
Republic of Zimbabwe

Country strategy and programme evaluation

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Action: The Evaluation Committee is invited to review the country strategy and programme evaluation for the Republic of Zimbabwe.

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Executive summary

A. Background

1. Following approval by IFAD's Executive Board at its 143rd session in December 2024, the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) conducted a country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) in the Republic of Zimbabwe, in accordance with the IFAD Evaluation Policy (2021) and guided by the IFAD Evaluation Manual (2022).
2. **Scope.** This CSPE examined IFAD's engagement in Zimbabwe over the period 2016–2025, covering the country strategy note published in 2016 and the country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) 2020–2025. The evaluation included three projects, with total financing of US\$187.7 million, of which IFAD provided US\$98.3 million. The full scope of IFAD's support was reviewed, including its strategic orientation, lending operations and non-lending activities (knowledge management, partnerships, policy engagement and grants). The evaluation applied criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact on rural poverty, gender equality and women's empowerment, sustainability, climate change adaptation and performance of partners (IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe).
3. **Objectives.** The main objectives of the CSPE were to (i) assess the results and performance of the IFAD strategy during the period 2016–2025; and (ii) identify key findings and formulate recommendations for the future partnership between IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe for enhanced development effectiveness and rural poverty eradication. The findings, lessons and recommendations from this CSPE will inform the next COSOP for Zimbabwe.
4. **Country context.** In 2024, Zimbabwe's population was estimated at 16.634 million and was growing at an annual rate of 1.91 per cent. Approximately two thirds of the population live in rural areas. Zimbabwe is classified as a lower-middle-income country, with a GDP per capita of US\$2,497 in 2024. The country is endowed with significant natural resources. Nevertheless, it is considered highly fragile owing to economic, institutional and social vulnerabilities. Drivers of fragility include policy instability, international sanctions, high debt and arrears, corruption, weak service delivery and climate shocks, and these drivers have been exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Persistent macroeconomic challenges (including high unemployment, fiscal pressures, liquidity shortages and a shrinking tax base) continue to undermine development, contributing to rising poverty (estimated to affect 37.7 per cent of the population in 2024). Food security remains a concern, with the country classified in the "serious" hunger category on the Global Hunger Index. Women, who represent 52 per cent of the total population, form the majority of smallholder farmers (61 per cent), and youth, who make up nearly half of the population, face limited economic opportunities. Agriculture remains dominated by small-scale, rainfed farming, which is highly vulnerable to climate change, with low productivity and weak market access.
5. **IFAD in Zimbabwe.** Between 1983 and 2005, IFAD financed five projects in Zimbabwe. During this initial phase of engagement, a COSOP was approved in 1998. In 2005, IFAD suspended its financial assistance due to the country's accumulation of arrears, resulting in the closure of three ongoing projects and a 10-year interruption of IFAD operations in Zimbabwe. Following the Executive Board's approval of the country's debt rescheduling plan in December 2015, IFAD re-engaged with Zimbabwe and published a country strategy note covering the period 2016–2018 (later extended to 2019), under which one project was approved in 2016. Subsequently, in July 2020, the Executive Board approved the COSOP for the period 2020–2025 (later extended to December 2026), under which two additional projects were approved. IFAD has not established a country office in

Zimbabwe. Programme oversight was managed from Rome until 2018 and thereafter from the multi-country office based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Since re-engagement, five country directors have overseen the portfolio. To strengthen IFAD's in-country presence, a local consultant was engaged and has been working in Zimbabwe since 2015. IFAD's primary government counterpart is the former Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, which coordinates the implementation of project and programme activities through a joint management unit (JMU) based in Harare.

B. Main findings

6. **Relevance** is assessed as moderately satisfactory. IFAD's programme was strongly aligned with both Zimbabwe's national development priorities and policies and IFAD's own strategic objectives. Projects were effective in addressing smallholder farmers' priority needs, which were identified through participatory processes. The programme applied a mix of geographical, direct and self-targeting approaches, supported by community-based mechanisms. These approaches were well suited to Zimbabwe's context, which is characterized by uneven poverty patterns. Direct targeting enhanced outreach to intended poor populations, while enabling measures strengthened the inclusion of women. However, efforts to enhance youth inclusion were less successful, particularly within irrigation schemes. Strategic documents were contextually sound at design, although technical gaps were identified in some areas, including irrigation, rural finance and market access. Adaptive design changes responded appropriately to evolving conditions, but some adjustments contributed to implementation delays. Institutional and decentralized implementation arrangements were generally appropriate, despite some complexity, and partner selection for rural finance and market access was suitable.
7. **Coherence** is assessed as satisfactory. There was a clear effort to ensure internal consistency within the IFAD portfolio and to generate synergies across projects. Portfolio projects employed complementary approaches to enhance synergies, and the national JMU was established to strengthen internal coherence and facilitate smooth transitions between projects. The grant programme was relevant in addressing key constraints related to markets and productivity through improved market linkages, post-harvest infrastructure and opportunities for practical learning. However, the coherence of some grants was weakened by institutional and implementation challenges. IFAD's comparative advantage in promoting inclusive smallholder economic growth, strengthening climate resilience and empowering communities was evident. IFAD also actively engaged in various coordination mechanisms to strengthen collaboration and alignment. The evaluation found weaknesses in government-led agricultural coordination structures, which received limited IFAD support.
8. **Knowledge management** is assessed as satisfactory. IFAD developed and disseminated various knowledge products, in line with the knowledge management framework set out in the COSOP. A substantial number of knowledge products and mechanisms were initiated at the national level and were found to be largely relevant to their intended audiences. However, at the subnational level, there were only a few formal knowledge-sharing mechanisms beyond routine reporting. At the community level, several knowledge-sharing mechanisms were implemented. Moreover, the programme made significant progress in implementing South-South and Triangular Cooperation. The portfolio projects adopted a structured monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework and deployed digital tools that emphasized the integration of M&E and knowledge management. However, projects experienced notable challenges in operationalizing their M&E systems. Evidence suggests that knowledge management and M&E outputs were used to strengthen learning across the country programme.
9. **Partnership development** is assessed as moderately satisfactory. IFAD applied a prudent, relevant and proactive partnership approach, anchored in strong strategic

engagement with the Government and shaped through consultative processes. Operational partnerships with government entities enhanced implementation supports and strengthened the capacity of parastatal and decentralized institutions to support rural communities. IFAD made efforts to mobilize cofinancing, with notable successes, although opportunities for joint programming were missed. Uneven progress was achieved in strengthening collaboration among the Rome-based agencies. Partnerships with other United Nations agencies, apart from the United Nations Office for Project Services, were also limited. Efforts to encourage engagement between private sector actors and smallholders, through farmer–company relationships, were often unbalanced. Collaboration with research institutions focused primarily on innovation. NGO and civil society partnerships remained limited.

10. **Policy engagement** is assessed as satisfactory. IFAD actively promoted policy dialogue on a range of topics, including irrigation reform, gender equality, social inclusion, market innovation, food systems transformation, and nutrition and biofortification. It leveraged its strategic positioning and relationships with key ministries, including those responsible for agriculture and finance, and platforms like the Agricultural Food Security Pillar and the Irrigation Working Group. Policy engagement contributed to tangible results under the national Agriculture and Food Systems Transformation Strategy and in irrigation development, food and nutrition security, biofortification, and horticulture recovery. However, outcomes were constrained by limited resources, as IFAD’s support for country-level policy engagement was primarily project based, with no dedicated budget for broader policy initiatives.
11. **Effectiveness** is assessed as moderately satisfactory. The programme had reached 56,181 rural households at the time of the evaluation (equivalent to an average outreach level of 53 per cent). Outreach remained below the target level, largely due to delays in implementing ongoing projects. Youth participation consistently fell short of expectations. Engagement of other vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities and landless people, proved difficult, and evidence of their effective participation remained limited. The portfolio contributed to measurable and sustained increases in agricultural productivity, particularly under rehabilitated irrigation schemes (e.g. maize yields in irrigated plots quadrupled). Improved water availability and the adoption of the block system approach were key drivers of productivity gains. Although water points and village business unit (VBU) gardens improved access and production reliability, gains remained fragile due to poor water management, increasing competition over scarce water resources, weaknesses in planting calendars, inadequate maintenance practices, siltation and recurrent pump failures. Despite capacity-building support, irrigation management committees often struggled to oversee newly developed infrastructure. Positive progress was observed in strengthening climate-resilient smallholder agriculture, and trainings facilitated the uptake of climate-smart practices (conservation agriculture, mulching, crop rotation and intercropping). Nonetheless, resilience gains were constrained by limited livelihood diversification beyond cropping, insufficient technical assistance and weak alignment with agroecological conditions. Overall adaptive capacity improved, mainly as a result of irrigation rehabilitation coupled with the application of climate-smart practices.
12. IFAD-supported interventions strengthened upstream segments of selected value chains, and an explicit value chain orientation gradually became systematic, with aggregation via VBUs and support for value addition and food processing. However, strengthening of downstream segments was hindered by insufficient market linkages, leaving producers exposed to localized gluts, particularly for perishable horticultural crops. Private sector engagement evolved from ad hoc arrangements to a more deliberate, though incomplete, approach for effective market integration of smallholders. Delays in irrigation scheme completion, the absence of dedicated

business development services and contracting challenges limited the depth and continuity of partnerships with private actors. Access to finance expanded mainly through internal savings and lending schemes, together with efforts to improve financial literacy and lay the foundations for inclusion. However, access to formal financial services remained limited, as did productive investment, owing to design weaknesses, capacity gaps and macroeconomic challenges. Capacity strengthening improved water governance, as irrigation management committees became more credible in managing water, operations and production planning.

13. **Innovation** is assessed as satisfactory. The Zimbabwe country programme helped to foster technological, institutional and social innovations that addressed water scarcity, climate stress and malnutrition among smallholders. Most initiatives adapted proven solutions to local agroecological and social contexts, rather than introducing entirely new approaches. Entry-point innovations included hydrogel soil conditioning, block farming, chameleon soil moisture sensors and the *Pfumvudza* approach to conservation agriculture, supported by biofortification of crops, keyhole gardens and nutrition-sensitive recipes. Institutional models such as Farming as a Business (FaaB) and VBUs linked community production with markets, while block farming reduced fragmentation through coordinated production. Efforts to scale up the use of the hydrogel technology failed due to weak institutional anchoring and market links. Conversely, the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) was scaled up and has contributed to improved conditions for women (see below).
14. **Efficiency** is assessed as moderately unsatisfactory. Operational efficiency across the three projects reviewed showed a deteriorating trend, with effectiveness lags declining from the earliest to the most recent project. Disbursement performance across the portfolio remained low and was constrained by design weaknesses, limited implementation readiness, cumbersome internal procedures and delays in operationalizing key components. The Smallholder Irrigation Revitalization Programme (SIRP) required two extensions, totalling 11 months, to complete pending activities. Under both SIRP and the Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project, project management costs slightly exceeded initial estimates but stayed within IFAD ceilings. Capacity gaps in procurement and financial management persisted, audit submissions were delayed and internal controls were weak. Economically, actual unit costs were lower than projected, and SIRP remained viable, although actual returns failed to meet expectations.
15. **Rural poverty impact** is assessed as moderately satisfactory. Regarding income and assets, there are indications that SIRP likely contributed positively to household income growth and productive asset accumulation. Field visits confirmed increased cropping intensity and production and modest livelihood diversification, especially in rehabilitated irrigation schemes. Income gains were partially reinvested in productive and household assets. These positive changes were uneven, however, due to infrastructure constraints and high transport costs. Food security and nutrition improved markedly among participating households, particularly irrigators, as nutrition training diversified diets and increased production of nutrient-rich crops. Women's dietary diversity expanded significantly, although targets were unmet. Human and social capital were strengthened through institutional development, gender-transformative approaches and improved water hygiene. SIRP also reinforced local irrigation governance and contributed to national irrigation and gender policy reforms. Overall, SIRP contributed to numerous positive changes, although the robustness of impact data was insufficient.
16. **Gender equality and women's empowerment** are assessed as satisfactory. Country strategy documents for Zimbabwe showed clear progress on gender integration. Project designs were informed by robust gender analyses that identified interconnected barriers to women's participation and translated them into

targeted, sometimes transformative, responses. During implementation, portfolio projects consistently applied gender-transformative approaches, notably through the systematic roll-out of GALS. Women's participation quotas were largely met, and measurable gains were achieved in women's involvement in decision-making, leadership and economic empowerment. GALS helped to improve communication within the households, promote fairer distribution of labour, reduce household conflict and encourage more collaborative farming practices. Labour-saving technologies reduced women's workloads and supported changes in norms. However, in many places, entrenched norms, unequal access to land and assets, women's heavy workloads and traditional social structures constrained broader transformative results.

17. **Sustainability** is assessed as moderately satisfactory. Strong participation and ownership were evident among SIRP participants. Some VBUs and irrigation schemes, especially in remote areas, faced limited market access and capital needs beyond local capacity. While routine management improved, risks persisted in relation to financial contributions, skills retention and long-term governance. Financial and economic sustainability benefited from market-oriented models, formalized producers' groups and development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, but was undermined by high recurrent costs, macroeconomic instability and weak engagement with formal financial services. Technically, solar pumping and climate-smart practices proved sound, but costly repairs required external support. Institutional sustainability was supported by strong government ownership, despite persistent resource and capacity constraints.
18. **Scaling up** is assessed as satisfactory. Although none of the projects developed explicit scaling up strategies, the programme demonstrated very good scaling results, driven mainly by government action. The FaaB model advanced towards national scaling up and was integrated by the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development into extension training, irrigation schemes and block farming systems. Through policy dialogues in 2023–2024, GALS evolved from a SIRP pilot into a nationally recognized gender-transformative tool, and the Government has committed to embedding it in its forthcoming Gender in Agriculture Policy, supported by IFAD, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Gully reclamation, lead farmer models and nutrition gardens were also scaled up nationally.
19. **Environment and natural resources management and climate change adaptation** are assessed as moderately satisfactory. Environment and natural resources management were systematically integrated across the portfolio, guided by the 2020 COSOP's focus on climate resilience and community-based national resources management and operationalized through IFAD's Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures. Design stage environmental and climate analyses were comprehensive and shaped environmental and social management plans, catchment rehabilitation, soil and water conservation, climate-smart agriculture and climate-proofed infrastructure. Projects delivered localized ecosystem improvements through institutionalized safeguards and strong community ownership, reinforced by visible short-term benefits. Intensification of irrigated schemes introduced risks, including salinization, waterlogging and pollution, which were mitigated through integrated pest management training, safe handling practices and approved environmental and social management plans. Constraints to stronger outcomes were mainly institutional and included weak enforcement of the regulations, limited monitoring capacity and financing gaps, despite a technically coherent climate resilience approach.
20. **IFAD performance** is assessed as satisfactory. IFAD re-established itself as a credible and trusted partner in Zimbabwe's smallholder agriculture following its 2015 re-engagement after a prolonged suspension. It is recognized as a neutral

leader in nutrition-sensitive and climate-resilient agriculture, supporting institutional recovery through sustained engagement. IFAD's portfolio has maintained a coherent focus on irrigation rehabilitation, commercialization, nutrition and climate-smart agriculture, while providing sound strategic oversight. Knowledge management and policy engagement improved, although dissemination remained largely national. Extensive consultations underpinned strategies and projects, but design gaps persisted, in particular underestimation of complexity and capacity constraints. Operational performance improved incrementally, but systemic fiduciary, coordination, macroeconomic and climate-related challenges continued to constrain efficiency, despite the implementation of adaptive risk management measures.

21. **Government performance** is assessed as moderately satisfactory. The Government of Zimbabwe demonstrated strong strategic commitment to IFAD-supported programmes, with the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion coordinating aid and the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development supporting replication of successful approaches and refining delivery for smallholders. Despite this, government contributions fell short in some cases, such as under SIRP, limiting the availability of cash for works and services. Government staff engaged actively at the provincial and district levels, ensuring integration through secondments, while project steering committees functioned relatively effectively, although they failed to include some key stakeholders. Early implementation suffered from project management unit delays and staffing gaps. Gradual improvements occurred in operational coordination, M&E, fiduciary management and procurement, although problems – including systemic delays, weak contract management, exchange rate volatility, issues regarding value-added tax (VAT) exemptions and audit backlogs – persisted.

C. Conclusions

22. After a decade of suspension of activities due to debt arrears, IFAD re-engaged positively with the Government of Zimbabwe in 2015 by orienting strategic investment to rehabilitate irrigation schemes. The period evaluated (2016–2025) was characterized by a volatile and generally unfavourable macroeconomic environment, including debt distress and inflation spikes, and by increasing climate-related pressures.
23. **The strategic partnership between IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe remained strong over the period evaluated, despite the Government's institutional challenges.** IFAD and the Government built a constructive, trust-based partnership, and IFAD was recognized as a credible agricultural partner whose strategies aligned with national priorities, while the Government demonstrated a strong strategic commitment to supporting and advancing IFAD-backed programmes. However, the Government also showed institutional and financial weaknesses, as it did not fully disburse committed financial contributions. Moreover, government strategic coordination mechanisms and support within the agricultural sector were functionally weak or absent over the evaluation period.
24. **Support to enhance smallholders' resilience was strategically pertinent and effective, but sustainability was constrained.** The CSPE found IFAD's strategic focus on strengthening smallholders' resilience through climate-smart agriculture, nutrition-sensitive value chains, market access and rural economic opportunities to be pertinent and sound and aligned with government priorities. Resilience improved as a result of rehabilitated irrigation, climate-smart practices and early warning systems. However, sustainability was constrained by post-SIRP technical support gaps, poor diversification and smallholders' limited capacity to manage irrigation schemes, compounded by restricted resources and weak government technical and financial support.

25. **IFAD support bolstered knowledge management and policy engagement, contributing to programme successes, but coordination gaps hindered greater performance.** Building on lessons learned from the 2016 country strategy note, the programme promoted consistency and complementarity across interventions, supported by the national-level JMU and IFAD's comparative advantage in smallholder agriculture. It advanced knowledge management effectiveness, which enhanced policy outcomes, while grant activities generated learning and achieved objectives. Overall, the programme fostered government engagement at the central and local levels, developed stakeholder capacities and leveraged cofinancing, all of which were critical to its success. Weak coordination limited learning among agricultural actors and hindered the scaling up of results, and opportunities for joint programming with United Nations partners (including the Rome-based agencies) and for additional cofinancing were largely missed.
26. **Efforts to promote sustainable smallholder agriculture yielded positive gains in productivity and farmer capacities, while new challenges emerged.** Climate-smart agriculture techniques improved moisture retention, reduced erosion and enhanced soil fertility, while rehabilitated schemes boosted productivity, cropping intensity and incomes. Farmers' skills were enhanced as they organized in block farming units, and women's participation and leadership increased. However, the coverage of these efforts was uneven and there were environmental trade-offs. The programme emphasized irrigation over soil and water conservation, increasing environmental risks such as salinization and waterlogging. Gains remained localized and were limited by institutional, financial and enforcement weaknesses.
27. **Investment to increase access to markets and to financial services yielded mixed results, and the portfolio projects demonstrated insufficient efficiency gains.** Delays in completing irrigation works affected smallholders' linkages to private sector offtakers, with benefits mostly favouring the latter. Farmers faced risks, including debt from a sorghum out-grower scheme during a drought period. Limited trust, weak community cohesion and ongoing extension needs threatened market engagement. Internal financial tools, such as internal savings and lending schemes and revolving funds, were paired with financial literacy training, but efforts to increase access to formal financial services remained unsuccessful at the time of evaluation. Slow disbursements, delayed project approvals and stakeholder agreements, and fluctuating market prices and exchange rates hindered efficient operations. Persistent staffing gaps weakened financial management, and procurement was negatively affected by macroeconomic instability, currency depreciation and disagreements regarding VAT exemption. Challenges were compounded by difficulties in establishing and implementing effective M&E systems.
28. **The programme successfully piloted innovations and scaled up good practices.** The programme demonstrated relevant problem identification and strong government collaboration. Technical innovations such as hydrogel soil conditioning and greenhouses saw limited replication due to weak supply chains and ownership, whereas social and institutional innovations (block farming, FaaB, GALS and gully reclamation) were widely adopted and scaled up with government support.
29. **Positive outcomes were achieved in nutrition and gender equality, enabling gender-transformative change, while results for other groups were limited.** Multifocal, nutrition-sensitive interventions, including biofortification of crops, development of small livestock farming, cooking demonstrations, potable water points and behaviour change communication, enhanced household nutrition and women's dietary diversity. Gender analyses and strategies improved women's participation, economic empowerment, leadership and access to resources, and reduced gender-based violence. GALS helped to transform household gender

norms and was scaled up nationally through the Ministry of Women Affairs and the Gender Commission. However, support for youth, persons with disabilities and landless persons yielded limited results. Youth participation remained below targets, as there were challenges in engaging them in agriculture, reflecting broader structural constraints.

D. Recommendations

30. The CSPE made the following recommendations to leverage successes and overcome challenges, and to address the gaps that hinder the achievement of better performance.
31. **Recommendation 1. IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe should prioritize, in the next strategy, strengthening the resilience of smallholders but in a more holistic manner.** IFAD's support for approaches (such as VBUs, management of revitalized irrigation schemes and their irrigation management committees, climate-smart agricultural practices, village environmental committees, and internal savings and lending schemes) should be underpinned by robust and holistic feasibility analyses that adequately capture the interlinkages among the multiple and interdependent constraints affecting smallholders, including cost recovery mechanisms and governance arrangements for irrigation systems and other project-supported investments. Such analyses should be complemented by targeted thematic and technical studies, as appropriate, notably in relation to the use of ground and surface water resources for irrigation purposes. Dedicated strategic assessments and master plans are warranted to avoid over-extraction of these resources.
32. Strategic orientation should also prioritize multisectoral and multi-stakeholder engagement, including with government institutions, development partners, producers' organizations, NGOs and the private sector, at both the national and subnational levels. This will require the establishment and effective operation of government coordination mechanisms within the agricultural sector (see the next recommendation).
33. **Recommendation 2. IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe should systematically leverage non-lending activities and address institutional capacity gaps.** Strategic orientations should be provided in the next COSOP to address challenges related to insufficient learning and weak implementation capacities, especially at provincial and district levels. To that end, institutional strengthening (both physical and non-physical) should be prioritized, targeting government institutions, farmers' organizations and other relevant institutions, with due consideration given to challenges related to the sustainability of benefits.
34. IFAD should leverage partnerships with other international partners (such as FAO, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) and contribute to the establishment and strengthening of robust and effective M&E systems under the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, to which all sector projects are linked. This system should enable aggregation of data, consolidation of information, and reporting on national rural development indicators, which should avoid their current mismatches.
35. In parallel, IFAD should contribute to fast-tracking the operationalization and use of the resilience platform (currently under development) to facilitate the functionality of agricultural sector working groups. Both mechanisms should enable (i) systematic exchange of experiences, (ii) cross-learning, and (iii) contributions to informed policymaking and decision-making.
36. **Recommendation 3. IFAD to strengthen its presence in Zimbabwe and improve strategic and operational coordination within the agricultural**

sector. Given the size of the portfolio in Zimbabwe, its growing complexity and the challenging macroeconomic and institutional context, IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe should explore options to strengthen IFAD's in-country presence, building on the current successful model of a long-term consultant. The objective is to enhance strategic coordination, operational harmonization and learning among development partners in the agricultural sector (in line with the preceding recommendation), thereby addressing the coordination gaps identified by the CSPE. This would also help to ensure that IFAD responds in a more timely manner to the volatility of the operating environment and seizes opportunities for partnership development. Finally, IFAD should endeavour to leverage the scaling up of successful models by other development partners at the national level and across the region through South-South and Triangular Cooperation activities.

37. **Recommendation 4. IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe to roll out sound thematic approaches (on inclusive financial services, value chain development and access to markets) aligned with the Zimbabwean context that further strengthen rural resilience strategies.** There is an urgent need to identify solutions that remove barriers to the deployment of line of credit mechanisms for matching grants and to expand smallholders' access to inclusive financial services, which are essential for successful value chain development. To that end, inclusive finance mechanisms should be piloted in selected value chains, reinforcing specific institutional functions, introducing risk-sharing instruments, and improving digital and process efficiencies within financial institutions.
38. In parallel, the country programme should develop an explicit operational plan to expand and sustain partnerships between smallholders and private actors through the development of contractual and partnership agreements with private actors for sustained access to profitable markets. Additionally, the role of the JMU should be strengthened by leveraging the programme's strong subnational presence and established relationships with decentralized structures in order to promote vertical and horizontal synergies within the programme and with external partners, thereby enhancing results across the above thematic areas.
39. **Recommendation 5. IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe, building on positive experiences of gender-transformative interventions, should strengthen social inclusion through context-relevant interventions for youth and other marginalized groups.** The next country strategy should include a context-responsive social inclusion approach that addresses the involvement of youth, persons with disabilities and landless people in a comprehensive manner in IFAD-supported interventions. Embedding these measures within the future COSOP and project designs would strengthen equity, improve programme sustainability and enhance resilience outcomes by broadening participation, while ensuring continued alignment with Zimbabwe's socioeconomic and agroecological realities.
40. The approach to youth economic empowerment should include: (i) diversified livelihood pathways beyond irrigated crop production, such as climate-appropriate off-farm and non-land-based activities (e.g. agroprocessing), explicitly tailored to the capabilities and interests of young people; (ii) targeted skills development and mentorship, linked to realistic local economic opportunities and supported by continued extension and business development services; and (iii) assessments to better understand youth's aspirations and constraints, and to target areas where alternative industries (such as mining) are not prevalent in order to reach youth with few income-generating opportunities.
41. **Recommendation 6. IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe to identify and implement appropriate solutions to remove bottlenecks that prevent achievement of efficiency gains.** Considering the volatility of the country's macroeconomic indicators, IFAD and the Government should identify sound mechanisms to adapt processes and procedures to facilitate further efficiency gains

in the implementation of the country programme. This will entail simplifying and streamlining management and approval procedures. Additionally, the Government should take action to eliminate or resolve issues that trigger recurring delays in government approval processes and in the disbursement of counterpart funds. Strengthening of procurement and financial management capacities should be prioritized, as these two areas have largely accounted for past delays.

42. Policy-level dialogue should be undertaken with the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion on the application of tax waivers under sovereign loans and on the establishment of an interim mechanism to prevent VAT-related liquidity constraints from undermining project performance. Furthermore, the programme should seek to deploy skilled service providers in areas where there are critical capacity gaps within project management units.

Main Report

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Currency equivalent, weights and measures

Currency equivalent

Currency unit =

US\$1.00 =

US\$1.00 =

Weights and measures

1 kilogram (kg) = 2.204 pounds (lb)

1 000 kg = 1 metric tonne (t)

1 kilometre (km) = 0.62 miles (mi)

1 metre (m) = 1.09 yards (yd)

1 square metre (m²) = 10.76 square feet (ft²)

1 acre = 0.405 ha

1 hectare (ha) = 2.47 acres

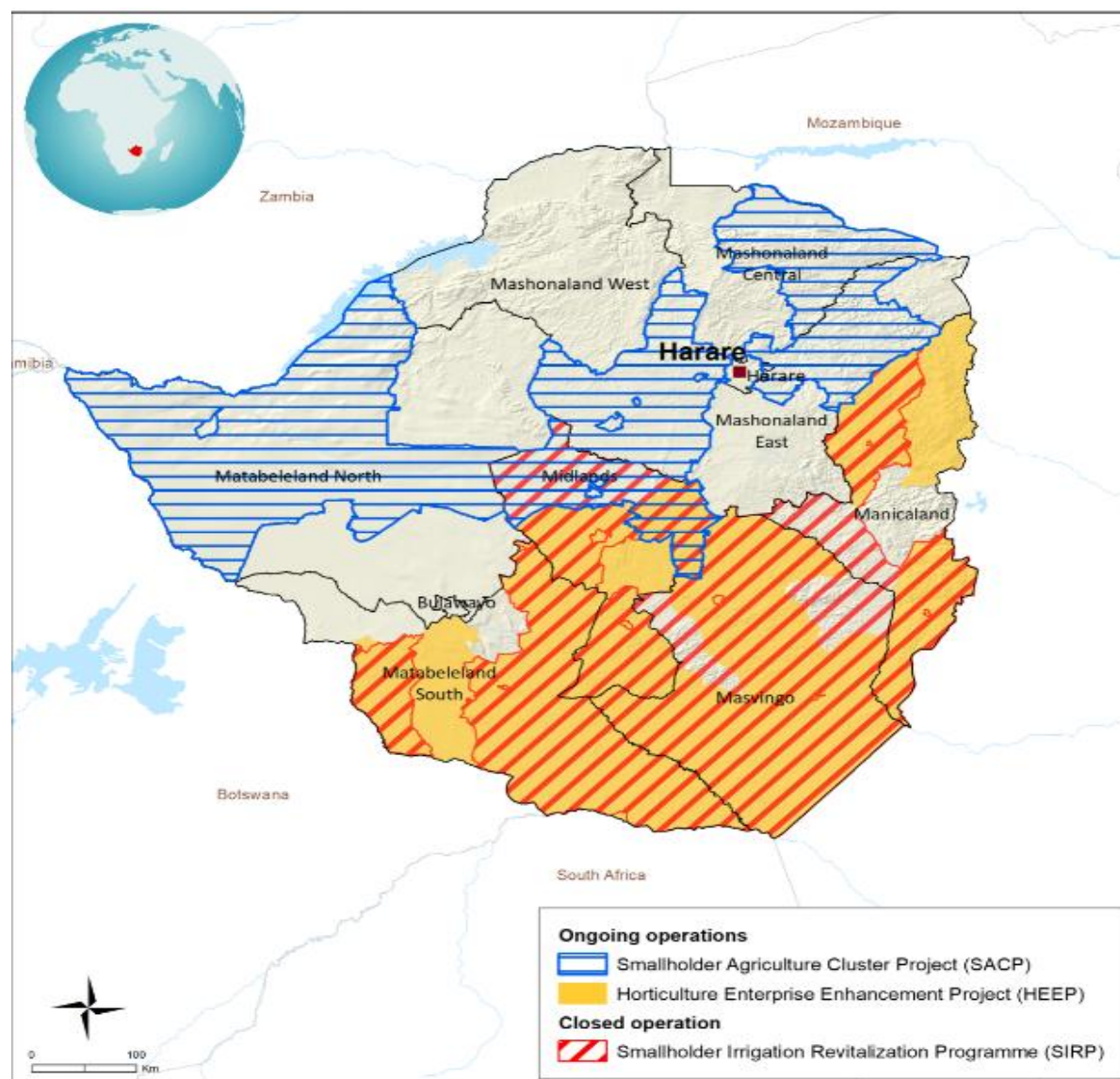
Abbreviations and acronyms

AFC	Agricultural Finance Company
AGRITEX/ARDAS	Agricultural Advisory and Rural Development Services
APGs	Agricultural Producer Groups
ARDAS	Agricultural and Rural Development Advisory Services Directorate
ASAP	Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme
COSOP	Country Strategic Opportunities Programme
CSA	Climate Smart Agriculture
CSN	Country Strategic Note
CSPE	Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation
EB	Executive Board
ESA	East and Southern Africa
EU	European Union
FaaB	Farming as a Business
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FMDB	Financial Management Dashboard
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environmental Fund
HDI	Human Development Index
HEEP	Horticulture Enterprise Enhancement Programme
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ILRI	International Livestock Research Institute
IMC	Irrigation Management Committee
ISAL	Internal Savings and Loans Scheme

¹ <https://treasury.un.org/operationalrates/OperationalRates.php>

JMU	Joint Management Unit
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MLAFWRD	Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development
MOFEDIP	Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion
MSEs	Micro and Small Enterprises
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NAPF	National Agricultural Policy Framework
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OBI	Oracle Business Intelligence
OFID	OPEC Fund for International Development
ORMS	Operational Results Management System
O&M	Operation and maintenance
PBAS	Performance Based Allocation System
PMU	Project Management Unit
PS	Permanent Secretary
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RPSF	Rural Poor Stimulus Facility
SACP	Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project
SDARMP	Smallholder Dry Areas Resource Management Project
SEDAP	Southeastern Dry Areas Project
SIRP	Smallholder Irrigation Revitalisation Programme
SISP	Smallholder Irrigation Support Programme
SOs	Strategic Objectives
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Operations Project Services
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VBU	Village Business Unit
VC	Value Chain
VCLE	Value Chain Lead Enterprise
WFP	World Food Programme
WUO	Water User Organization
ZINWA	Zimbabwe National Water Authority
4P	Private-Public-Producer Partnership

Map of IFAD-supported operations in the Republic of Zimbabwe (2016-2024)



The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IFAD concerning the delimitation of the frontiers or boundaries, or the authorities thereof.

Map compiled by IFAD | 21-05-2025

Republic of Zimbabwe

Country strategy and programme evaluation

I. Background

E. Introduction

1. As approved in December 2024 at the 143rd Session of the Executive Board (EB) of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD),² the Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE) of IFAD undertook a country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) in the Republic of Zimbabwe, in accordance with the Evaluation Policy (2021). In line with the IFAD's Evaluation Manual (2022), the main objectives of the CSPE are to: (i) assess the results and performance of IFAD's strategy and programme in the country; and, (ii) generate findings and recommendations for future partnerships between IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe to enhance development effectiveness and sustainable rural transformation. This CSPE is the first evaluation conducted by IOE in Zimbabwe. Findings, lessons and recommendations will inform the preparation of the next IFAD country strategic opportunity and programme (COSOP).
2. The country has been an IFAD member state since its independence in 1980, and the first IFAD loan to Zimbabwe was approved in 1983. Since the start of IFAD operations in the country, the Fund has approved eight loan funded projects (see Table 1 below and Annex IV), with a total cost of US\$396.3 million, of which IFAD has financed US\$162.8 million (41.1 per cent of total costs). There was a gap in IFAD financing from 2005 to 2015, when implementation of new projects began (see Annex VII for the timeline). This CSPE covers the period from 2016 to June 2025, aligned to the 2016 country strategy note (CSN) and the 2020-2025 COSOP.³ It covers three investment projects, for a total amount of US\$187.7 million, of which 52.4 per cent (US\$98.3 million) was financed by IFAD. The remaining funds came from the Government, domestic co-financiers (beneficiaries and others) and international co-financing. Grants are also covered by this CSPE (see Annex VIII).

Table 1.

Snapshot of IFAD's operations in Zimbabwe since 1983

Description	Key figures
Total amount of all loan projects since 1983 (8 projects)	US\$ 396.3 million
Total cost of portfolio to be evaluated (3 projects)	US\$ 187.7 million
IFAD financing of 3 projects evaluated	US\$ 98.3 million
Domestic contribution (government, beneficiaries and others) (3 projects)	US\$ 42.4 million ⁴
International co-financing (3 projects) ⁵	US\$ 47.0 million
Lending terms of the portfolio to be evaluated	Debt Sustainability Framework for SIRP; Highly Concessional for SACP and HEEP

Sources: Oracle Business Intelligence (OBI).

3. This report is structured as follows: the next part of the current Section-I discusses the CSPE objectives, methodology and process. Section-II presents the country

² <https://webapps.ifad.org/members/eb/143>.

³ The COSOP completion date has been extended from 31 December 2025 to 31 December 2026, following the recommendation of the COSOP Results Review undertaken between November and December 2023; this led to rescheduling of the CSPE for Zimbabwe to start in 2025, originally planned to start in 2024.

⁴ US\$18.5 million from the Government; US\$23.9 million from domestic contributions.

⁵ It includes contributions from OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID).

context and the overview of IFAD strategies and operations over the period under evaluation. Section III discusses the performance of IFAD strategies and programmes by evaluation criteria, while Section IV discusses the performance of IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe in managing the country programme. Section V presents the conclusions and the recommendations of the CSPE. In the annexes, detailed information on various aspects is provided.

F. Objectives, methodology and process

Evaluation objectives and scope

4. **Scope.** This CSPE covers the 2016 CSN and the 2020 COSOP, thus the period 2016-2025. It covers the full range of IFAD engagement, including: (i) IFAD's strategic orientation and support; (ii) the portfolio of lending operations; (iii) the non-lending activities (knowledge management, partnership- building, country-level policy engagement and grants); and (iv) the performance of the Government and IFAD in implementing the country strategy and programme.
5. Aligned with the IFAD evaluation manual (2022) the CSPE covered the following evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence (including knowledge management, partnership development and policy dialogue), efficiency, effectiveness (including innovations), impact on rural poverty, gender equality and women's empowerment, sustainability (including scaling up, environment and natural resources management, and adaptation to climate change). Finally, the CSPE has assessed the performance of partners (IFAD and Government) in managing the programme. Annex I includes the definitions and details related to each criterion. For each criterion, the CSPE rates the performance on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest).⁶
6. **Strategic aspects.** The CSPE reviewed IFAD's overall strategy in the country – both implicit and explicit – along with the strategic orientations, as provided in the 2016 CSN and 2020 COSOP. It explored the synergies and interlinkages among different strategic elements of 2016 CSN and 2020 COSOP, and how they enable achieving greater coherence within the country program. The evaluation also analyzed the extent to which the investment portfolio and non-lending activities contributed to achieving the strategic objectives, and the role played by the Government and IFAD to that extent. Building on these aspects, the CSPE concludes with the overall performance of IFAD strategies in the country over the reviewed period.
7. **Lending portfolio evaluability.** Table 2 below presents the evaluability of the three projects covered by this CSPE considering their implementation status. Out of the three projects, only one, the Smallholder Irrigation Revitalization Programme (SIRP) was assessed for all evaluation criteria. The second, the Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project (SACP), which passed its implementation mid-point, was assessed for all criteria except impact and sustainability, although it has not yet been mid-term reviewed (as delayed to early 2026), but the team assessed its progress by the time of the evaluation. The last project, the Horticulture Enterprise Enhancement Project (HEEP), was approved in December 2022, but only entered into force in 2024, hence only the relevance and coherence of its design have been assessed.

⁶ The standard rating scale adopted by IOE is 1 = highly unsatisfactory; 2 = unsatisfactory; 3 = moderately unsatisfactory; 4 = moderately satisfactory; 5 = satisfactory; 6 = highly satisfactory.

Table 2.

Evaluability of projects covered

<i>Project acronyms</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Approval year</i>	<i>Completion year</i>	<i>Midterm review</i>	<i>Criteria evaluated</i>
SIRP	Closed	2016	2024	2020	All evaluation criteria
SACP	Ongoing	2021	2027	not available yet	All criteria except impact and sustainability
HEEP	Ongoing	2022	2032	not available yet	Relevance and coherence

Source: CSPE team elaboration.

8. **Non-lending activities.** There is no explicit reference to knowledge management and policy engagement activities in the 2016 CSN, which only mentions the building-up of a reliable and solid partnership with the Government, stakeholders and development partners, as well as the consolidation of existing partnerships. Conversely, the 2020 COSOP was explicit and the evaluation assessed achievements as intended, mainly: (i) the extent to which knowledge management activities including lessons sharing and exchange of good practices have been supported, and the extent to which best practices and lessons learned have been documented and disseminated to target audiences, as well as facilitated policy dialogue on key themes; (ii) the degree to which strategic partnerships have been established, particularly with the Government, key development partners in the country, the United Nations Country Team and agencies, South-South triangular cooperation alliances, producer organizations, private sector entities, financial institutions and local civil society. It also assessed the extent to which, these partnerships have been leveraged to address key fragility factors constraining smallholder farmers; and (iii) the extent to which policy-strengthening activities have been mainstreamed with IFAD's support, and the level to which these contributed to shaping the Government's policy agenda.

Evaluation questions, theory of change and main themes

9. **Main evaluation questions.** The CSPE responded to the following overarching question: to what extent did IFAD's strategies and programme in Zimbabwe contribute to sustainably improve rural livelihoods in areas of operation, in terms of social, economic and ecological resilience, and ultimately for rural transformation? This entails inclusive and sustainable positive changes in food and nutrition security, income and job creation (particularly for women and young people), and natural resources management. Linked to this question, the CSPE answered specific evaluation questions based on the evaluation criteria, as presented in Annex II.
10. **Theory of Change (ToC).** The evaluation adopted a theory-based approach to assess possible causal relationships among different elements of the country strategy and programme. For that purpose, a ToC was developed (presented in Annex III). It reflects expected results (with causal links) and main assumptions. The ToC has been reviewed, discussed and validated throughout the evaluation process. The change logic is as follows.
11. The development goal (impact) sought by IFAD's strategy and programme in Zimbabwe is to enable rural transformation by improving smallholders' livelihoods, food and nutrition security, and make them more resilient to climate change burdens and economic shocks. Three pathways lead to this impact: (i) better access to markets and nutritious food for smallholders; (ii) increased smallholders' incomes; and (iii) improved performance, sustainability and resilience of smallholder agriculture. These pathways entail six short- and medium-term outcomes to which IFAD supported operations contribute directly and indirectly: effective value-chain development, effective partnerships with private actors, improved performance by rural institutions for smallholder agriculture development, increased access to financial services and resources, climate-resilient

and sustainable agricultural production. Moreover, the CSPE assessed the extent to which the project portfolio has promoted or is promoting gender transformative results and strengthened economic opportunities and decision-making for women and youth. Main assumptions include that stable and favorable economic policies are in place, and Government demonstrates efficient resource allocation and commitment to the agricultural sector.

12. **Main thematic areas of the CSPE.** Considering the focus of the country programme and based on the initial review and discussion, the CSPE identified four main key thematic areas, which were further explored through the process of data collection and analysis: Access to water resources and community management, Climate-resilient production and access to nutritious food, Value chain development, access to markets, and institutional strengthening for smallholder agriculture.

Methodology

13. **Methodological approach.** The CSPE utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and sources. The methodology is structured around the building blocks presented in the table below 3 and described in greater detail in Table A1 of Annex IX.

Table 3.

Methodology building blocks

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Brief description</i>
In-depth desk review	Review of portfolio and non-lending documentation to establish the evidence base and inform evaluation questions
Virtual stakeholder scoping interviews	Inception-stage interviews with IFAD and Government representatives to refine the evaluation scope and questions
Group discussions and key informant interviews	Semi-structured interviews with IFAD, government, community, NGO and private sector stakeholders involved in the programme
Direct field observations	Field visits to validate reported information and understand implementation and contextual realities
Self-assessment	Questionnaire to the IFAD country team and Government focal point to capture perceptions aligned with evaluation questions
Data analysis and interpretation	Qualitative and quantitative analysis and triangulation of evidence across all data sources

Source: CSPE Approach paper.

14. **Evaluation process.** The CSPE process includes the following phases:
 - **Preparatory and inception phase.** This entailed an initial desk review of CSN, COSOP and project documents, as well as virtual interviews,⁷ which informed the preparation of the approach paper. Initial meetings and discussion with IOE, other IFAD staff and the Zimbabwe Country team allowed for collecting expectations on the CSPE, to clarify its scope and tentative timeline. A self-assessment was conducted with IFAD and Government stakeholders. The approach paper was finalised based on comments received and shared. The team prepared internal working papers that presented available evidence as well as evidence gaps in responding to evaluation questions.
 - **Country mission.** The CSPE team carried out a country mission for data collection for two and a half weeks, led by IOE with the participation of international and national consultants. The evaluation team split into two for field travel to maximise coverage.⁸ The evaluation team visited selected

⁷ A total of 24 virtual interviews were conducted, involving 69 participants from government institutions, previous Country Directors, PMUs, UN agencies, implementing partners, NGOs and the private sector.

⁸ The field mission, conducted by two teams, covered 11 districts across 6 provinces. Visits took place in Matabeleland North (Hwange, Lupane), Matabeleland South (Gwanda), Midlands (Gweru, Kwekwe, Kadoma), Manicaland (Chimanimani, Chipinge), Masvingo (Chiredzi, Zaka), and Mashonaland Central (Chirumhanzu). This represents a purposeful sample of the portfolio: for SIRP, implemented in 20 districts, the mission covered 7 districts in Chipinge,

communities to collect data on their project experiences through interviews with key local informants and focus groups with smallholder farmers, including women and youth. The team also met private sector stakeholders and savings and credit group participants. At the end of the mission, a hybrid meeting was held to share the preliminary CSPE findings and lessons with key stakeholders of the country programme.

- **Reporting.** The preparation of the CSPE draft report involved the analysis of the data gathered during the field mission, combined and triangulated with prior information from the inception stage, to answer the evaluation questions, to draw lessons, conclusions and recommendations. The draft report will be shared with the Government and IFAD for their review and comments, after an internal thorough IOE peer review. Stakeholder meetings will also be organized to discuss comments made on the draft report, as deemed necessary.
 - **Final workshop.** The CSPE main findings, conclusions and recommendations will be presented during a final workshop, that will be organized virtually (default option on a date to be agreed, after discussion with IFAD and the government) with the participation of national stakeholders and the IFAD representatives. The aim is to facilitate the utilisation of the evaluation findings and recommendations.
 - **Agreement at Completion Point (ACP).** Following the completion of the CSPE, the ACP, which is a document summarizing follow-up actions on the CSPE recommendations as agreed by IFAD and the Government, will be signed by the representatives of IFAD Management and the Government (to be published in the final CSPE report). IOE is not responsible for preparing the ACP but facilitates the process.
15. **Ethical considerations.** The CSPE was conducted in full compliance with IFAD's Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Manual, and adhered to international norms and standards, including the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and IFAD's data governance policy. The evaluation team upheld the core principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, confidentiality and respect for human rights throughout the evaluation process. Participation in interviews and group discussions was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents. The evaluation adhered to the principle of 'do no harm' and applied culturally appropriate, gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches to data collection. Confidentiality of respondents was protected, and all personal data was anonymized. Ethical clearance and appropriate permissions were sought where required.
16. **Limitations.** The lack of evaluative evidence was a limiting factor, as no prior IOE evaluation was conducted. Although three investment projects have been implemented during this CSPE period (2016-2025), only one has been completed, that has comprehensive documentation. Therefore, many of the findings (especially on impact and sustainability) stem from one project only (SIRP). Project data availability, including the availability of GIS data, was somewhat limited, especially in terms of data quality, availability of disaggregated and outcome data, incomplete beneficiary information. Moreover, Zimbabwe faces high staff turnover in most public departments, including strategic positions, which limited the opportunities to interview former staff with some institutional memories. Consequently, the CSPE sought to mitigate these limitations by leveraging the triangulation of information sources, with thorough desk review, by identifying and interviewing various stakeholders (past and present), and applying a rigorous analytical framework to ensure a comprehensive assessment of IFAD's

Chimanimani, Gwanda, Chiredzi, Zaka, Gweru and Kwekwe; for SACP, targeting 18 districts, field visits touched 6 districts in Hwange, Lupane, Gweru, Kwekwe, Kadoma and Chirumhanzu; and for HEEP, implemented in 20 districts across four provinces, field visits covered all four provinces. The selected districts reflect diversity in contexts and interventions and were complemented by desk review and triangulation.

interventions.

