

**Midterm Review Report of the Project
“Conservation and Sustainable Use of Agrobiodiversity to
Improve Human Nutrition in Five Macroregions.”**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GCP/BOL/046/GFF

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ES1. The findings and conclusions of the Midterm Review (hereinafter “MTR”) of the project “Conservation and Sustainable Use of Agrobiodiversity to Improve Human Nutrition in Five Macroregions” (hereinafter “the Project”) are presented.
- ES2. The Project has a budget of USD 16,715,021, of which USD 2,600,000 is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The remaining amount comes from the initial co-financing committed by the partners and other national counterparts, as follows: USD 250,000 from the Environmental and Water Implementing Entity (EMAGUA) and the General Directorate of Biodiversity and Protected Areas (DGBAP), USD 8,528,030 from the Ministry of Environment and Water (MMAyA), USD 3,517,991 from the Autonomous Regional Government of the Chaco Tarijeño — Caraparí, USD 440,000 from the National Council of Quinoa Producers and Traders (CONACOPROQ), and USD 1,379,000 from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- ES3. Project execution officially started in January 2016 and was expected to be completed in January 2020. However, an extension was requested until December of that year. During the implementation period, it has had two implementing institutions: EMAGUA (2016-2018) and FAO (2018-to date).
- ES4. The main objective of the MTR was to review the effectiveness, efficiency, factors that may have affected or are affecting project execution, the incorporation of cross-cutting perspectives and the probabilities of sustainability. The final aim was to draw lessons learned and recommendations aimed at improving the impact potential of the initiative.
- ES5. In order to achieve the objective, a participatory and collaborative methodological evaluation approach was used, oriented towards learning and based on the theory of change. Quantitative and mainly qualitative data collection techniques and instruments were combined (interviews, focus groups, and bibliographic review). Once the instruments were applied and the different techniques implemented, each of the findings was analyzed, followed by a triangulation of the background and, in this way, obtaining a reliable explanatory basis for the evaluation of the different aspects of the project.
- ES6. Due to the emergency caused by Covid-19, the data collection was a remote activity conducted during 12 days (from 1 to 12 June 2020). A total of 48 key agents of the Project were consulted. The health context made it difficult to access and contact key informants of the institutional counterpart and beneficiaries of the places most affected by the pandemic.

MAIN FINDINGS BY EVALUATION CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS¹

Overall Project Rating: moderately unsatisfactory²

Rating of progress towards achievement of the project development objectives: moderately unsatisfactory

¹ To evaluate the different aspects of the evaluation criteria and questions, the GEF scale for rating results was used, with the following categories: Highly Satisfactory; Satisfactory; Moderately Satisfactory; Moderately Unsatisfactory; Unsatisfactory; Highly Unsatisfactory and; Not Rated.

² Overall rating of the project in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency.

Strategic Relevance

Question 1. Is the project aligned with the FAO Strategic Framework, the GEF priorities in the Focal Area of Biodiversity and the country's national priorities? Has the project been relevant to meet the needs of the beneficiaries?

Assessment of strategic relevance: highly satisfactory

ES7. The MTR confirms that the intervention logic and the execution of activities of the Project are strategically highly relevant. The results chain is aligned with the strategic priorities of the GEF in biodiversity, strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 of the 2010-2019 global framework and the FAO Country Programming Frameworks. It is also relevant for three pillars, five priorities and seven goals contained in Bolivia's Economic and Social Development Plan within the framework of Integral Development for Living Well 2016-2020 and consistent with the needs and interests of the beneficiary groups.

Effectiveness

Question 2. What direct and indirect results has the project achieved at the time of the review, and are they contributing and/or positioned to contribute to the achievement of the environmental and development objectives of the project?

Assessment of effectiveness: unsatisfactory

ES8. The Project's progress towards achieving its objectives, while heading in the right direction, is still incipient. Although some Project outputs have been developed with quality and effectiveness, progress towards the desired effects, such as the improvement of in situ conservation of agrobiodiversity and the improvement of the standard of living of beneficiary groups is weak at the time of the MTR.

ES9. Considering the interviews conducted and the information updated in the last PIR (June 2020), the MTR notes that four years and six months after the start of the Project, there is a significant delay in the implementation of most of the outputs and weak progress towards compliance of the formulated outcome and goal indicators (only component 1 has implementation levels above 50% on average).

ES10. Although effectiveness is rated unsatisfactory, the MTR considers it appropriate to note that, despite the difficulties and delays in implementation, remarkable achievements are identified, such as the generation of nutritional information of native species, the strengthening of local public institutions and the capacity-building of local producers. These outputs go in the direction of contributing to the fulfilment of the objectives sought by the Project.

Efficiency

Question 3. Have the implementation modalities, the institutional structure, the provided financial, technical, programmatic and operational resources and procedures contributed or hindered the achievement of the project outputs and objectives?

