
FINAL EVALUATION OF THE SEEDS AND MARKETS PROJECT (ESWATINI, LESOTHO AND ZIMBABWE)

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CONTENTS

List of Figures	iii
List of Tables	iii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
Abbreviations and acronyms.....	x
INTRODUCTION	1
SAMP project background.....	1
Purpose and objectives of the review.....	2
METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS	3
Methodology	3
Limitations.....	5
EVALUATION FINDINGS	6
Observations on the Results Chains for Different Phases.....	6
Project design and evolving theory of action.....	6
Project management and budget	8
Relevance.....	11
Efficiency.....	14
Effectiveness.....	16
Impact	18
Sustainability.....	22
The Governance Interventions.....	26
LESSONS LEARNED.....	28
Developmental Lessons	28
Operational Lessons.....	29
CONCLUSIONS.....	30
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	33
<i>Recommendations to SDC</i>	33
<i>Recommendations to the boards of COEs</i>	35
<i>Recommendations to SAMP partners</i>	36
<i>Recommendations to other development sector agencies considering PSD, IBM and SE</i>	37

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1: SAMP Phases and Timeline</i>	2
<i>Figure 2: Final Theory of Action</i>	7

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1: Project budget</i> _____	10
<i>Table 2: COEs Funding Status under SAMP 3 and SAMP 3+</i> _____	11
<i>Table 3: Interfaces and Causes of Friction between Actors</i> _____	32

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In the period 2010 to 2019, the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) supported a Seeds and Markets Project (SAMP) whose aim was to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers (SHFs) through enhanced access to quality seeds and agricultural products market participation. The project, with total funding of slightly over USD18.3 million, was implemented over three phases (SAMP1, SAMP2, and SAMP3) and covered three countries (Eswatini, Lesotho and Zimbabwe). In 2019, SDC commissioned an evaluation covering the three phases of the project. This report presents the main findings of the evaluation. A supplementary stand-alone report has been produced covering country-specific findings and the various annexes.

The evaluation, informed by the 2018 SDC Evaluation Policy sought to assess the performance of the project on relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, gender, connectedness, and lessons learned. The evaluation utilised available literature, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, case studies, a household survey and a reflexive approach to validate findings. While the evaluation faced several limitations, these limitations did not affect the overall analysis, observations and recommendations of the evaluation team.

KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Relevance

SAMP addressed key issues that potentially contributed to the realisation of Sustainable Development Goals 1 (No Poverty) and 2 (No Hunger). The evaluation found that the supported interventions were highly relevant as they addressed critical issues in rural household livelihoods and resilience in Southern Africa. Key areas addressed included:

- access to diverse and quality seed and access to markets;
- knowledge of good agricultural practices including conservation farming that responded to issues of environment and climate change;
- knowledge about food preparation and consumption that responds to issues of childhood stunting, general malnutrition and HIV and AIDS;
- addressing gender norms that disadvantage women and limit the benefits they derive from engaging in agriculture;
- mainstreaming of HIV and AIDS in agriculture interventions; and
- training of SHFs in financial literacy, including internal savings and loans (ISAL).

Project design and management

The project was managed flexibly and adaptively, thus allowing for evolution in approach, content and expected results over time. Important changes included: shifts from working with individual farmers to farmers' groups to community-owned enterprises (COEs); inclusion of nutrition, gender, and social inclusion, ISAL and HIV and AIDS; and expansion of geographic coverage through the COEs. As a result of the flexible and adaptive approach, at its completion, the project had not only benefitted participating farmers through various interventions contributing to their livelihoods but also established four companies (Masvingo Food

Commodities and Zimbabwe Super Seeds in Zimbabwe, Lehakoe Seed Company in Lesotho and Tshala Seed Enterprise in Eswatini) with the potential to not only extend the reach of project interventions but also sustain them in perpetuity. An immediate implication of the learning and adaptation approach is that the observed benefits of the project represent the distilled good practices and understate the costs of learning. While adaptation was informed by learning, the documentation of the lessons informing various adaptations made was not systematic.

Efficiency

Assessment of programming efficiency in adaptive programmes is inherently biased against the programmes. Drawing on hindsight, the assessment uses information that project managers would not have had at the project start. For this reason, the evaluation did not focus on programming efficiency. Instead, the focus was on the efficiency of resource utilisation. The analysis of resource utilisation was constrained by the budget format that only links a small proportion of the budget to results. A significant part (upwards of 70%, except for the first phase) of the budget fell into a ‘black box’ that included management and support costs with under 30% falling into ‘administrated funds’ directly linked to results. But even for the ‘administrated funds’ there were budget items with no country-level specificity. Attempting to assign the costs of long and short-term consultancies and related travel to results without a breakdown relating these results would render the exercises purely academic and with a high margin of error. To avoid being trapped in legacy allocations, the evaluation examined the structures for project delivery in the final years of SAMP3 (the assumption being that these, as with the technical aspects of the project, represented good practice arising from accumulated experience). Based on key informant interviews, questions arose on the delivery structures and roles of parts thereof. The contractual arrangements between SDC and the various managing agencies carried inherent risks of inefficiency in resource utilisation and offered little if any incentives for efficient cost management. While it may be the case that actual management costs were within what would be considered the norm by other development agencies, the budget formats did not allow for confirmation. Areas that stood out as having carried the potential for cost-saving and could have been reconfigured included head offices, field personnel, field offices, and the placement of regional roles and long term and short-term experts. Unlike the program aspects of the project, the administrative arrangements of Head Quarters, Regional Management Unit (RMU), Field Coordinating Offices (FCO) and long- and short-term consultants were maintained through phases without flexibility and adaptivity.

Effectiveness

SAMP has, across its phases, delivered the expected outputs (changes in capacities). The outputs led to the expected outcomes (changes in performance). Across a range of indicators, the farmers that have interacted with the project are better-off than their peers (with-without comparison). This observation was valid across countries and interventions and was confirmed by data, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The evaluation was unable to conclude whether or not SAMP farmers had always enjoyed some benefits over the comparison group (absence of recruitment bias). In Lesotho, the project inherited farmers who had previously been supported by FAO. In Zimbabwe, the project worked with irrigation and non-irrigation farmers. Group formation and member recruitment criteria were unclear. Possible biases include selection that picked farmers who were already strong performers (endowed with assets and skills) and could have achieved similar income results without project intervention. Multi-season recall data for Zimbabwe suggests that in some seasons the SAMP farmers enjoyed no income advantage over non-SAMP farmers. Disaggregation of the data into

irrigation and dryland farming suggests that dryland SAMP farmers enjoyed consistent income advantages over non-SAMP farmers. The advantage was mainly attributable to crop sales. Dryland seed farmers enjoyed no advantage in two of three seasons. On irrigated land, there was no consistent income advantage for SAMP farmers. The Zimbabwe data suggest that dryland farmers benefitted most from seed farming. While SAMP female-headed households enjoyed an income advantage over non-SAMP female-headed households, they were consistently out-performed by male-headed households on both irrigation and dryland irrespective of whether male-headed households were SAMP or non-SAMP farmers. The data also showed that farmers were mostly aged. A small sample prevented similar analysis for Eswatini. In Lesotho, SAMP worked only with dryland farmers and seed growers enjoyed income advantages over non-seed growers. The Zimbabwe data points to operational issues at the company level as being important in the extent to which farmers realised benefits from participating in SAMP. In the case of Zimbabwe, the growth of companies (volumes traded and geographic areas covered) did not always translate to improved benefits for the same group of farmers. Some farmers dropped out between seasons, and new farmers came on board.

Impact

SAMP had multi-level impacts. It contributed to the transformations of the seed sector by demonstrating a model of seed production that involves smallholder farmers. It provided a route for reducing the time lapse between variety development and availability to farmers. The project contributed to improved market access for SHFs and linkages to outlets they otherwise would not access. At the household level, SAMP contributed to household wellbeing through direct income gains, cost savings on seed purchases, access to farm input loans, improvements in dietary knowledge and consumption, HIV and AIDS impact mitigation, addressed gender roles and improved financial literacy. It also contributed to increased farmers' resilience against environment and climate change shocks as participating farmers enjoyed better yields and incomes than non-participating farmers in seasons with adverse conditions.

Some benefits of the project had a wider reach. Key among these was the production of OPV seed and bio-fortified beans whose reach spread the benefits of the project beyond the participating farmers and contributed to national seed sovereignty. Key questions that arose at the end of the project related to sustainability. Closely related to sustainability is value-for-money. The SAMP intervention has been a substantial investment. It cannot be justified based solely on the farmers reached. The true worth of the investment is in what extension personnel noted as the significant difference between SAMP and other development interventions in the project districts in Zimbabwe, that:

‘unlike other projects that come and go, SAMP is leaving something tangible in the community that has the potential to continue to grow and provide benefits in perpetuity’.

This observation also holds for Eswatini and Lesotho when considering the social and economic infrastructure established by the project in the form of farmers' associations and COEs and the capacitation of national seed units.

Sustainability

SAMP delivered results at different levels from household-level knowledge and skills to systems transformation. Some transformations, particularly those at the household level are self-sustaining while those that are systemic require further nurturing for continuity. Key to sustainability are extents to which the COEs are well-managed, operate profitably and provide

tangible benefits for farmers. The companies operate in a space that has not attracted large players owing to high costs and high risks. The evaluation examined business models, experiences and strategic plans. Overall, the COEs were found to be works-in-progress that required nurturing and protection from internal and external risks. Discussions of future directions offer both causes for optimism and cause for concern. The COEs attracting attention from the development community and expanding their geographic reach was a testimony to the efficacy of the approach. Examination of the strategic plans for the COEs and their quest for financial success brought to the fore the tensions between developmental objectives and the for-profit imperative. To meet the for-profit objectives, the COEs must cut back on some of the benefits they offer farmers like preferential pricing. To cut back on those benefits defeats the ends that justified the investment in their formation. An acceptable balance between smallholder farmers benefiting as producers and owners of the companies on the one hand and while on the other, the enterprises achieving sustainability through implementing strategies that typical private sector firms would adopt is required. Achieving the balance calls for stronger boards and clearer guiding charters for the firms.

Alongside the required nurturing of firms for sustainability will be that of National Seeds Units in Lesotho and Eswatini to develop capacities to continue to access parent material for the early germinating seed to supply to the COEs for multiplication by SHFs. Alternatively, an ecosystem type approach that directly links the COEs and the seed breeders for mutual support could be developed so as to avoid a uniform; one size fits all, institutional support arrangements in the three countries. This would also require some policy advocacy work to ensure an enabling environment for the ecosystem.

Cross-cutting Issues

Interventions on cross-cutting issues of gender and nutrition demonstrated the efficacy of the adopted tools and methods at impacting households. The approach to delivery limited reach beyond the immediate environs of the project beneficiaries. Continuity through peer-to-peer mechanisms offered little scope for continuous reinforcement and growth for reached farmers and scaling the reach of the investment. HIV and AIDS received some attention, as did financial literacy, including ISAL, while the youth was not a deliberate focus. Key actors saw the cross-cutting issues as not being part of the core business of private companies. Against these realities, the cross-cutting areas would have benefitted from separate strategies that were sensitive to the inherent tensions between social and commercial objectives. Policy advocacy, though not one of the project streams received attention in Lesotho where SAMP supported the redrafting of the Seed Policy which was approved by the Government and awaited the enactment of Seed Legislation. In the interim, SAMP had also capacitated the National Seed Unit.

LESSONS

Developmental Lessons

L1. Projects that are adaptive require periodic reflection, agreements on what is working well, what needs to be changed, and, aspects and expected outcomes of adaptation. Documentation of the reflection processes and their outcomes is key for steering the programme, communication and evaluation.

L2: The Theory of Action (TOA) is a useful tool for communicating what will be done to bring about change. A well-articulated TOA allows for potential challenges to sustainability to be identified early in the life of a project.

L3: SHFs could grow certified seed and SHFs benefit from interventions to support participation in commodity markets. Establishing companies for the benefit of smallholder farmers requires that there be clarity on the benefits for farmers and how the tensions between inclusiveness and profitability are to be managed.

L4: Private sector development interventions require clarity on objectives (what is to be achieved), the intended beneficiaries (for whom), acceptable strategies (the how), and awareness of risks associated with the interventions (tracking of performance and compliance with principles).

L5: Setting up COEs is a process that requires time, education on the part of communities and SHFs and collective visioning and purpose and establishing governance structures to superintend on the establishment of management and administrative structures.

L6: Inadequate safeguards in the form of complaint mechanisms and tracking of issues and their resolution leads to mistrust and undermines farmers' confidence in businesses intended for their benefit.

L7: Projects that seek to influence food value chains or seeds and market systems need to be long term and with room to evolve by being responsive to beneficiaries' needs. The evolution is only possible if the funding partner and implementing agencies are open and willing to learn and innovate based on project experience as SAMP demonstrated.

L8: Absence of a Seed Legislation/Act disadvantages Lesotho on regional initiatives. For example, according to some KIs, Lesotho lost out on the Harmonised Seed Protocols (HASPs) with FARNPAN when countries like Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Zambia benefited from the SDC funding aimed at strengthening their seed regulatory frameworks.

L9: Training on the cross-cutting issues equips the household to effectively handle the interactions of these forces on the household as a central player in the seeds and markets systems. The delivery of the cross-cutting issues needs to be thought through carefully to ensure it is done in a way that provides reach, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

L10: For projects involving market linkages, commercial entities, like banks and insurance companies and the like get interested where there is a success as was the case in Lesotho with Zenith Horizon Insurance Company and Standard Lesotho Bank that took a keen interest in weather index insurance and farming loans towards the end of SAMP. While such interest may arise from demonstrated success, in other cases, deliberate investments in developing interest and promoting participation are needed.

L11: The successful operation of seed-producing businesses requires access to adequate funding that enables the business to make timely payments to producers and cover operating

costs while processing and marketing seed. Inadequate capital leads to farmers bearing additional costs and exposed to inflation.

Operational Lessons

L12: On contractors (e.g. project implementing agencies) it is best to include registration in all operation countries as one of the preconditions than to contract based on a commitment to registration as delayed or failed registration can adversely impact delivery effectiveness and efficiency.

