

## **Management Response to the Mid Term Evaluation of the IRCEA Project**

**March 2020**

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### **Project background:**

The IRCEA project (Integrating climate resilience into agricultural and livestock production systems through soil fertility management in productive and vulnerable areas using the Farmer Field Schools) aims to strengthen the climate resilience of farming systems. The project's focus on crucial vulnerable areas by: (i) integrating Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) into agricultural and environmental policies, programs and practices; and (ii) capacity building and promotion of CCA through soil fertility and Sustainable Land Management (SLM) practices using the Farmers Field School (FFS) approach.

The Project, that has FAO as GEF Agency giving technical and methodological support in the implementation, is led by the Ministry of the Environment (MINAMB), in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MINAGRIF) and Ministry of Social Action, Family and Women's Promotion (MASFAMU). Other national partners include the Food Safety Office (GSA), the National Institute of Meteorology and Geophysics (INAMET) and the Institute for Agrarian Development (IDA). At the Provincial level, the Project counts with the involvement of the Provincial Governments of Huíla, Bié, Malange and Huambo, and, as well, with the public administrations of their respective municipalities, where the project is being implemented. It also includes other partners such as NGOs, Community-based organizations and academic and research institutions. The project started in October 2016 and it is, originally, scheduled to end in September 2021. The total project budget is of USD 30,287,412 of which USD 6,668,182 are financed by GEF, the rest of which to be co-financed by some of the governmental Project partners.

### **Overall response to the evaluation:**

The Mid Term Evaluation of the IRCEA Project took place at a watershed moment. After 18 months without a Chief Technical Advisor (CTA), this position has been fulfilled (unfortunately, however, after the evaluation activities took place) and the Project shall enter its second half with renovated energy and good perspectives for completion of the stated objectives. The absence of a CTA has contributed to a series of delays - dully noted within the MTR process- in the implementation of some activities/components. These delays are leading to the need of a project extension request of further six months to ensure the necessary time for a successful finalization.

The MTR consultant, after interviews with key stakeholders and visits to field sites where the project is being implemented suggested some adjustments of strategies, which will be herein analyzed and provided a response in terms of perceived viability by the Project management and if so, the mechanisms to be adopted.

Regarding the findings related to the evaluation questions, which were:

- MTR Question 1. Relevance: Have the project strategy and actions been relevant and appropriate to meet the needs of beneficiaries and other stakeholders as well as Government, GEF and FAO priorities?
- MTR Question 2. Effectiveness: How effective was the project in achieving its objectives and expected results?
- MTR Question 3. Efficiency: To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently regarding the timeliness of the activities and their cost-effectiveness?
- MTR Question 4. Sustainability: To what extent do financial, institutional, socioeconomic, and environmental risks exist?
- MTR Question 5. Factors Affecting Performance: What factors have positively or negatively affected project performance and delivery (project design, implementation, financial management and co-financing, supervision, partnerships, communication and knowledge management, M&E)
- MTR Question 6. Cross-cutting Concerns: To what extent has the project taken into account gender and equity concerns?

The overall response of the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) is that the Findings 1 to 4, related to the MTR Question 1, is reassuring. These findings demonstrate that not only the proposed project design, but also the implementation strategy, have been properly identified and conducted, despite the difficulties in management (i.e., long absence of a CTA), with an adequate investment in the construction of networks and alliances.

Findings 5 and 6, related to the MTR Question 2, confront the essence of the problems occurring with the IRCEA Project which are regarding the delays in the delivering the outputs of three out of four Components of the Project, what is affecting its effectiveness. A more detailed response to these aspects will be provided in the matrix of the following section.

Findings 7 to 9, related to the MTR Question 3, deepens into the above matter of the Project delays. The consultant noticed that more than half of the originally scheduled implementation period has elapsed, while, as mentioned above, some of Components have not reached their respective middle point. However, the perception that some the training provided to governmental officials of INAMET and GSA have too expensive, despite being properly noticed, it is within the Project perspective of still obtaining the most of this investment. The explanation on how this is intended to be achieved is provided below.