Key points

- This is the first country evaluation of IFAD's support to the Republic of Zimbabwe. The CSPE assessed the period between 2016 and 2025 and covered three investment projects (one completed and two ongoing).
- The total cost of the investment portfolio covered in this CSPE is US\$187.7 million, of which US\$98.3 million was financed by IFAD.
- The scope of the evaluation included an assessment of the country strategy and the performance of the portfolio, non-lending activities and partner performance (IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe).
- The evaluation applied a theory-based model and a mixed methods approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative data. Data was triangulated from various sources to generate findings, conclusions and recommendations.

II. Country context and IFAD's strategy and operations

A. Country context

Socio-economic and social development indicators

17. **Geography and demography.** Zimbabwe is located in Southern Africa, bordering South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique. It covers an area of 390,757 square kilometres (including land and water). Zimbabwe's population in 2024 was 16, 634,373,⁹ with a population growth rate of 1.91 per cent.¹⁰ The urban population is around 33 per cent, and the rural population around 67 per cent of the total population; the male population represents 48 per cent, while the female population represents 52 per cent.¹¹
18. **Administrative setup.** Zimbabwe is divided into 10 provinces (8 rural and 2 urban), each of which has different administrative districts, 60 in total, and 1,200 rural wards or municipalities. All provinces are administered by elected provincial councils, while the districts are administered by the District Administrators (now renamed District Development Coordinators).¹²
19. **Economy.** With a GDP per capita of US\$2,497 in 2024,¹³ Zimbabwe is a lower middle-income country, with abundant natural capital and growth potential, and is one of the fastest-growing economies in southern Africa.¹⁴ However, the country is classified as fragile, notably in terms of economic, institutional and social fragility, and is among the 15 most fragile countries in the world. Fragility is driven by policy volatility, international sanctions,¹⁵ high external debt and arrears, corruption, a low capacity to deliver basic services, climate shocks, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine.¹⁶ The country experienced strong real GDP growth rates of 6.5 per cent in 2022 and 5 per cent in 2023 (see Table A2 in Annex IX) after the COVID19 pandemic, driven primarily by agriculture, mining and service sectors.¹⁷ Real GDP growth for 2024 was only 2 per cent due to reduced agricultural outputs caused by droughts triggered by El Niño (see climate change section below).
20. Despite efforts to promote capital inflows and external support, the Zimbabwe economy faces significant challenges including: high unemployment rate, corruption,¹⁸ rising recurrent expenditures, liquidity constraints, a shrinking tax base and debt distress (debt was estimated at 80 per cent of GDP in 2025¹⁹). Additionally, the country faces limited institutional capacities, deteriorating infrastructure and erratic power supply leading to low capacity utilization by industry, lack of capital, high input costs, and obsolete machinery. Furthermore, macroeconomic instability has been exacerbated by foreign exchange shortages, high parallel market exchange rates of the US\$ against the currency of Zimbabwe (the Zimbabwe Gold, ZiG from April 2024, and previously the Zimbabwean dollar,

⁹ World Bank data - <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ZW>

¹⁰ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/zimbabwe/factsheets/>.

¹¹ <https://zimbabwe.opendataforafrica.org/anilptc/2022-population-housing-census>.

¹² <https://www.zim.gov.zw/index.php/en/>.

¹³ https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/macro-poverty-outlook/mpo_ssa.

¹⁴ Zimbabwe's 2023 economic growth rate significantly exceeds the average across Sub-Saharan African, and at par or exceeding most of its regional peers. (Chugumira, et.al, 2024).

¹⁵ See <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099100824173536299/pdf/BOSIB-f40507c2-27bc-479b-a7be-b4dd2e207c2a.pdf>.

¹⁶ <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/844591582815510521/world-bank-group-strategy-for-fragility-conflict-and-violence-2020-2025>.

¹⁷ Zimbabwe is rich in mineral resources with about 40 different types of minerals, and mining operations range from international mining houses to small-scale miners. The predominant minerals include platinum group metals, chrome, gold, coal, lithium, and diamonds. On the other hand, the service sector is dominated by tourism and transportation, while the higher-value service sub-sectors of telecommunications, finance and business process outsourcing remain underdeveloped. <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/zimbabwe-mining-and-minerals>.

¹⁸ According to Transparency International's 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index, Zimbabwe scored 22 out of 100 and ranked 157th of 180 countries, reflecting high perceived public sector corruption and a decline from its 2023 score of 24 and 149th position. https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Zimbabwe/transparency_corruption/.

¹⁹ <https://tradingeconomics.com/zimbabwe/government-debt-to-gdp>.

ZWL), leading to inflation spikes,²⁰ alongside challenges such as erratic rainfall and electricity shortages. The GoZ has made considerable efforts towards economic revitalisation through re-engaging the international development community in recent years, most notably through the Structured Dialogue Platform for arrears clearance and debt resolution for economic indicators.²¹

21. **Poverty.** According to World Bank data, the poverty ratio (headcount of PPP \$2.15/day) for Zimbabwe was estimated at 37.7 per cent in 2024, against 28 per cent in 2016. The proximate causes for the increase in extreme poverty were macroeconomic volatility, recurrent droughts, inflation and economic contraction related to COVID-19, exacerbated by extreme weather events. Approximately 25.8 per cent of the population were considered as multidimensionally poor, and an additional 26.3 per cent classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty.²² Poverty in Zimbabwe is largely rural, and vulnerability is significantly higher with rural households, compared to the urban households. However, poverty has urbanized in recent years. Among the poorest, orphaned children, women and people with disabilities are the most vulnerable. The poverty rate among people with disabilities was at 74.1 per cent in 2017.²³
22. **Human Development Index (HDI).** According to the 2025 Human Development Report, which covered 193 countries, the HDI score for Zimbabwe increased from 0.516 in 2015 to 0.598 in 2023, remaining classified in the Medium Human Development category.²⁴ Although the HDI score change from 2022 to 2023 was marginal, Zimbabwe's global ranking improved from 159th to 153rd out of 193 countries.
23. **Nutrition and food security.** According to the Global Hunger Index 2025, Zimbabwe is ranked 90th globally, with an index of 20.9 in 2025, lower than the 2016 index of 27.2. This still places the country within the serious category on the scale, but it is improving.²⁵ There was a decrease in acceptable food consumption from 70 per cent of households in 2023 to 50 per cent in 2024 (rising to 59% in 2025); and a decrease in the dietary diversity score from 5.6 in 2023 to 5.1 in 2024 (rising to 5.4% in 2025).²⁶ ²⁷ However, more favorable rainfall meant that there was a 290% increase in food crop production in 2024-25 compared with the previous season.²⁸ Malnutrition, undernutrition and stunting remain major challenges. The prevalence of undernourishment in the entire population rose from 29.6 per cent in 2004 to 38.1 per cent in 2023. The prevalence of stunting (for children under 5 years old) increased from 29 per cent in 1994 to 35 per cent in 2005-2006, declining to 27 per cent in 2015, and estimated at 23.7 percent in 2024.²⁹ Children living in rural areas are more stunted and underweight than those

²⁰ Macroeconomic instability in Zimbabwe has been marked by episodes of very high inflation and quasi-hyperinflation, with significant effects on the real economy. After the reintroduction of the Zimbabwean dollar in 2019, inflation escalated rapidly: estimates indicate annual inflation surpassed 500 per cent in late 2019 and reached over 800 per cent by mid-2020, amid severe foreign exchange shortages and drought-related supply shocks, sharply eroding real incomes and business confidence. Consumer price inflation jumped from about 255 per cent in 2019 to over 550 per cent in 2020, before moderating in subsequent years as monetary conditions adjusted. This period of heightened inflation contributed to sharp increases in input prices, reduced real wages and savings, and heightened uncertainty that constrained investment and enterprise planning, particularly affecting agriculture and small business sectors. While inflation has since moderated from these extreme peaks, continued volatility in prices and exchange rates has remained a binding constraint on economic recovery and livelihoods.

²¹ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099100824173536299/pdf/BOSIB-f40507c2-27bc-479b-a7be-b4dd2e207c2a.pdf>.

²² <https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/MPI/ZWE.pdf>.

²³ <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099062823005513984/p179911142c466021906b1a5f4a115199d>.

²⁴ <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2025reporten.pdf>.

²⁵ <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/>.

²⁶ Food and Nutrition Council. Zimbabwe Livelihoods Assessment Committee (ZimLAC) 2024. *Rural Livelihoods Assessment Report*.

²⁷ ZimLAC 2025.

²⁸ ZimLAC 2025.

²⁹ <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/zimbabwe/social-health-statistics/zw-prevalence-of-stunting-height-for-age--of-children-under-5-modeled-estimate>.

in urban areas. This is a result of a combination of reduced food availability caused by poor agricultural performance, lower access to food due to high levels of poverty and poor food utilization due to lack of knowledge on how to use available food. According to the State of Food Insecurity and Nutrition in the World (2023), Zimbabwe is considered one of the 19 territories classified as protracted major food crisis countries.³⁰ Approximately 4.3 million were severely food-insecure between 2021 and 2023.

24. **Gender and social inclusion.** In the 2024 Global Gender Gap Index covering 146 countries, Zimbabwe ranked 52nd (two ranks lower than 2022), with an index of 0.740. The country's highest scores were in women's economic participation and opportunities (0.786 - 14th in rank), and health and survival (0.980 - 1st in rank), but lowest in educational attainment (0.994 - 64th in the rank) and political empowerment (0.199 - 83rd in rank).³¹ Approximately 80 per cent of women live in the communal areas³² where they constitute 61 per cent of the farmers, and provide 70 per cent of the labour (with most being unpaid). While both men and women participate in most agricultural tasks, men predominate in land preparation, ploughing and pest control, while women are primarily engaged in watering, planting, fertilizing, weeding, harvesting, packing and marketing. See more gender contexts in Box A1, in Annex IX.
25. **Marginalized people.** The Government of Zimbabwe does not recognize any specific group as indigenous, and there is no specific policy in relation to indigenous people. Marginalized people include those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS (9.8 % in 2024)³³, those households with a large number of dependents, women-headed households, orphans, extremely poor households, people with disabilities and the elderly.³⁴
26. **Youth.** Zimbabwe is a young country, with 46 per cent of the population between the ages of 10-35 years in 2022, and more living in rural than urban areas.³⁵ The Global Youth Development Index (2023) ranks Zimbabwe as a "low youth development" country, placing it 159th out of 181 countries. Despite achieving a high youth literacy rate of approximately 90 per cent, the country grapples with youth unemployment. A survey by Afrobarometer in 2023 indicated that about 41 per cent of young Zimbabweans (aged 18-35) reported actively seeking employment,³⁶ compared to 26 per cent of middle-aged and 10 per cent of older citizens. Zimbabwean youth face significant challenges in agriculture and rural development, including limited access to land, financial resources and markets, and limited skills and training. More details on youths' challenges are presented in Box A2, Annex IX.

Agricultural sector and rural development challenges

27. **Agriculture importance.** Agriculture is central to Zimbabwe's food security and economic development. The sector contributes 17 per cent to GDP and 40 per cent to exports, supplying 68 per cent of raw materials to the manufacturing sector, and employing 53 per cent of the population in 2023.³⁷ Zimbabwe's agricultural sector

³⁰ <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/445c9d27-b396-4126-96c9-50b335364d01>.

³¹ https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf.

³² The communal areas were established as labour reserves in the colonial period, with limited land of generally low quality, and a high population density. <https://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/land-and-tenure-in-zimbabwes-communal-areas-why-land-reform-was-needed/>.

³³ WB data as of 2024.

³⁴ The Tshwa (3,129 people) and Doma (1,540 people) groups who self-identify as indigenous make up 0.03 per cent of the country's population and historically have hunting and gathering based livelihoods. <https://www.iwgia.org/en/zimbabwe.html>.

³⁵ Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT). 2022 Zimbabwe Population and Housing Census. Youth Thematic Report.

³⁶ Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 744, 6 December 2023 <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/AD744-Young-Zimbabweans-see-government-failing-on-jobs-and-economy-Afrobarometer-5dec23.pdf>.

³⁷ World Bank database - <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?locations=ZW>.

still remains predominantly smallholder-dominated, with over a million communal farmers relying mainly on rain-fed agriculture, and close to 70 per cent making a livelihood on less than two hectares (Ha).³⁸ Heavy reliance on rainfed systems and maize production leaves them vulnerable to increasingly severe climate events.

28. **Crop production.** The country's main staple crops are maize, sorghum and millet. Maize is the most produced crop, grown by 85 per cent of rural farmers.³⁹ The main export commodities are tobacco, cotton, sugar, tea, fish, groundnuts, wheat, soybeans, maize and bananas, mainly cultivated by commercial famers. Smallholder cropping lands in communal areas have been cultivated over many decades, depleting nutrients and leaving poor soils that require fertilisers for productivity. Apart from tobacco, production of maize, sorghum, millet and other cash crops has continued to trend downwards compared to 1985 production. Average productivity of both food and cash crops across all farm types declined between 1985 and 2016.⁴⁰ Very poor households rely on the government and other development actors for inputs such as drought tolerant seeds and fertilisers, without which they cannot produce enough to meet household needs, and are dependant on food aid.⁴¹ Main smallholders' constraints are presented in Box 1 below.
29. **Irrigation and water resources.** With 80 per cent of agricultural land located in arid or semi-arid areas, irrigation is key to agricultural production and productivity. Despite an estimated irrigation potential of 2.2 million hectares supported by over 10,600 dams and water bodies, only about 10 per cent of Zimbabwe's irrigable land is equipped with irrigation infrastructure, and just 5 per cent is currently used for cereal production. Existing smallholder irrigation schemes face several challenges including inadequate maintenance, siltation, water shortages, water loss via unlined canals, and a focus on inefficient flood irrigation rather than drip or micro-sprinklers. The governance is poor as farmers are reluctant to pay adequate user fees, especially when they tend to focus on low value crops for subsistence.⁴²
30. **Livestock production.** The livestock sub-sector is an important and integral part of the agricultural sector comprising beef, dairy, small ruminants, pigs, poultry, apiculture, aquaculture and other small and emerging stock. The sub-sector contributes about 19 per cent to the agricultural GDP.⁴³ Milk production is currently 67 million litres annually, which falls well below the annual demand of 120 million litres. Small ruminants (sheep and goats) and non-ruminants (poultry) represent an important safety net during droughts as they are easily disposable for cash.⁴⁴ Livestock production systems face multiple constraints, including climate change impacts, prolonged dry seasons, inadequate nutrition and dry-season feed, high feed costs, transboundary pests and diseases, irregular dipping schedules, high

³⁸ Government of Zimbabwe (2018). National Agriculture Policy Framework (2019-2030).

https://www.harvestplus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Zimbabwe_NAPF_2019-2030.pdf.

³⁹ With an average national yield of 1.39 tons per hectare; it accounts for a substantial proportion of the arable land cropped and inputs applied <https://www.fao.org/zimbabwe/fao-in-zimbabwe/zimbabwe-at-a-glance/en/>.

⁴⁰ For example, maize yields declined from an average 1.2 metric tonnes per Ha (MT/Ha) between the period 1990 to 1995 to an average of 0.749 MT/Ha between the period 2010 to 2016 owing to the Fast-track land reform programme (FTLR), economic meltdown and adverse weather shocks. Government of Zimbabwe, 2018. National Agriculture Policy Framework (2019-2030). https://www.harvestplus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Zimbabwe_NAPF_2019-2030.pdf.

⁴¹ The Pfumvudza programme by government supports over 1.6 million vulnerable households for maize, sunflower, small grains, soya beans production. Maize production is supported with a standardized input package of 3kg seed and 50kg basal and 50kg top dressing fertilisers. This package is enough to cover a 0.125 ha plot and beneficiaries are expected to fully adopt Conservation Agriculture Principles (CA) as a way to show the programme's support to climate. <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/zimbabwe-pfumvudza-programme>.

⁴² GoZ (2024). Zimbabwe Irrigation Investment Prospectus.

<https://www.agric.gov.zw/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/IRRIGATION-PROSPECTUS-2.pdf#:~:text=A%20total%20of%2028%20dams%20to%20be,irrigable%20land%20is%20currently%20available%20for%20cereals>.

⁴³ Government of Zimbabwe (2018). National Agriculture Policy Framework (2019-2030).

https://www.harvestplus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Zimbabwe_NAPF_2019-2030.pdf.

⁴⁴ <https://www.fao.org/climate-smart-agriculture-sourcebook/production-resources/module-b2-livestock/chapter-b21/en/>.

mortality rates, and limited market access.⁴⁵

31. **Land reform.** Since its Independence in 1980, the GoZ sought to address historic injustices in land ownership facilitated by the Land Appointment Act in 1930, which had awarded titles to a large proportion of the land to white farmers who comprised only 4 per cent of the population.⁴⁶ Initially, the Government of Zimbabwe proceeded with a willing-seller and willing-buyer process aiming to resettle 162,000 black families, but managed to resettle only 71,000 due to failure to acquire enough farms and to provide the necessary expertise and equipment to adequately train new farmers. In 2000, a constitutional amendment allowed for the expropriation of the land from white farmers without compensation, under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). This led to a sharp decline in number of white farmers from 4,500 to 200. FTLRP had a mixed impact on crop production. While it aimed to address historical land inequalities, it also led to a decline in overall agricultural output, particularly in the initial years after implementation (for various reasons, including lack of agricultural knowledge, access to finance, inputs, equipment and extension and drought).^{47,48} Regarding the livestock sub-sector, FTLRP has increased the participation of more than 300,000 resettled farmers with varied skills and resources, thus a significantly lower production capacity than before.⁴⁹

Box 1.

Constraints and opportunities of smallholder agriculture in Zimbabwe

Constraints. Rain-fed agriculture is highly vulnerable to climate change and is characterized by low productivity, resulting in food insecurity and poverty. Rain-fed irrigation systems are highly sensitive to droughts, low and erratic rainfall and other extreme weather events which lead to low productivity. Traditional irrigation systems are poorly managed and inefficient. Inadequate access to markets, land tenure insecurity and limited access to knowledge are challenges faced by smallholders.⁵⁰

In relation to livestock, increased temperatures, heat stress and reduced water availability are expected to have negative impacts on livestock production. Moreover, grazing systems, and the quality and quantity of fodder and feed will be seriously affected due to changing climatic conditions and weakening natural resource base.

Opportunities. fostering climate-smart agricultural practices; revitalizing infrastructure to lower production costs; improving post-harvest management technologies and practices; organizing smallholders-oriented value chain activities; incentivizing the private sector to provide extension and marketing services; and mainstreaming nutrition into rural food systems.

Source: COSOP 2020-2025.

Environment and climate change

32. Zimbabwe is highly vulnerable to climate change. It was ranked in the top three in Southern Africa by the 2025 Global Climate Risk Index, which ranks countries by the human and economic toll of extreme weather.⁵¹ In 2023, Zimbabwe had a ND-GAIN Index Country Index Rank of 171 out of 187 Countries (with a ND-GAIN score of 36.2).⁵² The country faces recurrent droughts, storms, heat waves,

⁴⁵ <https://www.fao.org/zimbabwe/fao-in-zimbabwe/zimbabwe-at-a-glance/en/>.

⁴⁶ <https://uscgpi.com/2023/05/04/persisting-issue-of-land-reform-in-zimbabwe/>.

⁴⁷ Ngarava, S. 2020. 'Impact of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) on agricultural production: A tobacco success story in Zimbabwe?' *Land Use Policy*, Vol 99, December 2020.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264837719303291#:~:text=However%2C%20the%20FTLRP%20has%20been,pertain%20to%20FTLRP%20in%20Zimbabwe.>

⁴⁸ Centre for Public Impact, 30 August 2017. *Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe*.

<https://centreforpublicimpact.org/public-impact-fundamentals/fast-track-land-reform-in-zimbabwe/>.

⁴⁹ Government of Zimbabwe (2018). National Agriculture Policy Framework (2019-2030).

https://www.harvestplus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Zimbabwe_NAPF_2019-2030.pdf.

⁵⁰ Limited access to finances constrains ability to acquire inputs, such as fertilizers, labour-saving technologies

⁵¹ German Watch (2025). Climate Risk Index 2025. <https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Climate%20Risk%20Index%202025.pdf>.

⁵² The ND-GAIN index and score measure a country's exposure, sensitivity and capacity to adapt to the negative effects of climate change. It measures overall vulnerability by considering six life-supporting sectors – food, water, health, ecosystem service, human habitat, and infrastructure.

flooding, flash floods, cyclones, strong winds and hailstorms which impact on its economy and its pursuit for structural transformation. Attacks by pests such as army worms regularly follow droughts. During the 2023-2024 agriculture season, an El Niño event caused droughts resulting in below-average food production.⁵³ Additionally, increased temperatures and reduced water availability are expected to adversely affect agricultural and livestock production and productivity.⁵⁴ Existing public sector resources to address climate change challenges are limited by weak domestic revenue mobilization and limited access to development finance due to arrears owed to multilateral development banks (MDBs).⁵⁵

Agricultural policy and institutional framework

33. The Zimbabwe's Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP: October 2018–December 2020), which served as a short-term reform agenda, aimed at stabilising the economy, addressing fiscal imbalances and laying the foundations for the long-term development vision articulated in Vision 2030. Building on the TSP, the Zimbabwe Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS 1: 2021–2025) set out Zimbabwe's medium-term development priorities. A key objective of the NDS 1 (among others) is to: promote new enterprise development, employment and job creation, and ensure sustainable environmental protection and resilience. The key agricultural policy framework is the National Agricultural Policy Framework (NAPF: 2018–2030), which provides a broad, long-term vision and framework. It aims at enhancing productivity, resilience, mitigation and climate-smart agriculture (CSA). Its strategic priorities include: (i) organising smallholder farmers into groups and converting them into small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); (ii) connecting farmers and groups to profitable value chains (VCs) and markets; (iii) facilitating contract farming; (iv) developing smallholder farmers business skills; (v) revitalising marketing and agro-processing hubs; and (vi) promotion of climate smart agriculture.⁵⁶ The NAPF is operationalized through the Agricultural Food Systems and Transformation Strategy (2021 to 2025), which is anchored by several plans.
34. **Institutional framework.** The agricultural sector in Zimbabwe operates under the leadership of the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development (MLAFWRD). The Ministry oversees key entities including the Agricultural and Rural Development Advisory Services Directorate (ARDAS, formerly AGRITEX); the Department of Research and Specialist Services (DR&SS); and the Veterinary Technical Services. The Ministry also oversees several parastatals pivotal to the sector's growth, including the Agricultural Finance Company (AFC, formerly Agribank), the Agricultural Rural Development Authority (ARDA) and the Grain Marketing Board (GMB). Additionally, regulatory and research-focused entities like the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA); Tobacco Research Board (TRB), Agricultural Research Council (ARC); and Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) contribute to sectorial development by ensuring regulatory compliance, advancing innovation, and managing water resources.⁵⁷

⁵³ <https://vcda.afdb.org/en/reports/country-focus-report-2024-zimbabwe> ;<https://www.fao.org/zimbabwe/fao-in-zimbabwe/zimbabwe-at-a-glance/en/>.

⁵⁴ Food and Nutrition Council. Zimbabwe Livelihoods Assessment Committee (ZimLAC) 2024. *Rural Livelihoods Assessment Report*. According to the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development's 2024 2nd Round Crop, Livestock and Fisheries Assessment Report, both agricultural production and productivity for the 2023/ 2024 agricultural season were severely and negatively impacted by, arguably, the worst drought-induced El Niño in 40 years

⁵⁵ World Bank Group. (2024). Zimbabwe Country Climate and Development Report. CCDR Series. Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/41137>.

⁵⁶ Other relevant policies and strategies include the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2012), the Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Strategy 2023-2025, the National Youth Policy (2015), the National Gender Policy (2017), the Zimbabwe Climate Policy (2016), and the Zimbabwe Drought Mitigation Strategy (2017-2025).

⁵⁷ At subnational level, the Ministry operates through provincial directorates, responsible for coordination, supervision and oversight of sector activities, and district-level offices, which provide frontline extension, veterinary and regulatory services. These decentralized structures ensure the representation of central government at local level and facilitate the implementation of national agricultural policies and programmes across provinces and districts.

35. **National investment in the agricultural sector.** The Government of Zimbabwe has a long history of providing subsidies to farmers, which has often led to significant and unsustainable pressure on fiscal resources and created dependency among smallholder farmers. In 2016, the Government launched the Command Agriculture Programme,⁵⁸ significantly increasing public spending on agriculture to US\$816.7 million (16.4 per cent of total government expenditure).⁵⁹ However, this surge in spending strained fiscal planning and highlighted inefficiencies in coordination with development partners. By 2020-2021, the Government introduced measures that allowed the private sector to fund agricultural activities, improving transparency and expanding funding opportunities within the agriculture sector.⁶⁰ For 2025, the lands, agriculture, fisheries, water and rural development sector ranks as the third-highest in terms of budget priority by the Government, with 22,935 million ZiG (US\$636.4 million), representing 10.5 per cent of the total budget allocated to initiatives like dam construction, irrigation development and strategic grain reserves.
36. **Foreign investment in the agricultural sector.** The country has received assistance from several development partners, including the European Union (EU), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and World Food Programme (WFP). Between January and September 2024, development assistance was recorded at US\$14.1 million for agriculture and US\$0.2 million for forestry sector. Funds mainly went towards provision of agriculture development and food security assistance.⁶¹ Development partners are expected to contribute US\$77.9 million toward climate resilience and food production in 2025.

B. IFAD's strategy and operations for the CSPE period

37. **Evolving country strategies.** From 1983 to 2005 IFAD supported five projects (see Annex II).⁶² During this first phase of IFAD support to the country, a COSOP was approved in 1998 (with no specific timeframe covered). In 2005, because of the non-payment of arrears, the Fund's financial support to the country ceased, and the three ongoing projects at that time were closed. IFAD's presence in Zimbabwe was interrupted for ten years.⁶³ Following IFAD EB's approval of the Debt Rescheduling Plan for Zimbabwe in December 2015, a Country Strategy Note (CSN) for the period 2016-2018 was developed (later extended until 2019), under which one project was approved in 2016. In July 2020, IFAD's EB approved the COSOP for Zimbabwe (2020-2025), extended until 31 December 2026, under which two projects are approved. This CSPE covers the period from 2016 to June 2025, including the projects approved under the 2016 CSN and the current COSOP.
38. **The 2016 CSN** covered the period 2016-2019. It sought to boost the well-being and food and nutrition security of vulnerable rural households, by developing climate-smart and highly efficient agricultural production and a strong rural enterprises sector, supported by investment in infrastructure and capacity building (see Table A3 Annex IX). Its specific objectives were to: (i) consolidate and expand partnerships with private sector and other non-state actors to provide training to beneficiaries; (ii) enhance the resilience of poor, vulnerable smallholder farming families to economic shocks, food insecurity and malnutrition; (iii) strengthen institutional capacities for agriculture, irrigation and climate change; and (iv) advance in the preparation for irrigation development in poverty-stricken areas. The priority area for investment was smallholder irrigation development, to be

⁵⁸ <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/zimbabwe-agricultural-sectors>.

⁵⁹ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/9f517389-1bfe-5925-83da-cc6db1e37b11/content>.

⁶⁰ <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/zimbabwe-agricultural-sectors>.

⁶¹ https://www.zimtreasury.gov.zw/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Budget-Statement-2024-Final_compressed.pdf.

⁶² Namely: (i) the National Agricultural Extension and Research Project; (ii) the Agricultural Credit and Export Promotion Project; (iii) the Smallholder Dry Areas Resource Management Project (SDARMP); (iv) the Southeastern Dry Areas Project (SEDAP); and, (v) the Smallholder Irrigation Support Programme (SISP).

⁶³ Due to arrears accumulation of loan repayment. Similar measures were applied by AfDB and the World Bank.

supported by investments in agricultural commodity market development and CSA.

39. **The 2020 COSOP** was approved in July 2020 for a period of six years (see Table A3 Annex IX). It was extended by one year (until end of 2026), following recommendation of the 2020 COSOP Results Review, undertaken in November and December 2023.⁶⁴ It aims to enhance incomes and food and nutrition security of poor rural households through the promotion of more efficient, resilient and inclusive agri-food systems. The COSOP includes two strategic objectives (SOs). Interventions to achieve SO1 include: the revitalisation and expansion of irrigation schemes, as a means of increasing the intensity and diversity of crop and livestock production. Efforts focus on promoting climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive agriculture; the adoption of CSA technologies and practices; and strengthening village-based natural resource management systems. Under SO2, interventions include organizing smallholder farmers into producer groups and transforming from subsistence to market-oriented enterprises. IFAD aligns with the Government focus on supporting Village Business Units (VBUs), aimed at generating income for households and improving livelihoods. Focus is also placed on engaging the private sector and civil society organizations for providing technical assistance.

Table 4.

Comparison of CSN 2016 and COSOP 2020–2025 (summary)

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>CSN 2016–2018</i>	<i>COSOP 2020–2025</i>
Overall goal	Improved well-being and food and nutrition security of vulnerable rural households	Increased incomes and food and nutrition security through resilient and inclusive agrifood systems
Strategic focus	Climate-smart production and rural enterprise development	Productivity and climate resilience; market access and nutrition-sensitive value chains
Geographic focus	Government priority areas	Poorest and most climate-vulnerable areas
Target groups	Poor rural families	Poor and food-insecure smallholder households

Source: CSN 2016 and COSOP 2020.

40. **Loan portfolio and investment categories.** The CSPE covers the three projects presented in Table 2 above. The first project, SIRP, aimed to improve rural households' food and nutrition security and build their resilience to climate change effects and economic shocks in the project districts. SACP, the second project, aims to increase smallholder participation in market-oriented and climate-smart value chains. Finally, HEEP aims to increase income, improve food security and empower smallholder farmers to effectively engage in profitable and sustainable horticulture value chains, through the support and increase of sustainable horticultural production and sales by smallholder farmers and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), engaged in horticulture value chains.⁶⁵ The thematic areas of highest investments are access to markets (38 per cent of total investments), inclusive rural finance (27 per cent) and project management (17 per cent), see Figure A1, Annex IX.
41. **Performance based allocation system (PBAS).** Zimbabwe was allocated US\$25.5 million for the period 2016-2018 (IFAD 10) (see Table A5 in Annex IX). The allocation rose to US\$35.7 million during 2019-2021 (IFAD 11), and again slightly increased with IFAD 12. IFAD lending in the period under review was provided on Highly Concessional terms for the SACP and HEEP, while IFAD

⁶⁴ The extension request was due to delays in the start-up of all three projects and the non-commencement of HEEP, with the consequence that certain key milestone indicators remain at zero. Moreover, it aimed to synchronise with the commencement of the National Development Strategy 2 2026-2030 and UN Sustainable Development Framework.

⁶⁵ In addition to its lending portfolio, IFAD's engagement during the evaluation period foresaw non-lending activities with varying degrees of explicitness across strategic frameworks. While the 2016 CSN made only limited reference to such activities, mainly in relation to strengthening partnerships, the 2020 COSOP articulated more clearly the role of non-lending activities in supporting learning, policy dialogue and strategic partnerships. These activities were intended to complement investment operations by facilitating the dissemination of lessons learned and good practices, strengthening coordination with government and development partners, and contributing to policy processes relevant to smallholder agriculture, value chain development and resilience.

contribution for the SIRP was provided through a Debt Sustainability Framework (DSF) grant.⁶⁶

42. **Grant portfolio.** The desk review found that during the evaluation period (2016-2025), no country-specific independent grants were implemented, but nine regional and global grants were, for a total financing of US\$26.4 million and a total IFAD contribution of US\$4.2 million (see Annex VIII for details). The main thematic areas of grants implemented during the period include climate change, policy dialogue, nutrition, innovation, marketing, and small and medium-sized enterprises support.
43. **Programme management and coordination.** Since the beginning of IFAD operations in Zimbabwe in 1983, there has never been a country office. After the IFAD re-engagement with Zimbabwe in 2015, there have been five country directors (CDs),⁶⁷ based in Rome until 2017, and operating from IFAD's MCO in Johannesburg from 2018, with no IFAD office in the country. There has been a local consultant contracted since 2015, who participates in meetings and missions and represents IFAD between visits of the CD. In January 2025, IFAD hired a UN Volunteer, based in the WFP office in Harare, to strengthen in-country coordination.
44. IFAD's main counterpart in Zimbabwe is MLAFWRD, which is the leading agency for the three ongoing projects.⁶⁸ MLAFWRD established a joint management unit (JMU) in Harare, that facilitates the coordination of IFAD-supported programmes. Each of the projects (HEEP, SACP and SIRP) are managed by a standalone and independent PMU, with provincial project implementation units.⁶⁹ The three projects have a joint project steering committee (PSC), chaired by the Permanent Secretary (PS) of MLAFWRD, which includes representatives of different public sector institutions and private sector organisations, providing project oversight and strategic guidance.

Key points

- Zimbabwe is a lower middle-income country, with abundant natural capital and a fast-growing economy.
- It faces severe economic, institutional and social fragility, driven particularly by policy volatility, international sanctions, high external debt and arrears, corruption and a low capacity to deliver basic services. Climate change is a growing threat.
- Poverty is increasing and households face serious food insecurity and worsening dietary diversity, leading to significant malnutrition and stunting.
- Zimbabwe has a young, educated population, which struggles to find employment and access to land, financial resources and markets.
- Smallholder agriculture dominates, with a heavy reliance on rainfed systems, which are highly sensitive to droughts, and small ruminants and poultry.
- The National Agricultural Policy Framework (2018-2030) and related Agricultural Food Systems and Transformation Strategy (2021-2025) guide the government's priorities.
- Assistance from development partners is limited by the debt arrears.
- 2016 CSN supported the restart of IFAD operations (following the closure 2005-2015). It focused on food and nutrition security, particularly supporting smallholder irrigation development, enterprises and CSA.
- 2020 COSOP continued the work with irrigation, and climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive-agriculture; and supported producer groups to transform from subsistence

⁶⁶ Lending terms for the projects implemented between 1983 and 2005, were: Intermediate for the National Agricultural Extension and Research Project and the Agricultural Credit and Export Promotion Project; and Highly Concessional for SDARMP, SEDAP, and SISP.

⁶⁷ T. Rath (2016- 2017), S. Jatta (2017-2018), S. Chinien (2018), J. Keitaanranta (2018-2022), F. M. Rispoli (2023-current).

⁶⁸ The main counterpart for the three closed projects that this CSPE covers was the same ministry, though under a different name: the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement (MLARR).

⁶⁹ Namely, the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) of the SIRP, the National Project Management Unit (NPMU) of the SACP, and the NPMU of the HEEP. Four positions are shared across the portfolio (Social Inclusion Officer, Knowledge Management and Communications Officer, and Secretary/Administrator in all three projects; and the M&E and Planning Specialist in SIRP and HEEP).

activities to market-oriented enterprises. Focus is also placed on engaging the private sector and civil society organizations.

III. Performance and rural poverty impact of the country programme and strategy

45. This section assessed the extent to which: (i) strategic and programme objectives were aligned with the government, IFAD and beneficiary needs/priorities; (ii) the design of the country strategy, interventions and targeting approaches were consistent with these objectives; and (iii) the strategy and interventions have been (re-) adapted to address changes in the context.

A. Relevance

Relevance to national priorities and IFAD global strategies

46. **There was a strong alignment between IFAD's programme and national development priorities**, notably Transitional Stabilisation Programme (2018 – 2020), Vision 2030 and NDS1 (2020-2025). IFAD contributed to seven of the fourteen NDS pillars, including economic growth, food and nutrition security, value chain transformation, infrastructure, youth development, environmental protection and climate resilience, and social protection.⁷⁰ IFAD's work also aligned with the 10-Point Plan for Economic Growth; the Zimbabwe Agricultural Investment Plan (ZAIP 2013-17); Comprehensive Agricultural Policy Framework 2012-2032 (CAPF), the NAPF (2018–2030), and with Zimbabwe's food systems pathways, and complemented key government initiatives such as the Pfumvudza/Intwasa Programme, the Climate Resilient Livelihoods Project, the Presidential Rural Development Programme, the establishment of Village Business Units, and the Horticulture Recovery Programme. SIRP addressed productivity constraints among irrigated and rainfed farmers through irrigation rehabilitation and the promotion of CSA, supporting the priorities under NDS1 and Agriculture and Food Systems Transformation Strategy (AFSTS) and complementing Command Agriculture and the National Irrigation Policy. IFAD's focus on women and youth aligns was consistent with the National Gender Policy (2017) and the National Youth Policy (2020). SACP supported commercialization through private sector-led value chains, aligned with national food security, gender, industrialization and rural transformation goals, while HEEP complemented both SIRP and SACP by supporting the recovery and growth of the horticulture sector in line with the Horticultural Recovery and Growth Plan.⁷¹
47. **The 2016 CSN, 2020 COSOP and projects were aligned with IFAD policies and strategies**, including IFAD's fourth Strategic Framework 2016-2025 (particularly its pillars of inclusive rural transformation, smallholder productivity and market access), IFAD's corporate commitment to nutrition sensitive interventions, and IFAD's Water and Rural Development Strategy. The projects explicitly integrated IFAD's mainstreaming priorities (climate change, gender equality, youth inclusion, and nutrition) in their designs. Box A3 Annex IX highlights alignment of projects with IFAD policies and strategies.
48. **IFAD supported projects effectively addressed smallholder farmers' priority needs, identified via participatory approaches.** Smallholder farmers consulted during the field mission consistently affirmed the relevance of IFAD interventions, in areas such as revitalizing irrigation infrastructure, improving productivity and access to markets, enhancing food and nutrition security, and supporting agribusiness development. Participatory planning processes, awareness campaigns, and stakeholder-led assessment helped tailor interventions to local contexts while fostering community ownership. SIRP, SACP and HEEP's design applied a structured participatory framework involving awareness meetings, dialogue platforms and collaborative infrastructure planning at district and ward

⁷⁰ IFAD (2023). Republic of Zimbabwe: COSOP results review. Main report and annexes

⁷¹ This Plan aims to revitalize the smallholder horticulture subsector using two key models: the Presidential Horticulture Scheme and the conventional "hub and spoke" approach.

levels.⁷² These processes enhanced the relevance and acceptance of interventions, across all 417 wards. Some isolated cases were encountered where IFAD interventions did not fully reflect local priorities. For example, in parts of Hwange District, stakeholders noted that livestock (identified as a key livelihood priority) was insufficiently integrated into project activities, although many of the matching grants elsewhere support livestock.

Relevance of targeting strategy / approach

49. **All projects in the Zimbabwe portfolio applied a combination of geographic, direct and self-targeting approaches, supported by community-based mechanisms and enabling measures, in line with IFAD's targeting policy.** Over successive operations, the portfolio demonstrated an expanding focus on inclusion. All projects incorporated a design-stage target of 50 per cent women's participation. Youth targeting was progressively strengthened, with SIRP setting a target of 2,000 young people, while the more recent SACP and HEEP projects established youth participation quotas of 30 per cent.⁷³ HEEP further broadened the targeting framework by introducing a specific target of 2,000 persons with disabilities (PWDs), reflecting increased attention to disability inclusion.
50. **Overall, the targeting approaches adopted across the portfolio were relevant to the Zimbabwean context, uneven poverty distribution, and appropriate to project objectives.**⁷⁴ Geographic targeting was particularly well aligned with the spatial distribution of poverty, shaped by prolonged economic decline, climatic stress, regional disparities, and limited access to basic infrastructure and services. IFAD-supported projects consistently focused on marginal and climate-vulnerable areas. For example, SIRP operated in 20 districts across Manicaland, Masvingo, Matabeleland South and Midlands Provinces, predominantly within agro-ecological regions III, IV and V.⁷⁵ These semi-arid regions account for a substantial share of national smallholder irrigation schemes⁷⁶ and have increasingly experienced climate change impacts, including rising temperatures, rainfall variability and recurrent droughts. Geographic targeting was further strengthened through alignment with the Government of Zimbabwe's household categorisation system developed by the MLAFWRD, supporting harmonisation with government and development partners and reducing fragmentation in beneficiary selection.⁷⁷
51. **Self-targeting mechanisms were effectively embedded in project design and implementation, particularly under SIRP and SACP.** Project documentation and CSPE field visits confirmed that community members and local leaders were consulted during project design, with participatory processes

⁷² SACP's District Agricultural Extension Officers (DAEOs) conducted awareness meetings across 18 targeted districts. These meetings engaged community members and raised awareness of the project's objectives, key activities, and implementation framework, emphasizing community-based approaches. (Supervision Mission Report 2024a).

⁷³ SACP designed a comprehensive community engagement and feedback plan informed by contextual and capacity assessments, incorporating measures to ensure inclusion of vulnerable groups.

⁷⁴ For example, according to ZimSTAT data (2015) the provinces with the highest poverty prevalence rates were Matabeleland North (85.7 percent); Mashonaland Central (75.6 percent); Matabeleland South (73.6 percent); Mashonaland West (73.3 percent) and Manicaland (71.8 percent).

https://www.researchpublish.com/upload/book/DETERMINANTS_percent20OF_percent20RURAL_percent20HOUSEHOLD-14082024-3.pdf.

⁷⁵ The selection of the targeted irrigation schemes prioritized areas that optimized a combination of bio-physical, technical, socio-economic and institutional criteria, in order to achieve economies of scale and scope, and to maximize efficiency, effectiveness and large-scale positive impacts (SIRP PCR, 2025).

⁷⁶ SIRP PDR (2016).

⁷⁷ SIRP and SACP used the asset-based categories (A, B1, B2 and C) to prioritise poorer households, while HEEP is finalizing a strategy focusing mainly on B1 and B2, with Category C households capped at 10 per cent. Category A: Highly vulnerable households (very poor, asset-poor, food insecure, no draught power); Category B1: Poor households with limited assets and low productivity; Category B2: Moderate households with some productive assets, can engage in market-based agriculture; Category C: Better-off households with productive assets and commercial farming potential. The SIRP Midterm Review (MTR) further confirmed that this approach facilitated inclusion of women, youth and other vulnerable groups.

especially evident in SIRP. There was broad consensus among stakeholders and beneficiaries that services were designed to respond to the priorities, assets and labour constraints of the intended target groups, thereby reinforcing self-selection by poorer households. In irrigation schemes, inputs and support were tailored based on assessments of water availability, environmental conditions and scheme-specific constraints, contributing to demand-driven participation and reinforcing targeting relevance.

52. **Direct targeting measures further enhanced the ability of projects to reach intended beneficiaries.** Eligibility criteria were applied at multiple levels, including households, groups and enterprises, and were supported by community-based selection processes involving village-level actors. Under SACP, a structured community engagement and feedback strategy was developed, grounded in community capacity assessments and designed to strengthen social inclusion. Measures included meetings with traditional leaders and councillors held in accessible locations and scheduled to facilitate the participation of women and other vulnerable groups. Beneficiaries confirmed that community-based targeting was generally effective. For example, in Mabhikwa VBU in Matabeleland North Province, beneficiary selection followed clear criteria prioritising widows, PWDs, the elderly and low-income households, although space constraints resulted in the exclusion of some eligible individuals. Overall, these approaches improved transparency and precision in beneficiary selection.⁷⁸
53. **Enabling measures also contributed positively to targeting relevance, particularly in relation to gender equality.** Gender-targeting approaches were appropriate given persistent gender inequalities in Zimbabwe's smallholder farming systems. SIRP's draft Gender and Targeting Strategy drew on the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, while SACP prioritised pro-women value chains through its matching grant criteria and applied participation quotas. The SACP Implementation Support Report (2023) identified weaknesses in quota enforcement and recommended corrective actions, including separate consultations for women and men, accessible meeting arrangements, use of local languages, deployment of female extension officers, engagement with women's organisations and promotion of labour-saving technologies.⁷⁹ Building on these lessons, HEEP adopted a gender-transformative approach using GALS to promote women's empowerment, strengthen decision-making roles and improve access to project benefits. As a result, women's participation exceeded targets, with SIRP achieving 59 per cent women participants at completion and SACP reporting 62 per cent women participants as of December 2024.
54. **Despite these positive results, some targeting-related challenges persist.** Youth inclusion has been comparatively less successful, particularly within irrigation schemes. SIRP's reliance on rehabilitating existing schemes limited opportunities for youth participation, as plots were largely held by adult men, with youth participation occurring mainly through inheritance or scheme expansion areas. While SACP and HEEP established 30 per cent youth quotas, and SACP held youth-only calls, CSPE field visits found mixed results under SACP. In some areas, youth participation in micro and small enterprises and producer groups was evident, while in others it remained limited due to competing income opportunities in mining areas, particularly in Matabeleland North. SACP plans to strengthen monitoring of youth wage and self-employment outcomes through quarterly tracking.
55. **The field mission also documented isolated instances of conflict,** particularly

⁷⁸ These disputes stemmed from competing demands for water between humans and livestock, as well as tensions with non-beneficiaries. The issues were being addressed through the community-based grievance redress system outlined in the SACP guidelines. For instance, in the Ndimakule VBU, the community agreed to allocate irrigation activities until 3 p.m., after which water is made available for other domestic uses. Separate troughs and water points are designated for livestock.

⁷⁹ This stipulated 50 percent women in APGs, and 25 percent women in Micro Enterprises and VCLEs.

in Matabeleland North Province, related to competition over water resources and tensions between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Water-related disputes reflect broader climate stress and resource scarcity rather than weaknesses in targeting relevance. Tensions involving non-beneficiaries, however, underscore the importance of transparent selection and communication processes. These issues were being addressed through community-based grievance redress mechanisms, mitigating risks without undermining overall targeting relevance.