Assessment of efficiency: moderately unsatisfactory

ES11. As of June 2020, four years and six months after the start of the Project, the accumulated expenditure reaches 51% (USD 1,330,000). Hence, six months before closure (including the first extension) the available amount is USD 1,270,000, i.e. 49% of the budget of USD 2,600,000. As for co-financing, USD 7,154,437 has been mobilized, i.e. 51.6% of the contribution committed in the project design and USD 283,542 more than planned.

ES12. The delay in financial execution and technical implementation points to the need to extend Project execution. In addition to making proposals for adjustments in the technical area, it will be necessary to propose mechanisms aimed at expediting the expenditure associated with the activities to be implemented.

ES13. Given the national reach, the complexities concerning accessibility of the territories where the Project is present and also considering the ambitious goals, the organizational architecture has not been apt to respond to the necessary requirements in terms of accompaniment.

ES14. Finally, it is noted that the implementation modality at the beginning of the Project, when EMAGUA was the project executing agency (through an execution agreement signed with FAO), was subject to administrative complications that delayed the technical execution of the project, conditioning the quality of the technical and financial performance. In agreement with the Government of Bolivia, this situation led to a change in the execution agreement so that FAO would resume this responsibility. The level of execution improved considerably once FAO assumed the responsibility of executing agency during the second half of 2018.

Factors affecting project performance

Question 4. What are the main factors that influenced project performance, in the stages of design, execution and monitoring, financial management and co-financing of the project?

ES15. The project has a standard monitoring plan that meets basic monitoring and accountability requirements. However, no monitoring and evaluation system (MES) was designed to guide the team's decision-making and coordination to develop a results-based management approach.

ES16. With regard to knowledge management, while communication materials and products have been developed aimed at raising awareness and disseminating the benefits of the approach promoted by the initiative, the absence of a MES hinders knowledge management in a way that facilitates the exchange, access and socialization of the effects and information generated by the Project.

ES17. Another factor that adversely affects the achievement of indicators and therefore effectiveness in the implementation of the Project, is the formulation of overestimated targets and indicators, that is, they are not realistic or achievable considering the available time, institutional capacity and budget. This finding is not new. In the early stages of the Project, there was already a certain degree of consensus in the project team and the institutional counterpart that it would not be possible to achieve them.

ES18. In addition to the above aspects, a lower than planned co-financing (with possibilities of an increase in the future) and a high turnover in the team and project coordination are noted.

Cross-cutting perspectives

Question 5a. To what extent did the Project, in its work with indigenous communities and peoples, ensure the participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making process (including the implementation of activities)?

Question 5b. To what extent has the Project addressed gender equality issues in its design and is it contributing to the empowerment of women, youth, and other vulnerable groups?

Assessment of the participation and inclusion of indigenous communities: satisfactory

Assessment of gender inclusion: moderately satisfactory

ES19. While the project design did not consider the active participation of the beneficiary indigenous peoples and communities since the GEF policy on this matter did not yet exist, the MTR was able to confirm that during its implementation, appropriate measures have been taken to ensure that the implemented activities are pre-validated and accompanied by the indigenous peoples present in the territory.

ES20. In line with the standards set out in FAO's gender strategy, differentiated outputs and targets for men and women were designed during the Project formulation. However, no specific strategy or methodologies have been designed to guide implementation.

ES21. With regard to environmental and social safeguards, the MTR confirms that the Project does not generate adverse effects on people and the environment, both in the territory of intervention and in other areas. On the contrary, it promotes the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity by actively incorporating local knowledge. Moreover, there has been active participation of indigenous communities, ensuring that the Project activities are validated, endorsed and accompanied by the organizations of indigenous peoples present in the territory of intervention.

Sustainability

Question 6. How sustainable are the results achieved and/or will they be? To what extent can the project be replicable and scalable at the national level to other municipalities and communities in the country?

Assessment of sustainability: moderately unlikely

Overall probability of risks to sustainability: likely

ES22. Given the low level of execution, the prospects for institutional, economic, social and environmental sustainability of the Project towards the end of its implementation are not promising. However, there are windows of opportunity to work with local and departmental governments that, if they are taken advantage of, could point to the continuity of the impact once the initiative is over.