Finding 10, related to the MTR Question 4, that there are high risks that could compromise the sustainability of results after project completion because of the unlikelihood of a significant increase in public resources for CCA/SLM issues, in particular, within the Environment and Agriculture sector budgets, associated with low local institutional capacity (i.e., Provincial Governments, IDA, EDAs, etc.), raises an alert for the need of a great attention to the Project's exit strategy.

Finding 11, related to the MTR Question 5, points out potential discrepancies between the Project's PRODOC proposed Products and Activities and the current needs of Angola and the identified beneficiaries. In part, the fact that the IRCEA Project started being designed in 2013 and, as not unusual with GEF Projects, implemented more than two years later, it would be expected a reality gap within its structure. Nevertheless, other variables contributed to an even greater change in the country's reality. A shift in the central governments administration with restructuring of the institution's top direction, inevitably led to some shift in the sought objectives regarding CCA and SLM. Moreover, a worldwide increase in the effects of climate change phenomena has particularly influenced the Project's target region,

demanding adjustments in the proposed strategy so that impacts that are more positive can be reached with the allocated resources.

Findings 12 to 14, are related to the analysis of the Project Execution. In part, these findings are attributed to a weak risk analysis at the time of the Project design. Once the actors related to this processes are not involved in the present implementation phase, no consideration can be provided in this arena. Nevertheless, it can also be conjectured that there is a direct correlation of this situation with the period that the IRCEA Project lacked a senior technical support, due the absence of a CTA, aggravated by the lack of a Representative within FAO Angola for 10 months from February to December 2018. The consequential situation, already detected by the new Representative and corroborated by the new CTA (arrived in March 2020), is that the Project's execution has incurred into the allocation of implementation energy without a coordinated and overarching articulation with stakeholders, beneficiaries and with other FRANG Projects working with similar issues. In other words, effort was placed into the execution of isolated activities leading to the present mismatch in the percentage of the implementation of the project components. These matters are specifically addressed with the management directive by FRANG Representation that all projects, IRCEA included, developed an Annual Operational Plan starting in 2020. This tool allows for a balanced allocation of time and resources in the implementation of the project's pending activities.

Regarding the Project's financial management aspects, Findings 15 throughout 19, point out that there are more than 50% of the original resources available, but up to this point, many imbalances have occurred in the expenditures, although the administration is impeccable in relation to transparency and compliance to GEF rules. Once more, the newly implemented strategy of adopting an annual operational plan shall deal with these questions. And regarding the lack of data on the co-financing, it has been initiated a closer relationship with the governmental institution responsible for the Project – Office of Climate Change of the Ministry of Environment, what shall allow for a better documentation of the in kind and from the other project's contributions.

Finding 20 highlights the period that the IRCEA Project lacked support from senior technical assistance and also from FAO Staff, locally and from Headquarters. Once this scenario has been solved, it is only expected that the Project enter its second half counting with a close and strong support to achieve the proposed objectives and results.

In relation to Findings 21 to 23, about the Project's stakeholders, a good perspective for the second half of the implementation of the IRCEA Project is to strength what is working well, such as the partnerships with local institutions through Letters of Agreement. On the other hand, as part of the above mentioned exit strategy, the PCU will invest on establishing within the central and local governments a sense of ownership of the Project activities.

Communication, including dissemination of the project impacts and knowledge that can be replicated, covered in the Findings 24-26, the weakness that have been documented, shall be solved once the FRANG has also received a strengthening in this area through the arrival of a new Communication Coordinator. The new CTA is already liaising with this officer to ensure the documentation and dissemination of best practices and mobilization of a wide range of stakeholders for the debates and capacity building opportunities that the IRCEA Project promotes.

