

Project Completion Report Validation

Smallholder Commercialization Programme

Republic of Sierra Leone

Date of validation by IOE: September 2020

I. Basic project data

			Approval (US\$ m)		Actual (US\$ m)	
Region	West and Central Africa	Total project costs	56.4		56.3	
Country	Sierra Leone	Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP ¹)	50.0	88.6%	49.9	88.6%
Loan number	n.a.	Recipient	4.57	8.1%	2.6	4.5%
IFAD project ID	1100001599	Beneficiaries	1.89	3.3%	3.7	6.5%
Type of project (subsector)	Agricultural Development					
Financing type	Supplementary Funds Grant					
Financing terms	n.a.					
Date of approval	11/05/2011					
Date of loan signature	30/05/2011					
Date of effectiveness	29/07/2011	Number of beneficiaries (individuals)	Direct: 100,000 Indirect: 300,000		Direct: 158,272 Indirect: 295,000	
Loan amendments						
Loan closure extensions						
Country programme managers	Hubert Boirard; Jakob Tuborgh; Ann Turinayo	Grant closing date			31/03/2020	
Regional director(s)	Nadine Gbossa (Director a.i.); Lisandro Martin; Ides de Willebois; Mohamed Beavogui	Mid-term review			15/08/2015	
Project completion report reviewer	Federica Lomiri	IFAD loan disbursement at project completion (%)				
Project completion report quality control panel	Eoghan Molloy Fabrizio Felloni	Date of the project completion report	30/09/2016		30/09/2019	

Source: IFAD. Sierra Leone. Smallholder Commercialization Programme. President's report, Supervision mission reports, Project Completion Report (PCR).

¹ The Smallholder Commercialization Programme (SCP) was funded by a GAFSP Grant with contributions from the Government and beneficiaries. IFAD supervised the project without providing any funding.

II. Project outline

Country & Project Name	Republic of Sierra Leone. Smallholder Commercialization Programme of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (SCP-GAFSP).
Project duration	Total project duration: Eight years. Board approval: 11 May 2011; Signing date: 30 May 2011; Entry into force: 29 July 2011; Expected completion date: 30 September 2016; Actual completion date: 30 September 2019. Number of extensions granted: Two. Effectiveness lag: Two months. Time from entry into force to first disbursement of funds: Four months. Time from approval to first disbursement of funds: Seven months.
Project goal, objectives and components	The project goal is to empower the rural poor to improve their food security and increase incomes on a sustainable basis in order to lead to long-term sector and economic development as well as poverty reduction. Specifically, the project aims to: (i) contribute to the reduction of the gap between national rice production and demand (representing 70,000 metric tons); and (ii) increase farm incomes by 10 percent for direct beneficiaries. The SCP-GAFSP has four Components: Component 1 (Smallholder agriculture commercialisation), Component 2 (Small scale irrigation development), Component 3 (Access to rural financial services) and Component 4 (Coordination and management).
Project area and target group	The programme was country-wide in scope, but some of the interventions prioritized specific districts according to various criteria including poverty and demographic indicators, complementarities with ongoing and planned initiatives, potential for poverty reduction and job creation, etc. Four main target groups were identified: (i) smallholder farmers; (ii) women, especially women-headed households; (iii) youth, particularly unemployed youth; and (iv) micro/small entrepreneurs. The targeting strategy is based on the geographical targeting of priority Chiefdoms and Wards carried out by the district agricultural offices with the technical assistance of the project.
Project implementation	The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF, previously MAFFS) has been named as the executing agency of the SCP-GAFSP through a dedicated Project Management Unit (PMU). IFAD was selected as the supervising entity and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as the implementation support entity for the provision of technical assistance.
Changes during implementation	The Ebola virus disease outbreak affected project implementation for 18 months between 2014 and 2016. Furthermore, the project was suspended by IFAD from August 2014 to September 2015 due to a case of mis-procurement. In this context, a budget neutral extension was granted on two occasions to catch up with delays. The first no-cost extension was granted in September 2016 for two years; the second was granted in September 2018 for one year. Overall, the project was extended by three years.
Financing	Total budget at appraisal was US\$56.4 million. The project was financed by a US\$50 million grant from GAFSP. The Government provided a contribution of US\$4.5 million as counterpart. The contribution of project's beneficiaries was US\$1.9 million. Actual disbursement was almost 100 per cent (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1
Project costs (US\$ million)

<i>Funding source</i>	<i>Appraisal</i>	<i>% of appraisal costs</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>% of actual costs</i>	<i>% disbursed</i>
GAFSP grant	50.0	88.6%	49.9	88.6%	99.8%
Government	4.57	8.1%	2.6	4.5%	56.2%
Beneficiaries	1.89	3.3%	3.7	6.5%	195.7%
Total	56.46	100%	56.3	99.6%	99.98%

Source: IFAD. 2020. *Smallholder Commercialization Programme. Project Completion Report. Main report and appendices.*

Table 2

Component costs (US\$ million)

<i>Component</i>	<i>Appraisal</i>	<i>% of appraisal costs</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>% of actual costs</i>	<i>% disbursed</i>
Smallholder agriculture commercialisation	28.9	51%	28.9	51%	100%
Small scale irrigation development	7.9	14%	6.4	11%	81%
Access to rural financial services	8.0	14%	10.3	17%	129%
Coordination and management	11.6	21%	11.6	21%	92%
Total	56.4	100%	56.4	100%	100%

Source: IFAD. 2020. *Smallholder Commercialization Programme. Project Completion Report. Main report and appendices.*

