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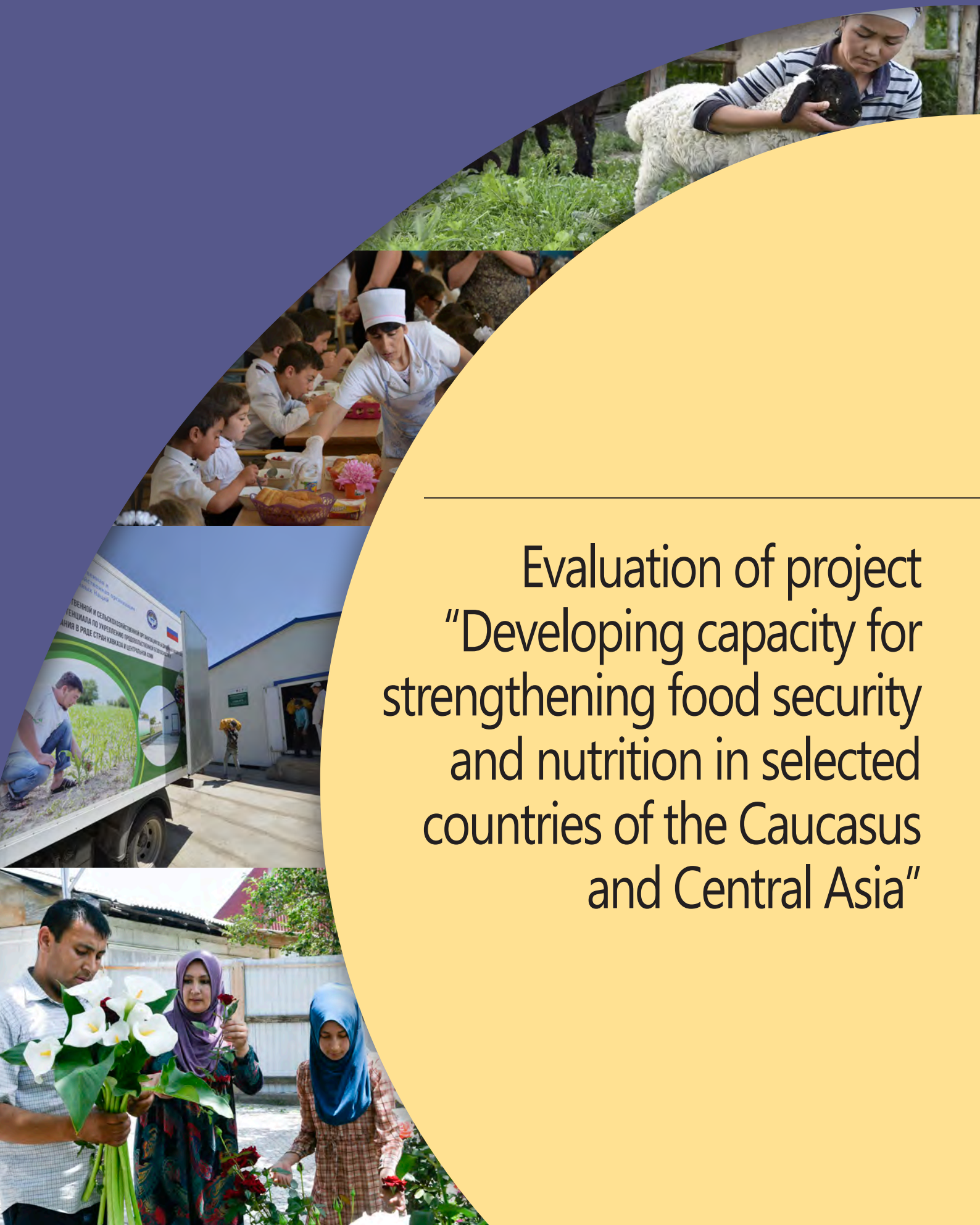

Evaluation of project "Developing capacity for strengthening food security and nutrition in selected countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia"

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Evaluation of the project "Developing capacity for strengthening food security and nutrition in selected countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia"

Project code: GCP/GLO/674/RUS

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Abstract

At project design, the levels of food security and malnutrition were relatively high in the Caucasus and Central Asian Countries. Particularly Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were facing significant challenges in achieving the required improvements in nutrition. Notwithstanding considerable changes to the agricultural sector over the last two decades, these countries remained highly vulnerable to weather shocks and the effects of climate change. Trade has been hampered by the lack of efficient and reliable transport systems, and adequate infrastructure. Moreover, wide gaps in terms of income, food security and nutrition, and access to social services have caused substantial migration from rural areas to neighbouring countries.

The project aims to strategically mediate these challenges and promote cross-sectoral collaboration between agriculture, health, education and social protection sectors. It provides an evidence base based on pilot initiatives in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and builds capacities at field and governmental level to build political commitment and coherence for the development of policies, legislations and programmes.

This evaluation serves a twin purpose of accountability and learning. In particular, it intends to inform decision-making on the formulation and implementation of a possible second phase of the project. The evaluation covered the period from May 2016 to November 2020. It answered five key evaluation questions related to project design, results, potential sustainability and scaling-up, targeting and gender, as well as project management and partnership arrangements.

Different methods were used to collect the views of beneficiaries and stakeholders, such as a desk review of project documents; key informant interviews; and selected project site-visits in Armenia and Tajikistan. For Kyrgyzstan, only remote interviews were held and satellite imagery from Google maps were used to visually confirm and analyse the project sites.

The evaluation concluded that overall the project has been successful. The building of operational capacity among stakeholders and beneficiaries is processing well through the ongoing pilot initiatives, while high-level coordination and policy dialogue, and the contribution to global policy processes and frameworks need more time to materialize. The project introduced innovative approaches and, through the project's three-tier model, results and lessons have been well disseminated across partners, stakeholders and countries. All pilots have demonstrated high potential for scaling-up and replication, but they are at different stages of readiness. The evaluation makes a number of recommendations to further enhance project design, implementation, monitoring and sustainability, and proposes a second phase of at least one to two years to consolidate and expand achievements.

Contents

Figures and tables

Figures

Tables

Acknowledgements

The FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) would like to thank everyone who contributed to this report. The evaluation was led by Renate Roels, Evaluation Manager, OED. The Evaluation Team Leader was Lasha Khonelidze (International Consultant), who received valuable support from Armen Grigorian (National Consultant, Armenia) and Manzura Makhkamova (National Consultant, Tajikistan). Sarah Jaff (Office Assistant, OED) provided administrative support throughout the evaluation exercise, while internal peer reviewers from OED, Serdar Bayryyev and Marta Bruno, provided comments on the draft report.

The evaluation was carried out with the invaluable assistance of project personnel at FAO headquarters, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) and the FAO Country Offices in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Their insight, knowledge, advice and comments made this evaluation possible.

The review benefited from the inputs of many other project stakeholders and beneficiaries, including government officers, representatives of national and international partner organizations, and researchers. Their contributions were critical to the team's work and are deeply appreciated.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ECFS	Eurasian Center for Food Security
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FSN	Food Security and Nutrition
IOM	International Organization for Migration
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIFI	Social and Industrial Foodservice Institute
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

1. This is the evaluation of the project "Developing capacity for strengthening food security and nutrition in selected countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia" (GCP/GLO/674/RUS) which is directly implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and funded by the Russian Federation.

2. The project objective is to provide guidance and knowledge for improved capacity, policies, legislations, programmes, and multi- and cross-sectoral coordination. It has various initiatives at the global and regional level and pilot projects focussed on school food and nutrition, social protection and agriculture in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Through these initiatives, the project aims to provide an evidence base and functional capacities across line ministries and decentralized government bodies to build political commitment and coherence for the development of policies, legislations and programmes. This should ultimately contribute to reduced malnutrition and increased food security in selected countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia and harmonization of approaches to food security, nutrition and social protection in the Eurasian region.

3. The evaluation objective is accountability and learning. In particular, the evaluation intends to inform decision-making on the formulation and implementation of a possible second phase of the project. It covered the period of project implementation from May 2016 until November 2020 and included all three project components. It answered five key evaluation questions related to project design, results, potential sustainability and scaling-up, targeting, equity and gender, as well as project management and partnership arrangements. The evaluation took place during an international crisis caused by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and used the following mixed methodology to answer the evaluation questions: i) a desk review of project documents; ii) the preparation of a theory of change; iii) remotely-conducted key informant interviews at global, regional and country level; and iv) in-country missions to Armenia and Tajikistan with in-person and remote interviews and selected visits to project sites. For Kyrgyzstan, remote interviews were held and satellite imagery from Google maps were used to visually confirm and analyse the project sites. The evaluation adopted a consultative and transparent approach with internal and external stakeholders throughout the process. It collaborated closely with the Project Task Force (PTF).

4. The evaluation team concluded that, overall, the project has been successful. In particular, the project showed good performance and good initial results towards Outcome 1 (Enabling Environment) and Outcome 2 (Coordination and Advocacy), yet some results need more time to materialize such as high-level coordination and policy dialogue, and the contribution to global policy processes and frameworks. The building of operational capacity among stakeholders and beneficiaries is processing well through the ongoing pilot initiatives. Outcome 3 (Piloting Policy Options) has been successful and achieved in most parts, however the project needs more time to consolidate the results of the completed activities and work out a proper handover strategy (to the national counterparts). A second phase of at least one to two years is therefore recommended to consolidate and expand achievements, and further enhance the capacity development of national governments that is a long-term process.

5. All pilots have demonstrated high potential for scaling-up and replication, but they are at different stages of readiness. Among all pilots, the Cash Plus pilot currently has the highest potential for sustainability and replication. Attention is needed for key operational and institutional risks and increased policy dialogue, based on clear pilot end-goals and a larger evidence base. For each pilot, the project should: i) prepare a handover strategy; and ii) identify and work with a lead agency, in addition to the government implementing partners, to strengthen policy dialogue and

ownership of project results. Applying a community-based approach could provide effective solutions to address the lack of service provision mechanisms.

6. When looking at project design, the project's three-tier model is found relevant to FAO, country and stakeholder priorities and needs, and introduced innovative approaches in the three target countries. Moreover, project results and lessons have the potential to permeate and influence FAO work globally, as guidance in selected areas of development. The design effectively stimulates awareness, stakeholder dialogue and coordination at a wider level and allows project activities to interact and reinforce each other in reaching the project's outcomes. At the same time, the project logical frameworks, risk analyses and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) need attention. A participatory theory of change (TOC) exercise for the overall project and individual pilots should help address these points and facilitate a long-term strategic visioning exercise between the project Steering Committee, key partners and resource partner.

7. The project targeted the relevant institutional actors to build their capacity and enhance the enabling environment. The pilots had defined targeting strategies and were, aside from the Matching Grants pilot, generally gender-neutral. The evaluation recommends the project to consider developing specific indicators to enhance monitoring based on gender-disaggregated and other relevant data, to better assess the degree of targeting men, women, youth, and most vulnerable groups of the population.

8. The project was effective in promoting and sharing project results and experiences and in disseminating lessons learned across partners, stakeholders and countries through a significant volume of promotional and communication materials as well as several important events. At the regional and global level, the Global Forums on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forums) are well functioning and useful platforms of knowledge sharing, and the project should continue to use them for more effective policy dialogue and advocacy. To strategically track, support and systematize further outreach and knowledge sharing at global, regional and national level, enhance further evidence building to support policy recommendations and inform project management decisions, the project could benefit from the set-up of a knowledge management strategy and centralized monitoring and evaluation system.

9. The project's implementation arrangements allowed the project management to successfully integrate activities and their results at all three levels; in both top-down and bottom-up directions. The project mobilized the needed expertise from FAO headquarters and effectively directed it to the regional and national level. This support built technical capacities of the decentralized offices and introduced new functions. While certain capacities and the confidence level of the national staff have been raised, there are still some capacity gaps that require further backstopping and capacity building. Moreover, more work needs to be done in ensuring the retention of the developed capacity.

10. The project demonstrated good adaptive management to significant impediments and all planned activities have been implemented, yet with different levels of efficiency and effectiveness. The evaluation observed significant overstretch on the project management and coordination. It is therefore recommended that headquarters starts sharing a part of responsibilities with the regional office in national staff supervision and administrative support, as it gained experience in several activities in the region through the project.

11. Effective partnerships were created by the project between FAO and a diverse composition of partners at all levels for the implementation or facilitation of project activities. The project linked up with other local projects and complemented South-South and triangular cooperation. The project effectively used FAO's comparative advantage and performed well in engaging the

government counterparts (ministries and local level authorities) into the various technical working groups and project pilots. Cross-partnerships and (informal) post-contract prospects should be stimulated to gain additional benefit to the project and enhance sustainability.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

12. This is the evaluation of the project Developing capacity for strengthening food security and nutrition in selected countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia (GCP/GLO/674/RUS) – hereafter referred to as "the project". The evaluation serves a twin purpose of accountability and learning. In particular, the evaluation will provide important findings, recommendations and lessons that could shape the decision-making on the formulation and implementation of a possible second phase of the project.

1.2 Intended users

13. The main audience and intended users of the evaluation are i) all personnel from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) involved in the design and implementation of the project, both at headquarters and decentralized offices; ii) the project countries (or their institutions/entities) involved in the pilots activities; and iii) the Russian Federation, the project donor. All could use the evaluation findings for internal learning, as a tool to promote further dialogue among (potential) project partners, and as a building block for the possible formulation of a second phase or similar projects. Secondary users are i) all external partners involved in project implementation that could use the evaluation findings to optimize their involvement in a possible second phase of the project; and ii) other donors, organizations and institutions interested in supporting and/or implementing the second phase of the project or similar projects.

1.3 Scope and objective of the evaluation

~~14.~~ **Scope.** The evaluation covers the project implementation period from May 2016 until November 2020 and includes all three project components at the global, regional and national level. The evaluation interviews covered a broad range of project stakeholders, among which selected members of the Project Task Force (PTF), FAO personnel involved in project design and implementation, government officials, project beneficiaries and project and/or implementing partners. The full list of people interviewed can be found in Appendix 1. In-person country missions were conducted in the project pilot countries in Armenia and Tajikistan. The national consultant in Armenia held interviews in Yerevan and Ararat (Vedi district), Shirak and Lori province, while the national consultant in Tajikistan held interviews in Dushanbe and the target districts Hisor, Vakhsh and Dusti. Remote interviews were held with selected beneficiaries, implementers and project partners in Kyrgyzstan based in Bishkek and the Chui province (Issyk-Ata and Kemin district) and Jalalabad province (Suzak district).

15. **Objective.** Following indications in the terms of reference (TOR), the evaluation provides a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the project by answering five key evaluation questions as presented in Table 1. In particular, the evaluation focussed on the project design, results, potential sustainability and scaling-up, targeting, equity and gender, as well as project management arrangements and partnership arrangements.

Table 1. Key evaluation questions

Focus area	Evaluation question
Design	How adequate was the project design in supporting the activities and expected results?
Results	What results have been achieved, and which factors affected effectiveness?
Potential sustainability and scaling-up	How sustainable are the project results, what are the risks and what is their potential for scaling-up?
Targeting, equity and gender	To what extent have the project activities reached the intended users and uses?
Project management and partnership arrangements	To what extent were the project management and partnership arrangements appropriate?

Source: Evaluation terms of reference.

1.4 Methodology

16. The evaluation adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) *Norms & Standards for Evaluation* (2016) and was in line with the OED *Evaluation Manual* (2015) and methodological guidelines and practices. It adopted a consultative and transparent approach with internal and external stakeholders throughout the evaluation process and was results-focused, using the aforementioned key questions as main areas of analysis.

17. An evaluation matrix was developed to guide the evaluation. The evaluation matrix, which can be found in Appendix 2, includes the key evaluation questions and related sub-questions, indicators, methods and tools for collecting and triangulating data and information, and likely sources of information.

18. In line with this, the evaluation used the following qualitative methods to answer the evaluation questions:

    i. A desk review of project documents made available to the evaluation team by the Project Task Force, among which project design document, progress reports, back to office report, communication materials, internal rapid assessments and cost-benefit analysis of the project pilots, beneficiary surveys, and analytical publications. The project documents were a particularly important source of information for the inception phase of the evaluation, to better understand the project's activities, and later to triangulate information received during interviews and country visits.

    ii. A project theory of change (TOC) was created to illustrate the pathway of change from project outputs, crossing an intermediate stage, and eventually reach impact and the overall project objective. This exercise was particularly useful to understand the various steps the project must undergo and to define and understand external factors that influence change along the major impact pathways (further discussed in section 2.3.).

    iii. Remotely-conducted, semi-structured key informant interviews through Skype, Zoom or WhatsApp call with key stakeholders, beneficiaries and other informants that were involved in the project design and/or implementation, served to ask more in-depth questions, prior to, and based on desk review findings. Interviews were carried out with

the objective to i) better understand the project design, performance and results; ii) obtain answers on selected key evaluation questions; and iii) pose follow-up questions and triangulate information received from others. The semi-structured interviews covered project activities at global, regional and national level, and were supported by checklists and interview protocols developed by the evaluation team at the beginning of the evaluation. The complete list of people interviewed can be found in Appendix 1.

iv. In-country missions with either face-to-face or remotely conducted key informant interviews, and selected visits to project sites were conducted in Armenia and Tajikistan by national consultants, in accordance with the respective Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) restrictions in each country, to assess and analyse i) project implementation; ii) results and factors affecting performance in the field; and iii) the perspective and participation of stakeholders and implementing partners at national and local level. Interviewees and project sites were selected on the basis of the stakeholder mapping exercise during the inception phase and suggestions from the project team, and included selected government representatives, the local FAO project team, selected project beneficiaries and (potential) project partners. Due to unforeseen circumstances further described in section 1.5 on limitations, information was collected remotely through key informant interviews via Skype or WhatsApp calls in Kyrgyzstan and additional desk review. Satellite imagery from Google maps were used to visually confirm and analyse the project sites, enable the evaluation team leader to ask specific field-related questions and build trust with his interviewees during the online interviews.

19. **Evaluating gender.** The evaluation team assessed how gender concerns have been taken into account in the design and during the implementation of the project. The *FAO Policy on Gender Equality* and the *Guidelines for the assessment of gender mainstreaming* developed by OED were used by the team. Specific questions regarding gender were asked during the interviews with stakeholders and beneficiaries to get insights of the beneficiary women's role, *inter alia*, in: i) equal decision-making; ii) equal access to goods and services; and iii) equal access to and control over resources.

20. The level of engagement of all stakeholders and partners approached for the evaluation was excellent given the circumstances of the international pandemic (see section 1.5) and all conversations are considered frank and constructive according to the evaluation team.

1.5 Limitations

21. The evaluation took place during an international crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the methodology had to be adjusted to comply with the international measures taken to contain the spread of the pandemic. Therefore, following the "risk analysis and guidance for the management and conduct of evaluations during international and national level COVID-19 crisis and restrictions" (OED, 2020), the evaluation was conducted in a mixed modality. This meant that three national consultants were recruited to conduct the in-country data collection in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, under the remote supervision of the team leader. The team leader held remote interviews with selected stakeholders, mainly at regional and global level. The evaluation team did what was within their means to minimize or mitigate the disruption this could cause to the evaluation. Delays in the evaluation timeline and limitations were however inevitable.

22. While most of the evaluation went on as planned, some of the evaluation approach and methodology needed adjustment on an ad hoc basis. For example, as already noted in the revised evaluation terms of reference, it was not possible for the team leader or evaluation manager to

travel to Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as originally intended. Furthermore, the national consultant in Kyrgyzstan was unable to start the data collection and the national consultant in Tajikistan was unable to submit written notes or reports after the data collection as both got affected in different ways by the pandemic. This resulted in less (written) evaluative evidence from these two countries than expected, particularly for Tajikistan. The team leader was able to partially mitigate this situation by conducting remote interviews and use Satellite imagery in Kyrgyzstan to virtually visit some project sites, and by conducting additional desk review of documentation. The evaluation manager also stepped in to contribute to the analytical work and selected writing, due to the diminished evaluation team.

23. The selection of interviewees and field visits in the three pilot countries was predominantly influenced by the COVID-19 restrictions and safety measures, and the availability of people. The evaluation is very grateful to the national FAO teams for their invaluable support in the organization of the interviews in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan during these challenging times.

1.6 Structure of the report

24. This report follows the Office of Evaluation (OED) recommended structure, starting with the description of the evaluation approach in section 1 and the context and project background in section 2. This is followed by the key findings organized by evaluation question in section 3, and lessons learned in section 4. Conclusions and recommendations are summarized in section 5.

2. Context and background of the project

2.1 Context of the project at design

25. When the project was designed, the levels of food security and malnutrition were relatively high in the Caucasus and Central Asian Countries. Particularly, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were facing significant challenges in achieving the required improvements in nutrition.

26. The agricultural sector in these countries has undergone significant changes over the last two decades and provides employment to a substantial number of people. Notwithstanding considerable economic growth and improvements in household welfare, the countries remained highly vulnerable to weather shocks and the broader effects of climate change, which adversely affected the economy and the population's nutrition status. Another impediment is that the countries are landlocked: although the agricultural sectors in all three countries have significant export potential, trade has been hampered by the lack of efficient and reliable transport systems and adequate infrastructure. Therefore, to a significant extent, the countries depend on imports and remittances to maintain their food security.

