

PROJECT EVALUATION SERIES

Evaluation of the Africa Solidarity Trust Fund

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ASTF	Africa Solidarity Trust Fund
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
DRE	Decent Rural Employment
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SPS	Sanitary and Phytosanitary

Executive summary

1. The Africa Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF) was initiated during the 27th Regional Conference for Africa of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), held in April 2012 in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Participants to the conference called for a joint and coordinated action to defeat hunger and malnutrition, improve the livelihood of farmers, and guarantee food and nutrition security for all in Africa. Consequently, they endorsed the proposal made by the Chair of the Regional Conference to create an African-funded solidarity trust fund to support food security in the continent.
2. This evaluation assessed the strategic relevance as well as the results of ASTF interventions, and identified lessons learned and causes of successes and failures. Specifically, the evaluation sought to answer the following questions:
 - To what extent is the ASTF **relevant to Africa's needs and priorities** in terms of food security and nutrition, livelihoods improvement, gender and women empowerment?
 - To what extent are the ASTF interventions **appropriate vis-à-vis its objectives**?
 - Is there a **common understanding and commitment** to ASTF objectives and approach among resource partners, country counterparts, FAO staff at headquarters and decentralized offices?
 - How does the ASTF engage in (national, regional and international) **partnerships** and to what extent have these partnerships been complementary and synergetic?
 - What is the **added value** of the ASTF compared to other funding vehicles?
 - What have been the **contributions** of the ASTF, and in particular the spillovers/**catalytic effect/sustainability prospects** of the results?
3. The evaluation team conducted an exhaustive review of the work being carried at headquarters, Regional Office for Africa (RAF) and in the field, with emphasis on gathering feedback from beneficiaries. In order to assess the relevance and the results achieved, the evaluation team examined ASTF contributions to three selected themes (employment and value chains; resilience and livelihoods; nutrition, food safety and security) in 11 countries from four subregions of Africa (West, East, Central, Southern).
4. The evaluation covered all ASTF-funded activities from its launch to date. However, due to the large size of the project portfolio and the wide geographical coverage of its interventions, it did not aim at a detailed evaluation of each individual project and rather focuses on assessing a sample of interventions to draw common findings and conclusions.
5. Main findings of the evaluation were as follows:

Finding 1. The ASTF "initiative" is extremely relevant for the African context as it addresses a fundamental mismatch in African development, whereas the continent's priorities are defined by member states but funding is coming from external partners. It also translates in practical terms the belief, shared by many Africans, that the main obstacle for Africa's development is not a lack of financial resources, but rather of political will and consensus. The de facto selection of i) food security and nutrition, ii) resilience and relief; and iii) employment as anchor themes for the ASTF is of high relevance: they encompass the main challenges currently faced by rural Africa.

Finding 2. The ASTF has been one of the most important sources of extrabudgetary funding for FAO's work in Africa. The Fund used appropriate implementation modalities: joint selection of interventions with proactive involvement of countries, emphasis on beneficiaries and productive assets on the ground, light-but-frequent monitoring/reporting requirements. These were appreciated by partners and FAO alike.

Finding 3. At the national level, ASTF projects provided an opportunity for FAO Country Offices to engage with non-traditional government partners such as the Ministries/Departments of Planning, Labor, Youth, Social Affairs, decentralized local governments, etc. Regionally, ASTF strengthened FAO partnerships with Africa's principal development actors, namely the African Union, New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Finding 4. The ASTF portfolio has an overall positive performance: the majority of projects achieved expected results while very few struggled to implement planned activities and thus delivered below expectations. In particular, contributions to institutional as well as individual capacity building were noted.

Finding 5. Several projects had an important catalytic effect leading to replication and upscaling of their interventions by other donors. This happened in spite of the lack of plans or scale-up strategies at project design stage.

Finding 6. Some results are sustainable and were in part borne from the successful completion of multiple production cycles and the generation of regular incomes, and from the end of external crises -market disruptions and disease outbreaks. This is particularly the case for the Ebola projects in West Africa and the employment projects in East Africa. Similarly, the knowledge and capacities transferred, for example in the case of the sanitary and phytosanitary project in southern Africa, have been institutionalized at the national and regional levels and can be continued through the recently signed project with the European Union as well as via governments' initiatives. However, the investment model used have generally been capital-intensive, bringing significant economic benefits to a small base of beneficiaries. This is not replicable or scalable and calls for more market-driven and financially efficient approaches.

Finding 7. Gender was not at the forefront of ASTF interventions. Only one project, representing a small portion of ASTF total funding, was explicitly dedicated to women empowerment. However, some projects made additional efforts to cater to female beneficiaries during the implementation phase.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. ASTF is highly relevant, but also an important funding mechanism to support African countries in pursuing their set priorities and objectives, in accordance with the commitment of Malabo Declaration to end hunger in Africa by 2025 and achieve food security. The fund has been successful in showcasing African solidarity and demonstrating the positive effects of this solidarity on the continent development.

Conclusion 2. ASTF has introduced new implementation modalities for extrabudgetary funding that are both flexible to accommodate country specific needs and effective to achieve desired results on the ground. The majority of ASTF projects achieved expected results. Few projects, however, achieved below targets. This discrepancy in performance highlights the lack of cross-learning among some of ASTF interventions.

Conclusion 3. ASTF has been instrumental in funding emerging thematic areas which were struggling for funding, such as youth employment, food safety and resilience interventions. In addition, the good results of these projects showcased FAO's expertise in these areas and had an important catalytic effect in some countries.

Conclusion 4. ASTF has helped FAO reinforce its partnerships with key regional development actors in Africa, such as the African Union, NEPAD and SADC. These strategic partnerships, however, have not always been nurtured properly to allow for an optimal collaboration among FAO and its partners.

Conclusion 5. FAO did not sufficiently communicate internally nor externally on the ASTF initiative which limited the visibility of the Fund's interventions. No resource mobilization strategy was in place at the Fund level. As a result, four years after the operationalization of the ASTF, there haven't been adequate resource mobilization efforts to replenish the Trust Fund, which could undermine its sustainability. In addition, there is insufficient clarity on the role of Resource Mobilization between the Regional Office for Africa (RAF) and headquarters, nor adequate understanding within the Organization of the Fund's approach and results.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The ASTF Steering Committee should strengthen efforts to communicate the relevance of the ASTF and its contribution to Africa strategic documents (Malabo Declaration and CAADP results framework) via the preparation of an exhaustive background document on the Fund, its objectives and funding strategy. This reference document should be widely distributed to increase FAO staff awareness about the Fund, and disclosed to resource partners during a side event on any relevant conference, including the Regional Conference for Africa and African Union summit.

Recommendation 2. The ASTF Steering Committee should earmark ASTF funds to develop and implement a communication and resource mobilization strategy aimed at the replenishment of the Fund. Given the urgency to mobilize additional resources, a Finance Committee under the Steering Committee could be created to ensure clear guidance and leadership for the resource mobilization efforts, as well as hiring a dedicated fundraising expert to support the process.

Recommendation 3. The ASTF Steering Committee should establish a cross-learning component within the ASTF to ensure cross-fertilization among the different interventions,

and also for replication of successful experiences in other countries pursuing similar themes, particularly in gender and youth employment.

Recommendation 4. The ASTF Steering Committee should ensure all ASTF interventions give adequate consideration to gender-related issues, including women economic empowerment.

Recommendation 5. FAO should continue to invest in strengthening the partnerships with the African Union and NEPAD in particular in the context of the ongoing NEPAD project. FAO should also leverage on the regional presence of NEPAD and explore their involvement in resource mobilization.

Recommendation 6. FAO should consider assigning dedicated staff to the management of the ASTF, ideally based in the Regional Office for Africa (RAF), especially in the context of increased funding. In addition to the administrative responsibilities, this staff will be responsible for transversal functions of the management of the Fund, including liaison with government donors and regional partners, communication, cross-learning and resource management.

1 Introduction

1. In July 2017, the Office of Evaluation (OED) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was requested to conduct an evaluation of the Africa Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF) by the Steering Committee of the ASTF.

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

2. This evaluation is intended to provide the FAO Management and the ASTF main donors, represented by the Steering Committee members, with an external assessment of the ASTF programme. It aims also to draw lessons and recommendations that would be useful for ASTF replenishment discussions.

1.2 Scope and objective of the evaluation

1.2.1 Scope

3. The evaluation covers all ASTF activities across Africa from its launch to date. This includes both the national projects, which constitute the first generation of the ASTF approved interventions, as well as the regional ones, which were approved at a later stage. As a programme evaluation, it does not aim at a detailed evaluation of each individual project and rather focuses on assessing a sample of the project portfolio to draw common findings and conclusions.

1.2.2 Evaluation objectives and questions

4. The specific objectives of this evaluation are to:
 - assess the strategic relevance of ASTF interventions
 - assess ASTF contributions to development results
 - identify lessons learned as well as causes of successes and failures
5. In order to achieve these objectives, the evaluation seeks to answer the following questions:
 - To what extent is the ASTF relevant to Africa's needs and priorities in terms of food security and nutrition, livelihoods improvement, gender and women empowerment?
 - To what extent are the ASTF interventions appropriate vis-à-vis its objectives?
 - Is there a common understanding and commitment to ASTF objective and approach among resource partners, country counterparts, FAO headquarters and decentralized offices?
 - How does the ASTF engage in (national, regional and international) partnerships and to what extent were these partnerships complementary and synergetic?
 - What is the added value of the ASTF compared to other funding vehicles?
 - What have been the results/contributions of the ASTF, and what are the spillovers/catalytic effect/sustainability prospects of the results?
6. The evaluation paid particular attention to the "solidarity" dimension of the Fund and its uniqueness as an *African for African* funding vehicle. In that regard it assessed its

responsiveness to African context and the appropriateness of its actions *vis-à-vis* the pressing issues in the continent. It also examined the ASTF funding modalities and processes highlighting the differences with “traditional” projects.