III. Review of findings²

PCR finding	Rating
A. Core Criteria	
Relevance	
<p>1. The SCP-GASFP was relevant to the objectives and priorities of the national agricultural development strategy and responded to the country's decentralization effort started in 2004. In Sierra Leone, overall orientation for the agricultural sector is provided by the National Sustainable Agriculture Development Plan (NSADP³) for 2010-2030, the aim of which is to provide short, medium and long term investment programmes to increase commercialisation of the sector and promote "farming as a business." A core aspect of the Plan is SCP, the flagship sector program aimed at building smallholders commercial capacity and operationalizing the goals of the NSADP. In June 2010, the SCP attracted a US\$50 million funding from GAFSP,⁴ in support of four of the six technical components of the SCP.⁵ The project design was also aligned to the Poverty Reduction Strategy II - national strategic plan (Agenda for Change) for the period 2008 to 2012, which had a key focus on increasing agricultural productivity (intensification and diversification and promoting commercial agriculture through private sector participation).</p> <p>2. Although this financing was not part of the Country strategic opportunities programme, IFAD was selected by the Government to supervise the project, in recognition of its contribution in supporting the country's agricultural development. The leading role played by IFAD in designing the project ensured its consistency with the three strategic objectives of IFAD's Results Based Country strategic opportunities programme for 2010-2015, i.e. (i) support to smallholder agriculture; (ii) support to rural finance; and (iii) support to local development.</p>	4

² In addition to the Project Completion Report, this PCRV is informed by the findings of other two evaluations: i) the Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation (CSPE) in Sierra Leone conducted by the Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE) of IFAD in 2019; and ii) the Evaluation of FAO's contribution to the Smallholder Commercialisation Programme and to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme in Sierra Leone, conducted by an independent evaluation team in 2018.

³ The NSADP is a sector-wide framework for putting into action the objectives of the country's second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (Agenda for Change) 2008-2012. The vision of the NSADP is to make agriculture the engine for socioeconomic growth and development through commercial agriculture.

⁴ The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) is a multilateral mechanism to assist in the implementation of pledges made by the G20 in Pittsburgh in September 2009. The objective is to improve incomes and food and nutrition security in low-income countries by boosting agricultural productivity. (Source: FAO: <http://www.fao.org/policy-support/mechanisms/mechanisms-details/en/c/447494/>).

⁵ The following components of the SCP have been funded by the SCP-GAFSP: (i) Component 1 (Smallholder agriculture and commercialization), Component 2 (Small scale irrigation development), Component 4 (Access to rural financial services) and Component 6 (Planning, Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation). The two components not funded by SCP-GAFSP were the following: (i) Component 3 "Improving access to markets by rehabilitating and maintaining 4,000km of feeder roads"; and (ii) Component 5 "Providing a social protection safety net to vulnerable households to increase food security and nutrition for 1.5 million people".

PCR finding	Rating
<p>3. The PCRV agrees that the design of SCP-GAFSP was highly relevant to the needs of small farmers at the time of appraisal, when they were still facing issues related to post-conflict situations, such as the inadequacy of the rural infrastructure and the weakness of the social and community organisations. The design document also planned to address other structural issues affecting smallholder productivity, i.e. lack of means to buy quality inputs and equipment, poor water management, lack of access to rural financial services and weak agricultural extension services. Moreover, the Agricultural Business Centres (ABCs) model as a decentralized structure owned by farmers and providing aggregation and processing facilities and joint marketing potential, was highly relevant to the Sierra Leone context, since almost no other institution is providing such services. However, the design did not include a feasibility study or value chain analysis to orient the support to ABCs.</p> <p>4. The PCR highlights a design flaw that resulted in the lack of an holistic approach to value chain development; although project interventions were meant to link farmers to markets and improving the marketing of their crops, the project focus has been rather placed on production, and very little was done in terms of establishing effective linkages with the private sector. This lesson has been later integrated in the design of the new agricultural value chain development project.</p> <p>5. Overall, the resources made available were not sufficient for attending the large groups of beneficiaries planned and achieving the ambitious project goal; as an example, the project design had planned to support a large number of ABC⁶ to provide smallholder farmers with the technical and financial inputs needed for expanding their business. However, during implementation, the underestimation of the costs of building a fully functional ABC resulted in a need to downsize their number from 350 to 52 ABCs to be “transformed” into viable business models. Similarly, other targets were scaled down during implementation, i.e. the hectares of Inland Valley Swamp (IVS) to be rehabilitated were reduced by half, the number of Community Banks (CBs) to be established was reduced from seven to four and coffee was excluded from tree-crop rehabilitation.</p> <p>6. In conclusion, the PCRV recognises the thematic relevance of the project design, which focussed on the one hand on building the capacities of Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs) and, on the other hand, on supporting the decentralized ABCs to provide value addition services to smallholder groups and establish effective links with buyers. Moreover, the SCP-GAFSP was integrated into the national rural development agenda by its very nature. However, a thorough technical analysis of the viability of value chains and rural finance institutions, conducted early in the design process or early during implementation, would have helped in getting a better understanding of the many challenges of the context and therefore in setting more realistic targets. Based on the above, the PCRV rates project relevance as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i>, one point below the PCR rating.</p>	
Effectiveness	
<p>7. Before discussing project effectiveness, it should be recalled that the SCP-GAFSP was affected by various adverse factors, namely the Ebola outbreak from 2014 to 2016 and the suspension decided by IFAD in 2014 following the recommendations of an Audit. Against this backdrop, the project was granted a no-cost extension on two occasions and the completion date has slipped by three years. The PCR assesses project effectiveness as being overall satisfactory. However, an in-depth analysis of available project documentation suggests that the achievements under the various components are mixed.</p> <p>8. With regard to Component 1, the project successfully established/rehabilitated 84 per cent of the tree crops planned. The establishment of the planned 350 new ABCs was replaced by the consolidation of the best performing 52 ABCs of the 139 already set up by other partners. While financial support and training was provided to all ABCs, mechanized farm equipment was distributed to 39 ABCs</p>	3

⁶ According to the design document, the SCP-GAFSP should have supported the consolidation of 150 existing ABCs and the establishment of 200 new ABCs.

