

Project Evaluation Series

**Final evaluation of
"Enhancing Agriculture Production
through Irrigation System
Improvement and Strengthening
Institutional Capacity"**

Project code: OSRO/AFG/502/JCA

Management response

Overall response to the evaluation

In this section, the project management presents its overall views on the evaluation, the report and its conclusions.

The Project team appreciates the comprehensive, analytical and constructive Final Evaluation of the project for "The Project for Enhancing Agriculture Production through Irrigation System Improvement and Strengthening Institutional Capacity" (OSRO/AFG/502/JCA). The Project team generally agrees with the key findings of the evaluators that despite the various implementation challenges, the project made significant contribution towards achieving its objectives and delivered results that are highly valued. It is also fair to say that the project performance was more successful in laying the groundwork for enhancing agriculture production through irrigation system improvement and strengthening institutional capacity as the objective of quite is quite broad to be fully realized within the project period of less than four years. The project resulted in significant capacity development of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) staff in the different aspects that the project covered. Several operational issues related to the implementation of the project, such as poor security conditions, high turnover rate in the authorities, are fully agreed. The project team appreciates the recognition that the gender balance needs to be given due attention despite the difficult socio-cultural context. The project team agrees that the project was not designed with appropriate gender focus.

The recommendations covering the follow up actions required in the capacity building part beyond the project and the considerations for future projects based on the experience of the project are accepted and the management responses are given separately below.

Response by recommendation

In this section, each recommendation has been addressed by Management. They have been discussed in the order presented in the executive summary of the evaluation report. It has been done in the format of the Management Response matrix and includes:

- a. The recommendation number and text copied from the evaluation report;
- b. Indication of whether the recommendation is accepted fully, partially, or rejected;
- c. Description of the actions to be taken, with comments as required on the conditions to be met during implementation, or on reasons leading to a partial acceptance or rejection of a recommendation;
- d. The responsible party or FAO unit for implementing the action/s;
- e. The time-frame for implementation and/or an implementation schedule, if required;
- f. Indication if further funding from FAO or a resource partner is required for implementing the recommendation.

| Management response to the final evaluation of “Enhancing Agriculture Production through Irrigation System Improvement and Strengthening Institutional Capacity” | | | | | Dec 2019 |
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| Evaluation Recommendation (a) | Management response (b) Accepted, Partially Accepted or Rejected | Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c) | Responsible unit (d) | Timeframe (e) | Further funding required (Y or N) (f) |
| Recommendation 1: Projects need to have integrated outputs and outcomes in order to produce a consolidated impact on project beneficiaries in a realistic timeframe considering the contextual constraints in Afghanistan. OSRO/AFG/502/JCA extended with a one year no cost extension. | Accepted | The suggestion is appreciated. It is fully agreed that clear roles and responsibilities and better coordination among water related institutions would have positive impact and lead to sustainability of the project results. The extended period of the project (Jan to Dec 2019) was planned and implemented with a more integrated approach. | FAO, Resource partner and project designers | To be considered during the design of each project | No |
| Suggested action 1 for R1: The project design encapsulates three distinct outputs that could not be inter-linked or integrated together to produce a consolidated project aimed at increasing (rice) productivity and water efficiency. The project had no inter-dependencies between each output’s activities in order to produce outcomes and a consolidated impact. The project would be more effective as three individual projects related to three specific sectoral development targets. FAO has extensive experience implementing irrigation rehabilitation and capacity building projects in Afghanistan. The tried-and-tested model works effectively and in fact, roughly 75 percent of the project budget was devoted to Output 1. Yet, the project team needed to split their focus and efforts between three disparate fields of work in three geographically different areas of Afghanistan. | Partially Accepted | The project team fully agrees with the suggestion but there was not much that could be done about it as it was the way the project was originally designed. However, this was a very good lesson learned for future projects. | FAO, MAIL and Resource partner | June 2020 To be followed in the designing of new projects. | No |

