

Programme Evaluation Series

01/2025

Evaluation of the Global Network Against Food Crises Partnership Programme

**Annex 1. Myanmar country investment brief
Project code: GCP/MYA/028/EC**

Background

1. The project "*Improvement of food and nutrition security of vulnerable population in Rakhine State*", was funded as the country investment of the Global Network against Food Crises (GNAFC) Partnership Programme in Myanmar. It had a budget of EUR 4 million (USD 4.7 million) and was implemented in the northern part of Myanmar's Rakhine State from late 2018 to 2022.
2. Rakhine State is one of the most food-insecure areas of Myanmar, with widespread poverty, a lack of access to essential services, and recurring environmental shocks. The project aimed to enhance community resilience and food security through the rehabilitation of agricultural infrastructure, strengthening local governance structures, improving water access, and promoting livelihood diversification. The project focused on building the capacities of local actors, including government agencies, community-based organizations, and agricultural groups, to better manage the impacts of food crises. Through its integrated approach, the intervention sought to create a more resilient food system, support food production, and improve water management, ultimately enhancing the livelihoods of vulnerable populations.

The GNAFC Partnership Programme is organized around three components: i) analysis and information: providing data-driven insights to understand and predict food crises; ii) country-level Investment and learning: piloting and scaling interventions to build resilience in vulnerable regions; iii) coordination and policy advocacy: driving systemic change at the national, regional, and global levels by promoting cohesive strategies and interventions.

As part of component 2, a number of country-level investments were implemented in Yemen, Cuba, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Myanmar, the Sahel (Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso), Somalia, South Sudan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Palestine. These investments aimed at generating knowledge on a set of typologies of crisis as well as effective response options that can be replicated by relevant national, regional and global stakeholders. This is one of them.

About the evaluation

3. This brief is the product of the country case study conducted for the GNAFC Partnership Programme evaluation. The aim of the overall evaluation was to provide evidence and learning on performance, as well as accountability for results to the European Union funding the programme. This case study, was an independent assessment of the project's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and alignment with GNAFCPP's broader goals. It aimed to provide actionable insights for future programming while ensuring accountability to donors and stakeholders.
4. A mixed methods approach was used. Primary data was collected through key informant interviews with different FAO country, headquarter and regional stakeholders, and implementing partners. Focus group discussions were also held with targeted populations. Secondary data collection and analysis consisted of a review of existing documentary evidence and data, including project document, annual and mid-year progress reports, project outputs, project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data, complaints and feedback mechanism data and learning products. Findings at country level were validated, tested and refined with the evaluation's interlocutors through validation and debrief workshops.

What did the project achieve?

5. *Agricultural infrastructure rehabilitation:* The project rehabilitated over 200 km of irrigation canals, improving access to water for over 8 000 households. This intervention enhanced crop production and reduced the vulnerability of farmers to droughts and floods.
6. *Water management and governance:* The project established ten community-based water management committees, providing training in water governance, irrigation management, and conflict resolution. In focus group discussions, this approach was reported to have fostered cooperation among different ethnic and community groups and helped reduce water-related conflicts.
7. *Livelihood diversification:* The project promoted alternative livelihoods through the introduction of climate-smart agriculture, fish farming and small-scale agroprocessing. These initiatives diversified income sources and reduced the dependency on agriculture alone.
8. *Capacity building:* Over 500 local leaders, farmers, and agricultural extension officers were trained in sustainable agricultural practices, water management, and the importance of good governance. This created a pool of skilled individuals capable of managing future challenges independently.
9. Approximately 25 percent of the beneficiaries were women, and specific initiatives targeted female farmers, such as training on sustainable agriculture and small-scale livestock management. However, challenges remained in fully integrating women into decision-making roles within community governance structures. Like with other GNAFC country investments, it was too early to undertake a thorough assessment of the longer impact. There was evidence of the project's contribution to intermediate objectives such as improved crop yields, that was expected to have increased agricultural productivity and therefore food insecurity.

Challenges

10. *Operational constraints from conflict, the pandemic, and political instability:* Access restrictions due to conflict, COVID-19 and Myanmar's 2021 military takeover delayed implementation and limited monitoring. Due to these restrictions, a number of Output 4 activities on food security and resilience information, and on early warning early action (EWEA) were not implemented. In addition, the region faced extreme weather events, including droughts and floods, which affected the timing and effectiveness of agricultural interventions.
11. *Adaptability constraints:* The operating environment proved not only to be complex, it was also constantly evolving and required constant re-examination of the nature and scope of food insecurity and vulnerability in the villages where the project was implemented and willingness to re-consider targeting and types of responses (not only the mode of delivery), while continuously trying that interventions also address the underlying inequities and imbalances in the agriculture sector and society. While operational adjustments were made (e.g., bundling COVID-19 response with existing interventions), the project's broader design remained rigid despite evolving challenges.
12. *Limited resources for broader community engagement:* Limited participation of marginalized groups, particularly women and non-farming households, in project design and benefits. Cash transfers occasionally caused tensions within communities due to perceived inequities.