PCR finding	Rating
<p>but none of them has received any training; as a result, no equipment is currently used by ABCs, apart from tractors. However, a follow-up project (Agricultural Value Chain Development Project – AVDP) is expected to support the existing ABCs to effectively utilise the received machinery. The target of setting up or consolidating 1,000 FBOs was slightly exceeded and 86 per cent of their members were trained. However, none of them report having adopted improved farming practices. The tree crops contract farming approach didn't work out, owing to the greater emphasis by the project on production aspects instead of focussing on the entire value chain, which resulted in the lack of a private sector engagement strategy to support farmers' competitiveness through increased access to markets and inputs. As a result, only 79 Memorandum of Understanding with just as many implementing partners were concluded, against a target of 300. Moreover, the SCP-GAFSP did not manage to set up a strong network of agro-dealers to support the small farmers: only 17 agro-dealers were functional at completion against a target of 40.</p> <p>9. The restructuring plan of the National Federation of Farmers of Sierra Leone was not implemented and the support provided by the project simply consisted in distributing some office furniture and computers.</p> <p>10. Under Component 2, 99.6 per cent of the planned IVS were rehabilitated.⁷ However, the number of IVS Associations (IVSA) established was 158 against a target of 270 (achievement rate of 58 per cent). Overall, the rehabilitation of IVS, combined with the introduction of new high-yield crop varieties, contributed to increasing rice yields by 35 per cent in 2017 and by 65 per cent in 2018.⁸</p> <p>11. The implementation of activities under Component 3 allowed the creation of all the grass-roots financial institutions planned, namely 15 Financial Services Associations (FSAs) and four CBs;⁹ all of them gained access to the refinancing facility provided to the Apex Bank for loan capital provision. Overall, the direct beneficiaries of FSAs and CBs is estimated at 105 per cent of the target (45 per cent women and 38 per cent youth).</p> <p>12. Despite the poor results achieved under Component 1, the implementation of the other two technical components has allowed for some encouraging results in terms of increased access to financial services, profitability of FSAs and CBs and productivity growth. This is remarkable, considering the many problems faced and the resulting delays. However, the activities carried out were not sufficient to achieve the main project targets and development objective and for this reason, the PCRV rates project effectiveness as <i>moderately unsatisfactory (3)</i>, one point below the PCR.</p>	
Efficiency	
<p>13. Upon completion, SCP-GAFSP had mobilized 99.98 per cent of all resources allocated. The percentage of the GAFSP grant disbursed was 99.78 per cent. Contribution from the Government was lower than anticipated at 56.2 per cent. On the other hand, in-kind contributions from the beneficiaries has been higher than expected and utilized at 195.7 per cent. It should be recalled that disbursements picked up only after the end of 2016 when implementation actually started, and therefore such disbursement rate could only be achieved as a result of the three year extension granted. The analysis of actual disbursement by year shows that expenditures were consistently below budget throughout the project's life.</p> <p>14. Time from approval to entry into force was two months, which is less than the average for the West and Central Africa region (7.1 months) as well as the average for Sierra Leone (9.9 months).¹⁰ Time from entry into force to first disbursement of funds was four months, which is also below the average of the</p>	3

⁷ The original target of 4,000 ha was revised and reduced to 2,000 ha.

⁸ Source: IFAD. *Smallholder Commercialization Programme. Project Completion Report. Main report and appendices, par.58.*

⁹ In principle, the difference between FSAs and CBs is that FSAs cannot take deposits, whereas CBs can, and that CBs need to meet a minimum capital requirement of Le 1 million, whereas there is no such requirement for FSAs (Source: Independent Office of Evaluation. Republic of Sierra Leone. Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation. May 2020).

¹⁰ IFAD. Independent Office of Evaluation. Republic of Sierra Leone. Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation. May 2020.