Monitoring and Evaluation was dealt with through Findings 27 and 28, pointing out that there are serious flaws regarding the selection of indicators, leading to shortcomings in the evaluation of impacts generated by the project. A possible mechanism to solve this problem is already being implemented which is developing and adopting a common monitoring matrix for all FRANG (and possibly of other organizations)

projects that utilize the Field Farm Schools as a model for introducing knowledge and change. The complementing strategy is to identify a few key Result Based Indicators for the mensuration of the achieved impacts. For this last strategy, the SHARP methodology Survey conducted with 431 households of FFS members provides key feedback on resilience indicators, whose baseline data has been collected and from now on will continue to be monitored.

The last three Findings, 29 to 31, are related to the MTR Question 6, which is regarding how gender issues are incorporated into the Project's actions and how it is ensured greater benefits with a perspective on gender. Numerically, the Project has involved a significant percentage of women and youth. However, taking into account the cultural perspective of local communities in Angola, this matter cannot be evaluated in a simplistic perspective. Nevertheless, the new CTA, a woman, and having the FRANG strengthened its unit that deals with gender issues, it is expected that the eventual weaknesses occurring in this arena will receive a very attentive support.

### **Responses by recommendations:**

In this section, Management shall address each recommendation, discussing them in the order presented in the executive summary of the evaluation report. This is done within the Management Response matrix below (see Box 1):

#### **1. Management response matrix<sup>1</sup>**

Management response to the IRCEA Project MTR					Date
					March 2020
Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Management response (b)	Management plan			
	Accepted, partially accepted or rejected	Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	Responsible unit (d)	Timeframe (e)	Further funding required (Y or N) (f)
OBS: There were no recommendations regarding the Project’s Relevance (A)					
Recommendation 1 - Effectiveness (B)	Accepted, partially accepted or rejected	Short narrative			
1a) Adjust the Project Results Matrix	accepted	Besides the utilization of indicators identified for monitoring the FFS, other RBM indicators will be identified from the SHARP survey results.	CTA and PCU in consultation with PTF	September 2020	N

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<sup>1</sup> Each column is cross-referenced to the bullet letters above.

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1b) Include teacher's training in capacity building strategy (Component 1)	accepted	In the activities for mainstreaming knowledge on CCA and the use of SLM practices for generating resilience it has been included in the 2020 POA tasks outreaching activities with universities, middle level and technical schools (Task 1.1.3.1 and 1.1.3.2). For example, through the establishment of a Letter of Agreement with the Provincial Directory of Environment, training sessions will be developed and implemented for governmental officials, the civil society and especially with the local academic institutions for the primary schools of the Province of Huila.	CTA, PCU and FRANG	October 2020	N

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1c) Define and implement a "FFS-Model" plan focused on specific themes that act as models/examples in each municipality (Component 2)	accepted	The 2020 POA has included a task of selecting at least six FFS that have the potential to become Model Schools to strength the interventions (chosen in a participatory manner) that will highlight their potential to promote resilience (Task 2.2.2.2)	CTA and PCU	September 2020	N

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1d) Set up an FFS-based Pilot Internship Program (Component 2)	accepted	In the 2020 POA it has been included a provision for establishing a Letter of Agreement with the academic institutions of the Province of Huila (middle level and university) for the implementation of an internship program in CCA and SLM practices (Task 2.2.1.5), through the establishment of Letters of Agreement (LoA) with academic institutions of the Province of Huíla (middle level - Tchivingiguiro; upper level - Arimba, Tundavala) to develop and implement a program of professional internships in CCA and SLM practices based on FFS, in partnership with high school or higher education institutions in the Province of Huíla.	CTA, PCU and FRANG	August 2020	N



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1e) Hold a National Conference on Climate Change (Component 3)	accepted	Task 1.2.1.4 of the 2020 POA is regarding the organization of a workshop in close collaboration with the Office of Climate Change of the MINAMB to discuss and establish a common concept of climate vulnerability for Angola and the mechanism to issue alerts and agro-meteorological bulletins to guide the agro-pastoral practices of small farmers.	CTA, PCU, Communications FAO Angola and FRANG	October 2020	N
1f) Finalize the analysis of the SHARP survey results to inform training themes / actions in Component 1 and 2	accepted	The new CTA is already in contact with FAO HQ to analyze the information gathered during the SHARP survey to include its use in the actions related to the FFS	CTA, PCU and Intl. Consultants: Txaran Basterrechea and Maria Hernandez Lagana	October 2020	N
Recommendation 2 - Efficiency (C)	Accepted, partially accepted or rejected	Short narrative			

