

Project Evaluation Series

**Terminal evaluation of the project
“Rehabilitation of Degraded Agricultural
Lands in Kandy, Badulla and Nuwara Eliya
Districts in the Central Highlands”**

**Project code: GCP/SRL/063/GFF
GEF ID: 5677**

Management response

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		Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection	Responsible unit	Time frame	Further funding required (Y or N)
<p>Recommendation 1. <i>To FAO and Government.</i> Strengthen role of Steering Committee for effective policy and best practices mainstreaming. Project Steering committees that bring together senior officials from across different ministries and agencies, could play a much more proactive role to support policy and practice mainstreaming. The project steering committee should also link project outcomes to policy making, national plan formulation and monitoring processes that are on-going through other ministries and agencies. This would enhance the scope of the project steering committee and ensure that a project’s policy related outputs do not ‘stand-alone’ and are well integrated into the relevant agencies. Best practice guidance materials developed based on the successful SLM models should be integrated into technical agencies and influence field interventions and future programmes. Hence, it is recommended that future Steering Committees are constituted to support the project in policy and financing aspects that are critical for sustainability but difficult for the PMU to handle on its own. This provides a solution to PMU capacity which is restricted by both GEF guidelines and financial regulations of the Government of Sri Lanka.</p>	Accepted	Subject of Land is interdisciplinary, in nature. Hence proper coordination & integration with all land users / stakeholders is a must when dealing with land related activities. Therefore, such a Steering Committee needs authority to deal with cross-cutting activities. In future, the members of the Steering Committee will also be trained on those important policy related matters and also on how to streamline and scale up the results into national level planning.	FAO Programme Team	With the inception of the new projects where there is a National Level Steering Committee involved	Yes

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<p>Recommendation 2. <i>To FAO and Ministry of Environment.</i> Develop a roadmap to use the LADA assessment to address the larger problem of land degradation in the central highlands. One of the most important assessments for the project was completed only at the very end of the project’s implementation period. This report however provides a valuable insight on land use in the Central Highlands and points to degradation hot spots that have the most impacts on watersheds, landslides, downstream impacts on hydropower and drinking water etc. The findings of this assessment should not remain as a report on a shelf simply to ‘tick a box’ in the project activities. It is recommended to engage the Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Management Centre (NRMC) to plan for a systematic way to integrate these findings into the plans and projects of development agencies working in the Central Highlands -including agriculture, water resources, power and energy, forestry, settlement and urban planning, plantation development, roads and other infrastructure. At the least, the FAO and MOE should use the results of the LADA assessment to influence site selection for future PLUDPs developed by the Land Use Policy Planning Department (LUPPD).</p>	<p>Partially accepted Even before the project implementation there were studies carried out by the DOA which mapped out and identified most vulnerable areas in terms of soil erosion. However, LADA approach was used at the latter part of the project of which indicated hot spots of land Degradation. Since the DOA had the information on hot spots before the LADA study, there was no negative impact on project implementation.</p>	<p>The LADA assessments need to be carried out all over the Island and need to be repeated, may be in every five years interval.</p>	<p>FAO Technical Team</p>	<p>In the future project design stages. FAOSRL has already considered LADA Assessment findings in selecting the sites for the GEF cycle 8 projects.</p>	<p>Yes</p>

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<p>Recommendation 3. <i>To GEF project formulators.</i> Projects trying to innovate conservation approaches beyond the traditional should have dedicated, embedded technical advisory support. The project design should have envisaged that implementing the more non-conventional outputs relating to policy, partnerships, SLM pilots and financing would require long term, embedded technical advisory services. A chief technical advisor was not part of the project management unit, during design or during implementation. A technical advisor would have been able to ensure the connectivity between outcomes and outputs and monitor the project theory of change at the outcome and objective level. As pointed earlier, this project only had ad hoc and short-term technical consultancies. Recognizing the practical drawbacks of depending on the GEF agency or the government executing entity (EA) for this support on a continued basis as required by the project, this support should have been built into the project at the design stage, or at least post MTR. A technical advisor could have liaised with the National Steering Committee for Land Degradation NAP and convened the Technical Coordinating Committee to build bridges between the project and the national policy arena.</p>	<p>Partially accepted It’s true that the project did not include a CTA but the necessary technical know-how was always been obtained through the local experts. The Department of Agriculture is equipped well with the necessary knowledge and skills for sustainable land management and the related areas.</p>	<p>In future projects, FAO will make sure to establish a Technical Working group as required and based on the availability of the technical expertise to projects.</p>	<p>FAO Programme Team led by the LTOs</p>	<p>At the project design stage</p>	<p>No</p>