PCR finding	Rating
<p>region (7.2 months) and for Sierra Leone (7.9 months). However, the validity of such comparisons is limited, given the different nature of the GASFP grant managed by IFAD compared to proper IFAD-funded loans, as well as the suspension of project delivery capacity until the end of 2016.</p> <p>15. The economic internal rate of return at completion is lower (10 per cent) than the value estimated at design (14.2 per cent). The net present value, discounted at 12 per cent, was estimated at US\$4.2 million at design, while it was of US\$23 million at completion, discounted at 5 per cent. The sensitivity analysis shows that the switching value benefits and costs would have to decrease by 37 per cent and increase by 58 per cent respectively, to have a negative net present value. However, it should be noted that the analysis did not capture benefits from the ABC, due to lack of available data.</p> <p>16. The programme management costs represented 21 per cent of the total project costs, which is higher than costs recorded for the RFCIP¹¹ (14 per cent) but lower than for the RCPRP¹² (24.6 per cent).</p> <p>17. According to the PCR, the high staff turnover rate of both technical staff and programme managers also affected project efficiency, given that the recruitment process of the technical staff was only concluded in mid-2017.</p> <p>18. Based on this assessment, and considering also the suspension decided by IFAD in 2014 in reaction to the presence of major fiduciary risks, the PCRV rates project efficiency as <i>moderately unsatisfactory</i> (3), in agreement with the PCR.</p>	
Rural poverty impact	
<p>19. The project's impact on rural poverty is assessed against the following four impact domains: (i) household incomes and assets; (ii) human and social capital and empowerment; (iii) food security and agricultural productivity; and (iv) institutions and policies. The data provided in the PCR is drawn from the "Final Impact Study". An adoption survey was conducted in December 2018, however there is no baseline to justify the comparison made between with- and without-project scenarios.</p> <p>20. Overall, the project exceeded the target of increasing farmers' incomes by 10 per cent. In particular, household incomes are estimated to have grown by 38 per cent for male-headed households and by 67 per cent for female-headed households involved in IVS production. On the contrary, for farmers involved in tree crop rehabilitation, the increase has been higher for male-headed households (57 per cent) than for female headed households (28 per cent), but the percentage is still well above the target. However, it is hard to measure these results, since the project did not collect baseline data on incomes.</p> <p>21. Overall, there is evidence that the project contributed to improving the human capital of beneficiaries, mainly through the provision of trainings on agronomic practices (through Farmer Field Schools - FFSs), business management, Gender Action Learning System (GALS), etc. The social capital was strengthened through the organization of farmers in FBOs and ABCs, which allowed for improved marketing capacity and bargaining power.</p> <p>22. When it comes to project impact on food security, the PCR provides anecdotal evidence of increased food availability among beneficiary households. On the other hand, the data provided by the Impact Study using estimates of the Food Consumption Score are only apparently positive and the PCR highlights that by using the double difference model, it was possible to conclude that project impact on consumption patterns was negligible.</p> <p>23. In terms of agricultural productivity, the PCR claims that IVS rehabilitation resulted in increased rice and vegetable production. The studies carried out on cocoa and rice and recalled by the PCR, show a yield increase of 22 per cent on average for cocoa farmers and of 21 per cent for IVS rehabilitation</p>	4

¹¹ The "Rural Finance and Community Improvement Programme" (RFCIP) was implemented from 2007 to 2014.

¹² The "Rehabilitation and Community-based Poverty Reduction Project" (RCPRP) was implemented from 2003 to 2017.

PCR finding	Rating
<p>beneficiaries.¹³ However, the impact on the reduction of post-harvest losses was insignificant and the target of a 20 per cent reduction was not fully achieved.</p> <p>24. In terms of institutions and policies, the PCR highlights the importance of establishing new Rural Financial Institutions to increase the presence of financial services in remote rural areas, even if the penetration rate remains low (15 per cent among project beneficiaries). Other effects reported are not relevant to this impact sub-domain.</p> <p>25. Based on the encouraging results in terms of increased incomes, productivity and human and social capital, but also taking into account the unsatisfactory results in terms of food security and improved access to rural financial services, the PCR rates project impact on rural poverty as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i>, one point below the PCR.</p>	
Sustainability of benefits	
<p>26. When assessing SCP-GAFSP sustainability, it should be recalled that AVDP,¹⁴ approved in December 2018, was conceived to consolidate SCP-GAFSP results by providing its beneficiaries, or at least part of them, with technical assistance and support to rice and tree crop marketing.</p> <p>27. Under the SCP-GAFSP smallholder farmers have received training in good agronomic practices and that training is expected to continue producing the corresponding benefits also after the project closure. However, according to the FAO Evaluation,¹⁵ very few farmers are adopting the technologies promoted because they are labour-intensive and farmers still don't have sufficient access to the financial resources needed to afford labour-saving equipment for both production and processing. As a result of the project failure to link ABCs to agro-dealers, farmers received insufficient access to quality inputs such as improved seeds and fertilizer, which hampered their efforts to maintain their initially high yields over the long run. Overall, for the ABCs and FBOs to become sustainable there is a need to continue supporting their governance structure, together with their marketing skills and business capacities.</p> <p>28. The SCP-GAFSP trained 316 youth contractors in IVS rehabilitation and maintenance. However, the impact of the Youth Contractor model on employment creation is not yet clear and the youth contractors seem to be mainly employed free of charge by their home communities. While the PCR mentions that nine service providers have been engaged by the German Agency for International Cooperation "for other work", without giving further details, the interviews conducted with Youth Contractors for the purpose of the IFAD Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation (CSPE) in Sierra Leone did not provide any evidence of paid employment opportunities outside their community.¹⁶ As a result, they had not earned any money apart from what they received from the project. On the other hand, the design of AVDP has included a potential solution to this situation by deciding to only support FBOs, cooperatives and small and medium enterprises in which at least 40 per cent of the members are young people.</p> <p>29. The PCR highlights that the training provided to Rural Financial Institutions and the Apex Bank ensured their sustainability; however, if that is true for the 19 FSAs, the inability of the Apex Bank to develop a credible banking model and strategy remains a threat to the sustainability of the entire Rural Financial Institution (RFI) network in the county. On the other hand, the average operational self-sufficiency rating for both FSAs and CBs has increased by more</p>	4

¹³ The data presented in the text are drawn from the PCR section on "Agricultural Productivity" (par. 72-74). However the PCR, in the "Most Significant Lessons Learned" section (page 3), presents the following data: "The adoption of improved farming practices increased across the board, resulting in some yield increases (51 per cent in cocoa and 41 per cent for IVS rice production in two cropping seasons, 2017 and 2018)".

¹⁴ The total cost of AVDP is US\$104.4 million of which IFAD finances US\$40.8 million and OPEC US\$20 million.

¹⁵ FAO. 2020. *Evaluation of FAO's contribution to the Smallholder Commercialisation Programme and to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme in Sierra Leone*. Project Evaluation Series, 07/2020. Rome.

¹⁶ IFAD. Independent Office of Evaluation. Republic of Sierra Leone. Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation, par. 139; and par. 189.