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| <p>Suggested action 2 for R1: While Output 3 activities did not contribute to the project's impact on beneficiary growers, the output interventions did establish a foundation and clear path to the provision of certified high-quality potato seed to farmers. The problem for Output 3 results was the project duration was insufficient for introducing a new technology into Afghanistan such as building a virus-free potato industry - at least five years is needed to establish the venture and support entrepreneurs producing certified seed and growers utilising virus-free potato seed for at least one season.</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>In order to compensate the short project duration in up scaling the production and strengthen the venture, other ongoing FAO project and programs can continue to support similar project in the future and take up the efforts to bring the initiatives to a logical end. However, ministry staff has been trained and their linked was developed with micro tuber production entities in India and CIP. Of course, they can run the business.</p> | <p>FAO, MAIL, Resource partner.</p> | <p>For follow up in coming several years in the follow up projects.</p> | <p>Yes</p> |
| <p>Suggested action 3 for R1: Irrigation projects implemented in complex operational environments, such as north-eastern Afghanistan, need to be 4-5 years duration. Funds were not disbursed evenly over the duration of the project due to the length of time to complete the initial irrigation scheme surveys, diagnostic analyses, water management infrastructure designs, prepare tenders and contract companies for rehabilitation works, and establish and build capacity of IAs. Most of this work needed to be completed by project team members during their visits to project areas from Kabul. The project design generally over-estimated what could be achieved in the time available. The security situation also deteriorated in the three project provinces that added difficulties to fieldwork and achievement of results.</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>The project team fully accepts this suggestion. From the allocated budget, it was able to make some saving to extend the project activities for one more year. However, the effectiveness of the project would have been much better if the team has been given a duration of 4-5 years as recommended by the Evaluation Team.</p> | <p>FAO, donors and MAIL</p> | <p>To be considered for development project for the agreement of Resource partners and MAIL.</p> | <p>Yes</p> |

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| <p>Recommendation 2. Irrigation rehabilitation projects should include training to demonstrate improved cropping practices to drive productivity improvements; and livelihood support activities to help farmers diversify their livelihoods, assist them to grow alternative crops and help build their resilience to external shocks.</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>The project team fully agrees with this suggestion. The project followed this suggestion and carried out O&M trainings for the communities during the extended period. These trainings can be continued through the regular program of the government. The project was linked with livelihoods projects in MAIL including RIPA.</p> | <p>FAO, Resource partner, MAIL</p> | <p>To follow up for couple of years</p> | <p>Yes</p> |
| <p>Suggested action 1 for R2: Output 1 interventions and the linkages with RIPA demonstration plots focused on increasing productivity and production of rice among farmers in the north-eastern project provinces. OSRO/AFG/502/JCA was fortunate to link with RIPA to provide this training and demonstration support to farmers, although the effectiveness of these linkages between projects cannot be gauged at the time of the evaluation as the RIPA interventions were just starting in project areas. Nevertheless, all irrigation rehabilitation projects need to provide training and support to farmers to assist them adopt improved production techniques and drive on-farm productivity improvements as soon as possible after commencement of these projects. For irrigation rehabilitation projects, this training is better placed within the project framework rather than linking with other external training facilities or projects. This provides more control over this key activity and project teams will be more influential in driving benefits to achieve the project impact (i.e. productivity improvements and water efficiency gains).</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>This is again a good suggestion. The project did establish good coordination with RIPA during the extended period to produce the synergy between improved irrigation services and best agronomic practices.</p> | <p>FAO, Resource partner, MAIL</p> | <p>To be followed and reported in the follow up report</p> | <p>Yes</p> |
| <p>Suggested action 2 for R2: Farmers growing cereals practise continuous cropping of their land, which leads to soil deterioration and higher probability of pest and disease problems (and an increased dependence on agro-chemicals). The effects of changing weather patterns, unpredictable rainfall and prolonged dry</p> | <p>Partially Accepted</p> | <p>There is a natural phenomenon of soil nutrient depletion in agriculture if it is not managed properly. Farmer practice crop rotation and addition of supplemental plant nutrients to sustain the crop production to their best of available resources. Natural calamities are unavoidable and there are ways and means to address such issues and challenges at</p> | <p>MAIL</p> | <p>To be recommended to formers and followed in the future</p> | <p>Yes</p> |