Quality of designs

56. **Both strategic documents were qualitatively sound and aligned with the context prevailing at their design.** The 2016 CSN was designed during the period of re-engagement between IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe, following the years of institutional absence. Given tight timelines and a complex socio-economic and political environment,⁸⁰ the CSN design team aligned with existing national priorities to expedite the re-engagement process. The design of the 2020 COSOP was informed by previous IFAD engagements. It drew lessons from SIRP, as well as IFAD projects conducted in Zimbabwe in the 1990s, and from other development partners. Key insights included the importance of participatory planning for ownership and sustainability, the effectiveness of farmer contributions in strengthening livestock services, and the need for multisectoral nutrition interventions to address Zimbabwe's persistent malnutrition. The 2020 COSOP prioritized irrigation development as an immediate entry point, which enabled attention to critical issues such as sustainable irrigation management, productivity improvement, market access and climate resilience.
57. **The design of the irrigation components (in SIRP) was contextually relevant but had technical gaps.** Under SIRP, irrigation designs were guided by feasibility studies conducted by the Department of Irrigation (DoI); however, several technical shortcomings were noted. Some feasibility studies lacked independence due to the preselection of irrigation schemes by the DoI (aligned with the project's implementation manual), and there was limited evidence of scientifically robust technical feasibility reports.⁸¹ Several technical design challenges were identified. For instance, at Mutambara Irrigation Scheme (Chimanimani district), none of the valves were functional during the field mission due to inadequate testing before commissioning. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized to the CSPE team, the importance of conducting borehole capacity tests and proceeding only with those that met the project's established water quantity and quality standards. This was reaffirmed in the May 2025 SACP Supervision Mission Report as a recurring design issue.
58. **Design elements related to rural finance and market access (SACP) also had gaps.** While project designs acknowledged limited access to finance as a key barrier to agricultural development, SIRP in particular lacked a thorough analysis of Zimbabwe's rural finance landscape or related policies. SACP was more explicit and recognized financial institutions' reluctance to support value chains and outlined clear instruments, target groups and partners. However, SACP's approach to market access was largely implicit, assuming that forming APGs around VCLEs would automatically enhance access, relying on national priorities such as contract farming. It lacked clear strategies for brokering or linking markets.⁸² SIRP was somewhat stronger, outlining activities for market infrastructure and facilitation, yet both projects focused more on production than on achieving effective market linkages. The design of HEEP has given more emphasis to a Public Private Producer Partnership (4P) approach.

⁸⁰ For example, at that time, Zimbabwe was facing strained international relations; arrears with creditors such as World Bank and IMF; high levels of poverty; low government spending on agriculture; debt distress; among other challenges.

⁸¹ Lessons learnt notes and interview with for IFAD Country Director.

⁸² SACP has adopted the Government and JICA approach to market facilitation through the SHEP approach.

Relevance of changes during projects' implementation

59. **Several adjustments were introduced in response to evolving contextual and operational realities, which were relevant. Some of these changes also contributed to delays.** SIRP's initial targets of 5,000 hectares across 125 irrigation schemes were later expanded to 6,100 hectares, but high per-hectare rehabilitation costs made these targets unattainable. A cost-optimization exercise at midterm reduced the target to 5,200 hectares across 60 schemes, improving feasibility but contributing to delays, with some works concluding near project closure. SIRP also received two six-month extensions and shifted from RIMS to IFAD's Core Outcome Indicators system, requiring Logframe revisions. Under SACP, structural modifications during the inception phase slowed the start of key activities. Training activities, initially organised by the project, were shifted to contractual modalities through a Technical Assistance (TA) provider,⁸³ which required a lengthy procurement process of more than 10 months.⁸⁴ These delayed essential interventions, such as APG and MSE training, business plan development, mentoring and financial disbursements. Additional refinements (for (SACP) included integrating a Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey into the baseline to strengthen the nutrition strategy; and embedding CSA practices and measurable CSA capacity-building targets into APG business plans and the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system.
60. **Inclusive rural finance components were adjusted during implementation to address and correct initial design weaknesses.** The SACP redesign was highly dynamic, involving multiple revisions, mostly informed by supervision missions. Key shifts included transferring implementation from private to public institutions, expanding the USD-denominated Line of Credit,⁸⁵ and altering matching grant mechanisms and institutional responsibilities.⁸⁶ These adjustments were in response to macroeconomic shifts but also exposed design fragility, inadequate anticipation of regulatory constraints and institutional capacity gaps, especially regarding Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ)'s initially overstated implementation role.⁸⁷ SIRP's redesign was more contained and strategic. Changes concentrated on refocusing the Natural Resource Management facility toward income-generating and environmentally sustainable schemes and reallocating rural finance resources to CSA.⁸⁸ These adjustments highlighted weaknesses in the original design.
61. **Responses to changes in context were sound.** Under SIRP, drought conditions prompted collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Meteorological Department to expand outreach on weather advisories. Main canals were converted to pipes at Banga irrigation scheme (62 ha) to reduce evaporation losses, and solar-powered pumps reduced reliance on diesel energy (SIRP MTR 2021). The programme adopted several measures that were relevant and appropriate to mitigate disruptions and ensure programme continuity, in response to the COVID-

⁸³ This was necessary because capacity gaps required IFAD's intervention, as early skeletal structures lacked sufficient technical staff, resulting in implementation delays. IFAD notes that the process was resisted by the project team, which contributed to the delay. The engagement of technical assistance experts and full-time staff subsequently strengthened coordination and improved project delivery.

⁸⁴ SACP PMU self-assessment questionnaire.

⁸⁵ The implementation support mission (May 2023) recommended opening up the USD denominated line of credit (LoC) beyond the initially envisaged export enterprises, and increased the amount allocated from USD2.5m to USD5m; this aligned with the country's economy at the time which accepted USD denominated transactions for all businesses.

⁸⁶ The supervision mission (November 2023) made yet another modification, this time on the use of matching grants, to focus only on asset investment and omit working capital with a beneficiary cash contribution of 20 per cent (APGs) and 30 per cent (SMEs) respectively to the host institution.

⁸⁷ The Supervision mission in February 2024 recommended that RBZ would manage both the LoC and the matching grants while AFC would be the PFI retailing the LoC. The mission noted that RBZ did not have the experience and would receive capacity building from the project.

⁸⁸ The natural resource management facility was redesigned to focus on schemes with income generating projects that had strong environment conservation elements and introduce a regional balance by having 2 projects per region with USD100,000-200,000 facility. Also, part of the funding originally earmarked for rural finance was repurposed for CSA on the request of MLAWRR, and the plan for recruitment of the rural finance specialist was abandoned.

19 pandemic. Responses include mobilizing additional resources – as IFAD amended SIRP’s financing agreement in January and September 2021 – to incorporate additional grant resources from the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF); as well as deploying effective community-based mechanisms (see more details in Box A4, Annex IX).

Relevance of institutional arrangements

62. **Institutional arrangements were adequate considering the context, albeit some complexity challenges.** SIRP implementation was fully embedded within government systems, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture, Mechanization and Irrigation Development and its technical departments.⁸⁹ The programme engaged full-time PMU staff while seconding government personnel to ensure dedicated involvement. Additional capacity support came from technical partners including United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) (SIRP), Linkages for Economic Advancement of the Disadvantaged (LEAD) (SACP), and currently the Horticulture Development Council (HDC) (HEEP). Government focal points from MLAWFRD emphasized a strong working relationship with IFAD, supported by regular high-level meetings with the Permanent Secretary (PS). At the same time, SIRP PMU faced challenges arising from complex, multi-ministerial institutional arrangements that exceeded implementation capacity. While the PMU generally coordinated programme activities effectively, coordination was at times suboptimal, and fiduciary functions were sometimes inefficient.⁹⁰
63. **Decentralized implementation arrangements were pertinent for the project delivery.** The CSPE confirmed active participation by local government departments in project activities. Provincial offices are staffed with specialists in some topics (e.g. value chains, CSA, M&E, social inclusion and procurement). SACP established a Provincial Technical Committee for screening proposals, considering women and youth quotas. District level implementation is supported by AGRITEX/ARDAS extension network that forms implementation teams in 18 SACP districts.
64. **The selection of implementation partners for rural finance and market access interventions was appropriate.** SIRP implemented a model for rural finance that promoted access to finance as part of the Farming as a Business (FaaB) capacity building through appropriate partners such as the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA) and ARDA. The selection of these partners was appropriate as these institutions were parastatals already operating within the government’s policy and regulatory frameworks.⁹¹
65. **Relevance summary.** The CSN, COSOP and IFAD projects were closely aligned with Zimbabwe’s agriculture and rural development priorities, reflecting national frameworks and key policies, strategies and plans and IFAD policies and strategies. Projects largely addressed smallholder farmers’ priority needs through well-suited participatory approaches, though some stakeholders noted isolated misalignments with local priorities. Multiple targeting mechanisms improved transparency and inclusion, but conflicts occasionally arose around water use, and youth targeting was less relevant. Gender-targeting strategies were highly relevant given persistent inequalities. Implementation adjustments supported adaptive management but sometimes caused delays. Institutional arrangements were adequate despite operational challenges for seconded government staff. Considering these, the **relevance is rated as moderately satisfactory (4).**

B. Coherence

⁸⁹ SIRP was implemented through AGRITEX/ARDAS and the Department of Irrigation, with extensive capacity-building for agencies such as AGRITEX/ARDAS, ARDA, AMA, and ZINWA, ultimately training over 1,500 staff.

⁹⁰ The government responded proactively by reshuffling the PCU, including terminating the underperforming coordinator, to improve implementation efficiency and effectiveness (SIRP PCR, 2025).

⁹¹ SIRP PCR (2025).

66. The CSPE examined the coherence of the Zimbabwe programme in two key dimensions. Internal coherence assessed how well IFAD-supported activities and projects complemented and reinforced one another. External coherence evaluated the alignment of IFAD's country strategy and programme with the priorities and interventions of other development partners operating in Zimbabwe. This section also gives particular attention to non-lending activities (knowledge management, partnership building and policy engagement) and considers how effectively they contributed to strengthening overall programme coherence.

Internal coherence

67. **The IFAD portfolio sought consistency across projects and aimed at creating synergies.** Collectively, the three projects demonstrated complementary pathways: SIRP focused on resilience through improved irrigation, production, and productivity, while SACP and HEEP emphasized market-oriented, climate-smart value chains, with HEEP integrating this approach within a holistic rural economy framework. SACP and HEEP addressed SIRP's financing gaps by facilitating SHF access to credit; and SACP complemented these efforts through partnerships with other development actors on nutrition, gender equality and market linkages. HEEP built on SIRP's irrigation investments by strengthening smallholder market linkages through the 4P approach. All the three projects focused on common thematic areas of increased household incomes and improved food and nutrition security. There were deliberate efforts at creating geographical overlaps between SIRP and SACP sites. The districts in the Midlands province where SACP operated, overlapped with IFAD supported SIRP targeted districts, in order to promote lesson learning between the two interventions and leverage existing irrigation infrastructure (SACP staff also attended some SIRP learning events).⁹² Value chain development was common across the portfolio, but the market orientation and resilience components were amplified in later projects, with more emphasis on MSMEs and market-oriented & climate-resilient value chains.
68. **Establishing a Joint Management Unit (JMU) at national level fosters coherence and seamless transition between projects,** by leveraging institutional memory, established networks and strong partnerships. SIRP initially had a very lean PMU with seconded government staff juggling project duties with their primary jobs, causing substantial operational challenges that led to implementation delays. This led to a revised model, establishing a JMU for IFAD funded projects. The JMU aims at improving the programme delivery by applying lessons learned and effective knowledge management, thereby accelerating implementation.⁹³ However, stakeholders highlighted the risk of overstressing staff in managing large projects concurrently. Although the programmatic approach through the JMU provides scope for coordinating much deeper synergies, such synergies were not apparent during the field mission.
69. **The grant programme was relevant in addressing key market, employment, and productivity constraints by strengthening market linkages, improving post-harvest infrastructure, as well as for practical learning.** The Red Meat grant enabled producer groups in Gwanda to establish direct market linkages with butcheries for goat and sheep sales, significantly increasing household incomes.⁹⁴ The Green Tech grant's cold room cut post-harvest losses by 50 per cent and tripled smallholder incomes by improving product quality and reducing rejections. The TAF/AAF grant supported Interfresh, helping safeguard nearly 200 jobs at risk from land expropriation and boosting citrus yields

⁹² SACP PDR (2021).

⁹³ The JMU allows sharing of office space, equipment, staff (Senior Social Inclusion Specialist, Knowledge Management and Communication Specialist and Office Secretary) and vehicles (See more details in Box 18, Annex IX).

⁹⁴ The project also built three and refurbished two livestock marketing (offtake) structures. Value Chains for Women and Young Farmers in East and Southern Africa, was implemented by ILRI (2020–2023).

by 60 per cent. Capacity-building was a central feature across grants.⁹⁵ Several grants also strengthened the programme by generating analytical products that informed design and implementation. In ASAP2, the Zimbabwe country study shaped new investments by analysing climate and nutrition priorities and identifying intervention pathways and later served as a national advocacy tool.⁹⁶ Similarly, rangeland assessments under the Red Meat Project provided critical evidence that informed community grazing management practices, demonstrating the value of data-driven approaches.

70. However, some grants faced reduced coherence due primarily to institutional and implementation weaknesses. For instance, in the Green Tech grant, construction of the SIRP pack house was repeatedly delayed by lengthy government procurement procedures and limited leadership. Zimbabwe's weak institutional capacity hindered progress, with partners often slow to respond or unable to meet commitments. In the TAF/AAF grant, the out-grower scheme was terminated as the company operational crises, leading to project cancellation.

External coherence

71. **IFAD's comparative advantage is confirmed in promoting inclusive smallholder economic growth, strengthening climate resilience, and empowering communities for sustainable development.** IFAD was widely regarded as a neutral broker, effectively linking stakeholders across agriculture and rural development. A further strength was in its direct engagement with government institutions, which enabled a deep understanding of government needs and the provision of responsive and well-targeted support. IFAD's continued engagement reflected a high level of trust between the organization and the Government of Zimbabwe, as well as its commitment to long-term partnerships, even in challenging operating environments. The Ministry of Lands and Agriculture and the Ministry of Finance consistently considered IFAD their closest and most effective partner in advancing rural transformation.⁹⁷ IFAD's added value, relative to partners such as the World Bank, AfDB, and UNDP, derived from its long-standing and specialized support to Zimbabwe's agriculture sector. It brought global expertise in smallholder commercialization, climate-smart agriculture, rural enterprise development, and linking productivity gains to improved nutrition. Unlike many donors, IFAD invested in resettlement farming areas, prioritizing smallholders. Government stakeholders highlighted IFAD's role in scaling models such as climate-smart agriculture, rural enterprises, and the Village Business Unit. IFAD also demonstrated flexibility by continuing to provide financing despite debt constraints, including innovative blended loan-grant arrangements highly valued by the Government.
72. **IFAD actively engaged in various coordination mechanisms to strengthen collaboration and alignment.** Even though it has no country office,⁹⁸ IFAD has been participating in the UN Country Team (UNCT); the Committee on the Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion (SHEP) tool within the Ministry of Agriculture; the RBA Joint Programming Discussions, held regularly with FAO and IFAD to explore joint programming opportunities; and the RCO-led Resilience and Climate Change Platform, which brought together various UN agencies, including WFP and FAO. Additionally, IFAD participated in the Agricultural and Development Partner Group, chaired by FAO, with uneven bi-monthly meetings

⁹⁵ in the Red Meat Project, 110 livestock farmers and extension staff were trained through a trainer-of-trainers model, while 1,000 farmers and 10 extension officers in Gwanda received training on livestock marketing indicators. Under TAF/AAF, a €250,000 initiative supported 200 smallholders producing citrus and other fruits, enhancing incomes, marketing skills and financial access.

⁹⁶ The Climate Change and Nutrition Linkages in IFAD's Investments – ASAP2 Concept Note Number 40, implemented by the WCDI (2020–2021) focused more on capacity-building within IFAD's design process (via SACP) than on direct field-level nutrition results.

⁹⁷ Interviews with government focal points from the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water & Rural Development; Interview with Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion.

⁹⁸ See elaboration on this aspect on the section of IFAD performance.

involving government, UN agencies and other development partners. SIRP's participation in national platforms strengthened alignment with government priorities, improved coordination, and reduced duplication through shared planning and joint programming.⁹⁹ Engagement across food security, irrigation, and nutrition deepened public–private collaboration, including joint ventures in irrigation schemes, demonstrating transparent, scalable partnerships validated by the Ministry of Agriculture.^{100,101} Box A6 in Annex IX further unpacks examples of complementarities with other partners. IFAD's targeting strategies have helped prevent duplication of efforts, while complementing and enhancing initiatives led by other development partners.

73. **However, government-led coordination mechanisms within the agricultural sector remained weak, with limited IFAD's support.** Although a Development Cooperation Policy was introduced in 2019–2020 under the Ministry of Finance, to improve coordination and reduce duplication, national level coordination of (national and international) partners' efforts remained problematic within the agricultural sector. The policy called for the establishment of sector working groups, and since 2022 the Development Projects Management Information System (DevProMIS) online platform had been operational, providing development information to both the public and donors. However, coordination through these sector working groups under the Ministry of Finance remained uneven. Interview outcomes indicated that the agriculture working group (in which IFAD participates in meetings) functioned irregularly, and coordination mechanisms at the provincial and district levels performed poorly. District-level discussions indicated that collaboration between partners was maintained through informal coordination, mostly based on fragmented reporting by various development partners.

Knowledge management

74. **IFAD developed and disseminated various knowledge products in line with the Knowledge Management framework defined in the COSOP.** The COSOP defined a Knowledge Management framework aligned with Country-Level Policy Engagement (CLPE) and the National Agricultural Policy Framework, emphasizing documentation of lessons learned, and knowledge-sharing events.¹⁰² Within this framework, working with PMUs, the IFAD country office produced documentary videos (such as *Fighting the Drought*) shared across YouTube, Facebook and Twitter/X. More than 50 success stories have been compiled and circulated.¹⁰³ By integrating knowledge management into communication channels, including social media, newsletters, radio and workshops, IFAD broadened outreach and stakeholder engagement.¹⁰⁴ It also produced a scientific and technical report on climate-resilient agricultural water management and a related policy brief. SIRP and SACP maintain websites that serve as platforms for continuous learning. Lessons generated from IFAD-funded initiatives were documented annually and

⁹⁹ Through engagement in the Agricultural Food Security Pillar, Irrigation Working Group, and Scaling Up Nutrition, SIRP shared programme progress, best practices, and planned activities, contributing to improved coordination, resource pooling, and reduced duplication of efforts, as well as joint programming with other partners, including input into the ZUNSDCF design.

¹⁰⁰ Notably, the use of joint venture arrangements in irrigation schemes operationalised these partnerships, exemplified by Tensor Systems' provision of mechanisation, land preparation, and working capital in exchange for farmer labour and shared harvest proceeds, under contracts validated by the Ministry of Agriculture's Legal Department.

¹⁰¹ IFAD is also contributing to the emerging Broader Resilience Platform, led by the Ministry of Agriculture and UNDP, which aimed to engage a diverse set of stakeholders, including the World Bank.

¹⁰² The CSN did not explicitly define a knowledge management agenda.

¹⁰³ Between 2024 and 2025, the portfolio generated 16 blogs and over 20 publications, including market assessments, lessons-learned reports and success stories, contributing to knowledge sharing and wider dissemination of experiences.

¹⁰⁴ SIRP produced and disseminated several success story booklets, news articles (in newspapers such as the Chronicle, and the Herald) and documentaries on the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) news between 2021–2022.

shared widely across the agriculture sector through biannual review meetings involving extension services, local authorities, key ministries, and parastatals such as ARDA, AMA and AFC. Additional lessons-learned workshops under the NORAD-funded nutrition component informed ministries and field officers. These efforts contributed to outcomes such as the National Gender Strategy for Agriculture.

75. **A substantial number of knowledge products and mechanisms were initiated that were largely relevant to their intended audience.** Key KM outputs across the portfolio comprised project briefs, policy papers, newsletters, flyers, brochures, learning visit reports. Guided by the KM and Communication strategy, SIRP implemented a wide range of initiatives, including hosting learning events on environmental and social safeguards, focusing on efficient water use in agriculture, inclusion of persons with disabilities, youth engagement in agriculture, nutrition, and the use of ICTs to empower women. SIRP also took part in regional knowledge-sharing events organized by IFAD's ESA regional office, including a nutrition-focused forum in Rwanda and an irrigation learning event in Eswatini. Box A8 Annex IX highlights further examples of knowledge products.
76. **Knowledge sharing mechanisms at the sub-national level were mixed.** At the sub-national level, there were few formal mechanisms for knowledge sharing beyond routine reporting. Although the CSPE team sought access to knowledge materials from local development partners such as AGRITEX/ARDAS, these were not made available. At the community level, several knowledge-sharing mechanisms were identified, including study tours, learning events and field days. Examples included: an exchange between Mamina and Sanyati irrigation schemes on value addition; exchange visits on water conservation techniques at the Cashel Valley irrigation scheme; field days that have proven popular, such as youth groups learning from one another through interactive sessions. The most effective learning approaches were exchange visits to project sites combined with learning workshops. While online learning sessions appealed to technical officers, their relevance was often limited by poor internet connectivity.
77. **The programme made progress in implementing South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC).** For example, SIRP engaged with the Smallholder Market Led Programme (SMLP) in Eswatini to exchange experiences on Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) methodology and engagement on youth in agriculture. Considering the relevance of irrigation in GoZ's strategy for the transformation of the agricultural sector, in December 2023, IFAD organized a high-level regional learning event on 'Rethinking Investments in Small-Scale Irrigation Systems in East and Southern Africa'.¹⁰⁵ SIRP hosted regional peers, such as Eswatini's Smallholder Market-Led Project (SMLP project), to share experiences in irrigation management, value chain development and gender mainstreaming. Additionally, SACP engaged in a virtual workshop with FINCLUDE (Eswatini), which led to the adoption of farmer diaries. A partnership with Brazil SSTC, through the Department of Research and Specialist Services, was established to promote fodder production.
78. **The portfolio projects adopted a structured M&E framework and deployed digital tools that emphasize the integration of M&E and KM.** SIRP developed a detailed and operational M&E framework aligned with IFAD's standards, ensuring systematic data collection, and reporting. SACP, learning from SIRP, designed its M&E system alongside an M&E Plan and an operational log frame, shared across project teams to guide data collection, analysis and reporting.¹⁰⁶ Discussions highlighted that SIRP produced and shared multiple outcome-level datasets. These include the 2022 and 2023 Annual Outcome Surveys, the 2024 Endline Report, and

¹⁰⁵ COSOP CRR (2023).

¹⁰⁶ SIRP utilized digital tools such as data collection tablets and Kobo Toolbox for real-time beneficiary registration, profiling and data entry. The project maintained a strong link between data collection and reporting via a Management Information System (MIS).

the GALS outcome evaluation.¹⁰⁷ SACP adopted similar SIRP tools, digitizing beneficiary registration and using Kobo Toolbox. Plans were underway to equip field extension officers with tablets connected to the MIS to ensure seamless data flow.¹⁰⁸ More information is provided in Box A9 in Annex IX.

79. **However, projects experienced notable challenges in operationalizing their M&E systems.** SIRP faced limited M&E capacity among government counterparts, which is now being addressed as reported by the Government. SACP continued to struggle with data quality, validation and system integration, raising concerns about the accuracy and reliability of its reporting. Baseline data collection was a major issue for both projects: SACP's baseline remained incomplete by 2024 and SIRP's was also collected late, limiting timely analysis and weakening performance benchmarks. SACP's MIS faced design and functionality gaps, including weak integration with mobile data tools, lack of real-time syncing and incomplete databases on value chain actors, persons with disabilities and matching grants. As a result, SACP continued to rely on mixed tools (Kobo, paper forms and Excel), causing data fragmentation, reliability issues and delayed reporting. SIRP's MIS was more integrated and functional, though government capacity constraints persisted despite PRIME-funded support.¹⁰⁹ At district and provincial levels, capacity was limited. Collaboration between M&E, component leads, finance and technical assistance teams were irregular, with discrepancies between reported datasets. Limited M&E involvement in planning and weak linkage with finance hindered reconciliation of physical and financial progress.
80. **KM and M&E outputs were increasingly utilized to strengthen learning across the country programme.** Cross-project learning occurred, with models like 4Ps, the hub-and-spoke approach and SHEP model transferred across projects, and the JMU (presented earlier). IFAD systematically documented innovations and good practices through blogs, infographics, policy briefs and internal reports, including on El Niño and Village Business Units.¹¹⁰ During SIRP, KM resources were limited, with a single individual handling M&E, KM and communications.¹¹¹ By contrast, SACP and HEEP had a dedicated KM and communications officer serving both projects, reflecting a notable progress in this area. Under SIRP, M&E findings and outcome surveys were routinely used to inform programme planning, targeting and design adjustments. Annual Outcome Surveys (2020, 2023) and thematic studies on nutrition, youth, gender and irrigation governance directly shaped implementation priorities, such as the promotion of the block farming model, refinement of the ARDA irrigation management approach and the adoption of the lead farmer extension strategy as well as the ongoing gender strategy formulation.¹¹² M&E results also informed the development of annual work plan and budget (AWPB).¹¹³ See more examples in Box A10 Annex IX.

Partnership Development

81. **IFAD utilised a prudent yet relevant and proactive partnership approach, characterized by strong strategic engagement with Government.** The two strategic entry points were the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and

¹⁰⁷ Each containing quantitative measurements of yields, income, food security (HDDS/FCS), CSA adoption, and gender/decision-making indicators.

¹⁰⁸ SIRP benefited from the PRIME capacity-building grant, which strengthened institutional M&E capacity. This included: development of robust questionnaires and MIS databases, training of M&E staff, establishment of a regional M&E network, and integration of knowledge management and M&E functions. IFAD (2020). QAG Review Note: Final Draft Project Design Document and President's Report.

¹⁰⁹ SACP's M&E capacity gaps remain significant. For example, the 2025 supervision mission noted that the PMU's M&E Specialist needs further training in IFAD reporting, data validation, and statistical analysis.

¹¹⁰ Self-assessment by IFAD staff.

¹¹¹ In 2021 a KM and M&E assistants were hired to improve the outputs, but no evidence of improvement found.

¹¹² M&E findings revealed fragmented smallholder production, prompting adoption of block farming to enhance efficiency. Governance assessments showed weak management, leading to ARDA's business-oriented model with dedicated scheme managers.

¹¹³ Priorities in areas such as post-harvest management, financial access through the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility and expansion of NRM and FaaB training in 2024.

Investment Promotion (MOFEDIP) and the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural (MLAFWRD). Partnerships with both ministries, which were informed by consultative processes conducted during the preparation of the CSN and COSOP, strengthened government accountability and enhanced the capacity of parastatal agencies in supporting rural communities. Other ministries included the ones in charge of Women's Affairs, of Small and Medium Enterprises, and Youth, of Environment, Climate and Wildlife. Key partnership strengths included strong government ownership and active involvement in project design, implementation and resource allocation, which ensured alignment with national priorities and achievement of project goals. Targeted capacity-building initiatives for government institutions, particularly in M&E and project management, further reinforced collaboration and enhanced overall effectiveness.¹¹⁴

82. **Partnerships with decentralised government institutions and state-owned enterprises contributed to enhancing implementation capacity and support comprehensive rural development efforts.** The secondment of government staff significantly strengthened their technical skills and practical experience, especially in feasibility studies and managing irrigation scheme contracts. Officers benefited from formal training, peer exchanges and learning visits that enhanced their capacity.¹¹⁵ Similarly, partnerships were also developed with government agencies including Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, ARDAS, Department of Irrigation (DOI), ZINWA, Department of Lands (DOL), Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA), Agricultural Rural Development Authority (ARDA), Environmental Management Authority (EMA) and Rural Infrastructure Development Agency (RIDA). Government partners praised IFAD's consultative processes during both the design and implementation of projects, and the relevance of IFAD's portfolio to government needs. Unlike many partners that rely heavily on international NGOs or UN agencies, IFAD prioritized national leadership and local systems.¹¹⁶
83. **IFAD made substantial efforts to mobilize co-financing, achieving notable successes.** Collaboration with JICA's Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment & Promotion (SHEP) programme supported training extension officers in Market-Oriented Agriculture, while NORAD co-financed SIRP's nutrition-sensitive interventions.¹¹⁷ The OPEC Fund contributed co-financing to SIRP, SACP and HEEP. Despite challenges, particularly IFAD being the only development finance institution lending directly to the Government, IFAD collaborated with various partners under SACP,¹¹⁸ which strengthened infrastructure, nutrition, climate resilience and market access. Debt arrears prevented the World Bank and AfDB from direct lending to Zimbabwe, limiting large-scale collaboration. Nevertheless, IFAD secured a USD 9.5 million grant from AfDB's Climate Adaptation Window. Additional grants were mobilized for disability inclusion (SPARK), irrigation sustainability and groundwater management (SADC-GMI). Additional co-financing intentions are presented in Box A7, Annex IX.
84. **There were missed opportunities for co-financing and joint programming, despite IFAD efforts.** Some development partners, such as the World Bank through the ZISET Trust Fund, established pooled funding mechanisms to enhance the impact of their support. IFAD had not strengthened collaboration and resource mobilization through such mechanisms. A potential US\$1 million cost-sharing MoU with USADF collapsed in 2023 due to U.S.-GoZ clearance challenges, forfeiting valuable business development support. Engagement with USAID in 2024 showed

¹¹⁴ Government Focal Points - Self-assessment.

¹¹⁵ For example, at Makwe Irrigation Scheme in Gwanda District, AGRITEX/ARDAS and ARDA staff praised the refresher courses in business planning and budgeting. AGRITEX/ARDAS officers also undertook "look and learn" visits to Insukamini Irrigation Scheme in Gweru to exchange best practices. At Mushandike, extension workers received targeted practical training in FaaBs, GALS, post-harvest handling and GAPs.

¹¹⁶ Interviews with Government Focal points in MLAFWRD.

¹¹⁷ JICA's partnership with SACP has enabled the setting up of rice seed multiplication DPs through its NERICA programme, and the training of SACP staff on the SHEP approach.

¹¹⁸ OFID, NORAD, AfDB-CAW, FAO-GEF7, UNDP-GCF, JICA and CGIAR centres such as CIMMYT and ICRISAT.

strong potential for synergies in lines of credit, matching grants and technical assistance for smallholders, but this was disrupted by USAID's office closure in July 2025.¹¹⁹ In the private sector, while companies like Tensor Systems were partners, broader engagement in off-taker agreements, input supply and agro-processing remained underdeveloped under SIRP, though SACP and HEEP aim to expand such arrangements. Opportunities existed to deepen collaboration with CGIAR centres in areas such as climate resilience and sustainable land management.¹²⁰

85. **Good progress was made in strengthening partnerships among the Rome-Based Agencies (RBAs), though collaboration remained uneven and required further consolidation.** The co-location of IFAD staff within the WFP office supported ongoing dialogue. In 2024, IFAD led the formulation of a Joint Action Plan with FAO and WFP, moving towards a structured collaborative approach.¹²¹ Even before a formal framework existed, IFAD pursued deliberate collaboration with FAO and WFP, resulting in several achievements including joint World Food Day events, food systems dialogues, training on SHEP and nutrition and development of an action plan linked to Village-Based Units. IFAD, FAO and WFP were also collaborating on the Ministry of Agriculture's Gender Policy. SIRP partnered with FAO to implement the GEF-7 grant, which enhanced natural resource management, catchment conservation, agroforestry and climate adaptation efforts aligned with Zimbabwe's NDCs.¹²² Weak collaboration among RBAs led to missed opportunities. WFP highlighted that the absence of a formal, sustained partnership limited joint proposal development (such as AfDB submissions) and reduced the potential for integrated, resilience-building interventions. FAO noted that earlier involvement in IFAD project design, particularly through its Investment Centre, would enhance technical quality despite perceived conflict-of-interest concerns.
86. **Partnerships with other UN agencies were limited despite a successful partnership with UNOPS.** At IFAD's request, the Government engaged UNOPS to manage contracts for 10 irrigation schemes facing potential delays. UNOPS effectively supervised implementation and trained government staff in contract management, strengthening institutional capacity for future infrastructure delivery. To address persistent challenges, SIRP was restructured in 2023, outsourcing oversight to UNOPS to accelerate irrigation works. UNOPS support enhanced monitoring, procurement efficiency, virtual stakeholder engagement and construction timelines, helping to mitigate issues such as procurement delays and economic instability. UNOPS highlighted that future projects should establish faster payment systems to ensure contractor liquidity and progress.
87. **IFAD expanded its engagement with private sector actors. However, collaborations between farmers and private companies remained uneven and often skewed in favour of the latter.** Aligning with the Government's NDS1 emphasis on private sector-led agricultural transformation, IFAD engaged financial institutions such as AFC Commercial Bank and AFC Land and Development Bank under SACP to develop loan products tailored to Agricultural Producer Groups, rural MSEs and VCLEs. Under SIRP, partnerships with companies such as PHI, Kacholo and Whitney Paprika supported demonstration sites and outgrower schemes, while additional firms including Celfre, Cairns Foods, Matanuska, UNKI Mine and Zim

¹¹⁹ Two key collaboration areas were identified: (i) Technical Assistance Coordination; (ii) Leveraging Financial Instruments – aligning USAID guarantees with IFAD financing to expand outreach. Further collaboration was envisioned around SIRP-rehabilitated irrigation schemes, focusing on farmer training in business development, CSA, financial literacy, operations and maintenance and market linkages.

¹²⁰ Self-assessment by IFAD staff.

¹²¹ The collaboration focuses on scaling impact through joint programming, policy advocacy, and resilient food system investments. Priorities include value chain strengthening, smallholder market access, climate-resilient assets, irrigation, Village Business Units, and nutrition-sensitive interventions. It also emphasizes women's empowerment, inclusive food systems, invasive species management, and post-harvest handling support.

¹²² SIRP also engaged in the SUN movement, working with FAO and WFP on knowledge-sharing initiatives covering youth, disability, environment, and legumes.

Super Seeds provided market linkages. Private companies were also contracted for irrigation design, rehabilitation, feasibility studies and technology introduction, including ARUP, SWS, China Geo, Conadic, Tensor and Zambezi Water.¹²³ Whitney Paprika works with 16 irrigation schemes but initially faced delays as buyers waited for scheme completion; limited BDS and linkage support further constrained progress. Although company-led training improved, side selling persisted despite the block model encouraging compliance.¹²⁴ Field evidence from SIRP suggested most partnerships were still unbalanced, with farmers in a weaker position.

88. **Operational partnerships with research institutions primarily focused on knowledge generation and innovation, while collaboration with NGOs and civil society remained limited.** IFAD partnered operationally with specialized institutions,¹²⁵ which led under SIRP to introducing renewable energy technologies (such as solar pumps, biogas and energy-efficient stoves), with NGOs led training and validation, and private companies to handle civil works. Under SACP, LEAD delivered various capacity building session for VCLEs, APGs and MEs on BDS, CSA and food loss reduction.¹²⁶ HarvestPlus, a global program that improves nutrition and public health, reported strong collaboration with SIRP and informal cooperation with SACP, contributing to training, certified seed access and market linkages.¹²⁷

Policy Engagement

89. **IFAD actively advanced policy dialogue across multiple thematic areas,** including irrigation policy reform, gender equality and social inclusion, market innovations, food systems transformation, nutrition and biofortification. IFAD capitalised on its strategic positioning and proximity to key ministries including Agriculture and Finance and relevant platforms such as Agricultural Food Security Pillar and the Irrigation Working Group to facilitate policy engagement activities.¹²⁸ Provincial consultations were facilitated in Masvingo, Matabeleland South, Manicaland and Midlands that informed the drafting of Zimbabwe's National Irrigation Policy (SI 38 of 2021). IFAD utilised multiple instruments to strengthen policy engagement, as presented in Box 2 below, and further successes are presented in Box A12, Annex IX.

¹²³ SIRP Supervision (2022).

¹²⁴ HEEP has initiated a promising partnership with the Horticulture Development Council, which links producers to anchor firms and supports the 4Ps model.

¹²⁵ Including (i) under SACP the Department of Research and Specialist Services on fodder production; the Forestry Commission and Environmental Management Authority on tree planting and ESMP approvals; SORIS for garlic demonstration plots; ILRI for the Red Meat Value Chain grant; and ICRISAT for seed multiplication. (ii) under SIRP with NGOs to enhance impact, signing MOUs with FANCHIG for GALS training, CCMT for conflict management and leadership development for water user organizations (WUOs), and HarvestPlus for promoting behaviour change, biofortified crops and nutritious diets; and also, a facilitation of a knowledge-sharing platform linking GALS champions, NGOs and government staff.

¹²⁶ The following partnerships were mentioned under SACP, e.g.: CIRAD for seed systems; ICRISAT for agronomic advice; CYMMIT/FAO/WFP for no-till mechanization pilots. However, no evidence found on their materialization.

¹²⁷ With SIRP, it prioritised developing WUOs, Irrigation Management Committees (IMCs) and natural resources management committees (NRMCS) to enhance irrigation scheme performance and local ownership.

¹²⁸ Interview with former IFAD Country Director.

Box 2.

Examples of policy engagement activities and results

SIRP contributed: to the approval of the Statutory Instrument 38 of 2021 on Irrigable Areas under MLAFWRD, and to the Food and Nutrition pillar under the National Agricultural Policy Framework (2018 - 2030); to the water pricing policy and the review of the water policy (2023). In 2024, SIRP coordinated a national policy dialogue on biofortification, resulting in an Issues Paper to guide a national biofortification strategy. On World Food Day 2024, IFAD and partners showcased the role of smallholders in supporting food security and humanitarian needs, underscoring their contribution to resilience and inclusive markets.

Through SIRP and later, SACP, IFAD also contributed to revising the Agriculture and Food Systems Transformation Strategy (AFSTS) to align with NDS2 priorities. SACP supported national policy development (including raising awareness on the Horticulture Growth and Recovery Plan), producing policy briefs on rural finance, biofortification, nutrition-sensitive agriculture and contract farming to inform sector strategies and successor project design.

Source: Desk review and interview outcomes.

90. **Despite efforts, challenges prevented greater policy engagement results.** Discussions highlighted that IFAD's support for country-level policy engagement primarily came through projects, as there was no dedicated budget for such activities.¹²⁹ This required leveraging project resources and being creative in mobilizing funds, sometimes even using supervision budgets to cover costs for policy events or processes. While much of the policy work occurred at the project level, IFAD's ability to facilitate these processes was influenced by available resources. Creativity and flexibility remained central to sustaining policy engagement efforts under existing financial constraints.
91. **Coherence summary.** The objectives of the CSN and the 2020 COSOP were well aligned with the COSOP building on and advancing the CSN's goals. The IFAD portfolio sought to ensure consistency and fostered synergies across projects, though these connections were not always evident during implementation. IFAD's comparative advantage remained strong, reflected in its long-standing partnership with government and its focus on inclusive smallholder growth, climate resilience and community empowerment. IFAD also participated actively in various coordination platforms to enhance collaboration. In terms of challenges, IFAD's support had not yet helped the government to better coordinate support and interventions in the agricultural sector. The CSPE rates the coherence as **satisfactory (5)**.
92. **Knowledge Management summary.** A comprehensive Knowledge Management (KM) strategy was developed in 2024, providing a clear framework to guide KM efforts across the Zimbabwe portfolio. Several COSOP-aligned KM activities were implemented, and the portfolio generated numerous relevant knowledge products. However, dissemination remained largely concentrated at the national level, with limited reach to provinces and districts. IFAD also made progress on South-South Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). A structured M&E framework and digital tools were introduced to integrate monitoring, evaluation and KM, but projects continued to face challenges in designing and operationalizing their M&E systems. However, KM strengthened learning within the country programme. The CSPE rates knowledge management as **satisfactory (5)**.
93. **Partnership Development summary.** IFAD broadened its partnerships across multiple ministries, while active participation of provincial and district staff strengthened integration within government systems. Collaboration with state-owned enterprises further enhanced implementation capacity and supported wider rural development objectives. There were successful efforts to mobilize co-financing, though missed opportunities for joint financing and programming remained. Partnerships among the Rome-Based Agencies improved but remained inconsistent. Engagement with other UN agencies was limited, despite an effective

¹²⁹ Discussion with former IFAD Country Director.

collaboration with UNOPS. Efforts to engage private sector actors with smallholders, through farmer–company relationships, were often unbalanced. Collaboration with NGOs and civil society was modest, while engagement with rural organizations was notably constructive. Partnership building is rated **moderately satisfactory (4)**.

94. **Policy Engagement summary.** The 2020 COSOP highlighted Country-Level Policy Engagement (CLPE) as essential for strengthening and learning from ongoing projects. IFAD advanced policy dialogue in irrigation reform, gender equality, market innovation, food systems, nutrition and biofortification. Key achievements stemmed from diverse instruments, including stakeholder workshops (SI 38 consultations, GALS dialogues, soil conservation sessions) and learning events such as the 2024-GALS Roundtable and Gender Strategy Learning Event. Through SACP, IFAD supported alignment of the AFSTS with NDS2, contributed to national policy development, raised awareness of the Horticulture Growth and Recovery Plan, and produced policy briefs informing sector strategies and future project design. Technical assistance supported work on food loss, contract farming and farmer group formalisation. However, the lack of dedicated budget remained a challenge for a broader CLPE results. Policy engagement is rated **satisfactory (5)**.

C. Effectiveness

95. The effectiveness criterion assesses the extent to which the country strategy and programme achieved or is expected to achieve its intended objectives including any unintended results. In line with the reconstructed ToC, the CSPE assessed results along six outcomes pathways: (i) increased and sustained agricultural productivity; (ii) smallholder climate-resilient agriculture; (iii) effective and inclusive smallholder-oriented and nutrition sensitive value chains; (iv) increased partnerships (4Ps) with private actors; (v) increased access to financial services and resources; and (vi) high-performing institutions for smallholder agriculture development. This section analyses the achievement of results along these pathways as well as the country strategy and programme performance in terms outreach and targeting.

Outreach

96. **Programme outreach remains below of its targets, due to delays in implementing on-going projects.** The strong outreach from SIRP, which exceeded its targets, contrasts with delays of the on-going projects. Slower delivery of services from SACP and HEEP continues to constrain the portfolio's aggregate outreach. By November 2025 the Zimbabwe portfolio had directly reached 56 181 rural households, corresponding to an average outreach level of 53 per cent across the portfolio,¹³⁰ HEEP not included (see Table 5 below). SIRP closed with strong performance, reaching 35 452 households (212 712 people), equivalent to 143 per cent of its cumulative target.¹³¹ As of November 2025, SACP had provided services to 20,729 households, roughly 26.5 per cent of its 78,240 end target.¹³² According to the last supervision mission, this included 11,982 women (30.6 per cent of its cumulative target), 5,389 youth (23 per cent) and 371 persons with disabilities (9.5 per cent), across five provinces.¹³³ Overall, the outreach for women has been very strong, representing 60 per cent of beneficiaries, versus a target of 50 per cent (see more details in the gender section).

¹³⁰ The COSOP 2020 – 2025 mentions an end target of 300 000 households

¹³¹ Complementary grants inside the programme widened coverage further: 13 577 households received COVID-19 stimulus packages under the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility and 22 611 households benefited from the NORAD nutrition-sensitive grant (COSOP MTR).

¹³² Supervision mission SACP November 2025.

¹³³ SACP had drilled 50 village water points, each expected to serve approximately 100 households. SACP remains behind schedule in terms of beneficiary coverage, mainly due to delays in operationalizing its two core financial instruments: the matching grant facility and the concessional Line of Credit.

Table 5.

Projects' outreach

<i>Project</i>	<i>Total HH reached</i>	<i>Men reached</i>	<i>Women reached</i>	<i>Youth reached</i>	<i>PwD reached</i>	<i>Cumulative progress</i>
SIRP	35 452	14 471	20 981	7 028	n/a*	143 %
SACP	20 729	8 747	11 982	5 389	371	26.5 %
HEEP	not started	not started	not started	not started	not started	-
TOTAL	56 181	23 218	32 963	12 417	371	53 %

Source: PCRs, Supervision mission reports.

97. **Youth participation has consistently fallen below targets**, with SIRP reaching 7,028 youth (20 per cent against the 30 per cent target) and training 941 young people in irrigation related roles, and 2,364 youth in vocational topics in total, achieving 61 per cent of its irrigation management goal and 118 per cent of the vocational training goal, while SACP has similarly struggled to meet youth inclusion targets. The field mission confirmed these patterns: site visits showed that youth engagement across Irrigation Schemes and VBUs was uneven and often limited. Although VBUs prioritised youth during beneficiary selection, none had youth-specific outreach strategies, and Irrigation Scheme membership structures, often established before project interventions, restricted opportunities for new youth to join.¹³⁴ Interviews further highlighted that while a minority of youth were strongly interested in agriculture, many beneficiaries reported that farming is commonly viewed by young people as a last-resort livelihood option. In contrast, the mining sector (perceived as offering faster and higher earnings) was consistently cited as a more attractive pathway. In several project areas, youth without access to their own land primarily engaged in agricultural piecework, reflecting structural constraints that continue to limit meaningful youth participation.
98. **Other vulnerable social groups, including people with disabilities and the landless, have been more difficult to engage, and evidence of their effective participation is limited.** Disability inclusion remains nascent, partly due to its recent introduction as an IFAD priority. While later projects (notably HEEP and partly SACP) introduced clearer strategies, concrete livelihood outcomes remain limited, with low participation, accessibility barriers and inadequate targeted support.¹³⁵

Increased and sustained agricultural productivity

99. **The portfolio contributed to achieving a measurable and sustained increase in agricultural productivity, particularly within rehabilitated irrigation schemes.** A total of 4,780 ha of irrigation schemes (92 per cent of target) were rehabilitated by SIRP, enabling year-round cropping for about 27,500 households across four provinces. According to SIRP PCR, maize yields in irrigated plots quadrupled—from 1.9 to 7.4 tons/ha (148 per cent of target) - while bean yields rose by nearly 300 per cent. The SIRP endline survey found 71% of households reported increased production. The 2023 Outcomes Survey confirmed that beneficiary irrigators achieved significantly higher yields and incomes than non-beneficiaries. Cropping intensity increased from 1.2 to 2.6 crops per year, contributing to improved food security and household incomes, with irrigators earning almost three times more than comparable non-beneficiaries. This led to significant productivity gains, supported by improved water access, better inputs

¹³⁴ The land expansion and rehabilitation of Rupangwana and Tshovani Irrigation Schemes in Masvingo Province enabled the scheme to incorporate new members, including women and youths.