L13: Using former implementing partners staff to start COEs is beneficial in that it transfers skills from the implementing partner to the COEs. However, it also carries power dynamics whose possible negative effects should be anticipated and planned for.

L14: Having appropriate structures for project management is not adequate to guide projects to achieve their full potential. Deliberate effort is needed to ensure the structures focus both on strategic and operational issues.

CONCLUSIONS

SAMP was implemented at a time when the Donor Committee on Enterprise Development (DCED) was beginning to develop standards and guidance on private sector development (PSD), inclusive business models (IBM) and social enterprise (SE). While issues addressed by SAMP through COEs and the challenges faced, together with some of the attempted intervention models are covered in the literature, the timing of the project and its adaptive nature meant that none of the guidance could quite fit the final COEs model under SAMP. Rather, SAMP had much to contribute to the intervention models (positive and negative lessons, as well as risks). The COEs intervention under SAMP straddled justifications for IBM while operationally having the characteristics of SE.

The evaluation concluded that the SAMP intervention demonstrated models of working, integration of multiple objectives and useful tools for gender and nutrition promotion. The observed level of benefits was narrower than could have been achieved with the investment.

The adaptive nature of the project carried risks whose effects were evident at evaluation. These included:

- The project agenda being broad such that the content of the project could expand while remaining relevant;
- Loss of focus between people as beneficiaries (farmers and household members) and the mechanisms for achieving project ends (companies);
- Having the right content but leaving its delivery to mechanisms that may not be ready or suited for its delivery (for example while gender equality should be an issue for the COEs, issues of household level dynamics while beneficial to society are not well placed in COEs' operations);
- Inadequate attention to within delivery mechanism issues and challenges;
- The dominance of operational issues over strategic considerations (such as the commitments to farmers, implications of scaling, and, building of scaling and continuity for cross-cutting interventions, among others);

- Inadequate learning arising from too broad a range of issues, inadequate theoretical grounding and incomplete documentation (while there are progress reports these do not provide information on the rationale for changes. For example, the Palladium Phase included profiling of project activities on a website. The page was discontinued and some of the previously profiled interventions were discontinued. This raised the importance of not only reporting progress but also sharing why some strategies were altered or replaced); and
- Challenges in designing appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems for the many aspects built into the project.

SAMP could have benefitted from:

- stronger strategic oversight and guidance
- stronger monitoring, and
- earlier placement of evaluation

The final validation workshop confirmed the existence of an oversight committee made up of key stakeholders. There emerged a consensus that there was an insufficient balance between strategic guidance and focus on operational issues. A stronger focus on strategy could have impacted decisions on partnerships and innovation. For example, a more deliberate and strategic reflection on partnerships for the delivery of components could have achieved household transformations while building actor capacities to sustain and expand coverage. The innovations in the project were dynamic in terms of attempting different means of attaining set objectives but less innovative in using the multi-country dimensions of the project. While on the one hand, the operational realities suggested the potential for an ecosystem operating across the three countries to enable local seed production, the strategic thrust appears to have remained rooted in seeking to create three similar but independent systems.

Retrospective analysis of SAMP suggests that the project could have benefitted from stronger theoretical grounding, comparison to experiences of interventions sharing similar objectives and/or approaches and strategies¹, clarity on the expected changes for farmers, tracking of the incidence of benefits, and monitoring and evaluation focused on strategic aims rather than tracking the delivery of outputs. The timing of the evaluation at the end of the project represented a lost opportunity to focus the final year of the project towards addressing operational issues, strategic orientation, scaling of impact, and strengthening the prospects for sustainability. Also, in the event of an extension, an early end evaluation would allow room for project redesigning without creating a project oversight gap.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to SDC

Issue: SAMP had several loose end interventions such as the COEs turnaround strategies, the continued supply of foundation seed materials to COEs and the appropriate nesting of cross-cutting issues for scaling up and sustainability. These warranted investments to see them to

¹ Examples include FAO and DECD literature on PSD and IBM.

completion and contribute to COE governance, strategy and effectiveness and scaling up and sustainability of initiatives beyond SAMP.

Recommendation 1: Consider a low cost two to three-year intervention to address issues outlined in recommendations 2 to 8.

Recommendation 2: Provide support for the consolidation of COEs learning and governance.

Recommendation 3: Refine the strategy for the intra-household focused interventions of gender, nutrition, HIV & AIDS, and labour-saving technologies to match the replicability and portability of the interventions that are driven by the COEs.

Recommendation 4: Revisit the productivity strategies in support of farmers, explore viable options, and support implementation.

Recommendation 5: Support the further development of the COEs to ensure the sustainability of the businesses.

Recommendation 6: Revisit and support work to facilitate access to EGS parent material.

Recommendation 7: Explore a sub-regional ecosystem/network type approach to the challenges faced by the COEs.

Recommendation 8: Provide support to COE boards to engage in strategic conversations and shape the implementation of recommendations 1 to 7.

Issue: The budgeting approach adopted in SAMP resulted in a disconnect between the results and expenditures. Such disconnects have implications for the efficiency of spending as well as the estimation of value-for-money.

Recommendation 9: SDC should, to the extent possible, consider adopting a results-based approach to planning and budgeting.

Recommendation 10: SDC should consider making guidance/templates available to partners to make better use of planning tools such as the TOC and TOA.

Recommendation 11: In projects that have several components, consideration should be given to developing separate, coherent and complementary strategies for the achievement of project objectives. For each component, attention must be paid to completeness (objectives, target groups, means of delivery, sustainability, monitoring, review and adaptation).

Recommendations to the boards of COEs

Issue: There exist tensions between the commercial interests of the COEs and their developmental goals.

Recommendation 12: The COE boards should develop company charters to set guiding frameworks for strategic and operational decisions and to provide reference points for the maintenance of acceptable balance between competing objectives.

Issue: Strategy development for the COEs has tended towards the character and practices of established seed and commodity firms. Copying the strategies of the larger long-established firms underplays the true nature of the COEs and may result in missed opportunities.

Recommendation 13: COE boards should embrace and optimise on COEs being private sector development (PSD) initiatives towards the reduction of poverty and use this identity to set themselves apart from other market actors.

Issue: The COEs in the three countries face a variety of issues. Viewed collectively, there is scope for the COEs to work together in ways that assist all of them to overcome their most pressing viability and sustainability challenges.

Recommendation 14: The COEs should explore the potential for partnerships in which they can assist each other overcome the challenges they face.

Recommendations to SAMP partners

Recommendation 15: SAMP partners should draw on the lessons of SAMP to establish and/or support innovative ways of promoting community development.

Recommendations to other development sector agencies considering PSD, IBM and SE

Recommendation 16: Learn from the SAMP model.

Recommendation 17: Build on the lessons from SAMP to support inclusive interventions that have the potential to deliver benefits in perpetuity.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBI	Crop Breeding Institute
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre
CF	Contract farming
COE	Community-Owned Enterprise
DAR	Department of Agricultural Research
DARS	Department of Agricultural Research Services
DCED	Donor Community on Enterprise Development
DOC	Department of Crops
DSQC	Department of Seed Quality Control
EGS	Early Germination Seed
ESWADE	Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FCO	Field Coordinating Offices
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GALS	Gender Action and Learning System
HaSSP	Harmonised Seed Security Programme
IBM	Inclusive Business Model
ISAL	Internal Savings and Lending
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
LNL	Lusuthu Neluboyane Luyasondla (Pty) Ltd
LSC	Lehakoe Seed Company
LSGA	Lesotho Seed Growers Association
LUSIP	Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project
M & S	Mgulugulu and Sihlase
MD	Managing Director
MFC	Masvingo Food Commodities
MoAFS	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSIMA	New Seed Initiative for Maize in Africa
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPV	Open Pollinated Varieties
PSD	Private Sector Development
RMU	Regional Management Unit
RSDA	Rural Self-Help Development Association
SAMP	Seeds and Markets Project
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation
SE	Social Enterprise
SHF	Small Holder Farmer
SNAU	Swaziland National Agricultural Union
TOA	Theory of Action
TOC	Theory of Change
TSE	Tshala Seed Enterprise
WFP	World Food Programme
ZSS	Zimbabwe Super Seeds

INTRODUCTION

SAMP PROJECT BACKGROUND

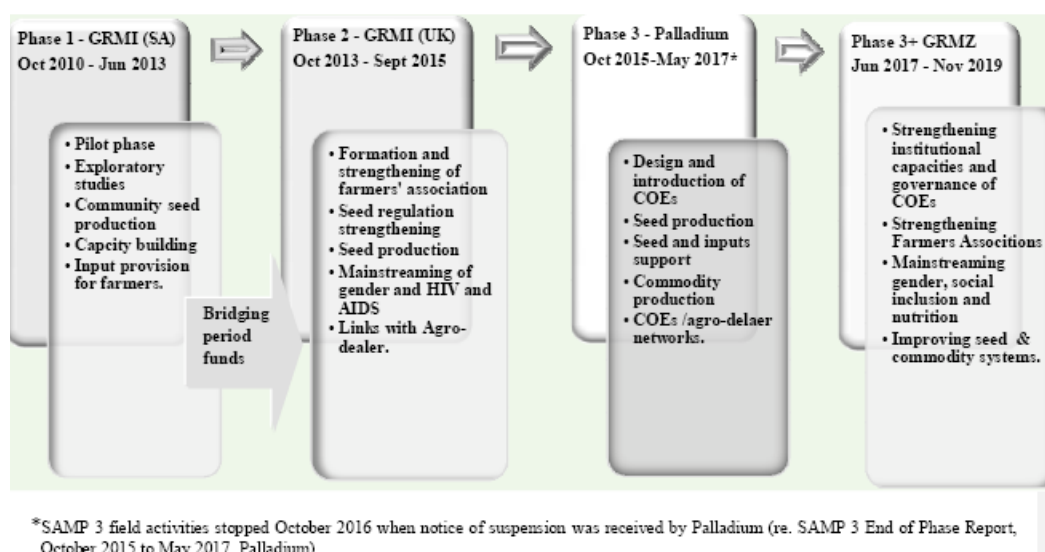
The Seeds and Markets Project is a Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) mandated project implemented from 2010 to 2019 across Zimbabwe, Eswatini, and Lesotho. The overall project goal was to improve the food and nutrition security of smallholder farmers in the three countries. A combination of the continuum and contiguum approaches to relief, rehabilitation, and development initiatives was adopted as the project evolved through three phases (Figure 1). SAMP was one of many interventions supported by SDC to improve seed security for smallholder farmers in Southern Africa. Other interventions included seed policy and regulatory harmonization through the Harmonized Seed Security Programme (HaSSP), research into new, improved varieties of maize through the New Seed Initiative for Maize in Africa (NSIMA) and, the consolidation of local knowledge and practices on seeds to better resilience through Seeds Knowledge Initiative (SKI).

The first phase of the project (SAMP 1) running from 2010 to 2013 was mandated to GRM International, based in South Africa, and focused on the production of certified seed by smallholder farmers targeting all levels of communities from the self-sufficient to the destitute covering inputs support to the chronically poor but able, partial or subsidised inputs to the transiently poor and benefits of improved technology and markets to all. The second phase (SAMP 2) from 2013 to 2015 was contracted to GRM International based in the UK. This phase focused on the broader aspects of the seed value chain by extending interventions into seed regulation strengthening, support to seed associations and agro-dealer networks. The third phase (SAMP 3) from 2016 to 2019 was initially mandated to Palladium International² to establish and strengthen Community Owned Seed and Commodity Enterprises (COEs³) and providing a range of services including financing, early generation seed access and facilitating markets for seed and commodities. SDC contracted the second half of SAMP 3, June 2017 to November 2019, to GRM International Zimbabwe (GRMZ) a locally registered management contractor. This phase focused on capacity building, developing a whole value chain approach to seed and commodity production and supporting the supply and demand side to promote sustainability of the COEs. The phase also focused on strengthening COEs governance and systems. Other initiatives including mainstreaming of gender, HIV, nutrition and financial literacy and Internal Savings and Lending (ISAL) were incorporated in the project in the three countries.

² Formerly GRM International.

³ Developed from the farmer seed associations/cooperatives.

FIGURE 1: SAMP PHASES AND TIMELINE



It is noteworthy that at the end of Phase 1 in June 2013, SDC agreed to fund a three month, July to September 2013 “*Bridging Period*” until the start of Phase 2 in October 2013. The bridging period was important for project continuity, and the bridging funds were reported to have allowed for a seamless transition to an expanded and enhanced programme for SAMP2 without a break in agricultural seasons.⁴ By contrast, in the transition between Palladium and GRMZ, there was a window of potential managing agency oversight gap for the SAMP project. This was probably due to the Palladium contract termination in the middle of the Phase, the search for a new contractor, and SDC/new managing agency contract negotiations.

The project targeted four districts in Zimbabwe (Gutu, Chivi, Masvingo and Zaka) and had spillover to five other districts (Mwenezi, Chiredzi, Mberengwa, Mutasa and Makoni), three districts in Eswatini (Hhohho, Lubombo and Manzini) and five in Lesotho (Berea, Butha-Buthe, Leribe, Mafeteng and Maseru Rural). In the three countries, the project was implemented in partnership with, among others, government extension services and research institutions, international research institutions, farmers’ associations or cooperatives and market actors, including agro-dealers.