1.3 Methodology

7. The evaluation questions listed above have guided the assessment and have been complemented with evaluation sub-questions to address different contexts and views in the beneficiary countries (the list of sub-questions is included in Appendix 1).
8. To answer the question on **Relevance** (1), the evaluation has reviewed the main reference strategy documents for agriculture in Africa such as the Malabo Declaration and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), as well as the documents of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa, and interviewed key stakeholders at the regional and country levels, including government officials and representatives of the development partners. At a micro level, the evaluation reviewed the project documents and spoke to samples of beneficiaries to assess the relevance of the Fund interventions *vis-à-vis* the national needs and priorities.
9. To answer the question on **Design** (2), the evaluation examined the ASTF governance, funding and implementation arrangements by reviewing the Fund’s key documents, including the background documents, the Programme Management Unit Calls for Proposals and the Steering Committee meeting records. The evaluation also interviewed key FAO staff involved in the design and implementations phases as well as Steering Committee members to get their assessment of the ASTF design logic and approach.
10. To answer the question on **Communication** (3), the evaluation interviewed representatives of the Steering Committee, key FAO staff involved in the design and implementation stages as well as representatives from government beneficiaries to document their understanding of the ASTF objective and approach. The evaluation also reviewed the overall Fund and projects’ documents and progress reports to assess the level of engagement of these key stakeholders in the implemented activities.
11. To answer the question on **Partnership** (4), the evaluation took stock of all existing partnerships within ASTF interventions and identified the key development partners working on the ASTF themes at country level. The evaluation then interviewed representatives from these partners to assess the role played by the ASTF in establishing these collaborations and what their main contributions were.
12. To answer the question on **Comparative advantage** (5), the evaluation conducted interviews with key FAO staff, representatives from development partners in particular the regional actors (New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and African Union), and key government counterparts to get their opinion on the perceived added value of an Africa Solidarity Trust Fund compared to other funding vehicles.
13. To answer the question on **Effectiveness** (6), the evaluation reviewed a selection of projects under each theme, beginning with a perusal of projects documents and progress reports, and took note of the management reported results. The evaluation validated these results through the field visits by interviewing representatives of the projects’ beneficiaries as well as through field observations depending on the type of interventions. The evaluation also

reviewed outputs of selected projects, when feasible, and assessed their contributions to ASTF identified themes.

1.3.1 Management arrangements

14. The Steering Committee is the primary client and reference body for the evaluation. It has therefore reviewed and provided comments on the evaluation concept note, Terms of Reference and on the final draft of the evaluation report, and will ensure the finalization of the Management Response to the evaluation.
15. The Office of Evaluation (OED) has the overall responsibility for the evaluation, including its conceptualization, design, team selection, management of the evaluation process as well as production and dissemination of the final evaluation report.
16. The ASTF Programme Management Unit based in the Regional Office for Africa (RAF) reviewed and commented on key documents (i.e., the evaluation's Terms of Reference and the draft Evaluation Report) and provided information/support throughout the evaluation process. The Programme Management Unit is also responsible for preparing the draft Management Response.

1.3.2 Evaluation process

17. The evaluation team conducted an exhaustive review of the work being carried out at headquarters, Regional Office for Africa (RAF) and in the field, with emphasis on ASTF beneficiaries' countries. As part of this process, the evaluation team discussed with FAO staff, and contacted key regional and country partners to identify strengths and weaknesses of the ASTF approach and overall strategic relevance of the Fund.
18. In order to provide feedback on the relevance and the results achieved at thematic and country levels, the evaluation team examined ASTF's contributions to three selected themes (employment and value chains; resilience and livelihoods; nutrition, food safety and security) and in four subregions of Africa (West, East, Central, Southern) through a combination of field visits, desk study and interviews with FAO stakeholders in a purposely selected sample of countries. The following criteria were taken into consideration to select the countries:
 - countries reporting results under ASTF interventions
 - countries recommended by the Programme Management Units
 - geographical distribution to ensure coverage of all the subregions
19. Based on the above, the following countries were identified for in-depth analysis:
 - West Africa: Ghana and Guinea Bissau
 - Central Africa: Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe
 - East Africa: Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda
 - Southern Africa: Zimbabwe, Botswana, Swaziland and South Africa
20. Similarly, the evaluation focused on specific ASTF projects, based on their thematic outreach as well as geographical coverage to ensure a balanced and representative feedback from the field visits. These included the four subregional projects, the regional project implemented

with NEPAD, the regional project on rural women economic empowerment and the resilience and livelihood project in Ethiopia.

21. The evaluation also benefited from ongoing/recent evaluations in Central African Republic, Guinea Conakry, Kenya, Niger and South Sudan, conducted in the framework of Country Programme Evaluations as well as the evaluations of the Strategic Objectives 3 and 4 led by the Office of Evaluation (OED).

1.4 Limitations

22. As noted earlier, and partially due to the large size of the ASTF portfolio (17 projects) and the wide geographical coverage of its interventions (over 40 countries across Africa), it was not possible for the evaluation team to assess all the projects funded by the ASTF. In addition, the projects were at different stages of implementation, which made it difficult to gather information on and assess project results in a systematic way; for instance, some of the projects were already completed, others were still ongoing and few had just started.

1.5 Structure of the report

23. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents the background and context of the ASTF. Chapter 3 presents the main findings. Cross-cutting issues and lessons learned are presented in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. Lastly, conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 6.

2 Background and context of the ASTF

2.1 Background of the ASTF

24. Participants at the 27th FAO Regional Conference for Africa, held in April 2012 in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, called for joint and coordinated action, as well as for technical and financial support to lead national and regional efforts to defeat hunger and malnutrition, improve the livelihood of farmers, and guarantee food and nutrition security for all, working within the priorities set under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme.
25. Consequently, they endorsed the proposal made by the Chair of the Regional Conference to create an African-funded solidarity trust fund to support food security in the continent. It is also worth noting that this initiative was promoted at the highest level in FAO, including by the Director-General.
26. An Africa Solidarity Trust Fund was proposed as a funding vehicle for African governments and partners to commit un-earmarked resources for the pursuit of relevant national and regional priorities, in total alignment with FAO's revised strategic framework.
27. It was decided that FAO will host, ensure the governance and administer this multi-donor trust fund. The Organization will also provide technical assistance for the formulation, supervision and implementation of proposed activities.

2.2 Context of the project

2.2.1 ASTF governance and funding modalities

28. The decision-making body of the ASTF is the Steering Committee. It provides strategic guidance and sets priorities for activities to be financed by the Fund, and approves the work plan and projects proposals submitted by the Programme Management Unit. The Steering Committee members include representatives of the ASTF donors (Angola and Equatorial Guinea), Chair of the Regional Africa Group, Chair of the Regional Conference for Africa, Representative of the African Union, the Deputy Director-General for Programmes, the Deputy Director-General for Natural Resources, and the Programme Management Unit, which act as the Steering Committee Secretariat.
29. The Programme Management Unit is responsible for the coordination of project activities and is based at the FAO Regional Office for Africa (RAF), under the oversight of the Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative.
30. The Programme Management Unit is also responsible for project identification, which is normally done by launching a Call for Proposals, which is circulated via the country and subregional offices as well as other FAO units indicating the guidelines for application. It then receives and assesses the proposals submitted and based on the assessment makes recommendations for the Steering Committee approval. So far two Calls for Proposals have been launched by the Programme Management Unit, which resulted in the funding of most of the ASTF interventions (14 out of the 17 projects). Also, occasionally proposals can be made directly by the countries or relevant headquarters units for the Programme Management Unit's review and consideration.

2.2.2 ASTF portfolio

31. As of July 2017, the ASTF has allocated USD 37 million to finance 17 projects in 41 Sub-Saharan African countries. Although the funding has covered several areas of work, the primary themes included: employment and value chains, resilience and livelihood, and food safety, security and nutrition, which received respectively 38 percent, 31 percent and 24 percent of ASTF's total funding. The ASTF also financed a project dedicated to rural women empowerment in the agriculture sector. A breakdown of the funding by theme is highlighted in the table below.¹

Table 1: Distribution of ASTF funding by thematic area

Theme	Number of Project	Budget (USD million)
Resilience and livelihood supports	8	11.5
Employment and value chain	4	14
Food safety, security and nutrition	4	10.5
Gender and women empowerment	1	1
Total	17	37

2.2.3 Main projects funded by ASTF

32. Five out of the 17 projects funded by ASTF have individual budgets of USD 4 million each; together they constitute more than 50 percent of the portfolio under evaluation. The common characteristic of these projects is their multi-country coverage. Four out of these five projects are subregional (one per subregion in Sub-Saharan Africa) and the fifth one is a regional project covering four countries across the continent.
33. With regard to the sectoral coverage, these projects in general address more than one theme, with **resilience, food security and livelihoods** common in all projects, but at varying degrees. That being said, three out of the five projects are primarily addressing employment issues, in particular youth employment, and the remaining two focused mainly on issues of food safety and security. All the subregional projects are implemented by FAO and managed from the respective subregional office. The regional project is implemented by NEPAD from their Secretariat, based in South Africa. Below is a brief description of these projects and their underlying objectives.

¹ Breakdown prepared by the evaluation team based on projects' review.

Table 2: Description of ASTF main projects

Project	Description	Objective	Countries	Primary Theme
GCP/SFE/001/MUL	Promoting nutrition sensitive agriculture diversification to fight malnutrition and enhance youth employment opportunities in East Africa (USD 4 million)	The programme aims at creating decent employment opportunities for youth (men and women) in the agricultural sector in order to: i) improve their income and own access to food; ii) increase the availability of locally produced eggs and fish, and improve their access for vulnerable children through school feeding programmes as well as households; and iii) increase the overall productive capacities of both the poultry and aquaculture value chains	Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda	Employment and Livelihoods
GCP/SFC/001/MUL	La sécurité alimentaire renforcée en milieu urbain en Afrique centrale grâce à une meilleure disponibilité de la nourriture produite localement (USD 4 million)	The project aims at supporting urban youth and women as well as other relevant stakeholders in developing horticulture activities as a way to improve access to quality fruits and vegetables and thus contribute to food security in their geographical areas	Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe	Food security
GCP/RAF/254/MUL	Creating agribusiness employment opportunities for youth through sustainable aquaculture systems and cassava value chains in west Africa (USD 4 million)	The objective of the project is to create agribusiness employment opportunities for the youth in six West African countries, namely Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Senegal, through the development of sustainable aquaculture systems and cassava value chains	Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Senegal	Employment
GCP/SFS/001/MUL	Strengthening controls of food safety threats, plant and animal pests and diseases for agricultural productivity and trade in Southern Africa (USD 4 million)	The project aims to address food safety issues, plant pests and animal diseases by putting in place effective prevention and control mechanisms to improve food and nutrition security and enhance regional trade of food and agro-products in the SADC Region	Angola, Botswana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe	Food security and safety
GCP/RAF/494/MUL	Enhancing employment opportunities for rural youth in Africa/ NEPAD Rural Futures Programme (USD4 million)	The project is anchored in the operationalization of the Rural Futures Programme at NEPAD. The Rural Futures Programme supports initiatives that promote both agricultural and non-farm development that allow rural people to move to new jobs. The development objective of the project is to contribute to creating decent and sustainable employment opportunities for young women and men through the development of sustainable rural enterprises along strategic value chains	Benin, Cameroon, Malawi, Niger	Employment

Source: ASTF Project Documents

3 Main findings

3.1 Strategic Relevance of ASTF

Finding 1. The ASTF “initiative” is extremely relevant for the African context as it addresses a fundamental mismatch in African development, whereas the continent’s priorities are defined by member states but funding is coming from external partners. It also translates in practical terms the belief, shared by many Africans, that the main obstacle for Africa’s development is not a lack of financial resources, but rather of political will and consensus. The de facto selection of i) food security and nutrition, ii) resilience and relief and iii) employment as anchor themes for ASTF is of high relevance as they encompass the main challenges currently faced by rural Africa.