¹³⁵ Under SIRP, PWD-related activities were mainly funded through the NORAD nutrition grant, including a disability-rights learning event and a nutrition session for children with disabilities at Mutambara School. SACP introduced a disability inclusion strategy and registered 371 persons with disabilities, disaggregated in its M&E. However, their participation in irrigation and VBU activities remains limited due to the physical demands of irrigation work and inadequate accessibility infrastructure.

and training in good agricultural practices. Further details are presented in Box A13, Annex IX.

100. **Key enabling factors for productivity improvement include improved water availability and adoption of the block system approach.** The latter enabled coordinated production (access to inputs and O&M), aggregation for markets and mainstreaming of CSA practices. Productivity gains were strengthened through improved capacity of IMCs in SIRP and the creation of 70 VBUs under SACP, which supported the establishment of community institutions including garden committees and water-user committees.
101. **Weak water governance constrained sustaining productivity gains.** While water points and VBU gardens improved access to water and contributed to more reliable production, these gains remain fragile due to inadequate water management and growing competition over this scarce resource. According to SACP supervision mission reports (2025), newly established water points are attracting users beyond those targeted by the project (including neighbouring households) resulting in abstraction levels that exceed design capacities. This is generating community tensions and undermining the reliability of irrigation for VBU gardens, where agricultural production is highly dependent on consistent water availability. In several sites, committees lacked clear mandates, by-laws or enforcement mechanisms to regulate water use, leaving them ill-equipped to prevent over-use or resolve disputes.
102. **Weaknesses in production/planting calendars and maintenance practices further constrains long term productivity gains.** Siltation and recurrent pump failures resulted in an estimated 25 per cent operational downtime in several schemes.¹³⁶ Infrastructure functionality is uneven, with inadequate climate-proofing measures.¹³⁷ For instance, continued reliance on grid-only power systems and diesel generators limits reliable water delivery to farmers, as evidenced in Chipiri and Mug, where frequent power cuts or generator decommissioning affect irrigation cycles. Farmers have limited understanding of O&M costs, while insufficient communication on recurrent liabilities (electricity bills, security services, levies) undermines the effective use and long-term sustainability of the rehabilitated schemes.¹³⁸ Further constraints to sustaining the productivity gains are presented in Box 3 below.

Box 3.

Further constraints to sustaining productivity gains

Incomplete fencing, recurrent pump failures, silting and incomplete climate-proofing have led to repeated operational disruptions. In some locations, inadequate planning, storage and transport facilities led to post-harvest losses. In Cashel Valley and Chipinge bumper vegetable harvests resulted in market gluts and income volatility.

Macroeconomic instability (marked by inflation, high interest rates and exchange-rate volatility) has constrained farmers' capacity to reinvest in inputs and maintenance. Frequent energy disruptions, breakdowns in solar systems and supply-chain delays for spare parts have also hindered production. Institutional ownership and accountability remain uneven, as several IMCs and VBUs still lack clear asset management frameworks.

Sources: CSPE interviews and field visits.

103. **Although IMCs benefited from capacity strengthening, they often have difficulties to manage newly developed infrastructure.** While IMCs oversee irrigation scheduling, evidence suggests that capacity for effective O&M and production calendars varies significantly across schemes. VBUs have established governance and marketing committees, yet their by-laws, accountability mechanisms and conflict-resolution procedures require consolidation. Although

¹³⁶ Field interview outcomes.

¹³⁷ Climate-proofing of schemes is critical – it would be important to contract out feasibility studies when there is insufficient internal technical capacity.

¹³⁸ SACP Supervision mission November 2025.

water, garden and water-user committees have been established across schemes, their constitutions and mandates remain weak, limiting their ability to manage technical and organisational demands, ensure accountability and address emerging disputes effectively. Field interviews show that training delivered through the FaaB approach strengthened farmers' skills in planning, budgeting and market analysis, increasing confidence and decision-making power in production and marketing. However, uneven extension support and the absence of systematic refresher training have limited the sustained application of these skills.

Climate-resilient smallholder agriculture

104. **Evidence suggests positive efforts in strengthening the resilience of smallholders' production systems to climate shocks.** Through the rehabilitation of irrigation schemes, installation of water-collection points and promotion of climate-smart innovations, IFAD helped improve productivity and water-use efficiency as presented on Table 6 below, which have markedly strengthened livelihood resilience. Farmers now cultivate sugar beans, groundnuts, maize, wheat and vegetables up to three times per year, and have adopted, in some areas, disease-tolerant and biofortified varieties such as sorghum, sugar beans, yellow maize and orange-fleshed sweet potato. As a result, annual cropping intensity has tripled, and average seasonal incomes have risen.¹³⁹ Increased income has enabled diversification into poultry and small-scale processing. Box A14 Annex IX gives more examples.
105. **Training played a key role in integrating climate-smart agriculture practices, including conservation agriculture, Pfumvudza, mulching, crop rotation, and intercropping.** Beneficiaries under SIRP reported visible improvements in soil fertility, erosion control and moisture retention, alongside the uptake of energy-efficient Tsotso stoves and wastewater reuse for irrigating dry plots. In several schemes, CSA practices were integrated with nutrition and gender training. Under SACP, as of November 2025, 339 hectares out of a planned 24,000 hectares (1.4 per cent) had been brought under climate-resilient practices. However, the discontinuation of refresher training under SIRP after 2024 and limited technical backstopping by extension officers appear to have weakened continuity and sustained adoption over time (further descriptions below in Table 6).

Table 6.

Evidence of CSA results

Project	Main CSA results
SIRP	Adopted resilient practices like conservation agriculture and drip irrigation; 4,780 hectares of irrigation rehabilitated (92 per cent of the revised target), with 57 out of 60 schemes completed. These works restored functionality and raised water-use efficiency from below 50 per cent to 83 per cent. Field observations in Banga, Rupangwana, Fungai and Musaverema confirmed reliable water delivery and year-round production, with most farmers now achieving three cropping cycles annually, compared with one or two before interventions.
SACP	Supported VBUs in Mabhikwa, Jabatshaba and Ndimakule reported higher yields and more consistent production. The project promoted climate-resilient practices over 1,200 ha, including drip/sprinkler systems that cut horticulture water use by 30%. SACP trained 7,000 farmers, increasing groundnut/sorghum yields by 35% despite poor rainfall. Flood mitigation in 14 VBUs used gabions, while FAO partnerships provided 11,424 farmers with SMS weather alerts. In Chibuwe, observations by the evaluation team suggest that fencing and drainage reduced wildlife and salinization risks.

Source: Desk review and Field interviews data.

106. **Building on these foundations, the institutionalisation of CSA principles gradually increased over time. Nonetheless, challenges persist, limiting the scope for resilience.** These efforts are supported through the introduction of drip irrigation, solar-powered pumping systems, composting, and pilot demonstrations on integrated pest management and water-efficient cropping.

¹³⁹ Field interviews.

However, sustained adoption depends on regular extension support, reliable access to inputs, and stronger integration of climate-smart agriculture into local planning and budgeting. While SIRP and SACP have increased awareness and tested promising practices, field evidence shows that institutional anchoring and large-scale uptake remain limited, resulting in fragile and uneven resilience gains across the portfolio. Additional constraints observed during field visits further reduced resilience impacts. In Banga, a damaged main pipeline leads to an estimated daily water loss of 20 megalitres, leaving eight hydrants uninstalled and 2.4 hectares uncultivated. In Rupangwana, low water pressure continues to restrict irrigation coverage.¹⁴⁰ Incomplete works, recurrent equipment failures and weak O&M continue to weaken irrigation performance. Observations in Mashonaland East found that incomplete bridges and roads continue to limit access to schools, health facilities and markets that are isolated during the rainy season.¹⁴¹

107. **Notwithstanding improvements in production intensity and resilience described above, planned livelihood diversification beyond cropping remained limited** in SIRP due to insufficient technical assistance and weak alignment with agroecological conditions. While the programme promoted diversification options such as fishponds, new crops, apiaries and poultry units, several of these interventions underperformed in practice. In dryland areas such as Musaverema (Mwenezi district), beneficiaries received sorghum seed that failed to germinate and apiculture support that reached only 38 of the 100 targeted beekeepers, with most hives remaining uncolonized. The lack of training and poorly constructed apiary structures, severely constrained honey production, which totalled only 200 kg in 2023. Similarly, providing five old layers per household, proved unviable due to feed costs and high poultry mortality rates, revealing design weaknesses and insufficient adaptation to context-specific conditions.
108. **Overall, smallholders' adaptive capacity was strengthened through a combination of irrigation rehabilitation and CSA practices**, including erosion control, intercropping and mulching. The introduction of drought-tolerant and biofortified crop varieties further enhanced both resilience and nutrition. Mainstreaming of CSA within local institutions remains incomplete: while IMCs and extension officers received basic training, systematic integration of CSA into local planning and regular refresher sessions haven't materialised, limiting institutionalisation of adaptive practices.

Effective and inclusive smallholder-oriented and nutrition sensitive value chains
109. Within the evaluated portfolio, value chain development was conceived as a pathway to commercialisation and inclusive market participation, primarily through improved irrigation-based production, farmer organisation (IMCs, APGs and VBUs), basic business skills and nutrition-sensitive production. These processes have been initiated only recently with SACP.
110. **IFAD interventions initially strengthened upstream segments of selected value chains.** Under SIRP, improved and more reliable production enabled surplus generation, while nutrition training, basic processing and small-scale value addition allowed some households to diversify products and generate limited cash income. SACP subsequently introduced a more explicit value-chain orientation through aggregation via VBUs, laying early foundations for market-oriented production. However, progress largely stalled at this stage. The lack of structured market linkages, limited access to processing equipment, weak operation and maintenance systems, insufficient post-harvest and enterprise support, and the absence of stable off-taker arrangements constrained movement towards downstream

¹⁴⁰ In Fungai, recurrent pump failures have halted operations; and in Musaverema, incomplete fencing, delayed payments and non-functional fishponds have eroded productivity.

¹⁴¹ RIDA was expected to complete 10 km of climate-proofed feeder roads by 2024, which is still pending, while the additional 50 km planned for 2025 have not yet started due to delayed procurement.

segments of value chains, leaving producers exposed to localised gluts, particularly for perishable horticultural crops. Overall, while the programme demonstrated latent potential for inclusive and nutrition-sensitive value chain development, this has not yet translated into mature value chains capable of delivering sustained income growth and market resilience at scale.

111. **IFAD's portfolio in Zimbabwe placed a strong emphasis on nutrition-sensitive value chains, effectively integrating input provision, training and behaviour-change communication into project activities.**¹⁴² This focus translated into substantial outreach and participation.¹⁴³ Under SIRP, support to improve nutrition reached 102 % of the endline target, while 13 287 farmers (106 % of the target) participated in cooking and feeding demonstration plots. Under SACP, 148 % of the endline target for nutrition-related activities had been already achieved. Field mission confirmed strong community uptake of nutrition-sensitive interventions. Across visited sites,¹⁴⁴ beneficiaries described the trainings as highly relevant and practical, noting that they learnt nutritional importance of various recipes (such as *Jambalaya*, *Muboora*, *Nyapapi* and *Mutsine*) and begun incorporating a wider variety of foods into their daily meals, including eggs, beetroot, carrots, peas, okra and cabbage. Many highlighted that beans had become a regular part of their diet, contributing to a noticeable improvement in household health and vitality. Community discussions also suggested perceived reduction in stomach-related illnesses and general improvements in wellbeing, with some reporting fewer instances of nutrition related bad conditions.¹⁴⁵
112. **Support for value addition and food processing is gradually more systematic.** In schemes such as Mayorca and Exchange, beneficiaries engaged in small-scale peanut butter and dried vegetable processing. In Gwanda, women who participated in value addition training began earning income by processing spinach fritters for nearby gold mines and drying vegetables into *mufushwa* (traditional dried vegetables), extending food availability year-round. Yet the sustainability of these promising initiatives was hindered by weak equipment maintenance and limited post-harvest and enterprise management support. The absence of a more structured approach to investment in processing facilities and their maintenance contributed to oversupply, particularly for perishable crops like tomatoes and leafy vegetables. Overall, these efforts demonstrate latent potential for women's economic empowerment and local enterprise development, though most remain small in scale.
113. **Despite progress made, safety and continuous water access still constrain nutrition outcomes in several irrigation schemes.** In some areas, households still rely on river water for domestic use. However, the installation of JoJo tanks¹⁴⁶ and rehabilitated boreholes within VBUs under SACP has begun to alleviate this challenge. Field visits to Nhakayedu, Jabatshaba and Ndimakule confirmed marked improvements in access to safe drinking water, enhancing hygiene, food safety and overall nutrition. Competition for scarce water resources remains a source of occasional tension, particularly during peak irrigation periods, when domestic needs, livestock watering and garden irrigation coincide. In some schemes, women reported intra-community disagreements over queuing times and prioritisation of water use, reflecting underlying governance gaps in water point management.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Nutrition outcome aspects are presented in the impact section.

¹⁴³ Interventions ranged from starter packs and small livestock distribution to cooking demonstrations, Nutrition and Social Behaviour Change Communication (NSBCC) and homestead garden packages.

¹⁴⁴ Chibuwe, Chimanimani, Rupangwana, and Banga.

¹⁴⁵ Such as kwashiorkor and diarrhoea. Kwashiorkor is a severe form of protein malnutrition that mostly affects young children where diets are low in protein but may still provide enough calories (usually from starchy foods like maize, cassava, or rice).

¹⁴⁶ A JoJo tank is a large, UV-resistant polyethylene water storage tank commonly used in Southern Africa to store rainwater, borehole water, or piped water. Its widespread use and durability make it a standard solution for improving reliable access to safe water in rural areas.

¹⁴⁷ SACP Supervision mission November 2025.

Ensuring sustainable and equitable access across all schemes remains an unfinished task, particularly in remote areas.

114. **Monitoring of outcome-level nutritional improvements remained weak.** There was a gap between output delivery and the evidence base needed to assess long-term dietary change. The absence of robust nutrition indicators and follow-up or refresher trainings after 2023 are challenges to sustaining behavioural change on nutrition practices. Limited reinforcement through periodic training and peer learning further reduced the consolidation of gains and increased the risk of backsliding.

Access to markets

115. **Private sector engagement has evolved from ad-hoc, scheme-specific arrangements to more deliberate, though largely unfinished architecture for market integration.** Early efforts under SIRP succeeded in securing contracts for paprika with Whitney Paprika and Kacholo, for chillies with Chilli Pepper Company, Kacholo and Shumbatafari, and for peas with Lingfield for the export market, covering 257 hectares and 921 farmers.¹⁴⁸ However, these linkages remained modest in scale and emerged late in the implementation cycle, as most formal buyers showed limited interest in engaging before scheme completion. Consequently, only two years remained to establish market relationships once irrigation works were finalized. Recent efforts through SACP have focused on laying the foundations for private sector engagement by mobilising 1069 APGs, identifying 214 MSEs for training, and attracting formal EOIs from around 35 private sector leads. Most arrangements remain at pre-financing stage, constrained by delays in business plan quality, slow grant appraisal and loan processing.¹⁴⁹
116. **Interviews with private sector actors confirmed that delays in completing irrigation schemes and the absence of a dedicated Business Development Services (BDS) function constrained the depth and stability of commercial engagement.** SIRP lacked indicators to systematically monitor partnership performance. Overall, partnerships were often disrupted by seasonal risks, fluctuating input supply, side-selling and weak group cohesion, with only some schemes maintaining supply after closure. Private sector engagement more broadly followed similar dynamics - PHI Commodities, Seed Co, OK Zimbabwe, Pick'n'Pay, Sitelink and Valley Seed interacted with farmer groups, but largely on a scheme-by-scheme basis rather than through a coherent or scalable 4P model, while the GMB remained the only consistent buyer, primarily for cereals, leaving high-value horticulture exposed to market volatility. Interviews and field observations further highlight both the fragility and potential of private sector partnerships, as presented in Box 4 below.

Box 4.

Fragility and potential for private sector partnerships

In Mbire District, PHI Commodities piloted a 50-hectare sorghum out-grower scheme with 50 farmers, but the 2023/24 El Niño season caused an almost complete crop failure: farmers harvested only 4.19 tons, earning US\$1,634 against US\$28,759 invested and accumulating a debt of US\$17,124. The 2024/25 season saw a partial recovery, yields rose to 2.3 tons/ha (116.5 tons total) due to better rainfall and a blended financing package of working capital, grants and loans, yet repayment problems persisted, especially in the driest areas, with US\$6,762 still outstanding. This experience shows that blended finance, mechanization support and full input packages are essential to stabilize partnerships after climatic shocks. Without risk-sharing instruments such as weather or credit insurance (currently being explored), these models remain commercially unattractive to buyers, as confirmed by PHI Commodities and Whitney Paprika.¹⁵⁰

Sources: CSPE interviews and field visits.

¹⁴⁸ SIRP PCR.

¹⁴⁹ SACP Supervision mission November 2025.

¹⁵⁰ Data shared by PHI Commodities.

117. **Across the portfolio, recurrent contracting challenges continued to undermine the continuity of private sector partnerships.** Companies pointed to side-selling, limited extension support from AGRITEX/ARDAS and frequent disputes within group payment systems as major deterrents to long-term engagement. Collective payment arrangements often created tensions around labour contributions and profit-sharing, while weak traceability further eroded buyers' confidence in consistent supply and quality. Weak integration of targeted investments and clear conditionalities within business plans was associated with persistent shortcomings in group governance, traceability and transparent, performance-based payment mechanisms. See more in Box A16, Annex IX.

Increased access to financial services and other resources

118. **ISALs became the main financial instrument facilitating small-scale access to capital.** By SIRP completion, ISALs were operational across all provinces, with participation rates as high as 96 per cent in Manicaland.¹⁵¹ SIRP complemented these schemes with financial literacy and business planning training to strengthening beneficiaries' capacity to manage group savings, issue internal loans and reinvest in productive activities. Revolving funds were also established in about one-third of irrigation schemes, often used to purchase inputs such as seed. They played a critical role in enabling seasonal production, although the amounts mobilised were small and unevenly distributed across schemes.
119. **Efforts to expand smallholders' access to formal finance achieved modest results, despite collaboration with financial institutions.** By SIRP project closure, 2,393 farmers had accessed loans totalling US\$292,699 and ZWL 219,379,708 through two partner financial institutions.¹⁵² However, uptake remained limited due to macroeconomic instability and high interest rates: several irrigation committees declined to borrow because the available credit carried annual interest rates of up to 54 per cent in local currency.¹⁵³ These constraints, combined with limited collateral options under communal land tenure and residual mistrust of formal banking, restricted the transition from informal to formal finance. Moreover, the programme's results framework did not include explicit targets or indicators for rural finance, resulting in limited attention to this outcome.
120. **Further delays stemmed from design revisions that reduced the clarity, accessibility and inclusiveness of the financial instruments.** The design of SACP was comprehensive and appropriate, combining grants with concessional lending to address liquidity and collateral constraints, to enable financial inclusion, as presented in Box A17 in Annex IX. Working capital was excluded from the matching grant facility and beneficiaries were required to make significant cash contributions (20 per cent for producer groups and 30 per cent for SMEs) paid directly to financial institutions. These conditions raised barriers for poorer participants. Consequently, by the time of the CSPE, only 3,912 households (about 5 per cent of the target) had accessed any rural finance product, mostly through informal savings groups (ISALs) rather than formal loans or grants. Moreover, assets purchased with grant funding could not be used as collateral, limiting their potential to unlock future credit. The concessional terms granted to AFC Bank were not extended to other financial institutions,¹⁵⁴ reducing competition and long-term sustainability. Awareness of the matching grant and Line of Credit facilities remained low among APGs, VBUs and even private sector partners engaged in value-chain development.¹⁵⁵
121. **The projects' progress in expanding financial inclusion was further**

¹⁵¹ SIRP PCR.

¹⁵² SIRP PCR.

¹⁵³ SIRP supervision mission May 2024.

¹⁵⁴ A call for Expressions of Interest was eventually launched in 2025 to engage a wider group of financial institutions.

¹⁵⁵ SACP supervision mission 2025.

constrained by systemic weaknesses in design, capacity and the wider macroeconomic environment. Neither project conducted a detailed rural finance landscape analysis during design to align instruments with the risk appetites and operational modalities of financial institutions.¹⁵⁶ The CSPE field mission revealed that many APGs were unaware of eligibility criteria or application processes, and product parameters were often defined by financing institutions without participatory co-design. These internal limitations were compounded by persistent macroeconomic instability, high inflation, foreign exchange volatility and the introduction of a statutory interest-rate cap that reduced banks' appetite for agricultural lending. Government input subsidies and price controls further distorted incentives for both borrowers and lenders, and the communal land tenure system prevented use of land as collateral.

122. **Increased access to financial services laid some foundations for inclusion, through widespread ISALs, enhanced financial literacy and a nascent framework for blended finance.** These efforts have yet to trigger concrete, gains in formal financial access or productive investment. SIRP succeeded in fostering grassroots savings mechanisms and basic financial literacy, providing an accessible source of working capital. Yet the scale and sustainability of these mechanisms remain limited, and their linkages to formal credit are weak. SACP introduced more sophisticated financial instruments with potential to transform access, but protracted institutional adjustments, weak implementation capacity and adverse macroeconomic conditions have delayed any measurable outcome.

Effective rural institutions for smallholder agriculture development

123. **Institutional strengthening efforts contributed to improved organizational structures, at different stage of consolidation,** including IMCs under SIRP and more recently, APGs and VBUs under SACP. These structures were intended to enhance local governance, accountability and participation in scheme management and market activities. While SIRP succeeded in creating relatively functional and representative IMCs that continue to operate beyond project closure, the institutional structures promoted under SACP are still nascent. Many newly formed APGs and VBUs are in the process of consolidating governance systems, building capacity and achieving legal registration to be autonomous local institutions.
124. **Local governance bodies across supported irrigation schemes have generally evolved into more credible structures,** managing water allocation, collecting O&M contributions and coordinating production calendars. SIRP PCR confirmed that 408 IMCs were formally constituted, with women holding around half of leadership positions in most schemes. Field observations in Banga, Rupangwana, Chibuwe, Chimanmani and Musaverema confirmed that IMCs are operational, maintain written constitutions and meet regularly with AGRITEX/ARDAS officers. These structures have supported tangible improvements in governance behaviour, including transparent fee collection, stronger accountability, the establishment of IMC bank accounts and clearer delegation of roles.¹⁵⁷ However, as noted by several government interlocutors and confirmed by the mission, these gains remain fragile and weakly institutionalised due to frequent staff turnover and weak mechanisms for institutional memory.
125. **Training initiatives particularly FaaB and GALS, have been central to embedding business management, financial literacy and gender-equity principles within community institutions across the portfolio.** FaaB was rolled out widely, equipping farmers with practical skills in record keeping, crop

¹⁵⁶ SACP's results framework listed financial inclusion indicators in the narrative but did not carry them into the Logframe. Institutional arrangements remained in flux for almost two years due to changes instigated by the MLAFWRD, and execution relied heavily on intermittent supervision and consultant-led redesigns rather than in-house expertise. Awareness and demand generation at the community level were insufficient.

¹⁵⁷ These gains were reinforced by substantial training efforts for government staff with 440 government staff trained in irrigation management (176% of target) and 1,120 in production and market access (224%).

budgeting, cost-benefit analysis and marketing, reaching 103 % of its end target while GALS strengthened intra-household and group dynamics by promoting joint decision-making and the inclusion of women in leadership roles within IMCs, VBUs and producer groups. Field evidence confirms that these trainings contributed to behavioral shift, with many beneficiaries transitioning from a subsistence-oriented approach to a more business-oriented mindset, reflected in improved planning, budgeting and collective economic decision-making. However, skill retention remains uneven: the absence of systematic refresher sessions and limited institutional performance reviews have contributed to declining cohesion in some mature groups, while newer producer organisations—such as APGs and VBUs—are still consolidating their governance structures. As of mid-2025, 608 APGs had been mobilised and had adopted constitutions, elected committees and gender quotas. Yet many remain pre-productive or lack registration and functional bank accounts, constraining their ability to access financial instruments, transact securely and reinvest, and signaling that institutional maturity is still in progress despite emerging signs of organisational strengthening.

126. **Effectiveness summary.** The programme delivered strong results in rehabilitated irrigation schemes, agricultural productivity and nutrition-sensitive interventions. Aggregate outreach is low due to delays in SACP and HEEP. Institutional structures such as IMCs and VBUs show promise, yet financial, technical and organisational capacities remain insufficiently consolidated. Value-chain engagement and access to finance advanced only partially, constrained by weak business plan readiness, delayed financial instruments and limited private-sector confidence. Climate-resilient practices improved water-use efficiency and diversified production, though infrastructure gaps and inconsistent extension support limit sustainability. The programme demonstrates clear positive effects but with significant performance variability and unfinished institutional and financial systems. Effectiveness is **moderately satisfactory (4)**.

Innovation¹⁵⁸

127. **The Zimbabwe country programme became a fertile ground for innovation (technological, institutional and social)** aimed at tackling the persistent constraints faced by smallholders, including water scarcity, climate stress and nutritional deficiencies. While few of these innovations were genuinely new, they represented context-specific adaptations of proven solutions, thoughtfully tailored to Zimbabwe's agroecological and social realities. See Table A6, Annex IX that presents the list of innovations.
128. **Several innovations were designed as entry points to revive productivity and resilience.** This included hydrogel soil-conditioning technology, the block farming system, chameleon soil-moisture sensors and Pfumvudza conservation agriculture. Complementary initiatives, such as biofortified crops, keyhole gardens and nutrition-sensitive recipes, helped reshape dietary habits, while institutional models like FaaB and VBUs bridged the gap between market-oriented value chains and community-based production. The introduction of GALS added a social dimension, empowering women and men to reimagine household relations, decision-making and resource management.
129. Field evidence showed that innovations addressing visible and recurring constraints, such as erratic rainfall, water shortages and women's workload, were the most widely adopted and sustained. Among them, Pfumvudza emerged as a flagship success, adopted by over 80 per cent of SIRP farmers and mainstreamed by AGRITEX/ARDAS as part of the Government's national resilience programme. Its appeal lay in its simplicity, low cost and tangible yield benefits. Farmers and

¹⁵⁸ Innovation is defined as the extent to which interventions brought a solution (practice, approach/method, process, product or rule) that is novel, with respect to the specific context, time frame and stakeholders (intended users of the solution), with the purpose of improving performance and/or addressing challenge(s) in relation to rural poverty reduction.

AGRITEX/ARDAS officers in Chipinge, Chibwe and Masvingo confirmed that Pfumvudza enhanced soil health, improved moisture retention and stabilised yields even during the 2023–24 El Niño drought.

130. **The block farming system appears as a context-adapted innovation, to effectively address the challenge of market fragmentation by organising farmers into synchronised production units.** By harmonising planting calendars and consolidating volumes, farmers in Banga, Rupangwana and Exchange succeeded in attracting formal buyers. Although this model risked market gluts during bumper harvests, it proved a high-value operational innovation for remote areas where aggregation was otherwise limited. Similarly, the chameleon soil-moisture sensors—though introduced at smaller scale—offered a technological leap towards water management. Farmers in Chipinge and Masvingo cited their usefulness in optimising irrigation schedules amid persistent water stress.
131. **On the nutritional front, biofortified crops, keyhole gardens and traditional African recipes fostered positive nutritional change.** SIRP's nutrition initiatives, led by community-based champions, inspired families to diversify meals with beans, vegetables and indigenous ingredients, promoting healthier, more balanced diets. These behavioural changes not only improved protein and micronutrient intake but also enhanced women's knowledge and agency in household nutrition, as they became the custodians of new culinary practices blending tradition with improved nutrition awareness.
132. **However, not all innovations achieved lasting traction.** The hydrogel soil-conditioning technology, though scientifically sound, suffered from weak institutional backing. Despite research confirming its suitability for sandy and clay soils, the absence of a supply-chain strategy or private-sector partnerships prevented scaling. Without sustained availability or cost-sharing mechanisms, the technology remained confined to pilot plots, with no enduring impact. Similarly, greenhouses and tree nurseries, initially intended to advance climate-smart horticulture and sustainable wood production, were often underutilised or non-functional due to design flaws, lack of maintenance capacity and limited farmer ownership.
133. **Beyond the technical sphere, the Zimbabwe portfolio stands out for its social and institutional innovations, where IFAD's comparative advantage is most visible.** Over 86 per cent of trained households reported reduced domestic conflict and greater joint decision-making. By enabling women to generate and manage their own income, GALS strengthened their economic agency and bargaining power, with ripple effects on family wellbeing and community cohesion. The integration of GALS with FaaB approaches created important synergies, embedding gender equality principles within production systems and community governance structures and reinforcing collective management and more inclusive decision-making.
134. **Innovation summary.** Overall, the programme introduced a diverse mix of technological, institutional and social innovations that were generally well aligned with local constraints and demonstrated clear relevance. Pfumvudza, the block farming system, nutrition-sensitive approaches and GALS showed the strongest uptake and practical value, contributing to behavioural change and productivity gains. At the same time, several innovations remained small-scale or underutilised due to weak supply chains, design limitations, limited ownership and uneven institutional anchoring. Learning, scaling and sustainability were inconsistent across innovations, resulting in fragmented adoption. Taken together, innovations showed promise and context-specific value, but with variable depth, reach and durability. Innovation is therefore rated as **satisfactory (5)**.

D. Efficiency

135. The efficiency section assesses the extent to which the intervention or strategy delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely manner. The assessment is conducted in terms of operational efficiency (how well the intervention was managed, including timeliness, business processes) and economic efficiency (conversion of inputs into results as cost-effectively as possible).

Operational efficiency

136. **The effectiveness lag across the three projects under evaluation shows a deteriorating trend, with delays increasing from the oldest to the most recent project.** SIRP became effective just one month after approval, significantly outperforming the ESA average of 6.7 months for the 2016-2024 period. This was likely due to the strong enthusiasm of all parties to resume IFAD's operations in Zimbabwe and ensure a quick start-up. By contrast, SACP and HEEP experienced longer effectiveness lags of 8 and 17 months respectively, indicating growing challenges in achieving timely inception (see Table A7 in Annex IX).¹⁵⁹ HEEP, in particular, faced several difficulties related to the ratification of the loan agreement with the OPEC Fund and the recruitment of key project staff.¹⁶⁰ In terms of approval to first disbursement, the CSPE portfolio performed slightly better than the regional benchmark: while the ESA average stands at 16.1 months, the portfolio average is 15.7 months (despite the significant delay of 30 months for HEEP's first disbursement due to the issues mentioned above). Similarly, the time from effectiveness to first disbursement was shorter in the CSPE portfolio, averaging 6.3 months, compared to the ESA average of 8.4 months, though HEEP again lagged behind, requiring 13 months.
137. **Disbursement performance across the portfolio projects has been generally low, constrained by design issues and weak implementation readiness, cumbersome internal processes and delays in making key components operational.** SIRP started with very low disbursement due to cash flow bottlenecks at the Ministry of Finance, delays in accessing IFAD funds from the Reserve Bank and difficulties in obtaining bank statements. These issues created serious risks of under-utilizing allocated funds. However, following the revision of the financing agreement and the provision of capacity support, particularly from UNOPS, disbursements improved to acceptable levels, although at closure risk of ineligible expenditure remained. SACP continues to show very low disbursement and outreach. While recent supervision noted steady progress in most activities, the Line of Credit and Matching Grants - representing the bulk of IFAD financing - remain non-operational until September 2025. This delay is largely attributable to severe capacity gaps in grant management within the Ministry of Finance, under which the Grant Management Unit was established. Disbursement is lagging across all co-financiers, with half of the project period already elapsed. Although project management funds have been used substantially, core investment components remain stalled until 2025. The main reasons include delayed agreements with key stakeholders, late recruitment of service providers and government delays in counterpart funding and tax payments. See Figure 2, Annex IX.
138. **SIRP received two extensions (totalling 11 months) to allow completion of pending activities.**¹⁶¹ Time was lost due to: (a) a lengthy process of recruiting

¹⁵⁹ One cause for delays was that until 2025, all externally financed projects legally required Parliamentary approval before becoming effective. HEEP's ratification was slowed due to Presidential elections.

¹⁶⁰ Such as National Project Coordinator, Senior Procurement Officer, Chief Accountant, Senior Climate Change Agriculture Advisor and M&E Planning Specialist.

¹⁶¹ The loan agreement of SIRP underwent two amendments, each resulting in an extension. The first was on 19 September 2023 regarding: (i) To cover a portion of the required resources to complete the ongoing investments. (ii) MOFEDIP formally requested to reallocate a portion of the IFAD financing for a total of US\$ 2 million initially designated for consultancy, training, workshops, goods and services, and operational costs, towards the works category, as contracts had been signed in US\$. (iii) Revising some Logframe targets, particularly in relation with the reduction of

PCU staff and meeting conditions for first disbursement; (b) prolonged procurement delays; and (c) COVID-19 lockdowns that disrupted works and overall implementation. Despite the extensions, some deliverables were still incomplete at closure, with three target schemes unfinished at the project completion mission. The Government of Zimbabwe committed to completing the outstanding works and no further extension was requested, in order to avoid further undermining efficiency. In contrast, SACP, designed with a six-year implementation period, has retained its original completion date; however, implementation delays have been observed since the outset and the MTR, foreseen for 2025, has been postponed allowing project activities to commence.

139. **For both SIRP and SACP, the project management component has absorbed a slightly larger share of costs than originally envisaged, though still within IFAD recommended ceiling.** In SIRP, project management costs were projected at 9 per cent of the total project costs, while at completion, they accounted for 15 per cent (still within the IFAD threshold). The increase was attributed to amendments in the financing agreement and lag in investment components, with early years showing unsatisfactory cost ratios of 49 per cent, 37 per cent and 19 per cent, although improvements were noted in the subsequent years. In SACP, project management costs were estimated at 8 per cent at design, and according to the May 2025 supervision mission, they currently stand at 10.3 per cent of total costs (including recurrent expenditures), still below the 15 per cent threshold. Supervision missions nevertheless flagged staff allowances and vehicle use policy as key drivers of cost inefficiencies. For HEEP, which is still at an early stage, project coordination is estimated at 17 per cent (US\$ 11.6 million) as the decentralized structure of the PMU foresees technical expertise at provincial level and a focal point at district level to ensure a prompt response to project needs (See Figure A3 in Annex IX).¹⁶²
140. **Across the portfolio, the programme emphasized the importance of ongoing capacity strengthening in procurement and financial management.** In the case of SIRP, the lockdown measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic caused delays in procurement and worsened the already poor contract management.¹⁶³ Throughout the implementation of SIRP, capacity gaps with the contractors and within the Department of Irrigation in contract management were observed. Moreover, the coordination of PMU staff was stated to be insufficient at times, and this was reflected in critical errors such as budgeting gaps. That said, communication among staff improved over time, particularly with the integration of the new coordinator. Another key implementation challenge was the inadequate quality of feasibility studies, as evident also from field visit; however, technical assistance (TA) support played a critical role in strengthening these studies over time, ultimately improving planning and execution. While qualified finance staff were in place, persistent weaknesses in transaction monitoring, financial reporting, fuel management and internal controls hindered overall effectiveness.¹⁶⁴
141. **Coherence between Annual Work Plans and Budgets (AWPBs) and execution was moderate.** In SIRP, AWPBs broadly reflected project priorities and

irrigation schemes and surface under irrigation. (iv) The project completion and closure dates were extended accordingly. Second amendment to the loan agreement was on 3 June 2024. The second extension aimed at consolidating the achievements made, completing pending works, ensuring that all the supported irrigation schemes were fully in use to the benefit of SIRP's target group, and fully utilizing Government of Zimbabwe contribution.

¹⁶² Figure 3, Annex IX shows details of the portfolio projects regarding project management costs.

¹⁶³ Other external shocks that affected the implementation by causing shipment delays of SIRP include unstable economic conditions, including inflation (which surged from -1.5 per cent in 2016 to 667.4 per cent in 2023), exchange rate fluctuations, and the Ukraine crisis.

¹⁶⁴ Despite previous recommendations, SIRP also incurred ineligible expenditures related to VAT payments totaling US\$ 16,777.15, with earlier refund claims still outstanding. Challenges with automatic deduction of IMTT charges by the bank and their delayed reversals further reflected gaps in expenditure verification and compliance with financial guidelines.

were adjusted to respond to extensions and external shocks; however, execution frequently lagged behind planning due to procurement delays, late mobilisation of service providers and constraints in counterpart funding, resulting in a concentration of expenditures and output delivery towards the end of the implementation period.¹⁶⁵ In SACP, while AWPBs remained aligned with the project's design and sequencing, implementation was constrained by delays in operationalising financial instruments, weaknesses in financial management and M&E systems, and slow disbursement, limiting the timely translation of planned activities into results. Overall, AWPBs provided a sound planning framework, but their effectiveness as an operational management tool was weakened by recurrent implementation bottlenecks.

142. **Submission of audit reports was consistently delayed and the presentation of financial statements required strengthening.** Internal control weaknesses were also observed, with some expenditures filed nearly a year after the activity, far beyond the 14-day deadline. In SIRP, additional support from UNOPS enhanced monitoring capacity and generated useful recommendations. By contrast, SACP benefits from a relatively adequately staffed PMU and a stronger, more experienced financial management team. Audit work has been described as comprehensive and acceptable to IFAD, although project reports suggest replacing the current auditor. Internal audit, run by the Ministry of Agriculture, has not been systematically shared with the PMU, limiting corrective action opportunities.
143. **Interviews found procurement staff had limited capacity to cope with the demanding workload.** The procurement function in SIRP started weakly and showed only gradual progress over time. Nevertheless, procurement indicators eventually performed at an overall adequate level by completion. Similarly, SACP also faced shortcomings until 2025, including weaknesses in the selection of procurement methods, inadequate retention of contract documentation and the absence of regular contract performance reviews with contractors and suppliers.

Economic efficiency

144. **The actual cost, both at beneficiary person and household level, has so far been lower than the design estimates.** In SIRP, the cost per beneficiary household and per beneficiary person at completion was computed at US\$ 1,384 and US\$ 231, respectively. This was favourably compared to the high appraisal estimates of US\$ 2,051 per beneficiary household and US\$ 410 per household person. The overachievement in outreach helped to reduce costs, while delays in early financial progress and time benefits lag affected the timely execution of key investments. The cumulative actual outreach reached 212,712 beneficiary persons and 35,452 beneficiary households, significantly exceeding both the original and revised targets.¹⁶⁶ Like SIRP, SACP's cost per beneficiary has so far remained below design estimates—US\$77 per person and US\$384 per household, compared to US\$91 and US\$456 respectively at design. Table 7 below presents the cost per beneficiary person and household for the three projects.

¹⁶⁵ SIRP PCR.

¹⁶⁶ SIRP's cumulative actual outreach was reported at 212,712 beneficiaries at project completion, compared to a final target of 148,750 following project restructuring and 125,000 in the original design. Similarly, the cumulative actual reach was reported as 35,452 households at completion, exceeding the final target of 27,500 after restructuring and 25,000 households set in the design.

Table 7.

Project costs per beneficiary households, planned versus actual

<i>Project</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary person at design</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary person at completion/to-date</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary household at design</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary household at completion/to-date</i>
SIRP	US\$ 410	US\$ 231	US\$ 2 051	US\$ 1 384
SACP	US\$ 91	US\$ 77	US\$ 456	US\$ 384
HEEP	US\$ 156	Not yet available	US\$ 778	Not yet available

Source: PDR of SIRP, SACP and HEEP; Supervision Mission Report of SACP; PCR of SIRP.

145. **The ex-post Economic and Financial Analysis (EFA) of SIRP confirmed the project's economic viability, albeit with lower-than-anticipated returns compared to the ex-ante estimates.** A comparison between the ex-ante and ex-post EFA of the SIRP reveals a decline in economic performance over the implementation period. At design, SIRP projected strong economic viability, with an estimated Economic Internal Rate of Return (EIRR) of 22 per cent, a Benefit-Cost Ratio (B/C) of 1.98 and a Net Present Value (NPV) of US\$ 30.77 million, indicating robust financial returns and sustainability. These projections were based on positive net benefits, particularly from the transition of rainfed to irrigated vegetable plots and were considered resilient to significant variations in costs or benefits. However, at completion a reduction in all major indicators was marked: EIRR dropped to 18 per cent, NPV declined to US\$ 13.99 million, and B/C decreased to 1.51. The deterioration in economic performance is attributed to changes in market prices, implementation delays, budget overruns and external shocks, including inflation (from -1.5 per cent in 2016 to 667.4 per cent in 2023), exchange rate fluctuations¹⁶⁷ and the Ukraine crisis. Despite these challenges, the ex-post EFA concluded that SIRP was still worth investment, although economic returns were lower than initially anticipated.
146. **Efficiency summary.** The analyses show that the times for entry into force and first disbursement were broadly in line with or slightly better than ESA averages. Project management costs remained within IFAD's ceiling for SIRP and SACP and unit costs per beneficiary were below appraisal estimates. SIRP's ex-post EIRR (18 per cent) confirms that investments were still economically viable, albeit less than anticipated. However, the programme operational efficiency was undermined by persistent delays in SIRP implementation, very low disbursement for core SACP components, a long effectiveness lag for HEEP, repeated extensions, stalled financing instruments and weaknesses in procurement, financial management and internal controls. Thus, the portfolio combines a positive economic efficiency with substantive operational inefficiencies. Efficiency is assessed **moderately unsatisfactory (3)**.

E. Rural poverty impact

147. The assessment of rural poverty impact relates only to SIRP, as the only completed project. It draws on both primary and secondary data, including desk review of SIRP reports, and baseline and endline surveys (for which the methodologies were not sufficiently robust).¹⁶⁸ The CSPE complemented this analysis with qualitative

¹⁶⁷ The sharp devaluation of the Zimbabwe dollar, combined with shifts between currency regimes, distorted input costs, labour prices, and output values. Evidence shows that this volatility significantly reduced trade, undermined competitiveness, and weakened the purchasing power. *Exchange Rate Volatility and Its Impact on International Trade: Evidence from Zimbabwe*, *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 2025.

¹⁶⁸ The baseline, conducted in 2019 used systematic random sampling across four project provinces (Manicaland, Midlands, Masvingo and Matabeleland South) and two control provinces (Matabeleland North and Mashonaland West), achieving 1,229 interviews. The endline covered 1,521 households from 20 irrigation schemes operational for at least two years. The latter survey used a quasi-experimental design with treatment and control groups to compare results, but the delayed baseline and non-random sampling reduced its robustness. As a result, findings should be seen as indicative of programme contributions rather than precise impact estimates.

field evidence to better understand observed changes.

Income and assets

148. **There is a likelihood of positive contributions to household income growth.** Both endline survey and field evidence confirm sustained increases in agricultural income, higher cropping intensity and slightly broader livelihood diversification, particularly in rehabilitated schemes. Beneficiaries consistently outperformed control groups in maintaining income growth and reinvesting earnings in productive and household assets. Quantitative evidence from the SIRP endline survey shows that average household income in treatment areas rose from US\$ 1,337 to 1,414 (a 5.7 per cent increase), while incomes in control areas declined from US\$ 1,554 to 1,474.¹⁶⁹ About 93 per cent of respondent attributed these gains to SIRP investments in irrigation rehabilitation, training, nutrition gardening and savings groups.
149. **There is a likelihood of positive contributions to productive asset accumulation.** Income gains were accompanied by reinvestment in productive and household assets, suggesting early asset accumulation effects among beneficiary households. Recorded improvements are closely linked to the substantial productivity gains achieved in rehabilitated schemes: maize yields in irrigated plots quadrupled, bean yields increased nearly threefold and cropping intensity rose from 1.2 to 2.6 cycles per year, supported by more than 85 per cent of households adopting climate-resilient practices (see Effectiveness – Agricultural Productivity).
150. Field evidence corroborates these findings. In Banga (Masvingo), farmers reported that average seasonal income rose from US\$ 200 to US\$ 500 per farmer, driven by the ability to produce up to three cycles per year, compared to one prior to SIRP. Women further diversified earnings through detergent production (around US\$ 1 per unit sold). Similar trends were observed in Fuwe Panganai (Zaka), where beneficiaries earned about US\$ 500 per season, reinvesting proceeds in school fees, poultry and household micro-enterprises. In Rupangwana and Fungai (Chiredzi), tomato income rose from US\$ 50–60 to US\$ 400–500 per week and bean revenues from US\$ 120 to US\$ 400 per season. The integration of FaaB was instrumental in reinforcing these gains.¹⁷⁰ Detailed testimonies are presented in Box A18, Annex IX.
151. Overall, SIRP strengthened household income, asset bases and financial literacy. Yet progress remains uneven and vulnerable to recurring challenges, leaking pipelines, undersized pumps, incomplete fencing and high transport costs which continue to constrain the full potential of the rehabilitated infrastructure. In addition, weaknesses in operation and maintenance arrangements, input supply reliability and market structures oriented towards aggregation, quality and value addition constrain the durability and scale of observed income and asset gains.

Food security and nutrition

152. **Evidence suggests strong contributions to improved food and nutrition security among participating households, particularly irrigators.** Endline data reported that households in treatment areas achieved higher dietary diversity (HDDS 6.5 vs 6.0, $p < 0.001$) and food consumption scores (FCS 50.4 vs 46.1, $p < 0.001$), with 80 per cent reaching acceptable consumption levels compared to 69 per cent in control areas. These gains were strongest among irrigators, who benefited from all-season production and steady access to a broader range of

¹⁶⁹ Gains were particularly marked among irrigators: in Manicaland, average incomes more than doubled (US\$ 1,085 to 2,769), compared to more modest increases among non-irrigators (US\$ 662 to 908).

¹⁷⁰ Farmers reported moving from “farming for survival” to strategic, market-oriented production, applying cost-benefit analysis, keeping records and negotiating with buyers. In Insukamini, producers now market cabbages and maize to Gweru and Zvishavane with stronger bargaining power, while Makwe farmers have accessed bank loans for equipment and adopted a more collective management approach.

foods. Field evidence corroborates this, illustrating a tangible shift toward more varied diets, greater vegetable intake and improved meal frequency across visited irrigation schemes.