PCR finding	Rating
<p>than 20 per cent between 2018 and 2019, showing a promising trend in the supported institutions. The average operational self-sufficiency ratio of FSAs and CBs stands at more than 200 and 160 per cent respectively.</p> <p>30. An exit strategy is in place for groups engaged in tree crop production and IVS through the AVDP which is supposed to provide training and technical assistance to the SCP "legacy farmers" whereas no further investments are foreseen in the SCP-supported FBOs.</p> <p>31. In conclusion, there are various challenges that still need to be faced to ensure sustainability of project interventions and the AVDP has actually been entrusted the continuation of benefits derived from capacity-building and financial support. For these reasons, project sustainability is rated as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i>, in line with the PCR rating.</p>	
B. Other performance criteria	
Innovation	
<p>32. The PCR identifies two main innovations introduced by the SCP- GAFSP, namely the Youth Contractor model and the use of FFSs for tree crop farmers. However, such innovations are not entirely attributable to SCP-GAFSP, but are rather a perpetuation and reinterpretation of innovative practices already introduced by other projects/actors. In particular, the use of male and female youth as service providers in IVS rehabilitation and tree crops rehabilitation had been introduced as an innovation by the IFAD funded RCPRP,¹⁷ while the SCP-GAFSP actually continued this practice. According to the PCR, the implementation of this model generated employment opportunities for young rural people while strengthening their capacities to such a degree that they were also contracted by other NGOs and non-project farmers. However, there are no data to validate any possible impact of the Youth Contractor model on youth unemployment in targeted areas.</p> <p>33. With regard to FFS approach, this was certainly not new to the context of Sierra Leone when the SCP-GAFSP came in, but it is true that it was only focused on food crop production, while the SCP-GAFSP was innovative in replicating the FFS approach with tree crops. The PCR mentions that tree crop FFS is being transferred to IFAD projects in Liberia and will be expanded by the AVDP by incorporating training in post-harvest value change and plantation management modules.</p> <p>34. Finally, the PCR also mentions as an innovation the use of electronic data collection tools (Open Data Kit) that replaced the paper-based forms; the use of Open Data Kit for data collection brought several benefits, such as real-time data collection, less chance of data loss and errors and data collection position recording.</p> <p>35. On balance, in consideration of the project's capacity to continue and adapt existing innovative practices to the local context and specific needs, the PCR rates innovation as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i>, in line with the PCR.</p>	4
Scaling up	
<p>36. The PCR assesses scaling-up of project interventions by describing the types of support that the AVDP will provide to the same target groups of SCP-GAFSP, although in other areas of the country. The AVDP scales up and improves the intervention model developed under the SCP-GAFSP, but with some innovations in order to strengthen integration of the selected value chains and boost the impact on nutrition and food security. In other cases presented by the PCR as examples of scaling up, there has been actually more replication than scaling up like for instance the new cocoa nurseries or the rehabilitation techniques that are now applied to non-rehabilitated areas or extended to non-project farmers.</p> <p>37. On the contrary, a clear example of scaling up which is not mentioned by the PCR is the youth contractor strategy that has been adopted by MAF and used in a</p>	4

¹⁷ Rehabilitation and Community-based Poverty Reduction Project.

PCR finding	Rating
<p>number of other projects in Sierra Leone, such as the Agricultural Sector Rehabilitation Project of the African Development Bank or the Linking Farmers to Market project.¹⁸</p> <p>38. In conclusion, considering on the one hand that the intention of the new AVDP project is to scale up (but also innovate) the intervention model developed under the SCP-GAFSP, but also, on the other hand, that the Youth Contractor model is the only concrete example of scaling up of a project activity, this PCRV rates scaling up as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i>, in agreement with the PCR rating.</p>	
Gender equality and women's empowerment	
<p>39. The SCP-GAFSP design document paid much attention to mainstreaming gender issues across project components; the document set quotas for women's participation (50 per cent) and indicates specific extension services for women and specific measures for the promotion of RFI services for women's groups. The GALS methodology¹⁹ was the main tool used by the SCP-GAFSP to mainstream gender and youth across project components. The GALS was piloted under both the RCPRP and the RFCIP-II project and linked to climate-related issues and loan application processes respectively.</p> <p>40. Overall, 36 per cent of the total beneficiaries were women and 27 per cent were youth. Women direct beneficiaries under FBOs represented 40 per cent and youth 45 per cent, while in the ABCs they accounted for 45 and 48 per cent respectively. Similar percentages are recorded for beneficiaries of IVS rehabilitation. On the other hand, the target of having a female participation of 25 per cent in the PMU staff was not achieved.</p> <p>41. Through the GALS approach, project staff were trained together with community facilitators, who then trained community members. As part of the Gender Action Plan, over 3,500 project participants were trained. However, there are no data on the percentages of women participants in specific training courses. According to the PCR, the introduction of GALS methodology at FFS, FBO and ABC level has helped not only to strengthen participants' understanding of gender issues, but also to increase women's participation in FBO and ABC governance structures and in decision-making at all levels. Furthermore, by targeting value chains in which women are highly represented, such as rice, vegetables and groundnut, the SCP-GAFSP has helped women to engage in new economic opportunities and increase their incomes, contributing to improve households' food security.</p> <p>42. Overall, the SCP-GAFSP had a strong gender focus, both at design and implementation level, and the effort to mainstream gender across the range of activities implemented is undeniable, as also reflected by the setting up of a Gender Youth and Targeting Unit which helped in increasing the project focus on women and youth, and in better adapting to the needs of women and youth beneficiaries. Thanks to this effort, the positive impact in terms of equal voice, economic empowerment and more equitable domestic workload of women beneficiaries has been widely acknowledged, despite the lack of gender-disaggregated data. In conclusion, despite not having achieved the overall expected outreach for women (36 of beneficiaries at completion instead of 50 per cent), project impact on gender equality and women's empowerment is deemed as <i>satisfactory (5)</i> by this PCRV, in agreement with the PCR.</p>	5
Environment and natural resources management	
<p>43. The rehabilitation of cocoa and planting of new oil palm and cashew plantations was carried out by using degraded secondary bush areas instead of clearing new forest areas, with the result of minimizing the environmental impact related to IVS development. However, no data have been collected on the additional swamp areas cleared. The PCR recalls the positive, even if unintended, side-effects of IVS deriving from the reduction of slash-and-burn practices in upland cultivations.</p>	4

¹⁸ Source: CSPE Sierra Leone, par. 207.