27. Moreover, wide gaps between the urban and rural populations in terms of income, poverty level, food security and nutrition, and access to social services have caused substantial migration from rural areas to neighbouring countries. At the time of project design, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were the major sources of labour migration in the region, as well as the largest recipients of remittances, mainly from Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. While this could potentially be invested in the countries and the agricultural sector, the vast majority of remittances were spent on primary needs, while a much smaller part went to savings and investments in rural areas.

2.2 Background of the project

28. **Basic project information.** The project was approved on 4 April 2016 and became operational on 01 May 2016, with an anticipated duration of three years. It was extended three times for the following six-month periods: from 1 May until 31 December 2019; from 01 January until 30 June 2020; and from 01 July until 31 December 2020. At the time of the evaluation, towards the end of 2020, the project is undergoing a fourth amendment, in which it has been agreed by the donor to extend project implementation until 01 March 2021 without additional cost. A cost extension is under discussion. Summary information about the project is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Basic project information

Project ID:	**GCP/GLO/674/RUS**
Executing agency:	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) / Agrifood Economics Division (ESA)
Resource partner:	Russian Federation
Collaborations with:	Ministries of Agriculture; Ministries of Labour and Migration, Ministries of Social Protection, Ministries of Education, Ministries of Finance, Ministries of Health, Statistic Agencies/Committees and local authorities in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; UN agencies and international organizations; Professional networks; Non-governmental and community based organizations, academia and private sector
Focal area:	Policies & capacity building, school food & nutrition, social protection and migration
Implementation level:	Global, regional and national level (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan)

Project ID:	GCP/GLO/674/RUS
Approval date:	04 April 2016
Start of project:	01 May 2016
Current end of project	01 March 2021
Budget:	USD 6 million

Source: Project document, project progress reports and PTF.

29. The project is directly implemented by FAO and funded by the Russian Federation. The project budget is USD 6 million, divided over three project components and project implementation costs. The breakdown can be found in Table 3. As can be seen in the last column, some amounts were reallocated; this was mainly due to the changing political situation in some countries, the COVID-19 situation, as well as some new activities under Component 3.

Table 3. Budget details per component

Component	Level	All years prodoc (data at design)	Total by December 2019	Difference/reallocated *
Component 1	Global	60 000	60 000	
	Regional	40 000	30 000	10 000
	Armenia	100 000	25 000	75 000
	Kyrgyzstan	80 000	80 000	
	Tajikistan	117 500	64 277	53 223
SUB-TOTAL		**397 500**	**259 277**	
Component 2	Global	105 000	105 000	
	Regional	100 000	94 000	6 000
	Armenia	125 000	75 000	50 000
	Kyrgyzstan	155 500	115 500	40 000
	Tajikistan	135 000	95 000	40 000
SUB-TOTAL		**620 500**	**484 500**	
Component 3	Global	250 000	250 000	
	Regional	40 000	40 000	
	Armenia	565 000	690 000	(125 000)
	Kyrgyzstan	545 000	585 000	(40 000)
	Tajikistan	560 000	653 223	(93 223)
SUB-TOTAL		**1 960 000**	**2 218 223**	
Project Implementation	Global	364 735	390 983	(26 248)
	Regional	150 000	123 752	26 248
	Armenia	610 000	610 000	
	Kyrgyzstan	619 500	619 500	
	Tajikistan	587 500	587 500	
SUB-TOTAL		**2 331 735**	**2 331 735**	
Project servicing		690 265	688 185	
PROJECT TOTAL		6 000 000	5 981 920	

** Positive figures- sources of reallocation, negatives- where reallocations went to.*
Source: Project progress report 2019, Steering Committee minutes.

30. **Project objective.** Providing guidance and know-how for improved capacity, policies, legislations and programmes, and multi- and cross-sectoral coordination is at the core of the project. The project aims to strategically mitigate challenges and promote multi- and cross-sectoral collaboration by providing adequate capacity to effectively pursue and manage coherence between agriculture, health, education and social protection sectors. Through pilot initiatives in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the project aims to provide an evidence base and functional

capacities across line ministries and decentralized government bodies to build political commitment and coherence for the development of policies, legislations and programmes. This should ultimately contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and lay the groundwork for the scaling-up of successful initiatives elsewhere.

31. **Project components.** The project approach is structured around three components:

i. Component 1 "Enabling Environment":

- **Outcome**: Improved capacities for result-oriented policies, legislations and programmes to ensure the achievement of food security and high levels of nutrition for the entire population.
- **Objective**: Providing guidance on know-how for improved policies, legislations and programmes. Identification of gaps and opportunities for cross-sector action and synergies to include food security, nutrition, social projection and sustainable agricultural actions, especially those resulting from the pilots, into current policy, legislative and programming processes and ultimately to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.
- **Key activities**: i) Development of a Comprehensive National Strategy on Nutrition per country; ii) Review and improvement of the current policy and legislative framework for food security and nutrition (FSN); iii) Production of country specific capacity development and advocacy products for FSN trainings and campaigns; iv) Collection of best practices and lessons learned for policy dialogue on food security, nutrition sensitive social protection and school feeding programmes; and v) Development of normative content in support of the new joint SO1/SO3 Programme.
- **Key outputs:** i) New and reviewed strategies, policies and concepts and action plans in the three countries; ii) Inter-ministerial and intersectoral working group or drafting committees established; iii) Assessments and policy briefs; Revised and/or drafted laws; iv) Global and regional side events; v) National workshops; vi) Publications on best practices and lessons learned at regional level with case studies from three focus countries; and vii) Contribution to global and regional FAO reports.

ii. Component 2 "Coordination & Advocacy":

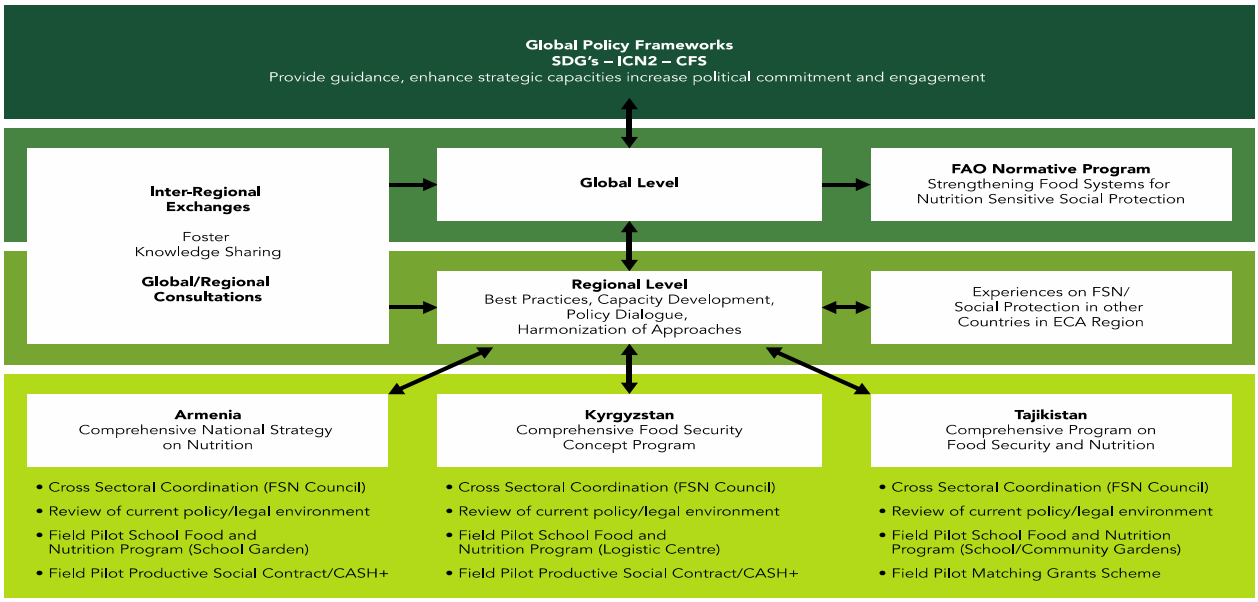
- **Outcome**: Improved multi- and cross-sectoral coordination for food security and nutrition governance.
- **Objective**: Aiming to foster political commitment and strategic policies, the project promotes policy dialogue and increased inter-ministerial support and collaboration with other partners towards a comprehensive approach on food security, nutrition, social protection and food systems.
- **Key activities**: i) Establishment or providing support to the National Food Security Councils in the three pilot countries; ii) Coordination and interaction with global political processes leading to Zero Hunger; iii) Organization of global and inter-regional E-consultations through the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum) for wider online policy dialogue; and iv) Advocacy and awareness raising campaigns, providing project's visibility on the importance of food systems, FSN and social protection at regional and global levels.
- **Key outputs:** i) Articles in FAO channels and national media; ii) Global, regional and country consultations and webinars; iii) Workshops and publications on policy dialogues at all levels; and iv) Visibility materials.

iii. Component 3 "Piloting Policy Options":

- **Outcome**: Improved capacities in governments and other relevant stakeholders for human resource development in the food security and nutrition domain.
- **Objective**: Six pilot operations in the three pilot countries (two per country) should provide an evidence base of impact of the integrated approach on development outcomes, with the results ultimately feeding into key policy, legislative and programming processes at the national, regional and global levels.
- **Key activities**:
  - three pilots on the School Food and Nutrition Programme linked to the Agricultural Sector through various school and community gardens (Tajikistan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) and a Logistics Center (Kyrgyzstan);
  - one pilot on promoting inclusive economic growth for families of migrants (remittances) through a Matching Grants scheme (Tajikistan). This also included South-South cooperation in the region.
  - two pilots on Strengthening Food Systems for Nutrition Sensitive Social Protection through Cash Plus initiatives (Armenia and Kyrgyzstan). This also included a technical intervention to boost agricultural production (Kyrgyzstan).
- **Key outputs**: i) Infrastructure, tools and knowledge materials for school greenhouses, seedbeds, gardens and Logistics Center; ii) Multi-party arrangements for the pilot governance: Supervisory Board for Logistics Center, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with local authorities, schools, parents and other community groups; iii) Infrastructure, tools and knowledge materials for beneficiaries of the Cash Plus and Matching Grants; and iv) Seminars, workshops, visibility materials, media products and publications.

32. The project's multi-level (national, regional, global) scope is shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Overview of multi-level project scope



Source: 2019 project progress report.

33. **Project areas in the three pilot countries.** In Armenia, the School Food and Nutrition pilot was conducted in three places in the Ararat Marze (province), namely Vedi, Verin Artashat and Surenavan. The Cash Plus pilot is carried out in two Marzes (provinces) – Shirak and Lori. In

Kyrgyzstan, The Logistics Center is benefitting schoolchildren in Kemin, Chui oblast (region). The Social Contract/Cash Plus pilot carried out in the Suzak district in Jalal-Abad oblast. The agricultural intervention was performed in the Nizhne-Serafimovsky orphanage in Issyk-Ata, Chui oblast. In Tajikistan, the pilot on School Food and Nutrition targeted primary schools in the Vakhsh and Dusti districts. The second pilot on Matching Grants is implemented in the Hisor and Jaloliddin Balkhii Districts. The pilot activities are focused on marginalized areas of the three pilot countries, defined with partners and stakeholders in a consultative process at the beginning of the project.

34. A summary of the main project implementation arrangements is illustrated below.

35. **Role of the Steering Committee and working groups.** The project Steering Committee is composed of members from the Russian Ministry of Finance; Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (through the Permanent mission of the Russian Federation to FAO and other UN agencies in Rome); FAO headquarters and Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU); and their correspondent alternates. The observers of the Steering Committee include a representative of the FAO Liaison Office with the Russian Federation, FAO Programme and Regional development Adviser and three National Project Coordinators. The role of the Steering Committee is to set the strategic direction of the Trust Fund, decide on strategic allocations, its monitoring and delivery amongst components, priorities and countries as mentioned in the terms of reference. The Steering Committee has a chair elected by all members and meets twice a year. Operational decisions are discussed at the working groups (inter-ministerial working groups) created at each component level.

36. **Role of FAO.** The project is directly implemented by FAO. The overall project coordination among the global, regional and country activities, technical advice, communication/outreach and networking lays at FAO headquarters hosted by the Agrifood Economics Division (ESA). The Project Task Force at FAO headquarters comprises the budget holder, a lead technical officer (senior project coordinator-capacity development officer), a programme and regional development adviser and one programme assistant.[1] Subject matter expertise and regional experience is obtained from the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, the Subregional Office for Central Asia (SEC) and the Liaison Office with the Russian Federation.

37. At the national level, the original project plan envisaged two full time project staff members under the overall supervision of FAO Representatives in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and directly reporting to the senior project coordinator/lead technical officer (at headquarters). These were i) the national project coordinator, responsible for overall project implementation of Components 1 and 2, and partially of Component 3; and ii) the project technical assistant, solely responsible for Component 3. While national project coordinators were indeed recruited, a full-time project assistant was hired only in Armenia, and in the other two countries assistants were either hired on a short-term basis or shared with other projects on a need basis during project implementation. Other support function personnel, such as specialists on communication, finance, procurement, monitoring and subject matters specialists, were shared with other running FAO projects in the countries and hired on short-term basis. Substantial additional backstopping was provided by the relevant headquarters departments as needed.

38. The FAO Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition is involved for the engagement and participation of food security and nutrition experts, practitioners and stakeholders in global, regional and countries food security and nutrition policy formulation processes and programmes.

[1] Only during specific times, there were two programme assistants, as originally planned in the project document.

39. Advisory technical services are drawn from: i) the Food and Nutrition Division (ESN) in the area of nutrition, school food and nutrition programmes, and nutrition education; ii) the Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP) for social protection policies, pilot designing, modelling and analysis; iii) the Rural Infrastructure and Agro-Industries Division in the areas of local procurement, food safety, construction and engineering; iv) Legal Office (LEG) in the areas of legislation development at country level and Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministries; v) Procurement Service in the areas of Letter of Agreement (LOA) clearance or conducting an international procurement that exceed Director or FAO Representatives (FAORs) ceiling; vi) Office for Communications (OCC) in the areas of video, photo and publications production and outreach; vii) Statistics Division (ESS) in the areas of statistics analysis and support to SGDs and other statistical indicators development at country level; viii) the Emergencies and Resilience Division (OER) as a partner on methodology and mechanism of cash transfers to beneficiaries of the Matching Grants in Tajikistan; ix) the Project Support Division (PSS) in the development of a modality of payment for Matching Grants; x) the Business Development and Resource Mobilization Division in the areas of clearance and communication and reports to the donor; and xi) the Agrifood Economics Division in the areas of food security and economic analysis and policy, and overall project coordination and administration. Guidance is also sought from the FAO Strategic Programme (SP) 1 (Contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition) and Strategic Programme 3 (Poverty reduction), and from the joint Strategic Objective (SO) 1/SO3 Programme on Strengthening Food Systems for Nutrition Sensitive Social Protection.

40. **Project partners.** At country, regional and global level, the project collaborated with the following partners and stakeholders:

i. At country level:

- Ministries of Agriculture, Education, Health, Social Protection and Migration as well as the Statistics Committee/Agency and local authorities in districts of pilot areas (four-five districts per country) were particularly involved for the development of relevant strategies, stimulate multi- and cross-sector coordination.
- Local government authorities at the district level (in all three countries) included district education departments (under the Ministry of Education) who were main counterparts for the greenhouse operations and the Logistics Center under the School Food and Nutrition pilots; district social services departments (under the Ministry of Social Protection) were training of trainers (TOT) recipients and implementing partners in the Cash Plus pilots, and local district agronomists involved in the Cash Plus pilots as training of trainers recipients and supporting the extension services provided by implementing service providers (below). The migration units at the district level under the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of populations in Tajikistan were main counterparts for the implementation of the Matching Grants pilot activities.
- International organizations (World Food Programme [WFP], United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], World Health Organization [WHO] and International Organization for Migration [IOM]) are participating in the development of activities leading towards the development of relevant FSN strategies at countries level where the project involves these organizations into a policy dialogue through joint or project's workshops, round tables, conferences, working groups or observing committees that support the governmental organizations, etc..
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) / Foundations / Community-based organizations (CBOs) (around three-six per country) are involved as service providers

through Letters of Agreement for activities such as awareness campaigns or trainings. The main project partner for three pilot activities under the School Food and Nutrition Programme pilot is the Social and Industrial Foodservice Institute (SIFI), an NGO from the Russian Federation, which was engaged in feasibility studies for three pilots, the selection process of beneficiaries and training in schools under the Letter of Agreement. SIFI was also a project partner for Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF) event in Armenia.

- The private sector partners were mainly involved through contracts for international and local procurement of goods and works (in the three countries), the Logistics Center pilot in Kyrgyzstan and Cash Plus pilot assessment in Armenia. Some activities related to visibility (e.g. video production, printing) also involved private companies:
    - Schools and local communities. Under the Cash Plus activities, the project focusses on vulnerable and marginalized people. Under the other pilot activities, the project targets schoolchildren, business-oriented migrants and their families, and farmers that sell their projects through the project-supported Logistics Center. In Kyrgyzstan, the project piloted an agricultural intervention for elderly people and people with disabilities. Women are supposed to indirectly benefit from improved policy and legislative environment in the recipient countries. The project was designed as mostly gender neutral.
- Academia/Education institutions are also involved in research work, surveys, assessments and cost-benefit analysis through Letters of Agreement. Universities and knowledge centres have an important role in developing capacity at country and regional level. The main partners for the three countries are the Eurasian Center for Food Security (ECFS) hosted by the Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU).

ii. At regional level

- FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU), initially contributed to the Nutrition and Food Security expertise, and later coordinated activities by linking to regional events on Food Security and Nutrition and School Feeding Programmes;
- FAO Moscow Liaison Office facilitated donor communication under its main mandate;
- FAO Regional Forum on Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia (the FSN Forum in ECA), a sub-platform of the FSN Global platform, provided place for online consultations, policy dialogue and knowledge product accumulation for project stakeholders involved in decision-making, project implementation and the experts community worldwide;
- The Moscow State University, the ECFS, the Food Security Centre and SIFI contributed to and facilitated the online activities that were conducted by the FAO FSN Forum (e.g. webinars, consultations and trainings);
- joint FAO/WHO/WFP regional policy consultation, UNICEF.

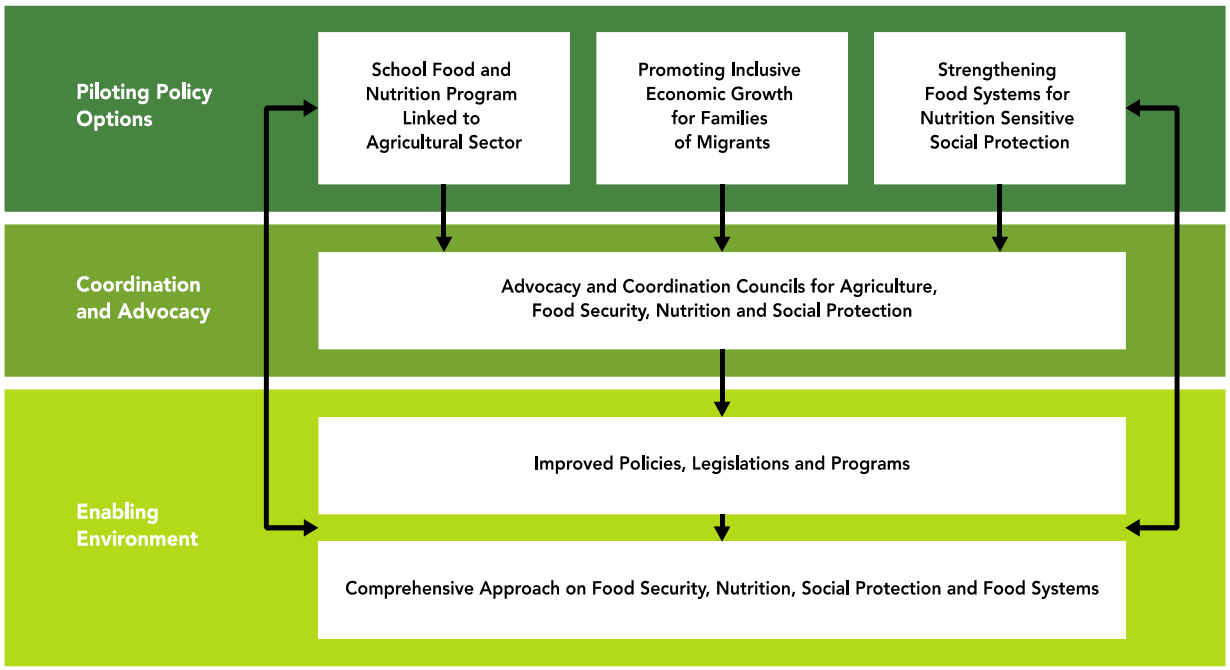
iii. At global level:

- The SO1/SO3 joint programme receives inputs from the project for the preparation of regional and country-specific guidance and approaches. The project interacts with global political processes of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN), and the FAO-WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission.

2.3 Theory of change

41. The evaluation reconstructed the project's theory of change based on the project's results matrix provided to the evaluation team and the projects' simplified theory of change that was presented in the 2019 progress report, illustrated in Figure 2. While Figure 2 shows how the key project components and outcomes are interlinked and reinforce each other, it does not show the pathway of change and the external factors that influence change to get from project activities to the desired outcomes and impact.

Figure 2. Project simplified theory of change (2019)



Source: 2019 project progress report.