As the project drew to an end, SDC commissioned an independent end of project evaluation for the entire SAMP since 2010 to assess impact and accountability and draw learnings. The evaluation was conducted from September to November 2019, culminating in this report.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

The purpose of the end of project evaluation is to fulfil SDC requirements for assessing the impact of the project, accountability, learning and informing future design processes. The evaluation was informed by the SDC Evaluation Policy (2018). At SDC, evaluations serve three inter-related

⁴ GRMI, SAMP Bridging Period Report - July to September 2013, December 2013.

purposes, namely: learning; evidence-based decision-making and steering of programmes and projects; and, accountability. The specific objectives of the SAMP evaluation were to:

- Assess achievements towards the planned outputs and outcomes of the project,
- test assumptions based on the theory of change (TOC) and whether TOC was relevant and effective, and
- make recommendations for a possible new commercial seed project.⁵

The SDC Evaluation Policy requires that evaluations meet eight principles of usefulness, feasibility, correctness, quality and reliability, participation, impartiality and independence, transparency, and partnership. The policy further outlines eight criteria for evaluation, namely: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, connectedness, coverage, coherence and coordination. Terms of Reference for the SAMP evaluation made specific reference to OECD criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. The evaluation, therefore, combined the SDC Evaluation Policy criteria with the OECD criteria, intending to satisfy the different anticipated users including SDC, GRM International Zimbabwe, Governments of Eswatini, Lesotho and Zimbabwe and other stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was conducted through seven stages, namely: literature review; inception report development; theory of action reflections; fieldwork for primary and secondary data collection; data collation, analysis, and report drafting; validation workshops; and final report preparation and submission. SDC and GRM Zimbabwe availed 108 documents⁶ for review to the evaluation team at the start of the evaluation exercise. For the literature review, these documents were grouped into seven categories (contracting, project documents, work plans, monitoring and evaluation, progress reporting, other reports, and presentations) to facilitate the identification of information gaps and engagement on additional documentation. In addition to these documents, the evaluation team gathered and reviewed independent literature on robust seed systems, seed systems resilience, experiences of other donors in supporting food security and food systems, FAO Sustainable Seed Systems Assessment conceptual framework and tools, risk management in seed systems, Private Sector Development (PSD), Value Chain Development, Resilient Agriculture and Women Economic Empowerment approaches and indicators. The preliminary literature review focusing on the four SAMP work streams of (a) enabling access to quality and diverse seeds (b) COEs model (c) value chain analysis, and (d) cross-cutting issues, informed the production of an inception report detailing evaluators' understanding of SAMP and the evaluation assignment, proposed methodology, draft tools and work plan. A draft inception report was shared with SDC and review comments were received and addressed.

Based on the revised inception report, a key stakeholder meeting was organised in Harare on 2nd October to reflect on consultants' understanding of the project as a whole and more specifically

⁵ Seeds and Markets End of Project Evaluation Terms of Reference – 2019

⁶ Additional documents were received during the evaluation exercise.

the project theory of action and the evaluation questions. Participants to the meeting included representatives of SDC, GRMZ, CIMMYT, Zimbabwe Seed Services Institute, Zimbabwe Crop Breeding Institute (CBI), Zimbabwe Super Seeds (ZSS) and the SAMP evaluation team. Feedback from the Harare reflection meeting was incorporated into a revised inception report that was then approved by SDC to guide the rest of the evaluation exercise. Similar reflection meetings were conducted in Lesotho and Eswatini at the start of fieldwork in the two countries to address country differences. The Lesotho reflection meeting was attended by representatives of Lehakoe Seed Company (LSC), GRM, Department of Agricultural Research (DAR), Rural Self-Help Development Association (RSDA), Zenith Horizon Insurance and the SAMP evaluation team. The Eswatini meeting was attended by representatives of Tshala Seed Enterprise (TSE), Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS), Department of Seed Quality Control (DSQC), Swaziland National Agriculture Union (SNAU), GRM Eswatini, Eswatini Bank and the evaluation team. The reflection meetings were important for key stakeholders' buy-in and contribution to the design of the evaluation exercise.

Secondary data was collected from a literature review at the start of the evaluation and through fieldwork. Primary data, to fill gaps identified from the literature review, was gathered from Key Informants Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and household surveys in the three countries. Among the Key Informants (KIs) interviewed were representatives of SDC, current and former staff of the different GRMs and Palladium, Government Extension Services, Research Institutes, COEs management, and Board members, agro-dealers, farmers' associations, and other stakeholders. A list of KIIs is given as an Annex to the supplementary report. In Lesotho, four FGDs involving 48 farmers (22 women and 26 men) were conducted; in Eswatini, four FGDs involving 38 farmers (21 women and 17 men) were conducted; and in Zimbabwe, four FGDs involving 33 farmers (17 women and 16 men) were conducted. The tools used for data collection and the lists of KIIs and FGDs conducted in the three countries are given as Annexes in the supplementary report.

Household surveys of COEs contracted farmers and non-contracted farmers as control groups were conducted in project districts in the three countries. Table summarises the sample sizes for the three countries. The final sample sizes across the three countries were adjusted from those estimated at the start of the evaluation. In Eswatini and Lesotho, the adjustments were occasioned by the reduced numbers of active farmers and the unavailability of some farmers during the data collection period. In Zimbabwe, the adjustments were occasioned by an improved understanding of the geographic presence of COE activities. The Zimbabwe sample was revisited to enhance the quality of within area estimates. Thus, rather than aim for representativeness across all the districts that the COEs worked in, the emphasis was placed on the founding districts and obtaining valid estimates between different land-use types (irrigation versus rain-fed) and within locality differences.

TABLE 1: HOUSEHOLD SURVEY SAMPLE SIZES

Group	Category	Zimbabwe*		Lesotho**		Eswatini***	
		Number	Sample	Number	Sample	Number	Sample
Seed analysis	Shareholder & non-shareholder producers seed producers	1043	322	88 (83)	57	75	54
	Non-COE contracted farmers (control group)	-	197	-	54	-	56
	Sub-total	1043	519	88 (83)	111	75	110

Commodity producers	Shareholder & non-shareholder commodity producers	780	161	-	-	-	-
	Non-COE contracted farmers (control group)		108	-	-	-	-
	Sub-total		269	-	0	-	-
	Totals	1823	788	88 (83)	111	75	110

* For Zimbabwe, the COE-provided numbers of farmers were higher than the actual numbers with many farmers that had previously produced for the COEs having dropped out.

**For Lesotho, project documents had 103 contracted farmers. In the field, Farmers' Associations confirmed 88 active members of which three farmers were indicated as having just pulled out of the Seed Growers Associations, and two of these declined to be interviewed. Another three farmers were ill at the time of fieldwork, with one of them in hospital, and could, therefore, not be interviewed. This left the number of contracted farmers that could potentially be interviewed at 83.

***Eswatini data from the GRM showed the number of farmers in associations was 79, and thus the sample size was mapped at 66 and 33 non-contracted farmers. However, on the ground, the evaluation team found the numbers were lower as some farmers had left the associations. Also, some farmers in the associations were not willing to be interviewed because of problems with Tshala. The final available farmers to be interviewed lowered the sample size of contracted farmers to 54 and increased the non-contracted to 56.

At the end of the fieldwork, data collation and analysis, the evaluators took preliminary findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the stakeholders in the field in the three countries for validation. Following field-level validation, a key stakeholder validation exercise was conducted in Harare after which a final report was produced.

LIMITATIONS

On the whole, the conduct of the SAMP end evaluation was reasonably smooth with a few challenges during fieldwork. Among the challenges encountered were:

- tight schedule coupled with the exercise coming at a time GRMZ had closed its FCOs in the three countries,
- movements and changes of key implementing agencies personnel between the start of the project in 2010 and its end in 2019,
- difficulties in securing appointments with some key informants in Zimbabwe,
- inconsistencies in numbers of COEs contracted farmers between records supplied for preliminary literature review and what was obtaining on the ground necessitating revisions of samples in the field,
- data collection for the evaluation coming soon after GRMZ gathered similar data from the same farmers,
- some farmers being unwilling to participate in the evaluation owing to grievances related to payment issues,
- a long recall period for respondents entailed by evaluation coverage from 2010 to 2019,
- lack of clarity on the categorisation of farmers that had dropped out and the income estimates on payments that were yet to be received, and
- the multiplicity of activities competing for farmers' time during the fieldwork (for example, social engagements across the countries, and state distribution of free inputs and social welfare grain in Zimbabwe).

The evaluation team went around these challenges, mainly by making adjustments to the data collection approach, triangulation, and country-specific validation exercises. The team used cost-saving methods of reaching farmers for household interviews in Lesotho and Eswatini, like requesting them to assemble at their usual meeting centres for the household survey interviews

and FGDs. The resultant budget savings were then used to cover the increased costs of fieldwork in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, the fieldwork team was trained and equipped with tablets and allowed an extended period for data collection. GPS coordinates and respondent photos were used as quick validation of the existence of interviewees. Additional team members (a data support assistant handling all data, and a field assistant assisting with case studies, focus group discussions and KII) were recruited and a WhatsApp group used for continuous contact and communication between the team members.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

OBSERVATIONS ON THE RESULTS CHAINS FOR DIFFERENT PHASES

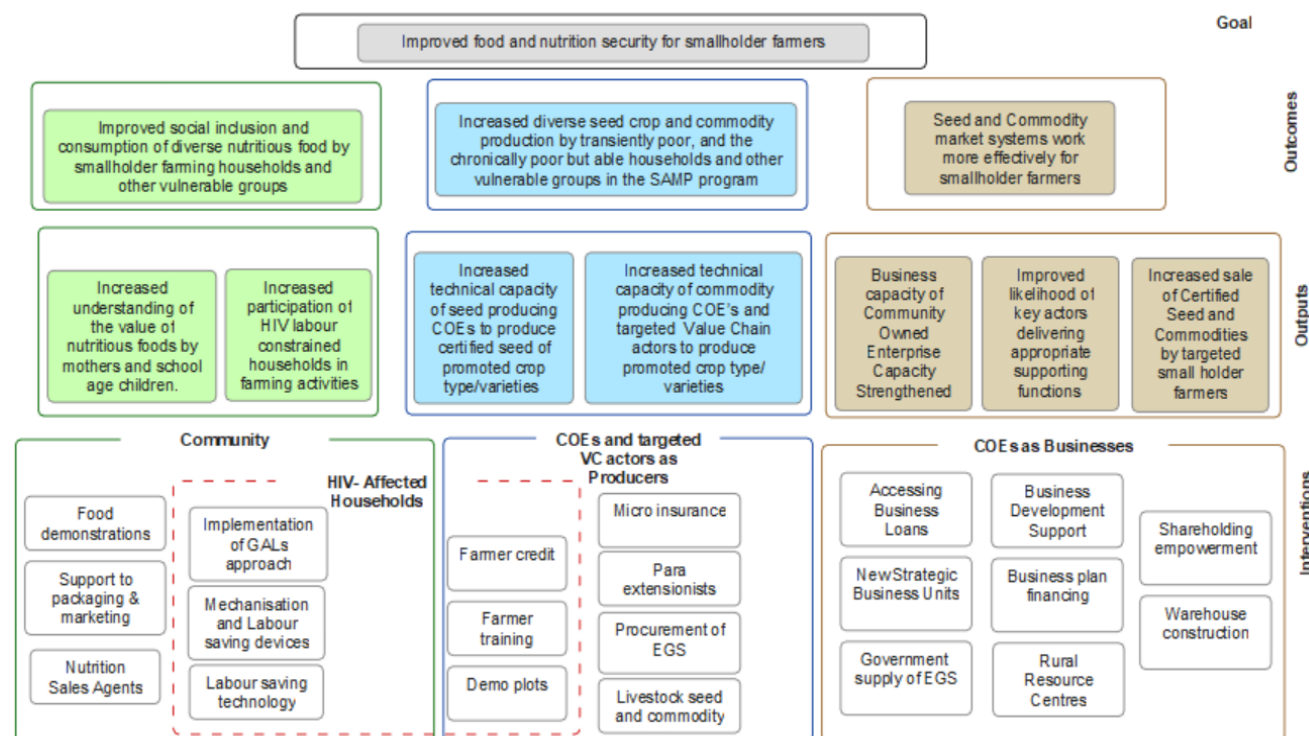
The results chains for the different phases present a mixed picture on levels of results. Whereas the bulk of outputs for the SAMP3+ are at the level of capacities and products, the outputs in earlier phases were a mix of capacities and performance. A key challenge seems to have been the separation of processes, products, and performance. The effect was that strategies were in places stated as outputs or outcomes such that changes in strategies affected the results chains and distorted the continuity of focus. For example, access to seed remained a constant focus. However, the strategies towards such access changed over time from engaging large firms, to developing agro-dealer networks to developing community-owned enterprises (COEs). On the other hand, there were also struggles in specifying outcomes with these at times being stated at immediate or intermediate level, for example specifying the changes in behaviours or practices at levels other than those of farmers would be immediate outcomes as that could either be specified as such or be lowered to output rather than positioned at outcome level.

PROJECT DESIGN AND EVOLVING THEORY OF ACTION

PROJECT EVOLUTION

The project evolved during implementation. At the start in 2010, it was just SAMP, and no one had envisaged it would go evolve in the way it did over Phases. At the start the project goal was *‘improved seed security strategies and policies adopted in the Southern Africa Region’*, and the purpose was *‘improved availability and access to quality seed by target households in the countries involved’* (re. Mid-term review, March 2012). The project evolved in response to experiences on the ground increased understanding of farmers’ priority needs and learning by implementing agencies and SDC. Each phase had a proposal, with subsequent phases’ proposals building on previous ones. At the inception of a phase, a theory of action, a logframe and accompanying budget were developed by the implementing agency and approved by SDC. The phase documents were subject to amendment during the phase. Phase3+, for example, amended its logframe and annual budgets several times in consultation with SDC. **Error! Reference source not found.** depicts the final Theory of Action and from it can be seen how even the project goal evolved during the project cycle.

FIGURE 2: FINAL THEORY OF ACTION



The final Theory of Action (TOA) had 21 interventions placed in four boxes (colour-coded) that contributed to 3 clusters of outputs supporting 3 outcomes. The interventions in the TOA were presented as a mix of what was to be done and who was to be targeted. There was a degree of ambiguity on who was to deliver the different components. The evaluation developed and tested, with stakeholders, supplementary diagrams to clarify on actors, expected changes and pathways for change. The additional diagrams were adapted to reflect country differences.