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| <p>periods are also increasingly impacting farmers and some interlocutors, including the Deputy Minister of MEW, begin to question the long-term viability of growing rice in Afghanistan.</p> | | <p>local level. Compared to rice there are other high value crops for specific rice growing environments but may not be applicable to all rice growing domain.</p> | | | |
| <p>Suggested action 3 for R2: The project training for improved cropping practices, such as crop diversification, should include a comprehensive package of activities that would help improve soils and longer-term cropping outcomes. Crop diversification depends on many issues including: the land size, farming experience, asset wealth, location, access to agricultural extension services, information on output prices, low transportation costs and general information access. Diversified cropping systems, in general, tend to be more agronomically stable and resilient mainly because they are usually associated with reduced weed and insect pressures, reduced need for nitrogen fertilizers (especially if the crop mix include leguminous crops), reduced erosion (because of cover crops inclusion), increased soil fertility and increased yield per unit area.</p> | <p>Partially Accepted</p> | <p>This is a very nice idea but tends to go beyond the scope of the present project which is already loaded with specific activities. The follow-on projects to this project should certainly take this into consideration and propose it from the very beginning.</p> <p>A main challenge in crop diversification package is that the smallholders cannot afford the risk of the changes and face difficulty in adjusting due to their daily needs. Hence, they always go for staple crop/food like wheat, rice etc.</p> | <p>MAIL, FAO</p> | <p>For future</p> | <p>No</p> |
| <p>Suggested action 4 for R2: Crop diversification is a viable climate smart agriculture practice that significantly enhances crop productivity and consequently resilience in rural smallholder farming systems. Project beneficiaries will remain predominately rice growers, however, development assistance projects should demonstrate the benefits of crop diversification through rotations and inter-cropping on climate smart agriculture through increased productivity (alternative crops, such as legume and cereal crop productivity) and enhanced resilience (household income, food security, and nutrition).</p> | <p>Partially Accepted</p> | <p>This also follows the same line as the previous one. The follow-on projects to this project should certainly take this into consideration and propose it from the very beginning.</p> | <p>MAIL, FAO</p> | <p>For future</p> | <p>No</p> |

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| <p>Recommendation 3. Capacity building activities of government staff should be based on an assessment of needs, available resources (before and after project) and aim to build applicable skills to ensure sustainability of results.</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>The project has taken positively this suggestion of assessed the training needs of the training participants prior to conducting the training during the extended period.</p> | <p>MAIL and FAO (as the implementing partner of irrigation rehabilitation projects)</p> | <p>To be strictly followed in future in MAIL and partners</p> | <p>No</p> |
| <p>Suggested action 1 for R3: Capacity building of government institutions needs to be targeted at practical and sustainable outcomes. The project provided in-field training and mentoring for PAIL staff and IA members to competently manage, operate and maintain rehabilitated water control structures. Formal training courses in Afghanistan and abroad concerning Water Accounting and PMS approach to irrigation management did not always transfer into useful skills for government staff that would assist them in their daily work. Government staff met during the mission appreciated the training but were not utilising the full array of their newly-acquired skills and could not explain how these skills were directly relevant in their work responsibilities. Without an opportunity to use these practical skills in their work, these government staff will likely quickly lose these skills.</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>The project included practical training during the extended period. The PMS approach dissemination during the extended period included hands-on training where that participants would learn by doing the task.</p> | <p>To FAO (as the implementing partner of irrigation rehabilitation projects)</p> | <p>Up to end of 2019</p> | <p>No</p> |
| <p>Suggested action 2 for R3: It is doubtful that any counterpart ministry has the resources or capacity to organise sufficient in-house training to maintain the technical skills of their staff developed through the project training courses. Therefore, project teams should critically assess the capacities and resources of government agencies, before- and after-project, and align training courses and equipment purchases accordingly, so that learned skills can be readily applicable to specific work areas of government staff responsible for those work areas.</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>The project teams has not only contributed to capacity building of the government staff but have also assessed their capacities and resources and aligned the training courses so that the learned skills can be readily applicable to their specific work areas.</p> | <p>FAO (as the implementing partner of irrigation rehabilitation projects)</p> | <p>During project period</p> | <p>No</p> |