42. Based on this logic, the reconstructed theory of change by the evaluation can be found in Figure 3. This exercise mainly served to show the pathway of change, and more importantly, to frame external factors that influence progress along the pathway of change. These external factors are assumptions when the project has no control over them, or impact drivers when the project has a certain level of control. In Figure 3, the assumptions and drivers are strategically placed in either the zone of project control, influence or interest – where they determine the progress along the pathway of change.

43. The following existing assumptions from the project logframe were used and consolidated: (A0) Project budget is sufficient to implement all envisaged project activities; (A1) Willingness and interest at high level government and other partners to participate in the project; (A2) Pilot activities demonstrated effectiveness and scaling-up capacity (which became an intermediate stage in the theory of change); (A3) Relevant government capacity available and willingness to participate in Inter-ministerial and Intersectoral Working Groups (IIWGs), FSN Councils from the government. The following two assumptions were added by the evaluation to the reconstructed theory of change: (A4) Political willingness to incorporate project related content, evidence and lessons into related sector programmes, policy and legislative processes; and (A5) A critical pool of local experts exists to give technically sound support to the pilot initiatives during and post-project period.

44. The evaluation team identified the following impact drivers: (D1) A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is effective to systematically capture project progress and lessons learned for evidence building and sharing; (D2) FAO engages stakeholders (at all levels) and partners to effectively support implementation and ensures that implementation and governance arrangements are clear to all; (D3) Tailored targeting strategy with a clear targeting approach and target groups for all activities; (D4) There is efficient interaction between FAO headquarters and decentralized offices; and sufficient (technical) capacity at FAO national offices; (D5) National FAO offices are engaged in national working groups to catalyse investment and information exchange; (D6) Knowledge management strategy at national, regional and global level is strategically supporting further outreach and knowledge sharing within the three countries and between regional and global level to consolidate project outcomes; (D7) Interaction with other projects/programmes and international players to catalyse investment and collaboration from multiple sources and allowing a further exchange of experience and lessons; (D8) Capacity needs to consolidate pilot effectiveness and start scaling-up are clearly identified and can be reasonably addressed within the available time and resources; (D9) Strong advocacy capacities for high-level policy dialogue in the national project teams; (D10) Pilots have defined end-goals, handover strategies and low operational risks; and (D11) (informal) post-contract prospects for partnerships identified. The topics in the assumptions and drivers will be further discussed in section 3 on Findings.

45. The evaluation team also defined the so-called intermediate stages that the project needs to pass before it can reach its outcomes and ultimately impact. In order to reach these intermediate stages and to move beyond them, the assumptions and drivers need to be fulfilled. The nature and context of the project are such that it would be unrealistic to expect progression from each of the components' activities to intermediate stages and outcomes to be linear and to attribute changes to the project only. Tracking the process of change, and learning from it, is, in this case, just as important as measuring the degree of completion of project outcomes themselves.

46. For the sake of clarity in the theory of change Figure, the evaluation consolidated a number of project outputs/activities and identified three main pathways in Figure 3, highlighted in green, blue and grey (based on the three project components – although some activities overlap among components (further discussed in section 3.1).

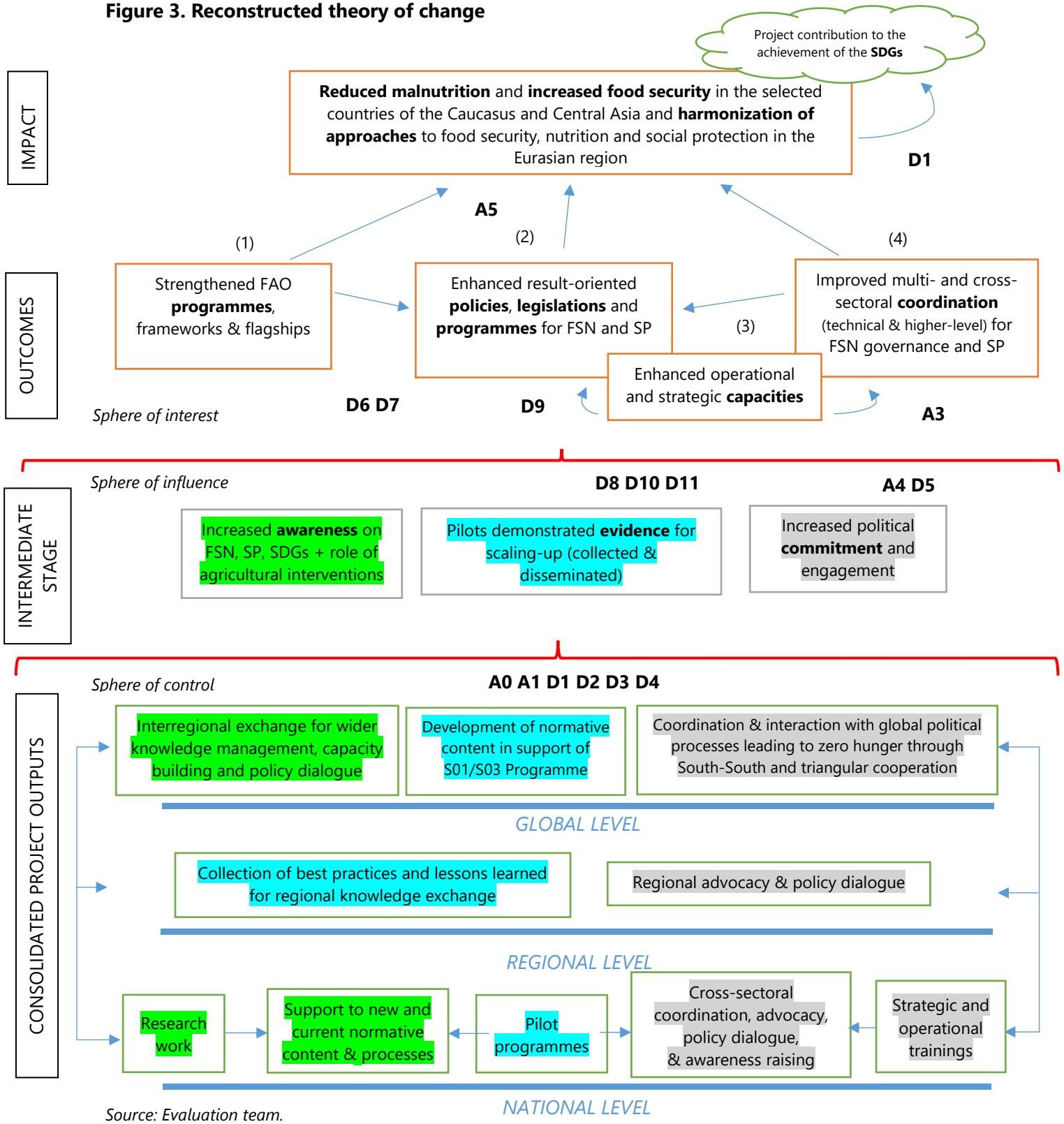
47. In short, the project aim is to operationalize the linkages between social protection, nutrition and agriculture, develop the necessary operational and strategic capacities for formulating policies and strategies in order to have more harmonized approaches and coordination for FSN and social protection and facilitate countries commitments to the SDGs.

48. The reconstructed theory of change exercise identified four outcome levels. Project evidence, know-how and lessons should eventually lead to strengthened FAO programmes, frameworks and flagships (outcome 1); and improved multi-stakeholder and cross-sector coordination to include food security, nutrition, social protection and sustainable agricultural actions, especially those resulting from the pilot programmes (Outcome 4) into enhanced operational and strategic capacities (Outcome 3) and result-oriented policies, legislations and programmes (Outcome 2). Ultimately, the outcomes combined should lead to reduced malnutrition and increased food security in the selected countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia and harmonization of approaches to food security, nutrition and social protection in the Eurasian region, and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs (impact levels).

49. As explained, before the consolidated and interlinked project outputs can lead to the desired outcomes and impact, they should first reach three intermediate stages: i) increased awareness

on FSN, social protection, SDGs and the role of agriculture interventions; ii) pilots demonstrated evidence for scaling-up; and iii) increased political commitment and engagement. In order to reach the intermediate stages, assumption A1 and impact drivers D1, 2, 3, and 4 should be fulfilled. Then, to move to the outcome levels, the project should pay particular attention and take specific (new) actions to fulfil D5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and assumption A3 and 4. To reach impact, the project should also pay attention to assumption A5, and again driver D1, as the project contribution to the achievement of the SDGs should be carefully monitored. This will also be further discussed in section 3.2 on Results.

Figure 3. Reconstructed theory of change



Source: Evaluation team.

3. Findings

50. Findings are analysed and presented according to the evaluation questions and sub-questions laid out in the evaluation matrix (Appendix 2).

3.1 Design. How adequate was the project design in supporting the activities and expected outcomes?

Finding 1. The project's three-tier model is relevant and well-suited for the implementation of activities at country, regional and global level. The design allowed for the identification of gaps and opportunities; it allowed project activities to interact with each other along the three implementation levels and reinforce each other in reaching the project's outcomes.

51. The three-tier model facilitates effective horizontal and vertical interactions between the global, regional and national levels to support several project objectives. There is clear evidence that it stimulates stakeholder dialogue and coordination and a greater coherence in the wider governance of FSN.

52. The global and regional experiences in multi-sectoral coordination and policy formulation in school feeding and social protection programmes were shared with national stakeholders through the FSN Forum and several events that served as a knowledge sharing platform. This provided opportunities to influence and frame policymaker's opinions and gain their buy-in for the pilot models.

53. Likewise, identified gaps and opportunities at the national level were brought to the regional and global level to stimulate wider dialogue and awareness (FSN Global Forum, global policy forums on Zero Hunger, regional and global conferences). This helped better formulate the pilots and the policy coordination process at the national level. As pilots were launched and first results and lessons were available, the same platforms allowed to contribute to the policy process in food security, nutrition and social protection at the regional and global level. In turn, greater coherence in the global governance of food security supported by different high-level policy processes (such as CFS, UNSCN, Codex Alimentarius, Second International Conference on Nutrition [ICN2]) encouraged convergence of policies and actions at regional and national levels.

Finding 2. The project did a good job in providing detailed logical frameworks for each implementation level and individual work plans for each country. At the same time, the clarity in the logical linkages between some outcomes, outputs and activities should be improved.

54. The project design and logical frameworks designed for each level (country, regional and global) were well-suited to the project overall objectives and implementation activities. The activities under each component were further broken down by more detailed sub-activities and presented in time bound work plans for each pilot country and separately for the regional and global level. This greatly contributed to and facilitated financial accountability and budget performance tracking at each level (country, regional, global).

55. There were, however, a number of flaws in the logical frameworks. First, there was no clear distinction between components, outcomes, outputs, activities, or clearly defined indicators and targets. There has been a mix-up between these, and it was therefore difficult to distinguish the intended pathway of change from output to outcome (and eventually impact) and, in some parts, this complicated the tracking of project progress and achievements. For example, the end-destination (or overall objective) of the pilots and how they should contribute to the overall

outcome of Component 3 was not clearly defined and measurable. Furthermore, the indicator for the School Food and Nutrition pilot was formulated as "percentage of children and target individuals in HHs [households] with an increased dietary diversity" which does not measure its contribution to the overall objective of project Component 3: "Improved capacities in governments and other relevant stakeholders for human resource development in the food security and nutrition domain." The evaluation relied for some part on the external assessment report findings, the bulk of which have been completed towards the end of 2020 and some of them are still in progress, to better understand the connections.

56. Second, in some cases, outputs were listed without specifying the related project activities, which were considered only in the work plans without indicators to measure the progress. Also, indicators, as defined in the logframes, were not provided in the detailed work plans with corresponding target values. Targets that were initially undefined were left unchanged and marked as "to-be-decided", "continued process" or "wide outreach", which complicated progress interpretation. Some outputs (and corresponding activities) did not have targets.

57. Third, the evaluation observed that certain activities overlap across the project components, such as outputs for the policy dialogue events under Component 1 and advocacy and communication activities under Component 2. Some activities under Component 3 (for capacity development workshops) were provided in the detailed work plans but were not included in the logframes with the corresponding indicators. While this does not have to create issues for project effectiveness, the evaluation finds that there could have been more distinction between activities (such as advocacy vs awareness) and clarity on the audience/target group for each activity. For example, the distinction between advocacy and awareness raising activity were not clearly defined at the national level and were also mixed with communication and visibility activities.

58. The evaluation further noted that the changes that were made by the project as a result of cancellation of various activities under Component 1 "Enabling Environment" (development of the national strategy on FSN and analysis of the current legislation on FSN in Armenia) and under Component 2 "Coordination and Advocacy" (all activities related to National Food Security Councils and parliamentarians) were only reflected in the budget as relocation of funds to the Component 3 "Piloting Policy Options" (see also Table 2 with the budget overview), the annual work plans and annual reports, without amending the logical framework and results chain. Therefore, it was difficult to map the implications of these changes for the overall pathway of change and project activities.

59. The project's design could have benefited from a theory of change exercise, which could have allowed for a better understanding of the different change pathways, as well as the implications of any changes made to them. Moreover, it could more accurately identify relevant assumptions, general and context specific risks and drivers. This is especially relevant for the project's complex contexts. In fact, the different pilot models should have their own internal theories of change.

Finding 3. The project risk analysis was not sufficiently comprehensive in addressing existing FSN governance contexts at national level. Also, the countries' fragility analysis was not conducted separately. While the project demonstrated exemplary adaptive management to (unexpected) impediments along the way, enhanced analysis could allow for better preparedness.

60. Although the project did a good job in identifying some critical assumptions in the logical framework, the corresponding risk analysis that would support the assumptions' statements could have been more comprehensive. Specifically, the following assumptions were not sufficiently assessed for risks: i) existence of political will and right attitude (at higher level in governments, such as performance of the National FSN Councils and Inter-ministerial and Intersectoral Working

Groups); ii) availability/access to national technical capacity; and iii) pilot-specific assumptions addressing operational risks. Furthermore, risks related to implementation arrangements were not included, such as procurement and administrative capacity, legal processing risks, and other stress tests for the prevention of critical delays in implementation.

61. The risk matrix prepared at design included four general type of risks, two of which were amber and two green: i) international and national organizations don't engage (green); ii) low political commitment from highest level of government (amber); iii) low interest for nutrition amongst agriculture trainees and Ministry of Agriculture staff (green); and iv) resources allocated to the agricultural sector are less than expected and affect overall coverage (amber). While these risks were recognized for the overall project level, specific insights into risk components and mitigating measures for each level would have been helpful. Furthermore, the risk log was not updated to reflect new information or changing circumstances during implementation. Furthermore, a separate fragility analysis was not conducted, which would have been appropriate given the context and background of Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

62. The design of Component 1 (Enabling environment) related to the comprehensive development of national FSN strategies and comprehensive analysis of the current legislation at the country level was complex but did not fully consider risks and national institutional contexts. The same applies to Component 2 (Coordination and Advocacy) which was substantially built on the high-level coordination with National FSN Councils and interactions with parliamentarians at all levels. The project, at the time, was informed by the FAO framework for food security work and the Zero Hunger approach including working with food security councils and parliamentarians, and it planned to build the institutional framework for FSN by focusing its activities on four elements that were assumed to be present to some extent in all three countries. Yet, in all three countries there has been insufficient institutional capacity and experience in those elements: i) a participatory approach to policymaking and performance monitoring; ii) institutional arrangements to make the implementation of policies feasible, including executive institutions and advisory bodies such as councils at central and decentralized levels; and iii) a coordinating institution answering directly to the Head of Government.

63. This meant that the project had to deal with these circumstances on the spot and others on a rather ad hoc basis. While the project should be complemented for their perseverance and good adaptive management (see also section 3.5), enhanced analysis could allow for better preparedness, enhanced efficiency and less pressure on project management (this will be further discussed in the dedicated section on project management).

Finding 4. The project was innovative in the subregion and all three target countries, and its objectives are relevant to the FAO country priorities, policy and strategy formulation needs of the governments and stakeholders' needs.

64. The project was conceptually new in the subregion and in all three target countries in attempting to introduce FSN concepts into existing social protection systems and develop capacities in formulating policies and strategies to meet countries commitments to the SDGs. Moreover, the project is the first among FAO projects to focus on migration and matching grants (the first pilot was through this project in Tajikistan) and lessons from the project have contributed to the 2019 FAO Migration Framework (see section 3.2 on Results). The project's innovative and comprehensive approach entails multi- and cross-sectoral coordination and close collaboration between state and non-state actors, while in the past these issues were addressed by a one-sector and one-agency method.

65. The project is relevant to FAO's Strategic Objective 1 (End hunger and malnutrition), in helping countries and stakeholders put in place the necessary elements for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which, according to FAO's Medium Term Plan 2014-17, are needed to effectively address the root causes of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. These elements included: political commitment, common understanding of problems and solutions, appropriate governance mechanisms and proper coordination, alignment of policies, programmes and investments; leveraging food and agricultural systems for better nutrition. The project is also aligned with Strategic Objective 3 (Reduce rural poverty), through emphasis on strengthening social protection systems.

66. The project design fits to the national priorities (FAO Country Programming Framework [CPF]): Armenia CPF 2016-2019 Kyrgyzstan CPF 2015-2017 and Tajikistan CPF 2016-2017 Regional Initiative/Priority Area. In Armenia, one of the three priorities of the new CPF is food security, nutrition and poverty reduction, while the existing CPF sets out six mutually agreed priorities for collaboration for the period 2012-2015. Main focus areas are, *inter alia*, support to the development of the small farmers' competitiveness with a focus on animal health, animal production, crop production, plant protection, natural resources management, as well as rural development and economic integration. FAO assistance in Kyrgyzstan is shaped by the CPF for the period 2015-2017, which includes four priority areas, and it has a strong focus on food security that aims to build capacity amongst key stakeholders to assess the agriculture, food security and nutrition situation in the country and prepare plans and strategies aimed at achieving Zero Hunger in Kyrgyzstan. The priority areas for FAO's collaboration with Tajikistan are shaped by the CPF 2015-2017 which was the result of a joint work with the Government of Tajikistan in consultation with partners in the Donor Coordination Council. While supporting FAO's corporate strategic objectives and regional priorities, the CPF was closely aligned with national strategy documents, including the Living Standards Improvement Strategy for 2013-2015, the Food Security Programme for the period up to 2015, the Mid-Term Development Programme of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2016 – 2020, and the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period up to 2030. FAO assistance also supported the Joint Country Partnership Strategy and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for 2016-2020. The new CPF directly supported the implementation of the Agricultural Reform Programme for Tajikistan (2012-2020), where "Enhancing national food and nutritional security and safety" is one of three priority areas identified by the Government.

67. The governments of the three focus countries politically committed to the SDGs and 2030 Agenda to address vulnerabilities to the food security situation mostly affecting the rural poor (especially children and women) in the form of malnutrition. Practical realization of these commitments creates needs for the national policy and strategy formulation in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that addresses the following core problems: i) one-sector approach for policy frameworks and programmes for food security, nutrition, social protection and agriculture; ii) lack of coherence and convergence among global, regional and national levels; iii) lack of strategic coordination among stakeholders relevant for food security, nutrition and social protection; and iv) weak institutions and insufficient capacity development of human resources in the food security, nutrition, social protection domain. These objectives also imply active engagement of the governments with all stakeholders and non-state actors, such as civil society and private sector. These issues were identified by the project design and properly adopted in the project objectives, meeting the needs of stakeholders.

3.2 Results. What results have been achieved, and which factors affected effectiveness?

3.2.1 Component 1 "Enabling Environment"

Outcome. Improved capacities for result-oriented policies, legislations and programmes to ensure the achievement of food security and high levels of nutrition for the entire population.

Finding 5. The project was effective helping governments (at national, regional and global level) in the identification of gaps, opportunities and priorities in the areas of FSN, social protection and sustainable agriculture; and defining coordinated actions for their implementation. While the project made significant steps, this outcome has not yet been fully achieved. Further policy dialogue is needed to turn policy/legislative commitments into actions.

68. At the national level, the project planned a set of specific support measures aimed at the development of the national capacities for results-oriented policies, legislations and programmes in FSN, social protection and sustainable agriculture. The thrust for these support measures had three main sources: i) the projects' pilot actions; ii) research and studies of the current policy and legislation environment; and iii) contribution to ongoing FAO initiatives in FSN and social protection. The pilot coordination mechanisms, such as the Inter-Ministerial Working Group in Armenia, and Technical Working Groups in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, established for cross-sectoral coordination and support to formulation and implementation of the pilot projects, effectively contributed to policy discussions and resulted in several national legislation commitments and initiatives. Some results are not yet achieved, and some are still work in progress. The details are discussed in the following sections.

69. Results from the project pilots are contributing to enhanced policies, strategies, programmes and frameworks. For example, the results and lessons learned from the implementation of the Cash Plus pilot were used for advocacy of the Active Employment Programmes by the Government of Armenia. In Tajikistan, the project assisted with the implementation of the National Sustainable School Feeding Strategy (2017–2026), contributing to the operationalization of the Strategy's Action Plan based on the results of the pilot activities, in close partnership with WFP, who is the main sponsor of the School Feeding Programme in the country. Moreover, the project was engaged in the review and improvement of the legislative and policy framework for FSN and social protection, specifically focusing on labour migrants. This process involved teamwork between Matching Grants pilot designers from the FAO Divisions on Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality (ESP), Food and Nutrition (ESN), Emergencies and Resilience (OER) and Legal Office (LEG) in collaboration with the country team, using the initial experiences from pilot implementation. The project has supported the Government with the review of the draft Law on Labour Migrants (provided by the Ministry of Labour and IOM), however this is still work in progress due to uncertainties with the Government's plans and frequent changes in its strategic vision.