In the three countries, the project focused on seed system-level interventions, product-market level interventions, and household system-level interventions. There were differences in emphases between countries. For the seed systems, support was provided to research institutions such as International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) and Crop Breeding Institute (CBI) in Zimbabwe, which provided seed parent material to Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS) in Eswatini and Department of Agricultural Research (DAR) in Lesotho for the production of foundation seed. Smallholder farmers working in farmers' associations/cooperatives/groups were supplied with Early Generation Seed (EGS) for multiplication. The associations/groups became the basis for the formation of COEs. The COEs supplied smallholder farmers with EGS and inputs like fertilisers on loan. The COEs and government research and extension services provided training on seed production, technical supervision, and inspection. The national seeds units inspected and certified seed. In Eswatini the project focused on beans and maize seed. In Lesotho, the initial focus was on maize and bean seed, but the former waned in the latter stages. In Zimbabwe, the focus was on beans, cowpeas, and maize. COEs bought seed from farmers, aggregated and processed and packaged and sold to agro-dealers and commodity producers. In Zimbabwe and Eswatini the COEs were also a market for commodities. In Lesotho, an NGO, Rural Self-Help Development Association (RSDA), working

to promote self-reliance among rural communities was brought in to stimulate demand for seed produced by COE. Owing to differences in country contexts, in Lesotho SAMP assumed a policy advocacy dimension supporting the redrafting of the National Seed Policy which was subsequently approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS). SAMP partners including DAR and RSDA advocated for the passing of Seed Legislation to, among other things, promote and protect local seed production and marketing. The policy work in Lesotho was in line with the SAMP March 2012 mid-term project review recommendation to increase attention to influencing policymakers and accelerate the implementation of the project's Knowledge Informing Use (KIU) strategy. The project design did not only evolve through phases but also in response to country opportunities and challenges and cumulative experiences with different types of interventions.

It is noteworthy that the real investments towards what each Phase sought to achieve were true for Phases 1, 2 and 3. The last Phase 3+, as the name suggests, was more to re-align and consolidate the Phase 3 initial investment, especially on COEs whose conceptual design had begun to show weaknesses. The real new investment during Phase 3+ was on the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues including gender and social inclusion through GALS training, HIV and AIDS effects mitigation, nutrition and dietary diversity as well as financial literacy encompassing ISALS, and strengthening the governance of COEs. The Phase 3+ new investments were relevant introductions to project focus in all three countries as affirmed by literature review, KIIs, FGDs and case studies. The cross-cutting issues were household system-level interventions which recognised the household as a seed and commodity producer, a user of seed and commodity, a player in the market place, and space where decisions relating outputs, income, and consumption are taken, and power relations are at play. It was recognised that there were strong relationships and interplay between gender, HIV/AIDS and nutrition, and dietary diversity.

Project design and theory of action evolution were possible because of several enabling factors including SDC's long term approach to programme funding, and the willingness to learn and innovate on the part of SDC and implementing partners.

The evaluation found that SDC worked with different, but closely associated, implementing agencies during the different project phases. The first two changes in implementing agency [GRM International registered in South Africa (SA)⁷ to GRM International (UK-based) to Palladium] was due to the institutional changes on the part of the implementing agency. The third change (Palladium to GRMZ) was due to contractual issues between SDC and the implementing agency. Despite changes in implementing agencies, key personnel remained through the life of the project, thus reducing the risk of loss of institutional memory, learning and experiences from previous phases. The retention of key personnel arose from the implementing agencies morphed from each other and inheriting staff from forerunner agencies.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

In all Phases, the implementing agencies managed the three projects in the three countries from a Regional Management Unit (RMU). Phase 1 was run by the South African -based and registered GRM International while Phase 2 was run by the UK based GRM International with

⁷ GRM -SA and GRM-ZIM were locally registered entities GRM International meant to allow for smooth operations.

regional offices in SA. Palladium based in Harare, Zimbabwe, managed phase 3. Palladium faced registration issues, and according to the Palladium End of Phase 3 report “*At the end of SAMP 2, Palladium committed to company registration in countries where it had no active registration. The Palladium Lesotho entity was registered and approved at the beginning of SAMP 3. Futures Group Global outreach in Swaziland was also reactivated to be used by the project. In Zimbabwe, Palladium continued to operate under GRM Zimbabwe with progress being made in the last few months to finalise Palladium Zimbabwe entity. In South Africa, the project continued to operate under Futures Group Global Outreach (South Africa).* The convoluted management arrangement that adversely impacted project delivery. GRM International Zimbabwe took over to implement Phase3+ and was also based in Harare.

It is noteworthy that in the transition between Palladium and GRMZ, there was a window of potential managing agency oversight gap for the SAMP project. The gap was six months, January 2016 to June 2017. between Phases3 and 3+.

Some of the potential pros and cons of switching implementing agencies have been touched on in the preceding section on project design and theory of action. In addition to these, KIIs had different perspectives in centralised management and finance systems employed by the different agencies and the roles of the FCOs. Views in favour of centralised systems cited uniformity of programming and systems in the three countries, and project activities oversight and accountability. Views against the centralised arrangement cited disempowerment of FCOs, top-heavy regional offices and hence a big overhead in terms of agency fees, and, disconnect with the day-to-day processes on the ground. Palladium, in particular, was singled out by many KIs as having been top-heavy and disconnected from the ground. Its key senior staff were said to have been in Dubai and UK where decisions were taken. Palladium’s Phase 3 budget had the highest allocation to HQ staff for a contractor at 6.33 per cent of total budget compared to 3.02 per cent, 4.13 per cent and 4.44 per cent for SAMP 1, 2 and 3+, respectively (re. Table 1). Many KIs also saw Palladium as having been a more commercially oriented agency running a development project. GRMZ was also considered top-heavy with several key informants across the countries questioning the value-added by some senior staff at the regional office in Harare to work on the ground considered unclear. Although GRMZ had the second-highest allocation to HQ staff for a contractor, it did not have Local Office Staff for Contractor costs, unlike the other three contractors. This was because GRMZ’s HQ based in Harare, Zimbabwe, served as the Project Management Unit (i.e. the Regional Management Unit).

Some KIs were of the view that most programme and management decisions were taken at the Regional Management Units leaving CFOs with administrative roles. The view of some KIs was that a structure where staff in CFOs would have some technical expertise in certain project thematic areas would have saved costs, improved decisions and contributed to better results. The project relied heavily on consultants for the delivery of cross-cutting issues initiatives.

The farmers’ associations did not directly feel changes in managing agencies and the farmers owing to field staff remain unchanged. The field staff also presented themselves as SAMP and by the name of implementing agency in charge at different points in time.

The evaluation explored the relationships between the agencies and institutions that were part of SAMP. At the institutional level, KIs considered the relations as cordial. SDC was said to have shown good donorship throughout the life of the project. It was said to be approachable, flexible, supportive and allowing implementing agency working space. Some KIs observed that SDC

became stricter and paid more attention to financial matters in SAMP 3+. The change was attributed to changes in personnel at SDC, and some adverse experiences in COEs, such as Tshala in Eswatini and Lehakoe in Lesotho.

Each SAMP phase had an SDC approved original budget included in the contract. The budget fixed the project cost limit. Table 1 summaries the original budgets for the different phases. The accompanying log frames focused on the administrated project funds components of the budgets. A review of the last SAMP 3+ log frame and the administrated project funds budget breakdown for the last three years of the project showed consistency with the outputs level of the final theory of action, indicating project-level activities were geared to deliver per the theory of action. There were one or more activities budgeted for each of the anticipated seven outputs per the theory of action. The achievements from these activities and the resultant impacts are discussed in Sections on project effectiveness and project impact, below.

TABLE 1: PROJECT BUDGET

Budget category	*SAMP 1 GRMI UK		Bridging Period GRMI UK		SAMP 2 GRMI SA		**SAMP 3 Palladium		SAMP 3+ GRMZ	
	US\$	% of total	US\$	% of total	US\$	% of total	US\$	% of total	US\$	% of total
HQ staff for contractor	112,720	3.02	5,340	1.52	174,530	4.13	629,795	6.33	261,830	4.44
Local Office Staff for contractor	116,760	3.13	9,700	2.77	399,046	9.45	201,257	2.02	-	-
Long-term experts	929,080	24.86	96,000	27.43	1,032,897	24.45	3,384,459	33.99	2,481,425	42.06
Short term experts (consultants)	255,343	6.83	52,952	15.13	459,492	10.88	1,691,865	16.99	604,860	10.25
Local support	791,409	21.18	64,000	18.29	699,754	16.57	1,290,974	12.97	820,700	13.91
Administrated project funds	1,528,758	40.91	122,000	34.86	1,458,000	34.52	2,758,000	27.70	1,731,068	29.34
Total project budget	3,736,954	100%	349,992	100%	4,223,719	100%	9,956,350	100%	5,899,883	100%

*Revised contract budget to include US\$488,838 to cover contract farming, a mid-term review and linking seed security knowledge use to policy work in Lesotho.

**This was budget to 30th November 2019 – contract terminated 31st May 2017. It is, therefore, assumed that the GRMZ budget for SAMP 3+ was the balance from the palladium Phase 3, which was terminated mid-way.

Source: SDC/implementing agencies contracts.

Table 2 represents the utilisation of the investment funds handled by Palladium in Phase 3 and GRMZ in Phase 3+. This was the spending on COEs in the three countries out of the ‘administrated funds’ that could be traced directly to specific COEs in the three countries.

TABLE 2: COES FUNDING STATUS UNDER SAMP 3 AND SAMP 3+

Country	Name of COE	Product	Grant Status	Current Size of Enterprise	Total grant funding disbursed (Including assets donated) as of May 31, 2017, under SAMP 3	*Total grant funding disbursed (including assets donated) under SAMP 3+	Total grant funding disbursed (including assets donated) under SAMP 3 and 3+
Lesotho	Lehakoe Seed Company	Seed & Crop Commodities	Active	Micro-Enterprise	140 172.00	351,689.05	491,861.05
	NEPO Sustainable Products	Crop Commodities	Terminated	N/A	39 784.00	Terminated	39,784.00
Swaziland	Tshala Seed Enterprise	Seed & Crop Commodities	Active	Micro-Enterprise	227 698.00	491,610.76	719,308.76
Zimbabwe	Masvingo Food Commodities	Crop Commodities	Active	Micro-Enterprise	281 308.00	210,934.72	492,242.72
	Zimbabwe Super Seeds	Seed	Active	Small-enterprise	228 044.00	144,513.79	372,557.79
TOTALS					917 006.00	1,198,748.32	2,115,754.32

Source: Palladium, SAMP 3 End of Phase Report, October 2015 – May 2017.
GRMZ, SAMP 3+ Expenditure by Year.

*SAMP 3+ expenditure figures for the third year were shown as estimates/forecasts.

RELEVANCE

Relevance was assessed based on programme content and programme approach.

PROGRAMME CONTENT

The relevance of SAMP and its interventions was assessed based on (a) literature review, (b) expert opinions, and (c) beneficiary perspectives.

The literature on smallholder farmer livelihoods highlights several vulnerabilities as well as diverse initiatives that have sought to respond to such vulnerabilities. SAMP addressed key issues that potentially contributed to the realisation of Sustainable Development Goals 1 (No Poverty) and 2 (No Hunger). In addition, within the context of addressing SDGs 1 and 2, the project's scope of work and content included aspects relevant to SDGs 3 (Good health and well-being) 5 (Gender equality), 8 (Good jobs and economic growth), 10 (Reduced inequality), 12 (responsible consumption), and 13 (Climate Action).

THE SEED SYSTEM INTERVENTION

The limitations imposed by seed systems on smallholder farmers have been recognised by FAO, The Economist Magazine, CIMMYT, researchers, governments, and development agencies. Key issues have included unavailability and cost of improved seeds, high dependence on informal seed systems where seed may be of variable quality, and aged seed that results in farmers missing out on the benefits of research to improve varieties, loss of seed during disasters, limited diversity of varieties and suitability of seed varieties to micro-climatic conditions obtaining in some countries

like Lesotho. The high dependence on the informal seed system is seen as contributing to disincentives for agro-dealers to stock seed. Thus, the seed system intervention had the potential to address seed as a major constraint on productivity and resilience, contribute to household incomes, and address nutrition objectives. An intervention strategy focused on open-pollinated varieties (OPVs) was relevant in that they allowed farmers to reuse the seed for two seasons without loss of quality. The intervention approach adopted by the project allowed for the research-to-farm timeframe to be reduced while at the same time extending the reach of the seeds produced. The ultimate proof of the relevance of the seed system intervention has been the ability of the seed-producing COEs to expand their producer catchment areas, the markets for their seed beyond their immediate environs, and demand that surpasses their supply capabilities. Buyers of seed have included farmers, aid agencies and governments. Farmers across the three countries expressed interest in the continuation of the seed COEs provided payment challenges are addressed.

THE PRODUCTS MARKET INTERVENTION

The products/commodity market interventions addressed constraints to smallholder farmers' participation in markets and their abilities to benefit from market participation. The creation of ready markets created the possibility for farmers to overcome challenges of storage, transporting commodities and finding buyers. It addressed key challenges in assembling enough produce to realise economies of scale, addressed quality issues and enabled farmers to benefit from the skills assembled by the COEs. As with the seed COEs, the commodity COE has experienced an expansion of its catchment area, been able to compete with established buyers, and yielded benefits that are recognised by farmers.

