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**Support to the EC Programme on Linking Information
and Decision-Making to Improve Food Security for
Selected Greater Mekong Sub-Regional Countries-
GCP/RAS/247/EC**

Management Response to Mid-term Evaluation Report

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Management Response

Mid-Term Evaluation of the EC-FAO Food Security Programme, Project GCP/RAS/247/EC

Support to the EC Programme on Linking Information and Decision-Making to Improve Food Security for Selected Greater Mekong Sub-Regional Countries

The Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) of the EC-FAO Food Security Programme, Project GCP/RAS/247/EC, *Support to the EC Programme on Linking Information and Decision-Making to Improve Food Security for Selected Greater Mekong Sub-Regional Countries*, took place from 18 May to 9 September, with a total of 42 working days. The evaluation was undertaken by an international consultant with oversight from FAO's Evaluation Division. The consultant visited the three project countries for approximately one week each, and FAO HQ and FAO RAP for briefings and debriefings, and for meetings with regional partners in Bangkok, including with the EU Delegation in Thailand, which is responsible for the project. The draft MTE report was submitted on 18 July, and the final report on 9 September 2011.

FAO, including project management and operational support based at the FAO Regional Office (RAP) in Bangkok and the Agricultural Development Economics Division (ESA) as the Lead Technical Unit (LTU) based in Rome, welcomed the evaluation, which assessed the performance of the project over a period of 27 months (from 1 April 2009 to 30 June 2011). On the whole, the evaluation report is clear and covers most of the questions outlined in the TOR. Efforts to incorporate and address comments made on the draft report are acknowledged.

Nonetheless, FAO has found the report overall to be unbalanced, while making selective use of information provided by FAO to the MTE. Importantly, the evaluator remains superficial in analyzing project results, while a number of issues identified are given greater importance than they deserve. Given the overall negative tone and criticisms contained in the report, it would have been important to provide more substantive analysis as to why certain conclusions were drawn – and what action is recommended to address identified weaknesses. It is of further concern to FAO that parts of the report appear to represent the personal opinion of the evaluator, rather than objective conclusions drawn from the observations and analysis made during the mission.

As an example, ahead of the evaluation, the project management had already raised the poor project design with the EU Delegation in Bangkok and had made recommendations to change the project document in line with what could actually be achieved. The evaluation subsequently confirmed that the project design and the project document were of very poor quality (weak problem analysis, weak intervention logic, poor structure, too many beneficiaries, too many activities, etc). Rather than acknowledging this as an issue identified by FAO itself, the weak project design became the central theme of the evaluation, and was used over and over again as a basis for a negative evaluation of all of the DAC criteria. In the absence of sound OVIs in the project document, the MTE concluded that it had no substantive basis or benchmarks to meaningfully evaluate actual project progress and results to-date.

FAO concludes that this represents a missed opportunity for a constructive evaluation of the project. Once the problems with the original project design were identified, the MTE should have put the project document aside – and evaluated the project through a detailed analysis of corrective measures, including those already taken by the project team with the full support of the LTU in Rome. The MTE could have furthermore acknowledged and assessed the various activities under implementation that will directly contribute to the project outcome and expected outputs, along with the actual and expected results achieved by the project. Such an assessment would have enhanced the value of the evaluation, and may have resulted in useful conclusions and recommendations not directly linked to the weak project design.

In regard to the above, the MTE also does not adequately explain or acknowledge the steps taken by project management to correct the deficiencies in the project design. In October 2010, the project proposed a revised intervention logic and country specific plans of action. The donor however, chose to wait for the MTE before accepting substantive modifications to the original project design. Changes proposed by the project team were developed in close consultation with the beneficiary countries, including feedback received from national inception workshops foreseen in the project document, a series of mid-term stakeholder consultations, and

project steering mechanisms in the three countries and aimed to rectify inherent weaknesses in project design and capitalize on emerging opportunities and synergies. Instead of acknowledging these attempts to correct the weak design, the MTE doubles back and faults the project management for not sticking to the original design.