¹⁹ The GALS is a community-led methodology which aims to give women and men more control over their lives in an equitable manner. It was firstly piloted in western Uganda by Oxfam Novib in 2009, co-financed with a small IFAD grant.

PCR finding	Rating
<p>44. The good agronomic practices promoted by SCP-GAFSP, such as mulching, rejuvenation, intercropping with annual crops (rice and ground nuts), were of significance both in terms of climate change mitigation and increased dietary diversity. Regrettably, no data have been collected to demonstrate any possible effect on household consumption patterns.</p> <p>45. Given the above, environment and natural resources management are rated as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i> by the PCRV, in alignment with the PCR.</p>	
Adaptation to Climate Change	
<p>46. According to the PCR, IVS development is the project intervention with the highest climate adaptation potential. When IVS are well-managed they contribute to mitigate climate change impacts through improved water management and improved agricultural practices, reducing farmers vulnerability to extreme climatic events such as droughts and flooding, while contributing to increased production and, ultimately, household incomes. However, the actual impact of IVS was lower than expected due to halving of targets, both in terms of hectares of land rehabilitated and IVS associations created. In order to fully develop the untapped potential of IVS, the largest share of the AVDP budget will be devoted to the development of the IVS for double or triple cropping of rice, according to Government's priorities.</p> <p>47. Following the examples of previous IFAD funded operations, the project provided IVS farmers with a shorter-cycle, higher-yield variety of upland rice seeds that are more climate resilient than the traditional rice varieties and can significantly boost both income and nutrition of farmers, as long as they remain available</p> <p>48. The tree crop plantations developed are a potential solution for coupling climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration, and economic development through supplying of marketable non-wood products (palm oil, cocoa and cashew) for national and international markets.</p> <p>49. It is undeniable that small-scale irrigation works (IVS) contributed to increase farmers' resilience to climate change-related risks, in addition to increasing agricultural productivity. However, the impact is limited in scale and difficult to quantify, due to the lack of relevant data, apart from yield increases which in any case did not exceed the targets set. Some issues are yet to be addressed, such as the need to provide continued training and technical support to IVS farmers to maintain water control structures, as well as granting access to labour-saving equipment to achieve sustainable intensification of production, especially in the case of rice. In light of the above, the PCRV rates adaptation to climate change as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i>, in line with the PCR rating.</p>	4
C. Overall Project Achievement	
<p>50. The design of the SCP-GAFSP included a range of interventions meant to boost agricultural productivity, promote commercialization and increase income diversification, but the overall impact was lower than expected, with particular regard to the value chains development.</p> <p>51. The project focused so much on production that it has not done enough to support agricultural marketing; it has also failed to carry out comprehensive value chain analyses to steer the support provided to ABCs and develop a holistic approach to value chain development in order to effectively engage the private sector in supporting small farmers' competitiveness. In particular, while most of the support has gone to ABCs, the project was not successful in creating linkages with agro-dealers. At completion, the ABCs still remain at an early stage of development and require additional support for strengthening their governance structure and their business approach.</p> <p>52. The FFS/FBO/ABC model was overall successful and is reportedly now being used as the extension model all across the country; although, the SCP-GAFSP experience shows that this model needs to be further adapted and improved to</p>	4

PCR finding	Rating
<p>fit context-specific challenges, such as lack of quality inputs and labour-saving technologies, limited extension capacities and lack of access to financial services.</p> <p>53. With regard to FBOs, the project was not successful in linking FBOs specialized in tree crops with ABCs, since most of the existing ABCs are focused on rice production. As a result, in many cases tree crop farmers that had received FFS training and had created an FBO, were not able to find an ABC that could support them in marketing their (possibly increased) crop production.</p> <p>54. Despite the establishment of a network of more than 70 FSAs and CBs, access to financing remains one of the major challenges that targeted smallholder farmers are confronted with. Few financial institutions such as Apex Bank, offer financing with exorbitantly high interest rates, varying on average annually between 24 and 32 per cent. This issue has been considered in the design of the AVDP project, through the provision of a matching grant scheme to increase financial inclusion and facilitate investment in production infrastructure to boost productivity.</p> <p>55. In conclusion, the PCRV acknowledges that the project had an impact on human, social and institutional capacities through the provision of various types of training; similarly, IVS rehabilitation increased production and productivity and contributed to increased food availability (rice) and higher incomes (tree crop). On the other hand, the improvement in agricultural productivity has been constrained by insufficient access to inputs, equipment and labour and the project failed to improve commercialization through access to agro-dealers and value chain development. Based on this assessment, and considering also the many challenges faced during implementation, the PCRV rates the overall project achievement as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i> just as the PCR rating.</p>	
D. Performance of Partners	
IFAD	
<p>56. During the eight years of implementation, IFAD has carried out nine supervision missions, three implementation support missions and one mid-term review for a total of 13 missions. According to the PCR, the many implementation challenges were managed by the Country Office set up by IFAD in Freetown in 2013 and staffed with a country programme officer handling Liberia and Sierra Leone. The project, together with the country programme, benefitted from the relocation of the country programme manager to the Abidjan Hub in 2018 as part of the Fund's decentralization, allowing for greater engagement with the MAF and the Ministry of Finance to address implementation bottlenecks. On the other hand, IFAD provided trainings on the Results and Impact Management System, Procurement and Financial Management and assisted in the development of the annual work plan and budget and procurement plans.</p> <p>57. During the Ebola emergency, although IFAD had to suspend its supervision activities due to movement restrictions, implementation continued on a smaller scale, and the Fund duly provided no-cost extensions services to relaunch project activities that could not be implemented during that crisis.</p> <p>58. Based on the above, IFAD performance is rated as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i>, in agreement with the PCR.</p>	4
Government	
<p>59. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry was the lead implementation agency for SCP-GAFSP; the project management was initially entrusted to the National Programme Coordination Unit that was already implementing the RCPRP and the RFCIP; then, in August 2012, the deployment of the PMU took place. According to the findings of the 2019 CSPE, the transfer of responsibility from the National Programme Coordination Unit to the PMU was not effectively managed, generating financial management issues that led to the first project suspension.</p> <p>60. The PMU's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities have mainly been limited to tracking inputs and outputs, with little progress being made in assessing outcomes, and insufficient use has been made of the data for steering decision-</p>	3

