

Summary of the Mid-Term Review of the project “Pesticide Risk Reduction in Bangladesh” GCP/BGD/060/GFF (GEF ID 9076)

Background and context:

The project “Pesticide Risk Reduction in Bangladesh” is a FAO/GEF project with a total planned budget of USD 42,038,050 (the GEF allocation is USD 8,295,000) and an initially planned project duration of 36 months, from June 2019 to June 2022. FAO is the GEF Agency of the project. The Executing Agencies are the Bangladeshi Department of Environment (DoE, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change), the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE, Ministry of Agriculture), the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare), and the Department of Fisheries (DoF, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock). Other key stakeholders include organizations, such as the Bangladesh Crop Protection Association (BCPA), the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA), the Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI), the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR), and the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB). Important project beneficiaries are farmers, manufacturers of dry fish products, and the local population near the Chattogram DDT pesticide depot.



DDT stockpiles at Chattogram

The **project objective** is to reduce risks to human and animal health and the environment from stockpiles of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), other obsolete pesticides and from ongoing excessive use of new POPs and other Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs). More specifically, the project aims to reduce these risks through environmentally sound elimination of approximately 1000 tonnes of POPs pesticides (mainly the DDT stockpiles at

the Chattogram governmental Medical Sub-depot that have been stored there since 1985), and through reduction of exposure to POPs pesticides, HHPs and other toxic chemicals, which will be achieved through a better management of empty pesticide containers, better food preservation and agricultural practices, and an improved legislation on the use and management of chemicals.

The Mid-Term Review

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) was carried out from July to mid October 2021 by an international and national MTR consultant. The main purpose of the MTR was to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, to provide recommendations for improvement of the project, and to contribute to learning and knowledge sharing among FAO and its project partners. The MTR team used multiple methods and sources to gather and triangulate as much information as possible to assess the evaluation criteria, including a desk review of key documents, a stakeholder analysis, the construction of the Theory of Change (ToC) and an elaboration of an Evaluation Matrix. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were held with 20 key stakeholders. Due to the COVID-19 situation in Bangladesh, most of the interviews were conducted online.

It was clear from the start of the MTR that few activities were implemented, largely due to the strict lockdowns in Bangladesh because of the COVID19 pandemic, and also because of the late approval of the Technical Assistance Project Proposal (TAPP) in August 2021. The TAPP is an internal governmental approval process. Only when the TAPP is approved, the executing agencies can start to implement the activities they are expected to coordinate within the project.

The overall response to the MTR was low and slow, possibly in part due to the fact that few activities were implemented. As a result, some stakeholders were not aware of the project, and some persons from executing agencies were reluctant to discuss the project with the MTR team because the TAPP was only approved later during the MTR process.

Main Findings and Conclusions of the Mid-term Review

Relevance: Satisfactory. The project is strategic relevant and in line with national priorities as well as donor strategic priorities, existing interventions, and with the FAO strategic Framework and the FAO Country Programming Framework. The MTR also found that there are certainly complementarities with existing interventions and projects, although the implementation status of existing interventions is not fully clear. The recently appointed project manager will discuss with the executing agencies and other stakeholders how other initiatives have been progressing during the COVID19 pandemic and how the project can cooperate with these initiatives and projects.

Effectiveness: Moderately unsatisfactory. The project has made good progress regarding preparation for safeguarding and disposal of the DDT stockpiles at the Medical Sub-depot in Chattogram under component 1 and outcome 1. A selection and bidding process was carried out and a company to undertake safeguarding and disposal was selected. This company, Polyeco, has been preparing to start safeguarding as soon as the COVID19 situation allows and the necessary equipment will have been shipped to Chattogram and cleared at customs. The actual safeguarding is planned to be implemented by March 2022, before the start of the rainy season. As safeguarding and disposal of the DDT stockpile in Chattogram is an essential part of the project, it is crucial that some progress has been made for this part of the project. However, overall project implementation has been severely hampered by the COVID19 lockdown. No field work could take place, and until the start of the MTR, no outputs or outcomes have been delivered, and little progress has been made towards achieving the project objectives. In addition, the late approval of the TAPP also means that most of the project activities could not yet start. It is therefore not feasible to implement the project before its current end date (June 2022).