70. The project supported the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic in developing a regulatory framework for school gardening in the country that would regulate all rules for creation, organization and implementation of school gardens with a view to contributing to a school food and nutrition programme. This would be the first regulation in the country on school gardens. However, at the time of the evaluation data collection, the finalization of the regulation was still work in progress as it is quite comprehensive and requires significant commitment from multiple ministries and agencies as well as a need for mobilizing financial resources to enforce the regulation.

71. Based on ideas from the Cash Plus pilot, the project developed a new programming approach in Kyrgyzstan to support most vulnerable and food insecure households. This was included into the National Food Security and Nutrition Programme (NFSNP) 2019-2023. Furthermore, the Cash Plus model was included as one of the approaches that will be considered by the Government under the Productive Social Contract programme as part of the country's National Development Strategy 2040.

72. The project's involvement in the revision of the Food Security Law in Kyrgyzstan introduced changes and amendments to address nutrition concerns and created conditions for the satisfaction of the food requirements of the various population groups and the responsibility for monitoring the efficiency of healthy food systems. Jointly with FAO's FIRST programme, the project contributed to the preparation of the NFSNP of Kyrgyzstan for 2019–2023, which was adopted by the Government. Moreover, the project contributed to the development of the national regulation on indicators and monitoring of the food security and nutrition (still to be adopted in 2021).

73. The project provided useful key policy tools and built specific practical capacity on SDG data collection. Significant practical results were achieved in delivering technical support to the National Statistics Committee of Kyrgyzstan and the Statistical Agency under the President of Tajikistan for the introduction and further development of the SDG indicators in the Agricultural Census. New methodology on food sheet balance with the National Statistics Committee has been introduced, which contributes to the reporting of SDG Indicator 2.1.1 (prevalence of undernourishment) and provides necessary and reliable information to the Kyrgyz Government on production volumes and usage in accordance with international standards for the evidence-based policy- and decision-making. The project provided support for the adaptation of SDG Indicator 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 for smallholders under FAO custodianship. This has led the Kyrgyz Government to begin a process of SDG adaptation, carried out with the involvement of various ministries and agencies under the coordinating role of the Ministry of Economy and the National Statistical Committee. The project supported capacity development for the Agency of Statistics in Tajikistan on Nationwide Minimum Dietary Diversity-Women, including data collection, data analysis, interpretation and reporting of country results, which provided a better understanding of the nutrition situation, including dietary diversity of women during the lean seasons. Moreover, the project was successful in assisting SDG councils for the 2030 Agenda planning (in all three countries) and providing technical assistance in SDG indicators (SDG 2) formulation and tracking (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) experts on statistics provided support on SDG activities in both countries and there was knowledge sharing on SDG indicators between Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

74. At the regional level, the project has compiled the best practices and lessons learned for policy dialogue on FSN sensitive social protection and school feeding programmes. The compilation was conducted from the FSN Forum online activities in close collaboration with REU, the FAO Food and Nutrition Division (ESN) and the FSN Forum as well as the inputs of 26 case studies from the region. Evaluation interviews indicated high practical interest for these materials from country stakeholders involved in those discussions.

Finding 6. Project results and lessons have the potential to permeate and influence FAO work globally, as guidance in selected areas of development.

75. At the global level, the project has committed to produce normative content to support the joint FAO Programme SO1/SO3 and widely disseminate project lessons and knowledge. This publication will use the results of the pilots and the project to produce normative content for the

SO1/SO3 Programme on strengthening food systems for nutrition sensitive social protection and *Strengthening the linkages between agriculture and social protection: designing coherent approaches for improving food security and nutrition in vulnerable households*. Understandably, this publication can only be produced when all the results are in place. Currently this publication is at advanced draft stage. The document discusses the policy, programme and operational level experiences and lessons learned from the pilots and presents options, recommendations and opportunities for improved coherence and coordination between social protection and agriculture to maximize their impacts on food security and nutrition outcomes. Further impact is to be determined.

76. The project has contributed to FAO corporate frameworks, flagships and strategic global publications, such as:

i. FAO corporate frameworks: in the *FAO 2019 Migration Framework - Migration as a choice and an opportunity for rural development*, a new concept of Matching Grants was introduced (first time in FAO), based on the pilot results. The project influenced FAO to include this new concept within its framework, so that FAO can implement this concept in other regions around the globe. In the FAO 2019 School Food and Nutrition Framework and FAO 2019 Work on Social Protection, Contributing to Zero Hunger, Poverty Reduction and Resilience in Rural Areas, the project models were introduced highlighting a potential for replication.

ii. Two flagship publications: *SOFA 2018 - The State of Food and Agriculture Migration, Agriculture and Rural Development*; and *SOFI 2018 - FAO's Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia*, where the region of the Central Asia and Caucasus was introduced with extensive data and analysis related to migration and remittances and the project significantly contributed to this content.

iii. The project was also highlighted in a number of other strategic publications, such as *FAO's Resources Partnerships Impact* 2018, 2019, and 2020 on school food and nutrition results of the project, social protection (Cash Plus) results of the project and migration results of the project.

Finding 7. The overall progress of the project towards achieving improved capacities for results-oriented policies, legislations and programmes is determined by the collaboration with local projects (at national level), capacities and performance of the national governments and the level of collaboration with non-state actors active in the field of FSN and social protection advocacy. The progress of the component on the regional and global level is directly dependant and linked to the results of the national pilots.

77. The most significant challenge in implementation of this component was observed in Armenia, where three out of four subcomponents were cancelled due to significant changes in the political situation in the country in 2018 and the corresponding shift in the government priorities. The work on the review and improvement of the current legislative and policy framework for FSN and social protection has been suspended, and all works have been cancelled for the participation in the Assessment of the National School Feeding Programmes, drafting of a Strategy for Sustainable Development of School Meals in the Republic of Tajikistan, and the support to the Action Plan of the Food Security Concept Paper (2017–2021). However, the prior progress achieved by the project on the development of a Comprehensive National Strategy on Food Security and Nutrition (with an operational plan) and the active participation in the working groups of the SDG Council (for SDG 1, 2 and 3) creates a potential to resume the work on those missed components as soon as the political environment in the country is stable enough to allow for high-level political dialogue.

78. Like in Armenia, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan a high-level political dialogue was hampered by the failure to establish working connections with the National FSN Councils of those countries (further discussed under Component 2). This affected the scope and achievement of the planned outputs related to the improvement of the current policy and legislative framework for FSN and social protection (there are some results at the high level, yet most of them are still commitments). The evaluation identified the following contributing factors to this issue (common to all three countries): i) lack of full-time advocacy capacities required for high-level policy dialogue in the national project teams (which could not be compensated by the backstopping support from headquarters); ii) low political interest from the governments (including high staff turnover of the key personnel with institutional memory); iii) still some lack of common understanding on FSN-related visions; and iv) dependence on single-sector focused on political interests and constantly changing political environment. Some of these issues can be found in the reconstructed theory of change (section 2). Nevertheless, the project managed to have many ministries collaborate together that would usually not interact.

79. Due to the challenges with high-level FSN policy interactions (at executive and legislative branches of the governments), the project has not yet been able to build the national policy formulation capacities in such a way that would enable the national governments to improve their abilities in identifying gaps and opportunities and formulate policies accordingly. This capacity building is processing well but it is a long-term effort that requires more time. Hence, substantial support and research in this field relied on the project with active collaboration from Russian Federation project counterparts and relevant FAO technical departments.

80. Collective efforts with FAO projects, external partners and line ministries are extremely important in enhancing the enabling environment. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the participation in the Food Security Law development was mostly a result of the collective effort with WFP, UNICEF, WHO (supporting the Monitoring and Evaluation Operational Guideline for the adopted FSN Programme for 2019-2023). Support to the Strategy for Sustainable Development of School Meals in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2017-2027 was provided by the project jointly with WFP. These efforts were reported to contribute to improved organization, quality, balance and safety of the school feeding system. At the same time, some evaluation interviews indicated that while the involvement of FAO in the ongoing working group is appreciated, participation could be more proactive.

81. These results need continuous support to be sustained, and more time is needed to observe the impact of these policy changes. Active and continuous engagement with local non-state actors (NGOs/civil society organization [CSOs]) who are specialized in FSN policy advocacy would be key to achieve success in the policy development at national level. This would enable the project to utilize already existing policy dialogue platforms and achieve synergies. More active engagement with WFP would benefit the effectiveness of the project in the strategic handover of the School Food and Nutrition pilots to the already existing national School Feeding Programmes (in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) and seek for more sustainable solutions in Tajikistan.

82. With the substantial knowledge on best practices and lessons learned from the Europe and Central Asia region, accumulated by the project through the FSN Forum, regional technical workshops and side events, a significant asset was created for future policy initiatives and policy dialogues. However, in-depth case studies for all three countries and SO1/SO3 normative content (global level objective) is still work in progress and can be carried out only after formalization and completion of all internal technical assessments of the pilots. This is a very important output for the project component.

3.2.2 Component 2 "Coordination and Advocacy"

Outcome. Improved multi- and cross-sectoral coordination for food security and nutrition governance.

Finding 8. The project, at all levels, actively promoted and contributed to improved awareness on food security, nutrition and social protection and the cross-sector and multi-stakeholder action in these fields. It is building operational capacity among stakeholders and beneficiaries through the ongoing pilot initiatives, while strategic multi-sectoral coordination is still lacking behind, mainly due to low political interest.

83. At the national level, the component originally focused on two main directions: i) working with and empowering of the National Food Security Councils (as high-level policymaking coordinating bodies) and conducting effective advocacy and policy dialogue; and ii) awareness raising, capacity building workshops and trainings, visibility and communication, with the overall objective of enhancing strategic and operational capacities for food security and nutrition, political commitment and engagement.

84. High-level coordination with National Food Security Councils did not come to fruition in the three countries and the comprehensive and ambitious plans in that direction could therefore not be implemented as planned. This significantly influenced the effectiveness of the strategic multi-sectoral coordination, advocacy and policy dialogue the project is advocating for and subsequently relied mostly on the coordination mechanisms from the pilots. The lower level, technical multi-sectoral coordination at the country level was mostly achieved by the pilot implementation actions through the inter-ministerial working group activities. The interactions between different ministries in those technical groups has proven to be valuable and reinforced the operational capacity of the group members of the technical groups, in addition to the special trainings, workshops and round table discussions. The challenges with the high-level policy interactions at national level were partially compensated by these working groups, however, policy processes cannot be fully addressed without strategic collaboration with other non-state actors who can provide alternative platforms on the ground for active and results-based policy advocacy. The strengthening of national food security bodies to enable them to take up recommendations, guidance and analytical advice from regional and global level takes time and could not be fully accomplished within the current project time frame.

85. Due to the challenges in working with the National FSN Councils in all three countries, most activities under this component were devoted to awareness raising, visibility and communication. The project was very effective in conducting awareness raising activities with a wide range of stakeholders besides the Government (including beneficiaries, local community leaders and authorities, service providers, and media representatives). The changes in attitude of the policymakers could be observed in all three countries (but the change was particularly prominent in Tajikistan) by their raised self-confidence in operating with complex concepts of nutrition-sensitive social protection and the role of education and agriculture, and applying them to the specific contexts (according to the evaluation interviews in all countries). The desk review and evaluation interviews indicated a high responsiveness and start in behaviour change of the beneficiaries in all three countries, due to the ongoing pilot initiatives. The direct beneficiaries responded well to the training and the training material and were taking specific actions such as: applying dietary practices by processing food, applying knowledge in production activities and showing positive attitude, pro-active interest to additional knowledge and creating a need for additional support. There is evidence in Kyrgyzstan (Cash Plus) and Tajikistan (Matching Grants) of non-project families living in project communities who were also positively influenced by the project, and they showed interest by trying to replicate similar activities with help of the project beneficiaries. These observations were captured in the interviews with the beneficiaries in

Tajikistan and the extension service providers in Kyrgyzstan. The full extent of behaviour change can be tested after project completion, once the pilot activities have been finalized. More details for the three focus countries as well as the regional and global level are provided below.

86. In Armenia, the component to support the establishing of the National Committee for FSN was implemented partially and stopped in 2018 due to the changing political situation in the country. The two inter-ministerial technical working groups were effectively supervising the pilot activities in coordination: the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Labour and Social Assistance to support the Cash Plus pilot; and the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Education and Science to support the School Food and Nutrition pilot. Operational coordination also took place at the local government (province) level with the involvement and active participation of the responsible stakeholders. The country representatives (project team, national stakeholders and expert community) were also active in online consultations and webinars on the FSN Forum for Europe and Central Asia. Evaluation desk studies and interviews found the consultations useful in providing knowledge materials for policymakers in public school feeding and nutrition sensitive social protection.

87. In Tajikistan, like in Armenia, the operational coordination took place through the inter-ministerial working groups created for the two pilots (Matching Grants and School Food and Nutrition). The Food Security Council (FSC) was approved by the Government of Tajikistan in 2011 as a high-level/strategic government consultative and advisory mechanism on food security issues and was operated through the Technical Food Security Working Group (TFSWG). However, it has not been functioning since 2014. The FAO Representation in Tajikistan had several meetings and attempts to establish working relationships with the FSC, but the Government showed low interest. Despite that, the project continuously involved government officials and relevant decision makers in various coordination events. Together with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Tajikistan, and with the support of experts from the Eurasian Center for Food Security, a three-day high-level training workshop was organized with focus on the improvement of FSN in Tajikistan. Similarly, a four-day certified training was organized in Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyzstan. The workshops were instrumental in enhancing operational capacity of leading technical specialists of state authorities and decision makers in the field of food security and nutrition. Evaluation desk study found that it also increased awareness of representatives from NGOs and other non-state actors.

88. As a member of SUN Movement Platform, FAO regularly participated in SUN multi-sectoral coordination meetings by contributing to the awareness on food security and nutrition issues and increasing project visibility. The project has been a member of the working group led by WFP for the Strategy for Sustainable Development of School Meals in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2017-2027 (reported under Component 1 "Enabling Environment"). The evaluation found that FAO participation in this process could be improved.

89. In 2019, FAO, WHO, UNICEF, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Aga Khan Development Network jointly with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection organized the 3rd National Nutrition Forum in Dushanbe, discussing how to improve the nutrition status of children and schoolchildren within the framework implementation of the National Development Strategy for the period up to 2030. During this key event, project results of the school food and nutrition pilot were presented and discussed and examples of the project's technical support to the Government to include nutrition aspects into the school curriculum were highlighted. The project also had a very productive cooperation with the Republican Healthy Lifestyle Center under the Ministry of Health that conducted a workshop on FSN and social

protection at the national level in July 2019 engaging ministries and agencies, local authorities, international organizations, as well as civil society organizations operating in the field.

90. In Kyrgyzstan, the project made progress in mobilizing national technical experts, policy champions, educate and train sectoral leaders and support national advocacy alliances in FSN and social protection linkages in policy process and actions. Although platforms were provided for wide policy debates to include nutrition-sensitive social protection in relation to agricultural production, there is still little evidence of active participation of line ministries (such as Health, Education, Labour and Social Protection) to include nutrition and social protection objectives and actions into the Food Security Council agendas and plans.

91. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the project produced some concrete results in supporting the process of national SDGs targets setting and identifying the indicators, especially those that reflect the food security, nutrition and social protection linkages.

92. At regional level, the project was to promote the harmonization of approaches to FSN and social protection in the Eurasian region and policy coherence in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) Member States. While the regional workshop on school food and nutrition in Belarus was successfully organized, the envisaged objective of developing a concept note for the establishing of the Eurasian Parliamentary Alliance could not be achieved. This was mainly due to the impossibility to engage parliamentarians into the policy dialogue activities in the three countries and this output was discontinued together with national councils.

93. The project promoted the development of integrated school food and nutrition policies and programmes, the sustainable social protection programmes, efficient agricultural investments and food security and nutrition policies through: i) the organization and participation at regional events; ii) the organization of side events; iii) the implementation of online activities; and iv) various study papers and publications. For example, the regional workshop on "Consolidating School Food and Nutrition Approaches in Europe and Central Asia" in Belarus on 11-13 December 2019 allowed to tailor the FAO approach on School Food and Nutrition for the region of Europe and Central Asia. Several practical recommendations were elaborated for enabling policy, legal and institutional environment, inclusive procurement and value chains healthy food environment and school food; and school-based food and nutrition education activities were taken into consideration.

94. The FSN Forum in Europe and Central Asia as part of the FAO Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition facilitated knowledge sharing in an inclusive and transparent policy dialogue, which was very well received by the mid-level government officials and other non-state stakeholders from all three target countries. The Moscow University's ECFS was found to be instrumental in facilitating webinars, workshops and online consultations in the bilingual platform, including the Russian language translation and content adaptation of the e-learning training module "Improving Nutrition through Agriculture and Food Systems".

95. The availability and easy accessibility of the accumulated knowledge materials such as webinar content, policy recommendations and other outputs will be useful for continuing policy analysis and formulation by the interested parties on a need-basis. However, systematization of the lessons learned and findings from the pilots would be helpful in conducting future advocacy and policy dialogue and would bring more practical value to the platform. Specific impacts on the enabling environment from widening the national and regional coordination efforts through the online Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition require more time and cannot yet be determined at this stage.

96. At the global level, the project actively interacted with global political processes leading to Zero Hunger and provided inputs and lessons from the project pilots and approaches based on the country contexts. For example, in 2018, the project organized the side-event on Migration and Remittances in Central Asia and the Caucasus with participation of 60 experts who took place at the 45th session of the Committee on World Food Security in Rome, Italy, on 19 October 2018. The event looked at the importance of migration in the region and discussed the potential of attracting remittances from migrants for investment in agribusiness for rural development based on the ideas from the Matching Grants pilot in Tajikistan. The project's involvement in the Global Child Nutrition Forum, an educational and technical assistance Forum held annually to support countries in the development and implementation of sustainable school meals programmes, was important to discuss the pilot activities in the three project countries and establishing new collaboration with country stakeholders. Both events were focused on increasing awareness of the project in nutrition-sensitive social protection and school nutrition, increasing the donor's visibility and supporting technical discussions.

97. Other global events organized or participated by the project contributed to Outcome 2 results and concentrated on awareness raising, visibility and knowledge sharing and, to a lesser extent, on advocacy and results-focused policy dialogue. These were: the Regional Symposium "Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia" (2017); FAO and WFP prepared the International Conference on Eurasian Food Security (ECFS) in Tajikistan (2018); and Regional Symposium on Sustainable Food Systems and Nutrition Governance for Healthy Diets in Central Asia and Caucasus (2019).

Finding 9. The project provided strong communication and visibility of the project activities and the donor. Dissemination of educational and methodological materials in Russian and local language reached and benefited stakeholders at all levels.

98. The project provided significant materials for knowledge exchange through research publications, e-learning modules and South–South cooperation-type visits. The visibility of the project and the donor was increased through various channels (such as website, online exchanges, press articles, networks, videos and newsletters). The pilot's photobooks, operational guidelines, brochures, leaflets and banners have been produced in Russian, English and national languages and the project's website has been operational in Russian and English. FAO e-learning modules were adapted and translated in Russian and applied digital technology with experts from Moscow State University and the Eurasian Center for Food Security. The modules were designed both for training and training of trainers. In their final assessment report, implementing partner ECFS indicated that the module has been successfully used in the online webinars on the FSN Forum platform.

99. The project supported a South–South cooperation study tour of a delegation of six government officials from Tajikistan to the Republic of Moldova on learning from Moldova's national Programme for Attracting Remittances into the Economy (known as PARE 1+1) which has been successfully implemented by the Organization for Small and Medium Enterprises Sector Development of Moldova since 2011. The gained experience supported the planning of the pilot project "Promoting inclusive economic growth through Matching Grants".

100. In Armenia, the project developed an Advocacy and Communication strategy which, in active partnership with national project implementing partners, was instrumental in carrying out numerous advocacy, awareness raising and communication activities, among which: public awareness raising events including annual World Food Day events and events for schoolchildren and the general public; community orientation meetings; the development and distribution of communication materials; promotional videos including the airing of videos on local TV featuring

the PAR for schoolchildren; and contributions in various TV and radio programmes. The active communication campaigns resulted in 120 mentions in the printing media only in 2019, and 8 media stories featuring the country project pilot activities posted on website, provided wide public access internationally.

101. The project in Tajikistan has been actively working on advocacy, awareness and visibility by using different instruments, including production of dissemination materials, producing and broadcasting TV and radio programmes. In Kyrgyzstan, the project also produced visualization (infographics) of the food security and nutrition situation through the Platform for Real-time Impact and Situation Monitoring (PRISM) of the food system and broadcasted in local mass media (including one TV and two radio stations).

3.2.3 Component 3 "Piloting Policy Options"

Outcome. Improved capacities in governments and other relevant stakeholders for human resource development in the food security and nutrition domain.

Finding 10. The project showed positive initial performance in all pilots by delivering good results on the ground and providing an evidence base for dialogue at the regional and global level. The pilots resulted in high interest and participation of stakeholders (including governments and direct beneficiaries) and contributed to improved awareness and understanding of FSN and social protection concepts. There has been evidence of initial behavioural change and application of acquired operational capacity.