13. *Long term sustainability:* Local governance structures, such as the water management committees, are expected to continue managing the irrigation infrastructure. However, there are concerns about the long-term financial sustainability of the infrastructure without external funding.
14. *Gender and social Inclusion:* While the project made significant efforts to include women and marginalized groups, there were barriers to full inclusion. Women's participation in leadership roles, particularly in water management committees, was limited due to cultural norms. Women were more likely to participate in agricultural training and livelihood activities, but less so in decision-making processes. In some areas, socially marginalized groups, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and ethnic minorities, were excluded from full participation in the project. This exclusion hindered the project's ability to reach its full potential in fostering community-wide resilience.

What did we learn?

15. *The importance of integrated approaches:* The success of the project demonstrated the value of an integrated approach that combines infrastructure rehabilitation, governance strengthening, and livelihood diversification. The combination of water management, agricultural recovery, and capacity building was crucial to restoring resilience in the face of multiple shocks.
16. *The role of conflict sensitivity:* In conflict-affected regions, it is essential to integrate conflict-sensitive approaches into project design and implementation. Engaging local stakeholders in decision-making, creating inclusive governance structures, and addressing root causes of conflict, such as resource competition, were key to the project's success.
17. *Sustainability requires local ownership:* The long-term success of resilience interventions depends on the active involvement of local communities and governments in both project design and implementation. Strengthening local capacity to manage resources and infrastructure is essential for ensuring that project outcomes are sustained after external support ends. While the project made strides in creating resilient infrastructure and governance structures, concerns about long-term sustainability remained. Local institutions lacked the financial resources to independently maintain the rehabilitated infrastructure. Without sustainable funding mechanisms, such as community contributions or government support, the long-term upkeep of irrigation systems could be compromised. While training efforts were successful, local government agencies and community organizations still lacked the capacity to manage the infrastructure effectively without ongoing external support.
18. *Adaptive management is critical in volatile settings:* Due largely to the adaptive management by the country office, the project was able to make adjustments to the mode of delivery for most project outputs, enabling the project to deliver albeit partially to its objectives of restoring and protecting agricultural livelihoods in the four townships despite the complex operating environment. The relatively long duration of the project, the flexibility, and the adaptive management capacity of the FAO Myanmar country office enabled the project to adjust delivery of project activities to respond to the changes in the context or the needs that emerged. These helped the project to complete the distribution of agriculture inputs, provision of farm machineries, construction of aquaculture ponds and multipurpose infrastructures, and use cash programming to support better nutrition and invest in livelihood activities (such as livestock) when possible, despite the operational limitations on the ground.
19. *Importance of participatory approaches and inclusive design:* Broader community consultation during the design phase could enhance the relevance and equity of interventions. Target beneficiaries and other project participants, including implementing partners and local leaders,

took part in the assessments and the consultation process that informed the design of the project, as a result participants in the focus groups discussions this case study conducted confirmed the relevance of project activities.

Next steps

20. *Scale up livelihood diversification:* Future projects should build on the success of livelihood diversification initiatives, particularly by expanding climate-smart agriculture and income-generating activities that reduce dependency. FAO can draw lessons from the Myanmar project and needs to seek opportunities to engage in longer-term programming that has the flexibility to incorporate anticipatory action, humanitarian emergency response, shock-responsive social protection, social transfers, community organizing and/or institution building and policy development. For example, by exploring modular and flexible project design approaches that will allow for frequent adjustments in the relationship with the state at different levels, in light of changing UN-government engagement policies.
21. *Strengthen gender and social inclusion:* Future programming should place a stronger emphasis on overcoming barriers to women's participation in leadership roles and decision-making. Gender-sensitive programming will be essential for achieving more equitable outcomes. A key way to achieve this is by expanding participatory mechanisms in project design and implementation to ensure inclusivity and relevance, especially for marginalized groups.
22. *Enhance partnerships for resilience building:* FAO Myanmar needs to strengthen its capacity to partner with other actors who have complementary comparative advantages. For example, in order to strengthen its conflict analysis and capacity it could partner with organisations working to promote peace and social cohesion, or it could strengthen engagement with networks such as the Myanmar Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group and the Myanmar Consortium for Community Resilience for learning, knowledge sharing, and joint programming in the future.
23. *Integrate robust monitoring and learning frameworks for adaptive management:* FAO Myanmar should build on the experiences of the project with MEAL, and invest in and extend MEAL approaches to the country portfolio. This includes developing a programmatic approach to MEAL and ensuring that monitoring is not only of outputs delivery but instead of results, outcomes, and the understanding food security and local contexts as they evolve during project implementation. The team has started to set up a network-based digital monitoring system using the Kobo Toolbox for its projects. This is a step in the right direction for encouraging broader-based, active monitoring of programme activities, and data-driven development and management of projects.

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