The MTE accepted open and transparent information from FAO about the difficulties experienced in project implementation in a selective manner. Too often, negative conclusions were drawn without sufficient reference to explanations provided by FAO. Similarly, feedback from stakeholders appears to be reported selectively, with comments made by one or two individuals presented as consensus amongst partners and stakeholders in all countries.

The MTE conclusion that National Project Coordinators (NPC) were not offered a clear vision of the project and have not actively participated in project planning and monitoring, fails to acknowledge the extensive role of the NPCs in project planning activities through their participation in the inception workshops, numerous stakeholder consultations which explicitly examined implementation progress, problems and plans, and through their participation in two project planning retreats prior to the MTE.

Finally, with specific reference to the MTE expectation that the project is expected to set-up or support full-fledged food security information systems, the Lead Technical Unit would like to stress that it is not the mandate of the project. Rather, the emphasis has been on making relevant food security information more available and more accessible to stakeholders as the crucial link between information and decision-making. Furthermore, in terms of beneficiaries, the project targets both the technical level (those who actually draft and influence policies and plans, as well as the ultimate decision-makers who actually sign off on the policies and plans.

Management Response Matrix

Management Response to the Mid-Term Evaluation of the EC-FAO Food Security Programme, Project GCP/RAS/247/EC Support to the EC Programme on Linking Information and Decision-Making to Improve Food Security for Selected Greater Mekong Subregional Countries					17-10-2011
Evaluation Recommendation	Management Response Accepted, partially accepted or rejected and comment on the Recommendation	Management Plan			
		Action to be Taken	Responsible Unit	Timeframe	Further funding required (Y or N)
Chapter 3: Relevance and Design					
3.1 The project needs to review and adjust its direct beneficiaries in order to increase its effectiveness and efficiency. Re-identification of beneficiaries will have to consider the present situation of the project with its partners, by country and region.	Accepted	The project team will propose to the EU that the target direct beneficiaries are national governments and regional organisations involved in collecting, analysing and disseminating food security information. On-going activities may require some exceptions.	Project Management	Proposal is complete and is under discussion with the EU	N
3.2 The project needs to review and adjust its intervention logic, taking account of the specificities of each country and the regional needs, as well as the feasibility offered by the remaining means (e.g. budget, time).	Accepted	The project team has reviewed the project intervention logic and has proposed a new logical framework to the EU that takes into account country and regional specificities and remaining resources.	Project Management	Proposal is complete and is under discussion with the EU	N
3.3 The project needs to review and adjust its strategies, so that the different levels of linkages as well as the necessary political awareness and commitment are addressed effectively. Increasing political awareness is crucial for the effectiveness of the intervention. Increasing political commitment is crucial for the sustainability of the intervention.	Partially Accepted The principle that political awareness and commitment are required for effectiveness and sustainability are well accepted.	The project will continue to strengthen political awareness and commitment through both national and regional, inter-agency and cross-sectoral mechanisms	Project team	Ongoing	N
3.4 The project needs to adopt some of the results based management principles (e.g., focussing on outputs and outcome instead of inputs).	Accepted Will require redefining the project's intervention logic.	The project team has proposed a revised intervention logic which will support results based management principles.	Project Management	Proposal is complete and is under discussion	N
3.5 The project needs to establish OVIs and a M&E system.	Accepted The original project OVIs are weak. Regular monitoring of project progress is in place.	The project team has proposed a revised logical framework with new OVIs which will allow for more effective monitoring.	Project Management	Proposal is complete and is under discussion	N
3.6 The project needs to re-identify key assumptions and risks and develop mitigation strategies.	Accepted	The project team has conducted an updated risk analysis with assumptions and has proposed mitigation strategies.	Project Management	Proposal is complete and is under discussion	N
3.7 The project needs to re-think the project's monitoring and governance mechanisms (steering	Partially Accepted The project team considers that project imple-	More frequent and inclusive monitoring and governance mechanisms will be introduced.	Project Management	Pending approval of	N