34. The ASTF Concept Note,² although not very specific on the Fund’s objectives, outlines its resource allocation focus: on activities to help countries increase resilience of rural livelihoods to threats and disasters which could negatively impact food security and nutrition, economic growth and sustainable development. The highest priority in terms of funding is given to activities focusing on eradication of hunger and malnutrition, in total alignment with the Malabo Declaration’s commitment to end hunger by 2025.
35. The ASTF funded projects and interventions have re-emphasized this strategic relevance as they are largely in alignment with the national priorities and needs of the beneficiary countries (for the national projects) as well as the regional priorities (in the case of the regional projects), as defined by the key development players in Africa in their reference strategies and policy documents such as the CAADP results framework, the Malabo Declaration and the FAO Africa Regional Conference documents.
36. Furthermore, this alignment with the needs and priorities of the recipient countries is enhanced by the flexibility dimension of the ASTF operation modalities, which allows to react to emerging events that could have not been foreseen and thus planned for in advance. The ASTF swift response to the Ebola outbreaks (in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea), where the Fund Steering Committee held extraordinary meetings to discuss the situation and approved national projects to support the stricken countries, is a clear indicator of the appropriateness of these interventions.

3.1.1 Support to national priorities

3.1.1.1 Youth employment

37. Of the 15 countries³ covered by the ASTF employment portfolio, several have already formulated policies and action plans for youth employment, while others are at different stages of formulating them. Some also have sector specific plans, especially for aquaculture and livestock development, as part of their overall development strategies. Therefore, ASTF interventions provided opportunities to strengthen linkages between policies to enable a stronger employment focus, especially with the use of value chain approaches. In all the projects, designs included policy dialogue components at national/regional level.

² GINC RAF 001 MUL Concept Note.

³ Mali, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Benin, Cameroon, Malawi, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and Senegal.

38. With a focus on aquaculture, projects also addressed important nutrition and food security priorities. Across Africa, the falling output of capture fisheries is causing high import dependence to meet animal protein requirements. With capture fisheries sector suffering from overexploitation and climate change impacts, aquaculture is seen as the main sustainable source of fish protein, and thus becoming strategically important in several countries.
39. Besides promoting domestic availability, small-scale aquaculture also has the potential for local employment creation, especially for youth. Even a small aquaculture pond (100 to 300 square metres) offers full time employment for two to three persons, besides short-time induction of paid labour in pond construction/preparation, harvesting and transportation. The short production cycle (less than five months) and availability of livelihood opportunities along the value chain – pond/cage preparation, seed and feed production, grow out ponds, post-processing and retail – provide a menu of employment and self-employment opportunities for youth at different stages of the value chain. There are also some niche spaces for women in these chains: hatcheries, post-processing and marketing are areas in which women tend to perform very well. Thus, selecting aquaculture for youth employment also contributes to gender equality outcomes.
40. A similar justification can be made for selection of poultry/egg farming in **Rwanda** and **Burundi**, with the added advantage of lower capital costs and potential for daily income from egg sales. Egg consumption is also a result of long-standing tradition and an improved awareness of nutrition benefits also promotes nutritional outcomes especially for children.

Table 3: Linkage of ASTF intervention to sector and youth employment policies

Country	Relevant sector and youth employment policies
Ghana	National Aquaculture Development Plan 2012-2016
Nigeria	Aquaculture Development Strategy
Senegal	National Rural Youth Employment Policy
Burkina Faso	National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Fisheries and Aquaculture
Kenya	Kenya Youth Agribusiness Strategy (2017-2021)
Rwanda	Strategy and Investment Plan to Strengthen Poultry Industry
Uganda	Wealth Creation and Youth Livelihoods Programmes

Source: *Evaluation of FAO Contribution to Decent Rural Employment (2016)*

3.1.1.2 Resilience and relief - example of the Ebola projects

41. The main objective of the resilience projects was to provide immediate short-term support to improve livelihoods, production, food security and therefore the resilience of rural populations in response to disasters, climate change shocks, emergencies and crises.
42. Three out of the seven ASTF funded projects under the resilience and relief theme were related to the Ebola virus disease outbreak in West Africa, namely in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In addition to the tragic human losses caused by the disease, the Ebola outbreak had negatively impacted the food security and livelihoods of the affected communities in these three countries. In fact, individual assessments of the food security situation post-Ebola, conducted by development partners working on food security-related

issues in the three countries, including FAO, have found the main impacts to be a reduction of agricultural production, increase in food prices and depletion of households' savings.⁴

43. The interventions were designed as part of the FAO Regional Response Programme to the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in West Africa, which aimed to address the challenges facing the agriculture and food security sectors in these countries post-Ebola. These challenges included shortages in supply of goods and services due to the imposed movement restrictions in and out of the affected communities, agriculture labour shortages due to the same restrictions as well as the loss of lives and the vulnerability of the workers due to the outbreak, and high commodity prices as a result of the market disruptions mentioned above.
44. The projects were therefore envisaged as a response to this post-crisis situation. They were designed as short-term interventions to mitigate the impact of Ebola virus disease on food security and agriculture-based livelihoods by: i) building the technical capacities of affected rural communities (women associations particularly in the case of Liberia and Sierra Leone); and ii) providing them with cash transfers, quality seeds and agricultural equipment so they can boost their agricultural production as well as engage in other off-farm income generating activities. The overall objective was to enable these affected households to regain their key role in the rural economy of their respective countries.

3.2 Additionality and complementarity of ASTF

Finding 2. The ASTF has been one of the most important sources of extrabudgetary funding for FAO's work in Africa. The Fund used appropriate implementation modalities: joint selection of interventions with proactive involvement of countries, emphasis on beneficiaries and productive assets on the ground, light-but-frequent monitoring/reporting requirements. These were appreciated by partners and FAO alike.

3.2.1 Important source of funding – example of youth employment

45. Decent Rural Employment is an important area of work under FAO's Strategic Objective 3 (Reducing Rural Poverty). While the Decent Rural Employment (DRE) practice covers several thematic areas, youth employment overshadows all other themes, with a footprint of over 33 countries (including 12 in Africa). In Africa, FAO has positioned itself strategically, is partnering with the key regional players (NEPAD, African Development Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development - IFAD) and has supported a number of countries – Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Tanzania, Zambia – in the formulation of national policies, strategies, investment plans and programmes for youth employment in agriculture.

⁴ Ebola Projects Terminal reports.

Table 4: FAO's other initiatives on Rural Youth Employment (selective)

Country	Highlights
Kenya	Youth Employment in Agriculture Strategy
Nigeria	National Youth Employment in Agriculture Programme (YEAP)
Senegal	National Rural Youth Employment Policy formulation and implementation
Tanzania	NAP 2013 - Employment in Agriculture and Decent Work, public private model
Mali	Update of National Roadmap to prevent Child Labour in agriculture
Malawi	Assessment of Child Labour in agriculture
Zambia	Rural Youth Employment project - YAPASA, Green Jobs

Source: compiled by evaluation team

46. Between 2014 and 2017, FAO's DRE delivery was in the range of USD 66 million;⁵ of this, over USD 21 million was for youth employment support. Emphasis has been upstream, influencing policies connecting Agriculture, Employment and Social Development domains to foster an enabling environment for decent rural youth employment connected to agricultural value chains.
47. Of FAO's total delivery of USD 63 million in the theme of Decent Rural Employment, nearly USD 40 million was funded from FAO's regular budget. Of the extrabudgetary support of USD 23 million, **The ASTF was the biggest provider of extrabudgetary funding for rural employment themes between 2014 and 2017**, contributing USD 12 million, leading ahead of Sweden (USD 7 million), Netherlands (USD 2.8 million) and Italy (USD 2.3 million), as reported in the thematic evaluation of FAO's contributions to Decent Rural Employment.

3.2.1.1 Introduction of new implementation modalities- example from the SPS project

48. The inclusive and participatory implementation modalities used by ATSF project has been highlighted as the main success factor in the sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) project implemented in the southern African region. The involvement of the technical officers from the beneficiary countries in the selection of the thematic areas of intervention, to the design of the intervention and then throughout the implementation phase has translated into a high degree of national ownership and commitment, which resulted in higher utility of the project's results. The national counterparts interviewed by the evaluation team have stressed the importance of the inclusiveness character of the intervention, confirming its uniqueness *vis-à-vis* other "traditional" donors' funded projects in their countries.
49. The project was therefore able to incorporate in its design the multi-sectoral characteristic of the sanitary and phytosanitary issues and target all the relevant sectors in the recipient countries, including plant health, animal health, fisheries, forestry and food safety. This multi-dimensional approach proved to be effective in raising awareness of the interconnectedness of the SPS issues within each country (sectoral linkages) as well as among the countries (transboundary dimension). This sensitization encouraged collaboration among the different actors within each country. It also contributed to the strengthening of the regional SPS coordination mechanism so it can effectively respond to the transboundary threats facing the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries.

⁵ Data from Thematic Evaluation of FAO Contribution to Decent Rural Employment, 2017.

50. In addition, the adopted implementation modalities of the project allowed for more flexibility during the execution of the project to cater for relevant issues that might arise in the future. This flexibility was very much appreciated by the beneficiaries especially when their countries were facing outbreaks of transboundary plant diseases such as the Fall Army Worm. Following the reporting of the pest, it was possible to reallocate some of the project's funds to implement a timely response to this transboundary crop threat.