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<b>2a) Strengthen partnerships with national institutions and reduce the weight of international consultants in carrying out activities</b>	<b>accepted</b>	Within the 2020 POA it has been included the establishment of 8 Letters of Agreement (LoAs) with local organizations and institutions. International consultancies have been kept to a minimum of 3 against 8 of national consultants	CTA, PCU and FRANG	August 2020	
<b>Recommendation 3 - Sustainability (D)</b>	<b>Accepted</b> , partially accepted or <b>rejected</b>	Short narrative			

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3a) Define an exit strategy for the project, including alignment with "Government's ongoing ECA institutionalization strategy"	accepted	This initiative is being conducted in cooperation with other project of the FRANG that have a focus on FFS; as matter of fact the Government of Angola have already expressed the FFS will be the basis for the official rural extension strategy; a manual that gathers the accumulated knowledge of 15 years of FAO FFS projects in Angola is under preparation and will guide the field work of all projects related to this theme	PCU, CTA, all other FAO Ang projects in consultation with PTF	July 2020	N
Recommendation 4 - Factors affecting performance (E)	Accepted, partially accepted or rejected	Short narrative			
4a) Prepare and request from GEF an extension of the project implementation period	accepted	The preparation of this request is already under way by the administration of the IRCEA Project	CTA, Administration, FRANG, in consultation with PTF	June 2020	N

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4b) Strengthen internal Monitoring & Evaluation procedures	accepted	As mentioned in the overall comments, the IRCEA Project is cooperating with other projects from FAO Angola in the development and gathering of data on the FFS for feeding a common use M&E database on FFS	CTA, PCU	September 2020	N
4c) LTO, BH and FLO supervision must be reinforced and FAO Office in Angola must establish a "Backstopping Team" linked to the Program Unit for field projects follow-up	accepted	The support of the Representative of the FAO Angola to the IRCEA Project has been straightforward since her arrival. HQ has already manifested its support to the project since the end of 2019 when there was a field mission to cooperate in the construction of the M&E database	LTO, FLO and BH	October 2020	N

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<b>4d) Strengthen internal procedures for Communication &amp; Visibility and Knowledge Management</b>	accepted	As mentioned above, FAO Angola has also a new Communication Coordinator who is closely supporting and guiding the Project's PCU into the documenting successful experiences and constructing a visibility/dissemination strategy (see Tasks 4.2.1.1 to 4.2.1.4)	CTA, PCU, Communications FAO Angola and FRANG	November 2020	N
<b>4e) Strengthen ownership/dialogue with national counterparts</b>	accepted	44 Tasks out of 74 listed in the 2020 POA include consultation and articulation with the national counterparts for their structuring and/or execution	CTA and PCU in consultation with FRANG and ADMIN FAO ANG	November 2020	
<b>4f) Review partner's co-financing strategy and account for other support being provided to the project but not considered as co-financing</b>	accepted	The PCU is already gathering data and conducting consultation processes with the national partners to obtain the necessary data regarding the co-financing of the IRCEA Project	PCU and CTA	March 2020	N

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		Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	Responsible unit (d)	Timeframe (e)	Further funding required (Y or N) (f)
<b>Recommendation 5 - Cross-cutting dimensions (F)</b>	<b>Accepted</b> , partially accepted or <b>rejected</b>	Short narrative			
<b>5a) Adopt a more inclusive and gender-sensitive strategy</b>	<b>accepted</b>	The FAO Angola office counts on a team of experts to help with gender issues who already are giving support to IRCEA and all other Projects of the office in the developing of an understanding on the theme and in revising the implementation of activities to ensure an effective inclusion of gender aspects	CTA and PCU	ongoing	N