102. For the pilot School Food and Nutrition Programme linked to the Agricultural Sector, the evaluation found it relevant and important that the significantly different initial institutional environments and conditions for school feeding in each target country had influenced the choice, approach and, eventually, the outcomes of the selected models. In Armenia, there was already a national school feeding programme supported by WFP, and the selected pilot schools were part of that programme. In Tajikistan (with the highest level of rural poverty among the three countries), school feeding is fully supported by various donors (with no government programme). There are generally poor infrastructural conditions in the schools. The greenhouses model (in Armenia and Tajikistan) was chosen to serve a dual purpose of improving children's access to healthy, diversified diets in sustainable ways and providing for voluntary adoption of healthy diets among schoolchildren by making nutrition education part of the curriculum. Moreover, the project's intention is to support local agriculture by building links between local production of nutritious food and schools, however this objective has not been yet directly addressed.

103. According to the 2019 progress report, under this pilot the project implemented four activities in the three countries and produced the following aggregated outputs, achieving or exceeding the targets:[2] i) greenhouses and orchards for three schools in the Ararat region of Armenia benefiting 700 students; ii) seedbed greenhouses and orchards for 20 schools in the Khatlon region of Tajikistan for 7 529 students; iii) a Logistics Center to supply 29 schools, for 12 000 students in Kemin district, and an agricultural intervention with 3 000 fruit trees for 24 schools of Issyk_Ata and Kemin districts in Kyrgyzstan; and iv) six learning hubs for modern agricultural education in schools of the Ararat region in Armenia.

104. The evaluation interviews in Armenia and Tajikistan indicated a good recognition of the educational value by the school administrations, children and parents. The vegetables and greens harvested in the greenhouses reached the school kitchens and improved school menus and nutrition. In all schools, the produce was sold partially, and proceeds were used to cover some of the operating and agriculture input costs (in Armenia and Tajikistan) or purchase other food items (in Tajikistan). Moreover, during evaluation interviews, a significant interest was expressed for greenhouses from other districts in Tajikistan, and there were numerous requests addressed to the Ministry of Education and Science from the local communities to include their schools into the pilot scheme.

105. The evaluation focus group discussions with students in Armenia showed that there were different levels of involvement and interest in the greenhouse- and gardens-based agricultural education process. It was higher in those schools where teachers were more proactively involved in using the greenhouse in the class process. The project-supported online platforms on modern agriculture education all over the Armenian school network, which provoked students' interest in agriculture education and offered a learning centre for smallholder farmers. Six learning hubs

[2] As highlighted in section 3.1, these were not defined in the logframe and were included later in the country work plans

were established with FAO publications on modern agricultural practices for local farmers and schoolchildren. These hubs were designed to reach out to students, teachers, families and promote better diets and nutrition education. In Kyrgyzstan, the removal of the practical labour classes from the school curriculum made it difficult for schools to involve students in the school gardening process. The nutritional objectives of the school gardens are yet to be seen with the first harvest. However, an interview with a school director revealed that there will be more need for technical support to handle the fruits from storage to processing in the school kitchen.

106. There were numerous operational challenges. For example, heating and cooling system in Armenia, and irrigation and seeds in Tajikistan, effectively addressed by the project. Other operational challenges that still require attention and have been identified by the project internal assessments and confirmed by the evaluation, are: i) long-term challenges for the school administration to combine greenhouse operations with its core responsibilities of education process management (mostly in Armenia); ii) weak financial management and poor record keeping (partially in Armenia and Tajikistan); iii) weak entrepreneurial skills and knowledge and uncertainties with the sale of the surplus produce in the market (in both countries); and iv) weakly functioning supervision and governance under Memoranda of Understanding signed between schools, parents committees and local authorities due to uncertain institutional role of the local authority (in both countries). Considering recommendations of the internal assessments, in both countries the project conducted bookkeeping training sessions for each pilot schools (covering greenhouse production, school kitchen garden and orchards).

107. In Armenia, the pilot counterpart agency is the Ministry of Agriculture, and in Tajikistan, the Ministry of Education. The Memorandum of Understanding arrangement introduced by SIFI included an agreement between school directors, parent committees and local authority to provide a monitoring and supervision function for the duration of project implementation. In both countries, the local community administrations (represented by district department of education) are the main supervising bodies and ultimately considered to become owners of these pilots. However, a clear ownership mechanism of this model after project completion has not been defined yet (see also section 3.3 on Sustainability). Overall, the pilot operations (in Armenia and Tajikistan) demonstrated that success was mostly dependant on the personal qualities and activism of the school principals which was very useful at the starting phase of the pilot and continues to be a main factor for greenhouse operations viability. However, the future institutionalization arrangements are not yet clear, and the schools are provided with full discretion on the use of the greenhouses. In Armenia, this has been expressed more explicitly in evaluation interviews than in Tajikistan, but cultural differences in showing appreciation and open criticism need to be taken into consideration.

108. Kyrgyzstan, like Armenia, had a national school feeding programme also long-time supported by WFP, which historically included school gardens, but there was low interest in the greenhouses from the Ministry of Education. Therefore, a different model (Logistics Center) was chosen by FAO to best serve the needs and interests of the rural schools and communities. The counterpart agency for this pilot is the Ministry of Agriculture. Evaluation interviews and desk review revealed a significant need and active interest from school directors and communities for this Logistics Center that would allow their remotely located rural schools (from a district centre) to order on a needs basis and receive fresh, high-quality, properly certified and documented, and less expensive vegetables, fruits and other products. Previously, the supply of perishable food products had to be arranged in the villages by only those parents who could afford it. Also, due to a lack of proper storage facilities at schools, children were often provided with inferior food alternatives (like fast food snacks or other high-fat food, and food with a high carbon footprint).

109. Despite significant delays with the procurement of certain distinct equipment (that required using special FAO procedures), the project successfully completed the infrastructural part of the Logistics Center including the food quality certification arrangement from a local food safety authority (who was also effectively supported by the project). Innovative organizational solutions designed by SIFI were effectively implemented for the first year of operations through multi-party Memorandum of Understanding arrangements (between Kemin District Administration, the private entrepreneur, and the District Fund). The creation of a governance structure with a Supervisory Board including district administration, the district's Economic Development Fund, local agricultural associations, school principals and school parent committees is supposed to ensure the operations viability by allowing the integration of local farmers into the process and collectively address government procurement procedures. This was achieved in the first year of operation, where all 29 schools were provided with fresh produce at a lower cost compared to the poor supplies in the past.

110. Operational viability was provided through additional storage facilities (two-thirds out of the total space) that was designed to serve non-school operations with local farmers who could store their perishable products during off-season times and sell it for extra profit during high demand. The next year, the Logistics Center lost the school supply tender but concentrated on this alternative storage use. It should be noted that the Logistics Center has been highly dependent on the existing public procurement system which cannot provide exclusivity in the food supply for the selected schools and imply competition. Another complication has been in the composition of the tender lot that combines vegetables with other processed food, while the Logistics Center supplies only vegetables. The evaluation found that the project conducted a diligent analysis of the reasons for losing and how to find long-term solution to the procurement issue. During the evaluation interview, SIFI suggested two solutions: i) push for the original plan to use the Supervisory Board instrument; or ii) use the Supervisory Board to leverage a deal with the Ministry to obtain at temporary exemption (for three-five years) from the tender procedures by obligating all schools in the district to use the Logistics Center. This issue remains open and the project is working on it.

111. Under the pilot Strengthening Food Systems for Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection (Cash Plus) in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, the main objective was to enhance the livelihoods, productive capacities and food and nutrition security of poor and vulnerable households. The pilot strategy was based on a partnership with the Government to deliver a flexible combination of cash transfers and agricultural activities, inputs, assets, training as well as extension and social support services.

112. The project had no specific targets in the logframe, initially, but these were defined later in the work plans before implementation. The project implemented all planned activities/outputs. The Cash Plus in Armenia supported 133 beneficiary households in the Shirak and Lori marzes, benefiting 802 people (388 children, 200 below the age of five). The Cash Plus in Kyrgyzstan covered 150 beneficiary households in Jalal-Abad oblast (with 22 percent female-headed households and 19 percent single mothers) and benefited 842 people, more than half of whom (472) were children below the age of 18. The project beneficiaries were provided with in-kind support in the form of seeds, other inputs and agricultural tools, and received technical training, regular coaching related to their specific type of productive package. The trainings and instructions were realized in full as planned, and covered topics on greenhouse construction, integrated crop protection, home-based fruit and vegetable processing, with attention to sustainable production methods and linkages with local markets. The project had a clear focus on maximizing health outcomes with providing nutrition-related trainings.

113. Within the Cash Plus pilot in Kyrgyzstan, the best 25 recipes have been included into a Cookbook of traditional healthy dishes. Agricultural interventions in the Nizhne-Serafimovsky orphanage in Kyrgyzstan were to improve access to a healthy diet for 370 elderly and people with disabilities by setting-up fruit gardens and fish production. The evaluation interviews found that all activities were executed, but without any visible nutritional outputs yet (it needs another year of two for the first harvest).

114. The evaluation desk review and interviews with selected stakeholders in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan indicated superior coordination of the project team with headquarters experts (who provided substantial technical support), the line ministries, and non-government implementing partners at all phases of design, implementation and assessment. The pilot performed very well with the following several main achievements. The pilot beneficiaries expressed high satisfaction, which was demonstrated during implementation interactions with social workers and extension service trainers and confirmed during evaluation interviews with these implementing partners. The beneficiaries showed high responsiveness to the training and coaching, which resulted in the following desired outcomes: adoption of presented healthy cooking practices, application of the practical recommendations and guidance to others in the household and within the community. This was also captured by the internal assessments (for both countries) that showed improvement in the dietary diversity and positive effects on resilience to the recent events following the COVID-19 pandemic.

115. The service mapping provided by implementing partners in Kyrgyzstan allowed to effectively design the project interventions and address most of the needs of the beneficiaries, however the evaluation interviews pointed to lack of proper operational guidelines and manuals including case management and the qualified social workers at the local district level to work with families in extreme poverty.

116. The pilot has been included by both Governments of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan into the policy documents as one of the possible models of the social contract to be considered for implementation. For example, the Government of Armenia has acknowledged the results of the Cash Plus pilot as a successful model of the active labour market project. At the same time, the evaluation noted passive institutional involvement of the Ministry of Agriculture in Kyrgyzstan's pilot and potential advantages of inclusion of the Ministries of Health (responsible for nutrition-related health issues) and Economy (responsible for the budget allocation) into the Intersectoral Coordination Group.

117. The focus of the pilot Promoting Inclusive Economic Growth through Matching Grants in Tajikistan was to assist migrants and their families/communities to mobilize migrants' remittances for small-scale investments in agriculture and agribusiness activities, and support the country's sustainable development. This pilot (like Cash Plus and School Food and Nutrition) required substantial preparatory work including defining the right targeting, selection criteria and coordination with state and non-state actors. This was reflected in an operational manual on Matching Grants and coordinated through an Oversight Committee with members from several ministries, (UN) agencies and private sector representatives. Despite the late start, due to delays in the country approval process and initial technical challenges with grant administration, all activities of the pilot were implemented in full. The targets were not defined in the logframe and were reflected in the work plans before implementation.

118. The pilot produced the following main outputs (meeting the work plan targets): it provided business plan writing training to 170 beneficiaries and screened their agribusiness ideas, 50 of which were selected for the Matching Grants programme in the districts of Hisor and Balkhi in

Tajikistan. 40 percent of beneficiaries were from the deported group, 30 percent were families with migrants and 30 percent were returnees.

119. The evaluation interviews with key stakeholders and beneficiaries allow to conclude that, overall, the project was successful in demonstrating profitable and sustainable business processes through the usage of remittances with equally matched project grant assistance. However, the evaluation considers the reported data on agribusiness generated employment opportunities a very rough estimate, as it was based on self-reporting and the actual financial records were not assessed. The potential for job creation by the beneficiaries and their growth takes time to observe.

120. Likewise, the full-scale impact assessment of the actual business performance of the individual beneficiaries is yet to be conducted. Preliminary assessment of the beneficiaries' opinions and perceptions about their business performance (conducted internally within six months of the grants disbursement) indicated optimism and general concurrence with the original business plans' projections. Better prospects of cost-effectiveness, scaling-up and impact should emerge towards the end of the project.

3.3 Potential sustainability and scaling-up. How sustainable are the project results, what are the risks and what is their potential for scaling-up?

Finding 11. All pilots have demonstrated high potential for scaling-up and replication, but they are at different stages of readiness. Among all pilots, the Cash Plus pilot currently has the highest potential for sustainability and replication. Attention is needed for key operational and institutional risks.

121. The evaluation concluded that, among all pilots, the Cash Plus (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan) and Matching Grants (Tajikistan) models are most ready for scaling-up and replication by the Government, while the others still need consolidation of results. For example, Armenia's State Poverty Reduction Policy adopted in December 2019 was developed based on the positive evidence created through the Cash Plus pilot implementation. Furthermore, while presenting the new state programme on overcoming poverty at the Government session, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has made a reference to the Cash Plus pilot "as a successful example of social protection and active labour market project". While Governments' declarative commitments for the Cash Plus and Matching Grants models after project completion may be considered as a convincing indicator for sustainability, further work is needed i) to address operational risks and fix certain weaknesses; and ii) prepare a clear handover strategy that illustrates a plan for policy dialogue leading to the pilots take-up. Next in line are the Logistics Center results in Kyrgyzstan, which demonstrated good potential for effective linking of the local agricultural production with school feeding initiatives at the local community level. Despite remaining challenges with the state procurement procedures (which needs to be addressed), it is a viable and self-sustainable business model. More details on each models' prospects for sustainability and scaling-up are considered below.

Cash Plus in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan

122. Beneficiaries demonstrated high interest in the productive activities and provided assets, training and coaching, as well as the seedbeds and greenhouses (in Kyrgyzstan), and livestock and poultry with berries (in Armenia). This interest was very high also among most poor households who had no prior experience in the supported activities (especially in Armenia). Interest in the new types of crops was initially limited and required targeted efforts to convince them that the new crops

would not affect traditional dietary practice but rather complement it and improve nutritional value. The key to success was the introduction of traditional recipes with the new nutritious crops. Acceptance of knowledge from training on nutrition and healthy dietary practices was also evident and stimulated changes in attitudes and practical application of the learned practices: food preparation, canning, drying, etc. The evaluation interviews also indicated high interest and willingness to support implementation with local authorities which is also indicative of local ownership.

123. Evaluation interviews identified a number of sustainability issues and challenges that were also mentioned in the final reports of the non-state pilot implementing partners (particularly in the service mapping). For example, access to agricultural extension services (related to assumption A5 in the theory of change) outside Ayil Okmotu (local district in Kyrgyzstan) is required for at least another two years and the absence of this service from the state in the remote villages is problematic, as beneficiaries cannot afford to use a private extension service. The situation with the extension services is relatively better in Armenia but post-project support is also required here. The technical viability of the seedbed construction in Kyrgyzstan proved to be weak, and different evaluation interviews highlighted that it would be better if it were replaced with full-fledged greenhouse structures, as benefits from the increased productivity would significantly outweigh the additional costs.

124. Other suggested improvements, mostly related to case management and extension service support, include: i) increase the intensity and duration of agricultural support (specific instruction for seasonal work, veterinary and agronomy care, etc. in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan); ii) due to lack of access to agricultural support from the Government in the remote villages, train and equip local community groups who would be able to provide such support when the project is over (in Kyrgyzstan); iii) improve the training materials and increase training time for the social workers responsible for case management (in Kyrgyzstan). In general, the main risk to sustainability is the lack of or no access to affordable services by beneficiaries to sustain the achieved benefits. The above suggested improvements should be tailored to address this overarching issue.

Matching Grants for migrants in Tajikistan

125. The findings from the evaluation interviews indicate positive initial performance and ownership by beneficiaries in all three groups (migrant family members, returnees and forced returnees). There were several cases reported when the beneficiaries expanded their business by adding extra greenhouse to the already built ones under the grant. The conducted survey (June 2020) of beneficiaries indicated resilience to the problems of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated by less dramatic deterioration of the financial situation in the household and higher optimism about the future, compared to the households that did not receive the assistance. Some donor communities, such as the FAO-Turkey project in Yavan district, World Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) started to implement this model to promote the improving agriculture and tourism sectors.

126. While the concept of the pilot has proven successful to generate benefits for its target population, there are several risk factors for sustainability that should be considered from a scaling-up perspective and a possible second phase. First, targeted business support services for the beneficiary-run enterprises should be determined and arranged for each sector of the business activity. The initial technical training will not be sufficient in the future. Second, possibilities for an agricultural risk insurance should be considered and collaboration with financial institutions will be necessary in finding appropriate solutions. Third, to avoid concentrations of the sectors by geographic location and cross-competition, the scaling-up of the pilot needs to be well planned

and distributed. Lastly, cooperation and forming of clusters among beneficiary businesses should be stimulated based on the value chain identification and assessments. All these would require active collaboration and cooperation with other donors to coordinate policy dialogue with the Government on developing other support measures that could further improve the pilot performance.

School food and nutrition in Armenia and Tajikistan

127. School principals and community leaders expressed support to the model during evaluation interviews, despite existing operational challenges which are being addressed with their active involvement. Although this is a good indicator of ownership, this pilot needs more work to be properly institutionalized and formalized. Only then, the pilot can be ready for scaling-up and replication. The main challenges for operational sustainability are: i) ensuring the right balance between education and nutrition functions of the greenhouses, seedbeds and gardens; ii) setting-up an appropriate management structure to run the agricultural production process and separate it from the educational process in the school; iii) need for improved infrastructure for the storage and realization of the excess crops; iv) need for improved record keeping, financial management and reporting; and v) need for continuous agricultural extension support during and post-project.

128. The administrative burden for the implementation of the School Food and Nutrition pilot may undermine productivity and affect its educational objectives. The pilot should account for the risks related to the increased responsibilities of the school administrations at the expense of their core duties. The effectiveness of technical assistance and agricultural training may not be high in the long-run as managing the agricultural production process is a full-time business and may be better implemented from the outside. The project is aware of these risks and is still working on the necessary adjustments in the production process to reduce risks and improve productivity, such as provide extension services, conduct proper planning and financial management.

129. To achieve institutional sustainability (in both countries), SIFIs framework of Memoranda of Understanding needs to be reviewed where necessary and reinforced with additional mechanisms that could support proper supervision by the local authorities (via district education departments). These mechanisms could be redesigned to include a lead agency who could facilitate coordination of the Memorandum arrangement. The School Feeding Foundation of Armenia was supposed to be a lead agency, who was ultimately responsible for administering the pilot after its take-up, however it has not been operational since 2018 due to changes in the Government. In Tajikistan, local authorities will remain the major focal points for the pilot's supervision as the School Feeding Programme has not been yet institutionalized and is being provided by WFP.

Agricultural intervention in the Nizhne-Serafimovsky orphanage in Kyrgyzstan

130. The agricultural intervention in the Nizhne-Serafimovsky orphanage in Kyrgyzstan has some potential for sustainability. Operational risks have been identified, related to the infrastructure for fruits storage, food safety (for fish), and general administration of the garden and the fishpond. However, making more specific judgements on sustainability would be premature since this pilot has not yet produced any nutritional outputs. Some of the positive factors contributing to sustainability are: i) the knowledge from the intensive technical assistance and training in fishery and gardening is retained by the personnel; ii) cooperation with local farmers in maintaining the garden and the informal agreement for joint use of harvest in the future.

Logistics Center in Kyrgyzstan

131. The practical instrument for institutional sustainability of the Logistics Center, introduced by the project (with SIFI's assistance), includes a collective governance model with a Supervisory Board. This arrangement gathers all key interested parties and community stakeholders and provides a space for collective action for the benefit of each party involved. The evaluation interviews confirm a high interest and engagement among local farmers in the community of Kemin district to benefit from the business opportunities created by the Logistics Center.

132. In this case, the key factors for sustainability include: i) making the Supervisory Board functional by finding a lead agency from NGOs who could be able and interested to take-up a facilitation role; ii) negotiating a temporary waiver from the Government on the procurement arrangements for the Logistics Center; and iii) working on a long-term policy-oriented solution for the school procurement through active policy dialogue and collaboration with other stakeholders, such as NGOs already working on similar issues and potentially benefiting from the partnership with the project, and WFP.

133. The procurement regulation remains the main obstacle for the school supply operations. Providing an infrastructural solution for small-scale producers' aggregation and quality check of the products will be insufficient to make the Logistics Center fully operational for the school food supply objective without a sustainable public procurement regulation. Also, the procurement regulation by itself would not be able to guarantee the transparency of the rules unless a proper risk assessment is conducted including alternatives, special interests and other context-specific issues. Finally, more long-term solutions towards productivity growth and cooperation outside the Logistics Center should be considered.

134. One perhaps positive unintended result is that SIFI's gained experience from this project is being applied by WFP in a scaled-up version of the Logistics Center in another district of Kyrgyzstan. Although it may appear as a competition, it actually provides an opportunity for learning and collaboration for the project if it is extended.

Finding 12. Sustainability of the pilots is not only determined by their operational soundness, but also by the interest of relevant ministries to integrate the pilot models into new or existing frameworks/national programmes. This requires sufficient evidence from the pilots, clear end-goals and a handover strategy.