153. **Field mission observations show that nutrition training triggered notable changes in dietary habits**, see Box 6 below. In some schemes, production diversified beyond traditional staples to include higher-value and nutrient-rich crops such as spinach, sugar beans, okra and other horticultural commodities, contributing both to income generation and improved household nutrition. Solar-powered drip irrigation in VBUs enabled multiple vegetable harvests per year and improved dietary diversity. Beneficiaries described a move from monotonous diets of sadza and leafy greens to more balanced meals that now include boiled eggs, yellow maize rich in Vitamin A, beans for breakfast and vegetables prepared with peanut butter or chicken. In Rupangwana and Fungai (Chiredzi), women recounted that before SIRP they ate once or twice daily, while they now prepare up to three meals a day, incorporating beans, carrots, okra and fruits. Participants linked these improvements to enhanced family health, reduced stomach-related illnesses and better nutrition awareness. The NORAD-funded grant also expanded SIRP's nutrition agenda (see Box 20 Annex IX).
154. **Among women aged 15–49, dietary diversity also improved significantly (MDD-W 4.2 vs 3.8, $p < 0.05$), with 40 per cent meeting the threshold of five or more food groups**, compared to 29 per cent in control areas—though still short of the 60 per cent programme target. These outcomes are closely tied to nutrition education, cooking demonstrations, biofortified crops and small livestock support, which increased protein and micronutrient intake.¹⁷¹

Box 5.

Field testimonies on nutrition achievements

In Banga (Masvingo), farmers explained that vegetables, legumes and eggs allow households to prepare balanced meals. At Fuwe Panganai (Zaka), participants highlighted that food security had shifted from uncertainty to predictability. Women described preparing mixed-vegetable relishes with groundnut paste and introducing poultry once a week (seen locally as a sign of improved wellbeing).

In Rupangwana (Chiredzi), farmers reported that access to diverse crops—especially leafy vegetables, beans, carrots and okra—reduced stomach-related illnesses. They linked this also shift to better hygiene practices learned through demonstrations, including safe water handling and vegetable washing.

At Insukamini (Midlands), men and women described a cultural change in household nutrition roles. GALS sessions encouraged men to participate in cooking. Households attributed fewer disputes and better budgeting to these shared responsibilities.

Source: CSPE field work.

155. **Nutrition and hygiene training similarly translated into improved knowledge and daily practices.** Endline data show that treatment households enjoy higher dietary diversity and food consumption scores, with a larger share consuming acceptable diets compared to controls. In some schemes, practical learning modalities reinforced these gains: in Insukamini, “nutrition corners” provided practical demonstrations of balanced meals, encouraging households to retain and consume part of their produce rather than selling all their harvest.
156. **The introduction of biofortified and nutrient-dense crops, particularly NUA45 sugar beans and yellow maize, played a decisive role in improving diets.** Seed fairs and nutrition-corner demonstrations helped households shift from selling their best produce to consuming it at home. Beneficiaries consistently associated these behavioural changes with improved health, stronger immunity and better understanding of balanced nutrition. Gender training also reinforced nutrition

¹⁷¹ Field mission evidence.

outcomes. Through GALS, men became more engaged in domestic tasks—helping with cooking, budgeting and meal planning—reducing household tension and fostering shared responsibility for food and family wellbeing.

157. **Overall, SIRP brought about measurable and lasting improvements in food and nutrition security, particularly where irrigation, training and diversified cropping converged.** Yet progress varied by province—Midlands performing best, Matabeleland South lagging—and remains more vulnerable to climatic shocks such as the El Niño, drought or cyclones, which severely reduced yields and fresh-produce availability. The durability of these gains is closely associated with the extent to which nutrition-sensitive agriculture, continued reinforcement of dietary and food safety practises, and the institutional anchoring of nutrition gardens and extension services were in place, shaping households' capacity to withstand future climatic stress.

Human and social capital empowerment

158. **SIRP contributed positively to the development of human and social capital in targeted communities,** particularly through institutional strengthening, empowerment initiatives and gender-transformative approaches. Technical trainings consistently translated into practical behavioural change and improvements in farmers' daily lives. Beneficiaries described how the project's support enabled them not only to acquire new skills but also to modify routines, strengthen organisations and improve household wellbeing.
159. **At the institutional level, SIRP placed strong emphasis on establishing and formalizing IMCs as the backbone of community-led irrigation governance.** In several schemes (such as Rupangwana, Banga, Chibuwe and Makwe), IMCs now manage fee collection for operation and maintenance, oversee equitable water allocation and hold regular meetings with local extension services, following trainings received (as presented earlier in the effectiveness section).¹⁷² Training through FaaB and business-plan development further enhanced community capacity for collective marketing and savings mobilization, fostering a shift "from individual to collective farming", as participants described. Although institutional functionality remains uneven across provinces, with stronger performance in Midlands and Masvingo, the overall trajectory indicates that capacity-building efforts translated into more organised and accountable irrigation governance structures.
160. **The change triggered by trainings was particularly visible in farmers' practices and livelihoods.** In Insukamini, participants emphasized that they now apply pesticides simultaneously, plan production together, purchase inputs in bulk and maintain records of expenses and profits—changes they directly attributed to trainings on good agricultural practices, record-keeping and marketing. These behaviours reportedly reduced losses, improved yields and increased farmers' ability to negotiate with buyers. In Banga, FaaB training translated into a more commercial orientation: production expanded from one or two seasons per year to year-round cycles and farmers reported that their average income rose from USD 200 to USD 500 per season after SIRP. In Rupangwana, women described how they now identify buyers before planting and adjust production accordingly, which has helped stabilize income despite volatile prices.¹⁷³
161. **SIRP interventions also strengthened social cohesion and collective identity within farming communities.** Participation in farmer and producer groups increased substantially in treatment areas (35.1 per cent vs 18.4 per cent in control areas), with crop production groups showing the highest uptake (58.8

¹⁷² IMCs were trained in scheme management, financial administration, conflict resolution and maintenance planning, resulting in clearer accountability and improved coordination with extension services.

¹⁷³ The endline survey confirms these qualitative observations: more than three quarters of households in treatment areas adopted the technologies and practices introduced by SIRP, and the majority rated them as useful and effective.

per cent vs 42.9 per cent). Field discussions revealed growing collaboration, trust and knowledge-sharing among farmers, often linked to group-based training modalities that reinforced collective planning and peer learning: in Makwe, beneficiaries noted, “We now plan together and share knowledge,” while in Rupangwana, women’s groups organized joint marketing and savings activities, reinforcing solidarity and financial inclusion. Overall, community perceptions of empowerment mirrored these institutional advances, with 85.9 per cent of respondents reporting higher respect and recognition from peers, indicating strengthened trust and cooperation.

162. **Water hygiene practices also improved markedly.** The endline indicates that more households clean their drinking-water containers every time they use them, reflecting the uptake of safe-storage practices promoted during training. Communities showed near-universal awareness of handwashing, with almost all respondents recognising the importance of washing hands before eating or feeding a child, and close to 90 per cent acknowledging the risk of illness when children do not wash their hands. Field evidence further indicates that several groups were trained to produce simple detergents and use them correctly (or sell), which they described as improving household cleanliness and food-handling safety. While reliance on untreated water persists in some areas, beneficiaries (particularly irrigators) showed improved practices in water treatment and avoidance of unsafe sources.
163. **Overall, SIRP’s investments in human and social capital laid the foundations for more inclusive, cohesive and self-reliant rural communities.** By linking institutional strengthening with behavioural change and gender transformation, the programme fostered equitable participation, stronger local governance and improved community resilience. Yet these gains remain uneven and depend on continued investment in refresher training for IMCs and regular oversight from government and district structures. The durability of observed institutional and social outcomes was closely associated with the extent of continued skills reinforcement for IMCs and the consistency of engagement by government and district structures, shaping the likelihood that short- to medium-term gains would be maintained over time.

Rural institutions and policies

164. **SIRP contributed to strengthening local rural institutions and governance structures.** At the community level, SIRP coupled irrigation rehabilitation with institutional capacity development, establishing or revitalizing IMCs across all schemes. These committees now oversee O&M, coordinate water scheduling, enforce compliance on water use and manage fee collection. Many IMCs adopted written constitutions, improving governance transparency and accountability, and were supported by training in leadership, record keeping, conflict resolution and financial management. In several schemes—such as Rupangwana, Banga and Mushandike—IMCs conduct weekly planning sessions with AGRITEX/ARDAS officers and have introduced sanctions for water misuse, reflecting stronger local governance and environmental discipline. Women’s representation in IMCs and related committees has increased substantially, with women often serving as treasurers or secretaries and occasionally as chairs, reinforcing inclusive governance at scheme level.
165. SIRP also supported the creation of revolving fund mechanisms, which enhanced group cohesion, collective marketing and access to working capital. The management of these funds strengthened local financial discipline and accountability, although inflation and high bank transaction costs constrained regular contributions. The establishment of these structures helped institutionalize local business planning and enterprise management capacities, further reinforced through FaaB training.

166. **Participation and training of government personnel contributed to institutional strengthening of government structures.** Government staff members who were seconded and those that participated in the project activities were trained, and equipped with skills in irrigation management, CSA, gender and nutrition. The secondment of AGRITEX/ARDAS and Department of Irrigation officers to PMUs reinforced ownership and embedded learning within public institutions, contributing to the gradual decentralization of technical support. However, high staff turnover, limited mobility and delays in resource provision hindered continuity, especially in Matabeleland South and Manicaland.
167. **Despite these achievements, collective agency and institutional capacities remain uneven.** While IMCs and revolving fund committees have improved governance, financial discipline and gender inclusion at community level, their functionality often depends on continued external facilitation and project incentives. Weak vertical linkages with formal government structures and limited post-project support for operation and maintenance further constrain the consolidation of these gains. The extent to which these achievements are sustained over time is closely associated with the availability of continued capacity reinforcement, periodic skills updating for IMCs and the degree of institutional anchoring within government systems.
168. **At the policy level, SIRP contributed strengthening the national irrigation policy reform and to foster gender mainstreaming policy.** Through provincial consultations in Masvingo, Matabeleland South, Manicaland and Midlands, SIRP informed the drafting of Statutory Instrument 38 of 2021, which underpins Zimbabwe's *National Irrigation Policy*. The programme also fed evidence and lessons into the revision of the *AFSTS I* and *AFSTS II* (2026–2030), ensuring alignment with *NDS II* priorities. SIRP's experience with GALS and gender mainstreaming provided inputs to the *Gender in Agriculture Policy* and influenced the establishment of the *Directorate of Women in Agriculture* within the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development—one of IFAD's most visible policy impacts.
169. **Impact summary.** Overall, evidence suggest a high likelihood of SIRP contribution to positive impacts, related to increased incomes, enhanced asset ownership, improved food and nutrition security, and strengthened human and social capital. The combination of irrigation rehabilitation, climate-resilient practices, market-oriented training and gender-transformative approaches translated into tangible improvements in household wellbeing, more predictable income flows, greater dietary diversity and stronger collective action. Qualitative evidence from the CSPE mission corroborate quantitative data available, which suffered of insufficient robustness of the methodology used to generate them. For this reason, the CSPE rated the impact of as **moderately satisfactory (4)**.

F. Gender equality and women's empowerment

170. This section assesses: (i) the relevance and effectiveness of applied gender-related strategies and approaches; (ii) the contribution of the country programme to the three main objectives of the IFAD Policy on Gender Equality (2012), including women's economic empowerment, enabling women and men to have equal voice and influence, and equitable balance in workloads and in the sharing of economic and social benefits; and (iii) capacities and conditions for contributions to gender transformative change.

Gender equality mainstreaming, strategies and approaches

171. **Country strategy documents for Zimbabwe show clear progress on gender.** The 2016 CSN offered only a limited analysis, noting women's roles in agriculture and restricted access to resources without addressing intersectionality or transformative change. By contrast, the 2020 COSOP provides a comprehensive gender analysis, recognises intersecting vulnerabilities, and mainstreams GEWE

across interventions.¹⁷⁴

172. **Project designs integrated strong gender analyses and included plans to implement GALS systematically.** Project design documents were informed by gender analyses that identified interrelated barriers to women's participation and translated these into targeted, sometimes transformative, responses. Designs consistently aimed to reduce gender inequalities, including quotas of at least 50 per cent women beneficiaries and measures to strengthen women's participation and decision-making. All projects referenced GALS and planned to mainstream gender in M&E through sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators (e.g. WEAI). SIRP and SACP allocated dedicated staff and resources. However, intersectionality and GBV safeguarding were limited as presented in Box A19, Annex IX.

Box 6.

Features and results of GALS approach applied in communities

Across most field sites, communities reported strong outcomes when men and women participated together. Households described fairer decision-making, shared workloads and improved collaboration, supported by communal farming, FaaB training and better market access, which eased financial stress. Several communities also reported reduced domestic violence. GALS strengthened household relations, productivity, resilience and agency, with over 86 per cent reporting greater peace, especially when locally tailored and embedded.¹⁷⁵

Source: CSPE field work.

Outreach and contributions to change in women

173. **During implementation, projects in the Zimbabwe portfolio consistently applied gender-transformative approaches, achieving measurable and sustained progress in gender equality and women's empowerment.** GALS was systematically rolled out as a cross-cutting methodology and embedded across producer groups, irrigation schemes, value chains and community institutions, supported by trained facilitators, gender champions, peer learning and standardised tools with repeated outcome measurement. Women's participation quotas were largely met through targeting criteria, community sensitization and participatory approaches. As a result, SIRP exceeded targets with 59 per cent women participants, while SACP reached 58 per cent women beneficiaries overall and over 60 per cent participation in APGs, despite lower representation in higher-value enterprises.

Box 7.

Challenges in achieving women's quota in irrigation schemes

Challenges in meeting gender quotas were observed. Women accounted for only 33–39 per cent of participants across several schemes, including Mushandike, Chipinge, Fungai and Exchange. In some cases, SIRP implementation increased male participation; at Rupangwana, women shifted from a majority to a minority. Notably, the 50 per cent gender quota remains below Zimbabwe's national share of women in agriculture.¹⁷⁶

Source: CSPE field work.

174. **The CSPE found that projects in Zimbabwe have demonstrates positive gender outcomes across the portfolio.** In SIRP areas, joint household decision-making increased substantially following GALS implementation, rising from 52.9

¹⁷⁴ It commits to transformative approaches such as GALS and details concrete actions—including labour-saving technologies, gender quotas, support for women-led value chains, capacity-building in financial literacy and irrigation governance—while also establishing plans to monitor progress through tools like the WEAI.

¹⁷⁵ Government self-assessments confirmed progress in IFAD projects, strengthening women's entrepreneurship, shaping the national Gender Strategy for Agriculture, and driving Ministry adoption of GALS.

¹⁷⁶ Nationally, more women than men participate in own-account farming, primarily in subsistence-based, rain-fed, small-scale agricultural activities (67 per cent of women compared to 53 per cent of men). UN Women (2022) The Cost of the Gender Gap in Agricultural Productivity in Zimbabwe. https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/unw_the_cost_of_the_gender_gap_in_agricultural_productivity_in_zimbabwe0606202301web.pdf.

per cent to 79.9 per cent, with women reporting higher levels of active participation than men. Women's economic inclusion also improved markedly, particularly among female-headed households, where access to internal savings and lending schemes rose from 21 per cent to 79 per cent. Across all projects, more than 16,000 beneficiaries were trained, strengthening women's voice in group planning, control over resources and leadership, even in contexts where structural barriers such as land tenure and market access remain.

Box 8.

Field observations related to gender roles

Where gender champions were present, beneficiaries said their strong knowledge of local conditions helped them mediate conflict effectively. However, their ability to implement activities was limited by the late introduction of the approach under SIRP and inadequate budgets, particularly for transport. In the absence of a formal gender focal system at scheme or district level, champions operate informally, relying on personal motivation rather than institutional support. In some cases, promised support was not delivered, such as bicycles in Chibuwe and reporting tablets at Exchange Irrigation Scheme.

Source: CSPE field work.

175. **Projects in Zimbabwe strengthened women's decision-making, leadership and inclusion at household and community levels.** In SIRP, treatment households reported more shared income decisions than control groups. Women's representation in Irrigation Management Committees rose from 33 per cent to 51 per cent, and participation in natural resource committees doubled (2021–2023). Field visits showed women confidently leading production, marketing and governance. Stronger results emerged with critical mass leadership, sustained GALS, collective farming and higher incomes. In SACP, more than 3,300 women were trained in GALS, and women held 43 per cent of leadership roles, supported by targeted measures and WEAI monitoring.
176. **Women's economic empowerment was strengthened through improved access to resources, finance, skills and markets, alongside norm change efforts.** In SIRP, female-headed households recorded high adoption of improved agricultural practices, near-universal production increases, expanded access to savings and credit, and modest gains in access to irrigated land. Financial literacy and business skills training supported women's entrepreneurship and market engagement. SACP likewise expanded women's access to assets and income opportunities, particularly through producer groups and livestock initiatives. Field visits highlighted women generating new income streams and prioritising household needs, though constraints such as water scarcity, delayed inputs and limited transport and storage continued to affect profitability.
177. **Portfolio projects reduced women's workloads through labour-saving technologies and improved practices, including solar pumps, threshers, jab planters and fuel-efficient stoves, alongside more equitable sharing of household responsibilities.** In several communities, increased male involvement in cooking and childcare further eased women's time burdens. Although some women experienced higher workloads due to expanded production and year-round cultivation, most considered this an acceptable trade-off given the resulting income gains. In parallel, nutrition-sensitive agriculture and gender-responsive training improved nutrition outcomes. Women's minimum dietary diversity increased significantly under SIRP, outperforming control groups despite adverse climatic conditions, with benefits extending to whole households through improved access to healthcare, safe water and safer working environments.
178. **Desk reviews, interviews and field visits confirmed meaningful shifts in gender norms, attitudes and behaviours.** GALS and FaaB contributed to improved household communication, shared planning and more balanced decision-making. Many couples reported adopting joint approaches to crop selection,

financial management and household investments.¹⁷⁷ Women increasingly took on leadership roles in committees and producer groups, supported by growing confidence and recognition from men. GALS also promoted fairer distribution of labour, reduced household conflict and encouraged more collaborative farming practices, particularly where both women and men participated in training.¹⁷⁸

179. **Despite positive results, GALS faced constraints on its transformative potential.** In some sites, women-only training limited shifts in gender norms and sometimes heightened household tensions. Progress was further constrained by entrenched norms, unequal access to land and assets, women's heavy workloads, traditional social structures, and weak implementation capacity, including limited facilitators, follow-up, and support for gender champions.
180. GEWE summary. Strong progress has been made on gender equality and women's empowerment through improved gender analysis, GALS, quotas, and expanded access to resources, training, and leadership. Outcomes include increased participation and decision-making, reduced workloads, improved diets, and shifting norms. Economic opportunities improved, notably under SIRP and SACP, despite gaps in GBV, intersectionality, and follow-up capacity. **The performance for GEWE is rated satisfactory (5).**

G. Sustainability

181. The sustainability criterion assesses the extent to which the net benefits induced by the strategy and programme continue over time. It includes issues of social, financial/economic, institutional and technical sustainability. This section mainly focuses on SIRP, as the only completed project, and highlights confirmed sustainability prospects for the programme. Other specific aspects assessed (both SACP and SIRP) are scaling, and environment, natural resources management and climate change adaptation.

Social sustainability

182. **Strong engagement, participation, and ownership are evident among beneficiary households and community organisations, particularly under SIRP.** Communities were consistently consulted from design through implementation, shaping decisions on irrigation rehabilitation, and business plans to reflect local priorities.¹⁷⁹ Ongoing guidance from Agritex workers further reinforced ownership. Most farmer and irrigation groups demonstrate strong institutional maturity and social cohesion, supported by established governance structures, clear roles, peer accountability, and sound financial management, although a small number remain fragile due to capacity or economic constraints. Field evidence indicates that many groups are already self-financing essential needs. Overall, SIRP-supported groups have strengthened their capacity to operate independently, with growing self-reliance, internal resource mobilisation, effective monitoring, labour-sharing under block farming, and routine scheme management.
183. **However, the CSPE team found that some VBUs and irrigation schemes¹⁸⁰ are less prepared,** particularly those in remote areas where access to markets and financial services remains limited, and where major capital needs, such as large-scale infrastructure replacement due to damaged systems or dam siltation, exceed local financial capacity. Indeed, factors underpinning the sustainability of

¹⁷⁷ Across Chimanimani, Jabula, Jabatshaba, Mushandike and Musaverema, communities reported positive shifts in gender roles, with men supporting women's economic participation and leadership. Joint participation in GALS was cited as a key driver of shared decision-making and change.

¹⁷⁸ SIRP's PCR reported GALS raised crop decisions from 52.9 per cent to 79.9 per cent, boosted productivity, increased household peace to 86.6 per cent, and reduced GBV from 69.9 per cent to 4.5 per cent.

¹⁷⁹ Similar but less intensive engagement was observed in SACP.

¹⁸⁰ Field visits identified lower levels of preparedness among VBUs and irrigation schemes in more remote areas. In Hwange, limited market access continues to constrain preparedness in Mabhikwa, Jabatshaba, and Ndimakule VBUs, while three irrigation schemes in Midlands Province (including Exchange, Hamamavhaire, and Banga) are experiencing significant infrastructure deficits.

supported community-based organisations include insufficient financial discipline, breaches in the governance rules, insufficient capacity for management, commercial negotiation, and in fostering ownership and long-term commitment.

184. **While capacity for routine management has improved, concerns persist over the consistency of financial contributions, retention of technical skills and long-term governance of some WUOs and IMCs.** CSPE field visits found that a few groups experienced stagnation or decline where post-project support was insufficient. Limited inclusion of poorer members and youth opting for more lucrative opportunities, particularly in mining areas, also pose risks. As most schemes are recently revitalised, institutionalisation of good practices will take time and technical backstopping. The completion report notes continued AGRITEX and Department of Irrigation support, but limited resources mean dependence on government remains.

Financial and economic sustainability

185. **Market-driven production models have strengthened sustainability.** Supported groups have built local technical capacity to maintain infrastructure and have increasingly formalised producer structures, enabling reinvestment, access to credit and entry into higher-value markets.¹⁸¹ SIRP has driven notable improvements in business practices and commercialisation. Across schemes, beneficiaries reported bulk input purchasing, improved record-keeping and cost tracking, contract farming arrangements and crop planning aligned with buyer demand. In Hamamavhaire, for example, producers negotiated with buyers prior to planting and used commercial planning tools to distinguish gross from net profit. These shifts indicate a growing commercial orientation, supporting sustained productivity and competitiveness.
186. **Some schemes and VBUs improved their market access, thus bolstering sustainability prospects.** Several groups formalised as MSMEs, enabling greater access to finance and commercial partnerships. Joint venture arrangements at schemes such as Chibuwe facilitated co-investment, technology transfer and reliable market linkages, while Insukamini successfully entered export supply chains. Productivity improvements supported by CSA practices, upgraded irrigation systems and farm-business training have further enhanced income stability. Adoption of water-saving technologies, soil moisture monitoring and diversified cropping systems also strengthened climate resilience, supporting sustained production across seasons.
187. **Several challenges nevertheless constrained financial sustainability.** Under SIRP, farmers were required to make upfront cash contributions (US\$100/ha) for operation and maintenance, but recurrent costs, including electricity tariffs, inflation and competing household needs, undermined compliance. Macroeconomic instability, notably hyperinflation and input price volatility, weakened financial planning and increased infrastructure costs. Funding constraints limited investment in complementary infrastructure such as roads and storage, reducing market efficiency. Procurement and disbursement delays slowed implementation and constrained system embedding. Planned commercialisation support was scaled back. External shocks, including COVID-19, conflict-driven inflation and recurrent drought, further depressed production and increased vulnerability.
188. **ISALS promoted under SIRP strengthened smallholders' access to finance.**¹⁸² Designed as self-managed, community-based systems, ISALS are expected to continue benefiting communities beyond the project lifecycle,

¹⁸¹ Strengthened WUOs and IMCs have further enhanced financial discipline and resource management, with nearly 8,000 irrigators and more than 1,800 IMC members trained in irrigation operations, water and financial management, and cost recovery, while fee systems introduced before scheme rehabilitation promoted financial sustainability.

¹⁸² Having been established or strengthened through the programme's FaaB capacity-building approach to support input purchases, small investments and other livelihood needs.

supported by financial literacy and business planning training and linkages to formal financial institutions. While SIRP did not develop detailed post-project sustainability plans, the project completion report suggests ISALS remain viable in most locations due to strong community ownership and integration into wider rural finance strategies. Field observations confirmed continued functionality in many areas, although high fees contributed to member dropout in some cases. Long-term sustainability depended on member commitment, the enabling environment and the availability of follow-up support from government or development partners.

189. **CSPE field visits found that engagement by VBUs and irrigation schemes with formal banking institutions was limited, which limits financial sustainability.** Many of the VBUs and schemes report that they have opened accounts primarily to meet project requirements and securely manage contributions, rather than to access credit or other financial products. Across sites, communities emphasised self-reliance and internal financing. In some cases, VBUs and IMCs reported that they avoid taking loans from banks due to prohibitive interest rates.
190. **Where SIRP brokered linkages with major input suppliers and off-takers, smallholders with reliable irrigation appear as commercially viable partners,** which strengthened economic sustainability prospects, and continued collaboration. However, such linkages remain limited. CSPE field evidence indicates that sustaining partnerships depends on consistent, high-quality supply and effective market engagement. Transport constraints, weak marketing capacity and the incomplete rollout of business development services reduced farmers' bargaining power and hindered institutionalisation of private-sector partnerships. Cases such as Whitney Paprika show that sustainability requires not only infrastructure, but also strong farmer organisation, reliable irrigation and effective governance structures (IMCs and WUOs) that build investor confidence. See detailed elaboration in Box A20, Annex IX.
191. **Limited access to markets remains a major sustainability constraint, as well as high repair costs and economic volatility.** Field visits revealed that many VBUs struggle with transport shortages that reduce competitiveness and increase post-harvest losses, while irrigation schemes often prefer private buyers over the Grain Marketing Board due to better prices and faster payments. Although many groups have marketing committees, their limited capacity to identify and negotiate with buyers underscores the need for continued support in market linkage development and negotiation skills. Similarly, situations of repairs of major infrastructure, and replacement exist, which exceed the financial capacity of some communities, creating the reliance on external support for large capital works. Broader economic volatility (such as inflation) also undermines savings and complicates financial planning for maintenance.

Technical and institutional sustainability

192. **Several promoted technologies and approaches were technically sound and sustainably applied.** These are the cases for solar pumping, improved irrigation scheduling, climate-smart production and water measurement devices. Many schemes continue applying them post-project and farmer-led repairs show a practical understanding of system maintenance. In more mature schemes, technology has been adapted and routines institutionalised, suggesting strong viability.
193. **Strengthened local capacity to operate and maintain infrastructure drives technical sustainability of project results.** Beneficiaries reported they have acquired skills in pump operation, irrigation system management and routine repairs, with youth often trained to provide ongoing technical support.¹⁸³ Youths

¹⁸³ SIRP trained 1,810 IMC members in leadership, conflict resolution and technical skills, while nearly 8,000 irrigators learned efficient irrigation and water scheduling techniques using tools such as chameleon sensors.

received vocational training in canal construction and basic electrics, and government staff were trained for long-term technical support. In Banga, beneficiaries emphasised their ability to troubleshoot pumps and irrigation equipment without relying on external technicians. VBUs similarly reported gaining competence in solar system management and routine maintenance. Although distance to spare-part suppliers remains a challenge in some areas, the development of local technical capability reduces operational risks and costly downtime. CSPE field visits confirmed that training and capacity building have strengthened monitoring and the ability to repair minor infrastructure issues and reduced dependence on external support.

194. **Technical challenges persist and hinder the sustainable management of irrigation infrastructure.** High-cost repairs and major replacements often exceed community financial capacity, creating reliance on external support for large capital works. Many schemes reported persistent issues such as leaking pipes and dam siltation, which require specialised skills and budgets beyond VBU and scheme resources. Uneven post-handover support has further weakened sustainability; for example, at Fuwe Paradzai, the lack of follow-up contributed to declining O&M discipline. Equity and affordability challenges persist, as seen in Nhakayedu, where households unable to meet contribution requirements withdrew, reducing the member base and threatening long-term maintenance.¹⁸⁴ Expectations of continued government intervention remain among some farmers, despite fiscal constraints.
195. **The CSPE found evidence of strong government engagement and ownership in sustaining SIRP results, with continuity beyond the project period shaped by institutional capacity, resources and policy alignment.** Sustainability was reinforced by alignment with national policies, officer training, community ownership and productivity gains that maintained government interest. Implementing SIRP through existing structures (MLAFWRD, AGRITEX and the Department of Irrigation) helped embed systems within national frameworks. The Government of Zimbabwe's allocation of funds to complete unfinished works after closure signalled commitment. The project also strengthened national and subnational institutions by training and embedding officers, institutionalising governance, CSA practices and routine management, with agencies continuing to provide extension and technical support.
196. **Despite these gains, government agencies face resource constraints that limit sustained technical support and monitoring.** High staff turnover and skills gaps (especially at local levels such as ARDA) have undermined implementation continuity and may persist post-project. Weak market infrastructure and service linkages remain, with delays and funding shortfalls constraining BDS delivery and post-harvest facilities, thereby limiting farmer commercialisation. Fragile market ecosystems continue to threaten long-term sustainability. CSPE field visits also found that major rehabilitation and capital maintenance needs often exceed local capacity, sustaining reliance on external funding. While the model reduced expectations of ongoing subsidies, operational discipline weakened in some lower-capacity communities lacking follow-up support.

Exit strategy development and implementation

197. **All three projects began planning exit strategies at the design, emphasising farmer resilience and self-reliance.** SIRP adopted a phased approach focused on strengthening the capacity of farmers and government institutions to independently manage schemes. By the MTR farmers still lacked clarity on full O&M and depreciation costs needed to assess profitability. After the MTR, the strategy was refined by finalising O&M manuals; training youth technicians, GALS facilitators, nutrition champions and lead farmers; and

¹⁸⁴ Youth out-migration to pursue more lucrative opportunities and employment in mining areas have reduced available technical capacity and continuity in certain schemes.

strengthening market and financial linkages. By completion, 31 of 59 schemes had been handed over to ARDA and beneficiaries, though issues such as low O&M contributions, limited partner readiness and untested block production systems remained, due to late scheme finalisation and limited documentation. The CSPE fieldwork confirmed that post-MTR measures were implemented.¹⁸⁵

198. **Sustainability summary.** SIRP sustainability is underpinned by strong community ownership, mature farmer and irrigation groups, sound financial discipline, and widespread adoption of technical and institutional practices, including CSA, strengthened WUOs and IMCs, and functioning O&M systems. Many groups self-finance minor repairs and maintain savings. However, sustainability is uneven due to weak contributions in some schemes, limited technical capacity, youth out-migration, reliance on government for major repairs, macroeconomic instability, and constrained markets. **Sustainability is rated moderately satisfactory (4).**

Scaling up

199. While none of the projects developed concrete strategies for scaling up interventions, SIRP has shown some evidence of scaling up driven mainly by the government. While project documents occasionally mentioned scalability, these references were superficial and lacked detail on how expansion would be achieved.
200. **The FaaB model introduced under SIRP has advanced significantly toward national scale-up.** MLAFWRD officials confirmed that FaaB has been integrated into agricultural extension training across irrigation schemes and VBUs and embedded in block-farming approaches in irrigated areas. Under the Government's V30 Accelerator Model, FaaB principles are being applied across the planned 35,000 VBUs, with ARDA business managers mentoring farmers in planning, record-keeping, cost management and market-oriented production. VBUs are now positioned as a core platform for rural transformation beyond IFAD target areas. The Ministry has also created supportive structures (including a Value Chain Unit and strengthened gender systems) reflecting lessons from IFAD's commercialisation focus. However, interviews noted the absence of a national M&E system to track FaaB outcomes, meaning system-wide institutionalisation and reporting are still maturing.
201. **GALS is now a nationally recognised gender-transformative tool, backed by government commitment, coordinated partner support, and clear pathways for scale-up.** Initially piloted under SIRP, it evolved into a nationally recognised gender-transformation tool through high-level policy dialogues and roundtables in 2023 and 2024. The Government has committed to integrating GALS into the forthcoming Gender in Agriculture Policy, supported by draft terms of reference co-developed with IFAD, FAO and the Swiss Development Cooperation. The Ministry of Women Affairs and the Gender Commission are exploring a trainer-of-trainers model and establishing a national GALS network, with UN Women, UNFPA, SACP and HEEP committed to continued support. This reflects broad multi-stakeholder ownership and momentum toward long-term scale-up.
202. **Gully reclamation models piloted under SIRP are now embedded in national programmes,** including the Food-for-Work scheme, achieving 83 per cent adoption nationwide. Nearly 20,000 farmers have been trained, and manuals guide extension staff, supporting replication. Almost 90 per cent of irrigators and 64 per cent of non-irrigators engaged in reclamation activities, demonstrating diffusion beyond target sites.
203. **The lead farmer model has been scaled up through incorporation into government extension systems and continued community-to-community**

¹⁸⁵ SACP and HEEP have designed exit strategies from inception, with SACP focusing on sustainability at individual, cooperative and value-chain levels and HEEP emphasising profitable, long-term business linkages between smallholders and private sector actors.

transfer. Lead farmers remain active across schemes and VBUs, supporting peers in production planning, record-keeping, CSA and NRM. While highly valued, the approach is not yet fully formalised or budgeted in policy frameworks, and quality varies with extension capacity.

204. **Nutrition gardens have also upscaled nationally**, with SIRP's model integrated into VBUs and a national target of 35,000 sites. The programme supported 5,386 household keyhole gardens and 30 school gardens and manuals institutionalised technical knowledge. Expansion is co-financed by partners, including China Aid and World Vision, demonstrating sustained investment and adoption.
205. **There is no clear evidence that private actors are independently scaling up SIRP results or have concrete plans to do so.** While SIRP sought to engage off-takers, input suppliers and financial institutions, and explored a partnership with USADF as a business development service provider, this was not approved. As a result, market-related services were delivered mainly through government channels and ad hoc partnerships. Interviews indicated that private-sector engagement was late, limited and constrained by economic fragility. Market linkages only emerged once irrigation was nearly complete, and the absence of a dedicated BDS provider constrained systematic partnership development. No scaling by other national or international partners was identified.
206. **Scaling up summary.** Several SIRP-introduced models (including FaaB, GALS, gully reclamation, the lead farmer model and nutrition gardens) have demonstrated significant national uptake, driven largely by government institutionalisation, multi-stakeholder support and integration into existing extension and policy systems. Scale-up was limited to critical government efforts, as no evidence of contributions by other development partners and/or private-sector actors. **The CSPE rates scaling up as satisfactory (5).**

Environment and natural resources management and climate change

207. **Environmental and natural resources management considerations were systematically integrated across the portfolio**, guided by the 2020 COSOP's focus on climate resilience and community-based NRM and operationalised through consistent application of IFAD's Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP). Environmental and climate analyses at design stage were comprehensive and evidence-based, providing a uniform framework for screening, risk mitigation and safeguard compliance, and directly shaping interventions such as Environment and Social Management Plans,¹⁸⁶ catchment rehabilitation, soil and water conservation, CSA promotion and climate-proofed infrastructure. Under SIRP, conservation and catchment rehabilitation became standard features of irrigation revitalisation, while SACP applied the same principles to value-chain infrastructure, supported by CSA training manuals that reinforced climate-resilient practices.¹⁸⁷ However, implementation capacity remained uneven, with delays in baseline data collection, and limited staffing and resources constraining environmental monitoring and grievance redress effectiveness, despite the consistent application of SECAP procedures across the portfolio.¹⁸⁸
208. **Projects achieved meaningful site-level ecosystem improvements by institutionalizing environmental safeguards, though the impact remained localized due to capacity and implementation constraints.** SECAP procedures and ESMPs provided clear operational standards for conservation measures, while training of AGRITEX officers and NRM subcommittees created local technical capacity to monitor and address emerging environmental risks. Integration of safeguards into routine irrigation and NRM activities marked a shift from project-

¹⁸⁶ SIRP NRM Strategy – Zero Draft, July 2020, SIRP Natural Resources Management Report, August 2022.

¹⁸⁷ See Box 23, Annex IX.

¹⁸⁸ The IFAD self-assessment (2025) notes that while GRMs have enhanced community responsiveness, follow-up capacity within the PCU and line ministries remains weak, limiting consistent feedback and closure of reported cases.

by-project mitigation to a more consistent compliance culture, explaining why impacts were significant at site level even though geographic reach remained constrained by variations in institutional capacity and implementation pace.

209. **Community participation and ownership were critical enablers of environmental improvements**, with catchment rehabilitation adopted as part of normal farming practice rather than as an external requirement. Visible short-term benefits—such as reduced flooding and improved soil moisture—strengthened local commitment to maintaining these works beyond project closure. Activities like fruit-tree planting, apiculture and seed-ball initiatives added livelihood value to restoration efforts, creating economic incentives that reinforced ecological outcomes and enhanced the prospects for sustainability.
210. **Productivity increase in rehabilitated irrigation schemes introduced environmental risks**, such as salinization, waterlogging and pressure on downstream flows, which SECAP identifies as common challenges when irrigation is expanded without adequate safeguards.¹⁸⁹ Despite the safeguard measures applied,¹⁹⁰ stakeholder interviews indicate that in drought years irrigation demand can exceed sustainable supply where catchment enforcement is weak or upstream management is under-resourced, contributing to erosion, siltation and wetland degradation, as well as water shortages driven by infrastructure failures. SIRP's integrated livestock–crop interventions helped mitigate some of these pressures by linking cattle and goat enterprises with rangeland rehabilitation, though further scaling of the beef value chain may intensify competition for land and water in semi-arid areas if not carefully regulated.¹⁹¹
211. **Intensification of crop production increased the usage of fertilizers and pesticides, creating risks of water pollution, eutrophication and harm to aquatic ecosystems, if not properly monitored.** These risks were mitigated through Integrated Pest Management (IPM) training, safe-handling guidelines and the development of ESMPs (including 16 approved by EMA under SIRP) which set standards for soil conservation, water allocation and regulated agrochemical use. SECAP training, grievance-redress mechanisms and environmental audits further strengthened compliance and early risk detection, though implementation capacity remained uneven across provinces, leaving some irrigation zones with ongoing concerns about long-term ecosystem health.
212. **Main constraints to stronger environmental and NRM outcomes were institutional and systemic rather than technical:** weak by-law enforcement, inadequate monitoring capacity and limited financing for O&M and environmental oversight undermined otherwise well-designed interventions. Strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring sustained financing and more clearly linking project safeguards with national policy frameworks remain essential for scaling and sustaining environmental gains.
213. **IFAD supported a technically coherent climate-resilience approach across the projects**, linking SECAP-informed risk screening with irrigation rehabilitation, catchment protection, CSA promotion and climate-proofed value-chain infrastructure.¹⁹² Environmental screening requirements shaped the design of resilient irrigation systems, water infrastructure and feeder roads, particularly under SACP, helping to stabilise production and reduce climate-related losses. Farmers were trained in CSA practices—including soil and water conservation, mulching, conservation tillage and agroforestry—and supported through climate-

¹⁸⁹ SECAP Training Report, March 2022.

¹⁹⁰ Integrated conservation measures including contouring, tree planting, gully reclamation and flood-protection work that helped reduce sedimentation and stabilize adjacent cropland.

¹⁹¹ SIRP NRM Report, 2022.

¹⁹² Under SIRP, soil and water conservation measures and strengthened scheme-level governance improved the reliability of irrigation systems, while complementary catchment works reduced siltation, storm damage and land degradation. SIRP NRM Report, August 2022.

resilient technologies¹⁹³ and low-cost ecological measures. Where infrastructure was restored and adequately maintained, production capacity and local ecological resilience improved. However, adoption of CSA practices remained uneven, constrained by perceptions of high labour requirements, delayed economic returns, inconsistent extension support and limited incentives. As a result, while the climate-resilience approach was technically sound, adoption gaps reduced the potential for ecosystem-scale recovery and wider diffusion of sustainable practices across landscapes.¹⁹⁴

214. **Smallholders' climate resilience supports were relatively effective.** IFAD's climate-resilience approach combined investment in irrigation infrastructure, with CSA, water-efficient technologies, practices for erosion reduction, improved access to water and strengthened production systems under drought conditions. Complementary investments in climate-proofed value chains—such as solar-powered irrigation, weather-index insurance and drought-tolerant enterprises—helped smallholders reduce exposure to climatic shocks while expanding opportunities for inclusive commercialization. These interventions were implemented within a coherent policy framework aligned to the National Climate Policy, updated NDCs and NDS1, ensuring consistency between project-level safeguards and national climate priorities. IFAD's multi-layered approach, linking resilient infrastructure, promoting CSA practices, improved information systems and strengthened local institutions,¹⁹⁵ significantly enhanced the capacity of rural households and ecosystems to anticipate, absorb and recover from climate risks. These also contributed to strengthening resilience at communities' levels. Related to the latter, community institutions—NRM subcommittees, WUOs and IMCs—were revitalized to maintain irrigation infrastructure, coordinate water use and embed adaptation practices into local governance. Evidence from studies and supervision reports show that where these committees were active, households were better able to cope with droughts, floods and economic shocks than comparable non-beneficiary groups.¹⁹⁶ ¹⁹⁷ Overall, IFAD's systems approach produced measurable improvements in resilience, though adoption and institutional performance varied by district.
215. **ENRM and CCA summary.** The portfolio has made important contributions to natural resource management and climate change adaptation and strengthened the resilience of households to cope with erratic rainfall. This was based on analysis of environmental and climate hazards with community participation and application of a range of conservation measures. Investment in irrigation, in water-efficient technologies, in reducing erosion and stabilizing water access and CSA practices were relevant and effective for climate resilience. However, sustaining and expanding positive environmental results were constrained by factors such as financial gaps, weak enforcement mechanisms, the increase reliance on fertilizers. Moreover, the rehabilitation of irrigation and intensification of agriculture do introduce more environmental risks, which must be monitored. Considering all these, **the CSPE rated environment, natural resources management and climate change adaptation as moderately satisfactory (4)**

H. Overall country strategy and programme achievement

216. The CSPE's ToC considered three main long-term pathways of the programme

¹⁹³ SIRP NRM Report (2022), SACP and Resilience Agriculture Cluster Project (RACP) piloted weather-index insurance, strengthened APGs, and promoted renewable energy solutions such as solar-powered irrigation. These innovations collectively expanded households' adaptive capacity while supporting commercialization and livelihood diversification.

¹⁹⁴ SIRP NRM Report (2022), Conservation works, tree planting and catchment rehabilitation progress.

¹⁹⁵ Resilience Agriculture Cluster Project (RACP) Concept Note (2024), Climate-resilient value chains, insurance and renewable energy.

¹⁹⁶ Phiri, K. et al. (2021). Understanding climate smart agriculture and the resilience of smallholder farmers in Umguza district, Zimbabwe. ResearchGate.

¹⁹⁷ Mpala, K. & Simatele, D. (2024). Climate-smart agricultural practices among rural farmers in Masvingo district. Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems.

(covering both the 2016 CSN and the 2020 COSOP): (i) increased access to markets and to nutritious food by smallholders; (ii) increased smallholders' incomes; and, (iii) better performance of smallholder agriculture that is sustainable and resilient.

217. In relation to market access, the strategy and programme achieved moderate progress in linking smallholder farmers to private actors through contract farming and commercial arrangements, as discussed earlier. Conversely, even though several challenges were observed in the irrigation schemes, significant results were recorded in improving agricultural production and productivity, and to improve food security and nutrition among rural households. This progress was driven by sustained and measurable achievements, particularly in terms of rehabilitation of irrigation schemes, capacity-building activities across multiple thematic areas, promotion of new or adapted innovations (e.g. climate-smart agriculture practices, the block system approach, biofortified crops), effective grant complementarity, and strong engagement of government stakeholders. These gains were closely associated with rising rural incomes, contributing overall to improved resilience of smallholders in the intervention areas.
218. The strategy and programme faced two main challenges: (i) linking farmers to viable financial systems, as implementation delays in ongoing projects undermined overall effectiveness at the time of the evaluation; and (ii) ensuring continuity of government support beyond project completion, due to insufficient national resource availability. These challenges were compounded by external factors (identified in the ToC assumptions) during the evaluation period, including significant currency fluctuations, suboptimal coordination and resource allocation by the government, and limited financing from other multilateral development banks. Overall, the country strategy and programme achieved a moderately satisfactory performance (4.4).

Table 8.

CSPE ratings

<i>Evaluation Criteria</i>	<i>Rating 2025</i>
○ Relevance	4
○ Coherence	5
○ Knowledge management	5
○ Partnership development	4
○ Policy engagement	5
○ Effectiveness	4
○ Innovation	5
○ Efficiency	3
○ Rural poverty impact	4
○ Gender equality and women's empowerment	5
○ Sustainability	4
○ Scaling up	5
○ Natural resource management and climate change adaptation	4
OVERALL ACHIEVEMENT	4.4

Source: CSPE.

Key points

- IFAD has taken an important step in re-opening the programme in 2015.
- The IFAD country strategies and programmes have operated closely in line with key government strategies, policies and priorities, as well as IFAD's corporate policies.
- Outreach under SIRP performed strongly but has been slower under SACP and HEEP.
- There have been positive results from irrigation rehabilitation, agricultural production and nutrition, but delays in implementation and patchy institutional and extension support have meant that producers were not well linked to markets or finance.
- Non-lending activities included strong engagement of IFAD and the GoZ, and advancement of policy dialogue across multiple themes. There has been limited collaboration via grants, but this contributed to strengthening market linkages and enhancing post-harvest infrastructure. KM was successful at national level but less so locally.
- Efficiency is less than satisfactory due to delays in disbursement and operational inefficiencies and challenges with the M&E system.
- The programme has increased women's opportunities and access to resources and services. Women's confidence and voice have also been improved at household and community level. Application of GALS has been a contributing factor.
- In project areas, sustainability has been generally achieved, based on strong community ownership and adoption of new technical and institutional practices. However, there is still a tendency for reliance on the government for major repairs, and financial weaknesses.
- Several models introduced in SIRP have been scaled up nationally to government systems.

IV. Performance of partners

219. This section assesses the extent to which IFAD and the Government managed the programme in achieving results, and to enable a conducive policy environment to leverage the impact and the sustainability of the achievements.

A. IFAD

220. **IFAD has established itself as a credible and trusted partner in supporting Zimbabwe's smallholder agricultural sector.** Its re-engagement in 2015 (see Box 8 below), after more than a decade of suspension, positioned the Fund as a neutral and key actor, recognized by both the Government and other development partners for its leadership in smallholders' nutrition-sensitive agriculture. Through the continuous engagement under SIRP, SACP and HEEP, IFAD is contributing to rebuilding institutional capacity and guiding the country's transition towards more inclusive, sustainable, and transformative agriculture. IFAD's interventions have maintained a coherent focus on climate-resilient irrigation rehabilitation, smallholder commercialization, nutrition and CSA.