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| <p>Recommendation 4: GIS should be considered a necessary tool to support evidence-based decision-making, and more accurate monitoring and assessment of project progress and results.</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>This was a good suggestion. It should be in-built in all the future similar irrigation projects.</p> | <p>MAIL and FAO (as the implementing partner of irrigation rehabilitation projects)</p> | <p>For the project in the future.</p> | <p>No</p> |
| <p>Suggested action 1 for R4: GIS monitoring and evaluation of project progress needs to be included from commencement of irrigation support projects. Irrigation rehabilitation projects suffer from a lack of regular monitoring and evaluation. As the primary purpose of monitoring was to achieve efficient and effective project performance, GIS should be an integral part of the Management Information System and a regular internal activity in any irrigation project. GIS monitoring of irrigation canal rehabilitation and command areas would provide real time results on progress and early warning of problems, such as canal damage and leakage. GIS can also be utilised for multiple tasks and monitoring indicators to provide an array of performance evaluation information – realisation of irrigation potential, production and productivity improvements (maximisation of crop yields), changes in land use, extent of double (or triple) cropping, efficient management of irrigation water, improvements or deterioration (salinity, water-logging) in irrigated lands.</p> | <p>Partially Accepted</p> | <p>The project team agrees with the suggestion but on the other hand it is also brought to the attention that the team is utilizing the approach of water accounting which also utilizes the Geographic Information System (GIS) technology.</p> | <p>FAO (as the implementing partner of irrigation rehabilitation projects)</p> | <p>For the project in the future.</p> | <p>No</p> |
| <p>Suggested action 2 for R4: There are methodological problems in developing cost-effective and reliable approaches that can be used with the resources and expertise available. GIS would assist in overcoming these problems and help establish baselines, monitor project progress, identify limitations, assist with work planning, and</p> | <p>Partially Accepted</p> | <p>The project focused more on water accounting for which schematic maps of upstream and downstream linkages were identified and illustrated so that most suitable schemes can be selected in the given context.</p> | <p>FAO (as the implementing partner of irrigation rehabilitation projects)</p> | <p>For the projects in the future.</p> | <p>No</p> |

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| <p>increase the irrigation potential of rehabilitated systems. There are several open source GIS software programmes and geospatial data is freely available. These solutions may now guarantee a more cost-effective and sustainable approach with the cost to projects reduced to capacity building and human resources.</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Suggested action 3 for R4: FAO supported establishment of a GIS monitoring unit in MAIL, but more support would likely be required to enable MAIL to monitor such activities around an irrigation rehabilitation project. Skilled GIS technicians are in high demand and often difficult to retain in government departments. Therefore, designers of agricultural irrigation projects may need to allocate sufficient funds to employ external GIS monitoring services that can complement any information provided by in-house GIS technicians, and provide a wide selection of monitoring and evaluation information relevant to irrigation rehabilitation projects to assist accurate decision-making processes.</p> | <p>Partially Accepted</p> | <p>As the project is ending so is not possible to be included in this project but can be considered in future similar projects. The GIS/MAIL has the capacity which needs to be used.</p> | <p>MAIL and FAO (as the implementing partner of irrigation rehabilitation projects)</p> | <p>For the ongoing and future projects in the future.</p> | <p>Yes</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 5: All stakeholders should critically evaluate and validate the PMS approach, screen best practices and document lessons learned and experiences.</p> | <p>Partially Accepted</p> | <p>The success of PMS approach is evident by the greenery that PMS has been able to establish in the Gamberi area. However, the project team does agree that that the approach is relatively new and that the best practices of the approach and its experiences and lessons learned needs to be properly documented for future references and follow-up projects to come along its line.</p> | <p>FAO implementation team, MAIL, MEW and MRRD in consultation with PMS</p> | <p>In near future.</p> | <p>Yes</p> |
| <p>Suggested action 1 for R5: The project team should evaluate, and document lessons learned from the PMS system operational in Nangarhar. The FAO team MAIL, PMS and staff from MEW and MRRD (if available) should evaluate</p> | <p>Partially Accepted</p> | <p>This is a very good suggestion. Given the workload of the project, it was not possible within the timeframe of the project. However, this point has already been realized by JICA and it is evaluating and validating the works under the PMS</p> | <p>FAO implementation team, MAIL, MEW and</p> | <p>In the next few years</p> | <p>Yes</p> |