/advisory).	mentation is too advanced to introduce major changes to governance mechanisms.		and NPCs	proposed no-cost extension	
Chapter 4: Project Implementation – Recommendations for Management					
4.1 Essential steering and managerial mechanisms need to be put in place urgently. These include: appointing advisory or steering committee for the overall project (minimum composition to include the EC and FAO, welcome participation from WFP and ASEAN). Activate the PTF, if found necessary by FAO.	Partially Accepted The project team considers that project implementation is too advanced to introduce major changes to governance mechanisms. PTF is activated, but with members at FAO HQ and RAP, no face-to-face meetings have been organized.	More frequent formal and informal FAO-EC meetings will be sought at both regional and country levels.	Project Management and NPCs	Immediate	N
4.2 Increase regular, informal, face to face dialogue between EC and FAO.	Accepted	More frequent formal and informal FAO-EC meetings will be sought at both regional and country levels.	Project management and NPCs	Immediate	N
4.3 Establish measurable OVIs and an effective M&E system.	Please see recommendation 3.5 above.				
4.4 Increase the involvement of NPOs in project planning and monitoring.	Partially Accepted NPOs have been strongly involved in project planning and monitoring through implementation.	NPOs will help develop, implement and monitor actions to be taken in response to the MTE.	Project management and NPCs	Immediate	N
4.5 Adopt a reporting format that allows easy comparisons, and provide adequate information for management. Strictly link approved plans of actions and progress reporting, and provide adequate explanations on changes made.	Partially Accepted Formal reporting formats are predetermined by the EU and are part of the general conditions.	Internal reporting formats will be revised and standardized according to MTE recommendations.	Project management and NPCs	Already introduced	N
Chapter 4: Project Implementation – Recommendations to Efficiency and Effectiveness					
4.6 Streamline activities around a few themes and beneficiaries.	Accepted Within the context of existing commitments and expectations. Please see Recommendation 3.1 on adjusting direct beneficiaries.	The project team has developed a proposal to streamline and reduce the number of activities specific to each country and region.	Project management and NPCs	Immediate pending EU approval	N
4.7 Deliver results with higher added value and impact for stakeholders and the development community generally.	Accepted	The project team has proposed a revised intervention logic and plans of action for each country and the region.	Project team	Immediate pending EU approval	N
4.8 Revise implementation arrangements.	Accepted	The project team has proposed strengthening the project team with additional technical and or managerial expertise, as required at national and regional levels.	Project management and NPCs	Immediate pending EU approval	N
4.9 Revise communication strategy, including dissemination (e.g. proceedings of workshops and studies).	Accepted	A regular project e-newsletter to inform partners and stakeholders of events and available reports has been initiated.	Project management and NPCs	Immediate	N
4.10 Recruit a senior officer to assist the CTA in his administrative and thematic works.	Partially Accepted Given the remaining duration of the project, it could be difficult to find a well qualified candidate.	Proposed Terms of Reference have been developed and are under discussion with the EU.	Project management	Pending approval of the EU and	N

	Therefore, a mid-level consultant will also be considered.			identification of consultant	
4.11 Further look into synergies between this project and FMM.	Accepted To the extent activities are consistent with both projects' objectives, outcomes and expected outputs and do not divert project resources.	Will continue to seek and build synergies between the two projects.	Project teams	Ongoing	N
Chapter 5: Project Results and Contribution to Stated Objectives					
5.1 To further increase its effectiveness on activities and beyond (outputs) concentrate its efforts on a restricted number of them, notably those where the project has made some impact or brought added value (should the project continue targeting policy level at national level or work from the top, that is to say through ASEAN?).	Accepted Please see Recommendation 4.6 on streamlining activities.	The project will continue to target the policy level both at the national level and through ASEAN.	Project team	Ongoing	N
5.2 Drop or downplay activities for which the project has not been, or is not in a position to be, a successful champion (e.g., attempt to increase coordination).	Accepted Please see Recommendation 4.6 on streamlining activities.	The project will support multi-agency and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms that provide a mechanism for integrated food security understanding, analysis and reporting.	Project team	Ongoing	N
5.3 Adopt the spirit and implement RBM techniques	Please see Recommendation 3.4				