HOUSEHOLD SYSTEM INTERVENTIONS

The household-level interventions addressed issues of gender roles, inclusive decision-making within households, knowledge about good nutrition, financial literacy, awareness about HIV and AIDS, and the use of labour-saving technologies to cope with labour constraints associated with chronic illness and women farmers. Across the three countries, the societies are patriarchal with male household heads often making decisions on their own although all family members are involved in farming activities. HIV and AIDS was and continues to be a major challenge for the sub-region. Stunting levels are high and owing to poor nutrition among pregnant women, lactating mothers, and babies. Dietary diversity is a major challenge across all three countries with diets low in protein and minerals. Interventions to address gender, HIV&AIDS, nutrition, household labour constraints, and financial literacy were relevant in improving productivity and spreading the benefits of improved production and improved incomes to all household members.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE APPROACH

SAMP intervened through a number of measures recognised as part of Private Sector Development (PSD). The interventions in different phases included those that form part of Inclusive Business Models (IBM) and Social Enterprise (SE). At different stages of the project, different components had the prominence and at later stages waned as lessons influenced the specific aspects to focus on. During the life of SAMP, the Donor Committee on Enterprise Development (DCED) developed guidance materials PSD, IBM and SE. The guidance materials were largely informed by emergent practice and thus reflected common language and conceptualisation of what was being done and shared rather than being prescriptive. The final SAMP model of COEs does not sit neatly in the guidance on IBM or SE. It however demonstrates a potentially useful addition to the

tools used in PSD and IBM⁸. The SAMP COEs can be characterised as seeking to achieve IBM objectives through what would be characterised as a social enterprise. However, even this characterisation would be inaccurate because none of the SAMP literature refers to social enterprise. None of the SAMP documentation made reference to the emergent literature. Neither was there evidence of SAMP being documented to inform the emergent literature. A literature search and verification with the ZSS management confirmed the participation of ZSS in a project documenting inclusive business models. The ZSS model was yet to be documented. The conceptual fit of SAMP within PSD, IBM and SE literature is not in doubt. To the extent that the literature covers challenges in inclusive business model development and the challenges of SE, SAMP could draw from the literature. However, the specific challenges in setting up and operating COEs as a strategy for furthering IBM is not well documented. Consequently, the SAMP experience has something new and different to add to the literature.

INTERVENTION THROUGH COMPANIES

Intervention in the development sector through private sector development (PSD) is an accepted and growing approach that emphasises adaptation and continuity. It recognises that one of the keys to successfully addressing developmental challenges is to address conditions that limit the extent to which markets work for some segments of the population. An underlying assumption is that once the constraints are resolved, previously excluded groups can benefit from inclusive markets. Contract farming (CF) is a tool widely used to facilitate the inclusion of farmers. In theory, it resolves several challenges at the same time, subject to how contracts are structured.

Interventions in the seed and market systems through COEs were relevant in a context in which smallholder farmers as producers of seed and their seed needs (affordable and reusable seed supplied in small quantities) were not attractive to established seed producers. SAMP in earlier phases had attempted to intervene in the seeds market through partnerships and support to established market players. These types of interventions had carried limited prospects of operating independently of donor funding. On the other hand, working with farmers' associations had limited prospects of success as these had limited reach and faced skills constraints. The establishment of the COEs allowed for specialised skills to be deployed in the service of farmers.

DIRECT DELIVERY OF INTERVENTIONS

GRMZ directly implemented the interventions on HIV&AIDS, nutrition, gender and financial literacy with the support of short-term consultants. While the interventions were of value, the direct intervention was only appropriate in so far as the primary concern was the farmers that were at the time working with the COEs and their immediate neighbours. Underlying the rationale of the interventions were expectations of peer-to-peer transfer of knowledge. A longer-term perspective and wider scope would have realised at least four immediate weaknesses with direct delivery:

⁸ Conceptually, the SAMP model goes further than many IBM interventions in that it seeks to empower farmers through ownership of businesses rather than mere inclusion as producers or distribution agents. Realising the potential of the model is strongly dependent on starting out with an empowerment focus ahead of a services focus.

- a) direct delivery meant there was a limited transfer of knowledge and skills to entities with the continued presence in the communities (community-based organisations or NGOs), thus potentially limiting its spread in terms of geographic and time spaces;
- b) The absence of connection with entities specializing in the particular themes also meant that the knowledge delivered represented the full but incomplete package for continuous growth. That is, the knowledge was static and hanging rather than fitting into a process of growth;
- c) The knowledge was already recognised as not being in keeping with the priorities of COEs, and yet there was no convincing strategy for its spread beyond the direct intervention activities; and
- d) The direct engagement of GRMZ in the work areas of the COEs presented a donor presence that potentially undermined the COEs. As the COEs attempted to establish themselves as independent entities owned and operating on behalf farmers, donor presence or representation through GRMZ was perceived as having undermined their attempt at image building and potentially affected community attitudes towards the COEs. Although not investigated, the contention of the COEs was that their efforts to get farmers to pay back loans were undermined as the funding was seen as donor money.

Expecting GRMZ to build capacities of CBOs and NGOs would have been counterintuitive for GRMZ who would have viewed such entities as competitors for resources and credit attribution. Thus, the choice of a strategic approach for delivery was rational for GRMZ and would have required SDC intervention to change. Recognising the need for continuity in the delivery of cross-cutting interventions, a more strategic approach to the delivery of the interventions would have been to consider supporting the capacity building of NGOs or CBOs. Not only would have the approach addressed continuity and transferability concerns but it also would have created an avenue for continuous strengthening outside of the GRMZ contract and, if necessary, outside of SAMP.

EFFICIENCY

The efficiency of the project was assessed based on the efficiency of resource utilisation, efficiency in implementation, and the extent to which activities translated into outputs.

An adaptive learning approach presents challenges with efficiency analysis - activities may translate to outputs, but the adaptive approach may mean that over time some outputs become outdated or redundant. That is, there is not a direct incremental approach to outputs delivery and outcomes. There, however, was scope for efficient use of resources through the adoption of principles for the management of resources.

THE EFFICIENCY OF RESOURCE UTILISATION

The first challenge for SAMP was the structure of the budget. The structure allowed for administrated funds directly linked to the results. This part of the budget was, to a large extent, results-based. The larger part of the budget (above 70%) consisted of different forms of support. In sharp contrast with practices in organisations that use results-based budgeting, the SAMP had a larger share of its budget in the 'support' category (>70% where not more than 30% would be expected). The immediate effects were that these costs could not be disaggregated and linked to any specific countries and results. Consequently, the true costs of results were understated.

The budgeting approach also meant that there was not as much pressure on the managing agent to contain costs as would have been the case with a results-based budget in which the proportion of

management/support costs would have been restricted to a lower percentage of the budget. The budgeting approach created scope for both redundancies and inefficiencies and did not allow for results-based review of spending.

For Phase 3+ under GRMZ, the total administrated project funds budget for the three years was US\$2,050,745. At the time of the evaluation, the total expenditure was estimated at US\$2,018,095, giving a potential variance of US\$32,650 (being 1.59 per cent under-spend). The administrated project budget are the funds allocated for direct project activities. The difference between the administrated budget figure in Table 1 above and the one here is due to the budget amendments done by GRMZ in consultation with SDC during SAMP 3+. Table 1 captures original budgets figures at contract signing time. GRMZ estimated the expenditure based on its budget tracking system as the final figures were still being worked. It is safe to conclude that the burn-rate was very high and near perfect.

The administrated project funds in Table 1 are the funds allocated for direct project activities. These would include the grants to COEs, project partners, the training and mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues, for example. The rest of the budget categories in Table 1 were the costs of delivery on the direct project activities. The direct project activities were 40.91% in SAMP 1 budget, 34.52% in SAMP 2 budget, 27.77% in SAMP 3 budget and 29.34% in SAMP 3+ budget. According to the budgets, more was being spent on the delivery mechanism than on the project activities. This raises the question of whether more could have been achieved with the same funding if other delivery mechanisms were used.

EFFICIENCY OF IMPLEMENTATION

The project started well in Eswatini and Zimbabwe, and it was slow to start in Lesotho owing to registration issues of GRMI. Lesotho was supported from SA in the beginning until an MoU was signed with MoAFS in 2012.

Palladium handled the investment that was meant to support the establishment of COEs. The disbursement of the grant was slow as, *“The percentage of the **non-disbursing grants** is very high. As of May 2017, only four grants are active out of the projected total of 12; thus, 33% of grants were active and disbursing. One (8%) grant award out of the projected total of 12 was terminated, and 7 (58%) grant awards were inactive and not disbursing, and they remained unapproved by SDC.”* (Palladium, SAMP 3 End of Phase Report October 2015 – May 2017). In its End of Phase report, Palladium attributed the slow disbursements to delays in the timely set up of company registrations, bank accounts and company audits as having hurt both financial reporting and project operations.

ACTIVITY TO OUTPUT CONVERSION

The planned activities in SAMP3+ translated into planned outputs. The extent of output achievement was in line with expectations. The evaluation did not seek to estimate the unit cost of achieving each output. Engagements with key informants suggested that there were concerns about the approach adopted by GRMZ. Both the communities and COEs were said to be recipients of centrally planned interventions with little input on the choice of interventions, the design of interventions or the selection of the consultants to deliver the interventions. Thus, while there was an acknowledgement that GRMZ hired competent consultants, there were views that similar results could have been achieved at lower cost by matching the profiles of the consultants to the tasks at

hand, that is, by scaling down the profiles of consultants hired to match the skill levels they were to engage with.

EFFECTIVENESS

As indicated earlier, the project evolved during its life cycle, and as such, each phase had objectives set out in the log frames. The evaluation consulted operational reports to assess how well the project performed against objectives and understand the enabling and inhibiting factors. SAMP 1 progress reports are silent on Lesotho for the period up to 2012. The GRMI, SAMP End of Project Report 2010 – 2013 shows that, overall SAMP 1 achieved on its five Logframe output indicators which included: approved the project design and implementation plan; pilot schemes to improve the availability of agricultural inputs designed and implemented; pilot schemes to increase income from output sales designed and implemented; knowledge into Use (KIU) plan designed and implemented; and, effective SAMP project through efficient project management.

At the end of Phase 1 in June 2013, SDC agreed to fund a three month “bridging period” until the start of Phase 2 in October 2013. The bridging period funds were used to maintain staff levels and to support farmer organisations to process and market products as the harvesting cycle had not completed, conduct consultations with various stakeholders who were going to be partners in Phase 2, and conducting studies that would feed into consolidated plans for the three countries.⁹ The achievements of the bridging period were reported as part of SAMP 1.

The bridging period funds of US\$349,992 covering the period July to September 2013 was reported to have provided a seamless transition between SAMP 1 and SAMP 2. The latter was a continuation and expanded technical and material support to SHF seed growers, their associations/cooperatives and SAMP partners. The SAMP 2 End of Phase report shows SAMP 2 as having been on track in achieving its targets per Logframe. The outcome indicators on (a) vulnerable food insecure smallholder farmers having secure access to and control over a diversity of seeds, and (b) markets established for the sale of surplus quality seed and commodities produced in the target areas, were reported as being on track. The report was also positive on the four output indicators on community seed producers increase the production of quality seed; agro networks strengthening; formation and strengthening of community producer groups; and installing of a knowledge management system. The signing of an MoU in Lesotho saw activities that had hitherto stalled pick up in the country.

In its SAMP 3 End of Phase Report October 2015 – May 2017, Palladium presented a summary of achievements against targets in the Logframe showing targets being achieved or surpassed on most objective and outcome indicators except indicators on household dietary diversity score and on the increase in seed types and/or varieties sold. The report also presented ZSS in Zimbabwe as the only COE deemed commercially viable. It is important to note that the targets were for the period 2015 to 2019, but Palladium’s contract was terminated in May 2017. The field operations had, however, been suspended in October 2016 on receipt of the termination notice. The achievements reported were, therefore, largely for work carried out during the first year of implementation and not the full three years of the Phase. This raised the question of whether the

⁹ GRMI, SAMP Bridging Period Report - July to September 2013, December 2013.

project was setting itself low targets or was so effective to achieve most of the targets in times shorter than planned.

GRMZ took over SAMP 3 when the Palladium contract was terminated. Through Phase 3+, GRMZ focused on capacitation of the COEs and strengthening of the seed systems, product-market systems, and the household systems. For the seed and product markets system, this involved support to key players in systems like agricultural research institutions, extension services and players like Rural Self-Help Development Association (RSDA) in Lesotho to deliver supporting functions. The strengthening of the household system was mainly through mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues including gender and social inclusion, HIV and AIDS, nutrition and financial literacy which included training on Internal Savings and Lending (in the case of Lesotho). The technical and material support to SHFs was now directed through COEs as part of the seed systems and product market systems-level interventions. According to the SAMP 3+ Annual Report for June 2017 to May 2018, the project had achieved 58 per cent or more against set targets on all indicators and achieving over a hundred per cent in others. Since this was midway in the Phase period, it was safe to infer that SAMP 3+ was on course towards achieving its set targets. The reporting of hundred per cent or over target achievements again raises the question of whether the project was setting itself low targets.

KIIs, FGDs and the household survey corroborated delivery by SAMP on most of the indicators across the three countries. The details of findings from the FGDs, KIIs and household surveys are captured in the specific country reports. KIS and FGDs, however, revealed a potential challenge regarding numbers of farmers producing certified seed and commodities for COEs across the three countries. Legacy issues of mismanagement in COEs in Lesotho and Eswatini and COE/producer relations in Zimbabwe were causing farmer withdrawals and serious side marketing in the past three years. It is important to note that the legacy issues were a factor in the design and programme focus of SAMP 3+. Also, all the COEs had been supported by SAMP to develop strategic plans in 2019.

Documents review and KIIs revealed that the enabling factors for the achievements during the different Phases included:

- a) The funding support by SDC
- b) The project benefitted from the contributions of the international research centres like CIMMYT, CIAT, and CBI with foundation seed and training of government stakeholders,
- c) Good working relations among project players including relevant government agencies such as Agritex in Zimbabwe, DAR in Lesotho and DARS and DSQC in Eswatini,
- d) Project relevance and hence SHFs willingness to participate,
- e) Willingness to learn on the part of SDC and implementing agencies, adopting and implementing project review recommendations, and
- f) Partnerships with the private companies' producers to produce seed under irrigation, for example, the LUSIP companies in Eswatini who joined Tshala Seed Enterprises.

Among factors that affected achievements in some Phases and/or countries are:

- a) Implementing agency registration issues in Lesotho,
- b) The contract termination for Palladium in the middle of Phase 3,
- c) Legacy management issues like with the Lehakoe in Lesotho and Tshala in Eswatini. The Phase 2 end project report also reported under-budgeting for programme activities at the

beginning of the phase and “*the resources management was also not efficient and poor monitoring and follow up by management.*”

- d) Some unfavourable climatic conditions, especially in Lesotho where the project was wholly based on dryland farming and, therefore, heavily dependent on rainfall,
- e) The mismanagement and poor governance issues by the COE, for example, Tshala Seed Enterprises, which resulted in a bad reputation among partners and farmers pulling out of associations.