3.2.1.2 Complementarity with other FAO projects - example from the gender project

51. The Rural Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Programme is the only ASTF funded project dedicated to gender equality. It is being implemented in three countries across Africa, including the Gambia, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Swaziland and has a relatively small budget of USD 1 million. Because of this small envelope, the project focused on countries where other similar interventions were being implemented by FAO. In other words, the ASTF funding was a complementary source of financing and did not leverage on the additional specificities of ASTF, as it was the case in other projects. This complementarity, however, was intended to allow for replication and scaling up of the good results realized by the previous interventions in these countries.
52. For example, in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, the project is working in synergies with another ongoing project on gender-based violence in the same areas of intervention (OSRO/DRC/402/CEF). The project activities consist of replicating successful FAO participatory approaches, using the Dimitra Clubs as a main entry point, which promote rural women and men's socio-economic empowerment and consolidate the resilience of their livelihoods.
53. In **Swaziland**, the project is complementing the activities of another ongoing Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP/SWA/3503) which is supporting the commercialization of sweet potatoes. At the time of this evaluation, the project was at the early stages of implementation and therefore most of its activities were still being planned. It aims at expanding the work done under the previous project by supporting rural women's access to productive resources, in particular the agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilizers, and strengthen their entrepreneurial and business skills so they can play a relevant role in the sweet potato value-chain.
54. In the **Gambia**, FAO has already supported the government in developing a national programme on women's empowerment, which recognizes the opportunities available in the poultry sector for empowering women economically and identifies the key challenges and obstacles faced by women in this industry, including access to inputs (poultry feeds) and advisory services. The project therefore represents a continuation of these efforts and is addressing some of the challenges identified previously, namely access to feeds to enhance profitability of women's poultry farms.

3.3 Partnerships

Finding 3. At the national level, ASTF projects provided an opportunity for FAO Country Offices to engage with non-traditional government partners such as the Ministries/Departments of Planning, Labor, Youth, Social Affairs, decentralized local governments, etc. Regionally, ASTF, through its subregional and regional projects, has contributed positively to strengthening FAO partnerships with Africa's principal development actors, namely the African Union, NEPAD and SADC.

3.3.1 National level partnerships

55. ASTF projects, like most of FAO implemented projects, have primarily engaged in national partnerships and with local stakeholders from recipient countries. The level of this engagement from the national counterparts, especially the government partners, has however been particularly high in most of the ASTF interventions. There was a very specific motivation and commitment to effectively use the funding to achieve good results. The solidary factor - funding 'by Africa for Africa' – brought both pride and high responsibility for implementing partners and was well internalized in the projects. This was reflected by an active involvement of government partners at all stages of the project cycle: design, selection and targeting, implementation, and monitoring.
56. In addition to the engagement with FAO traditional government partners, including the Departments of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, and due to the flexibility character of the funding, ASTF projects have engaged in partnerships with less traditional government partners such as the Ministries of Labor, Social Affairs, Economics and Trade, and Local Development, in total alignment with the revised FAO Strategic Objectives. This was for instance the case with youth employment projects, where partnerships were built with non-traditional government entities such as the Ministry of Labor in **Mali** and Youth Employment Authority in **Ghana**.
57. In fact, ASTF presented FAO teams with opportunities to pursue non-traditional thematic areas for which it would have been harder to mobilize financing from the traditional FAO resource partners. Once these interventions were implemented and proof of concept was achieved, FAO country offices, in many cases, were able to use these results to mobilize additional funding from their development partners. This was the case for the resilience-building project in Malawi, which included a strong social protection component. FAO implemented the project jointly with a multitude of partners, including the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, and Local Government Authorities through the District Council, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as a group of local non-governmental organizations. FAO country office building on the good results of the project was able to mobilize additional funding from the European Union to continue working on the same issues.

3.3.2 Subregional level partnerships

58. The sanitary and phytosanitary project implemented in the Southern African region has played a key role in strengthening FAO's partnership with the main development actor of the subregion, SADC. The project document clearly spells out the intervention's first objective as seeking to strengthen SADC SPS coordination mechanism.
59. In order to do so, the ASTF project supported, through capacity building activities as well as networking and coordination actions, the SADC's Technical Committees and subcommittees covering the areas of animal health, plant health, food safety, forestry and fisheries. It also supported collaboration with other Regional Economic Communities in the region, including the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).
60. Specifically, the project has supported the SADC Secretariat, through the Trade, Industry, Finance and Investment (TIFI) Directorate, to review the SADC Pesticide Guidelines and align

them with international norms and standards through the Southern African Pesticide Regulators Forum.

61. Moreover, the project conducted a study, in collaboration with SADC and COMESA, to map out pests and diseases that affect the development of cereals and legumes under the SADC Regional Value Chains, in preparation of an awareness raising workshop about sanitary and phytosanitary issues targeting food value chain operators.
62. Furthermore the project, through its awareness, lobbying and advocacy activities has encouraged the beneficiary countries to appreciate more the importance of collaboration in addressing their sanitary and phytosanitary challenges. These efforts have contributed to concrete results such as unified regional responses, under the leadership of SADC, to respond to emerging transboundary pests and diseases like the Fall Army Worm, the Asian fruitley fly, and *tuta absoluta*.
63. These different support activities provided by the project have led to a close partnership between SADC and FAO in southern Africa translated in the organization of joint events as well as the invitation of FAO staff to SADC organized events, as it was the case for the meetings of SADC Sanitary and Phytosanitary Coordinating and Technical Committee held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, between 7 and 10 March 2017. FAO technical officers responsible for Livestock, Food Safety, Crop production and protection as well as the ASTF project coordinator were invited to attend the meetings.
64. The appreciation of the ASTF project contribution to SADC SPS work has been also translated in the designation of FAO to implement a replication of the intervention funded by the European Union and covering all 15 SADC countries.

3.3.3 Regional level partnerships

65. At the Fund level, FAO has been keen in associating the African Union via its executive branch - the Commission – throughout the development of the ASTF initiative. In fact, the ASTF was conceived as a mechanism to achieve the objectives set by the African Union in relation to ending hunger and achieving food security in Africa.
66. Once the ASTF was launched and its governance structure established, the African Union Commission became represented in its main governing body - the Steering Committee - by a designated staff member. This representation was intended to directly involve the Commission in the decision-making process of the Fund and ensure coherence and alignment of the funded projects and the continent priorities set by the African Union. To a large extent this has been achieved, the ASTF is well viewed from the African Union side and its utility fully acknowledged. The ASTF has also embedded the key African Union documents -the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme results framework and the Malabo Declaration - as reference documents for its work across the continent.
67. At the interventions level, one project - Enhancing employment opportunities for rural youth in Africa/NEPAD Rural Futures - stands out as a major step towards building/reinforcing the institutional partnership between FAO and one of the key regional development players in Africa, NEPAD. Differently from other ASTF projects, this project is embedded in NEPAD's Rural Futures Operational Action Plan, and integral to the CAADP Results Framework. It consists of structural support, technical assistance and capacity development for NEPAD to operationalize its Rural Futures Programme. The overall responsibility of implementation

- vests with NEPAD, with FAO's role being technical backstopping, by technical units at FAO headquarters and Regional Office for Africa (RAF).
68. The project is the launch pad of a high-level partnership inked by FAO's Director-General and NEPAD's Chief Executive Officer recognizing NEPAD's central role as the implementing agency for the African Union's key regional programmes and initiatives, especially the CAADP. It also represents another level of the solidarity principle: developing capacities of African institutions. However, the project's progress has been unsatisfactory, with implementation embroiled in contractual procedures, resulting in a dismal rate of resource drawdown and delivery. According to the latest progress reports, although over 86 percent of the funds have been disbursed under an Operational Partnership Implementation Mechanism to NEPAD, expenditures and utilization levels have been far lower, and only few inception phase tasks had been completed as of mid-2017.
 69. The high political priority accorded to the partnership at higher levels has not yet translated into an effective technical partnership, in part because of change of high-level officials in some countries, which affected setting up of country level coordination mechanisms and adoption of work plans and deliverables. However, there was also fragmentation of institutional arrangements. While the administrative relationship lay with the Regional Office for Africa (RAF), the bulk of FAO's work on youth employment has been fronted by the Decent Rural Employment team at Strategic Programme 3, which has the expertise, footprint of field projects and has built a range of capacity development tools. Overall, the Strategic Programme 3 team's involvement in ASTF projects has been low, restricted to improvement of concept notes, but not in active participation in design and conceptualization. However, in case of the NEPAD project, this represents a serious gap, considering FAO's key responsibility for technical capacity building of the NEPAD for implementation.
 70. NEPAD staff contacted by an earlier evaluation of FAO's contributions to decent rural employment pointed out that FAO has prioritized policy support more, while neglecting downstream support where needs are increasing in the context of jobs creation. In countries with huge demands and opportunities, FAO must step up country presence to be counted as a serious contender. The experience with the ASTF project has been that the support from country offices varied much, and subregional or regional mechanisms were likely to be more effective.
 71. Relationships at the technical level between NEPAD and FAO suffered with the slow implementation of the project and created a trust deficit which needs to be resolved through interventions at a higher level.
 72. A strong NEPAD-FAO partnership for youth employment in agriculture is crucial for both entities given the dimensions of the challenge and also their pivotal roles and potential to address it. NEPAD has a frontal role in coordinating implementation of continent-wide and regional programmes and initiatives, besides resource mobilization and technical partnerships. Its Rural Futures Programme aims for rural transformation through skills, jobs creation and youth economic empowerment. NEPAD already partners with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and FAO to assist countries in the implementation of CAADP pillars relating to employment creation and the African Youth Charter. Several countries have provided for National Agriculture Investment Plans in their CAADP Compacts and include specific actions for youth employment in agriculture and related areas.

73. In this regard, strengthening this partnership is imperative from the ‘solidarity’ principle, and warrants high priority through an extension of the project. Also, given the political importance and sensitivity, the institutional relationship with NEPAD should be managed at higher levels, and with a bigger role of the Strategic Programme 3 team in design and implementation.

3.4 Effectiveness - results and accomplishments

Finding 4. The ASTF portfolio has an overall positive performance: the majority of projects achieved expected results while very few struggled to implement planned activities and thus delivered below expectations. In particular, contributions to institutional as well as individual capacity building were noted.

Finding 5. Several projects had an important catalytic effect leading to the replication and upscaling of their interventions by other donors. This happened in spite of the lack of plans or scale-up strategies at project design stage.