Box 9.

Overview of IFAD's re-engagement process in Zimbabwe

IFAD began operations in Zimbabwe in 1983. In 2006, Zimbabwe lost access to new financing from IFAD due to long-standing arrears, which by mid-2015 had reached about US\$ 23 million. In June 2015, IFAD's Regional Director indicated that support could resume in 2016 if the country demonstrated commitment to settling its arrears. Later, in October 2015, an IFAD technical mission visited Zimbabwe to assess needs and identify priorities, with emphasis on smallholder and dryland irrigation in communal, and old resettlement areas. IFAD was perceived as politically neutral, allowing it to engage when many bilateral partners were hesitant due to political concerns. The mission aimed to shape a new project concept focused on irrigation and climate resilience for smallholder farmers. In December 2015, Zimbabwe signed a debt-rescheduling agreement, making a US \$2.3 million down payment (about 10 percent of arrears) and pledging to clear the remainder over five years. This arrangement unlocked a US \$55 million irrigation revitalization program.

Sources: CSPE Scoping interviews.

221. **Since its re-engagement in 2015, IFAD has been providing sound strategic oversight to the programme.** Five Country Directors (CDs) have overseen the portfolio, initially from Rome until 2017 and later from the IFAD's Multi-Country Office in Johannesburg. While there were three CDs in the period 2015-2017, since 2018, only two CDs have been providing continuous and stable leadership in managing the country programme. Although IFAD lacks an in-country office, the national long-term consultant, who has been the same person since 2015, has been instrumental in maintaining a strong and constructive relationship with MLAFWRD, ensuring institutional continuity, and in representing IFAD in various meetings and missions. Stakeholders from MLAFWRD and MOFEDIP have consistently acknowledged IFAD's strengths in piloting integrated, community-based models, notably the IMCs and VBUs, which combine social inclusion with productive infrastructure and market integration. It has pursued targeted but modest partnerships, with promising steps toward more structured collaboration (see partnership section presented above). IFAD has been successful in mobilizing external funds (loans and grants) to co-finance designed projects.
222. **KM and policy activities have improved significantly in recent years.** The 2024 Country Knowledge Management Strategy provided a clearer framework, leading to the production of diverse materials, guidelines, case studies and policy briefs. However, these outputs have largely remained confined to the national level, with limited dissemination to provinces, where the IOE mission found little evidence of KM documentation. IFAD's policy engagement has yielded tangible contributions

to several strategic frameworks (see Policy engagement section).¹⁹⁸

223. **The design of strategies and investment projects followed comprehensive consultations. Nevertheless, design gaps affected thematic aspects.** Both strategic documents and the projects were developed through extensive engagement with government ministries, including senior officials from Finance and Agriculture, the Reserve Bank and key line departments, as well as development partners, multilateral agencies, civil society organizations, financial institutions and private sector actors. However, gaps were identified for project design components, as presented in the relevance section, due to an underestimation of the complexity of the initial situation, and/or the government capacities in place.¹⁹⁹ Yet, several feasibility studies proved overly complex and irrigation costs were underestimated, leading to budget adjustments. However, designs notably well integrated aspects of inclusiveness, SECAP and climate change.
224. **Operational strengthening efforts by IFAD led to incremental improvement, supported by regular and technically robust supervision and technical supports. However, structural constraints remain.** IFAD's portfolio evolved to more specialized and decentralized PMUs under SACP and HEEP, supported by provincial-level staff in procurement, social inclusion and CSA. In this context, IFAD actively promoted the establishment of a Joint Management Unit (JMU) across SIRP, SACP and HEEP as a cost-sharing and continuity mechanism, with the objective of improving coordination across projects and retaining institutional memory as the portfolio expanded. According to IFAD staff, this arrangement facilitated cross-project learning and reduced duplication of key functions, although it also increased workload pressures on shared staff. Supervision and technical missions have been implemented regularly, with at least one mission annually led by Country Directors and supported by a multidisciplinary team (see Table A8, Annex IX). IFAD also invested significantly in capacity building, regular trainings and technical backstopping from UNOPS. Despite these efforts, operational challenges are persisting, in relation to fiduciary aspects, bureaucratic procedures and weak coordination with line ministries, all these issues being systemic linked to the government structure. On IFAD side, interviews highlighted delays in fund release and poor alignment with national budgeting cycles, which adversely affected AWPB execution.
225. **IFAD made significant efforts to enable an effective programme delivery in contexts featured by high macroeconomic and climate-related risks.** Risk management has been proactive and adaptive, addressing a complex risk environment encompassing macroeconomic volatility, fiduciary weaknesses, climate shocks and institutional fragility. Mitigation measures included flexible disbursement, enhanced procurement and FM manuals, continuous policy dialogue and climate adaptation planning. During the COVID-19 crisis, the RPSF supported 14,820 households through nutrition-sensitive crop and livestock inputs, youth-led solar dryer production, women's groups manufacturing PPE and block farming approaches that increased yields and market linkages. The COSOP MTR observed that many risks materialized despite mitigation efforts, particularly cofinancing delays, inflation and recurrent droughts, which continued to constrain implementation efficiency.
226. **IFAD performance summary.** IFAD re-engaged adequately and re-established itself as a credible partner and maintained strong strategic engagement, designs and ensured continuous supports. The portfolio benefited from strengthened institutional arrangements, targeted partnerships, and improved knowledge

¹⁹⁸ There is an on-going suggestion of establishing a dedicated KM focal point within the Agriculture Working Group to enhance visibility and cross-agency learning.

¹⁹⁹ With SIRP, these reflected the rapid design process and the strategic imperative to re-engage swiftly in Zimbabwe after a long suspension. Direct interactions with key stakeholders were limited by COVID-19 during the SACP and HEEP design processes.

management, while policy supports were effective. However, the IFAD's support was constrained by structural issues linked to government capability (coordination gaps, fiduciary challenges), and an operating environment featured by several high-level risks, beyond the control of IFAD. **IFAD's performance is assessed as satisfactory (5).**

B. Government

227. **The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) has demonstrated strong strategic commitment to IFAD-supported operations.** The MOFEDIP, acting through its International Cooperation and Economic Affairs Departments, serves as the borrower and plays a pivotal role in aid coordination.²⁰⁰ In parallel, the MLAFWRD, demonstrated consistent strategic engagement and commitment to IFAD supported programme. The MLAFWRD has supported the replication of successful approaches and sought to refine delivery modalities to better address smallholder farmers' evolving needs. While irrigation rehabilitation and nutrition remain core priorities, project design has progressively tried to incorporate a stronger focus on market access and public-private-producer partnerships (4Ps). However, these efforts are still at an early stage of institutionalization, and the overall coordination within the agriculture sector remains weak (as presented above in the coherence section).
228. **Despite its strong strategic engagement, the GoZ's contribution fell short of commitments.** In SIRP, GoZ was to provide US\$ 7.9 million (14.7 per cent of total costs); actual contributions reached US\$ 5.9 million (76 per cent), much of it in kind (staff time, premises, vehicles), which constrained cash available for works and services. For SACP, counterpart funding was far more problematic: against a planned US\$ 5.3 million (7.8 per cent of total costs), only 9.2 per cent of the target had been released as of November 2025.²⁰¹ These financial shortfalls and delays constrained procurement, slowed infrastructure works and contributed to disbursement lags.
229. **The GoZ demonstrated strong operational engagement with the IFAD supported programme.** Government staff at provincial and district-level have been actively involved in the projects' implementation, which ensured strong integration within government structures, through the secondment model. This latter significantly strengthened the technical skills and practical experiences of those staff, as officers benefited from learning opportunities that enhanced their capacity. (see details in the partnership section). Similarly, state-owned enterprises collaborated in the implementation processes of projects. This close involvement of government structures reflects the strong operational engagement of the GoZ, which has been determinant for the continuity of supports (see sustainability section).
230. **The PSCs functionality has been relatively effective. But its composition was incomplete.** The SIRP PSC was assessed generally effective, despite some missed meetings, according to the completion report. Both SIRP and SACP PSCs meet biannually to review programme progress and approve key plans. Since 2022, a Joint Programme Steering Committee chaired by the PS of MLAFWRD—supported by the JMU—has provided unified oversight across both projects and enhanced coherence in decision-making. However, the CSPE found inadequate that the Ministry of Finance is not represented in the PSC, as being a key strategic actor. Additionally, it appears that financial and statistical data are not systematically channelled through Treasury, diminishing the visibility of IFAD's contribution within the broader national financing framework.

²⁰⁰ It established nine sector working groups and the rollout of the Development Projects Management Information System (DEVPROMIS) in 2022—an online platform designed to enhance donor coordination, accountability and oversight of national development initiatives. DEVPROMIS enables real-time monitoring of both internationally and domestically funded projects, improving visibility on implementation status and results.

²⁰¹ Moreover, these funds were provided in local currency while contractor obligations were denominated in USD, creating liquidity gaps and undermining contractor confidence.

231. **Persistent delays in establishing PMUs and recruiting key staff weakened early implementation across the portfolio.** In SGRP, late appointments of Project Coordinators and M&E Specialists constrained technical oversight during critical start-up phases. Over time, capacity improved with the recruitment of specialized experts (e.g., irrigation engineer, rural finance consultant) and decentralization of staff to provincial levels. SACP experienced similar issues, exacerbated by staff turnover and incomplete recruitment, with key positions filled only recently.²⁰²
232. **Operational coordination and learning have improved in recent years.** The CSPE noted periodic meetings organised between PMUs and Provincial Project Implementation Units (PPIUs), and shared staffing arrangements between SGRP and SACP. The establishment of the JMU, which retained experienced technical staff in M&E and KM from SGRP, enhanced continuity and cross-learning. The deployment of specialized provincial officers in CSA, procurement and M&E further bolstered implementation capacity, an approach now replicated under HEEP. However, persistent resource and capacity gaps at district level—particularly within AGRITEX and the Department of Irrigation—continue to constrain the pace and quality of implementation.
233. **Project M&E systems had weaknesses and no linkage with a broader Government M&E framework.** The projects' M&E systems show gradual improvement but remain constrained by weaknesses, as elaborated earlier in the KM section. The Ministry of Agriculture has only begun developing its M&E systems in the past five years and reporting is still largely narrative. A dashboard exists but is not yet functional online and most data collection relies on Kobo tools. Provincial departments also have M&E officers. Despite this, major gaps persist. There is no interface that links IFAD project M&E systems and the government's Results Framework, and the national M&E framework lacks standardized indicators. IFAD project data are not integrated into national MIS. Government officials often learn of project issues only during joint field missions,²⁰³ hindering alignment. It appears that overarching harmonized indicators at national level, and clear data-sharing and aggregation mechanisms are missing, thus hindering development effectiveness reporting and policymaking.
234. **Fiduciary aspects were undermined by both internal and external challenges. Positive corrective measures were initiated in recent years.** Both SGRP and SACP experienced delayed disbursements, audit backlogs and incomplete financial reporting.²⁰⁴ One constraint is that the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion (MoFEDIP) does not exempt IFAD-financed projects from paying VAT, despite the Financing Agreement requiring the Government to provide its counterpart contribution through waiver of taxes and levies. This has been a recurrent and unresolved issue, particularly under SACP.²⁰⁵ Corrective actions introduced under SACP and HEEP – the recruitment of qualified financial management staff, capacity-building support from IFAD's Regional Office, and the adoption of Sage Pastel accounting software – are beginning to yield modest improvements in terms of compliance and reporting. The collaboration with UNOPS since 2023 has also enhanced financial and contractual oversight. Nonetheless, public disclosure of financial data remains limited, and internal audit

²⁰² To address these systemic constraints, HEEP adopted an alternative model—externally recruiting PMU staff from the private and donor sectors and establishing a decentralized structure with provincial and district officers to strengthen field-level delivery.

²⁰³ SGRP's independently developed database is incompatible with Ministry of Agriculture systems, while SACP collects data not fully aligned with government priorities.

²⁰⁴ In SGRP, fiduciary risk was rated moderate, stemming mainly from limited FM staff and delayed access to bank statements. SACP faced even greater challenges, with slow budget approvals, unfilled positions in finance and procurement, and weak coordination between central and provincial teams. The absence of internal audits since 2022 highlights significant risks to financial accountability.

²⁰⁵ According to the ICO, the absence of VAT exemption has eroded the trust of suppliers and service providers, created cash flow bottlenecks, and contributed to significant delays in procurement and contract execution.

functions require substantial reinforcement to ensure sustained transparency and accountability across the portfolio.

235. Additionally, volatile exchange rates, frequent price adjustments and supplier reluctance to commit to fixed-price contracts undermined cost estimates, reduced bid validity periods and contributed to repeated retendering. While procurement plans aligned with IFAD's requirements and AWPBs, implementation was often slowed by late initiation, prolonged approvals and weak contract management.²⁰⁶ Remedial actions (including adoption of IFAD's Contract Monitoring Tool, use of standard bidding documents, procurement training under SACP and outsourcing oversight to UNOPS) helped strengthen compliance but have not fully addressed efficiency gaps.²⁰⁷
236. **Government performance summary.** The GoZ demonstrated strong strategic commitment to IFAD-supported operations, as well as strong operational engagement. However, its counterpart funding fell short of commitments. The active involvement of government structures was determinant to ensure continuous supports. While the PSCs functioned relatively well, and institutional learning improved through the JMU and provincial staffing, gaps persist particularly in procurement, M&E, financial and contract management. In recent years corrective actions have begun to yield improvement. Overall, the government performance **is moderately satisfactory (4)**.

²⁰⁶ Contract management weaknesses included delayed payments, inconsistent record keeping and limited enforcement of contractual clauses. Transparency was low, with weak databases and minimal public disclosure.

²⁰⁷ Notably, several key infrastructures work under SACP—such as bridges and feeder roads in Mashonaland Central, West and East—remain incomplete as contractor identification and contracting processes are still ongoing.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

237. IFAD re-engaged positively with the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) in 2015, after a decade of suspension due to debt arrears, by orienting strategic investment to rehabilitate irrigation schemes. The evaluated period (2016-2025) was featured by a volatile and generally unfavourable macroeconomic environment, including debt distress and inflation spikes, as well as increasing climate-related pressures.
238. **Despite the difficult context, the strategic partnership between IFAD and the GoZ remained strong over the evaluated period.** IFAD and the GoZ developed a stable and constructive partnership, marked by a mutual trust and continuous engagement to achieve intended objectives. IFAD has established itself as a credible and reliable partner in Zimbabwe's agricultural sector, despite having no country office in the country, and its strategies and operations were well aligned with the GoZ development priorities and policies. In the other hand, the GoZ has demonstrated strong strategic commitment to IFAD-supported operations overall. **However, the GoZ showed institutional and financial weaknesses**, as it did not fully disburse committed financial contributions. Moreover, government strategic coordination mechanisms and supports within the agricultural sector were functionally weak or absent over the evaluation period.
239. **Supported themes linked to the resilience of smallholders were strategically pertinent and sound.** Both the CSN 2016 and the COSOP 2020 placed a strategic focus on strengthening smallholders' resilience through support to sustainable and climate-smart production, nutrition-sensitive value chain development, improved access to markets, and the creation of economic opportunities in rural areas. Those themes were relevant in line with the national development strategies and priorities, especially the Zimbabwe Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 2021-2025. They were also sound considering challenges faced by smallholders, in terms of rainfed agriculture particularly vulnerable to climate change, featured by low productivity, resulting in food insecurity and poverty, and exacerbated by limited economic opportunities. Especially, investment to rehabilitate the irrigation schemes were particularly vital for smallholder farmers' resilience. Nevertheless, the CSPE found design gaps on the thematic areas of irrigation (water resources), rural finance and market access.
240. **In fact, climate-resilient smallholder agriculture has been successfully strengthened. Persistent challenges remain, however, constraining the sustainability of results.** The combination of rehabilitated irrigation, gradual institutionalisation of CSA (notably conservation agriculture, intercropping and mulching), and early warning systems have strengthened smallholders' climate resilience. Nonetheless, the overall scope of resilience remained constrained by (i) design gaps in the thematic areas of irrigation (water resources), rural finance and market access; and (iii) persistent challenges linked to insufficient technical supports (especially after the SIRP completion). Diversification interventions largely failed due to weak alignment with agroecological conditions. Moreover, while government engagement in sustaining results is meaningful, sustainability is constrained by limited public resources, as well as weak technical and financial capacities in the management of irrigation schemes by smallholders.
241. **IFAD supports bolstered knowledge management and policy engagement, contributing to programme successes.** Building on the lessons of the 2016 CSN, the programme sought for greater consistency and complementarity across interventions, reinforced by the establishment of a JMU at national level, and in building of IFAD's comparative advantage in terms of supporting smallholder agriculture. The country programme made significant progress in enabling the effectiveness of KM system, thus contributing to satisfactory policy results. Similarly, grant supported activities contributed to generating valuable learning and

- achieving programme objectives. Overall, the IFAD supported programme has (i) sought an effective involvement of government institutions at central and decentralised levels; (ii) supported capacity development of various stakeholders; as well as (iii) leveraged additional co-financing. All these efforts were critical for successes. **But gaps hindered achieving greater performance.** As coordination mechanisms remained weak, there were insufficient learning opportunities among various actors within the agricultural sector, which limited the scope of scaling up results. There were, also, missed opportunities for joint programming or collaborations with UN partners including the RBAs, and for additional co-financing.
242. **Efforts to promote sustainable smallholder agriculture yielded positive gains in productivity and farmer capacities.** Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) techniques were mainstreamed and delivered positive outcomes in terms of improved moisture retention, reduced erosion, and enhanced soil fertility. Rehabilitated schemes contributed to higher productivity, increased cropping intensity, and improved household incomes. Farmers' capacities were strengthened, and they were organized into synchronized production units (block farming), with growing participation of women as active members and leaders. **Conversely, these efforts resulted in uneven coverage and emerging environmental trade-offs.** While the programme promoted soil and water conservation practices, a stronger emphasis was placed on irrigation development, which carries inherent environmental risks, including salinization, waterlogging, and increased pressure on downstream water flows. Moreover, the gains achieved tended to be localized and were constrained by institutional, financial, and enforcement weaknesses.
243. **Investment for access to markets and to financial services yielded mixed results.** Due to delays in the completion of irrigation works, linking smallholders to private sector off takers was also delayed. Where such linkages were eventually established, the resulting benefits were largely skewed in favour of the latter. Risks have also been evident, with farmers going into debt in a sorghum out-grower scheme that coincided with drought-induced crop losses. A lack of trust and community cohesion, along with delays and a need for continuing extension support, is endangering any opportunity for market engagement. Internal financial instruments (such as ISALs and revolving funds) have been supported with financial literacy training. However, access to formal finance was unsuccessful by the time of the evaluation.
244. **Similarly, the portfolio projects demonstrated insufficient efficiency gains.** Slow disbursements and delays in operationalization of components, due to delays in approvals of projects; delays in agreements with key stakeholders; and changes in market prices and exchange rates negatively affected the implementation pace of operations. These delays lead to risks of non-achievement of objectives and risks for sustainability. Moreover, financial management has been undermined by persistent staffing gaps, while procurement processes have been adversely affected by disagreements on VAT exemption, macroeconomic instability and rapid currency depreciation. Difficulties in establishing and implementing effective monitoring and evaluation systems have further compounded these challenges.
245. **The programme successfully piloted innovations and upscaled successful practices,** reflecting relevant and appropriate identification of problems and a good working relationship with the Government. Some technical innovations, such as hydrogel soil conditioner or greenhouses, were not replicated due to weak supply chain strategy and institutional support, and limited ownership. However, social and institutional innovations (such as GALS, FaaB, gully reclamation models and the block farming system) have been adopted widely and upscaled due to government efforts.
246. **Finally, positive results were achieved in improving nutrition and enabling**

gender equality and contributions to gender transformative change. Multi-focal and nutrition-sensitive interventions, focusing on different crops (including biofortified crops, introduction of small livestock, cooking demonstrations, construction of potable water points and behaviour change communication) have contributed to significant improvements in household nutrition, including dietary diversity for women. Gender analyses and strategies improved outcomes regarding women's participation, economic empowerment and access to resources, workloads, leadership and voice, as well as decreases in gender-based violence, though it has been uneven. GALS was particularly important in transforming gender norms at household level, and based on this, it has been replicated nationally and is adopted by the Ministry of Women Affairs and the Gender Commission. **Conversely, support to other social groups, including youth yielded very limited results.** Youth participation has consistently fallen below targets, largely due to difficulties in engaging young people in agricultural activities, reflecting broader structural constraints. Similarly, engagement with people with disabilities and the landless persons has been minimal.

B. Recommendations

247. The CSPE made the following recommendations to overcome challenges, and address gaps that prevent achieving greater performance, while leveraging on the positive achievements. These recommendations are aligned with the Zimbabwe Agriculture Food Systems and Rural Transformation Strategy 2, 2026-2030.

248. **Recommendation 1. IFAD and the GoZ should pursue prioritising, in the next strategy, strengthening the resilience of smallholders but in a more holistic manner.** This strategic theme should be embraced considering the complexity of the social, economic, environmental and climate-related challenges faced by smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe and considering the appropriateness of production systems in line with the agroecological zones and the needs of smallholder farmers.

IFAD's supports to approaches – such as VBUs, management of revitalised irrigation schemes and their IMCs, CSA practices, environmental committees in the villages and ISALs – must be underpinned by robust and holistic feasibility analyses that adequately capture the interlinkages among the multiple and interdependent constraints affecting smallholders, including cost-recovery mechanisms and governance arrangements for irrigation systems and other project-supported investments. Such analyses should be complemented by targeted thematic and technical studies, as appropriate, notably in relation to ground and surface water resources for irrigation purposes, which warrant dedicated strategic assessments and master plans to avoid over-extraction.

Strategic orientation should also prioritize multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder engagement – including government institutions, development partners, producers' organisations, NGOs and the private sector – at both national and subnational levels. This requires the establishment and effective functioning of government coordination mechanisms within the agricultural sector. (see the next recommendation).

249. **Recommendation 2. IFAD and the GoZ should systematically leverage non-lending activities and address institutional capacity gaps.** This would contribute to enhanced programme performance, particularly in terms of impact and sustainability of results. Strategic orientations should be provided in the next strategy on these aspects, to address challenges of insufficient learning and weak implementation capacities, especially at provincial and district level. To that end, institutional strengthening (both physical and non-physical) should be prioritized, targeting government institutions as well as farmers' organizations and other relevant institutions, with due consideration to challenges related to the sustainability of benefits.

Leveraging partnerships with other international partners (e.g. UNDP, WFP, FAO, NORAD, and JICA) and its subnational presence, IFAD should contribute to establishing and strengthening robust and effective monitoring and evaluation systems under the MLAFWRD, to which all sector projects are linked. This system should enable the aggregation of data, consolidation of information and reporting on national rural development indicators and avoid the current mismatches.

In parallel, IFAD should also contribute to fast-track the operationalization and use of the Resilience Platform (currently under development), as well to facilitate the functionality of agriculture sector working groups. Both mechanisms should enable (i) systematic exchange of experiences, (ii) cross-learning, and (iii) contributions to informed policy and decision-making.

250. **Recommendation 3. IFAD to strengthen its presence in Zimbabwe, and to support the government to improve strategic and operational coordination within the agricultural sector.** Given the size of the Zimbabwe portfolio, its growing complexity, and the challenging macroeconomic and institutional context, IFAD and the Government of Zimbabwe should explore options to strengthen IFAD's in-country presence, building on the current successful model of a long-term consultant. The objective is to enhance strategic and operational harmonization, and learning among development partners in the agricultural sector, thereby addressing the coordination gaps identified by the CSPE. This would also contribute to ensuring more timely responses by IFAD to the volatility of the operating environment and to seizing opportunities for partnership development. Finally, this should aim to leveraging the upscale of successful models by other development partners at national level, as well as across the region, through SSTC activities for instance.

251. **Recommendation 4. IFAD and the GoZ to roll out sound thematic approaches (i.e. on inclusive financial services, value chain development and access to markets), aligned with the Zimbabwean context, that further strengthen rural resilience strategies.** There is an urgent need to identify solutions that remove barriers to deploying line-of-credit mechanisms for matching grants and to expand smallholders' access to inclusive financial services, which are essential for successful value chain development. To that end, it is essential to pilot inclusive finance mechanisms in selected value chains, reinforcing specific institutional functions, introducing risk sharing instruments, and improving digital and process efficiencies within financial institutions.

In parallel, the programme should develop an explicit operational plan to expand and sustain partnerships between smallholders and private actors, through the development of contractual and partnership agreements with private actors, for sustained access to profitable markets. Additionally, by leveraging the programme's strong subnational presence and established relationships with decentralized structures, the role of the Joint Management Unit (JMU) should be reinforced to foster vertical and horizontal synergies within the programme and with external partners, thereby strengthening results across the above thematic areas.

252. **Recommendation 5. IFAD and the GoZ, building on positive experiences of gender transformative interventions, should strengthen social inclusion through context-relevant interventions for youth and other marginalised groups.** The next country strategy should include a context-responsive social inclusion approach that addresses in a comprehensive manner, the involvement of youth, PWD and landless people in IFAD-supported interventions. Embedding these measures within the future strategy and project designs would strengthen equity, improve programme sustainability, and enhance resilience outcomes by broadening participation, while remaining aligned with Zimbabwe's socio-economic and agro-ecological realities.

Approach of youth economic empowerment should include: (i) Diversified livelihood pathways beyond irrigated crop production, such as climate-appropriate off-farm and non-land-based activities (e.g. agro-processing), explicitly tailored to youth capabilities and interest; (ii) targeted skills development and mentorship, linked to realistic local economic opportunities and supported by continued extension and business development services; and (iii) conduct diagnostics to better understand youth aspirations and constraints, and target areas where alternative industries (such as mining) are not prevalent to reach youth with few income-generating opportunities.

253. **Recommendation 6. IFAD and the GoZ to identify and implement appropriate solutions to remove bottlenecks that prevent achieving efficiency gains.** Considering the volatility of macroeconomic indicators of the country, IFAD and the GoZ must identify sound mechanisms to adapt processes and procedures, to facilitate further efficiency gains in the implementation of the country program. This also entails simplifying and streamlining management procedures and for approvals. Additionally, the GoZ should take action to eliminate or resolve issues that trigger recurring delays of government approval processes and in disbursing the counterpart funds. strengthening procurement and financial management capacities should be prioritized, given their central role in past delays.

Policy-level dialogue should be undertaken with the ministry in charge of finance on the application of tax waivers under sovereign loans, or the establishment of an interim mechanism to prevent VAT-related liquidity constraints from undermining project performance. Furthermore, the programme shall pursue deploying skilled service providers in areas where they are critical capacity gaps within the PMUs.

All these actions shall be undertaken with the aim of improving the overall portfolio efficiency and enable better use of the resources mobilized for agricultural transformation.

Definition of the evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria

Relevance

The extent to which: (i) the objectives of the /country strategy and programme are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, institutional priorities and partner and donor policies; (ii) the design of the strategy, the targeting strategies adopted are consistent with the objectives; and (iii) the adaptation of the strategy to address changes in the context.

Coherence

This comprises two notions (internal and external coherence). Internal coherence is the synergy of the intervention/country strategy with other IFAD-supported interventions in a country, sector or institution. The external coherence is the consistency of the intervention/strategy with other actors' interventions in the same context.

Non-lending activities are specific domains to assess coherence.

Knowledge management

The extent to which the IFAD-funded country programme is capturing, creating, distilling, sharing and using knowledge.

Partnership building

The extent to which IFAD is building timely, effective and sustainable partnerships with government institutions, private sector, organizations representing marginalized groups and other development partners to cooperate, avoid duplication of efforts and leverage the scaling up of recognized good practices and innovations in support of small-holder agriculture.

Policy engagement

The extent to which IFAD and its country-level stakeholders engage to support dialogue on policy priorities or the design, implementation and assessment of formal institutions, policies and programmes that shape the economic opportunities for large numbers of rural people to move out of poverty.

Effectiveness

The extent to which the country strategy achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives and its results at the time of the evaluation, including any differential results across groups.

A specific sub-domain of effectiveness relates to:

Innovation, the extent to which interventions brought a solution (practice, approach/method, process, product, or rule) that is novel, with respect to the specific context, time frame and stakeholders (intended users of the solution), with the purpose of improving performance and/or addressing challenge(s) in relation to rural poverty reduction.²⁰⁸

Efficiency

The extent to which the intervention or strategy delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.

"Economic" is the conversion of inputs (funds, expertise, natural resources, time, etc.) into outputs, outcomes and impacts, in the most cost-effective way possible, as compared to feasible alternatives in the context. "Timely" delivery is within the intended timeframe, or a timeframe reasonably adjusted to the demands of the evolving context. This may include assessing operational efficiency (how well the intervention was managed).

Impact

The extent to which the country strategy has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.

The criterion includes the following domains:

- changes in incomes, assets and productive capacities
- changes in social / human capital
- changes in household food security and nutrition
- changes in institution and policies

The analysis of impact will seek to determine whether changes have been transformational, generating changes that can lead societies onto fundamentally different development pathways (e.g., due to the size or distributional effects of changes to poor and marginalized groups).

²⁰⁸ Conditions that qualify an innovation: newness to the context, to the intended users and the intended purpose of improving performance. Furthermore, the 2020 Corporate-level Evaluation on IFAD's support to Innovation defined transformational innovations as "those that are able to lift poor farmers above a threshold, where they cannot easily fall back after a shock". Those innovations tackle simultaneously multiple challenges faced by smallholder farmers. In IFAD operation contexts, this happens by packaging / bundling together several small innovations. They are most of the time holistic solutions or approaches applied of implemented by IFAD supported operations.

Evaluation criteria

Sustainability and scaling up

The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention or strategy continue and are scaled-up (or are likely to continue and scaled-up) by government authorities, donor organizations, the private sector and other agencies.

Note: This entails an examination of the financial, economic, social, environmental and institutional capacities of the systems needed to sustain net benefits over time. It involves analyses of resilience, risks and potential trade-offs.

Specific domain of sustainability:

Environment and natural resources management and climate change adaptation. The extent to which the development interventions/strategy contribute to enhancing the environmental sustainability and resilience to climate change in small-scale agriculture.

Scaling-up* takes place when: (i) other bi- and multi laterals partners, private sector, etc.) adopted and generalized the solution tested / implemented by IFAD; (ii) other stakeholders invested resources to bring the solution at scale; and (iii) the government applies a policy framework to generalize the solution tested / implemented by IFAD (from practice to a policy).

*Note that scaling up does not only relate to innovations.

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; workload balance and impact on women's incomes, nutrition and livelihoods; and in promoting sustainable, inclusive and far-reaching changes in social norms, attitudes, behaviours and beliefs underpinning gender inequality.

Evaluations will assess to what extent interventions and strategies have been gender transformational, relative to the context, by: (i) addressing root causes of gender inequality and discrimination; (ii) acting upon gender roles, norms and power relations; (iii) promoting broader processes of social change (beyond the immediate intervention).

Evaluators will consider differential impacts by gender and the way they interact with other forms of discrimination (such as age, race, ethnicity, social status and disability), also known as gender intersectionality.²⁰⁹

Partner performance (assessed separately for IFAD and the Government)

The extent to which IFAD and the Government (including central and local authorities and executing agencies) ensured good design, smooth implementation and the achievement of results and impact and the sustainability of the country programme.

The adequacy of the Borrower's assumption of ownership and responsibility during all project phases, including government, implementing agency and project company performance in ensuring quality preparation and implementation, compliance with covenants and agreements, establishing the basis for sustainability and fostering participation by the project's stakeholders.

²⁰⁹ Evaluation Cooperation Group (2017) Gender. Main messages and findings from the ECG Gender practitioners' workshops. Washington, DC. <https://www.ecgnet.org/document/main-messages-and-findings-ieg-gender-practitioners-workshop>.

Evaluation framework

Evaluation criteria and definition	Key evaluation questions	Data sources and collection methods
<u>RELEVANCE</u>	- To what extent and in what ways was the country strategy and programme relevant and aligned to: (i) the country's development needs, priorities and challenges, national policies and strategies, and sectorial and thematic plans; (ii) IFAD's relevant strategies and priorities; (iii) the needs of the target group? - To what extent did IFAD's strategic positioning remain relevant throughout the implementation of the COSOP considering changing context, national capacities and needs? How relevant and flexible was IFAD in responding to the COVID-19 crisis in the country? - How appropriate was the targeting strategy, with attention to women, youth, landless, people with disabilities, and other marginalized groups? Did it evolve over the years in response to the ground realities? Was the geographic targeting, and hence, the selection of project areas, appropriate in terms of maximising the effect of IFAD interventions? - Were lessons from previous interventions adequately taken into consideration in the design of strategies and projects? How was the quality of project designs? Were there recurrent or common design issues, including related to design complexity? Did assumptions hold during the programme period? - Was the design realistic in terms of suitability to the context and implementation capacity of both IFAD and the government's institutions? Were government capacities (at national, provincial and district levels) adequately considered in programme designs? Were the capacities of other stakeholders (e.g. rural organizations, service providers, NGOs/CBOs, private sector, rural finance institutions, research centres) adequately considered in programme design? - Were the institutional arrangements for programme management, coordination and oversight relevant and appropriate for the interventions? To what extent were these arrangements appropriate to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation? - Are IFAD priority themes (e.g. gender, youth, climate change, and nutrition) sufficiently addressed in the CSN and COSOP, and projects' interventions? Were adequate resources allocated to address issues related to priority themes? - How inclusive and pro-poor were the rural finance and market access interventions? How appropriate have been these interventions, given the existing legal and institutional framework? How appropriate has been the selection of partners?	In depth review of the CSN and COSOP, and programme/projects' documents: PDR, President reports, supervision mission reports, implementation support mission reports, Mid-term review reports, Project Completion Report (SIRP), and other relevant documents related to different interventions. In-depth desk review of national policies and strategies. Interviews with IFAD staff and national stakeholders Interviews and focus groups with target groups during field visits
<u>COHERENCE</u>	- To what level of clarity was IFAD's comparative advantage (in the Zimbabwe context) defined in the CSN and COSOP, and to what extent did the COSOPs intend expansion beyond conventional areas of its comparative advantage? - Were there synergies and interlinkages between different elements of the country strategy and programme (i.e. between projects, between lending and non-lending activities)? to what extent? Is there evidence of cause analysis having been done on how the activities and outputs would	In depth review of CSN, COSOP, COSOP reviews, and programme/projects' documents: design reports, supervision mission reports, implementation support mission reports, MTR reports, and all other relevant documents related to different interventions Review of documents and reports of projects

Evaluation criteria and definition	Key evaluation questions	Data sources and collection methods
	contribute to achievement of SOs? - Did the country programme allocate sufficient (human, technical and financial) resources for non-lending activities? - To what extent and how did the country strategy and programme take into consideration other development actors' initiatives to maximize the investments and efficiency and added value? What mechanisms have been developed to promote complementarity, harmonization and coordination with these actors?	supported by other development partners Key informant interviews with IFAD staff, government stakeholders and other relevant partners
Knowledge Management:	On Knowledge Management - To what extent and through which mechanisms have knowledge from investment projects and grants been gathered, documented and disseminated? How have these informed new strategies and projects design? Did the country programme engage in south-south and triangular cooperation? - How relevant were the knowledge products to the target audience? - Which knowledge management tools and approaches have been used? How have these been used to inform new strategies, project design and/or have contributed to decision making at governmental level? - How effective has been the organizational process? - Were KM activities outlined in the CSN and the COSOP and/or is there a specific country strategy for KM? Did the projects have any KM/communication strategies? - Is there any evidence that lessons, and knowledge produced through IFAD lending and non-lending activities have been effectively used to support scaling up successful initiatives?	
Partnership development:	On Partnership development - How did IFAD position itself and its work in partnership with other development partners? What types of partnerships were established and to what end (e.g. influence policy, leverage financial resources, enable coordinated country-led development processes; generate knowledge and innovation; strengthen private sector engagement; enhance visibility)? Which results were achieved? What were key factors for successes and the main challenges? - How did IFAD position itself and its work in partnership with the private sector, civil society/rural organizations and research institutions? To what extent were the private sector and civil society/rural organizations involved in design and implementation of its activities? What type of partnerships were developed? Which results were achieved? What were key factors for successes and the main challenges? - Was there sufficient strategic level suitability of partnerships that were entered into for the CSN and COSOP implementation? What was the nature of partnerships established with partners (e.g. to influence policy, in thematic areas of IFAD's interest, leverage co-financing, enable coordinated country-led development processes; generate knowledge and innovation; strengthen private sector engagement; enhance visibility)?	

Evaluation criteria and definition	Key evaluation questions	Data sources and collection methods
	• Did IFAD loans and grants contribute to create and support partnerships at different levels (local, national, international) with the aim to leverage resources, broker knowledge, avoid duplication of efforts and influence policy in supporting Zimbabwe smallholder agriculture? Were these partnerships effective? • Was co-financing with development partners sufficiently sourced? • To what extent was the partnership strategic and based on sustaining IFAD's activities post-programmes? • What aspects of IFAD's partnership were valued by government and why? • To what extent were the systems and capacities of IFAD and the government geared to work with the private sector?	
Policy engagement:	On Policy engagement • To what extent and how did IFAD contribute to policy discussions drawing from its programme experience (for example, on themes addressed by the country interventions, around the key issues identified in the COSOP, etc.)? Who were the main actors with whom IFAD engaged in this regard? • Which specific policy engagement activities were implemented, and did they yield positive results? What were key factors for successes and the main challenges? • Is there any actual policy change that IFAD work in the country has contributed to? Was it documented? • Was there a consistent follow-up in documenting and supervising results on IFAD policy engagement in areas of strategic focus? • Was there any explicit strategic orientation on policy engagement in the CSN and COSOP? • How did IFAD plan to use in-house knowledge and resources to engage and inform government on relevant policies and regulatory frameworks, and to what extent was it successful?	
EFFECTIVENESS	• To what extent were the objectives of the country strategy and programme (output and outcome-level) achieved or are likely to be achieved at the time of the evaluation? What worked well and why, and did not work well and why? • What were the key achievements of the country strategy programme, i.e. what would not have happened, or happened as quickly without the country strategy programme? • Were the objectives of the interventions achieved, or likely to be achieved, at the time of the evaluation? • For each thematic area identified (Access to water resources and community management; Climate-resilient production (CSA) and access to nutritious food and dietary diversity; Value chain development, access to inputs and access to markets; and Institutional strengthening for smallholder agricultural development), which were the main strategies and tools adopted? What	In depth review of CSN, COSOP and COSOPs review reports In-depth desk review of projects' documents: projects design documents, supervision mission's reports and implementation support missions' reports, mid-term reviews and completion reports; projects targeting and gender strategies; M&E data from projects (progress on outputs and outcomes / disaggregated data), etc. Interviews with IFAD staff and national stakeholders

Evaluation criteria and definition	Key evaluation questions	Data sources and collection methods
	have been the strengths and weaknesses of these strategies and tools? Which were the concrete achievements? Were community-based approaches successfully strengthened? What have been the main factors explaining the performance/non-performance and what could have been done differently? • Which mechanisms and interventions were the most effective in targeting vulnerable groups? To what extent have vulnerable groups benefited from IFAD-supported interventions? To what extent did the programme reduce the vulnerabilities of poor men and women (social, environmental and economic)? What factors contributed to the success? What were the key challenges? What efforts were employed to address the key challenges and what results did such efforts yield? • How effective have interventions been in reaching out to women, young women and men, people with disabilities, as well as landless and other marginalized groups? • To what extent have interventions contributed to improve the resilience and livelihoods of rural youth, women, people with disabilities, and landless by increasing: (i) their productive capacities (ii), their capacities to undertake/engage in economic activities, on and off farm, and employment (iii) their access to markets? • What evidence is available in terms of positive changes for women and youth empowerment that can be attributed to programme support? • How effective have the interventions been to support the establishment and strengthening of community-level organizations? • Did the interventions achieve other objectives/outcomes, or did they have any unexpected consequence? • What were the main implementation challenges and how effectively were they addressed? What internal and external factors (included the COVID-19 pandemic) had positive or negative influence on the achievement of the intended results? • To what extent was the involvement of the private sector effective in providing easy financial access to the rural poor and in their capacity building, and in effectively connecting them with value chains? What factors favoured and hindered private sector and beneficiary participation? • How did the grant programme contribute to better effectiveness of IFAD's lending and non-lending activities? On Youth: • How effective have interventions been in reaching out to young women and youth from the poorest? • To what extent have interventions contributed to improve the resilience and livelihoods of rural youth by increasing: (i) their productive capacities (ii), their capacities to undertake/engage in economic activities (iii) their access to markets? • What evidence is available of youth empowerment that can be associated with programme support? • What has been the contribution of non-lending activities, especially grant supports, in supporting	Interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries during field visits GIS data Analysis Secondary data

Evaluation criteria and definition	Key evaluation questions	Data sources and collection methods
youth? Innovation:	On Innovation: • What innovations were successfully introduced and scaled up? What factors contributed to the successful introduction and scaling up of these innovations? Which innovations did not do well, what were the reasons? What could have been done differently to make such innovations succeed? • To what extent did the interventions promoted innovations aligned with stakeholders' needs or challenges? In what ways were these innovative in the local context? • Were the innovations inclusive and accessible to a diversity of farmers/ to different groups (in terms of gender, youth and diversity of socioeconomic groups)?	
EFFICIENCY	• How efficiently were the projects processed and implemented, including: (i) project preparation and processing timeliness; (ii) disbursement timeliness (including project management performance); (iii) cost-benefit, economic internal rate of return; and (iv) project management cost? ◦ How far in advance were implementation schedules set, and to what extent were they achieved? ◦ What is the relation between benefits and costs (e.g. planned and actual net present value, internal rate of return)? How did this compare with similar interventions (if the comparison is plausible)? ◦ Are programme management cost ratios justifiable in terms of intervention objectives, results achieved, considering contextual aspects and unforeseeable events? ◦ Are unit costs of specific interventions (e.g. infrastructure works) in line with recognised practices and congruent with the results achieved? • Is the timeframe of the intervention development and implementation reasonable and justifiable, taking into account the results achieved, the specific context and unforeseeable events? • Were the financial, and technical resources adequate for achieving the outcomes and were they mobilized in a timely manner? Were project management offices sufficiently staffed and effective in the execution of tasks? How were IFAD's human resources deployed and organized to supervise and support the lending portfolio and engage in non- lending activities? • What factors have been affecting efficiency of IFAD interventions? • How did the project management unit perform in terms of contributing to portfolio efficiency?	Desk review of IFAD strategy and programme documents (projects design documents, supervision mission and implementation support mission reports, MTRs, CSN, COSOP and COSOP reviews). In-depth review of IFAD database (e.g. Oracle Business Intelligence, FMDB), including historical project status reports, M&E data, project financial statements, economic and financial analyses, audit reports. Cost and benefit data from other similar projects. Key informant interviews with IFAD staff and national stakeholders Interviews and focus groups with direct and indirect beneficiaries during field visits, spot validation of reported costs, benefits.
IMPACT	• What contribution did the country programme make to the reduction of poverty in target areas? • Has the country strategy and programme had the anticipated impact on the target group and institutions and policies? Why? • What are the observed changes in target group productivity, incomes and assets, household food security and nutrition, social/ human capital and institutions and policies over the project period? What explains those changes? What are the challenges? • From an equity perspective to what extent have the interventions had a positive impact on women,	In-depth desk review of strategy and programme documents (projects design documents, supervision missions' reports, implementation support missions' reports, MTRs, CSN, COSOP and COSOP reviews, etc. Key informant interviews with IFAD staff and national stakeholders Interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries during field visits.