IMPACT

THE SEED SYSTEM

IMPACT ON SEED-PRODUCING HOUSEHOLDS

Seed producing households gained an income advantage over comparison households across Eswatini, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. The size of the gain was substantial in the early phases of the project owing to the seed being a higher value crop than a commodity, the pricing model, bulk selling and timely payments. The early phases were spoken of with much positivity in Eswatini and Zimbabwe. In the later stages of the project, the income advantage waned owing to several factors including late payments, non-collection of seed from some farmers, rejecting of seed, changes in the pricing models, and adverse COE staff and management practices. In Zimbabwe, late payments in a context of high inflation led to significant erosion of earnings. Delays in payments and non-payments worsened the problems of side-marketing as farmers sought to meet immediate financial needs by selling seed to commodity buyers that offered lower prices but could pay on the spot. In Lesotho, the COE mismanagement issues caused farmer withdrawal from contracted seed production and rampant side marketing, a situation that was now being addressed through the company’s turnaround strategy. In Eswatini, there was also contracted seed growers flight owing to Tshala management issues.

IMPACT ON SEED SYSTEM ACTORS

Seed system actors value the SAMP intervention as being important in shortening the time for new varieties to reach farmers, spreading the reach of the varieties, and popularising the varieties through a model that draws on local demonstrations and trust in local farmers. While there are no benchmarks for the uptake of beans and maize seed, the evaluation observed that the arguments were more strongly likely to be valid for bean seed than they were for maize seed. It is noteworthy that in Lesotho LSC was focusing on beans in the last three farming seasons and only now thinking of re-introducing seed maize with an eye for OPV yellow maize in the future. The observation on maize seed stems from the fact that the variety grown the most (ZS521) was released in 2002 and was also marketed by other companies. The extent to which these companies would have spread the seed to the sites covered through project interventions was unclear. There was merit on both the demand and supply side in the demonstration argument. On the demand side, farmers expressed greater confidence in the varieties based on observed local performance. This effect would have been less likely to occur with other seed houses as they did not have the same extent of field and demonstration coverage. On the supply side, the SAMP seed interventions illustrated both the scale of demand and potential for seed sales of OPVs. There was no evidence to suggest that the demonstration of the demand for OPVs had led to other firms investing in OPVs. Rather what was apparent was the adoption and selling of the same varieties as ZSS in the same localities. For

example, in Masvingo town, National Tested Seeds was selling ZS521 in various pack sizes and posing direct competition to ZSS.

IMPACT ON SEED USERS

The evaluation did not explicitly track the extent to which the adoption of seed produced by SAMP supported companies translated into improved performance among seed users. The tracking of such changes would have been best done through seasonal data collection better suited to project monitoring and evaluation. Rather, the evaluation sought to estimate the potential reach of the seed produced and sold by the firms. In Zimbabwe, ZSS has continuously increased its production, sales and areas of operation. The company counts among its distribution network, companies with national reach. In addition, it has been a supplier to Government of Zimbabwe programmes (Command Agriculture) with national reach. In Lesotho, several challenges militate against the estimation of reach. These include, the prevalence of side-marketing, the sale of seed as both seed and commodity, and the large disparity between stated farmer production and the volumes sold through LSC. In Eswatini, as was the case in Lesotho, management challenges negatively impacted overall production and marketing through the COEs. In both Lesotho and Eswatini, the COEs barely affected the level of seed imports.

The significance of the estimated reach is that, to the extent that the sold seed represents gain irrespective of whether this is in productivity, ability to withstand adverse conditions or nutritional value, the gain was extended to a substantially large population across the country and beyond the country's borders through seed exports. In extrapolating the gain, a caution is made to account for a displacement/substitution effect as the seed would have displaced some other variety or crop, except in Lesotho where seed from SAMP producers could only replace imported seed, mainly from SA. In the case of beans, the estimates of reach may be overstated as there were indications that at times seed was consumed, sold through side marketing as a commodity or bought by organisations who used it as a commodity as the case was in Lesotho during the COE's turbulent times.

IMPACT ON COMMODITY CONSUMERS

The maize seed is not expected to have had any impact on final consumers as there would not be any unique characteristics making the consumption of seed company-based foods unique. To the extent that bio-fortified beans were consumed (assuming appropriate preparation), it is expected that the final consumers would have benefited from the improved micronutrient and mineral content of the food. The opportunity for consumers of maize to benefit from unique varietal traits existed with orange maize. However, the uptake of orange maize was limited to Lesotho, potentially reaching only a small population.

THE PRODUCT MARKET INTERVENTION

The marketing of commodities provided farmers with access to ready markets, skilled personnel to handle commodity marketing, and access to technical skills and credit in Zimbabwe and Eswatini where the COEs were also involved in commodities. These benefits contributed to time and cost savings for farmers, improved receipts from sales through bulk purchases that allowed for better planning of income use. Less often mentioned but equally valid would have been the reduction of the anxiety associated with small and opportunistic sales.

Access to markets appears to have contributed to better incomes. This is borne out by survey data, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The changes in farmer incomes were however uneven. Zimbabwe data that was disaggregated by irrigation versus dryland and by sex of household head for dryland and irrigation suggests that SAMP dryland farmers enjoyed greater income advantages when compared to their peers. Irrigation farmers did not enjoy significant gains over their peers in the irrigation schemes. This was largely attributed to non-SAMP irrigation farmers also growing high-value crops such as chilli and having access to buyers. The greater gain for dryland farmers relative to their peers in dryland areas was largely due to the value-added of COEs for farmers. This included considerations that ordinarily the dryland smallholder farmers would not have been able to bulk up their commodities and have them collected on-site. The smallholder farmers were freed from the need to transport small quantities to regular selling points and spend days trying to sell their commodities.

THE HOUSEHOLD SYSTEM INTERVENTION

HOUSEHOLD CAPABILITIES AND INCOMES

The SAMP seed interventions have had an impact on household productive capabilities through knowledge transfer as well as improvements in welfare. While indications are that in the later stages of the project farmers were receiving smaller benefits than they did in earlier stages, across the three countries, farmers valued the contributions, had positive stories of changes in incomes and assets acquisition (including children's education) to tell, and were keen on continuation of the seed intervention on condition that their main concern (late payment) was resolved. Income estimates were difficult to interpret on account of unknown status of the households at the commencement of SAMP. The picture emerging across the countries is varied. The evaluation collected income estimates for three seasons and compared the levels and changes between the project and outside of project farmers in the same localities.

In Lesotho, the seed-producing households were generally well-off compared to the comparison group. Whether this was the case or not from the outset is unclear. The project took on board farmers that had received FAO support leading to a long period of support that potentially could explain their relative wealth status. What the evaluation was able to establish was the relative changes in agricultural incomes across the three reference seasons and the contribution of seed farming in each of the seasons. In Eswatini, the included farmers had lower income estimates than the excluded farmers. Across all reference seasons, the included farmers were outperformed by the farmers that were not producing seed, except for Lesotho where included farmers always outperformed the excluded. Zimbabwe had a mix of irrigation and dryland farmers in significantly large numbers. On dryland, the SAMP farmers outperformed their peers. On irrigation, the differences were much smaller, reflecting the relative availability of other marketing opportunities for non-SAMP farmers. Within SAMP farmer comparisons between irrigation and dryland farmers showed the irrigation farmers enjoyed income advantages over dryland farmers – a possible reflection of differences in productivity arising from better yields on irrigated plots.

THE LABOUR-SAVING INTERVENTION

The labour-saving technology intervention appears not to have gone much further than simply raising awareness. Some of the technologies, like the two-wheel tractor, were only delivered in 2019 in Lesotho and will be available for use for the 2019/20 farming season while some aspects

of conservation farming and chemical weeding seemed to have been adopted by some farmers in the past couple of seasons. Part of the challenge may have been the requirement to invest in equipment at a time when farmers faced reduced returns from working with SAMP-supported firms.

THE NUTRITION EDUCATION INTERVENTION

The intervention to improve nutrition was highly rated as informative and transforming the farming and food consumption patterns of households. The claimed rate of utilisation of lessons from the intervention was universal. The rationale for the intervention steeped in creating demand for seed and commodities was out of sync with the growth of the companies that were looking beyond local customers to customers in other districts and beyond their respective country boundaries.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Although cross-cutting issues began to be mainstreamed seriously in SAMP 3+, it is important to note that the project evaluation in March 2012 had called for operations in Zimbabwe and Eswatini to expand to include work on the empowerment of women farmers and mainstreaming of HIV and AIDS. Issues of chronic challenges of HIV and AIDS for Lesotho and Eswatini were raised as far back as 2011 in SAMP operational reports.

GENDER

In the early years of SAMP, gender mainstreaming was mainly through giving equal opportunity to both men and women in seed production and contract farming. For example, in Zaka in Zimbabwe, SAMP sought to empower smallholder farmers especially women farmers through strengthening their capacity to produce and access high-quality seeds and, for example, crops that were mostly used by women (cowpea, Bambara nuts, and sugar beans) were given special attention in the project (re. SAMP Gender Progress Report 2012). This type of mainstreaming, intra-household power dynamics that GALS in Phase 3+ addressed.

THE GALS INTERVENTION

The household system-level intervention, for its short duration, yielded some remarkable benefits across all the countries. Particularly important were reported changes in the attitudes of men towards the sharing of chores and household decision-making. In both Lesotho and Zimbabwe, the gender intervention largely reached the households that were working with the SAMP-supported companies. In Eswatini the reach was wider, including households that were not engaged with the SAMP-supported company. The intervention proved the effectiveness of the GALS approach, but its reach was limited by choice of strategy for its rollout. The strategies for the roll-out of seed and commodity production were company-based, thus allowing for expansion to other geographic areas. The strategy for rolling out the gender intervention used companies to reach community groups but not to roll-out the content. With the companies considering the intervention focused on household dynamics as not contributing to their survival and unlikely to invest in it, the prospects of the positive benefits of the GALS intervention being realised by future seed and commodity producer households was curtailed.

DIFFERENCES IN INCOME GAINS FROM SEED AND COMMODITY PRODUCTION

The data for Zimbabwe shows that households that are *de jure* female-headed had the least earnings from agriculture. *De jure* female-headed households on irrigation outperformed their dryland peers. The *de jure* female-headed dryland households outperformed their non-SAMP

dryland peers. However, both irrigation and dryland female-headed households were outperformed by irrigation and dryland male-headed households. At the validation workshop for Zimbabwe, these findings were interrogated and revealed that male-headed households were an amalgam of male-headed households and *de facto* female-headed households (that is, households that are headed by a female owing to the spouse being away). The *de jure* female-headed households consisted mainly of widows and single women. In Lesotho and Eswatini, the small sample size did not give much room for this type of disaggregated analysis. All seed growing was on dryland. And suffice to say, observations, KIIs and case studies found some female farmers to be among the biggest seed producers and also holding influencing positions in LSC board and the five farmers' association committees. The data from Zimbabwe suggest that a deliberate gender strategy that encompassed attention to the disadvantage faced by *de jure* female-headed households would have furthered the inclusiveness of the project beyond participation in addressing gaps in gains.

YOUTH AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Across the three countries, the recruitment strategies for farmers were based on membership of farmers' associations. The recruitment criteria into membership of the associations were unclear and appeared not to have been a specific area of focus for the project. The project achieved inclusion to the extent that the associations were already inclusive. SAMP did not explicitly target youth. Consequently, there were no deliberate measures to track and encourage youth participation.

While the project was meant to target the chronically poor but able and the transiently poor, it missed on this in some instances. In Lesotho, for example, the project inherited seed farmers from an FAO Community Seed Production programme that was coming to an end. The inherited farmers had been growing seed for up to seven years when taken over by SAMP - they were no longer among the poor and vulnerable. Across the three countries, youth participation was low. The absence of a deliberate strategy to target the youth limited the projects' impact on opportunities for youth. The absence of a deliberate focus on youth meant that there was no deliberate strategy for youth inclusion.

SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABILITY AT THE HOUSEHOLD LEVEL

At household level benefits for farmers have included knowledge, skills and assets acquisition, transformations in attitudes, improvements in the qualities of the seed, crop yields, diets, markets, and incomes. For shareholders, ownership of shares is an added benefit.

To the extent that the continuation of benefits is independent of companies, there are no major sustainability risks except for those arising from lack of reinforcement, periodic updates and support for growth. Risks to the sustainability of benefits through inadequate reinforcement, update, and growth that is independent of the companies arose primarily from the strategic choices made by the project and vary by site. These include the approaches to gender, HIV and AIDS, nutrition education, and the provision of extension services. Where the project emphasised direct delivery and/or delivery through companies, reinforcement and growth are left to chance. Where partnerships were pursued, there are stronger prospects for continuous growth. Examples include seemingly contrasting approaches to the provision of extension services in Lesotho and Eswatini on the one hand and those in Zimbabwe. Whereas, in Eswatini and Lesotho the working

relationships between SAMP and extension services appear to have been complementary, in Zimbabwe extension personnel felt they had been marginalised and disempowered through farmers receiving training that they were not part of and were not able to engage farmers as experts with broader knowledge that that provided through training. The use of internal arrangements for extension services and seed inspection were sources of tension that threatened farmers' access to extension services they would have ordinarily accessed. The 'fractured relations' between extension personnel and farmers supported by the companies is likely to endure into the future. Similarly, delivery of gender, HIV&AIDS, and nutrition interventions through direct implementation or companies and peer-to-peer approaches offered limited scope for reinforcement and continuous growth.

The sustainability of company-dependent benefits is conditional on two main aspects, namely:

- a) The extent to which the companies continue to exist and to fulfil the roles they have played in the delivery of benefits; and
- b) The extent to which the companies continue to strive for improvements in the conditions of SHFs in their founding localities.

The former aspect is discussed under company sustainability. The latter aspect is dependent on company practices ranging from strategic decisions, operational practices, internal risk recognition and management, and the extent to which the companies prioritise benefits for farmers.