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<p>Recommendation 4. <i>To Project Team, FAO and Ministry of Education.</i> The project should catalyze and showcase their knowledge management, training and outreach related innovations post-COVID-19. This is an important lesson and case study for development projects struggling to deliver in very challenging circumstances as COVID-19 continues to impact on movement and field-based activities. The project faced an almost impossible task as field delivery was just beginning to pick up when COVID-19 induced country-wide lockdowns and travel restrictions between districts. This setback was eventually transformed in to one of the project’s most lasting legacies and best practices. The TE recommends a detailed documentation of the process followed to translate the farmer field school into an online format and the delivery of different FFS modules with government agencies. The establishment of WhatsApp groups to follow up on the training, the peer-to-peer information exchange that was triggered by the access to online learning material etc., would be invaluable for other projects in Sri Lanka and also similar interventions in other countries. The lesson that very practical agricultural and plantation crop management training could be delivered purely through online sessions and platforms was a novel experience to extension services and to farmers. Project’s</p>	Accepted	Formalization of E-agriculture approaches beyond just merely through WhatsApp groups.	FAO project planners	At the project design stage.	Yes

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knowledge management has taken a leap of its own since the introduction of the online content, and new media platforms. There are so many good lessons to be gained from this experience and should be widely shared across development projects and FAO networks.					
<p>Recommendation 5. <i>To GEF project formulators.</i></p> <p>Long term and innovative financing should be embedded into sustainable land use models in project and pilot design. Rehabilitation of degraded agricultural lands is a long-term process for which continuous application of SLM practices over a long period time will be necessary. Thus, in order to seize the real (consolidated) impacts of the project interventions, it is recommended that impact assessment be carried out systematically to support both policy influence and financing of future scaling up. The project would have had more success with the introduction of innovative financing mechanisms if these were already considered when developing the scope of the project design and the specific sustainable land management (SLM) pilots. GAP vegetable production with private sector investment and technical assistance from the Department of Agriculture is a good example of such a solution. The SLM aspects of this initiative</p>	Accepted	SLM practices need to be financed. Hence need to be considered as a national responsibility and should not put the total burden on the land user. FAO will consider more sustainable financing options including the blended financing in the future projects.	FAO Programme Team	At the design stage of the new projects	Yes

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were strengthened through project intervention, however access to financing and markets (through Cargills) will be the catalyst that takes the initiative to other farmers/areas in the country. The entire pilot was co-designed with the financing mechanism and private sector partner. Similarly, the SLM approaches piloted in the seed potato cultivation pilot has a strong financing partnership through IFAD’s SAP project with the Provincial Department of Agriculture intermediating between the agencies. It is clear therefore that the more successful and sustainable pilots were ones that did not separate the technical development from the financing modality. It is recommended therefore, to treat financing mechanisms as part of the pilot design and not seek financing options post-facto to sustain investments already made in technical design and field implementation.					
Recommendation 6. <i>To FAO and To GEF project formulators.</i> Use the capacities of local NGOs to improve delivery efficiency and leave behind local capacity. It is strongly recommended that capacities of local non-governmental organizations and civil society is leveraged to support project execution. PMUs established by UN agencies and government for implementation of field-based projects should provide the overarching guidance and technical	Accepted	Ways and means of using NGOS more effectively in SLM, needs attention. Establishment of CSO platforms and Local NGO forums at the design stage of the projects will help them sharing their voice which in turn strengthen the relationship with government and other key stakeholders.	Project planners and designers	When designing the project concept notes and proposals	Yes

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<p>advisory support and ensure that both government and non-government extension networks are used for last mile dissemination, community mobilization and training workshop organization. The Midterm review also recommended this approach specially to overcome the obstacles of transferring funds to support farm level soil conservation measures. It is strongly recommended that PMUs should not take up the space of local actors and NGOs working in the field and with years of experience in field delivery, and instead should use this opportunity to capacitate NGOs and field level development networks with technical knowledge and new tools/financing opportunities. The design of future GEF projects should seriously consider execution support by local organizations right at the design phase. It is important to ensure that NGOs are not merely means to channel funds to the local communities but a part of the scaling up process. Increased local capacities will enable lateral replication of SLM models and training tools/ material. Engaging local organizations at the design phase, with a view to delegate execution responsibility, will build trust between government and NGOs in the conservation and development landscape.</p>					