3.4.1 Results against project targets/milestones

3.4.1.1 Youth employment interventions

74. The scale and scope of the chosen interventions were not of a magnitude that could cause large scale effects on youth employment and livelihoods. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to assess effectiveness in terms of levels of employment created. The only comparisons in this regard can be the results against project targets themselves. Two projects (**Eastern Africa and Mali projects**) attained and surpassed their employment creation targets, whereas the others are unlikely to attain their targets.
75. The **subregional project in West Africa** has two design challenges – the aquaculture component could not accommodate 250 beneficiaries per country with the current budget, leading to steep reduction in coverage, and the cassava component being more a public good was to result in high levels of indirect benefits than direct employment in the cassava processing centres. However, these could not be implemented as designed, and lacked sufficient interest of stakeholders, compared to aquaculture.
76. With regard to **the NEPAD project**, implementation responsibility rests primarily with NEPAD and depends on requisite staffing and technical capacities for backstopping countries. The NPCA has very limited staff, and in this regard the need for FAO to play a more frontline role should be examined in case the project is extended.

Table 5: Financial utilization of ASTF youth employment projects

Project county/region	Financial utilization rate
East Africa employment project	77%
West Africa employment project	60%
Mali project	97%
NEPAD	NA

Source: ASTF Progress Reports

3.4.1.2 Food security and SPS projects

77. With regard to the food security and SPS projects, the two subregional projects in Central and Southern Africa have fully utilized the projects' resources. The SPS project in Southern Africa was satisfactory in achieving its initial targets at the regional level; project performance at country level was also overall satisfactory although it varied from one country to another depending mainly on the institutional set-up as well as the political will of the recipient institutions.
78. The food security project in Central Africa has achieved majority of its targets successfully; the main shortcomings were related to the creation of horticultural development units in targeted municipalities. Initially the project aimed to establish a horticulture unit in 12 municipalities. This objective was only achieved by 50 percent at the end of the project. Six municipalities in three out of the six beneficiary countries (Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe), didn't set-up these units as planned; these units were intended to continue the progress achieved by the project and thus ensure the sustainability of its achievements beyond project completion.
79. The project could not set-up a reliable information system to monitor its indicators with the aim to ensure an adequate assessment of its achievement on the ground, in terms of cultivated areas, vegetable produced, increase in income, etc. This was mainly attributed to a lack of sufficient human resource to collect and process the data from the field. Nevertheless, a database using access was set-up and some data (though not complete) is available on beneficiaries, cultivated areas, number of beneficiaries trained and production figures.

Table 6: Financial utilization of food security and safety projects

Project	Financial utilization rate
Central Africa food security project	100%
Southern Africa SPS project	99%

Source: ASTF Progress Reports.

3.4.1.3 Resilience and relief projects

80. Under the resilience and relief theme, all of the ASTF funded projects have achieved, and in some cases surpassed, their set targets. All eight projects have also fully utilized their allocated resources. These are all national projects and most of them, with the exception of the projects in Ethiopia, Malawi and Niger, contributed to an FAO general response to natural disasters or conflicts in that particular recipient county. The ASTF funding most appreciated feature in these cases are the rapidity in mobilizing the funds and the flexibility in their utilization.

Table 7: Financial utilization and achievement rate of resilience projects

Project country	Financial utilization	Objectives achievement rates
Ethiopia	95%	100%
CAR	100%	+100%
Guinea	96%	100%
Liberia	94%	100%
Sierra Leone	96%	100%
Malawi	96%	100%
Niger	97%	100%
South Sudan	99%	+100%

Source: ASTF Progress Reports

3.4.2 Contributions to policies and complementing programmes

3.4.2.1 Youth employment interventions

81. The main purpose of field level interventions, in **the employment projects**, was to provide evidence to support policy development. This has happened only in two of the four projects, and linked to the availability of evidence from the field implementation experiences.
82. The Eastern Africa project was specifically mentioned by national counterparts, in Rwanda and Uganda, as the first intervention focusing on employment and micro-enterprise development in smallholder poultry and aquaculture in the chosen districts. Thus, despite its small-scale in relation to the overall unemployment problems, the project has demonstrated pathways out of poverty and unemployment, which can be replicated or upscaled through other initiatives. Also, it has generated valuable data that can be used by other institutions for programming and implementing financial instruments for value chain financing.
83. Moreover, the project has supported the development of the Youth Employment Policy in Uganda, which was launched by the Minister of Finance in October 2017; and the subregional platform to discuss youth employment strategies in sectors such as aquaculture and poultry industry.
84. Project completion reports for the Malian project mention the creation of district level coordinating committees for policy dialogue on youth priorities, and national level multi-stakeholder consultations to mainstream youth employment in agricultural policies.
85. Although the NEPAD project is qualified as a "policy project", institutional challenges have impeded engagement in national action plans - a key outcome for the project.

3.4.2.2 Resilience and relief

86. Most of the resilience and relief projects integrated and complemented an FAO emergency response in a particular country. This was the case of: i) the Ebola projects in West Africa, which constituted a part of FAO's overall response to the disease in the region; ii) the South Sudan project, which contributed to the Emergency Livelihood Response Programme

adopted by FAO to respond to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country; and ii) the Central African project, which complemented other FAO projects working on strengthening the resilience of rural communities affected by the political-armed crisis of 2012.

87. These projects provided flexible resources to upscale and replicate the previous and/or existing interventions so they can reach more beneficiaries at the field level. The focus was mainly on supporting the affected communities regain their economic role, via capacity building, agricultural inputs distribution and assets reconstitution.
88. The Ethiopia project was the only one to have a policy-focused component, which was successfully implemented. The project supported the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in the development of a web-based Planning and Monitoring system to improve agricultural data collection, quality assurance and usefulness for decision-making purposes and in relation to national development plans, such as the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP).
89. The project is very appreciated by the local and national authorities, and is being expanded to other regions of the country with government funding.

3.4.2.3 Food safety and security projects

90. The food security project in central Africa has contributed immensely to horticulture national policies in the subregion. For instance, it has supported all six beneficiary countries to develop a national horticulture development strategy, in a participatory fashion including all relevant actors from the Ministries of Agriculture, representatives of the cities' municipalities and civil society. These national strategies later contributed to the subregional strategy for horticulture development also developed with the support of the ASTF project.

3.4.3 Contributions to technical and institutional capacities

91. All the projects aimed at extensive technical capacity building not only for final beneficiaries but also for government staff and extension service providers and other intermediaries. Most of the capacity building activities were conducted via direct trainings, workshops, study tours and exchange visits, and knowledge products.
92. Three of the ASTF projects could be singled out as the biggest contributors to capacity building:
93. **The south-south cooperation project hosted in the Regional Office for Africa (RAF):** the project has organized study tours and exchange visits among African technical staff as well as farmers to share successful experiences and benefit from the existing knowledge in different countries. The project organized the following visits:
 - Technical officers from the government ministries and civil society in **Ghana** conducted a study tour in Ethiopia focused on Web-based e-Monitoring and Evaluation and Reporting System through improved use of information technology and Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP).
 - Technical officers from **Niger** conducted an exchange visit to Tunisia to improve awareness at country and regional level on good practices in establishing the Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) policy enabling environment.

- Eleven farmers from **Rwanda** visited Uganda to learn about best practices of small-scale irrigation from Ugandan farmers.
 - Around 30 participants from **Kenya, Uganda and Zambia** visited Zimbabwe to share experience in climate-smart agriculture and conservation agriculture.
 - Cassava farmers and actors from Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo visited and gathered experience from cooperatives in the cassava value chain in Cameroon.
94. The **youth employment project in East Africa**: an important element observed in this project was the training and backstopping provided by FAO to local government extension services in the project, with further replication closely accompanied by FAO staff, which is instrumental for sustainability and replication. Knowledge and capacity development included:
- During the three-year implementation, a series of a 2x5-day trainings were organized in each country, culminating with a five-day subregional training organized for the best performers selected from direct and indirect beneficiaries, government officials and FAO country staff. The trainings covered 'Aquaculture as a Business' and aimed to help the participants understand the technical and scientific principles of aquaculture, together with economic and financial principles.
 - A "User-Friendly Tool for Investment Decision-Making in Aquaculture" a spread sheet that supports scenario analysis and investment and financial decision-making for practitioners. The tool analyses Grow-Out; and Nursery operations for Nile Tilapia and the North African Catfish using cage culture and integrated systems.
 - Value chain studies were prepared for fisheries and aquaculture in **Uganda and Kenya**, and eggs/poultry in **Rwanda and Burundi**. These technical reports provide rich information for programmes and governments.
 - Several training packages and manuals (in English and French) covering handling, post-harvest and marketing manuals, principles of aquaculture and aquaculture as business were elaborated.
 - A stocktaking study and workshop of experiences with public-private partnerships (PPP) and contract farming to strengthen marketing aspects of value chain projects took place and provided the preliminary information for preparation of a youth employment strategy in the aquaculture and poultry sector.
95. In **Uganda**, some district level fisheries extension officers acknowledged the FAO training on pond management, hatchery and feed production as being the first practical orientations they had received, and thus valuable. Furthermore, the project provided much needed budgets for monitoring and backstopping in remote areas, which proved vital for the consistent good results across locations.
96. **The SPS project in Southern Africa**: the project's main goal was to enhance the capacities of the participating countries to address food contamination, animal and plant pests and diseases and their impact on the productivity of food crops, livestock, fisheries and forest resources.⁶ In pursuing this objective, the project has worked at the regional level to strengthen the SADC sanitary and phytosanitary coordination mechanisms to support

⁶ Project Document - Strengthening controls of food safety threats, plant and animal pests and diseases for agricultural productivity and trade in Southern Africa.

detection, early warning and rapid response to transboundary pests and diseases among member countries, as well as to improve coordination and information sharing.

97. For instance, as a response to the Fall Army Worm invasion, FAO held three Regional Technical Consultative Meetings to consult and prepare a management strategy with countries, Regional Economic Communities stakeholders and development partners. The meetings focused on the following: *Established and updated status of infestation in the region; Contingency Planning and Awareness Creation; Monitoring, Early Warning Systems and Impact Assessment; and Coordination and communication.*⁷ The meetings resulted in the initiation of priority national action plans for southern Africa and SADC member states as well as harmonized regional action plans.
98. Another example of regional capacity building efforts by the project includes a food safety training conducted at the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa Food Safety Reference Laboratory in Mauritius in 2017 with the aim to enhance implementation of SPS measures in monitoring food systems. The training was based on the results of an earlier assessment conducted by the project in 2016 to evaluate the status of food safety laboratory systems in all the seven participating countries. It consisted of a course work on testing methods in pesticide residues, mycotoxins and heavy metals to enhance the skills of laboratory technicians and managers in surveillance, detection, identification and control of food safety threats. Overall the training was attended by 16 participants from the seven countries.
99. At the national level, the SPS capacities and control mechanisms of the seven participating countries were assessed, and critical gaps were identified in the relevant sectors of plant and animal health, fisheries, forestry and food safety. On this basis, the project designed country specific capacity building activities to strengthen the capacities of the relevant regulatory agencies. The national level capacity building focused on: surveillance and pest risk assessment, early detection, diagnosis and identification of diseases, rapid response to pest invasion, and compliance and implementation of the SPS standards. Below are few examples of the national capacity building activities conducted by the project:

Botswana

100. A National Training-of-Trainers Workshop on Risk-based Food Safety for Port Health Inspectors was conducted from 16 to 18 May 2017. Thirty-nine technical officials from Ministry of Health and Wellness, Ministry of Agriculture, Port Health Department, National Food Control Laboratory and Gaborone City Health participated in the workshop. The overall objective was to provide practical guidelines and the roadmap for food inspectors to use when conducting the newly introduced risk-based inspection.