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| <p>and validate the PMS approach, screen best practices and document lessons learned and experiences. This could form the basis of an operations-type manual that describes the context that allowed PMS to work, institutional structures and responsibilities, transferability of certain PMS practices, technical considerations and sustainability of the PMS approach in order to understand the interventions that were most effective. The result of this analysis would prepare the foundation for training as well as other dissemination materials. Such a document could be invaluable for government staff and the intention to expand PMS into national irrigation rehabilitation projects.</p> | | <p>approach and developing a guideline in the process of following the approach. Of course, this effort needs support from all ministries (MAIL, MEW and MRRD) both in terms of developing the guidelines and also in terms of following it.</p> | <p>MRRD in consultation with PMS</p> | | |
| <p>Recommendation 6: Gender inclusiveness in irrigation rehabilitation projects could be addressed through targeting women's participation in project through a range of agriculture-based livelihood activities and/or promote the inclusion of women as members in the existing water users' associations.</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>It is accepted that the current project was not designed with any specific gender empowerment component. Future project should be designed and developed in alignment with the National Women's Economic Empowerment Program and Plan and FAO Gender Policy.</p> | <p>FAO, MAIL, MEW and MRRD</p> | <p>In the next few years</p> | <p>Yes</p> |
| <p>Suggested action 1 for R6: An effective mean to incorporate gender inclusiveness in irrigation rehabilitation projects is through implementation of a broader range of alternative livelihood support activities. In this project, besides the involvement of women in activities associated to the production of virus-free potato seeds, limited alternative livelihood support activities were offered. Parallel activities could enable women to actively participate and could empower them as secondary earners.</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>This suggestion is well received. An offer of a broader range of alternative livelihood support activities for women would enable them to participate actively and could empower them as secondary earners. Futures projects should be designed along this line.</p> | <p>FAO implementation team, MAIL, MEW and MRRD</p> | <p>In the next few years</p> | <p>Yes</p> |

Management response to the final evaluation of "Enhancing Agriculture Production through Irrigation System Improvement and Strengthening Institutional Capacity"

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| <p>Suggested action 2 for R6: Another key element is to encourage communities to include women in the local water users associations to strengthen women's bargaining position as resource users within households and communities. An advocacy strategy for inclusion of women in community decision-making bodies should formally be consulted in the design of future FAO rehabilitation and infrastructure projects as well as community natural resource management projects.</p> | <p>Accepted</p> | <p>This suggestion is well received. In the future projects, communities can be encouraged to include women groups to strengthen their bargaining position as resource users within households and communities. The future FAO infrastructure and natural resources management projects should be designed to formally ensure their inclusion in the community decision-making bodies as much as possible.</p> | <p>FAO , MAIL, MEW and MRRD</p> | <p>In the follow up projects</p> | <p>Yes</p> |
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Assumption: The execution of the recommendations is subject to the commitments of responsible unit/parties and fund allocation as indicated in above list.