135. Those pilots, which were envisaged to modify the existing state programmes, and where the relevant ministries already have vested interest, have relatively better sustainability prospects (i.e. Cash Plus in Social Contract and Family Assistance models of the Social Protection programmes in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan; School Gardening pilot in National School Feeding Programme sponsored by WFP in Kyrgyzstan). The following other pilots could not be (in)directly linked to ongoing state programmes, and initial interest from the ministries as future owners was not yet clear. These are the Logistics Center in Kyrgyzstan, and the School Food and Nutrition pilots in Armenia and Tajikistan. For the latter, formal procedures for their take-up by states is more complex, as they need budget commitments where direct involvement of the Ministries of Finance is also required. The ultimate owners of these pilots were considered the district level authorities (district education departments) under the Memorandum of Understanding arrangements during project implementation. However, this role is yet to be demonstrated. Collaboration with WFP could help the project in the strategic handover of the School Food and Nutrition pilots to the already existing national School Feeding Programmes (in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) and the

Strategy for Sustainable Development of School Meals in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2017-2027 (in Tajikistan).

136. Based on evaluation desk review and interviews with stakeholders, it could be concluded that the Matching Grants pilot in Tajikistan has shown excellent initial results and potential for sustainability, however due to its small-scale (only 39 direct beneficiaries out of 250 applications at early stage), the collected evidence (such as internal assessment, cost-benefit analysis and socio-economic analysis that are being conducted at the headquarters level) may not be formally sufficient for the full take-up by the Government with corresponding financial commitment and would require the replication at a larger-scale to collect more evidence. Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the initial intention of the Ministry of Finance in Tajikistan to earmark some state budget funds for Matching Grants has been postponed for the next years.

137. For all pilots, a clearly defined end-goal and handover strategy should be prepared, which are currently not yet defined. This could include two options (in case of pilot success): i) further replication and scaling-up with a subsequent handover strategy in place; or ii) a complete take-up by the Government at a higher scale, with backstopping from the project.

Finding 13. Policy dialogue based on the final results of the pilots will be a critical factor to turn current commitments into actions. Global and regional coordination platforms require follow-up.

138. The production of the final results of the pilots will be a critical ingredient for continuing coordination and policy dialogue in all three countries. Other factors that could assist the policy dialogue are described below.

139. In Tajikistan, the project's involvement in the Strategy for Sustainable Development of School Meals in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2017-2027, supporting the Strategy for Migrant Labour until 2030 provides good basis for the policy dialogue process. In Armenia, significant preparatory work already conducted for the National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition provides an opportunity to work with the National Food Security Council in the future, if the political environment allows it. Otherwise, the project should concentrate on working through existing coordination platforms around the pilots. In Kyrgyzstan, the project gained experience in cooperation with WFP, UNICEF and WHO on the revision of the Food Security Law, the development of legislative frameworks for certain aspects of certification and school procurement (limited only to school gardening at the moment), and other normative work (e.g. development of national regulation on indicators and monitoring of FSN).

140. Active and continuous engagement with local non-state actors (NGOs/CSOs) specialized in FSN policy dialogue would be key to achieve success in policy development at national level. This would enable the project to utilize already existing policy dialogue platforms and achieve synergies. Moreover, since FAO has a comparative advantage in creating operational linkages for multisectoral coordination and advancing policy solutions, there is a significant opportunity to bring value and lessons from FAO's approach on School Food and Nutrition to the existing policy dialogue platform of the WFP-led Sustainable School Feeding Programme.

141. Global and regional coordination platforms require follow-up. For example, the FSN Global Forum (including FSN Forum for Eastern Europe and Central Asia) is a well functional and useful platform of knowledge sharing, which has good potential to be used more effectively for policy dialogue and advocacy. The cancellation and possible reorganization of the SO1/SO3 Programme (due to the UN reform process) would require reformulation of the normative work objectives at the global level.

3.4 Targeting, equity and gender. To what extent have project activities reached the intended users and uses?

Finding 14. While the project did not have a targeting strategy document, the target groups and their needs, constraints and opportunities were defined in the pilot models. For policy and coordination activities, the target groups were implied from the stakeholder engagement plans.

142. In all three countries, the project pilots intended to reach two types of target groups: direct beneficiaries, represented by government officials and the most vulnerable and marginalized population, and indirect beneficiaries, such as the private sector (i.e. food and seed producers) and civil society organizations. The latter were considered crucial in reaching the public and informing citizens about the benefits of the project nationwide, and to have a representation in the discussion of policies and legislations. The project also involved local universities, academic and scientific research institutes to provide their technical inputs throughout the development of strategies on nutrition at national levels.

143. In general, the Cash Plus and Matching Grants pilots had a defined targeting approach which evolved during implementation. The targeting parameters, such as geographic location, poverty level, vulnerability groups, family composition and gender considerations were determined by active discussions with the relevant ministries administering social assistance programmes in their respective countries. For the Cash Plus pilots (in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan), the project targeted national social assistance programmes' recipients in rural locations. The beneficiaries for the pilots were selected after household needs assessments and identification of the most vulnerable districts in the countries. Several additional eligibility criteria were applied to define the groups for one of three packages of the "Plus" component support. While the competition rules and selection criteria did not have formal provisions for ensuring inclusiveness and targeting of especially vulnerable groups, the selected beneficiaries groups showed diversity and included women, single mothers, wives of migrants and children.

144. In a few cases, time constraints (due to delayed start of pilots) affected inclusiveness. Evaluation interviews in both countries indicated that the project's outreach method (Cash Plus, Matching Grants) was not always effective in ensuring inclusiveness as some groups from the most vulnerable cohort (such as families in difficult situations and people with disabilities) could not be reached as they did not formally qualify for the beneficiary status. Some groups were missed, such as families in difficult situations and people with disabilities. Some families in the pilot communities (both in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) expressed their dissatisfaction about not being selected as they could have potentially been considered during scaling-up initiatives.

145. The late start of the Cash Plus pilot in Kyrgyzstan affected the timeliness of the training for beneficiaries which was conducted during the agricultural season and, consequently, not all groups were able to attend. The same pilot could not cover specific vulnerable groups needing social service support as part of the case management.

146. The School Feeding pilots were generally targeting the rural poor and the beneficiaries were the schoolchildren and their parents. According to evaluation interviews, the realization of the targeting plans at the country pilot level had mixed results. In the School Food and Nutrition pilot, the project successfully reached all direct target groups consisting of schoolchildren, their families and local communities, as well as schools' administration. Targeting of farmers as linkages to the greenhouses and food supply to schools is still work in progress in Armenia and Tajikistan, as the greenhouse management is under the school administration responsibility according to the current model configuration. Engagement of farmers under the Logistics Center pilot in

Kyrgyzstan was active and the storage facility was used by them for economic activities in the community. A comprehensive analysis of private sector engagement under the Logistics Center for meeting nutrition objectives is work in progress and being conducted by a local consultant.

147. For the policy development and multi/cross-sectoral coordination activities, the project's targeting strategy was inclusive. It included national policymakers, relevant (national and local) ministries, non-state implementing partners and experts. The composition of these institutional target groups was based on the project's stakeholder engagement plans and a result of comprehensive and participatory engagement with FAO country offices, local governments and active non-state actors with practical experience in training, awareness raising and advocacy in food security, nutrition and social protection. As already highlighted in the section on Sustainability, the involvement of non-state partners in the policy dialogue process was not prominent. Also, an opportunity was missed by not engaging local partners in a wider discussion during the assessment of the pilot results.

Finding 15. With the exception of the Matching Grants pilot, the project was designed as mostly gender-neutral. Reference to child protection was not evidenced.

148. To address the causes of malnutrition, effective nutrition-specific actions and nutrition-sensitive interventions are required from a broad front including gender, social protection and other considerations. The evaluation noted that gender was only partially included in the project objectives and results. This was evidenced by the results framework, which did not include gender-sensitive results indicators that could have been used to measure and assess the extent to which the intended objectives and results contribute to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. However, gender-disaggregated data on training participants was collected.

149. Overall, women issues were addressed only as part of the casework during implementation of the Cash Plus pilot. However, it was not based on a comprehensive gender-role study adapted to local contexts that would have allowed for better assessment of pilot impacts and limit the risk of harm (such as increased burden with additional agricultural works on regular family responsibilities of women versus productive impacts).

150. In the Matching Grants scheme pilot, women and youth are the main target group of this intervention. Female grant recipients (Matching Grants) mainly included mothers-in-law, who were traditionally major decision makers in Tajik households and not wives or daughters of migrants. Evaluation interviews confirmed the strong collaboration with IOM that resulted in the development of a comprehensive operational guideline that contributed to the transparency and quality of the beneficiary selection process (ten members in the Oversight Committee), and allowed to pay attention to gender equality (16 female grant recipients out of 39).

151. Child protection policy reference in the implementation manuals were not clearly evidenced, which is necessary to regulate child labour use in the school gardens and greenhouses, as schools using children in harvesting might cause reputational risks.

3.5 Project management and partnership arrangements. To what extent were the project management and partnership arrangements appropriate?

3.5.1 Project management

Finding 16. The project management structure and implementation arrangements were well suited for the needs of the three-tier model and generally performed well. The project started building technical capacities of the decentralized offices.

152. Implementation arrangements allowed the project management to successfully integrate activities and their results at all three levels; in both top-down and bottom-up directions. The global nature of the project, which addresses FAO frameworks on social protection, migration, and FSN, policy development and tangible outputs, required access to high-level technical expertise. Although food security policy-related projects have been implemented before by FAO in all target countries, this project tapped into new areas such as social protection, nutrition, migration, and innovative agricultural solution to nutrition problems where FAO country offices were not much experienced. The project management mobilized this required expertise from headquarters and effectively directed it to the regional and national level, where required capacity was missing – particularly during the first two years of implementation.

153. At the start of project implementation, the FAO country offices in the three focus countries experienced capacity limitations of different magnitude which included limited availability (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) or initial absence (Armenia) of a procurement function, limited or no initial access to qualified personnel with relevant national (and especially international) advocacy experience in social protection, nutrition and sustainable food systems (in all countries). At the same time, interviews revealed a perception that the project budget was not adequate at the national level to fully cover the costs of administrative support and procurement functions without substantial intervention from headquarters management, which resulted in frequent micromanagement. At the same time, the same interviews acknowledged the substantial support provided by headquarters project management to fill theses gaps by providing direct training and coaching, and introducing new internal processes and procedures developed through their active work with relevant technical departments (headquarters). This support built technical capacities and introduced new functions in Matching Grants cash transfers procedures (Tajikistan), local procurement procedures (Armenia), planning and implementing granting schemes (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan), and general planning and reporting activities (in all countries). Thanks to this support, the needed administrative capacities were created, and the confidence level of the national staff has been raised. This will allow the national project staff to implement most of these support functions with minimum backstopping support from headquarters.

154. At the same time, there are other capacity gaps that still requires backstopping from headquarters, such as policy dialogue, high-level advocacy and coordination, agricultural and specific technical expertise (agronomy, veterinary and food safety) required to support and supervise the greenhouse and Cash Plus/Matching Grants operations and conduct monitoring, economic analysis and impact assessment. The recruitment and retention of highly skilled and qualified national personnel remains a critical problem in all three countries. The overuse of the national project coordinators outside project activities is also a problem in all countries. Moreover, interviews revealed that a more active involvement from FAO in policy dialogue processes is desired and that it is considered to currently play a more secondary role in national working groups and meetings, compared to other (partner) international organizations.

155. Based on the overview of content, character and volume of the actual work performed within and beyond the functional job descriptions by headquarters personnel, the evaluation observed significant overstretch on the project management and coordination that needs attention.

156. For some elements of the implementation arrangements, the role of the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) was not clearly defined in the design document and therefore evolved during the inception phase and implementation. REU played an active role (especially in the first two years of implementation) and was very instrumental in the conceptual design and integration of nutrition into the pilot models. The Regional Office Representative (also FAOR Armenia) played an active role representing regional views in donor communications and participating in the project's operating and strategic decision.

157. REU organized several important regional events and included various types of support to the project, among which logistics, communication and outreach, administration and selection of relevant experts. The evaluation considers REU's participation optimal, taking into consideration the limited availability of technical expertise and relevant human resources (social protection, migration, and later nutrition –therefore obtained from headquarters). Their role could have been considerably wider during earlier years (and with more substantive cooperation with headquarters and national level) if the needed technical and human resources had been available.

158. Lately, as a result of project implementation, REU has gained experience in several activities in the region, also thanks to the project. Consequently, the project increased collaboration with REU in strategic cooperation at the regional level with other projects and initiatives (such as subregional cooperation in the upscaling of the Matching Grants model in Tajikistan). As REU gets more capacity, it opens more opportunities to contribute to the project in the future on key topics such as migration/matching grants, social protection, school feeding, SDGs indicators/statistics, and visibility products. In case of project extension, care should be used for planning joint activities to avoid duplication of functions with headquarters.

159. The Steering Committee, responsible for the overall leadership of the project, was effective in setting strategic direction and tracking project progress. The composition originally envisaged a full representation from country level Executive Committees which would make it more balanced, but these committees were not set. However, FAORs and National Project Coordinators were encouraged to attend as observers. There was close consultation and information-sharing related to all activities under the Trust Fund between country level and headquarters. The meeting minutes were informative, action-oriented and allowed to track progress. Based on the review of the Steering Committee meeting minutes, the evaluation observed a lack of critical views and contribution into the discussions from the country offices, which should be stimulated. Moreover, cross-country cooperation of the management teams has been limited to the interactions that took place at the regional workshops.

Finding 17. Delays in the country approvals, prolonged procurement and other impediments had to be dealt with on the spot. The project demonstrated good adaptive management to significant impediments and all planned activities have been implemented, yet with different levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

160. The country approval process was delayed in all three countries (from 10 to 21 months) which shifted the work plan timelines for the pilots. Although many preparatory activities were implemented in the meanwhile, such as feasibility studies by SIFI, site selection, agricultural crop analysis, stakeholder selection and initial communication and other, the late start had negative effects on performance. The lack of necessary legal and procedural conditions at the FAO country

offices (including absence of acting FAORs at different times in all countries) further delayed the procurement process, which had several undesirable effects, such as: delays with launching the Logistics Center operations, missed agricultural season for Cash Plus beneficiaries in Armenia and tightening training process for Cash Plus beneficiaries in Kyrgyzstan. Despite two contract extensions, ECFS was not able to fully incorporate the delayed results and preliminary evidence from the pilots (in Tajikistan and Armenia) in their outputs (policy briefs and studies).

161. In most cases (except for the country events like the revolution in Armenia and the currently ongoing pandemic), the likelihood of the mentioned undesirable events could have been accounted for during the planning stage, as well as the FAO country offices' procedural and administrative limitations to execute project transactions. Corresponding mitigating actions could have been factored in the project document's risk analysis (see also section 3.1 on Design), at least after the inception phase. The risk analysis should have included the country factors with specifics and dynamics of governance, key procedural requirements, constraints and limitations. The theory of change exercise described in sections 2 and 3.1 could have been helpful in this process. Nevertheless, under these limitations, the project team managed to deal with most issues with full dedication and commitment, as well with the currently ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, but at the cost of project efficiency (delays) and increased pressure on project management. Several technical challenges that came up during implementation, such as wrong choice or lack of needed equipment for the greenhouses (Armenia), selection and international procurement of the right types of seeds (Tajikistan), finding solutions for the procurement of the special equipment (Kyrgyzstan), etc. were addressed effectively and with due care.

Finding 18. The project produced a significant volume of promotional and communication materials showcasing results and experiences. A knowledge management strategy could have better supported this.

162. Evaluation interviews confirm that the project was effective in promoting and sharing experiences and in disseminating lessons learned across partners, stakeholders and countries (as detailed in section 3.2.2, Finding 9). The project website as a repository of all project-related information contains an impressive wealth and range of information products (publications, videos, reports). At the same time, it is unclear how the use of project communication products will be tracked. Capacity building results were mainly contained in the implementing partners' final reports and need continuous monitoring and evaluation. A knowledge management strategy would allow to effectively use the M&E system to i) systematically track and guide the production and usage of the communication outputs; and ii) support sustainability. (see Recommendation 6)

Finding 19. The project did not have a centralized monitoring and evaluation system, which would allow it to better consolidate the current performance beyond the output level and more effectively report on the critical issues.

163. The project has not developed a rigorous centralized M&E system. According to the project evaluation desk review and interviews, the external subject matter experts (including experts from project implementing partners, headquarters divisions and national experts) who are tasked to prepare assessment reports for the pilots, are collecting the monitoring data and report on the contribution of outputs to the outcomes. The data from these monitoring exercises feeds into numerous internal assessments, to produce cost-benefit analyses and a consolidated socio-economic analysis for each pilot. For example, this process has been completed for the Cash Plus pilots in Kyrgyzstan and Armenia and the results were presented to the governments at the validation workshops in the form of policy briefs and power point presentations. The progress reports, however, are mostly descriptive, focused on the output level data and lack the analytical rigour, and references to the internal assessments are general.

164. A centralized M&E system, containing proper (SMART) M&E indicators, baseline data, data collection methods and performance reporting templates would have facilitated the project in collecting and documenting lessons learned and in supporting enhanced evidence building to inform project management decisions and better support policy recommendations.

3.5.2 Partnership arrangements

Finding 20. Effective partnerships were created between FAO and different entities to facilitate project implementation at all levels. Further cross-partnerships and (informal) post-contract prospects should be stimulated.

165. At the country level, besides working with the two major implementing partners (SIFI and ECFS), the project worked with a wide range of partners who were directly or indirectly engaged in the pilot implementation, such as NGOs, civil society organizations, private sector service providers, local authorities, as well as with informal groups such as parents councils and local community leaders. The selection of partners in all countries was based on rigorous research, analysis and selection process with wide participation and consultations within FAO (and with participation of FAORs), and with country-based international organizations and government representatives. The evaluation found that the composition of local partners was diverse and included organizations of different size, location (capital-based and regional), women-led, etc. Special attention was given to the level of subject matter competency, field work experience and good knowledge of the local communities which was required for the implementation of the pilots involving intensive interaction with local authorities and community groups.

166. Most of the partners' work was governed by contractual agreements (LOAs) with specific time frames. Although all contractual obligations were fully met, opportunities for cross-partnership were missed. For example, numerous local partners were involved at each particular step in the Cash Plus pilots implementation (in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan), such as NGOs specialized in social protection coaching, family health and nutrition, education, agricultural extension and services who worked hand in hand with the project team and international experts. Although each of them successfully accomplished their individual segment of work, the project could have benefited significantly if these partners had a possibility to collaborate with each other, share information, exchange experience (positive and negative) and contribute to the overall pilot knowledge management and coordination. Furthermore, there were limited post-contract prospects for the partners who could contribute to impact and sustainability of benefits.

167. The project had link-ups with several ongoing local country projects: with WFP on the development of a Comprehensive National Strategy on Food Security and Nutrition with an operational plan in Armenia, development of the Food Security Concept Programme and its action plan to incorporate nutrition and social protection issues (FIRST) in Kyrgyzstan, and support the drafting of the National Sustainable School Feeding Strategy initiated by WFP in Tajikistan. These collaborations contributed to the enabling environment component of the project. At the same time, the evaluation found that delays in the country approval process (described in the paragraphs above) did not allow the project to sufficiently engage in the important WFP-led policy discussions on School Feeding strategies where FAO's participation was critical to introduce the innovative approaches of the School Food and Nutrition and the Logistics Center pilots, and shape the policy dialogue process.

168. The project successfully complemented South-South and triangular cooperation work with global and regional advocacy, policy dialogue, communication, capacity development and other actions that helped to raise the levels of visibility and awareness and created possibilities for partnership for eradicating food insecurity and malnutrition. It has been particularly successful in two specific

aspects: i) gaining strong interest and political support by the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population in Tajikistan for applying the Republic of Moldova's experience of the Migration Support programme (1 plus 1) and its successful realization into Matching Grants pilot in the country; and ii) upgrading capacity of the national statistics services in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in adopting SDG 2 indicators and collecting agricultural stock data.

169. Although the project was not able to engage with the National Food Security Councils as originally planned, the team did an excellent job in engaging government counterparts (ministries and local level authorities) into the Technical Coordination Groups (aka inter-ministerial working groups) created for the supervision and implementation of the pilots. Within these groups, the relevant ministries took an active role in supervision and coordination (Matching Grants, Cash Plus, School Food and Nutrition). According to evaluation interviews with the representatives of the ministries involved in the working groups in all three countries, this process contributed to better understanding the importance of inter-ministerial discussions which traditionally did not take place in the past, and the ministries did not have institutional experience of multi-sectoral interactions. The ministry representatives (deputy-ministries, mid-level officials and heads of departments) appreciated the practical value that the project created by providing mechanisms for coordination and policy dialogue (even if not fully effective yet) that was oriented towards making specific policy changes in the issues of FSN, social protection and migration based on the pilot models. The project also successfully engaged with local level authorities (at the district, village and community level) through the pilots with local level authorities.