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<p>Recommendation 7. To FAO, LUPPD and Ministry of Education. Land use planning and development planning should not be disconnected. The sustainability and success of the participatory land use development plans (PLUDP)s depend on integration into development planning. If not well integrated in to the divisional and local development plans and processes the PLUDPs runs the risk of ‘hanging loose’ and disconnected from local development-related decision making which can negatively influence and even overturn recommendations of the PLUDP. The test run of a divisional level PLUDP in Doluwa, Kandy District demonstrated that these plans are an excellent tool- both technically and procedurally to bring together government services and communities around the table for a common planning effort. However, the implementation and monitoring of these plans need wider reach beyond the LUPPD and agriculture sector. It is recommended that PLUDPs should be developed in close collaboration with the divisional and district planning units, and not just with technical agencies engaged in soil conservation. PLUDPs should lead to sustainable land management within the local development plan addressing the different drivers of degradation (roads, settlements, and other infrastructure programmes) and integrate ways to mitigate land</p>	Accepted	More integrated / interdisciplinary approach to be used with the participation of land users as well. The provincial and district level development plans should be integrated with the PLUDPs which prevent duplication and Complexities.	FAO Programme Team	At the divisional and local level planning	Yes

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degradation and erosion. In this respect this recommendation ties with recommendation 2 that a more systematic approach is required to develop and implement sustainable land management policies and practices in these districts and divisions based on the scientific evidence and approaches promoted by the project.					
<p>Recommendation 8. <i>To FAO and GEF project formulators.</i> Extension and outreach approaches should be modernized in terms of processes, tools and material used, since farmers have shown a huge capacity to engage with technology. The project amply demonstrated that farming communities, even those living in the most remote villages in the central highlands, can use modern technology and online learning platforms to obtain new knowledge and improve their practices. The project has, in this respect, demonstrated a ‘turning point’ in capacity development and technology transfer methods for farmers. FAO’s farmer field school (FFS) concept has been adapted and taken to a new (and arguably, vastly improved space) through digital content and online delivery. This is an important breakthrough and should be seriously considered in future project development. Many capacity building initiatives have not thought ‘out of the box’ and adopts the same content and</p>	Accepted	As mentioned earlier more formalized approaches for enhancing E-agriculture will be used in the future projects as well.	FAO project planners	At the project design stage.	Yes

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training methodologies. This is true even of NGO or private sector supported project. One of the best lessons of this project is the success rate of the online delivery and the readiness of the community, even the older farmers, to embrace such technological innovation and even become content creators through the WhatsApp groups. Modern technology, online delivery and updated content has attracted many youth and young farmers to the training programmes and even brought back youth working in town and cities, to farming. Therefore it is recommended that future projects seriously consider replicating the digital FFS modules, WhatsApp groups and online training experience, combined with the right amount of field-based mobilization support.					
<p>Recommendation 9. <i>To FAO.</i> Project monitoring should be better resourced with dedicated human resources and funding for impact indicator monitoring Despite the anecdotal success of the SLM models, and the results of the impact study conducted at the end of project implementation, the project is missing data that will provide a clearer picture to evaluators of the extent of environmental and social benefits accrued due to the project. Therefore, it is highly recommended that project</p>	Accepted	SMART indicators need to be identified for monitoring the impacts of SLM. The required HR need to be budgeted at the project design stage to conduct proper monitoring and evaluation activities. Use of digital tools will be further encouraged for this purpose and will include in future projects.	FAO Project planners	At the concept and proposal development stages	Yes

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development should pay greater attention to and allocate sufficient resources to build partner capacity for monitoring of longer-term impacts and results at the outcomes and objective level. In this case, the necessary capacities and skills (and possibly equipment) for monitoring longer term changes in the biophysical parameters and agricultural practices could have been integrated in to partner organizations implementing SLM models and the NRM. It is prudent to engage stakeholders (government, NGO and private sector) in all stages of the project life cycle -from developing a coherent and risk informed theory of change and M&E plan at designing stage, assigning of human resources to execution of M&E functions including conducting baseline, systematic data collection and verification, management and reporting during project implementation. It was difficult for the TE team to find evidence of participatory M&E approaches or regular data flow from implementation partners.					
Recommendation 10. <i>To FAO and GEF project formulators.</i> Integrate climate smart agriculture recommendations to the different Farmer Field School (FFS) modules to increase resilience building practices among farmers	Accepted	FAO will make sure to include indicators to measure the implementation of climate-smart agriculture tools in order to enhance the farmer resilience at the local level.	FAO Programme Team	At the project design stage	Yes

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<p>The Farmer Field Schools (FFS) have been tremendously successful in delivering practical and up-to-date capacity building to both extension services and farmers. This vehicle can be used by the Department of Agriculture to promote the wider adoption of climate resilience practices as promoted in the Climate Smart Agriculture Guideline developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of Sri Lanka. The current climate smart guideline is particularly for the Dry and Intermediate Zones of the country, and not aimed at the Central Highlands. Therefore updating of these guidelines based on the climate change resilience practices promoted by the project, such as efficient irrigation, watershed conservation, erosion control, improving soil organic content, improving shade in tea fields and rainwater harvesting in farm fields, and integrating these in to the training package would be an excellent value addition- to ensure that farmers are equipped to deal not just with the current rainfall variability but also future climate change.</p>					

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