PCR finding	Rating
<p>making and improving learning. The PCR highlights the lack of availability of the necessary human and material resources to support the creation of an M&E and knowledge management culture.</p> <p>61. Despite being fully committed to achieving IFAD's development objectives, actual contributions by the Government have been lower than projected at the design stage. Based on available documentation, the PCR assesses this impact domain as <i>moderately unsatisfactory (3)</i>, one point below the PCR rating.</p>	

IV. Assessment of PCR quality

PCR finding	Rating
Scope	
<p>62. All the chapters, sections and annexes required by the Guidelines for Project Completion Review, 2015 have been included by the PCR. However, the narrative is burdened by many pages of tables which should have been summarized in the main report and rather included in the Annexes in their full version. Overall, the PCR scope is rated as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i>.</p>	4
Quality	
<p>63. The completion review process saw the participation of various stakeholders. A wrap up meeting was held in September 2019 with government staff and representatives from various organisations to present the draft PCR and discuss successes and failures of project implementation.</p> <p>64. According to the PCR, the assessment of SCP-GAFSP builds on a good M&E system articulated at district level and for which adequate training and resources were provided. In addition, to regular monitoring and reporting, the project conducted thematic studies for example on cocoa and rice yields, to provide additional information on project outcomes. However, gender- and age-disaggregated data have not been systematically collected and reported.</p> <p>65. Overall, the quality of the PCR is not very satisfactory: the assessment of project performance suffers from a lack of analytical focus which makes the narrative merely descriptive far too often. Much of the report is poorly written and therefore difficult to read, and the narrative is quite often redundant. In conclusion, the quality of the PCR is rated as <i>moderately satisfactory (4)</i>.</p>	4
Lessons	
<p>66. The PCR includes a list of lessons learned from the project, mainly focussing on key facts and findings but without providing much analysis.</p> <p>67. One relevant lesson drawn concerns the access to rural financial services: despite establishing a network of over 70 FSAs and CBs in rural areas through IFAD support, access to reliable and sustainable financial services for the rural poor remains a major issue, owing to lack of capitalization of the RFI network. The PCR identifies a matching grant scheme as the best solution to lower the interest rate paid by the beneficiaries and increase financial inclusion.</p> <p>68. Other lessons that are worth mentioning are on the need for IFAD to focus on creating and strengthening the linkages among the various value chains actors for improved processing and marketing, as well as enhancing country-level policy dialogue in order to bring about the necessary reforms such as the rice import policy, the agricultural input policy and agricultural finance policy. Based on the above, the lessons drawn by the PCR are rated as <i>satisfactory (5)</i>.</p>	5
Candour	
<p>69. The PCR narrative sometimes is too generous in the ratings attributed to performance criteria in comparison with the actual results achieved. The PCR would have benefitted from paying more attention to the analysis of the root causes, impacts and possible solutions to the various design and implementation</p>	4

<p>issues identified. For this reason, the PCR process had to include the review of various additional documents to offset this gap.</p> <p>70. Moreover, the text presents a number of inconsistencies and contradictions, such as, for instance, the assessment of IFAD performance which is rated as moderately satisfactory (4) in the ratings matrix, but is then rated as satisfactory (5) in the PCR narrative. Based on the weaknesses described, the PCR candour is deemed <i>moderately satisfactory</i> (4).</p>	
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V. Final remarks

<p>Issues for IOE follow up (if any)</p>
<p>No issues have been identified for follow up by IOE.</p>