Immediately obvious strategy level risks arise from potential tradeoffs between maximizing benefits for smallholder farmers in low potential agricultural areas and achieving lower costs and greater returns by bringing on board farmers that can produce on a larger scale owing to the sizes of their plots or their location in areas with greater potential (displacement of smallholder farmers as producers). Such displacement leaves smallholder farmers as beneficiaries through shareholding rather than a combination of shareholding and production. The risk has been evident in the expansion of geographic coverage that serves company survival but has no clear benefits to the farmers in the founding communities.

Operational practices that have implications for the sustainability of benefits to farmers include the pricing strategies adopted by the companies, the time taken to pay farmers, and the extent to which companies provide support or linkages that ensure that seed or produce is not rejected – including timely collection. Issues in this category affect the returns on the investments made by farmers and have direct bearings on their welfare.

Internal risks that impact on farmers' welfare arose at the interface between the companies and farmers. Practices detrimental to farmer interests translated to losses to farmers, with no clarity if the practices were attributable to the companies or individual staff members. Examples included the alleged collection of produce at night or early morning hours when farmers would ordinarily be sleeping, collection of produce without recording of weights and delaying weighing at designated points such that individuals meant to observe the weighing left, and inefficient complaints mechanisms that created opportunities for diversion of payments due to farmers.

Discussions during focus group discussions suggest that farmers are aware of many areas of vulnerability and are somewhat sceptical of the extent to which the companies genuinely seek to improve their welfare. There are perceptions among some farmers that they were roped in as a

means to meet registration requirements rather than as a means to improve their welfare. Practices that not only leave farmers feeling like outside recipients of benevolent actions rather than entitled owners but also focus on punishing or taxing farmers rather than assist them are cited as reflecting the absence of genuine concern for the welfare of farmers. The extent to which such actions can be limited through controls was viewed as being limited. Rather, the view was that the starting point for management needed to be a genuine love for and concern for the welfare of farmers. The view was that such genuineness is about personalities and cannot be changed by simply replacing one set of managers with another. While recognising the sentiments of the discussion participants, the evaluation team interpreted the concerns as being about the prioritisation of farmer interests in ways that are tangible, easy to understand and on which farmers can undertake objective assessments.

SUSTAINABILITY AT THE COMPANY LEVEL

Across the three countries, all four of the COEs, have the potential to sustain their operations. Sustainability at the company level is dependent on strategy, efficiency in operations, cost-containment or realignment, transparency in operations, abilities to overcome legacy issues.

Across the three countries, the COEs faced challenges that required astuteness in strategy formulation, implementation, and adaptation. The challenges range from the procurement of materials and coping with competition, to overcoming challenging economic conditions and regulatory constraints. The primary thrust of the COEs strategic plans appeared to favour following the examples of more established firms in the seed and commodity trading, especially in Zimbabwe, where there were already other established commercial seed companies. Modelling the COEs along such lines failed to build on the unique characteristics of COEs and the potential for synergies and positioning as serving more than just commercial interests. An opportunity to leverage the unique identities and profiles of the firms was missed thus positioning the companies in competitive spaces in which their survival would depend on their abilities to compete with entities that did not carry the same social/developmental aspirations and expectations. For example, by not positioning themselves as social enterprises, the companies competed on price rather than leveraging a status that could allow them to be viewed as candidates for socially responsible investment or purchases.

The COEs emerged from a history of a progressive transition from contract management agent operations to community-owned companies. The transition meant that a cost structure that was unrelated to the potential of the firms was imposed on the COEs and persisted after the transition. Costs that appeared reasonable when met from SDC support were burdensome to the firms leading to payments arrears when salaries had to be paid from company earnings. Besides, legacy issues have affected shareholders' attitudes which seem to be grounded in the belief that the role of the company is to meet all needs and whims at no cost to the owners. Externally, the COEs face tensions between striving for competitiveness and meeting the expectations of their shareholders who are also producers.

COEs faced challenges in terms of unethical practices, potential conflicts of interest, and experienced suspicions of the interests of the businesses being sacrificed for personal gains. The effects were tensions between management and boards as well as between boards and shareholders. Also, shareholders and other stakeholders became hesitant to invest in businesses.

Questions that could easily have been addressed through monitoring and evaluation systems whose data could be validated by community representatives remained unanswered further feeding suspicions of unethical conduct. In both Lesotho and Zimbabwe some farmers contended that they had not been paid for long periods. The Lesotho case had, however, been rectified in 2019 with a grant to LSC to deal with the farmer payment legacy issue. There were contentions that a monitoring and evaluation system had been developed but had not found traction with the COEs. Indications are that engagements around the monitoring and evaluation system had been with the management of companies rather than the boards who were keen on the information. On the other hand, the COE management in two cases argued that the system would have required taking personnel time from productive tasks to monitoring tasks.

The Zimbabwe COEs were faced with a multitude of challenges from an internal cost structure, competition, pricing challenges, under capitalisation for the expanded operations, and a hyper-inflationary environment. A core survival strategy, that of exporting offered potential but was constrained by the need for regulatory approval for exports of seed and commodities.

Overall, ZSS has greater stability and growth in volumes. MFC is struggling with defining an operating model but the board has clarity on overall direction. LSC, is moving past legacy issues through a strong board but constrained by small volumes. TSC is on a recovery path but faces challenges related to low volumes and defining a strategy for increasing volumes.

SUSTAINABILITY AT SEED SYSTEM LEVEL

SAMP made investments that enabled the COEs to access EGS and supported key seed system actors. The relationships, established and maintained through project funding, played an important role in the business activities of the seed COEs. The extent to which the relationships will endure without periodic funding and technical support to address challenges that may arise remained unclear. There were indications that Eswatini faced challenges in state institutions supplying EGS as well as difficulties in importing the same. In Lesotho DAR is considering the establishment of a revolving fund for the importation of parent material for EGS. The Seed Policy and the Seed Bill which was awaiting enactment into a legislative instrument provide for a MoAFS administered revolving fund, hence DAR was eagerly awaiting the passing of the bill in Parliament. In Zimbabwe, indications were that ZSS was considering the production of hybrid seed, focusing on large producers, and developing in-house breeding capacity. These decisions were considered as important for financial viability even though they undermined the very aspects that made the SAMP seed market intervention unique. The pricing model adopted in Zimbabwe in the early years led to improved incomes for farmers. In the later years, attempts to adjust the pricing model carried the potential of transferring value from the farmers to the COE.

SUSTAINABILITY AT THE PRODUCTS-MARKET SYSTEM LEVEL

SAMP commodity market interventions were beneficial for farmers in Zimbabwe and Eswatini¹⁰ when payment was timely, purchase prices competitive and farmers confident that their products would be purchased. Negative experiences relating to non-collection of commodities, rejection of commodities and late payments undermined farmers' confidence in the COEs. The COEs were in the role of commodity aggregation and transportation agents for larger commodity buyers. In this

¹⁰ In Lesotho, LSC was not in commodity trading.

role, they were price-takers and were always at risk of their buyers, by-passing them and purchasing commodities directly from farmers. This was particularly so on irrigation schemes where buyers could be assured of easy bulking in a short space of time. In attempting to assist farmers in overcoming resource constraints, the COEs had at different points in time attempted to provide farmers with the support that included access to inputs. In a context of inadequate ownership of the COEs by farmers, the provision of inputs proved to be risky and turned out to be an added incentive for side marketing. While the COEs learned and attempted different models of input provision including selling through agro-dealers, and linking farmers to financial institutions, none of the models proved to be effective where the COE remained the point of debt collection.

The sustainability of the products/commodity market intervention was closely tied to a) the extent to which the COEs could operate at a profit, and b) the extent to which the COEs could realise profits while offering farmers competitive prices.

Across the COEs, the first challenge was to overcome legacy issues that had a) determined salary levels based on donor financing rather than company capacity to pay, and b) been a basis for setting expectations among staff of the COEs and communities, and c) continued to undermine the COEs efforts to not be seen as NGOs. Addressing these issues was key for a) realigning staff and shareholders' expectations to company performance and b) transforming the company-shareholder relationship to one in which the shareholders understood their role not only in governance but also in the capitalisation of the firms. Other challenges were to a) shift COEs from supporters of production and aggregators and transporters for larger buyers to either direct supplier to end-users or supplier of value-added commodities. The boards of the COEs were aware of the necessary strategic and operational shifts but faced capacity and resource constraints. Investments in governance carried the potential to contribute to the COEs in Eswatini and Lesotho continuing on a recovery path.

THE GOVERNANCE INTERVENTIONS

The final phase of SAMP addressed governance issues in the COEs. A number of issues had arisen in the operation of the COEs suggesting challenges with an approach that built businesses and sought to transfer the ownership to farmers. Noteworthy, was the relationship between the boards and management of the respective COEs, the internal management systems of the COEs, farmers as shareholders in the COEs, and board capacities. The interventions included board orientation, board roles, and basic financial management, among others.

Across the COEs, the governance interventions are characterised as having addressed the imbalances that arose from establishing businesses first and bringing farmers and boards into running entities. This characterisation by key informants emphasised authority over function. Beyond authority, the boards required capacities to a) contribute to the strategic direction of the businesses and, b) provide oversight. When the focus was on function, greater emphasis was placed on oversight. Both functions required clarity of purpose, some understanding of the business, and access to appropriate tools.

LSE and TSC experienced cases of fraud that led to the replacement of the management teams. The cases of fraud exposed underlying organisational weaknesses. The weaknesses were in internal systems and the utilisation of the systems by the respective boards. Viewed from this

perspective, replacement of management teams addressed manifestations rather than causes. Board capacity building, thus need to be run in tandem with interventions to strengthen internal systems and, have a focus beyond understanding of financial information to include understanding of the systems in place to support board oversight. A key gap across all the COEs was the absence of adequate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. Thus, board capacity building took place without a key tool for tracking aspects of the businesses that boards would need to be informed about.

To inform the development of meaningful M&E systems, the boards would have needed clarity on what the businesses sought to achieve beyond financial viability, and have clarity on how such achievements would be tracked. Developing such clarity called for engagement on the purposes of the businesses, what constituted desired outcomes, and for whom such outcomes would be achieved. Across the COEs, such discussion was pending. For the boards to engage in discussion on desired outcomes, the members would firstly need to engage with the respective associations they represented. In Lesotho, board members, to the extent to which they consulted their respective associations could be regarded as representative. In Eswatini, the mix between companies representing groups and individuals provided for relatively credible representation. In Zimbabwe where ownership of shares was by individuals, the extent to which board members were representative of shareholders was debatable, as was the extent to which shareholders had a shared vision for the company. The mechanism for board membership (the association) provided for legitimacy. However, many shareholders were not paid up, and farmer board members were open to individual self-interest as producers.

The strengthening of governance needed to address multiple facets. The timeframe for addressing these many facets was limited and the interventions incomplete. For farmer board members to have made meaningful input into the strategic direction of the firms, while benefiting from the high level of skills brought by management teams, they would have needed to focus on high level issues reflecting their shared aspirations and holding management to account in relation to those aspirations. The process of empowering farmers as shareholders and board members thus needed to have started at association level. Starting capacity building at board level potentially created a need for repeats of the same training.

The continued tenure of the management teams in the Zimbabwe COEs offered stability that could benefit the COEs and their owners. Key strengths were that the management team had accumulated experience to operate the business, advise on the design of information systems, and provide experiences to inform the design, content and delivery of governance-strengthening interventions. The challenges in strengthening governance in Zimbabwe were to a) install and operationalise systems that would aid effective board oversight, and b) strengthen board capacities to provide strategic guidance drawing on the respective strengths of farmer board members and technical board members. The evaluation noted tensions that had emerged owing to governance strengthening interventions. The tensions primarily arose from the experiences in LSE and TSE

(fraud and replacement of management teams), inadequate consultations in the design of interventions, and inadequacies in the content, sequencing and targeting of interventions.

LESSONS LEARNED

DEVELOPMENTAL LESSONS

Key Lessons
L1: Projects that are adaptive require periodic reflection, agreements on what is working well, what needs to be changed, and, aspects and expected outcomes of adaptation. Such reflection allows for clearer identification of areas of continuity and the additional benefits of adaptation. Documentation of the reflection processes and their outcomes is key for steering the programme, communication and evaluation.
L2: The Theory of Action (TOA) is a useful tool for communicating what will be done to bring about change. In presenting the TOA, there is a need for some basic considerations such as going beyond listing what will be done but also clearly identifying the actors whose actions/relationships are to be affected. The inclusion of such detail is important to inform what is monitored and reported and for understanding the extent of achievement of results and prospects for sustainability. A well-articulated TOA allows for potential challenges to sustainability to be identified early in the life of a project.
L3: SHFs can grow certified seed and SHFs benefit from interventions to support participation in commodity markets. The handling of seed and commodities need not be done through a single entity. Rather, separate entities allow for the harnessing of different strengths. COEs are a viable mechanism for the inclusion of SHF as seed growers and commodity producers. The COEs carry the potential for continuous inclusion. Establishing companies for the benefit of smallholder farmers requires that there be clarity on the benefits for farmers and how the tensions between inclusiveness and profitability are to be managed. In the absence of such safeguards, the sustainability of the firm or the benefits to smallholders is threatened.
L4: Private sector development interventions require clarity on objectives (what is to be achieved), the intended beneficiaries (for whom), acceptable strategies (the how), and awareness of risks associated with the interventions (tracking of performance and compliance with principles). When there are weaknesses, there arises the risk of focusing on metrics that do not address the primary concerns of the intervention.
L5: Setting up COEs is a process that requires time, education on the part of communities and SHFs and collective visioning and purpose and establishing governance structures to superintend on the establishment of management and administrative structures. The sustainability of COE required that there be mixed Boards with farmers and technocrats to ensure that requisite expertise is available on the Board. For instance, the LSC Board members were of the view that they need Board members with a legal and financial background to have a balanced team. The Board was comprised of farmers only (a situation attributed to farmers' preference following a case of fraud). The Boards in Zimbabwe benefited from having technocrats that could engage at the same level as management and offer advice beyond the expertise of the management.