Madagascar

101. In January 2017 the plant health sector trained 50 (35 males; 15 females) inspectors and assistants to develop capacity for surveillance of major pests and diseases. In February the project purchased seed testing kits that were used from February to April to carry out seed testing activities on hybrid rice seeds for farmers in Iavoloha Antananarivo and

⁷ ASTF Progress Reports.

Ambatondrazaka. A number of diseases were identified and appropriate control measures were applied to the seeds before planting.

Zimbabwe

102. The Department of Livestock conducted two training workshops entitled 'Training of Regulators and Value Chains on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Recommended Best Practices for Quail meat, Bees and Honey, Mopani worms, Commodity-based Trade (CBT) for Beef, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and Animal Welfare. A total of 125 participants (66 regulators; 59 value chain actors) were trained to improve compliance with SPS measures for trade in animal and animal products.

Zambia

103. The plant health sector in the project held training programmes and created awareness on Fall Army Worm to farmers and extension officers - 235 participants trained in six Provinces (Lusaka, Eastern, Western, Central, Southern and Copper belt) of whom 146 were men and 89 were women. In total, the capacity building activities of the projects benefited 4 493 participants from the beneficiary countries.⁸
104. The project's capacity building efforts mentioned earlier are credited to have supported the beneficiary countries in meeting their International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) obligations with regard to pest surveillance and presence reporting; for instance, Zambia was able to timely detect the presence of the devastating tomato leaf miner (*tuta absoluta*), as a result of its surveillance activities, and reported its presence to the IPPC portal and to neighbouring countries.
105. In addition, the overall response done by countries in the subregion in a timely fashion to the Fall Army Worm invasion is a confirmation of the effectiveness of the capacity building activities conducted by the project on surveillance and reporting obligations of transboundary pests.

3.4.4 Contributions to resource mobilization

106. Some projects have shown good results in addressing the priority issues facing the recipient countries as well as augmenting the livelihoods and incomes of the direct beneficiaries. In some cases, they also demonstrated the strength of the business models implemented for scalability and replication nationally and regionally. This has led to the mobilization of additional funding from recipient governments as well as external donors interested in expanding the reach of these interventions to a larger number of beneficiaries, and/or to other districts or regions within the country. There were also other cases when the donors wanted to replicate the interventions in other countries.
107. The following examples are an illustration of the catalytic effect of some of the ASTF projects:
 - Building on the youth employment project's results in **Rwanda**, the government has invested a similar amount of resources to replicate the poultry model in two other locations.

⁸ Based on Project Progress Reports.

- The youth employment project implemented in **Mali** led to the mobilization of an additional EUR 1.5 million from the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to replicate the same approach in two other regions, and an additional USD 209 950 from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to support similar interventions in a third region.
 - In **Liberia**, following the ASTF Ebola intervention, FAO raised USD 1.2 million from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for scaling up the project's interventions in other counties.
 - In **Malawi**, the project mobilized additional EUR 5.5 million from the European Union to replicate its activities using the same approach in three other districts. There were also ongoing discussions with the European Union to replicate it at an even larger scale with a potential funding of EUR 35 million.
 - In **Niger**, Norway has contributed USD 810 300 for strengthening resilience of rural communities based on the ASTF project's results.
 - The SPS project in the **southern African region** has led to the mobilization of an additional EUR 3.6 million from the European Union to continue the project work in the animal and plant sectors. The European Union project will cover all 15 SADC countries.
108. The successful projects provide evidence for respective FAO country offices to engage with other partners for upscaling and replication of these approaches at a national level. As stated above many country offices have used these results to source additional funding, and efforts are underway in other country offices.
109. FAO **Kenya**, for instance, has initiated discussions with government and IFAD to formulate loan investments in poultry and aquaculture smallholder value chains. In Uganda, field visits are being organized for donors to see the positive results of aquaculture interventions, and these can result in major supplementary investments based on the successful business model. Several communication materials, case testimonials and videos present success stories from the projects.
110. However, the projects did not have an inbuilt upscaling resource mobilization component, which could have aided these efforts.
111. On the other hand, at the fund level, there is no evidence, four years after the operationalization of the ASTF, of a resource mobilization strategy to showcase promising results from the portfolio to attract additional funding from African and other donors.
112. If the character of ASTF is to remain essentially African, the practically more effective location for resource mobilization should be Addis Ababa, which has more connection points with African Union events than the Regional Office for Africa (RAF) or even headquarters.
113. At a minimum, there is merit in a communications plan focusing on African Union event side lines, irrespective of creating resource mobilization positions in Addis. In this regard, there is merit in using some of the unspent funds to prepare for and organize a targeted capital raising event during which FAO could market the ASTF initiative.
114. The good experience from projects also presents opportunities for beneficiary countries to offer 'in kind' contributions to other countries, through exchange of best practices and

arranging demonstration trials in existing beneficiary facilities. This would further ingrain the solidarity aspect of the ASTF.

3.5 Sustainability of results

Finding 6. Some results are sustainable and were in part borne from the successful completion of multiple production cycles and the generation of regular incomes, and from the end of external crises - market disruptions and disease outbreaks. This is particularly the case for the Ebola projects in West Africa and the employment projects in East Africa. Similarly, the knowledge and capacities transferred, for example in the case of the sanitary and phytosanitary project in southern Africa, has been institutionalized at the national and regional levels, and can be continued through the recently signed project with the European Union, as well as via governments' initiatives. However, the investment model used have generally been capital-intensive, bringing significant economic benefits to a small base of beneficiaries. This is not replicable or scalable and calls for more market-driven and financially-efficient approaches.

3.5.1 Human, technical and institutional sustainability

115. In many of the ASTF projects, the principal recipients of technical assistance – field level beneficiaries – have shown successful absorption of the knowledge, and have demonstrated economic gains. This is well documented in the Ebola projects in West Africa and the East Africa employment project for instance. The low levels of attrition and the high rates of reinvestments attest to the sustainability of several beneficiaries.
116. Capacities built for technical officers are irreversible as they are largely in the form of knowledge. Likewise, essential capital goods provided by the projects for early warning, detection and control of plant and animal diseases in the case of the SPS project, and for monitoring and backstopping support in the case of the employment projects, are likely to remain in use, as they are now anchored in the existing institutional setup. Furthermore, the uptake of the projects' interventions by the beneficiaries themselves, national governments, regional bodies and other donors will also create the demand for these capacities and ensure its relevance in the near future.

3.5.2 Financial sustainability

Case of youth employment projects

117. The financial sustainability of the interventions needs to be assessed from two perspectives: for beneficiaries, and for ASTF funding. As for the first, there is sufficient evidence of the sustainability of the project beneficiaries, reflected in the low levels of attrition, the high reinvestment rates into the businesses and the accumulation of assets and savings. In this respect, the projects have shown proof of a rapid rise out of poverty for youth: incomes from poultry in Rwanda were over USD 125 per month. In the process, they have raised expectations for the continuation of funding and greater beneficiary coverage.
118. However, this positive result masks a fundamental distortion in the business model: it does not factor in the financing cost and a repayment plan for the capital investment which was provided as a grant. The value of the grant (average USD 7 000 per beneficiary in case of poultry, Rwanda) is the equivalent of 15 years' minimum wages in Rwanda. The high cash

flow and earning capacity of these projects do not justify a full grant finance, at least for scalability.

119. In the more capital-intensive aquaculture model, the East Africa employment project designed for a progressive contribution by beneficiaries, rising steadily from 25-50-75 percent of costs, as a criterion for inclusion. In the West Africa project, beneficiaries were to repay the investments into a community revolving fund, to benefit new entrants. However, it is not clear that this mechanism has been operationalized. Generally, revolving fund mechanisms have had a poor track record worldwide, characterized by an absence of recourse in grant models.
120. On the other hand, the established profitability of the models from the enormous data available offers the business case for new modes of financing value chain-based approaches, while still addressing the collateral gaps that youth borrowers are likely to have. Therefore, from an ASTF perspective, financial sustainability of the funds can be enhanced significantly by innovating the financing model for youth employment, drawing from the experiences of the present portfolio. However, these have not been explored sufficiently at the project level, except in Rwanda, where the Rwanda Agriculture Board is in discussions with financial institutions to propose funding models using the cash flows witnessed in the poultry model. Also, there are efforts to link to the national Youth Enterprise Development Fund which offers a grant to cover equity and promote contribution gaps in business plans. In Uganda, a roster of successful youth business leaders has been prepared as part of a business investor matchmaking initiative to link projects with investors.

3.5.3 Strategies for upscaling/replication

121. As shown above, successful ASTF projects have not been able to fully explore all available options for upscaling and replication. This is fairly understandable given the uncertainties involved. However, now, with the hindsight of experience, greater attention should be given to upscaling strategies. At the minimum, future youth employment projects could consider a guarantee model for supplier credit or bank-financed models with cash flow securitization, which could still provide remuneration for the youth and enable an earn-out of the assets instead of receiving a bonanza grant.
122. This would also imply mapping all available avenues and funds for youth enterprise development, and also initiating discussions with leading agriculture and value chain finance providers, including regional banks.
123. The African Development Bank's 'Jobs for Youth in Africa' initiative has an ambitious target of creating 25 to 35 million jobs and skilling 10 to 15 million youth across 25 countries by 2025, using agribusiness as the vehicle for growth. Based on the successful beginning in Nigeria, African Development Bank aims to roll out its 'ENABLE Youth' programme in 20 countries and has budgeted USD 12. billion (USD 0.5 billion per country) to enable 1.25 million jobs in Africa. Several countries are in different stages of submitting country plans. Similarly, IFAD's 'Investing in the Future' is a global initiative to support countries in youth employment initiatives.