CONCLUSIONS

ES23. Considering the main findings associated with the review questions and criteria, the following conclusions are presented:

- **Conclusion 1 (Criterion: strategic relevance):** The design and implementation of the Project are very relevant and aligned with Bolivia's national priorities, FAO's strategic objectives, the needs of the beneficiaries and objective 2 the GEF biodiversity focal area. The high pertinence and relevance facilitate the dialogue between stakeholders and generate a favorable scenario for the participation and commitment of the target group of the intervention.
- **Conclusion 2 (Criterion: effectiveness):** The level of progress towards the objectives and the degree of achievement of the targets associated with outcomes and outputs are low compared to what was planned. More than four years after the start of the Project, four of the five components have levels of compliance below 50%. The deficient performance is explained by: an overvaluation of the indicators; a territorial reach of the intervention area that cannot be covered with the available human and financial resources; initial delays in technical execution; continuous changes in the team and coordination; the lack of a results-based management approach; in addition to context constraints such as a complex political and social situation in 2019 and the health emergency due to Covid-19 that marked the beginning of 2020.
- **Conclusion 3 (Criterion: effectiveness — component 1):** As a result of Project implementation, it was possible to consolidate information that was dispersed and generate additional knowledge about the nutritional properties of prioritized plant ecotypes in each of the macroregions. These results are a contribution to strengthening Bolivian institutionality and fundamental evidence and inputs for the design of public policies for the promotion and protection of these species. Furthermore, they are crucial for the development of the other Project components.

In order to facilitate access to the collected and generated information, the data should be consolidated into the so-called national information system, which has not yet been designed. For the MTR, the start-up of this system should be a priority in the next Project implementation period

- **Conclusion 4 (Criterion: effectiveness — component 2):** The targeted producers have developed capacities in the transformation of native species from agrobiodiversity and have strengthened their associations. Along with this, seed banks have been established, business diagnostics have been developed and certification processes have been accompanied.

Although these actions have received positive assessments from the beneficiaries and the MTR, these steps forward have not yet been translated into concrete effects on the in situ conservation of agrobiodiversity and an increase in the revenues of the beneficiary population, which are both central effects and impacts of the Project.

- **Conclusion 5 (Criterion: effectiveness — component 3):** The strengthened interinstitutional coordination and advocacy work in the design and approval of local public policies to promote the protection of species derived from agrobiodiversity, is a tangible achievement of the Project. The development of initiatives at the national level has not had the expected intensity and results, mainly due to context constraints.

The progress observed at the departmental and municipal levels, combined with the commitment shown by local governments to the approach and work developed, is an opportunity for the next phase of implementation. The conditions are favorable for deepening the collaboration and there is an opportunity for institutionalization of the Project proposal.

- **Conclusion 6 (Criterion: effectiveness — component 4):** Communication has been understood as fundamental for the promotion of agrobiodiversity products among the general public as well as for stakeholder ownership. In this sense, the Project has developed and disseminated communication products aimed at different audiences. However, there is no clear increase of the demand for native products and there is no clear improvement in the levels of awareness and ownership of beneficiary groups, at the time of the MTR.

Under component 4, capacity-building spaces have also been provided to different recipients (producers, public officials and others). Based on the review of secondary information and the sources for verification, i.e. the attendance register, it has been found that there is progress towards the achievement of the targets set in terms of the number of participants and the percentage of women.

- **Conclusion 7 (Criterion: efficiency):** Project efficiency is assessed as moderately unsatisfactory. The reasons for this assessment are: budget underspending of 49%; an organizational structure that has not been apt to achieve the territorial coverage and quality of accompaniment required for the implementation of activities and the scope of the targets; and the existence of initial delays due to late implementation of the administrative arrangements needed to begin technical and budget execution.
- **Conclusion 8 (Criterion: factors that affect performance):** The MTR identifies five main factors that have affected Project implementation in different ways, namely: a. a weak monitoring and evaluation system that does not generate the support needed to implement results-based management; b. a results matrix with overrated indicators that are unviable with the available resources; c. a high turnover of staff that has affected the continuity of processes; d. a political, social and health context that has hindered the technical implementation of the planned activities; e. a low co-financing compared to the level planned.
- **Conclusion 9 (Criterion: participation of indigenous peoples):** It was found that the Project has adopted the necessary measures to ensure that the implemented activities are pre-validated and accompanied by the indigenous peoples of the territory, actively involving them in the definition and implementation of the executed actions.
- **Conclusion 10 (Criterion: gender):** In line with FAO policy, outputs were designed that addressed gender goals and a record of participation has been kept, differentiating

between men and women. Nonetheless, the drafting of a strategy or specific methodologies aimed at generating transformations in the gender gaps present in the territory has not been considered.

- **Conclusion 11 (Criterion: sustainability):** The sustainability of the Project in all its dimensions is not assured. At the institutional and economic level, it has not been possible to anchor programs or develop national public policies to promote local agrobiodiversity. The results in the social and economic field of the Project actions among local producers are not yet observable. In the environmental field, the effects on biodiversity conservation are not yet tangible or measurable, given the low technical implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ES24. The MTR considers it is appropriate to make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1. For the Project Team, FAO and MMAyA.