Efficiency: Moderately unsatisfactory. The project is well behind schedule. Due to the COVID19 lockdowns and late approval of the TAPP, very few activities have been implemented (only activities related to preparation for safeguarding and disposal of the DDT stockpile at Chattogram were initiated). As few activities have been implemented, and no outputs and outcomes have been achieved, it is difficult to assess cost-effectiveness. The costs for the safeguarding and disposal company (which are a considerable cost to the project) are lower than budgeted in the project document. However, as such, activities are generally highly complex; there can still be unforeseen costs. For example, logistics may become more expensive due to COVID19 (fewer containers are available and there are congestions at the Chattogram harbour as well as global ports).

Sustainability: Moderately likely. The risks to financial sustainability are medium if the project as defined in the original project document is followed and a financially sustainable mechanism for empty container management as well as an incentive scheme for the safe manufacturing of dry fish is established. These mechanisms would need to be discussed early on during the remaining project period, as the mechanisms need involvement of many stakeholders and the mechanisms will need time to be set up properly. Environmental sustainability is likely if the DDT stockpile at Chattogram is safeguarded and eliminated. Aspects related to institutional sustainability need to be further considered now that the project activities can start to be implemented. Executing partners at the moment do not always have the capacity to undertake all project activities. They need technical and coordination support as well as trainings from FAO. It is important to ensure that capacity will be built within the project (within executing partners and of other stakeholders) and sustained after the project ends.

Factors affecting performance: Moderately satisfactory. As few activities were implemented, it was difficult to assess factors affecting performance when looking at the aspects that need to be

considered according to MTR guidelines. The MTR team tried to balance the assessment based on the quality of the information provided in the project document and on what was actually implemented (also taking into consideration that the project is currently gaining momentum as the TAPP has been approved and the strict lockdown regulations were lifted). Overall, the project at design adequately considered most factors affecting performance (such as project partnerships and stakeholder engagement, project supervision and management, and awareness raising and communication), but the level of project oversight and project execution has been limited.

Cross-cutting dimensions: Moderately satisfactory. During project design, aspects related to gender and vulnerable groups have been adequately considered, including a Gender Mainstreaming plan. As few activities have been executed, these aspects were thus far not considered during implementation. Recently a gender expert has been involved in the project who will monitor these aspects closely. The project document contains an annex on environmental and social risks, this annex focuses on safeguarding, transportation and disposal under component 1. For the safeguarding and disposal several necessary precautions have already been arranged, including development of a Health, Safety and Environmental Plan for the safeguarding, and an Emergency Prevention Preparedness and Response Plan. All work is expected to be conducted in line with Stockholm and Basel Convention requirements, and FAO's Environmental Management Tool Kits.

The overall assessment of the project's progress is considered to be moderately unsatisfactory. This assessment follows from the lack of progress towards achieving outputs and outcomes, but the MTR team realises that activities could not have been achieved due to COVID 19 and the late approval of the TAPP. The MTR team also recognizes that important progress has been made to one of the most essential components of the project (i.e. preparations for safeguarding and disposal of the DDT stockpile at Chattogram) and that the project is currently gaining momentum. Therefore, the MTR team considers that it is moderately likely that the project can reach its main targets and objectives if an extension is granted.

Recommendations and the way forward

1. The MTR recommends an extension of the project until December 2024 in order to make it possible for the project team and the executing partners to achieve the project outputs and outcomes.
2. FAO to ensure that the coordination and monitoring mechanisms will be set up and start as soon as possible, including the meetings of the Project Steering Committee. The Inception Workshop needs to be the start of building of strong coalitions among FAO, executing agencies and key stakeholders.
3. FAO to ensure that exit strategies (what will happen after project end) will be prepared timely to ensure sustainability of project results.
4. Start recording co-finance at a detailed level, and possibly still record co-finance contributed by the executing partners from the period before approval of the TAPP.
5. Start to record expenditure on a more detailed level, if possible per output but at least per outcome, so it will be easier to assess cost-effectiveness of particular actions and of the final results.
6. FAO to ensure that a methodical/strategic communication and awareness raising strategy for the entire project is prepared and implemented, including budget for the communication activities. Additionally, the M&E as well as gender plans need to be updated and brought in line with the communication and awareness raising strategy.