124. Some countries have announced large youth employment programmes and begun allocating substantial national resources for these. They aim at large-scale employment connected to agriculture sectors. The value of the ASTF project learnings can be immense in this regard. Thus, the ASTF could consider a formal upscaling component for the youth employment theme based on the initial experience.

4 Cross-cutting issues

4.1 Gender analysis

Finding 7. Gender was not at the forefront of ASTF interventions. Only one project, representing a small portion of ASTF total funding, was explicitly dedicated to women empowerment. However, some projects made additional efforts to cater to female beneficiaries during the implementation phase.

125. Most of the ASTF projects are gender blind in the sense that they didn't specifically target women in their design. However, during implementation the projects' female beneficiaries, when disaggregated data was available, represented 30 to 40 percent of total beneficiaries across the ASTF portfolio. In some interventions, women proved to be more suitable for some specific activities and the project adjusted to take that particularity into consideration for the remaining activities.

4.1.1 Rural Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Programme

126. One project, on the other hand- *Rural Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Programme* - has been designed to specifically empower women in three countries, namely the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Kingdom of Swaziland and the Republic of the Gambia. The project was among the latest to be approved (May 2016) and has a relatively small budget of USD 1 million.

4.1.2 Design

127. In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, the project is scaling up successful FAO participatory communication initiatives that promote rural women and men's socio-economic empowerment. The intervention is using the Dimitra Clubs as the main entry point at community level, based on their successful results including: behavioural changes, improved food and nutrition security, better access to information and to opportunities and women's participation in decision-making and leadership. The project components include training in improved farming techniques to improve productive capacities, village loans and savings associations, and introduction of small irrigation equipment to reduce work burden.

128. The project's main activities evolve around capacity building of: i) government extension officers on gender responsive participatory services; and ii) women and men farmers on good agricultural practices (focus on the fish farming and gardening value chains), entrepreneurship and business skills, and leadership and local governance.

129. In **the Gambia**, the project is building on the results of FAO's earlier work under the Technical Cooperation Programme TCP/GAM/3501, through enhancement of the agricultural component of the Gambia Women's Empowerment Programme. The specific focus of the intervention is on improving access of women's groups, specifically through the Rural Poultry Farmers Association which comprises over 450 family poultry farms, to quality poultry feed at village level.

130. The project's main activities include provision of equipment and capacity building for women groups to establish and operate poultry feed mill structures, with the overall objective of creating women-led small enterprises in the agriculture sub-sector of poultry feed.

131. In **Swaziland**, the project was designed to complement the activities of an ongoing Technical Cooperation Programme focused on the commercialization of sweet potatoes. Its activities include distributions of agricultural inputs (improved seeds and fertilizers) as well as capacity building in the areas of good agricultural practices and entrepreneurial and business management skills. The project will also procure processing equipment to support women's group in their commercialization effort of sweet potatoes by-products.

4.1.3 Results

132. At the time of this evaluation, the project had been operational for almost a year, which is half of its two-year duration, with a financial utilization rate of over 36 percent. However, limited progress has been achieved in countries like the Gambia, where the political situation last year had caused major delays to the start of implementation, and in Swaziland to a lesser degree, where the FAO Country Office has attributed the existing delays to cumbersome administrative and procurement procedures. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the other hand, the project has been on track in achieving its planned results.
133. In Swaziland, capacity building activities were conducted for 36 women groups, a total of 603 beneficiaries, on sweet potato processing and preservation methods, to diversify their utilization of sweet potatoes at household level and improve household nutrition. In addition, the project provided processing equipment for baking secondary products of sweet potato flour, including tables, dough mixing machine, baking oven, gas cooker, weighing scales, kitchen scales and thermometers, to four women groups identified by the Ministry of Agriculture, Home Economics offices.
134. Although the beneficiaries met by the evaluation team could acknowledge the positive impact of the intervention on their food security situation, they are yet to see the same effect on their income levels. This is particularly true due to the lack of a sufficient market for their products. In fact, there seems to be no interest from the local distribution actors in the sweet potatoes by-products, instead they would prefer to buy them directly after being harvested. The sustainability of this component is therefore highly questioned beyond the project completion, unless more is done to market and raise consumers' awareness about these products.
135. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the project has provided capacity building support in the form of training and coaching to a variety of stakeholders including government officials as well as beneficiaries from the rural populations. For example, 445 people, including 243 women, from 20 Dimitra Clubs were trained to improve their organizational skills, participatory communication, access to information and collective action. In addition, government officials from agriculture and rural development services were capacitated on gender-sensitive methodologies to empower rural communities and how to mainstream gender in rural development and agriculture strategies.
136. Moreover, the project has signed a Letter of Agreement with the trained governmental extension services to provide specific trainings to 14 Dimitra clubs' members on agricultural techniques for vegetable farming as well as pest and disease control using biopesticides. A total of 28 club leaders participated in the training, which they replicated for their own members reaching around 350 farmers. The impact of these training on the vegetable production of these farmers could not be assessed at the time of the evaluation, although

the high level of participation and uptake from the club members is a good indicator on the perceived utility of these activities.

137. Furthermore, the project distributed 14 treadle water pumps to the 14 Dimitra Clubs engaged in the vegetable gardening, therefore reducing the efforts and time needed from the farmers, particularly women, to water the gardens.
138. In the Gambia, and due to the delays mentioned above, the only activity that was implemented by the project is the organization of workshop on “Gender Mainstreaming for Inclusive Agricultural Growth” to train 50 participants including government officials and members from women’s networks and civil society organizations on the linkages between women’s economic empowerment in agriculture and achievement of zero hunger, import substitution and inclusive agricultural growth.⁹ The activities of the project resumed in May 2017 and the procurement of the poultry feed mills is well advanced.

4.1.4 Ebola response projects in West Africa

139. In addition to the gender specific project mentioned above, the three Ebola response projects implemented in **Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea** have particularly targeted women beneficiaries. The projects were designed to support farmers’ organizations (mainly the women ones) in the Ebola-affected communities to recover from the effects of the outbreak through assets’ reconstitution (via cash transfers) and technical and managerial capacity building (via trainings and workshops).
140. For example, the Liberia project’s main objective was *to enable women associations to regain their key role for rural economy and social mobilization in EVD affected areas in Liberia*.¹⁰ It targeted 50 women associations in the Ebola-affected communities through capacity building activities as well as cash transfers operations to enhance their livelihoods and restore their assets, so they can play their socio-economic role plentifully in their communities.

4.1.5 Food security project in Central Africa

141. The food security project in Central Africa has supported women entrepreneurs in **Gabon, Cameroon, Sao Tome and Principe, and Chad** to better commercialize their horticulture produces through transformation and marketing techniques. For instance, the project has organized a study tour to Burkina Faso for ten women entrepreneurs from **Gabon** to learn about sanitary norms and transformation techniques such as drying of fruits and vegetables, juice production and pastry preparation. This study tour was very appreciated by the beneficiaries who have improved the quality of their products, and have since then constituted a cooperative which is continuously growing and is now made of 80 women involved in horticulture transformation.
142. It is worth noting that with the exception of the gender specific project, the Senior Gender Officer based in the Regional Office for Africa (RAF) was not associated in any of the other ASTF projects and therefore could not provide any information of their effectiveness.

⁹ Project Progress Report.

¹⁰ Project Document.

5 Lessons learned

5.1 Success enabling factors

143. The ASTF introduced some innovative operational modalities for extrabudgetary instruments, which were highly appreciated by FAO staff implementing the projects, and also by government counterparts. These brought in higher levels of ownership and commitment of stakeholders. The key differentiating aspects are enumerated below.

- **Priority alignments.** Unlike several donor-funded initiatives, which are dictated by donor priorities for country/regional strategies, the ASTF is a response to national and regional priorities emerging from regional consultations (Regional Conference for Africa) and national priorities under Country Programming Frameworks. The scope for funding was based on a few broad priorities: resilience to crisis and threats, food security and livelihoods, with an emphasis on national governments' and regional organizations' capacity development.
- **Ease and predictability of funding.** Unlike typical donor-funded proposals with no a priori funding envelopes, the ASTF began with a clear visibility of funding. The corpus of USD 40 million was in place before proposals were invited. Also, funding criteria were set in advance: USD 2 million for single-country projects of the first tranche, and USD 4 million for subregional projects (maximum USD 1 million per country) for the second tranche. This enabled FAO country offices to formulate pragmatic proposals matching the available budget ceilings. Also, compared to other donors, proposal requirements for ASTF were much simpler and called for less documentation and due diligence – as FAO was the key implementer of projects. Approvals were also expeditious, as the Steering Committees could be convened frequently and flexibly. These made the financial approvals of ASTF projects very popular with the Lead Technical Officer/Programme Officers.
- **Fund allocation.** The idea of an 'African fund for Africa' was internalized in projects to reflect high cost-effectiveness in programming. Two specific elements were: the 7 percent cap on administrative overhead and, more importantly, a directive to spend at least 70 percent of programme funds on beneficiaries. Thus, most ASTF projects had minimal budgets for official study tours, seminars and conference events, and spent a high share of budgets on building assets and skills on the ground. These led to the highest possible beneficiary coverage. However, in a few odd instances, these may have contributed to low levels of involvement by some stakeholders.
- **Beneficiary contributions.** Many projects, especially the more capital-intensive aquaculture projects, included beneficiary co-finance or in kind contributions as selection criteria, which enabled a wider spread of the grant components. In some cases, revolving fund concepts were explored in design (though no signs of these being implemented), to enable plough back of funding to serve other beneficiaries.
- **Selection of beneficiaries.** The design of elaborate selection criteria, drawn with consultation of counterparts and communities, and a transparent selection of beneficiaries through a competitive process, as well as a community endorsement of credentials enabled a merit-based selection of beneficiaries (example: the East Africa employment project). This reduced resistance and also brought in community ownership of the initiatives.