The Project requires a redefinition of indicators and a territorial targeting within each macroregion. In this regard, it is advisable to carry out a realistic analysis of the possibility of achieving the outstanding outputs and goals of all outcomes. Once the exercise has been completed, an adjustment and extension proposal should be developed that would consider the available human and financial resources and the technical feasibility of achieving the new commitments with quality, effectiveness and efficiency.

- **Suggestion 1:** Conduct a reflection exercise in a participatory manner, involving the entire team, the FAO country office, MMAyA and other stakeholders.
- **Suggestion 2:** Assess the possibility of external facilitation of the spaces for reflection.
- **Suggestion 3:** Include FAO regional office and headquarters (FLO, LTO, others) as technical endorsements and support for the adjustment and extension proposal.
- **Suggestion 4:** Consider prospective scenarios, identify risks and implement mitigation measures.

Recommendation 2. For the Project Team.

In order to facilitate the collection and consolidation of information on the progress in the indicators and beneficiary groups, the systematization of lessons learned and improved knowledge management and accountability, it would be advisable to strengthen the project monitoring system.

- **Suggestion:** Consider specialized technical support (internal or external to FAO).

Recommendation 3. For the Project Team.

As a measure to consolidate results, multiply the potential for impact and increase visibility of the Project, it would be desirable to speed up the implementation of the national information system. This process should be accompanied by the development of capacities in the generation and management of nutritional databases in public institutions for their autonomous management once the Project has ended.

Recommendation 4. For the Project Team.

As a way to move forward in quality assurance of the Project's processes and results, it would be advisable to accelerate the implementation of the suggestions made by the FAO Regional Office's team of nutrition specialists. Particularly those related to the approval of standards for food analysis.

Recommendation 5. For the Project Team and FAO.

Given the characteristics of the beneficiaries and the gaps between men and women in food security, malnutrition and income, as well as the fact that this is considered in a significant number of outputs, it is highly recommended to design and implement a strategy to address the gender dimension.

- **Suggestion 1:** Involve FAO Regional Office specialists in the design and follow-up of the strategy.
- **Suggestion 2:** Generate an instance for capacity development in the project team.

Recommendation 6. For the Project Team.

Considering the good preliminary results and the willingness shown by some departments and municipalities, it would be advisable to deepen the work and articulation in these spaces and thus promote institutional anchorage of the Project at the local level.

Recommendation 7. For the Project Team.

Along with the promotion of the consumption of agrobiodiversity products in the general population and beneficiary communities, it would be advisable to try and secure marketing agreements with State agencies that ensure minimum volumes of purchase and therefore production.

Recommendation 8. For the Project Team.

Associations and producers have developed capacities that are specific to the production process; in order to improve their autonomy, it is recommended to promote a training cycle aimed at strengthening management and administrative skills for a better management of their enterprises.

Recommendation 9. For the Project Team.

In order to broaden the chances of success of the previous recommendations, it is necessary to generate the corresponding logistical and financial arrangements to ensure a greater presence of specialists in the various macroregions.

LESSONS LEARNED

ES25. As a result of the review, it was possible to draw the following lessons learned:

- **Lesson learned 1:** Because considerable time passes between project formulation and the start of implementation, the kickoff workshop considered for GEF Projects should be used as a space to review the results framework and if necessary, to make adjustments in line with the new setting in which the project is developed.
- **Lesson learned 2:** In order for the implementation of the OPIM modality to be more likely to succeed, systematic support for the executing institution is required, expressed in the development of a plan for strengthening technical and administrative capacities and monitoring of the implementation and results obtained from the mitigation measures designed during the project drafting phase.
- **Lesson learned 3:** The design of goals, outputs and the territorial scope of the Project should consider criteria of temporal, financial and human feasibility, as well as a realistic analysis of its technical feasibility.
- **Lesson learned 4:** Monitoring and evaluation systems are crucial to drive results-based management. In order for them to be effective and fulfill all their potential functions, the design and implementation of these systems require a certain specialization and sufficient time to perform such a task.
- **Lesson learned 5:** For gender mainstreaming to be effective, it is necessary, along with a project design that considers it, to develop and implement specific strategies and methodologies. To fully achieve this purpose, expert knowledge and capacity-building are required at the level of the members of the Project team.
- **Lesson learned 6:** The teams, and especially the Project coordination, require continuity in their positions. Successive changes substantially affect the effectiveness, efficiency and quality in implementation.
- **Lesson learned 7:** The change in consumption habits of the general population is a long-term process that is beyond the scope of the Project. Ensuring the commercialization of products derived from agrobiodiversity is more feasible if, together with awareness-raising and promotion among potential consumers, purchasing power from State institutions is drawn on. For example, schools (taking advantage of Law 662 on supplementary feeding), hospitals, armed forces, etc.
- **Lesson learned 8:** In order to advance the autonomy and sustainability of productive ventures, producers and processors of food from agrobiodiversity should not only have capacities specifically related to the productive process, but they should also develop skills in management and administration of their ventures.