should be met in accordance with the provisions in the Treaty, as well as relevant international agreements and declarations. In addition, particular attention should be given to ensuring that projects address the needs and rights of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities and developing new markets for local varieties and "diversity-rich" products, such as denomination of origin agreements in order to add value to the PGRFA they conserve and manage.

Recommendation 6 to support the BSF funding cycles

- 28 In line with Recommendation 1, steps should be taken to improve knowledge and data management on the BSF-funded projects. This would enhance the implementation of the entire project cycle, from project appraisal to monitoring (in accordance with Articles 13 and 17 of the Treaty).



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