- **Decentralized implementation.** The significant difference in implementation efficiencies between the East Africa employment project and all other employment projects highlights the benefits of decentralization of both budget holding and national implementation modalities. Unlike the other three which were managed out of the Regional Office for Africa (RAF)-Ghana and headquarters, the East Africa project was not only managed by the subregional office in Addis Ababa, but subdivided the budgets into five 'baby' projects, four representing the country-level components and the fifth, a subregional component. In retrospect, these decentralized arrangements led to the following advantages:
 - Delegation of ownership, accountability and administrative management: country offices were responsible for implementation of the respective 'baby' projects.
 - High flexibility and local context adaptation: due to national structures, projects were better structured with greater involvement of country staff, and budgets could be adapted to local requirements and used national procurement, not international. In Uganda, for instance in the East Africa project, this flexibility allowed the country offices and local governments to include the nutrition component at the most appropriate level with a good integration of vulnerable groups (women, youth, and in north Uganda the integration of elders and children as well)
 - Improved backstopping quality: the Lead Technical Officer could focus on technical aspects and trouble-shooting rather than budget holding and contracting.
 - Greater involvement of the national counterparts right from project design to implementation and monitoring, which led government partners to accept outsourcing some of the extension services delivery to the private sector as well as to other farmers.
- In comparison, the employment project in West Africa, which had almost the same type of intervention and even a common sector - aquaculture, being managed out of the Regional Office for Africa (RAF) in Ghana - had to remotely backstop six countries, manage budgets and contracting, and operate without the full involvement of FAO country offices. These challenges are visible in the results shown.
- **Light but periodic reporting.** ASTF projects also had to comply with lighter although more frequent (quarterly) reporting of progress, which enabled close monitoring and course corrections without creating the burden of preparing voluminous reports.
- **Flexible governance.** An important aspect of the ASTF was the ease of convening the steering committee at short notice, including through the use of teleparticipation. The Steering Committee has met frequently upon need, and cleared proposals and issued decisions expeditiously.

5.2 Limiting factors

- **Fragmentation of technical leadership.** In the case of employment initiatives, the role of headquarters support is of crucial importance in terms of technical leadership. This is because the core technical expertise and knowledge products reside almost entirely in the Decent Rural Employment team stationed in Rome. However, the overall leadership of implementation of the ASTF initiative being at the Regional Office for Africa (RAF) left some gaps in the quality of technical backstopping, with the DRE team playing a minor advisory role when sought (commenting on proposals, for instance)

but not to drive thematic leadership of the projects. This gap was felt most in the NEPAD project, which hinges on technical assistance provision by FAO, a role that is more to be played by the headquarters teams than the Regional Office for Africa (RAF). Also, the DRE team is directly implementing several youth employment projects in Africa, including in some countries that are part of ASTF interventions (Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Niger and Uganda) with a focus on policy mainstreaming. However, linkages remained weak with ASTF projects (especially in Nigeria and Senegal), unlike in Uganda, which established good synergies among ASTF and other youth employment projects being implemented by headquarters teams.

- The absence of these linkages affects **upstream policy uptake from the ground results**, and deviates from the ASTF principle of strengthening policy and institutional capacities of governments. At the same time, the involvement of DRE teams from headquarters adds another layer of costs that reduce the magnitude of funds to be spent on beneficiaries, which was another guidance directive for projects. The trade-off between the need for technical expertise and the associated costs can be delicate. Perhaps, this would have been easier had there been a specific recognition of youth employment as a primary thematic area of the ASTF, which is warranted.
- **Complex administrative procedures.** Although this is not specific to ASTF-funded projects, many stakeholders have complained about the complexity and slowness of the recruitment and procurement procedures, in particularly when the project's Budget Holder was not in the same country office. This has caused unnecessary delays and in some cases undermined the projects' results.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. ASTF is highly relevant, but also an important funding mechanism to support African countries in pursuing their set priorities and objectives, in accordance with the commitment of Malabo Declaration to end hunger in Africa by 2025 and achieve food security. The fund has been successful in showcasing African solidarity and demonstrating the positive effects of this solidarity on the continent development.

Conclusion 2. ASTF has introduced new implementation modalities for extrabudgetary funding that are both flexible to accommodate country specific needs and effective to achieve desired results on the ground. The majority of ASTF projects achieved expected results. Few projects, however, achieved below targets. This discrepancy in performance highlights the lack of cross-learning among some of ASTF interventions.

Conclusion 3. ASTF has been instrumental in funding emerging thematic areas which were struggling for funding, such as youth employment, food safety and resilience interventions. In addition, the good results of these projects showcased FAO's expertise in these areas and had an important catalytic effect in some countries.

Conclusion 4. ASTF has helped FAO reinforce its partnerships with key regional development actors in Africa, such as the African Union, NEPAD and SADC. These strategic partnerships, however, have not always been nurtured properly to allow for an optimal collaboration among FAO and its partners.

Conclusion 5. FAO did not sufficiently communicate internally nor externally on the ASTF initiative which limited the visibility of the Fund's interventions. No resource mobilization strategy was in place at the Fund level. As a result, four years after the operationalization of the ASTF, there haven't been adequate resource mobilization efforts to replenish the Trust Fund, which could undermine its sustainability. In addition, there is insufficient clarity on the role of Resource Mobilization between the Regional Office for Africa (RAF) and headquarters, nor adequate understanding within the Organization of the Fund's approach and results.

6.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The ASTF Steering Committee should strengthen efforts to communicate the relevance of the ASTF and its contribution to Africa strategic documents (Malabo Declaration and CAADP results framework) via the preparation of an exhaustive background document on the Fund, its objectives and funding strategy. This reference document should be widely distributed to increase FAO staff awareness about the Fund, and disclosed to resource partners during a side event on any relevant conference, including the Regional Conference for Africa and African Union summit.

Recommendation 2. The ASTF Steering Committee should earmark ASTF funds to develop and implement a communication and resource mobilization strategy aimed at the replenishment of the Fund. Given the urgency to mobilize additional resources, a Finance Committee under the Steering Committee could be created to ensure clear guidance and

leadership for the resource mobilization efforts, as well as hiring a dedicated fundraising expert to support the process.

Recommendation 3. The ASTF Steering Committee should establish a cross-learning component within the ASTF to ensure cross-fertilization among the different interventions, and also for replication of successful experiences in other countries pursuing similar themes, particularly in gender and youth employment.

Recommendation 4. The ASTF Steering Committee should ensure all ASTF interventions give adequate consideration to gender-related issues, including women economic empowerment.

Recommendation 5. FAO should continue to invest in strengthening the partnerships with the African Union and NEPAD in particular in the context of the ongoing NEPAD project. FAO should also leverage on the regional presence of NEPAD and explore their involvement in resource mobilization.

Recommendation 6. FAO should consider assigning dedicated staff to the management of the ASTF, ideally based in the Regional Office for Africa (RAF), especially in the context of increased funding. In addition to the administrative responsibilities, this staff will be responsible for transversal functions of the management of the Fund, including liaison with government donors and regional partners, communication, cross-learning and resource management.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1. List of people interviewed

Name	Position	Institution
Global		
Florêncio Mariano da Conceição e Almeida	Ambassador	Permanent Representation of the Republic of Angola to FAO
Carlos Alberto Amaral	Alternate Permanent Representative	Permanent Representation of the Republic of Angola to FAO
Mateo Nsogo Nguere Micue	Advisor	Permanent Representation of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to FAO
Daniel Gustafson	Deputy Director General	FAO-HQ
Laurent Thomas	Deputy Director General	FAO-HQ
Maria Helena Semedo	Deputy Director General	FAO-HQ
Nadine Valat	Senior Programme Officer	FAO-HQ
Dina Rahman	Programme Officer	FAO-HQ
Areej Atalla	Donor Liaison Officer	FAO-HQ
Meshack Malo	Attache de Cabinet	FAO-HQ
Ana Menezes	Aquaculture Officer	FAO-HQ
Peter Wobst	Senior Programme Officer	FAO-HQ
Ghana		
Alex Kwami Nyarko-Badohu	TCP Programme Officer	FAO-RAF
Herve Ouedraogo	Regional M&E Officer	FAO-RAF
Sekou Hebie	Project Analyst	FAO-RAF
Peter Atimka Anaadumba	South-South Cooperation Officer	FAO-RAF
Bukar Tijani	Assistant Director General/Regional Representative for Africa	FAO-RAF
Yapi Atse	LTO	FAO-RAF
Tacko Ndiaye	Regional Gender Officer	FAO-RAF
Nadia Nsabimbona	Resource Mobilization Officer	FAO-RAF
Moussa Djagoudi	Regional Agribusiness Officer	FAO-RAF
Martinus van der Knaap	Fisheries Officer	FAO-RAF
Serge Nakouzi	Deputy Regional Representative for Africa	FAO-RAF
Koffi Amegbeto	Senior Policy Officer	FAO-RAF
Daniel Ninson	Senior Agricultural Officer	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
Philip Atakwa	Former Project Coordinator (GCP/RAF/254/MUL)	Fisheries Commission
Abebe Gabriel	FAO Representative to Ghana	FAO
Kwesi Evans Nkum	Director	National Youth Authority
Edmund Datwah	Assistant Director of Fisheries	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
Dzorhyleny Zico	Principal of Training Institute	National Youth Authority

Benjamin Adjei	Assistant FAO Representative	FAO
Abigail Kanje	National Project Coordinator	FAO
South Africa		
Fati N'zi-Hassane	Senior Coordinator, Office of the CEO and the Head of Skills and Youth Employment Programme	NEPAD
Abraham Sarfo	Youth Employment officer	NEPAD
Vincent Oparah	Project Manager - ASTF	NEPAD
Mohamed Abdisalam	Head of Programme Management Office	NEPAD
Hamady Diop	Program Manager: Natural Resources Governance	NEPAD
Lewis Hove	FAO Representative to South Africa	FAO
Jacoray Khunou	Policy and Partnership Officer	FAO
Alain Onibon	Senior Investment Officer	FAO
Guinea Bissau		
Nicolau dos Santos	Minister	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Livestock
Mahamadou Fadiya	Minister	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance
Orlando Mendes Viegas	Minister	Ministry of Fisheries
Yannick Rasoarimanana	FAO Representative	FAO
Rui Fonesca	Assistant FAO-Rep	FAO
Mr Fransisco Canouto de Pina	(Aggregator) Quinhamel, Bissau, Guinea-Bissau	FAO
Sao Tome and Principe		
Teodoro Campos	Minister	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
Trindade Metzger	Project Coordinator	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
Barbara Cristina Costa Moreira Campos	Programme Assistant	FAO
Policarpo Freitas	President	Camara Distrital de Lobata
Sabina Ramos	Country Representative	UNDP
Gabon		
Helder Muteia	Sub Regional Coordinator and FAO Representative	FAO
Sankung Sagnia	Plant production and protection Officer	FAO
Koumba Mouendou Descartes	Junior Professional, Plant Production	FAO
Kacou-Amondji Hyacine	Communication Specialist	FAO
Ernest Ogandaga	Major (Maire) Commune de d'Ankana (region Libreville)	FAO
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