170. The project developed substantial institutional experience (both positive and negative) through direct engagement with the local authorities. In the School Food and Nutrition pilots (in Armenia and Tajikistan) the project not only raised awareness and technical knowledge but also equipped the local district education departments and community leaders with practical tools for greenhouse operations management and supervision. Despite some technical difficulties and challenges remaining to be addressed in this model, this partnership set the ground for long-term collaboration with FAO at the local level. In the Logistics Center pilot, the engagement of the local authorities of Kemin district (as well as local community leaders and all other non-state actors) in Kyrgyzstan, as part of the Supervisory Board arrangement, also set a foundation for future work to address remaining issues in this model. For the Matching Grants pilot (Tajikistan), the local authority's engagement contributed to their empowerment in terms of stimulating interest and incentives to support future operations at the larger scale. Within the Cash Plus pilots (in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) cooperation at the local level was probably the most intense, as it involved effective engagement of social services, education, agricultural extension, and health sectors representatives that resulted not only in the successful implementation of the pilot activities, but also in raising capacities, confidence level and gaining support from the local government representatives of all these sectors.

171. Besides direct supervision, technical support was the most significant role played by FAO. The project effectively used a mix of international and national expertise, as well as technical support from national institutions such academia, government entities and private sector in pilot activities implementation, monitoring and assessment as well as in policy studies. The project also took full advantage of FAO's expertise at headquarters and in the field. The evaluation found that the contribution made by the backstopping services during the pilots' implementation did not only contribute to the pilot activities and capacity building of decentralized offices, but also enhanced the knowledge of local implementing partners through working process interactions.

172. Partnerships with government ministries in all countries were successful in general. The most successful collaborations were achieved with the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment

of Population in Tajikistan, and the Ministries of Social Protection in Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Collaboration with the Ministries of Education was also effective in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, although direct (vested) interest in the pilots was sometimes constrained due to administrative or legislative limitations. For example, the Ministry of Education in Kyrgyzstan was sceptical and reluctant about the Logistics Center pilot considering it being under local government responsibility and outside its direct sphere of influence, unlike the Ministry of Agriculture who had direct interest in developing this model at the local administration level. Similarly, the main interested party for the School Food and Nutrition pilot was the Ministry of Agriculture (later Economy) and not the Ministry of Education. Overall, the project pilots helped the project team to develop a good understanding of the internal political dynamics and gained significant knowledge about the gaps and opportunities in the existing governance structure in each country.

173. The involvement of the UN/international organizations WFP, UNICEF, WHO and IOM contributed to the relevant work on FSN strategies in all three countries through joint or project events, working groups and observing committees. For some initiatives, like the School Food and Nutrition pilot, the joint work with WFP was indispensable in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and to some extent in Tajikistan. An unintended result was WFP's active engagement in the same type of activities as those under this project, and their active interest in the project (especially after diversification of WFP's mandate and specialization beyond the relief operations towards more development work). This may potentially create an undesirable competitive environment and hamper collaboration. Differently, this factor could be used as an opportunity to create closer collaboration within WFP's Sustainable National School Feeding Strategies (in all three countries) where FAO can use its comparative advantage in creating linkages necessary for intersectoral policy coordination.

174. Collaboration with WHO and UNICEF was instrumental for the Cash Plus pilot in formulating nutritional- and health-related activities. IOM's participation in the joint grant commission of the Matching Grants pilot in Tajikistan was also important, contributing to the selection process and attention to gender (as highlighted in section 3.4).

175. Partnership with the project's two main non-governmental implementing partners - ECFS and SIFI - was very instrumental. Both partners significantly contributed to the successful implementation of the School Food and Nutrition pilot actions and concept design, capacity building at national, regional and global levels, and the development of knowledge materials (such as technical guidelines, learning materials, policy research and studies, initial assessments and analysis of the pilots' results). The FAO-SIFI partnership could be improved for the overall good of the project. Implementation delays (caused by external factors) and the inability to extend the Letter of Agreement did not allow SIFI to complete some of the important work related to the institutionalization of the school greenhouses (i.e. operationalization of the Memoranda of Understanding by modifying and extending them beyond the implementation period) and the Logistics Center (i.e. practical realization of the Supervisory Board mechanism). The impossibility to assess and analyse the results of the implemented work and to continue collaboration (which could contribute to sustainability) did not contribute to an effective partnership.

176. At regional and global levels, the project successfully partnered with the Committee on World Food Security, the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition, the FAO-WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission and the FAO Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition, and joint FAO/WHO/WFP regional policy consultation. Details are presented in section 3.2.1 on Component 1 (Enabling Environment).

Finding 21. FAO demonstrated its comparative advantage in the identification of gaps and opportunities, providing institutional knowledge and expertise in creating operational intersectoral linkages.

177. FAO's comparative advantage for implementing this project at national level has been the experience from FAO's work in other countries on the institutional frameworks for food security and nutrition. The project contributed in all three countries to a participatory approach to policymaking and performance monitoring. The institutional arrangements to make the implementation of policies feasible included executive institutions (Ministries of Agriculture, Education, Social Protection and Health) and the inter-ministerial working groups, which also played some advisory role. The realization of higher-level mechanisms, such as FSN councils and coordinating institution for high-level policy dialogue could not yet have been realized due to lack of political will and vision from the national governments and lack of capacity of the country offices (in all countries), and requires further attention (see also section 3.2).

4. Lessons learned

Lesson 1. Capacity development of national governments in the target countries in FSN policy formulation and implementation is a long-term process, and the piloting of policy options is an indispensable instrument for providing evidence and cross-sectoral coordination.

178. The project made a tangible contribution by focusing on awareness raising, capacity development, facilitating stakeholder dialogue and facilitating cross-sectoral approaches (i.e. inter-ministerial coordination). Capacities should be built in such a way that they can be absorbed, and the project in that sense has been in a difficult situation so far (*inter alia* due to turnover). Ideally, it is desirable to work with people and institutions that already have some initial capacity and would allow a project to move forward quickly and realize policy changes in a short time. However in reality, this is rarely the case and capacity building is a process requiring significant time. Moreover, the ability of governments to understand multidimensional approaches requires special attention in situations where some developed capacities are lost due to changes in the government and key persons (with institutional knowledge and decision-making power) leaving their positions.

Lesson 2. The formal availability of structures supposedly responsible for supporting FSN policies at the national level does not provide by itself the supportive conditions for high-level policy dialogue (i.e. National Food Security Councils). Policy development design needs a more targeted governance analysis in each country.

179. The dynamics of institutional change in specific contexts are complex and uncertain, but analysis is essential for assessing the possibilities and formulating strategies to achieve transformational change. For example, before project start, Tajikistan had favourable condition with suitable legal environment for intersectoral collaboration and coordination for FSN with the High-level Security Council under the Prime Minister. Also, the country had been involved in the SUN movement, with institutional connections with the Codex Alimentarius Committee (FAO-WHO joint programme for food safety standard setting). Under these conditions, a comprehensive approach to food security (with only food availability emphasis, but also safety and nutrition consideration) appeared to be favourable for this project. Nevertheless, there appeared to be no interest from the National FSN Council to engage in the project.

180. To be effective, policy formulation must be systematically linked to governance analysis, based on evidence and sound methods (see the FAO Policy Support and Governance Gateway). Understanding and considering relevant governance and political and economic concerns – such as the diversity of interests among stakeholders, power imbalances in decision-making processes, and institutional rigidities that constrain capacities for action – are essential requirements.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1 (Design). The project design is relevant to FAO, country and stakeholder priorities and needs, detailed at all implementation levels and introduced innovative approaches in the target countries. Its three-tier model is well suited to accommodate and reinforce the vertical and horizontal interactions between activities. At the same time, the project logical frameworks, risk analyses and pilot objectives need attention.

181. The project's innovative and comprehensive approach is addressing important country and stakeholder needs and relevant to FAO's Strategic Objective 1 and 3. The three-tier model has proven to be an effective way to stimulate stakeholder dialogue and coordination at a wider level. While important knowledge from global and regional events set the ground for the pilots and national policy processes, the pilots in turn provide important evidence and lessons that stimulate further dialogue and awareness at the regional and global level.

182. The detailed logical frameworks and corresponding work plans greatly contributed to, and facilitated financial accountability and budget performance tracking at each of the three levels (country, regional, global). At the same time, in some cases, not always clearly observable connections between activities, outputs, outcomes and impact, as well as lack of corresponding performance indicators complicates the understanding of the project's pathway of change and the measuring of progress towards outcomes beyond the activities and outputs level. While the project's adaptive management to (unexpected) circumstances is commendable, project management could have benefitted from a more comprehensive risk analysis and additional fragility analysis for the three target countries.

Conclusion 2 (Results). Overall, the project has been successful. In particular, the project showed good performance and good initial results towards Outcome 1 (Enabling Environment) and Outcome 2 (Coordination and Advocacy), yet some results need more time to materialize such as high-level coordination and policy dialogue, and the contribution to global policy processes and frameworks. Outcome 3 (Piloting Policy Options) has been successful and achieved in most parts, however the project needs more time to consolidate the results of the completed activities and work out proper handover strategy (to the national counterparts).

183. The project was effective in providing useful policy tools and build specific practical capacity on SDG data collection. It was also successful in setting-up operational (pilot) coordination mechanisms that effectively contributed to policy discussions and resulted in several national policy, legislation commitments. Furthermore, the project, at all levels, contributed to improved awareness on FSN and social protection and the importance of cross-sector and multi-stakeholder actions in these fields. It build operational capacity and put in motion an important start in behavioural change among stakeholders and beneficiaries. The full extent of behaviour change can be tested at project completion, once the pilot activities have been finalized.

184. The pilot initiatives showed positive initial results and were therefore an important base of evidence that led to the aforementioned political commitments, further outreach and awareness at the regional and global level and for the strengthening of FAO strategic frameworks and flagship publications.

185. To move beyond these good intermediate accomplishments (see also theory of change in Figure 2) to the full achievement of project outcomes, the project needs, *inter alia*, to consolidate

the pilots and systematize their lessons learned/findings, consolidate the already conducted normative work, and strengthen higher-level coordination, strategic capacity and policy dialogue in order to turn commitments into actions and obtain results-oriented policies, legislations and programmes.

Conclusion 3 (Sustainability). The project pilots demonstrated different prospects for scaling-up and risks for operational and institutional sustainability. Overall, attention is needed for increased policy dialogue, based on clear pilot end-goals, larger evidence base and a handover strategy.

186. The evaluation found evidence of positive initial ownership by beneficiaries, changes in attitudes and practical application of learned practices in all three pilots. The Cash Plus and Matching Grants pilots have demonstrated relatively stronger prospects for sustainability (compared to other pilots) and have good potential for scaling-up and replication. At the same time, the project still has more work to do to address the operational risk management and sustainability of the service provision. The School Food and Nutrition pilots (including school gardening/agricultural intervention) also needs to address operational risks and agricultural production management issues. The Logistics Center is an excellent business model, yet needs more support to get protected from the uncertainties of the procurement regulation. Better prospects of cost effectiveness, scaling-up and impact should emerge towards the end of the project.

187. Further work needs to be done to address operational risks as part of a clear handover strategy including results-oriented policy dialogue leading to the pilot's take-up (and turning commitments into actions). The latter should be based on clear pilot end-goals and increased evidence from the pilots. The project's non-state implementing partners could be a valuable source for providing several improvements in the areas of social work case management, extension service support and policy dialogue. Working with a strategically selected lead agency would facilitate collaboration with local authorities and community leaders on the pilots' supervision through helping practical realization of Memoranda of Understanding (for schools) and the Supervisory Board (Logistics Center). At the regional and global level, the FSN Forums are well functional and useful platforms of knowledge sharing, with good potential for more effective policy dialogue and advocacy.

Conclusion 4 (Targeting). The project targeted the relevant institutional actors to build their capacity and enhance the enabling environment. The pilots had defined targeting strategies and were, aside from the Matching Grants pilot, generally gender-neutral.

188. The pilots had clear targeting strategies defined by government social assistance programmes or school feeding programmes and complemented by additional eligibility criteria. The involved beneficiaries showed diversity and overall the intended target groups were reached. In a few cases, time constraints affected inclusiveness in pilot activities. For the policy development and multi/cross-sectoral coordination activities, the project's targeting strategy was inclusive.

189. With the exception of the Matching Grants pilot, the project was designed as mostly gender-neutral. The Matching Grants pilot had more specific requirement to best serve the interest of the direct female relatives of migrants. The Cash Plus pilot was focused on women's conditions as part of the social work case management. Other categories such as youth, people with disabilities or child protection were not specifically addressed or evidenced.

Conclusion 5 (Project management and implementation arrangements). The project mobilized the needed expertise for project implementation from headquarters and effectively directed it to the regional and national level. The project started building technical capacity of the decentralized offices. More work needs to be done in ensuring the retention of the developed capacity and providing additional support to the country teams where the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) could play a more facilitating role.

190. Implementation arrangements allowed the Project Management to successfully integrate activities and their results at all three levels; in both top-down and bottom-up directions. The technical capacities created at the country offices with introduction of new operating functions will enable the country teams to assume more responsibilities. The recruitment and retention of the highly skilled and qualified national personnel remains a critical problem in all three countries. The use of the National Project Coordinators to perform other functions and responsibilities not directly related to the project objectives needs attention and should serve the best interest of the project objectives. More focus and involvement in high-level policy dialogue is desired.

191. The capacity of REU has increased as a result of project implementation. This provides opportunities for playing a more supportive role to headquarters who is overstretched with numerous functions and responsibilities, a significant part of which consists of the support to the national teams.

192. The project dealt with impediments on the spot with good adaptive management, although this could have been largely avoided with a proper risk analysis framework. Communication activities, project management decisions and policy recommendations could have been better supported by an M&E system and knowledge management strategy.

Conclusion 6 (Partnerships). Effective partnerships were created by the project between FAO and partners at all levels for the implementation or facilitation of project activities. Partnerships with international organizations at national level were effective but some opportunities were missed or not fully used. Cross-partnerships and (informal) post-contract prospects should be stimulated to gain additional benefit to the project and enhance sustainability.

193. The project successfully engaged a diverse composition of partners at all levels, linked up with other local projects and complemented South-South and triangular cooperation. The project effectively used FAO's comparative advantage and performed well in engaging the government counterparts (ministries and local level authorities) into the various technical working groups and project's pilots. Collaboration with ministries under the working groups provided good further experience and institutional knowledge that could be utilized in the continuation of the project. The involvement of UN/international organizations positively contributed to the project, although the FAO-SIFI partnership could have been stronger and FAO could be more pro-actively engaged in (WFP-led) policy discussions. Due to late start at the national level, the project missed opportunities to engage in the important WFP-led policy discussions on School Feeding strategies where FAO's participation was critical and should play a more pro-active role in the second phase.

194. There were limited (informal) post-contract prospects for the national implementing partners who could have contributed to knowledge (taking part in assessment, reviews, etc.), stimulated cross-partnerships and eventually contribute to impact and sustainability of benefits.

5.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (Results). While the project has been successful in providing good results in raising awareness, developing enabling environment and demonstrating good results from pilot initiatives, the achievement of the project's main objectives requires more time to achieve high-level coordination, strategic policy dialogue and the implementation of results-oriented policies and legislation. A second phase of at least one to two years is recommended to consolidate and expand achievements. (see Conclusion 2)

195. The project has a strong focus on policy engagement and development, governance improvement, capacity development and change in behaviour, which are known to take time to develop and stick, and need to undergo different stages of change.

196. The evaluation finds that the project has reached mostly stable "intermediate stages" (see the reconstructed theory of change in Figure 3), such as increased awareness, demonstrated evidence for the scaling-up of the pilots, while work on the project outcomes still needs further consolidation. More specifically, the project needs more time to: i) consolidate the pilot results before scaling-up; ii) systematize the lessons/findings from the pilots and consolidate the already conducted normative work; iii) further support the ongoing behaviour change and application of acquired operational capacity and focus on enhancing strategic capacity; iv) strengthen the high-level cross-sector coordination and policy dialogue to turn political commitments into plans of action; and v) raise the prospects for ownership and sustainable impact.

197. Before starting with the second phase, the project should, in consultation with the resource partner, Steering Committee and key partners, conduct a long-term strategic visioning exercise. This exercise should help to map out:

i. where and which activities/achievements need consolidation through direct support (paying attention to assumptions and drivers), and when/where the project could provide a backstopping role;
ii. how to work with FAO and non-FAO partners to consolidate and scale-up results;
iii. when and how handover strategies should be shaped (see also Recommendation 8 on sustainability);
iv. the necessary cost for the consolidation of results and scaling-up initiatives.

Recommendation 2 (Design). The project should update its logical framework to address some methodological shortcomings with definitions, logical linkages and missing indicators, and conduct participatory theory of change exercises to identify pathways of change and proper assumptions and impact drivers. (see Conclusion 1)

198. The logical framework should be corrected for some inconsistencies and shortcoming with regards to proper definitions of the results chain: activities, outputs, outcomes and impact(s) as indicated in section 3.1. Each component of the results chain should be assigned a properly defined indicator. (see also Recommendation 6)

199. To facilitate this, the project should conduct a participatory theory of change exercise together with project teams at all levels and selected key partners. An overall project TOC as well as individual pilot TOCs should be developed for a better understanding of the different change pathways, as well as the implications of any changes made to them. Moreover, it would allow to identify relevant assumption, general and context specific risks and impact drivers. The pilot TOC

exercise should help the project in defining clear end-goals for the pilots (which are currently missing).

Recommendation 3 (Risk analysis). Based on the outputs of the theory of change exercise, the project should design a risk analysis framework that can be monitored and updated for any new significant information that may adversely affect the likelihood or the magnitude of the risk factors. (see Conclusions 1, 3)

200. The assumptions which are beyond the direct control of the project (which will be identified and provided by the theory of change exercise) should be used to define risks. A risk framework should be prepared including the description of undesirable events (including their individual characteristics and magnitude) and the probability of occurrence. Special attention should be given to the operational and institutional risks for the pilots, highlighted in the evaluation report.

201. Both parameters should be regularly monitored and updated for any significant new information. The risk framework should be integrated into the progress reporting format and the significant risks and their effects on project performance should be reflected in the report narrative.

Recommendation 4 (Project management and implementation arrangements). In the second phase, the project should maintain the three-level management structure (headquarters-regional-national) and further enhance the capacity of FAO decentralized offices. The project should pay attention to the recruitment and retention of highly skilled and qualified national personnel, and headquarters should start sharing a part of responsibilities with the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) in national staff supervision and administrative support. (see Conclusions 3, 4)

202. Since the recruitment and retention of the highly skilled and qualified national personnel remains a critical problem in all three countries, this needs special attention moving forward. The recruitment of highly skilled project personnel at the FAO country offices (such as National Project Coordinator, Project Technical Assistant, M&E Officer, and other full-time project personnel) should be conducted with a strong intention to find highly qualified and motivated candidates. International job advertising platforms and international exchange alumni networks (available at the corresponding exchange programme office in each country) should be used with an effort to reach out to high-profile applicants residing outside the country and willing to return. Internship programmes should be also encouraged to attract highly talented and motivated students or recent graduates of the universities with an acumen and interest in international development work and agriculture. FAO country offices where such experience is available should be consulted through REU office.

203. As the capacity of REU in technical expertise and administrative support increased, thanks to the project, the Regional Office could be more actively engaged in the team coordination encouraging cross-country collaboration and assisting headquarters in that role, who is significantly overstretched and frequently had to micro-manage. To encourage experience sharing and learning, also providing possibilities for coaching or support as needed, cross country working groups composed of the National Project Coordinators (at least) should be created, which could be facilitated by REU and coordinated by headquarters.

204. The technical capacities created at the FAO country offices with introduction of new operating functions will enable the country teams to assume more responsibilities. However, further capacity building is required for policy dialogue, high-level advocacy and coordination as well as agricultural and specific technical expertise for some pilot activities (see section 3). The overuse of National Project Coordinators outside project activities should be avoided (this should also contribute to more retention of staff) and the national project teams should increase their

involvement in national policy dialogue processes, working groups and meetings – once this capacity has been enhanced/expanded. This should ultimately enhance stronger ownership and sustainability prospects on the ground.

205. To clarify current and new responsibilities and reporting lines, the project should make an organogram describing positions, reporting lines and key functional relations at the overall project, and each individual level (global, regional and country). The organogram should be accessible to each team member and updated for any major changes. It is also recommended to have a similar organogram for all committees, working groups or commissions that are created and functioning within the project. The organograms of the working platforms not established by FAO should be requested (if available) or reconstructed based on their functional duties and involved parties.

Recommendation 5 (M&E). The project should have its own M&E plan and system with well-defined performance indicators, monitoring plans, data collection methods, responsibilities and quality assurance. The system should allow the project to track progress, identify corrective actions in a timely and transparent way and document evidence to support policy recommendations. (see Conclusion 5)

206. The project should design a detailed M&E plan with clear responsibilities for monitoring (data collection, quality assurance and storing) and internal evaluation of the project's key milestones. An M&E system, which could be a centralized master file, should be designed and contain at least the following elements (that could be tracked and updated when necessary according to defined and transparent rules): inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes; and SMART indicators with clear definitions and calculating methodology. It is important to have an internal data collection methodology and assigned responsibilities with ensuring data reliability and integrity. The project should design a simple (possibly a spreadsheet-based), secure and reliable database to store all data for M&E. The project should recruit a full-time M&E consultant to set up and execute the plan and system. If necessary, M&E training should be provided to those external consultants or persons from the project and partners involved in data collection and entering.

207. Ideally, the M&E system should function in (near) real-time to facilitate the project in collecting and documenting important evidence and lessons that can timely inform project management decisions and better support policy recommendations.