Definition and rating of the evaluation criteria used by IOE

Criteria	Definition *	Mandatory	To be rated
Rural poverty impact	Impact is defined as the changes that have occurred or are expected to occur in the lives of the rural poor (whether positive or negative, direct or indirect, intended or unintended) as a result of development interventions.	X	Yes
	<i>Four impact domains</i>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Household income and net assets: Household income provides a means of assessing the flow of economic benefits accruing to an individual or group, whereas assets relate to a stock of accumulated items of economic value. The analysis must include an assessment of trends in equality over time. 		No
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human and social capital and empowerment: Human and social capital and empowerment include an assessment of the changes that have occurred in the empowerment of individuals, the quality of grass-roots organizations and institutions, the poor's individual and collective capacity, and in particular, the extent to which specific groups such as youth are included or excluded from the development process. 		No
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food security and agricultural productivity: Changes in food security relate to availability, stability, affordability and access to food and stability of access, whereas changes in agricultural productivity are measured in terms of yields; nutrition relates to the nutritional value of food and child malnutrition. 		No
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutions and policies: The criterion relating to institutions and policies is designed to assess changes in the quality and performance of institutions, policies and the regulatory framework that influence the lives of the poor. 		No
Project performance	Project performance is an average of the ratings for relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of benefits.	X	Yes
Relevance	The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, institutional priorities and partner and donor policies. It also entails an assessment of project design and coherence in achieving its objectives. An assessment should also be made of whether objectives and design address inequality, for example, by assessing the relevance of targeting strategies adopted.	X	Yes
Effectiveness	The extent to which the development intervention's objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.	X	Yes
Efficiency	A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted into results.	X	Yes
Sustainability of benefits	The likely continuation of net benefits from a development intervention beyond the phase of external funding support. It also includes an assessment of the likelihood that actual and anticipated results will be resilient to risks beyond the project's life.	X	Yes
Other performance criteria			
Gender equality and women's empowerment	The extent to which IFAD interventions have contributed to better gender equality and women's empowerment, for example, in terms of women's access to and ownership of assets, resources and services; participation in decision making; work load balance and impact on women's incomes, nutrition and livelihoods.	X	Yes
Innovation	The extent to which IFAD development interventions have introduced innovative approaches to rural poverty reduction.	X	Yes
Scaling up	The extent to which IFAD development interventions have been (or are likely to be) scaled up by government authorities, donor organizations, the private sector and others agencies.	X	Yes
Environment and natural resources management	The extent to which IFAD development interventions contribute to resilient livelihoods and ecosystems. The focus is on the use and management of the natural environment, including natural resources defined as raw materials used for socio-economic and cultural purposes, and ecosystems and biodiversity - with the goods and services they provide.	X	Yes
Adaptation to climate change	The contribution of the project to reducing the negative impacts of climate change through dedicated adaptation or risk reduction measures.	X	Yes

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Definition</i> *	<i>Mandatory</i>	<i>To be rated</i>
Overall project achievement	This provides an overarching assessment of the intervention, drawing upon the analysis and ratings for rural poverty impact, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability of benefits, gender equality and women's empowerment, innovation, scaling up, as well as environment and natural resources management, and adaptation to climate change.	X	Yes
Performance of partners			
• IFAD	This criterion assesses the contribution of partners to project design, execution, monitoring and reporting, supervision and implementation support, and evaluation. The performance of each partner will be assessed on an individual basis with a view to the partner's expected role and responsibility in the project life cycle.	X	Yes
• Government		X	Yes

* These definitions build on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management; the Methodological Framework for Project Evaluation agreed with the Evaluation Committee in September 2003; the first edition of the Evaluation Manual discussed with the Evaluation Committee in December 2008; and further discussions with the Evaluation Committee in November 2010 on IOE's evaluation criteria and key questions.

Rating comparison^a

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Programme Management Department (PMD) rating</i>	<i>IOE Project Completion Report Validation (PCR) rating</i>	<i>Net rating disconnect (PCR-PMD)</i>
Rural poverty impact	5	4	-1
Project performance			
Relevance	5	4	-1
Effectiveness	4	3	-1
Efficiency	3	3	0
Sustainability of benefits	4	4	0
Project performance^b	4	3.5	0.5
Other performance criteria			
Gender equality and women's empowerment	5	5	0
Innovation	4	4	0
Scaling up	4	4	0
Environment and natural resources management	4	4	0
Adaptation to climate change	4	4	0
Overall project achievement^c	4	4	0
Performance of partners^d			
IFAD	4	4	0
Government	4	3	-1
Average net disconnect			-0.33

^a Rating scale: 1 = highly unsatisfactory; 2 = unsatisfactory; 3 = moderately unsatisfactory; 4 = moderately satisfactory; 5 = satisfactory; 6 = highly satisfactory; n.p. = not provided; n.a. = not applicable.

^b Arithmetic average of ratings for relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of benefits.

^c This is not an average of ratings of individual evaluation criteria but an overarching assessment of the project, drawing upon the rating for relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability of benefits, rural poverty impact, gender, innovation, scaling up, environment and natural resources management, and adaptation to climate change.

^d The rating for partners' performance is not a component of the overall project achievement rating.

Ratings of the project completion report quality

	<i>PMD rating</i>	<i>IOE PCR rating</i>	<i>Net disconnect</i>
Candour	n.a.	4	n.a.
Lessons	n.a.	5	n.a.
Quality (methods, data, participatory process)	n.a.	4	n.a.
Scope	n.a.	4	n.a.
Overall rating of the project completion report		4	

Rating scale: 1 = highly unsatisfactory; 2 = unsatisfactory; 3 = moderately unsatisfactory; 4 = moderately satisfactory; 5 = satisfactory; 6 = highly satisfactory; n.p. = not provided; n.a. = not applicable.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABC	Agricultural Business Centre
AVDP	Agricultural Value Chain Development Project
CB	Community Bank
CSPE	Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FBO	Farmer Based Organization
FFS	Farmer Field School
FSA	Financial Service Association
GAFFSP	Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
IVS	Inland Valley Swamps
IVSA	Inland Valley Swamps Associations
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NSADP	National Sustainable Development Plan 2010-2030
PMU	Project Management Unit
RCPRP	Rehabilitation and Community-based Poverty Reduction Project
RFCIP	Rural Finance and Community Improvement Programme
RFI	Rural Finance Institutions
SCP	Smallholder Commercialisation Programme

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