Evaluation criteria and definition	Key evaluation questions	Data sources and collection methods
	youth, the very poor/marginalized vulnerable groups and how? - Did the interventions improve social cohesiveness amongst members of beneficiary groups formed for the purpose of benefiting from IFAD activities? - To what extent did the country strategy and programme have the anticipated impact on rural institutions? What are the observed changes in terms of emergence and/or strengthening of rural institutions within communities, as well as policy change? How did the intervention result in or contribute to those changes? What were the challenges? - To what extent did the interventions contribute to increased resilience of beneficiary households and communities? - How effective were the value-chain linkages promoted by the projects in ensuring sustainable market access as well as inclusive benefits for smallholder farmers, poor people, women and men? To what extent did the beneficiaries access rural finance for increasing their on-farm, off-farm and non-farm activities?	Secondary statistical data on poverty, household incomes and nutrition where available and relevant (possible benchmark) GIS data Analysis
SUSTAINABILITY	- To what extent did the interventions contribute to long-term institutional, environmental and social and financial/economical sustainability? What have been the challenges? - What is the level of engagement, participation and ownership of the government, local communities, grass-roots organizations and poor rural people? In particular, did the government ensure budget allocations to cover operations and maintenance? - How sustainable are the community organizations supported by the programme (including WUOs, farmers' groups, etc)? Would they continue operation without external funding? What are the explaining factors? How likely are farmer/community-based organizations to continue operation without IFAD support? - Are there sufficient mechanisms for sustainable management of infrastructure (including irrigation infrastructure)? - How sustainable are the approaches to strengthening the institutional capacities of different providers for pro-poor financial services? Are savings and credit groups and financial institutions in rural areas sustainable and did the capacity building contribute to this? Would they continue operation without external funding? What are the explaining factors? Did/would national level institutions continue activities they initiated with IFAD support? What are the explaining factors? - Are adopted approaches and technologies technically viable? - Did the programme include an exit strategy? - To what extent are rural financial institutions expected to continue providing financial access to rural poor without IFAD support? - To what extent are private actors in the value chains expected to continue their engagement with farmer-based organizations?	In depth review IFAD strategy and projects documents (projects design documents, supervision mission reports, implementation support missions' reports, MTRs, CSN, COSOP and COSOP reviews, etc.) Interviews with IFAD staff, national stakeholders and development partners Interviews and focus groups with direct and indirect beneficiaries during field visits M&E data
Environment, natural resource management and	To what extent and how did IFAD-supported interventions contribute to better adaptation by the target group rural population to climate change, and to what extent are the intervention strategies:	In-depth desk review of strategy and programme documents (Projects design documents,

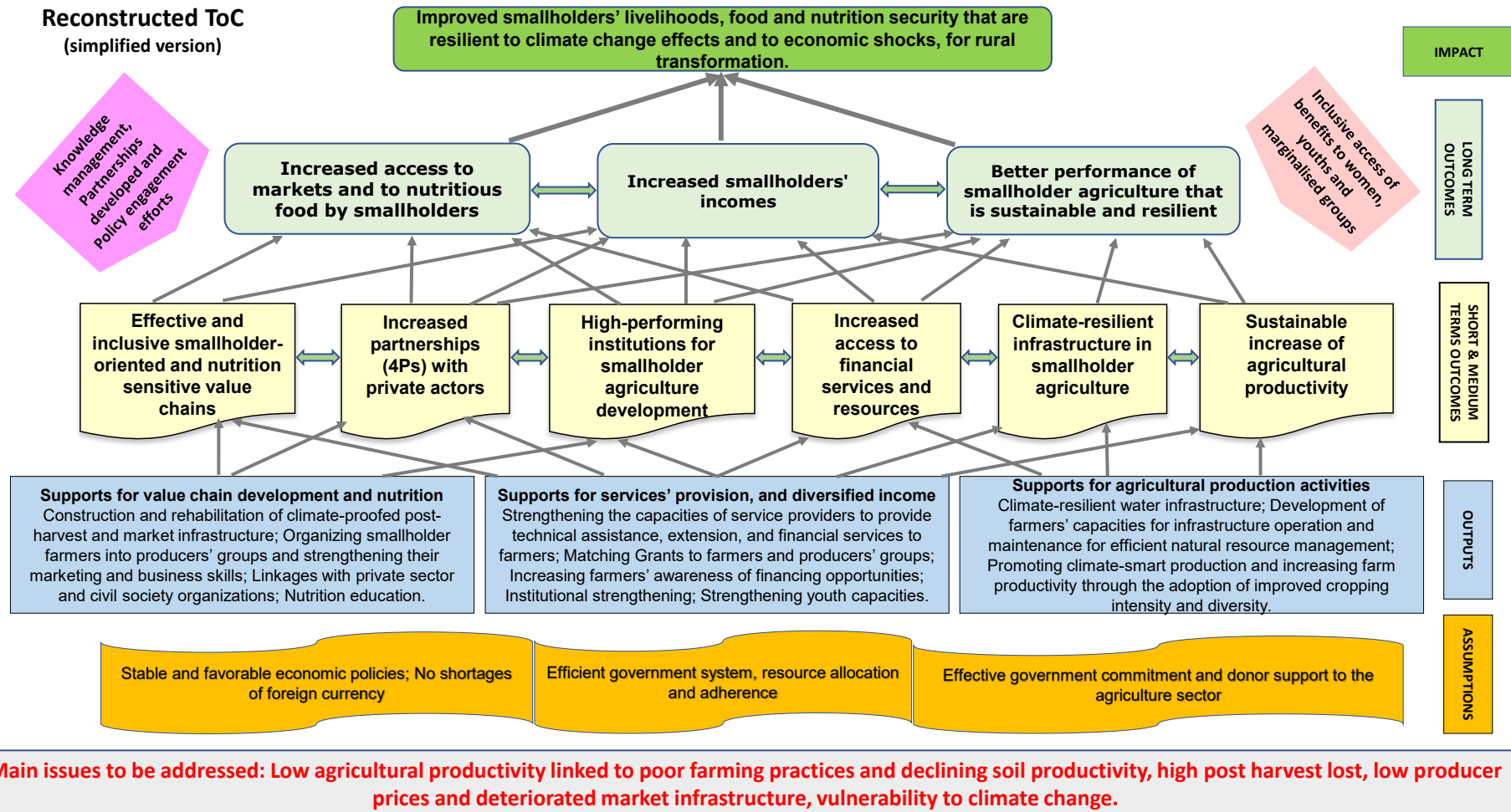
Evaluation criteria and definition	Key evaluation questions	Data sources and collection methods
climate change adaptation	(a) Addressing water scarcity, degradation of water and land resources? (b) Improving farming practices for better resilience? Minimizing environmental damage and introducing compensation to counter the damage caused by these agricultural practices? (c) Supporting agricultural productivity that is sustainable and integrated into ecosystems? (d) Channelling climate and environmental finance through the interventions to smallholder farmers, helping them to reduce poverty, enhance biodiversity, increase yields and lower greenhouse gas emissions? (e) Building climate resilience by managing competing land use systems while reducing poverty, enhancing biodiversity, increasing yields and lowering greenhouse gas emissions?	supervision missions' reports, implementation support missions' reports, MTRs, CSN, COSOP and COSOP reviews, etc.) Interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries during field visits Key informant interviews with IFAD staff and government stakeholders GIS data analysis
Scaling up	• To what extent were results scaled up or likely to be scaled up in the future? • Is there an indication of commitment by the government and key stakeholders to scale up interventions and approaches – for example, in terms of the allocation of funds for selected activities, human resources availability, continuity of pro-poor policies, participatory development approaches and institutional support?	In-depth desk review of strategy and project documents Key informant interviews with IFAD staff, national stakeholders and other development partners.
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	• What were the projects achievements in terms of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and the contribution/s of the interventions to changes in: (i) women's access to resources, income sources, assets (including land) and services; (ii) women's influence in decision-making within the household and community; (iii) workload distribution (including domestic chores) and sharing of benefits; and, (iv) women's health, skills, nutrition? • Were there notable changes in social norms, attitudes, behaviours and beliefs and policies/laws relating to gender equality? • Was attention given to programme implementation resources and disaggregated monitoring with respect to gender equality and women's empowerment goals? • Did the programme (and projects) have gender strategies and action plans? How transformative were these strategies? • Were sufficient (human and financial) resources allocated to implement these strategies? • Were indicators (and data) to monitor targets and results disaggregated (according to gender and age)?	In depth review of CSN, COSOP and COSOSP's reviews In depth review of projects' documents: projects design documents, supervision missions' reports, implementation support missions' reports, mid-term reviews and completion reports, projects targeting and gender strategies, M&E data Key informant interviews with IFAD staff, national stakeholders and development partners. Interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries during field visits. Evidence and testimonies gathering. Secondary statistical data on gender, youth, landless and other marginalized groups
PARTNERS PERFORMANCE	IFAD • How effectively did IFAD support the overall quality of design, including aspects related to project approach, compliance, and implementation aspects? Was it a consultative process? • To what extent did the design take into account factors of fragility and/or vulnerability of the system components? • How did IFAD take into account contextual issues and challenges in working in the country,	In-depth review of strategy and programme documentation, including the quality of design, frequency and quality of supervision and implementation support mission reports, MTRs, project status reports, CSN, COSOP and COSOP reviews Review of projects targeting and gender

Evaluation criteria and definition	Key evaluation questions	Data sources and collection methods
	including identifying and addressing threats to the achievement of project development objectives? • How effectively did IFAD support the implementation of projects on aspects related to project management, financial management, selecting of project staff and setting-up project level M&E systems? Were supervision and support missions timely, with the desired frequency (including whether they were flexible to respond to changes in the context), adequately resourced and were their recommendations of the desired quality? • How well did IFAD perform in the support and supervision of the programme? • Did IFAD deploy the required financial and technical resources in an adequate and timely manner? • Did IFAD exercise its fiduciary responsibilities adequately? • How did IFAD position itself and its work in partnership with other development partners? Were IFAD's engagements with the implementing agencies, the private sector and NGOs/Civil society of the desired level? • Was the IFAD's strategic oversight effective and based on its comparative advantage in Zimbabwe? • Did IFAD provide capacity building opportunities to staff of the projects and implementing agencies, and how timely and adequate were they? • Was the level of technical support from the ESA Division in Rome (until 2022), the ESA regional office in Nairobi (since 2022), and the IFAD's multi-country office in Johannesburg (since 2018) sufficient for the programme implementation?	strategies, M&E data and systems, key correspondence (IFAD-Government). Interviews with IFAD staff and government stakeholders Interviews and focus groups discussion with other non-governmental stakeholders
Government:	GOVERNMENT • How tangible was the government's commitment to achieving development objectives and ownership of the strategy/project? • Did the government adequately involve and consult stakeholders at design and during implementation? • Did Government demonstrate ownership in the design and implementation of the country programme? • How did the government position itself and its work in partnership with other development partners? • How well did the project management units manage start-up procedures, implementation arrangements, the appointment of key staff and resource allocation, and the involvement and coordination with other partners? • How timely did the projects management units identify and resolve implementation issues? Was project management responsive to context changes or the recommendations made by supervision missions or by the project Steering Committee? • How useful were the various project management tools, annual workplan and budget and the management information system, developed during implementation? Were these tools properly used by project management?	

<i>Evaluation criteria and definition</i>	<i>Key evaluation questions</i>	<i>Data sources and collection methods</i>
	• How was Government fiduciary performance with regard to counterpart funding/financial contribution? How well did the projects management units fulfil its fiduciary responsibilities (procurement, financial management)? • How adequate were M&E arrangements made by the PMU, including the M&E plan, and the use of evaluation M&E data in decision-making and resource allocation?	

Theory of change

Reconstructed ToC
(simplified version)



IFAD-supported lending projects in Zimbabwe since 1983 (million US\$)

Project name	Project sector	Date of approval	Date of entry into force	Completion date	Total cost*	IFAD financing	Govt funding	Other domestic funding**	International co-financing	Status	Cooperating institution
National Agricultural Extension and Research Project	Research / Extension / Training	21/04/1983	17/11/1983	30/06/1987	33.8	12.4		10.0	IBRD1: 11.4	Financial Closure	World Bank: IBRD
Agricultural Credit and Export Promotion Project	Credit and Financial Services	06/12/1989	01/08/1990	30/06/1995	116.9	15.0		23.5	BADEA ² : 9.7 IBRD: 36.3 Japan: 1.8 ³ New Zealand: 0.2 ⁴	Financial Closure	World Bank: IBRD
Smallholder Dry Areas Resource Management Project	Agricultural Development	02/12/1993	12/05/1995	31/12/2000	23.4	13.9		2.8	Australia: 6.5 ⁵	Financial Closure	UNOPS
Southeastern Dry Areas Project	Agricultural Development	13/09/1995	02/11/1998	30/06/2003	20.3	11.2	1.0		Netherlands:6 ⁶	Financial Closure	UNOPS
Smallholder Irrigation Support Programme	Irrigation	02/12/1998	14/09/1999	31/12/2007	14.3	12.1	0.2		Denmark: 0.4 ⁷	Financial Closure	IFAD-supervised
Smallholder Irrigation Revitalization Programme	Irrigation	22/09/2016	18/11/2016	31/12/2023	53.8	25.5 (DSF) ⁸	8.0		NORAD: 0.5 ⁹ RPSF: 1.6 ¹⁰ OFID: 15	Project Closed	IFAD-supervised

¹ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

² Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa.

³ Grant.

⁴ Grant.

⁵ Grant.

⁶ Grant.

⁷ Grant.

⁸ Grant – Debt Sustainability Framework.

⁹ Grant – NORAD Nutrition Sensitive Grant – Nourishing People and the Earth through Inclusive and Sustainable Agriculture.

¹⁰ Grant, including: (i) RPSF I (US\$699,999) and (ii) RPSF II (US\$854,690).

Project name	Project sector	Date of approval	Date of entry into force	Completion date	Total cost*	IFAD financing	Govt funding	Other domestic funding**	International co-financing	Status	Cooperating institution
Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project	Credit and Financial Services	17/03/2021	26/11/2021	31/12/2027	67.4	35.7	5.3		15	Ongoing	IFAD-supervised
Horticulture Enterprise Enhancem. Project	Marketing	28/12/2022	28/05/2024	30/06/2032	66.5	37.1	5.2	59 000	OPEC:15	Ongoing	IFAD-supervised

Source: OBI.

* Discrepancies between total cost and IFAD, co-financing, Government and other domestic financing funding are due to rounding.

** Includes beneficiary contributions and domestic financial and private institutions.

Overview of IFAD's loan portfolio to be covered by the CSPE (2016-2024)

Project ID	Project short name	Implementation period	Objectives	Components	Target group	Geographical coverage	Executing Agency
2000001233	SIRP	2016-2024	The overall goal is that rural households achieve food and nutrition security and are resilient to climate change effects and economic shocks in the programme districts. The programme development objective is that rural households sustainably increase their income in SIRP-supported schemes and adjacent rainfed areas.	Component 1: Sustainable Smallholder Irrigation Development Component 2: Climate Smart Agriculture and Market Access	25,000 smallholder poor rural households (125,000 people), that are currently engaging in irrigation as well as poor and vulnerable smallholders engaged in rainfed farming in the adjacent rainfed areas. Women will account for at least 50 per cent of the target. SIRP beneficiaries will include: (i) 12,500 households (62,500 people) with an average of 0.4 hectares in the irrigation scheme, (ii) 12,500 households (62,500 people) with no access to irrigation in the greater-scheme and sub-catchment areas relying on rainfed agriculture and livestock, (iii) 2,000 youth, and (iv) 500 extension service providers.	SIRP will revitalize about 5,000 hectares of existing smallholder irrigation schemes, mostly in communal and old resettlement areas of 20 rural districts in the provinces of Manicaland, Masvingo, Matabeleland South, and Midlands which lie in agro-ecological regions III, IV and V.*	MLAFWRD
2000002341	SACP	2021-2027	The project goal is to increase household incomes and improve nutrition, through sustainable transformation of the smallholder farming sector. The project development objective is to increase smallholder participation in market-oriented and climate-smart value chains.	Component 1: Inclusive Value Chain Development Component 2: Climate Proofed Value Chain Infrastructure Component 3: Institutional Support and Project Coordination	800 agriculture producer groups (APGs), located in 20 production clusters. 78,240 smallholder households, as follows: (i) 24,000 low-income households receiving capacity building and financial services to further develop their livelihoods, (ii) 24,000 labourers benefiting from employment opportunities created by APG investments, (iii) 15,240 smallholder households, benefiting from SACP support for MSMEs and value chain lead enterprises (VCLEs), and (iv) 13,000 households, benefiting from employment and opportunities generated through VC development by MSMEs and VCLEs.	18 rural districts of 5 provinces: Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Midlands and Matabeleland North, covering around 400 wards (further organized into production clusters). The districts in the Midlands Province overlap with SIRP targeted districts.	WRD

30,000 beneficiaries will benefit from irrigation, water supply, sanitation and access roads infrastructure.							
2000003944	HEEP	2024-2032	The project goal is to increase incomes, food security and empowerment for smallholder farmers engaged in profitable and sustainable horticulture value chains. The project development objective is to support and increase sustainable horticultural production and sales by smallholder farmers and MSMEs engaged in horticulture value chains.	Component 1: Village Horticultural Garden (VHG) and Private-Public-Producer Partnerships (4Ps) Mobilization and Development Component 2: Access to Finance Component 3: Institutional Support and Project Coordination	Smallholder farmers who are organised in APGs (operating in either VHGs, in irrigation schemes or outside the irrigation schemes) or in 4Ps linked to anchor firms/farms. HEEP will promote youth and women led horticulture MSMEs linked to anchor firms and service providers to provide employment to young people, especially women. The total direct target group will be 71,000 smallholder farmers households (31,000 smallholder farmers in VHG and 20,000 in 4Ps who will benefit from improved production, post-harvest handling, local market access and capacity building, and 20,000 labourers who will benefit from seasonal and part-time employment with anchor firms, service providers or smallholder farmers).	The VHG activities will be implemented in 20 districts in the arid and semi-arid areas of Matabeleland South, Manicaland, Masvingo, and Midlands Provinces. HEEP interventions using the 4P approach, will be implemented in well-functioning irrigation schemes on a nationwide basis.	WRD

Sources: Project Design Reports, Operational Results Management System (ORMS).

* The districts include in Manicaland: Chipinge, Chimanimani, Buhera and Makoni; in Matabeleland South: Gwanda, Beitbridge, Insiza, and Mangwe; in Masvingo: Masvingo, Chiredzi, Mwenezi, Zaka, Gutu, Chivi, and Bikita; and, in Midlands: Kwekwe, Zvishavane, Chirimanzu, Gweru and Mberengwa.

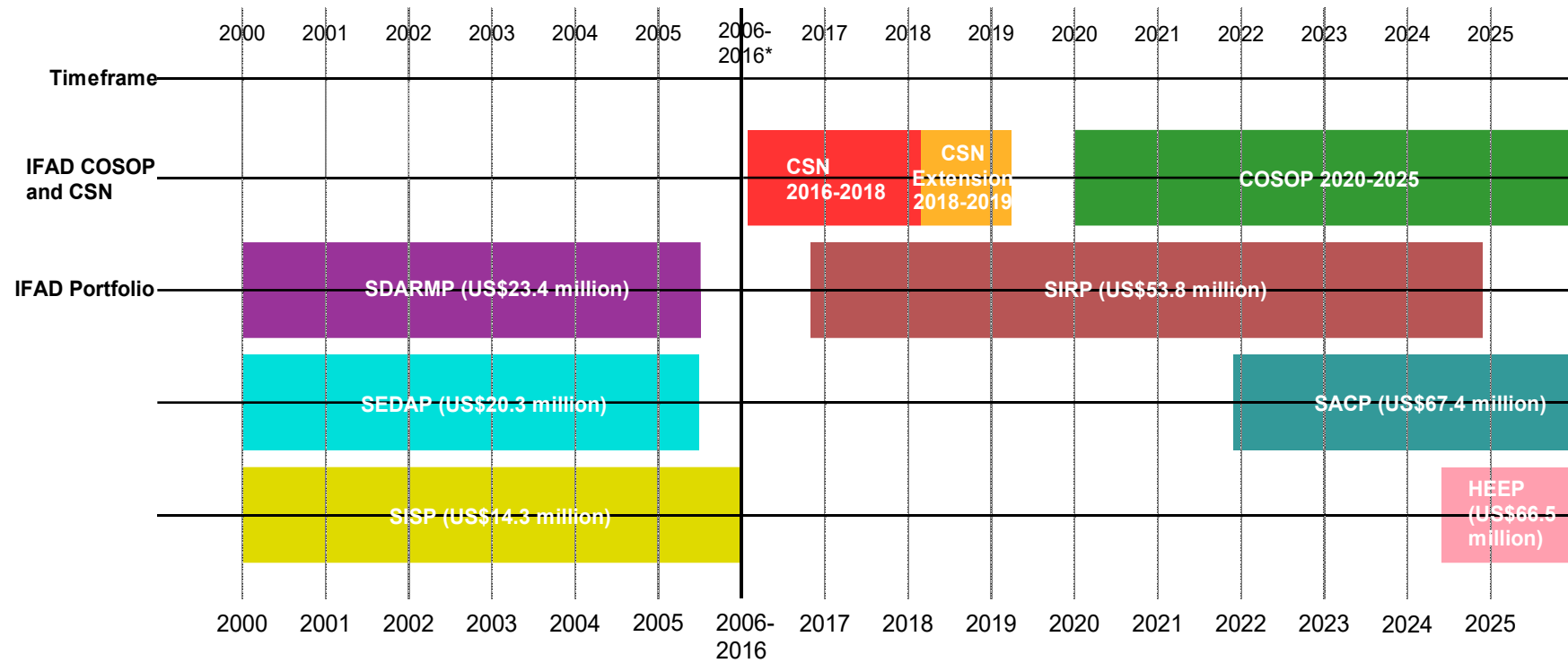
Overview of IFAD's closed loan projects (2000-2005)

<i>Project ID</i>	<i>Project short name</i>	<i>Implementation period</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Components</i>	<i>Target group</i>	<i>Geographical coverage</i>	<i>Executing Agency</i>
1100000341	SDARMP	1995-2005	The goal of the project was to provide poorer people living in the drier communal areas of Midlands and Matabeleland South Provinces with enhanced food security and incomes, based on sustainable and drought tolerant resource management by and for the community.	• Component 1: Communal Resource Management • Component 2: Agricultural Development • Component 3: Project Facilitation, Monitoring and Evaluation • Component 4: Agribusiness Development, Increased Draft Animal Power, and Improved Credit Access	437,000 poor rural households.	Communal areas of: Beit Bridge and Gwanda Districts in Matabeleland South Province; and Zvishavane, Shurugwi and Mberengwa Districts in Midlands Province.	Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement (MLARR)
1100000435	SEDAP	1998-2005	The overall objective of the project is to provide a sustainable increase in the income of, and through it enhanced food security for, poor rural communities and households in the drier communal areas of Masvingo and Manicaland Provinces. Measures would be employed to develop more resilience to environmental stress within the smallholder production systems.	• Component 1: Agricultural and Natural Resources Development • Component 2: Rural Institutions Strengthening • Component 3: Rural Financial Services • Component 4: Project Organisation and Management	956,000 people in some 186,000 farm families would benefit from the participatory approach to management of the common property resources, as well as the enhanced operations of technical and administrative support services. The focus of interventions would be to serve the special needs of poorer farmers and ensure their equitable access to resources. Women will represent 50 per cent of the target group.	6 districts in Manicaland Province (Buhera, Chimanimani, Chipinge, Makoni, Mutare and Nyanga) and 5 districts of Masvingo Province (Bikita, Chiredzi, Chivi, Masvingo and Mwenezi).	MLARR

1100001051	SISP	1999-2005	The development objective of the project is to increase the incomes and food security of smallholder irrigating households and households in neighbouring communities on a sustainable basis.	• Component 1: Scheme Upgrading and Development • Component 2: Strengthening of Institutional and Policy Framework • Component 3: Programme Facilitation	Smallholder farmers who, without access to irrigation as a means of stabilising crop production, would continue to be dependent on high-risk dryland farming. The SISP would aim to upgrade approximately 2 000 hectares of existing schemes, with a target group of some 34,000, made up of some 10,000 plot owners and users; and the remainder labourers and dependent traders. The programme would additionally develop 500 hectares of new irrigation schemes, expected to target some 9,000 more people, of whom 2, 400 would be plot holders or users. On this basis, the total direct target group of the programme is estimated at least 43,000.	The programme would be national in scope, operating in the communal and resettlement areas of in all 8 provinces. Scheme-level support would ultimately cover a total of 28 districts. As such, it would be mainly concentrated in natural regions III, IV and V.	MLARR
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Sources: SDARMP Project Completion Report, SEDAP Project Design Report and Progress Reports, SISP Project Design Report.

Timeline of IFAD-supported loan portfolio 2000–2025



Source: IOE analysis based on OBI.

* The ongoing country loans were closed at the end of 2005 due to arrears. Re-engagement occurred in 2015, following an official request from the Government of Zimbabwe soliciting IFAD to discuss possibilities for rescheduling Zimbabwe's arrears and debt to the Fund

IFAD-funded grants in Zimbabwe since 2015

Project ID	Project name	Type	Covered countries	Entry into force date	Completion date	Total cost	IFAD financing	Non-IFAD financing*	Recipient*
2000000325	Grassroots Women's Groups Championing Transformative Rural Development Priorities in the Post 2015 Development Agenda Forging Blueprints for Holistic, Bottom-Up Ownership and Implementation	Global/Regional	South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Ghana, Cameroon, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Jamaica, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, India, and Nepal	16/12/2014	31/03/2016	US\$250,000	US\$250,000	-	Huairou Commission
2000001855	Supporting Africa-Wide Agricultural Extension Week (AEW)	Global/Regional	Burkina Faso, Mozambique, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Zambia, Angola, Kenya, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco, Botswana, Senegal, Cameroon, Tunisia, Gabon, Madagascar, Mauritania, Somalia, Eswatini, South Sudan, Malawi, Eritrea, Central African Republic, Seychelles, DRC, South Africa, Gambia, Uganda, Nigeria, Tanzania, Benin, Egypt, Namibia, Burundi, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe	19/09/2017	31/12/2018	US\$350,000	US\$350,000	-	AFAAS 220
2000001635	Green Technologies to Facilitate Development of Value Chains Perishable Crops and Animal Products	Global/Regional	Rwanda, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe	22/06/2018	31/03/2023	US\$2,640,000	US\$2,200,000	Sundanzer and Winrock International: US\$440,000	Sundanzer
2000003246	Climate Change and Nutrition Linkages in IFAD's Investments - ASAP2 Concept Note Number 40	Global/Regional	Lesotho, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe	13/02/2020	31/05/2021	US\$298,632	-	ASAP 2 Trust Fund: US\$298,632	WCDI 221

²²⁰ African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services.

²²¹ Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation.

Project ID	Project name	Type	Covered countries	Entry into force date	Completion date	Total cost	IFAD financing	Non-IFAD financing*	Recipient*
2000002818	IFAD's Top-Up Contribution to the African Green Revolution Forum 2018 - 2020	Global/Regional	Mozambique, Eritrea, Burundi, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius, Zambia, South Sudan, Namibia, Angola, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kenya, Lesotho, Botswana, Tanzania, Malawi, and Uganda	21/10/2019	31/12/2021	US\$300,000	US\$300,000	-	AGRA 222
2000002983	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) ex-pillar IV Africa Regional and Sub-regional Organizations for Agricultural Research and Innovation (CCARDESA Portion)	Global/Regional	Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe	21/06/2019	31/12/2024	€5,370,000	-	EU: €5,370,000	CCARD ESA223
2000002847	Inclusive Red Meat Value Chains for Women and Young Farmers in East and Southern Africa	Global/Regional	Malawi and Zimbabwe	14/12/2020	31/12/2023	US\$2,000,000	US\$1,000,000	ILRI: US\$334,000 Solidaridad Network: US\$333,000 GRSB224: US\$333,000	ILRI
2000003949	IFAD's Contribution to the African Green Revolution Forum (AGRF) 2021	Global/Regional	Zimbabwe, Comoros, Namibia, Botswana, Madagascar, Burundi, Kenya, Eswatini, South Sudan, Rwanda, Zambia, Seychelles, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Eritrea, Angola, Mauritius, Lesotho, Malawi, and Uganda	11/01/2022	31/01/2023	US\$100,000	US\$100,000	-	AGRA
2000004344	IFAD's Contribution to the African Green Revolution	Global/Regional	Zimbabwe, Comoros, Namibia, Botswana,	25/04/2023	31/12/2024	US\$240,000	US\$240,000	-	AGRA

²²² Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa.

²²³ Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa.

²²⁴ Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef.

<i>Project ID</i>	<i>Project name</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Covered countries</i>	<i>Entry into force date</i>	<i>Completion date</i>	<i>Total cost</i>	<i>IFAD financing</i>	<i>Non-IFAD financing*</i>	<i>Recipient*</i>
	Forum (AGRF) 2022-2024		Madagascar, Burundi, Kenya, Eswatini, South Sudan, Rwanda, Zambia, Seychelles, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Eritrea, Angola, Mauritius, Lesotho, Malawi, and Uganda						

Sources: OBI, FMDB, HERMES, Grant managers.

* The full names of the remaining stakeholders are listed on the acronym page.

Additional supporting information

Table A1.

Data collection methods

Approach	Description
In-depth desk review	In-depth desk review of portfolio and non-lending operations related documentation, including design documents, mid-term reviews, supervision and completion reports, grant reports, COSOPs, and portfolio review documents. Desk review working papers were prepared and the findings guided further inquiry during the evaluation mission. During this phase, the team compiled detailed review questions and data sheets, which formed the basis of requests for additional data from the IFAD country office.
Virtual stakeholder scoping interviews	Scoping interviews with IFAD and Government representatives were held at the inception stage to gather their expectations, as well as to enable the evaluation team to get a better understanding of the context and refine the evaluation scope and questions.
Group discussions and key informant interviews	Semi-structured interviews were held with IFAD staff, government representatives, community members, NGOs & private sector representatives and consultants who have been exposed to or interacted with the programme activities. The mapping of stakeholders is presented in Annex X.
Direct observations during field visits	The team collected information from the field, spot checked reported information, in order to understand implementation and contextual realities. The sites were sampled purposely to cover the diversity of interventions within a relatively short timeframe.
Self-assessment	A self-assessment was carried out through a questionnaire to be sent to the IFAD country team and the Government focal person to elicit their perceptions in line with the evaluation key questions.
Data analysis and interpretation	This entailed qualitative and quantitative analyses; and triangulation of information and evidence from sources as mentioned above. Additionally, the team held complementary group meetings to discuss preliminary findings and trends, as needed.

Source: CSPE team elaboration. -

Table A2.

Economic indicators

Indicator	2000	2014	201	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024
GDP growth (annual per cent)	-3.1%	1.5%	0.9	5.0%	-6.3%	-7.8%	6.5%	5.4%	1.7%
GDP per capita growth (annual per cent)	-4.0%	-0.7%	-	2.9%	-8.2%	-9.7%	4.4%	3.6%	-0,1%
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added (per cent of GDP)	15.7%	8.8%	7.9	7.3%	9.8%	8.8%	7.2%	27.0%	
Industry (including construction), value added (per cent of GDP)	..	23.7%	22.1	31.0%	32.0%	32.8%	40.4%	46.9%	
Exports of goods and services (per cent of GDP)	38.2%	20.9%	19.9	26.2%	27.6%	22.3%	28.0%	..	
Imports of goods and services (per cent of GDP)	35.9%	33.7%	31.3	28.4%	28.2%	25.0%	37.0%	..	

Source: World Bank data.

Box A1.

Gender Context in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has made commendable progress in promoting gender equality, ranking 50th globally on the 2022 Global Gender Gap Index.²²⁵ Despite this advancement, **the country remains deeply patriarchal, with men continuing to dominate leadership and decision-making spaces.** Historically, women were marginalised in land ownership and political participation. However, the post-independence land reform efforts led to some gains, with women receiving 18% of redistributed land by 2000.²²⁶

In agriculture, women's agricultural productivity is lower than that of men, with just 57 per cent of women earning their livelihoods in the agriculture sector compared to 66 per cent of men. A similar disparity exists in ownership and access to agricultural land, where just 2 per cent of women are owners, as opposed to 3.8 per cent of men. Women also experience limited access to credit, inputs and training, hindering their productivity and economic empowerment. Women in polygamous marriages have reduced access to and control of resources and benefits. The national gender machinery is led by the Ministry for Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, with a strong presence in rural areas. It has supported the National Gender Policies (2013, 2017 and 2025).

Various government interventions have aimed to strengthen women's empowerment. Initiatives such as the Zimbabwe Women's Microfinance Bank, the adoption of the 2013 Constitution, and the implementation of the National Gender Policy have expanded women's legal protections and economic opportunities.²²⁷ Nevertheless, access to leadership roles, financial resources, and formal employment remains limited due to entrenched cultural norms and societal expectations.²²⁸

Health outcomes for Zimbabwean women have improved over time, especially concerning maternal and child mortality. Yet, gender disparities persist. **Over two-thirds of adult women experience severe food insecurity, and rural women continue to face significant barriers in accessing healthcare.**^{229,230} Moreover, HIV continues to disproportionately affect women, with a prevalence rate of 15.3% compared to 10.2% in men.²³¹

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue in Zimbabwe. As of 2016, 35% of ever-married women reported experiencing physical or sexual abuse.²³² Government efforts to address GBV include the Zero Tolerance 365 Project and the National GBV Strategy. However, these measures are undermined by weak enforcement mechanisms and pervasive stigma, which deter survivors from seeking support. The 2023 Zimbabwe GBV Assessment revealed that 39.4% of women have experienced physical violence, and 11.6% have endured sexual violence. **Alarming, intimate partner violence remains the most common form, and nearly 90% of women report experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace.**^{233,234} Despite a decline in child marriage rates, 16.2% of women were still married before the age of 18 in 2022.²³⁵

Zimbabwe has shown commitment to several international and regional frameworks aimed at combating GBV, including CEDAW, the Maputo Protocol, and the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development.²³⁶ At the national level, the

²²⁵ World Economic Forum. (2022). Global Gender Gap Report 2022. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf.

²²⁶ Tekwa, N., and Adesina, J. (2018). Gender, poverty and inequality in the aftermath of Zimbabwe's land reform: A transformative social policy perspective. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19(5), 45-62. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol19/iss5/4/>.

²²⁷ Tarinda, S. (2019). Gender, Women's Economic Empowerment and Financial Inclusion in Zimbabwe. Alliance for Financial Inclusion. https://www.afi-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AFI_BTG_Zim_CS19_AW_digital.pdf.

²²⁸ Dickson, M., and Louis, N. (2018). Discrimination and oppression of women: A social work exploration in Zimbabwe. *Social Criminology*, 6(2), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.35248/2375-4435.18.6.185>.

²²⁹ UN Women. (2022). Women Count: Zimbabwe. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/zimbabwe>.

²³⁰ Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency and ICF International. (2016). Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey 2015: Final Report. <https://dhsproject.com/publications/publication-FR322-DHS-Final-Reports.cfm>.

²³¹ Pillay, N. et al. (2021). Gender inequality, health rights, and HIV/AIDS among women prisoners in Zimbabwe. *Health and Human Rights Journal*, 23(1), 225-236.

²³² Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency and ICF International. (2016).

²³³ World Bank. (2023). Zimbabwe Gender-Based Violence Assessment - Scope, Gaps and Entry Points. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099062823005529216/pdf/P1799111824c0f0fe1998d1786a3ba8c074.pdf>

²³⁴ ILO. (2017). Rapid Situational Analysis on Violence and Harassment in the Workplace in Zimbabwe. International Labour Organisation.

²³⁵ World Bank. (2023).

²³⁶ Ibid.

2013 Constitution enshrines gender equality and prohibits discrimination. Key legislation includes the Domestic Violence Act (2007), the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, the Sexual Offences Act (2002), and the recently revised Marriages Act (2022), which sets the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 for both sexes.²³⁷ Nonetheless, significant gaps remain in the legal system. Emotional and psychological abuse are not criminalised, and harmful cultural practices often fall outside the scope of existing laws. **The inconsistent enforcement of legislation, limited resources, and weak inter-agency coordination hinder the effective implementation of legal protections for women.**²³⁸

Women in Zimbabwe also experience challenges in other areas. In terms of political representation, women held 28.9% of parliamentary seats as of February 2024 - an improvement, but still far from parity.²³⁹ Reproductive health indicators show more positive trends; 84.8% of women aged 15-49 had their need for family planning met with modern methods as of 2015, and the adolescent birth rate decreased from 107.9 per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 in 2017 to 86.8 in 2021.²⁴⁰ However, child marriage remains widespread, with 33.7% of women aged 20-24 reporting marriage or union before age 18.²⁴¹

Legal protections for gender equality are not yet comprehensive. As of 2024, Zimbabwe had established only 66.7% of the legal frameworks required to effectively promote and monitor gender equality, particularly in addressing violence against women.²⁴² In 2018, 18.2% of women reported experiencing physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in the preceding year.²⁴³

A significant obstacle to advancing gender equality in Zimbabwe is the lack of reliable data. By the end of 2020, only 46.7% of the 72 gender-specific Sustainable Development Goal indicators had data available.²⁴⁴ Critical information gaps persist in areas such as unpaid care work, gender pay disparities, land ownership, and the gendered impacts of environmental degradation. Addressing these data gaps is essential to designing effective, evidence-based policies.

Source: CSPE Desk Review.

Box A2.

Youth Context in Zimbabwe

Youth constitute a large share of Zimbabwe's population, with about 33% aged 15–35 years. Most (58%) live in rural areas, though older youth are more concentrated in towns and cities. Education levels vary significantly by location: overall, 57% of youth have completed secondary school, 37% primary school, and 4% tertiary education. Urban youth have higher attainment levels, with 67% completing secondary and 8% reaching tertiary, compared to 50% and 1% respectively in rural areas. Only 1% of youth self-report as having a disability, primarily related to communication, cognition, mobility, or self-care—with most disabled youth (73%) located in rural communities.

Youth are excluded from formal financial services largely due to negative stereotypes as they are considered high risk-individuals. These factors contribute to youth unemployment and poverty, hindering their potential to contribute to the agricultural sector. Approximately 37 per cent of Zimbabwe's youth are employed in agriculture (2020).

Youth labour force participation remains low, with only 17% engaged in economic activity. Participation is highly gendered: 21% of young men are economically active compared to just 3% of young women. Men tend to work in construction, mining, and transport, while women are concentrated in education, health, and domestic services.

Mobility is increasing among young people in Zimbabwe, largely driven by the search for education and employment. Several provinces report net youth out-migration, including Manicaland, Masvingo, Mashonaland Central, Midlands, and Matabeleland North. Harare is the main destination for young migrants, recording a high in-migration rate (43%) due to perceived economic opportunities. Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, and Matabeleland South also attract youth, though to a lesser extent.

Agriculture remains central to Zimbabwe's development, yet many young people remain

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ UN Women. (2022). Women Count: Zimbabwe. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/zimbabwe>.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

disengaged from agriculture. Among youth who are economically active, 64% of young men and 36% of young women work in agriculture, forestry, or fishing.

Young people in Zimbabwe face numerous barriers that hinder their effective participation in agriculture. One of the most critical issues is limited access to land, which is often governed by customary practices that favour older male relatives, thereby marginalising youth, especially young women. Moreover, agriculture is frequently perceived by youth as an undesirable or low-status occupation. Many young people aspire to formal urban employment, viewing farming as a fallback option rather than a promising career. Gender dynamics further complicate participation, with societal expectations and physical demands shaping boys' and girls' experiences differently.

Several governmental initiatives aim to address these barriers. Within MLAFWRD, the Agricultural Youth Desk (launched in July 2023) focuses specifically on involving youth aged 15–35 in agriculture. It promotes agriculture as a modern, viable livelihood aligned with national economic goals. The Youth Desk provides training, entrepreneurship development, leadership programmes, and information on markets and innovation. It also supports youth representation in policy processes and facilitates mentorship and networking. The Desk is establishing Youth Business Units and Provincial Youth Hubs across rural wards and promotes access to finance and markets, including through initiatives like the National Young Farmer Excellence Awards.

The Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Development and Vocational Training (MoYEDVT) complements these efforts by driving youth empowerment, skills development, and entrepreneurship. Through vocational training centres, innovation hubs, agriculture and fish-farming projects, and business incubators, the Ministry equips youth with technical and entrepreneurial skills while advancing national development and the SDGs.

Source: ZimStat; UNFPA. (2022) Zimbabwe population and housing census. Youth thematic report. https://www.zimstat.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/Census/Youth_Report.pdf.

Table A3.

Comparison of CSN 2016 and COSOP 2020-2025

	2016-2018 CSN	2020-2025 COSOP
Transformative goal	Boosting the well-being and food and nutrition security of vulnerable rural livelihoods.	Enhancing the incomes and the food and nutrition security of poor rural households through the promotion of more efficient, resilient and inclusive agrifood systems.
Strategic objectives	(SO1) Contribution to Government of Zimbabwe efforts, by developing climate-smart and highly efficient agricultural production. (SO2) A strong rural enterprise sector, supported by investment in infrastructure and capacity-building.	(SO1) Increased productivity and climate resilience of smallholder agriculture. The aim is to enhance agricultural productivity and achieve sustainable land and water management, food and nutrition security, and smallholder resilience. (SO2) Improved market access for smallholder farmers (smallholder farmers) of nutritious foods. Here the aim is to strengthen income pathways to nutrition, added value and improved market access for smallholder farmers while increasing rural employment opportunities.
Geographic priority	The Government of Zimbabwe's priority areas in agricultural and rural development.	Areas with the highest incidence and prevalence of poverty, high food and nutrition insecurity and are most prone to drought and other climatic shocks.
Main target groups	Poor rural families.	Often chronically food insecure but capable of becoming transitory food secure and transitory food insecure farmers.

Source: CSN 2016 and COSOP 2020.

Table A4.

Projects covered by the evaluation

Project name (acronym)	Sector	Implementation period	Total cost*	Status
Smallholder Irrigation Revitalization Programme (SIRP)**	Irrigation	2016-2024	53.8	Closed
Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project (SACP)	Credit and Financial Services	2021-2027	67.4	Ongoing
Horticulture Enterprise Enhancement Project (HEEP)	Marketing/ Storage / Processing	2024-2032	66.5	Ongoing
Total			396.3	

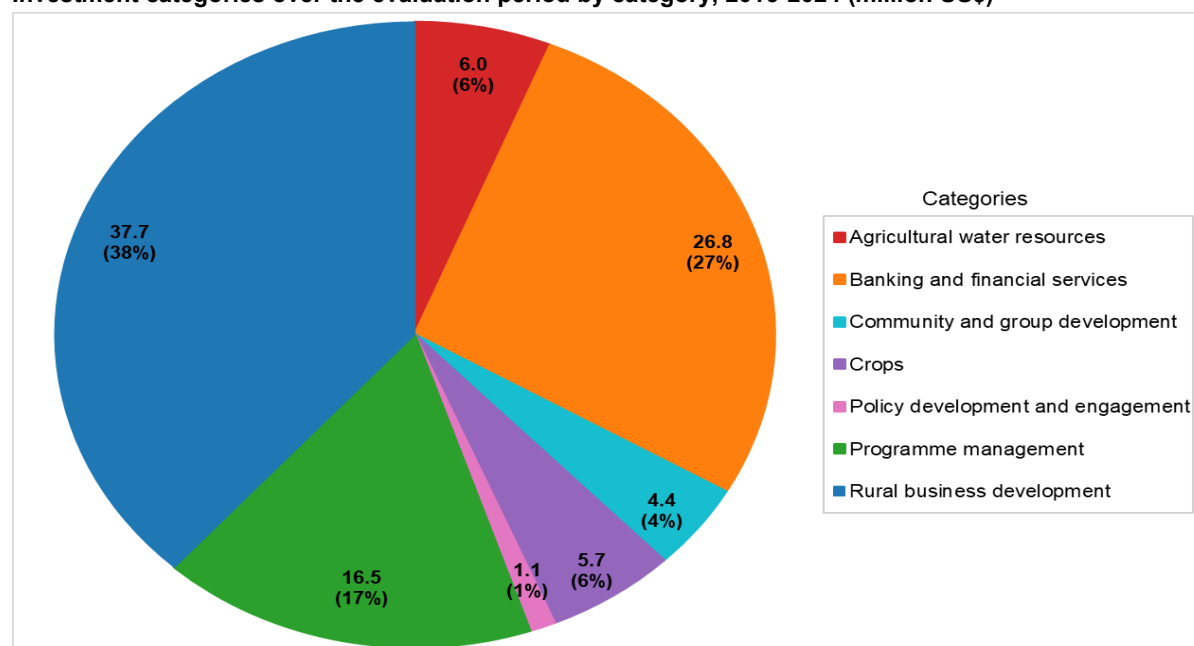
Source: OBI.

* Includes beneficiary contributions and domestic financial and private institutions.

** The total approved was US\$51.2 million, the current amount is US\$53.8 million due to the additional financing of the RPSF grants (US\$1.6 million), the NORAD grant (US\$0.5 million), National Government (US\$0.5 million) and the beneficiaries (US\$0.4 million).

Figure A1.

Investment categories over the evaluation period by category, 2016-2024 (million US\$)



Source: IOE analysis based on OBI. Period covered: 2016-2024.

Table A5.

PBAS allocation

	IFAD-10	IFAD 11	IFAD 12
PBAS allocation	25,456,158	35,687,318	37,145,308
PBAS used	25,456,158	35,700,000	37,140,000
Pipeline	-	-12,682	5,308
per cent PBAS used	100%	100%	100%

Source: IOE analysis based on OBI. Period covered: 2016-2024.

Box A3.

Alignment of the projects with IFAD policies and strategies

SIRP reflected IFAD's priorities in irrigation, water management, financial inclusion, and women's empowerment. This was consistent with several IFAD policies and strategies, including the Water and Rural Development Strategy, Rural Finance Policy and Gender Equality Policy. It also linked to livestock development, youth and nutrition through IFAD's thematic action plans.^{245,246} SACP strengthens value chains within a private sector-led framework, embedding gender, nutrition and CSA while advancing COSOP objectives. Its tailored interventions address social inclusion beyond income generation, ensuring nutrition and gender transformation are core components. HEEP aligns with both IFAD's Framework and the UNDSCF (2022–2026), reinforcing climate-resilient, market-oriented value chains. It combines income growth with targeted gender, youth, and nutrition measures to ensure inclusivity. The project directly contributes to the COSOP transformation agenda by focusing on poverty reduction and income growth through climate-resilient and market-oriented value chains. However, integration of people with disabilities, in line with IFAD's Disability Inclusion Strategy 2022–2027, remains weak across all projects. The design of SIRP and SACP preceded the Disability Inclusion Strategy.

²⁴⁵ Youth inclusion under the Rural Youth Action Plan (2019–2025), and improved nutrition through the Nutrition Action Plan (2019–2025). SIRP design preceded these plans, but the project was deliberate in youth engagement.

²⁴⁶ SIRP's irrigation and water management components are in line with IFAD's Water and Rural Development Strategy, which advocates for sustainable irrigation as a key driver of productivity in smallholder systems.

Sources: Project design documents; IFAD strategic documents

Box A4.

Adaptive measures by IFAD's programme to respond to COVID-19

Responses include mobilizing additional resources, and community-based mechanisms. In recognition of the disruption caused by the pandemic, IFAD amended SIRP's financing agreement twice (in January and September 2021) to incorporate additional grant resources from the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF). These included US\$699,999 (RPSF1) and US\$854,590 (RPSF2), aimed at enhancing the resilience of rural households by improving timely access to inputs, information, markets, and liquidity during the crisis.²⁴⁷ In the course of implementation, further funding was mobilized, including US\$460,000 from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), with a focus on nutrition-sensitive interventions; US\$1.55 million from IFAD's RPSF, further strengthening rural livelihoods during the pandemic. SIRP also supported community-level response and participation, therefore, community-based resilience through targeted livelihood activities. For example, at Gudo Irrigation Scheme, a group of 18 women beneficiaries participated in a Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) training initiative in 2021. They were trained in sewing reusable face masks and were provided with sewing machines and materials. The group adopted a sustainable business model, selling the products locally and reinvesting in raw materials to continue operations. Alongside this, the group received training in the production of hygiene products, including soaps, sanitizers, sunlight liquid, and foam bath, which they now produce and sell in nearby markets such as Checheche Growth Point and Chiredzi town. This initiative helped strengthen local enterprise development, women's empowerment, and hygiene awareness during a critical public health period. These interventions demonstrate how SIRP, under IFAD's broader programme, adapted to protect livelihoods, promote resilience, and ensure continued inclusion amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Sources: Project reports.

Box A5.