208. The project should consider developing specific indicators to enhance monitoring based on gender-disaggregated and other relevant data, to better assess the degree of targeting men, women, youth and the most vulnerable groups of the population.

Recommendation 6 (Knowledge management). The project should set-up an overall knowledge management strategy. (see Conclusion 2, 5)

209. The project would benefit by setting-up a knowledge management strategy to strategically support further outreach and knowledge sharing within the three countries and in between the three levels, in order to i) guide the production of communication activities and outputs; ii) systematize the lessons learned/findings from the pilots; iii) consolidate the already conducted normative work and make a concrete plan on how project results and lessons can further permeate and influence FAO work globally (and that of other players in FSN, social protection and migration); iv) enhance evidence building and documentation of lessons learned that can support policy recommendations; v) systematically track the usage of the communication outputs (supported by M&E system); and vi) support sustainability.

210. The adoption of systematic knowledge management and streamlines information sharing mechanisms/formats (e.g. progress reports) should also be promoted amongst all project partners to facilitate cross-analysis of the information.

Recommendation 7 (Partnerships). The project should enhance cross-partnership collaboration with project partners during and beyond contracts by creating space for informal collaboration. (see Conclusion 6)

211. Cross-partnerships and (informal) post-contract prospects should be stimulated to gain additional benefit to the project and enhance sustainability. In the future, the project should use its database of implementing partners who successfully completed the project activities under their Letters of Agreement and provided significant value to the project. The project should create a pool of the most active actors who provided valuable inputs through their reports and informal communication, and form an informal group. There could be many creative options of setting this group which is recommended to be formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding and linked to a lead agency arrangement (discussed further in Recommendation 8). The created groups in each country could be connected to the FSN Forum platform.

Recommendation 8 (Sustainability of the pilot results). For each pilot subject at the national level, the project should i) prepare a handover strategy; and ii) identify and work with a lead agency, in addition to the government implementing partners, to strengthen policy dialogue and ownership of project results. Applying a community-based approach could provide effective solutions to address the lack of service provision mechanisms for the target beneficiaries. (see Conclusion 3)

212. The project should start preparing for the sustainability of the project pilot results. Based on clear end-goals for the pilots, the project should work out a detailed handover strategy for the pilot projects which should include a proper SWOT analysis, risk mitigation plan (for identified institutional and operational risks) and institutionalization mechanisms built on the already created Memoranda of Understanding and Supervisory Board framework.

213. The project's non-state implementing partners should be considered a valuable source for providing several improvements in the areas of social work case management, extension service support and policy dialogue. A lead agency could be selected from these non-state actors (local NGO, or locally-based/international CSO working in FSN, social protection and migration) with advocacy experience and vested interest in these topics. Through this partnership arrangement, the project can establish an advocacy and policy dialogue platform, which will be more continuously focused on coordination and the enabling environment. The platform should be open for all interested stakeholders and have a specifically defined agenda. The lead agency can be instrumental in monitoring the pilot process and directly bringing the issues for policy dialogue. Moreover, collaboration with a specialized lead could not only provide a platform for policy dialogue at the community level, but also with the government ministries.

214. At the regional and global level, the FSN Forums are well-functioning and useful platforms of knowledge sharing, and the project should continue to use them for more effective policy dialogue and advocacy.

215. Involvement of local community-based organizations (such as women's centres, local farmers groups, etc.) will allow to make project intervention more community-focused and provide solutions for the lack of service provision mechanisms.

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Appendix 1. People interviewed

Last name	First name	Position	Institution/Agency	Location	Role in project
Ahmadov	Ibrohim	FAO National Project Coordinator	FAO	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Project team
Aliev Makhsud	Aliev	Staff of the Training Center	Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Implementing Partner
Alishoev	Firuzshoh	Head of the Dept on Migration in Hisor district	Stakeholder of the Matching Grants pilot	Hisor, Tajikistan	Government
Alishoev	Olimshoh	Entrepreneur	Beneficiary of the Matching Grants pilot	Hisor, Tajikistan	Beneficiary
Arayik	Madinyan	Beneficiary	Gyulagarak Community	Lori Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Asanov	Taalai	Local consultant, Logistics Center	Private Consultant, Kemin district	Chui oblast, Kyrgyzstan	Expert
Atoyan	Merselida	Beneficiary	Mayisyan Community	Shiraq Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Avagyan	Lyuba	Beneficiary	Mayisyan Community	Shiraq Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Avazov	Shahzod	FAO M&E Manager	Monitoring	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Project team
Azimova	Bunafsha	FAO Communication Specialist	FAO	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Project team
Beglaryan	Zaruhi	National Project Coordinator	FAO, Armenia	Yerevan, Armenia	Project team
Bekkulieva	Anarkul	Head of Food Security Dept	Ministry of Agriculture, Food Industry & Melioration	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Government
Berdaliev	Sharip	Agronomy consultancy for pilot school gardens	Rural Advisory Services (RAS), Suzak district	Jalalabad Oblast Kyrgyzstan	Implementing Partner
Blanck	Max	FSN Forum manager	FAO, HQ, ESA	Rome, Italy	Project team
Boboev	Kiyomiddin	Chief specialist	Dept on Migration in Hisor district	Hisor, Tajikistan	Implementing Partner
Boboeva	Sabohat	Housewife	Beneficiary of the Matching Grants pilot	Hisor, Tajikistan	Beneficiary
Bolotnikova	Elena	Head of External Relations, SIFI	SIFI, Russian Federation	Moscow, Russian Federation	Implementing Partner
Buriev	Khursand	Head of the village; Training participant	Village Vakhsh	Vakhsh, Tajikistan	Beneficiary
Davtyan	Armen	Beneficiary	Mayisyan Community	Shiraq Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Djunushev	Bakyt	Orphanage house director	Nizhne-Serafimovsky orphanage house, pilot in gardens	Chui Oblast, Issyk-Ata, Kyrgyzstan	Beneficiary
Dupouy	Eleonora	Food Safety and Quality Officer	FAO, Food Safety and Quality Unit (AGFF)	Budapest, Hungary	Project team
Guchgeldiyev	Oleg	FAO Representative in Tajikista	FAO	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Project team

Last name	First name	Position	Institution/Agency	Location	Role in project
Hewlett	Michael	Officer-in-charge/TAIRRP project manager	IOM	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	IOM
Homidov	Nazarkhuja	FAO Matching Grants specialist	Selection of beneficiaries	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Expert
Ismailova	Jamilya	Head of State Benefit Unit	Ministry of Labour and Social Development	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Government
Jehle	Raimund	Regional Project Coordinator and FAOR Armenia	FAO, REUT	Budapest, Hungary	PTF
Kamolov	Rahmonali	Principal of school	Dusti Public School 16	Dusti, Tajikistan	Beneficiary
Karen	Arshakyan	Head of Community	Marmashen Community	Shiraq Marz, Armenia	Government
Khachatryan	Khachatryan	Beneficiary	Mayisyan Community	Shiraq Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Khachatur	Papoyan	Beneficiary	Mayisyan Community	Shiraq Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Kozhobergenova	Gulmira	Nutrition education specialist, Head	PF Civil Society for Nutrition, SUN-Kyrgyzstan	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Implementing Partner
Kvinikadze	Giorgi	Statistics Specialist	FAO REU	Budapest, Hungary	Expert
Levina	Karina	Kyrgyzstan, Cash + programme	Former FAO, HQ, ESA	Moscow, Russian Federation	Project team
Livinets	Svetlana	Programme and Regional Development Advisor	FAO, HQ, ESA	Rome, Italy	PTF
Mahmadullozoda	Nurullo	Deputy minister	Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Government
Maksimov	Anatolyi	Technical Project Supervisor, SIFI	SIFI, Russian Federation	Moscow, Russian Federation	Implementing Partner
Mambetova	Sagyn	Cash Plus pilot Consultant	FAO (PSA) retired	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Implementing Partner
Manik	Zalinyan	Beneficiary	Gyulagarak Community	Lori Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Margaryan	Eduard	Beneficiary	Hatsik Community	Shiraq Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Minasyan	Astghik	Head of Social Assistance Department	RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs	Yerevan, Armenia	Government
Miralibekova	Shamsiya	WFP Nutrition Officer	WFP	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	UN
Mkertchyan	Ani	Social Worker	Marmashen Community	Shiraq Marz, Armenia	Government
Mkrtumyan	Suzanna	Beneficiary	Gyulagarak Community	Lori Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Movsisyan	Rubik	Beneficiary	Mayisyan Community	Shiraq Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Mursabekova	Gulzeinep	head of agricultural statistics department	National Statistics Committee	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Government

Last name	First name	Position	Institution/Agency	Location	Role in project
Musaeva	Nazgul	Senior Specialist, School Nutrition	Ministry of Education and Science	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Government
Musaeva	Nurjan	Cash Plus pilot cooridnator on social coaching	PU Moya Semya, NGO	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Implementing Partner
Muzaffarov	Badriddin	Ministry of Education and Science	Executive partner	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Government
Nazarov	Bakhodur	Ministry of Agriculture	Ministry of Agriculture	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Government
Papoyan	Alvard	School Principal	Vedi Basic School N 1	Ararat Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Pavel	Popov	Director of school	Orlovka, Kemin district school	Chui oblast, Kyrgyzstan	Beneficiary
Rakhmatullaeva	Sanavbar	Chief Specialist	Ministry of Health and Social protection	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Government
Rosales	Mauricio	Senior Project Coordinator	FAO, HQ, ESA	Rome, Italy	PTF
Saidjamol	Saidzoda	Vice president	Agriculture Academy Science of Tajikistan	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Academia
Sanchez Cantillo	Marco	Deputy Director	FAO, HQ, ESA	Rome, Italy	PTF
Shabanova	Malohat	UNICEF Nutrition officer	UNICEF	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	UN
Sharipov	Zoirjon	WFP Social Protection Officer	WFP	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	UN
Shirvanyan	Ashkhen	Head of the Food Security Department	RA Ministry of Economy	Yerevan, Armenia	Government
Tamazyan	Suzanna	Beneficiary	Gyulagarak Community	Lori Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Turdaliev	Kurmanbek	National consultant on school gardening issues	FAO Expert	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Expert
Tynaliev	Marlen	National Project Coordinator	FAO, Kyrgyzstan	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Project team
Vardanyan	Rafik	Deputy Community Head	Gyulagarak Community	Lori Marz, Armenia	Beneficiary
Yakusheva	Tatyana	Project Coordinator	ECFS, Moscow University	Moscow, Russian Federation	Implementing Partner
Yusupov	Jamshed	Entrepreneur	Beneficiary of the Matching Grants pilot	Hisor, Tajikistan	Beneficiary
Zainiddinov	Mahmud	Principal of school	Vakhsh Public School 15	Vakhsh, Tajikistan	Beneficiary
Zokirova	Mavluda	Specialist	Republican Center "Healthy Life Style"	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Implementing Partner

Appendix 2. Evaluation matrix

	Evaluation questions	Criteria of judgement/indicators	Data collection methods and sources	Data sources
DESIGN				
1	**How adequate was the project design in supporting the activities and expected results?**	Assessment of relevance of the priority areas identified by the project given the country situation and needs and problems identified. Evidence of coherence between FAO activities and the national strategies in all three countries.	Interviews with: Project Task Force (PTF) Headquarters: ESA, ESP, ESN REU FAORs + national project coordinators	ProDoc, six-month and annual reports LOAs Needs assessments
1.1	To what extent are the project design and objectives **relevant to the needs** of different stakeholders and **country priorities**?			
1.2	How was the **internal coherence** of the project in terms of synergies and complementarity between objectives, components, activities and outputs? And across the multi-layers of the project?			
1.3	What is the added value of a three-tier model global, regional and national level activities) in creating an **enabling environment** to reach the project goal?			
RESULTS				
2	**What results have been achieved, and which factors affected effectiveness?**		Interviews with: PTF Headquarters: ESA, ESP, ESN REU Site-visits in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Interviews with beneficiaries. Interviews with implementing partners - Ministries, SIFI, ECFS FAORs + national project coordinators	Project logical framework at country, regional and global level Six-month and annual progress reports Reports of country activities and workshops Country internal/rapid assessment report FAO flagship reports Back-to-office report (BTORs)
2.1	To what extent have the awareness raising initiatives promoted **cross-sector and multi-stakeholder action** towards a comprehensive approach on food security, nutrition and social protection?			
2.2	As a result of the three project outputs, can it be verifiably concluded that the project **enhanced capacity** in local and national governments, FAO representations and other targeted stakeholders towards improved results-oriented policies, legislation and actions on agriculture, nutrition and social protection?			
2.3	What are the main results from the pilots, and to what extent have these **pilot results fed into key policy, legislative and programming processes** and political commitment at the national, regional and global levels?			
2.4	To what extent has the project contributed to **strengthen FAO programmes, frameworks and flagships**?			
2.5	Which are the **challenges and constraints** affecting full effectiveness of the project outputs?			
2.6	To what extent has the project been **able to adapt to impediments** or changing conditions to improve the efficiency of the project?			
2.7	Did the project produce any **unintended results**, either positive or negative?			
POTENTIAL SUSTAINABILITY & SCALING-UP				
3	**How sustainable are the project results, what are the risks and what is their potential for scaling-up?**		Interviews with: PTF Headquarters: ESA, ESP, ESN REU	Project logical framework at country, regional and global level
3.1	Do the project activities at national level have proper documented **exit strategies**?			

	Evaluation questions	Criteria of judgement/indicators	Data collection methods and sources	Data sources
3.2	Is there a clear indication of government **commitment** (and of other project partners) after project completion to continue their support for the project activities?		Site-visits in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Interviews with beneficiaries. Interviews with implementing partners - Ministries, SIFI, ECFS FAORs + national project coordinators	Six-month and annual progress reports Reports of country activities and workshops Country internal/rapid assessment report, socio-economic analyses BTORs
3.3	Has the project **been monitored effectively and lessons learned and best practices disseminated widely** - with a view to scale-up successful initiatives?			
3.4	What are **the risks** if the project activities are not sustained through a second phase?			
3.5	Which activities have most **potential for scaling-up**?			
3.6	What **lessons learned** from the project can be useful for a potential phase 2 of the project?			
TARGETING / EQUITY AND GENDER				
4	**To what extent have the project activities reached the intended users and uses?**		Site-visits in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan. Interviews with beneficiaries. Interviews with implementing partners - Ministries, SIFI, ECFS	Project logical framework at country, regional and global level Six-month and annual progress reports Reports of country activities and workshops Country internal/rapid assessment report, socio-economic analyses BTORs
4.1	To what extend did the project have a **clear target audience** for each activity, and to what extend were the activities tailored to their needs?			
4.2	Were the **needs**, constraints and opportunities of the different target groups taken into account at design? And during implementation?			
4.3	To what extent have **women, youth, vulnerable and marginalized groups** participated in the project at the various levels?			
4.4	To what extent are the policy dialogue and cross-sector actions **inclusive**?			
PROJECT MANAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS				
5	**To what extent were the project management and partnership arrangements appropriate?**		Interviews with: PTF Headquarters: ESA, ESP, ESN REU FAORs + national project coordinators	Project logical framework at country, regional and global level Six-month and annual progress reports Reports of country activities and workshops BTORs
5.1	To what extent were the management/implementing arrangement **efficient? And clear** to all project partners?			
5.2	What is the **comparative advantage of FAO** for implementing this project?			
5.3	To what extent has the variety of partnerships created or facilitated by FAO stimulated **collective action** for project implementation at all levels?			
5.4	To what extend did the project **link up with other development projects** in the three pilot countries on agriculture, food security, nutrition and social protection?			

Appendix 3. Project outputs at glance

Global and regional level

Output 1. Improved capacities for result-oriented policies, legislations and programmes to ensure the achievement of food security and high-levels of nutrition for the entire population.

1.1. Compile best practices and lessons learned for policy dialogue on food security, nutrition-sensitive social protection and school feeding programmes (regional level).

1.2. Development of normative content in support of the new joint SO1/SO3 programme on Strengthening Food Systems for Nutrition Sensitive Social Protection (global level).

Output 2. Improved multi- and cross-sectoral coordination for food security and nutrition governance.

2.1. Interact with global political processes leading to zero hunger to provide policy-oriented norms and standards on food security, nutrition and social protection linkages (global level).

2.2. Promote the harmonization of approaches to food security, nutrition and social protection in the Eurasian region and policy coherence in the Eurasian Economic Union Member States (regional level).

2.3. Enhance strategic and operational capacities for food security, nutrition and social protection political commitment and engagement (regional and global levels)

2.3.1. Providing advocacy and raising awareness and the project's visibility on the importance of food systems, food security, nutrition and social protection linkages.

2.3.2. Foster knowledge sharing in an inclusive and transparent policy dialogue.

Output 3. Improved capacities in governments and other relevant stakeholders for human resource development in the food security and nutrition domain.

3.1. Support the organization of "2016 Global Child Nutrition Forum" (global level).

3.2. Support the organization of one global event in the sphere of food security, nutrition and social protection policies (global level).

3.3. Promote the exchange of experiences and lessons learned with other regions in particular from countries that adopted Zero Hunger Initiatives by South-South and triangular cooperation exchange (global level).

Armenia

Output 1. Improved capacities for result-oriented policies, legislations and programmes to ensure the achievement of food security and high levels of nutrition for the entire population.

1.1. Development of a Comprehensive National Strategy on Food Security and Nutrition with an operational plan.

1.2. Participation in the Assessment of the National School Feeding Programmes and in the drafting of a National Strategy on Sustainable School Feeding.

1.3. Support the operationalization of the Action Plan of the Food Security Concept Paper (2017 – 2021).

1.4. Review and improvement of the current legislative and policy framework for food security, nutrition and social protection.

Output 2. Improved multi- and cross-sectoral coordination for good food security and nutrition governance.

2.1. Support for the establishment of the National Committee for Food Security and Nutrition.

2.2. Enhance strategic and operational capacities for food security and nutrition, political commitment and engagement.

Output 3. Improved capacities in governments and other relevant stakeholders for human resource development in the food security and nutrition domain.

3.1. Development of a pilot on School Food and Nutrition Programme linked to the Agricultural Sector.

3.2. Development of a pilot on Strengthening Food Systems for Nutrition Sensitive Social Protection.

Kyrgyzstan

Output 1. Improved capacities for results-oriented policies, legislations and programmes to ensure the achievement of food security and high levels of nutrition for the entire population.

1.1. Further development of the Food Security Concept Programme and its action plan to incorporate nutrition and social protection issues.

1.2. Review and improvement of the current policy and legislative framework for food security and nutrition.

1.2.1. Participation on the revision of the Food Security Law.

1.2.2. Participation on the development of legislative frameworks for certification and school procurement.

1.3. Support to the National Statistics Committee for the introduction and further development of the SDG indicators in the Agricultural Census and nutritional assessment tools for informed decision-making.

Output 2. Improved multi- and cross-sectoral coordination for good food security and nutrition governance.

2.1. Raising political awareness and commitment for food security, nutrition and social protection. This will include sensitization of food security, nutrition and social protection issues to all Ministries and Parliamentarians; advocacy for food security governance and support for the debate of food security and nutrition issues.

2.1.1. Raising political awareness on and commitment to food security and nutrition and promoting poverty reduction of the population in the country with the support of the "Roza Otunbayeva Initiative" International Public Foundation (IPF).

2.1.2. High-level political advocacy for Parliamentarians.

2.1.3. Promoting healthy child nutrition and social policies, with UNICEF.

2.1.4. Supporting advocacy and communication activities through the FAO Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum).

2.2. Support to National Food Security Council: building national consensus for a comprehensive approach to food security, nutrition, social protection and agriculture among the FS Council, SUN and the FS Alliance.

Output 3. Improved capacities in governments and other relevant stakeholders for human resource development in the food security and nutrition domain.

3.1. Development of a pilot on School Food and Nutrition Programme linked to the Agricultural Sector.

3.2. Development of an alternative model of the Productive Social Contract/Cash Plus.

3.3. Development of agricultural technical interventions at the Nizhne-Serafimovsky orphanage for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Tajikistan

Output 1. Improved capacities for results-oriented policies, legislations and programmes to ensure the achievement of food security and high levels of nutrition for the entire population.

1.1. Support to planning the National 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDG 2 indicators.

1.2. Support the drafting of the National Sustainable School Feeding Strategy.

1.3. Support the drafting, from the perspective of food security, nutrition, social protection and agriculture, of the Strategy for Migrant Labour 2016-2020.

1.4. Review and improvement of the current legislative and policy framework for food security, nutrition and social protection, in particular for labour migrants.

Output 2. Improved multi- and cross-sectoral coordination for food security and nutrition.

2.1. Enhance the political dialogue with the Government on food security issues.

2.1.1. Strengthen, build capacity and operationalize the Food Security Council of Tajikistan and its Secretariat.

2.1.2. Participate in the Inter-ministerial working group on school food and nutrition programme.

2.1.3. Increase participation on the SUN movement bringing agriculture and food security issues and introducing nutrition-sensitive interactions.

2.2. Enhancing strategic and operational capacities for food security, nutrition social protection, political commitment and engagement.

Output 3. Improved capacities in governments and other relevant stakeholders for human resources development in the food security and nutrition domain.

3.1. Implementation of the pilot School Food and Nutrition Programme linked to the Agricultural Sector.

3.2. Implementation of the pilot Promoting Inclusive Economic Growth through Matching Grants.

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