Functioning of the JMU and PSC

A Joint Project Steering Committee (PSC) was established (for SIRP, HEEP and SACP) chaired by the PS of MLAFWRD (the JMU is the secretariat). The PSC should meet bi-annually to review and approve physical and financial progress, assess management effectiveness, decide on corrective measures where appropriate, review lessons learned and good practices, and approve AWPBs and Programme Procurement Plans (PP). However, it faces challenges: inconsistent representation, irregular meetings, and weak documentation of decisions. The absence of the Ministry of Finance reduces opportunities for policy alignment and visibility of IFAD's contributions.²⁴⁸ This represents a missed opportunity for IFAD to contribute to key policy discussions and demonstrate its impact on overall budget allocations. It also means IFAD's data and statistics are not consistently channelled through the Ministry of Finance, weakening coordination and strategic alignment.

Before the JMU was established, Project Management Units (PMUs) faced operational challenges, including procurement delays and weak financial reporting, which slowed implementation. Engagement of Technical Assistance experts and full-time staff improved coordination and delivery. Since 2023, IFAD has also adopted a multi-pronged strategy to strengthen PMUs in Zimbabwe. This includes targeted capacity building in procurement, financial management, M&E, gender, nutrition, CSA and water management; intensive start-up and early implementation support; and continuous engagement through monthly meetings, supervision missions, and weekly follow-ups. PMU staff KPIs are now embedded in contracts to enhance accountability. IFAD has also engaged technical partners such as UNOPS (SIRP) and LEAD (SACP) and maintained high-level dialogue with the Ministry of Agriculture to address critical issues.

Sources: CSPE team interviews, SIRP PCR, SACP Supervision mission report, Self assessment by IFAD staff.

Box A6.

Examples of the complementarities between development partners

FAO – GEF 7 Partnership: IFAD's focus on climate-smart value chains complements resilience initiatives by other donors, supporting Zimbabwe's adaptation to climate variability and food security. Through the GEF-7 initiative with FAO, IFAD advanced catchment conservation, reforestation (2,300 ha), biodiversity, and soil conservation in Save and Runde, aligning with GoZ's NDC commitments.

²⁴⁷ SIRP Supervision Mission (2022)

²⁴⁸ Lessons learnt notes and interview with IFAD Country Director.

UNDP and FAO: Under SIRP, IFAD complemented work by UNDP and FAO through GCF funding promoted sustainable irrigation, renewable energy, and climate information services, leading to 79 percent adoption of climate-smart practices and a 25 percent emissions reduction in pilot schemes.

JICA – SHEP and Rice Demonstration: IFAD integrated JICA's Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion (SHEP) methodology into SIRP, later extending it to SACP and HEEP. This collaboration trained smallholder farmers to aggregate and market produce more effectively, reaching 17,838 farmers (14,417 women). Nearly 47 percent reported improved market access. Building on this success, IFAD continues applying SHEP in SACP and HEEP, while also partnering with JICA on NERICA rice demonstrations, seed multiplication, and agronomic training to scale adoption.

CESVI and ICRISAT – Climate Resilience and Value Chain Development: IFAD's SACP project established MoUs with CESVI and ICRISAT. CESVI and SACP will jointly strengthen market access, promote small grain seed systems, and support climate change adaptation in rural communities. ICRISAT, in particular, will work with producer groups to enhance productivity of small grain seed multiplication, leveraging SIRP's investments in irrigation.

UNOPS – Infrastructure Deliver: At IFAD's request, the Government partnered with UNOPS to manage contracts for 10 irrigation schemes at risk of delay. UNOPS successfully supervised the projects and trained government staff on contract management, improving institutional capacity for future infrastructure delivery.

USAID: SACP complements the work of the USAID funded Amalima Loko in promoting good agricultural practices for increased production and productivity in the crops and livestock sectors in Matabeleland North province. Amalima Loko, as SACP, has strong emphasis on Gender (women and youth), and environmental protection. SACP also collaborates with ICRISAT in developing.

CARITAS Zimbabwe: SACP partners in Matabeleland North to develop multi-purpose water points and plans Village Business Units around CARITAS-drilled boreholes.

NORAD: initiative on nutrition, linked to SIRP.

Sources: IFAD Staff and SACP PMU self-assessments; SIRP PCR; SACP Supervision Mission Reports, SIRP Supervision Mission Reports.

Box A7.

Additional co-financing collaborations

IFAD also developed a Country Engagement and Resource Mobilization Plan, expanding collaboration with DeSIRA+, CGIAR and the FARM P3 programme, which has supported financing for infrastructure, post-harvest loss reduction and climate resilience. The Infrastructure Development Bank of Zimbabwe (IDBZ) is working with IFAD on a Green Climate Fund proposal, though progress is complicated by GCF's preference for direct access entities.²⁴⁹ The French Government has also contributed resources under SACP to strengthen the sorghum value chain through mechanization, while FARM P3 is helping build an MSE pipeline for SACP's financing instruments.

Source: Desk review and interview outcomes.

Box A8.

Contribution of grants to KM development

Knowledge management (KM) was a central element across most grants, functioning both as a learning mechanism and as a tool to inform IFAD's strategic direction. The Green Tech project stands out for producing a diverse set of knowledge products that are expected to shape IFAD's future engagement in agricultural renewable energy. In Zimbabwe, a key product was the lessons-learned report Implementing Solar Powered Walk-in Cold Rooms for Smallholder Agriculture in Zimbabwe and Malawi, which offered practical guidance for replication. ASAP2 made notable contributions by generating strategic knowledge on climate-nutrition linkages. Its country studies examined how climate change affects nutrition and proposed interventions, target groups, delivery methods and partnership options. To enhance accessibility, an animated explainer video narrated through the experience of a young female farmer illustrated climate-nutrition interactions and was produced in three languages. Field-based learning was strengthened through the Red Meat grant, which localized knowledge via practical training and demonstrations. Farmers received instruction on reducing post-harvest losses, effective crop and storage practices and fodder preservation across five districts, benefiting 249 participants, primarily women. They identified drought-tolerant fodder varieties such as lablab, velvet beans

²⁴⁹ To overcome this, the government would provide co-financing to IDBZ (approximately \$10 million) through an existing loan from IFAD's HEEP project (valued at \$37 million).

and forage sorghum. The training also encouraged behavioral change, promoting recognition of livestock as an economic asset and encouraging strategic destocking during droughts to finance water infrastructure.

Despite these successes, challenges emerged. The Green Tech grant faced slow progress in developing and sharing knowledge products, while the Red Meat project encountered barriers to field-level adoption due to limited storage infrastructure. The TAF/AAF project showed minimal engagement in KM - its only reference being that one SME transaction served as a test case for future investors - indicating a missed opportunity for systematic knowledge generation, documentation and dissemination.

Sources: Project reports.

Box A9.

Detail regarding SIRP and SACP M&E systems

SIRP produced multiple outcome-level datasets and analytical reports, including: Annual Outcome Surveys (2022, 2023), the 2024 Endline Report and the GALS outcome evaluation. These datasets measured progress on yields, income, food security (HDDS/FCS), CSA adoption and gender empowerment. SIRP's sampling and methodologies were statistically robust, validated by provincial M&E teams and aligned with IFAD's Core Outcome Indicators (COIs 1–5). SACP has established a dedicated team comprising M&E, Knowledge Management and Data Assistant Specialists. Provincial M&E staff are now in place in most provinces, supporting beneficiary registration and data management. SACP has begun producing progress and monitoring reports guided by its M&E Plan, though delays in baseline data collection have constrained deeper analysis and outcome-level reporting. SIRP's M&E framework included sex- and age-disaggregated data and integrated gender-sensitive indicators at output, outcome and impact levels. Tools such as the Multi-dimensional Poverty Assessment Tool (MPAT) and Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) and Nutrition KAP surveys provided a strong foundation for measuring social inclusion outcomes. SACP plans to incorporate similar disaggregation and participatory monitoring to ensure inclusivity, drawing from SIRP's tested approaches.

Sources: Interviews with ICO; SIRP and SACP Supervision Mission reports

Box A10.

Examples of knowledge products

SIRP facilitated multiple learning and knowledge-sharing initiatives, including an exchange visit with Eswatini's Smallholder Market-Led Project and a policy dialogue on the GALS approach to inform scale-up through national policy influence. The project produced diverse KM products: newsletters, success stories, annual lessons-learned reports, educational fliers, nutrition and biofortification materials, and technical articles for the Zimbabwe Agricultural Journal. Regular updates through its website and social media expanded visibility on CSA, biofortification, and conservation practices. Documentation continues on best practices such as GALS, biofortification, lead farmer models, and block farming. SACP, together with SIRP, conducted learning exchanges with Eswatini's SMLP and FINCLUDE projects, leading to the adoption of "farmer diaries" within SACP's MIS. A SHEP (Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion) Approach Learning Event, hosted by JICA, trained farmers on market research, crop identification and selection, and crop calendar development. A joint SIRP-SACP learning event in April 2023 focused on poultry, horticulture, irrigation rehabilitation, and market access. Additional insights (from SIRP close-out workshops and exchange visits to ARDA-managed VBUs) enhanced knowledge on targeting, sustainability, and diversification. SIRP also used local radio and produced a documentary on nutrition-sensitive interventions.

Sources: COSOP results review (2023); SACP PMU self-assessment questionnaire.

Box A11.

Grants' contribution to partnership development

Across the portfolio of IFAD-supported grants in Zimbabwe, several common achievements related to partnership building are evident. Projects showed consistent efforts to engage both local and national stakeholders in a collaborative manner. For example, in the ASAP2 project, the teams for the study mission to Zimbabwe consisted of two experts of the implementing agency WCDI and two local experts (one on nutrition and one on climate change). This team collaborated intensively for the remote mission as well as the write up of the recommendations and the final presentation to stakeholders. Additionally, the local experts were responsible for connecting the study team to other local experts (on nutrition, climate, environment, gender, youth, agriculture, etc.) to ensure that all the IFAD mainstreaming themes were covered in the study. This illustrated strong national-level engagement aimed at ensuring

contextual relevance and comprehensive knowledge coverage. Another example is the Red Meat project where marked involvement of government structures was observed. In Zimbabwe, the project has actively supported the government's mainstream agricultural activities through field days and participation in multi-sectoral rangeland assessments involving FAO, Forestry Commission, Environmental Management Agency and AGRITEX/ARDAS. This multi-sectoral approach was able to capture insights from various stakeholders. Similarly, inclusion in the decision-making of government officials such as the chief director of extension workers, district officers and relevant stakeholders at project inception enhanced project buy-in at a critical project stage, signalling meaningful government participation in key planning and implementation phases.

Certain particular achievements also stood out. The GreenTech initiative reported that the project has demonstrated strong synergies with both country specific and broader initiatives. In Zimbabwe, the initiative has worked earnestly to support the efforts of IFAD-funded investment project SIRP. Likewise, to address gaps in rangeland and pasture management, the Red Meat project worked with the EU-funded LIPS-Zim and the FAO supported the ERVHIZ project to conduct comprehensive rangeland assessment, leading to improved carrying capacity and sustainability of livestock farming. These demonstrate instances of inter-project partnership arrangements.

Sources: CSPE desk study and interviews.

Box A12.

Further examples of successful policy engagement initiatives

SIRP:

- Five gender studies to support mainstreaming of gender issues in policy formulation: 1) Barriers to women's economic empowerment in irrigation schemes and rainfed areas; 2) Assessing Profitability and productivity barriers and opportunities in small scale irrigation schemes - addressing gender gaps in productivity; 3) Gender and decision making in agriculture and irrigation; 4) Understanding the socioeconomic and cognitive factors affecting adoption of climate smart technologies - including gender differences in adoption and 5) Addressing gender in value chains (2021-2022).
- In December 2023, SIRP convened a GALS policy dialogue with 65 stakeholders, while in November 2024, IFAD and the Platform for Market Innovations (PMI) co-hosted a national event promoting GALS integration into the forthcoming Gender in Agriculture Strategy. MLAFWRD formally committed to this, requesting IFAD's continued support alongside FAO, WFP and the World Bank.
- In agriculture extension, AGRITEX/ARDAS drafted two policy briefs that encouraged to policy makers to support market development and rural finance for smallholder farmers.
- Collaborated with the MLAFWRD's department responsible for Strategic Policy Planning and Business Development (SPBD) in developing policy options for irrigation models for smallholder irrigation schemes (2022).
- In 2024, SIRP coordinated a national policy dialogue on biofortification, resulting in an Issues Paper to guide a national biofortification strategy. On World Food Day 2024, IFAD and partners showcased the role of smallholders in supporting food security and humanitarian needs, underscoring their contribution to resilience and inclusive markets.
- SIRP contributed to the Statutory Instrument SI138 for irrigation models and assisted the MLAFWRD with Seed Policy and Soil and Water Conservation Policy (2022).
- The SIRP MTR (2021) underscored strong policy engagement, especially the project's leadership in analysing irrigation models and operation and maintenance (O&M) systems,²⁵⁰ and highlighted an effective partnership with Environmental Management Agency (EMA) that improved the processing of prospectuses and Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs). However, the SIRP CPR (2025) noted only modest progress, partly due to SI 38 shifting authority over irrigable areas to the Government.²⁵¹ Meanwhile, SACP supported national policy development (including raising awareness on the Horticulture Growth and Recovery Plan), producing policy briefs on rural finance, biofortification, nutrition-sensitive

²⁵⁰ Statutory Instrument 38 of 2021 in Zimbabwe, titled "Irrigable Areas (Control) Regulations, 2021", grants the government increased authority and responsibility over irrigable areas. These regulations, made under the Agricultural Finance Act, aim to regulate the development and utilization of irrigable land and associated water resources.

²⁵¹ Key design issues (such as strengthening WUO/IMC legal status, clarifying asset ownership and O&M responsibilities, and revising water pricing) remained unresolved.

agriculture and contract farming to inform sector strategies and successor project design.²⁵²

SACP:

- SACP contributed to the Value Chain Analysis for the AFSTS to align with NDS2 priorities and reviewed the contract farming framework and development of the Agricultural Gender Strategy (2023-2024).
- IFAD promoted donor coordination through events such as the 2025 Roundtable on the Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy and contributed to national policy processes, including drafting soil conservation and irrigation policy inputs, as well as a biofortification issues paper.

Sources: SIRP MTR 2021; SIRP Supervision 2022; COSOP CRR 2023; SIRP PCR 2025; SACP Supervision Mission Reports.

Box A13.

Evidence on productivity increases

Maize yields in irrigated plots quadrupled—from 1.9 to 7.4 tons/ha (148 per cent of target) - while bean yields rose by nearly 300 per cent. The SIRP endline survey found 71% of households reported increased production. The 2023 Outcomes Survey confirmed that beneficiary irrigators achieved significantly higher yields and incomes than non-beneficiaries. Cropping intensity increased from 1.2 to 2.6 crops per year, contributing to improved food security and household incomes, with irrigators earning almost three times more than comparable non-beneficiaries. Over 85 per cent of households adopted climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable practices, exceeding project targets. The introduction of biofortified and drought-tolerant varieties, such as NUA45 beans and yellow maize, further strengthened resilience, although some yield losses were recorded during periods of heavy rains and El Niño-related flooding.²⁵³ Additionally, SACP has mobilized 1,069 APGs and 214 MSEs and strengthened market integration through collective action.

Sources: CSPE Desk study.

Box A14.

Rehabilitated irrigation schemes and CSA contribute to resilience

Rehabilitated schemes have markedly strengthened livelihood resilience. Farmers now cultivate sugar beans, groundnuts, maize, wheat and vegetables up to three times per year, and have adopted, in some areas, disease-tolerant and biofortified varieties such as sorghum, sugar beans, yellow maize and orange-fleshed sweet potato. As a result, annual cropping intensity has tripled, and average seasonal incomes have risen from around USD 200 to USD 500 per farmer. Increased income has enabled diversification into poultry and small-scale processing, while improved diets, particularly the regular consumption of beans, reflect a broader transformation in household food security and nutrition.

Sources: Desk review and interview outcomes.

Box A15.

Evidence of grant supports to SIRP nutrition objectives

The NORAD-funded grant *Nourishing People and the Earth through Inclusive and Sustainable Agriculture (2021-23)* expanded the nutrition agenda initiated by SIRP across 12 districts. The initiative reached 6,100 poor and vulnerable households, establishing over 5,300 homestead gardens and 30 school gardens, and promoting traditional and biofortified crops such as sorghum and millet. Capacity building included training of 50 extension officers and rollout of a Social and Behaviour Change Communication strategy, engaging over 27,000 people through cooking clubs, fairs and demonstrations. Women and youth groups diversified livelihoods through small-scale bakeries, oil-pressing units and solar-powered technologies. While these initiatives show promise, most remained at an early stage by the endline survey, with measurable impacts on diets or income yet to materialize.

Sources: Desk review and interview outcomes.

Box A16.

Portfolio projects' approaches to enable market access

Overall, SIRP demonstrated that market-linked approaches are feasible and can generate meaningful benefit when infrastructure, input access and training are aligned; however, the

²⁵² By the end of 2025, the project will also complete consultations and produce policy briefs on food loss and waste, as well as farmer group formalisation. The project supported awareness workshops in four provinces to unpack the Horticulture Growth and Recovery Plan for farmers, government officials, parastatals, farmer organisations, and the private sector. It provided input into the Contract Farming Strategy, addressing food loss and waste, and supporting farmer registration. SACP will further assist the Ministry in developing a National Gender Policy for Agriculture, also scheduled for completion by late 2025. SACP PMU self-assessment questionnaire; Interview with SACP Team.

²⁵³ SIRP endline survey

resulting partnerships remained isolated, small in scale and emerged only towards the end of the implementation. SACP has introduced a more deliberate and structure framework for value-chain development, yet it remains at an early stage of operationalisation. Critically, the delayed rollout of its two financing instruments, the Matching Grants and the Line of Credit, has significantly constrained progress. Unless these instruments become fully operational soon, with streamlined procedures, clear governance and robust risk-mitigation measures, SACP risks reproducing SIRP's pattern of isolated successes instead of achieving a coherent and scalable transformation in market engagement.

Sources: Desk review.

Box A17.

SACP's approach to financial inclusion

SACP introduced a more comprehensive and systemic approach to rural finance architecture, combining grants with concessional lending to address liquidity and collateral constraints. This included a US\$21.6 million matching grant facility for productive assets under SACP with a US\$14 million concessional Line of Credit (LoC) to be channelled through the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) and retail partners such as AFC Bank.²⁵⁴ The dual architecture was intended to crowd in private finance through risk sharing. In practice, however, implementation proved slow and fragmented. Between 2023 and 2025, the institutional arrangements for these facilities were revised multiple times, with responsibility shifting between RBZ, MoFEDIP and AFC Bank. RBZ's role was progressively reduced after the recognition that its regulatory mandate conflicted with direct management of retail credit and grants. As of April 2025, the subsidiary agreements between the Ministry and participating banks were only finalised and neither the matching grant nor the LoC had yet disbursed.²⁵⁵

Sources: Desk review.

Table A6.

Some of the innovations piloted in SIRP

Innovation	Challenges Addressed	Delivery Approach	Adoption and Results
Block farming system	Fragmented production; weak market access and aggregation	Group-based production blocks within irrigation schemes to synchronise production and attract buyers	Improved coordination and marketing (e.g. paprika, peas, chillies); constrained by late irrigation completion and lack of business support
Pfumvudza (conservation agriculture)	Low productivity; soil degradation; rainfall variability	Farmer field schools and extension training; supported by demonstration plots	High adoption; improved yields and resilience in drylands; key entry point for climate adaptation
Traditional African recipe promotion	Poor dietary diversity; low nutrition awareness	Nutrition demonstrations led by nutrition champions	Introduced beans and vegetables in daily meals; increased protein and iron intake; behavioural shift
Chameleon soil moisture sensors	Inefficient irrigation scheduling; water wastage	Distributed to IMCs with training and demonstrations	Improved awareness on irrigation efficiency; limited sustained use due to maintenance and calibration challenges
Gender Action Learning System (GALS)	Gender inequality; limited decision-making power and economic participation of women	Participatory gender-transformative training integrated with FaaB and community planning	High uptake: over 86% of households reported reduced domestic conflict and greater joint decision-making; strengthened women's agency and economic empowerment

Source: CSPE.

²⁵⁴ SACP PDR.

²⁵⁵ SACP supervision mission 2025.

Table A7.

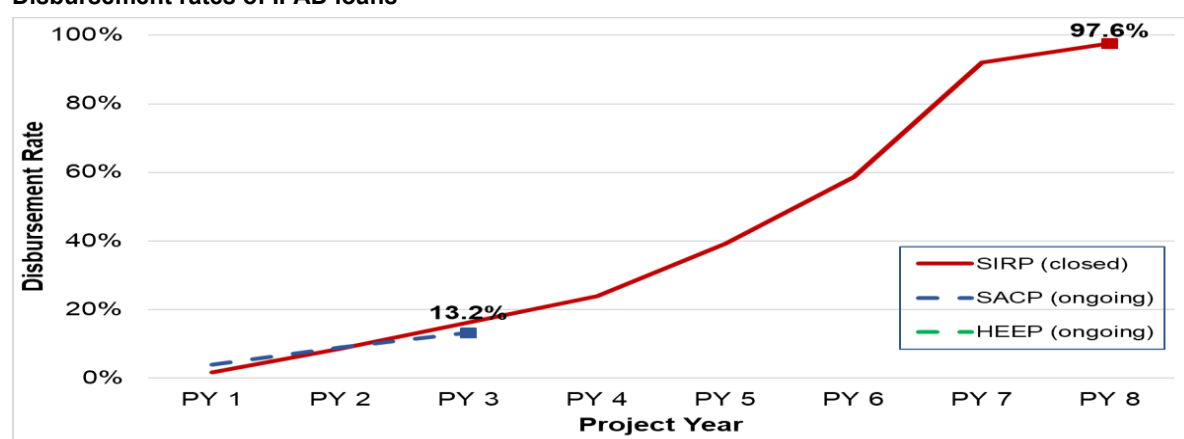
Time between key milestones (in months)

Project name	Approval to entry into force	Approval to first disbursement	Entry into force to first disbursement	First disbursement to project completion	Project completion to financial closure
SIRP	1	8	6	89	1
SACP	8	9	0	72	5
HEEP	17	30	13	83	6
Zimbabwe average	8.7	15.7	6.3	81.3	4
ESA average*	6.7	16.1	8.4	68.7	5

Source: CSPE elaboration based on OBI data.

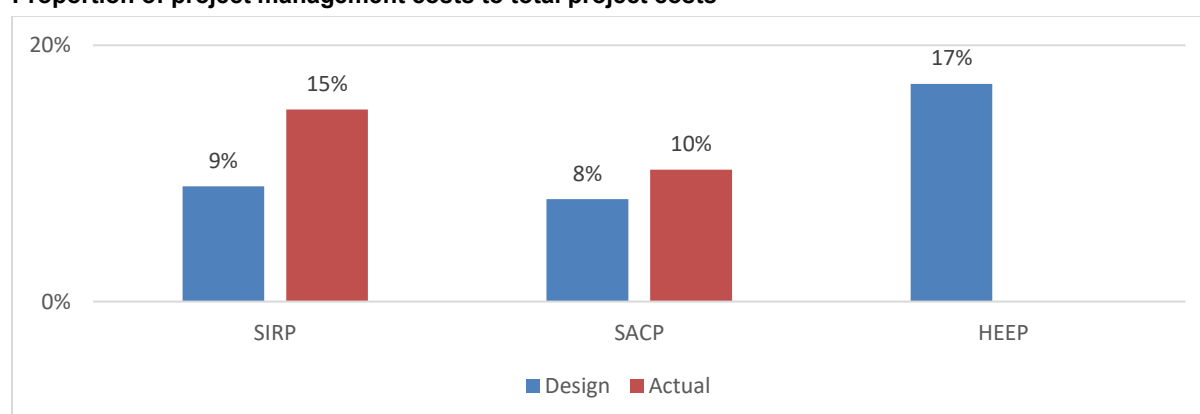
* This average includes the projects approved between 2016 and 2024 in Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Comoros, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. During the same period, no projects were implemented in the ESA region countries of Mauritius and Namibia.

Figure A2.

Disbursement rates of IFAD loans

Source: CSPE elaboration based on OBI data.

Figure A3.

Proportion of project management costs to total project costs

Source: PDR SIRP, SACP and HEEP; Supervision Mission of May 2025 of SACP; PCR of SIRP.

Box A18.

Direct observations and testimonies on economic gains following SIRP rehabilitation and FaaB

Farmers reported moving from “farming for survival” to strategic, market-oriented production, applying cost-benefit analysis, keeping records and negotiating with buyers (FaaB). In Insukamini, producers now market cabbages and maize to Gweru and Zvishavane with stronger bargaining power, while Makwe farmers have accessed bank loans for equipment and adopted a more collective management approach.

In Banga (Masvingo), farmers emphasised that year-round production has become the norm, with three harvest cycles now regarded as the minimum target rather than an exceptional outcome. In Fuwe Panganai (Zaka), several women described income from tomato and bean sales as “the first money we can plan with” noting that proceeds were earmarked for school fees, small livestock purchases and rotating input contributions. They also reported that improved diets, enabled by more diverse production and market purchases, were becoming an indicator of improved economic status, with households moving from two meagre meals of saza during the El Niño year to “consuming beans, eggs, cabbage and chicken on a regular basis”.

At Rupangwana (Chiredzi), farmers recounted a marked shift in local economic dynamics as tomato buyers from Harare began visiting weekly. Several participants noted that “money now enters the household every week” contrasting this with pre-SIRP periods when crop sales occurred only once per season. Income gains were sufficiently large that households began constructing improved brick houses and purchasing goats and chickens, despite continuing constraints linked to power cuts and pump maintenance.

In Insukamini (Midlands), farmers noted that SIRP training fundamentally changed their planning behaviour, shifting from subsistence production to forward budgeting for harvest quantities and loan-financed investments. They reported that adoption of a business mindset enabled them to market cabbages and green mealies to Gweru, Zvishavane and Shurugwi, with several attributing their ability to negotiate prices to new skills acquired through FaaB and post-harvest training.

Across these schemes, farmers consistently described asset accumulation—such as livestock purchases, fencing repairs, water-pumping equipment and home improvements—as ‘a visible sign of progress’.

Source: CSPE field work.

Box A19.

Projects’ resources for gender activities

Under SIRP, significant efforts included appointing gender-focused staff,²⁵⁶ training 551 GALS champions (330 women), enforcing a 50% quota for women in matching grants, and allocating US\$456,000 to nutrition gardens for vulnerable women. Additional actions included vocational training that increased women’s participation by 300 participants, expanding training budgets to 17.2% of total project costs, and achieving measurable empowerment gains, with WEAI scores rising to 63.7% for treatment groups versus 55.6% among controls, and female-headed households improving from a baseline of 53.7% to 59.1%. SACP appointed a Poverty Targeting and Social Inclusion Specialist, earmarked US\$16 million in matching grants for women-inclusive APGs, and required gender-sensitive business plans while providing gender-responsive business development services, finance access, and training covering technical skills, GBV prevention, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, alongside applying GALS to strengthen household and community-level empowerment.

Nevertheless, field mission visits to SIRP project locations indicated that staffing resources for implementation were limited. For example, beneficiaries in Mushandike reported that under SIRP, there was “only one facilitator at provincial level,” which was insufficient for meaningful field engagement and follow-up, while in Manicaland, district-level staffing resources were reported to be weak under SIRP but improved under HEEP. Beneficiaries in some locations under SIRP (e.g. Chibwe and Cashel Valley) also noted that refresher trainings are needed because knowledge declines once external facilitators leave.

Sources: Desk review.

²⁵⁶ A lessons learned document compiled by IFAD found that gender mainstreaming requires more than appointing focal persons. It must be embedded in staff roles, supported by capacity building, and backed with dedicated budgets and action plans. Document shared by Country Team titled “Lessons Learned April 14” shared 21 August 2025.

Box A20.

Case Study of partnership with Whitney Paprika

Whitney Paprika's collaboration with smallholder farmers under SIRP offers a case study on how private sector partnerships can support long-term commercialisation and strengthen farmer-based organisations when the right institutional foundations are in place. The company began engaging with irrigation schemes once rehabilitation was underway. Whitney Paprika provided seed and later purchased harvests and offered agronomic and post-harvest training. Staff interviewed for the CSPE reported that this approach helped farmers internalise production quality standards and market discipline while reinforcing ownership and financial responsibility within irrigation committees and WUOs.

Company staff emphasised that sustained engagement depended on organised farmer structures, functional scheme governance and accessible extension support. Strong, cohesive schemes delivered successful contract cycles, while areas facing drought or weaker group cohesion struggled to uphold commitments. Company staff also observed that more intensive, hands-on support was required than initially expected, indicating that institutional sustainability in farmer groups requires sustained technical assistance. One persistent risk was side selling, which undermined contractual trust; the firm noted that clear penalties and stronger policy enforcement were needed to improve long-term market reliability.

Despite challenges, the company affirmed that when farmers are trained, organised and supported with reliable irrigation, they consistently meet quality requirements and secure good prices. To strengthen sustainability, Whitney Paprika recommended "more inputs to fewer farmers," deeper joint planning and closer coordination between IFAD projects, private buyers and farmer committees. The experience of Whitney Paprika demonstrates that commercialisation requires more than infrastructure and group formation; it depends on reinforcing governance systems, transparent benefit-sharing rules, coordinated extension support and market incentives that reward loyalty and quality.

Source: CSPE interviews and field visits.

Box A21.

Environmental conservation measures applied under SIRP and SACP

Land and catchment systems. Under SIRP, a suite of physical conservation measures – including contouring, gully reclamation, tree planting and flood-protection structures – were implemented around irrigation schemes to safeguard production zones and water assets. These measures reduced sediment loads and bank erosion, protecting canals and headworks while stabilizing adjacent cropland. By 2022, more than 1,200 hectares had been protected from erosion (though well behind the target of 25,000 hectares) and thousands of farmers had adopted soil and water conservation practices consistent with Zimbabwe's UNCCD Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets, which prioritize erosion control and reforestation.

Forests and rangelands. Capacity-building in mulching, conservation tillage, agroforestry and controlled grazing under both SIRP and SACP helped reduce open-area soil exposure and fuelwood demand, encouraging gradual vegetation recovery on the communal lands most exposed to degradation. The planting of around irrigation schemes and supported diversified household nutrition via over 23,800 fruit trees and distribution of 40,000 seed balls and further contributed to woodland regeneration and the enhancement of local biodiversity. These efforts also improved microclimates production.

Flood-protection works, including earth embankments and barrages, further enhanced hydrological stability. Designed primarily to safeguard irrigation infrastructure, these structures also contributed to ecosystem resilience by reducing sediment transport, stabilizing riverbanks and preserving downstream water quality.

Livelihood-linked conservation activities deepened the ecological impact of project interventions. High-impact initiatives such as apiculture and livestock paddocking connected household livelihoods with ecosystem stewardship. Beekeeping promotes pollinator populations vital for crop and forest regeneration, while paddocking reduced uncontrolled grazing and allowed degraded rangelands to recover. Tree planting combined with community-based natural resource management (NRM) activities encouraged biodiversity conservation and collective responsibility for local ecosystems.

Community-based NRM subcommittees, 39 out of 60 of which were revitalized by 2022, became focal points for environmental stewardship. These committees led activities in fire management, catchment mapping and environmental awareness campaigns such as *World Wetlands Day*, reinforcing local accountability and continuous ecosystem monitoring. By embedding conservation within local governance, projects strengthened both the institutional and ecological dimensions of adaptive capacity.

Safeguards and institutional measures. The integration of SECAP-driven Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs) institutionalized environmental protection within project operations by regulating extractive and damaging activities such as sand abstraction, streambank cultivation and brickmaking near waterways. Grievance mechanisms and audit procedures introduced under SECAP created local enforcement channels that reinforced positive ecosystem outcomes beyond individual project boundaries.

Source: SIRP NRM Strategy (2020), SIRP NRM Report (2022), SECAP Training Report (2022).

Box A22.

SECAP Assessment

SIRP was classified as a **Category B project**, requiring site-specific Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMPs). Twenty-five ESMPs were prepared, of which 16 were licensed by EMA, covering measures such as soil conservation, water-use efficiency, and catchment rehabilitation.^{257,258}

SACP integrated SECAP risk-screening into its *climate-proofed value chain infrastructure* component, ensuring that irrigation, potable water systems, and feeder roads were designed with resilience considerations.²⁵⁹

SECAP analyses highlighted that irrigation scheme performance was directly linked to upstream and surrounding catchment conditions. In response, projects prioritized physical measures such as contour construction, gully reclamation, tree planting, and erosion control. These interventions aimed to reduce sedimentation in canals, protect water infrastructure, and restore degraded landscapes. In SIRP, for instance, catchment rehabilitation became a cornerstone activity, ensuring that rehabilitated schemes would not again fail due to upstream

²⁵⁷ ZWE Smallholder Irrigation Revitalization Programme Final Draft PDR Post-Negotiations, 2016.

²⁵⁸ SIRP Natural Resources Management Report, August 2022.

²⁵⁹ Zimbabwe Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project Design Report, 2021. Available at: <https://webapps.ifad.org/members/lapse-of-time/docs/english/EB-2021-LOT-P-2-Project-Design-Report-Zimbabwe.pdf>.

land degradation.²⁶⁰²⁶¹

SECAP findings emphasized the risks of soil degradation, declining fertility, and vulnerability to erratic rainfall. This informed the promotion of CSA practices — including mulching, conservation tillage, and agroforestry — as low-cost strategies to improve resilience. Training and demonstration plots under SIRP and SACP helped farmers understand how these practices conserve soil moisture, improve fertility, and reduce dependence on external inputs. In the medium term, CSA adoption enhances household resilience while contributing to landscape-level sustainability.

SECAP analyses further underscored the need to build infrastructure that could withstand floods, droughts, and increasingly variable rainfall. SACP translated this into the concept of “climate-proofed value chain infrastructure,” ensuring that irrigation, potable water systems, feeder roads, and irrigated gardens were designed with resilience criteria in mind. For example, roads were aligned with natural drainage patterns, while irrigation systems incorporated water-efficient technologies. These measures reduce climate-related disruptions, making production systems more reliable in the face of shocks.

SECAP analyses were not just a compliance requirement; they provided a structured framework that directly shaped climate resilience actions across IFAD’s Zimbabwe portfolio. Catchment rehabilitation, CSA adoption, climate-proofed infrastructure, and renewable-energy solutions emerged as practical interventions that strengthened both production systems and ecosystem health. While some supervision missions noted delays in baseline surveys and screening, the consistent application of SECAP ensured that resilience was embedded at the design stage of each project.

Source: CSPE.

Box A23.

Presence or absence of a country office

There were mixed views on physical absence of a country office. Most stakeholders felt that a country office would be beneficial, as IFAD’s absence limited opportunities for collaboration and engagement with the government. A local presence would also enhance visibility, which is important given that IFAD is the largest contributor to the agricultural sector, yet receives limited recognition. Moreover, it would facilitate closer follow-up and oversight of ongoing projects; and may enhance opportunities to obtain climate finance. However, the IFAD consultant liaison officer remains actively engaged, supported by the Country Director’s visits; and a UNV contributes through participation in the RCO’s M&E Committee. The liaison officer regularly attends biannual agricultural meetings with FAO, UNCT sessions and related sub-committees, contributes to the UNCT Annual Report and joins monthly virtual meetings with the Minister and PS of Agriculture, ensuring continued coordination despite the absence of a local office.

Sources: CSPE interviews.

Table A8.

Number of times technical specialists were included in supervision missions

Project	Technical & financial	CCA	on	chain	ement	on	ng
SIRP	8	8	7	7	8	4	6
SACP	5	4	4	4	5	1	5

Source: CSPE Team.

²⁶⁰ ZWE Smallholder Irrigation Revitalization Programme Final Draft PDR Post-Negotiations, 2016.

²⁶¹ SIRP Natural Resources Management Report, August 2022.

Results on youth and other marginalised groups

Analysis of supports to Youth

The 2020–2025 COSOP positions youth (15–34) as a core target group, aiming for them to make up 30% of direct beneficiaries in IFAD-supported projects, and promotes their engagement in CSA, irrigation, agro-processing, value addition, and entrepreneurship, with emphasis on off-farm services and quick-return ventures that align with youth interests. It also prioritises youth inclusion in policy dialogue, governance, and feedback mechanisms to strengthen participatory rural development. This focus responds to persistent barriers such as high unemployment, limited land access, low incentives for farming, and scarce resources. Lessons from SIRP and the Zimbabwe Livelihoods and Food Security Project show youth preferences for rapid-return enterprises and mobile agro-processing, which now inform programme design. As a result, interventions include vocational and business training, incubation hubs, innovation grants, improved access to finance, and support for youth associations and marketing platforms. This marks a shift from the 2016 CSN, which recognised the youthful population but did not explicitly prioritise youth, though project-level design did establish youth targets, quotas for activities like APGs and matching grants, and age-disaggregated data systems to track inclusion.

Youth empowerment was embedded across all three project designs through training in business planning, leadership, financial literacy, and CSA. SIRP engaged youth in agribusiness and value-chain development to support entrepreneurship, while SACP created women-only APGs and leadership spaces. All projects used geographic targeting, self-selection, and vulnerability criteria to reach land-poor and low-education youth. HEEP plans to expand opportunities by adding digital and life skills, reflecting youth interest in higher-return activities such as horticulture, post-harvest processing, and services, and will offer childcare to support young mothers' participation. Overall, the three projects demonstrate strong commitment to inclusive youth development, with early SIRP evidence highlighting the value of flexible delivery, gender-responsive approaches, and pathways into higher-value agricultural roles for equitable empowerment.

Despite these strengths, challenges have constrained youth outcomes. Mobility barriers, delayed implementation, and budget reallocations in SIRP limited youth-oriented activities such as business development and market linkage support. High staff turnover among implementing partners reduced training quality, while fewer irrigation schemes diminished opportunities for technical skills acquisition. In addition, a failed partnership with the United States of America Development Foundation disrupted the delivery of business development services, curtailing access to entrepreneurship and value chain engagement.¹

The programme contributed to youth empowerment, by building their capacities. SIRP facilitated youth engagement and participation in irrigation schemes and management, access to practical, technical, and vocational training, and the use of gender-transformative approaches such as the mobile training model, which broadened opportunities for young women. These efforts improved youth employability, supported business start-up, and enabled participation in community-level gender dialogue through GALS. SACP similarly empowers youth by ensuring their representation among project participants and promoting their leadership within value-chain enterprises, where they often take on managerial or operational roles. Both projects prioritise capacity building, offering training in GALS, nutrition, financial literacy, and CSA to strengthen youth decision-making and entrepreneurial readiness. While both projects focus on youth skills and engagement, SIRP places more emphasis on irrigation governance, whereas SACP more strongly promotes youth leadership in enterprise and value-chain governance.

Field visits for the CSPE reaffirmed these findings: although some youth secured employment following training in places such as Exchange, Hamamavhaire, and Makwe,

limited post-training support often constrained long-term outcomes, with many citing a lack of start-up equipment or capital. Youth involvement in value chains and irrigation governance also remained limited overall, yet where youth were engaged—such as in VBUs, irrigation maintenance, water management, and block farming—they contributed meaningfully, often taking on tasks older beneficiaries could not manage. These mixed results highlight both the strong potential for youth leadership when meaningfully included and the need for enhanced support and targeted strategies to sustain youth empowerment.

However, there were limited positive results in building youth productive capacities. SIRP rehabilitated 4,780 hectares of irrigation infrastructure, increasing irrigated maize yields from 1.9 to 7.4 tonnes/ha. Youth were key actors in scheme rehabilitation and maintenance, and 941 youth received training in irrigation management, construction, and electrical work. SIRP also supported vocational training for diversified income, though evidence of outcomes remains largely anecdotal. SACP strengthened youth capabilities through quotas for youth participation, training in business development, financial literacy, CSA, governance, and GALS, and matching grants designed to increase youth access to capital. Partnerships with government ministries further supported youth inclusion.

Market access interventions yielded mixed outcomes. All projects included efforts to connect youth to value chains and enhance marketing skills. SIRP partnered with AMA and ARDA to strengthen marketing capacity, but broader efforts were constrained after a planned partnership with the U.S. African Development Foundation did not materialise. SACP leveraged partnerships with lead enterprises and plans to establish a credit line to promote deeper market engagement. HEEP intends to expand market linkages through anchor firms and improved storage and transport.

Field visits found persistent barriers to youth engagement remain inconsistent implementation of youth-specific activities across sites. Some locations offered vocational training that enabled income generation for certain youth, while others reported no targeted support. Even where training existed, youth often struggled to apply acquired skills due to limited capital for equipment or workspace. Persistent barriers continue to affect youth participation: beneficiaries reported low youth interest in agriculture, which is perceived as labour-intensive, high-risk, and low return compared to mining and other sectors. Out-migration and limited land access further constrain engagement. However, stakeholders widely noted the potential of mechanisation, digitalisation, and value-addition (e.g., peanut butter, popcorn production) to make agriculture more attractive. These findings suggest that advancing youth empowerment will require modernising agriculture, scaling mechanisation and value-added initiatives, and addressing land and water constraints.

Summary. Projects in the Zimbabwe portfolio have provided interventions targeting youth, such as expanded vocational and business training, innovation grants, incubation hubs, and gender-responsive measures that improved access for young women—while also strengthening youth skills, leadership, and engagement in value chains and irrigation governance. However, participation fell below targets due to mobility constraints, limited land access, delayed implementation, and uneven delivery of youth-specific activities. Many youths struggled to apply new skills because of insufficient capital, weak market linkages, and low interest in agriculture relative to faster-earning sectors.

Supports to people with disabilities, landless and other marginalised groups

While country strategy documents lack explicit inclusion of persons with disabilities, landless people, and other marginalised groups, project-level designs—particularly HEEP—show progressively stronger efforts to recognise their vulnerabilities and integrate targeted measures to support their participation. At the country strategy level, neither the 2016 CSN nor the 2020 COSOP make explicit references to persons with disabilities, landless people, or other

marginalised groups. While the 2020 COSOP acknowledges issues related to land tenure security and access to natural resources, these references primarily concern smallholders who already possess some land rather than the entirely landless. Similarly, neither document includes targeted strategies or mentions of persons with disabilities or other marginalised groups, highlighting a gap in the strategic focus on equity and the need for more deliberate efforts to address the unique vulnerabilities faced by these populations. Project design documents provide varying degrees of attention to persons with disabilities, landless people, and other marginalised groups, with some projects demonstrating more explicit inclusion strategies than others. All three projects in the Zimbabwe portfolio recognised the specific vulnerabilities and needs of persons with disabilities, though the extent of inclusion varies: the SIRP design document makes only limited mention of persons with disabilities, primarily identifying them as a priority group for community-based targeting, while the later SACP and HEEP project design documents explicitly highlight the high poverty prevalence among persons with disabilities and introduce measures to integrate them into APGs, provide nutrition-sensitive education, and promote employment opportunities. HEEP goes further by setting a target of 2,000 persons with disabilities beneficiaries and collaborating with local organisations to identify participants, reflecting a more deliberate and measurable approach.

Results for persons with disabilities have been very limited. During implementation, SIRP promoted disability inclusion through a 2022 workshop that framed disability as a human rights issue, emphasised universal design principles, and shared promising practices, including the use of assistive technologies. While its completion report acknowledged persons with disabilities, evidence of concrete results was lacking, aside from two case studies, such as that of a physically disabled woman who actively participated in irrigation activities with community support. SACP has made more progress. As of December 2024, the SACP reached 662 persons with disabilities (out of 10,122 beneficiaries), mainly through participation in APGs and trainings on nutrition, governance, and GALS. The project has also prepared a draft disability inclusion strategy aligned with IFAD's SPARK II-ESA initiative, and partnerships with disability organisations such as FODPZ and NASCOH are being established. While inclusion structures are progressing, tangible livelihood outcomes for persons with disabilities are yet to be realised.

Field visits found consistently low participation of persons with disabilities across SIRP and SACP sites, with some sites such as Chibuwe and Cashel Valley reporting no PWD participants in the Irrigation Scheme. There was no evidence of targeted outreach or tailored support to address accessibility barriers faced by persons with disabilities, and in some schemes IMC members held beliefs that irrigation and farming activities are unsuitable for persons with disabilities. Persistent barriers were noted: in Chimanimani, women reported that persons with disabilities rarely attend meetings and often feel discouraged due to limited capacity for agricultural labour, while in Nhakayedu and Mayorca, physical access to irrigation plots was described as too difficult for individuals with mobility challenges. Field visits also suggested that persons with disabilities may be undercounted due to reliance on self-reported disability status rather than objective measures; for example, although no persons with disabilities were formally recorded in Mabhikwa, the team observed a beneficiary with mutism and another with significant hearing loss. Given the high proportion of elderly participants in both SIRP and SACP sites, it is likely that the number of individuals with disabilities benefiting from project support is underreported, underscoring the need for future projects to consider using tools such as the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning.

The inclusion of landless people and other marginalised groups in project design and implementation in the Zimbabwe portfolio has been limited and uneven. Earlier projects such as SIRP and SACP acknowledged landless individuals mainly in the socio-economic context, noting their challenges with limited or no land access, but neither made landlessness an explicit targeting criterion, and their largely land-based interventions risked excluding landless households. Although SACP's poverty

categorisation and plot size criteria, along with requirements for APGs to comprise at least 70% poorer households, may have indirectly included some landless or nearly landless members, neither project documented concrete outcomes showing improved livelihoods or expanded opportunities for this group, and gains in land access—such as those achieved through tools like GALS—primarily benefited individuals who already owned or accessed land. By contrast, the new HEEP project design represents a more deliberate and inclusive approach, explicitly recognising landless youth and proposing alternative participation pathways, including service provision in crop protection and mechanisation within horticulture value chains, thereby enabling benefits without land ownership. Project design documents also recognised a range of other marginalised populations: SIRP references female-headed, child-headed, and elderly-headed households as priority targeting categories, while SACP and HEEP list multiple marginalised groups, including the chronically ill, who face multiple layers of deprivation and are intended to be integrated into activities such as APGs, Village Horticultural Gardens, and employment initiatives. The SACP project additionally frames its inclusion strategy as complementary to broader social protection efforts, reflecting a more systemic approach.

List of key people met

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Hwange - Matabeleland North province

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Otrude Ncube, Committee member

Chivi - Masvingo Province

Munogwei Mateza, Chairperson

Jeta Aaron, Vice chairperson

Chiredzi - Masvingo Province

Peter Bheka, Chairperson

Mapuwa Edson, Farmer

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Munogwei Mateza, Chair Banga

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