L6: Inadequate safeguards in the form of complaint mechanisms and tracking of issues and their resolution leads to mistrust and undermines farmers' confidence in businesses intended for their benefit.
L7: Projects that seek to influence food value chains or seeds and market systems need to be long term and with room to evolve by being responsiveness to beneficiaries' needs. The evolution is only possible if the funding partner and implementing agencies are open and willing to learn and innovate based on project experience as SAMP demonstrated.
L8: Absence of a Seed Legislation/Act disadvantages Lesotho on regional initiatives. For example, Lesotho lost out on the Harmonised Seed Protocols (HASPs) with FARNPAN when countries like Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Zambia benefited from the SDC funding aimed at strengthening their seed regulatory frameworks according to some KIIs
L9: Cross-cutting issues of gender and social inclusion, HIV and AIDS and nutrition are important in seeds and markets systems as they affect the household as a seed and commodity producer, user, participant in the market, consumer and decision-maker on output, income and resources allocation on-farm and non-farm activities. Training on the cross-cutting issues equips the household to effectively handle the interactions of these forces on the household as a central player in the seeds and markets systems. The delivery of the cross-cutting issues needs to be thought through carefully to ensure it is done in a way that provides reach, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. The implementers of seeds and market systems may not necessarily have the expertise and space in the execution of their core business to mainstream cross-cutting issues. Hence collaboration and networking opportunities with agencies and/or programmes whose main focus is the cross-cutting issues should be explored for increased effectiveness and efficiencies
L10: For projects involving market linkages, commercial entities, like banks and insurance companies and the like get interested where there is a success as was the case in Lesotho with Zenith Horizon Insurance Company and Standard Lesotho Bank that took a keen interest in weather index insurance and farming loans towards the end of SAMP. While such interest may arise from demonstrated success, in other cases, deliberate investments in developing interest and promoting participation are needed.
L11: The successful operation of seed-producing businesses requires access to adequate funding that enables the business to make timely payments to producers and cover operating costs while processing and marketing seed. Inadequate capital leads to farmers bearing additional costs and exposure to inflation.

OPERATIONAL LESSONS

Key Operational Lessons
L12: On contractors (e.g. project implementing agencies) it is best to include registration in all operation countries as one of the preconditions than to contract based on a commitment to registration as delayed or failed registration can adversely impact delivery effectiveness and efficiency.

L13: Using former implementing partners staff to start COEs is beneficial in that it transfers skills from the implementing partner to the COEs. However, it also carries power dynamics whose negative effects should be anticipated and mitigation/corrective measures put in place. Key effects include distortions of authority, cost implications for the COEs, and potential conflicts on mandates and expectations.

L14: Having appropriate structures for project management is not adequate to guide projects to achieve their full potential. Deliberate effort is needed to ensure the structures focus both on strategic and operational issues.

CONCLUSIONS

SAMP was implemented at a time when DCED was beginning to develop standards and guidance on PSD, IBM and SE. While issues addressed by SAMP through COEs and the challenges faced, together with some of the attempted intervention models are covered in the literature, the timing of the project and its adaptive nature meant that none of the guidance could quite fit the final SAMP model. Rather, SAMP had much to contribute to the intervention models (positive and negative lessons, as well as risks). The SAMP COEs intervention straddled justifications for IBM while operationally having the characteristics of SE. In its various phases, SAMP exhibited characteristics of contract farming (CF) working through some well- documented CF models to a model of farmer-owned companies run by professional managers – a model that is not well documented in smallholder settings.

The management of SAMP appears to have faced tensions between a focus on farmers and a focus on the vehicles for their commercial success – the COEs. The desire of the COEs to be profitable meant trying to craft profitability strategies in a context where the bulk of production was coming from a small set of farmers. Maintaining inclusiveness and supporting the growth of farmers meant that the least productive of the farmers needed to be supported. For ZSS, commercial viability meant geographic spread and reducing the variability of volumes which favoured farmers with irrigated land and expansion to high potential regions. For MFC, commercial viability meant not focusing on a small set of value chains and developing farmer capabilities but rather focusing on exploiting available market opportunities which in turn favoured trading activities ahead of farmer development. Added to the already complex balancing act were the socially-relevant themes of gender equality, nutrition, labour-saving technologies and HIV&AIDS. A triad of complex and technically involved components (farmer productivity, company formation, and intra-household dynamics) was implemented within a single project.

The evaluation found that SAMP achieved its targets for each of its phases. There however remain several areas in need of attention. The evaluation, with the benefits of hindsight, noted that targets set for SAMP interventions were adequate for the development and testing of models but rather modest in relation to the budgets and potential of the project. The questions that remain relate to model refinement, sustainability, scaling and the safeguarding of farmers' interests in the long term.

SAMP, in its various phases, focused on improving the wellbeing of smallholder farmers through improvements in food security, nutrition security and incomes over the long-term. The mix of interventions changed over time to reflect adaptation with different strategies for achieving the aims of the project. This process of adaptation relied on active learning and innovation. The

learning and adaptation affected both the range of actors brought into the project and the types of services offered to farmers. Aspects that failed were dropped, while those that succeeded were maintained. By mid-term in SAMP 3, a promising model had emerged, albeit with its flaws. SAMP 3+ sought to consolidate this model. The consolidation of the model appears to have focused on addressing some flaws, particularly, inadequate attention to the non-market-based non-commercial aspects of inclusion and household food and nutrition security. The interventions focused on these aspects proved to be effective but without a well-defined strategy for reinforcement and scaling out. Interventions focused on the COEs were relevant and reasonably effective. However, the interventions focused on the COEs, and their boards could have been delivered in more empowering ways through more consultative approaches and the transfer of some responsibilities to the boards of the COEs. The pressure on the COEs to be profitable appears to have been brought on too early and without due consideration of what it would take to achieve profitability and resolution of the operational constraints of the COEs.

The COEs bore some of the effects of an adaptive approach that started with connecting farmers to value chain actors to undertaking some of the functions of value-chain actors and then establishing companies to fulfil multiple roles within the value chain. Decisions were taken that later turned out to be sources of difficulties. These ranged from the transfer of Palladium personnel at Palladium salaries to the start of the COEs without defined periods of tenure, transition plans or performance-related adjustments. The models of support to farmers for commerce-related services entailed direct brokerage of services and building internal company capacities. Such approaches are modelled along with dominant company strategies and are evident in the company strategies. Building in-house capacities in areas such as extension and field inspections presented challenges of service adequacy as the costs did not allow for more personnel to be recruited. At the same time, in the case of Zimbabwe, it led to a breakdown of relations between extension personnel and SAMP farmers. The breakdown was detrimental to farmers' interests and arose largely from extension personnel feeling marginalized and ill-equipped to assist farmers that had undergone training they (extension personnel) had not been included in. On the other hand, GRMZ and the COEs held the view that extension services did not have the capacity to support the SAMP farmers. Various reasons were cited by GRMZ for not engaging in some partnerships. These included a belief that GRMZ could do a better job than CBOs and NGOs with social issues and a directive against the provision of support to government departments in Zimbabwe.

In the final phase of SAMP, interventions were made to strengthen governance. The interventions yielded some positive benefits. At the end of SAMP, governance issues were works in progress across all the COEs. The end of SAMP meant that the further strengthening of COE governance was left to boards. The abilities of the boards to see the tasks through, at best, were tenuous. The boards, at a minimum faced four challenges:

- their own development and continued assertion of their roles;
- providing strategic guidance to businesses that are unique in their makeup and purpose;
- guiding the businesses to overcome internal and external challenges; and
- ensuring continuity of direction with the expiration board member tenures.

The long duration of SAMP, as well as its adaptive nature, required that there be periodic reflection on project content, strategy choices, effectiveness and corrective measures. Risks inherent in the adaptive nature of the project included:

- The project agenda being broad such that the content of the project could expand while remaining relevant;
- Loss of focus between people as beneficiaries (farmers and household members) and the mechanisms for achieving project ends (companies);
- Loading content on the wrong vehicles/mechanisms for delivery;
- Inadequate attention to within delivery mechanism issues and challenges;
- The dominance of operational issues over strategic considerations;
- Inadequate learning arising from too broad a range of issues, inadequate theoretical grounding and weak documentation; and
- Challenges in designing appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems for the many aspects built into the project.

To achieve a more deliberative and structured adaptation process, improvements would have been needed on the TOC assumptions, TOA, the M&E system, and the content of programme coordination meetings. Recognition of the final phase as refining a model rather than merely addressing some operational aspects of an emergent model would have called for greater investment in strategic analysis in addition to the operational focus. For these reasons, earlier placement of the evaluation could have been beneficial to the project through highlighting areas in need of attention while corrective measures could be taken within the life of the project.

The evaluation findings, together with the validation workshops, favoured the continuation of support for SAMP. The position was arrived at in light of the incomplete consolidation of the SAMP model, including the ongoing processes of strengthening governance. Across all the countries challenges arose that provided a basis for learning and recognition of weaknesses in the emergent model. While the Zimbabwe COEs appear to be ready to go it alone, they have incomplete processes and face a challenging context. In Lesotho and Eswatini, the turnaround processes are incomplete. The COEs still face challenges in accessing adequate financial resources for their operations. Table 3 below presents an overview of the areas of friction, the causes, and indications of the appropriate actors to have addressed the issues.

TABLE 3: INTERFACES AND CAUSES OF FRICTION BETWEEN ACTORS

Interface	Friction	Causes	Actors to resolve
Farmer-COE field Relations	Weighing, rejection, failure to collect, returns, transportation, operational level disputes	Inadequate support and poor communication	COE management
Farmer-COE	Side-marketing, credit repayment avoidance	A mix of shareholders and non-shareholders where one group has a long-term stake in the company, and the other does not share the same stake. Inadequate arrangements to address delinquent practices	COE management with Board Guidance
Farmer-COE	Prices, Payments, Complaints	Poor communication, weak monitoring, and absence of transparent complaints tracking mechanisms	Boards
Farmer - COE	Payment delays	Inadequate operating capital	Boards and Shareholders
COE Management-Boards	Control, accountability, misuse/mismanagement of resources	Inadequate board oversight, legacy issues on appointments and salary levels	Boards

COE Management - Boards	Lack of strategic input, fault-finding and blaming	Inadequate capacity, conflicts of interests for farmer board members,	Boards
COE – Local leadership	Exclusion, discrimination against farmers working with COEs	Inadequate balancing of interventions as both developmental (requiring the engagement of local leadership) and as private sector activity (concerned only with direct clients). Lack of standard protocols particularly for Zimbabwe, where political sensitivities are high.	Boards
COE – Extension Services	Inadequate support to COE farmers	Exclusion from skills development/enhancement, absence of defined roles, seemingly being displaced by in-house and farmer capacities	COEs
COE - Distributors	Non-payment/ failure to remit sales revenue	Perverse incentives for delayed payments, inadequate experience with credit management	COEs and Boards
COE – Financial institutions	COE as debt collects from unwilling/unable clients with different priorities	Premature redirecting of farmers to formal credit systems when locally-based credit (ISALS) may have yielded better results	COEs
COE-GRMZ	Decision-making, prioritisation and management practices	Inadequate consultation, inadequately defined roles for establishment phase of COEs, tensions between NGO and private sector approaches, failure to direct issues appropriately to boards and management	GRMZ
COE-GRMZ	Mistrust, transparency	Absence of proactive measures to address legacy issues, developments in other COEs and development of shared way forward	GRMZ & SDC
COE-GRMZ-SDC	Inclusiveness	An inadequate balance between developmental work and commercial viability coupled with lack of clarity on cost-sharing and delivery mechanisms for developmental goals	GRMZ
GRMZ -SDC	Efficiency	Budgets and contracts that are not fully results-based and provided no incentives for efficient use of resources	SDC
GRMZ - SDC	Effectiveness and sustainability	Inadequate recognition and strategic input on areas of potential conflict between project interests and company interests	SDC
GRMZ-SDC	Limited credit/visibility of SDC	Limited profiling of the project after the termination of the Palladium contract.	SDC

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SDC

Issue: SAMP had several loose end interventions such as the COEs turnaround strategies, the continued supply of foundation seed materials to COEs and the appropriate nesting of cross-cutting issues for scaling up and sustainability. These warranted investments to see them to completion and contribute to COE governance, strategy and effectiveness and scaling up and sustainability of initiatives beyond the project duration.

Recommendation 1: Consider a low cost two to three-year intervention to address issues outlined in recommendations 2 to 8.

Recommendation 2: Provide support for the consolidation of COEs learning and governance. SAMP went through a phase of refining and consolidating the intervention model and its operations. The key elements of a model are in place. However, staying true to the objectives and ensuring long-term effectiveness and sustainability require further investments in strengthening

some elements. Key elements to be addressed include refining and grounding the model in PSD, IBM and SE literature; clarifying the strategies for ensuring a sound balance between profitability and developmental outcomes predicated on inclusiveness; strategies for inclusion; and strengthening the governance of the COEs.

Recommendation 3: Refine the strategy for the intra-household focused interventions of gender, nutrition, HIV & AIDS, and labour-saving technologies to match the replicability and portability of the interventions that are driven by the COEs. There are various strategy options ranging from the COEs incorporating these interventions in their work to partnerships that can be mobilised to work independently or offer interventions wherever the COEs work.

Recommendation 4: Revisit the productivity strategies in support of farmers, explore viable options, and support implementation. The TOA contains a number of relevant interventions to enhance farmer productivity. However, the implementation of the project has not ensured all the components work as expected. For example, in Zimbabwe, access to credit, extension services, inputs have faced challenges that have left farmers operating well below their potential and encouraged the COEs to expand to areas with better production levels. At the same time, the COEs have operated in ways that have diluted the commodity value chain approach, thus limiting continuity in production and farmers' growth. In a context of reduced predictability of COE support, incentives for investment are reduced.

Recommendation 5: Support the further development of the COEs to ensure the sustainability of the businesses. Each of the COEs has work currently underway that is important to ensure the continuity of operations and foster sustainability of benefits. These processes that include the development of the operating systems (human resources policies, finance policies, monitoring and evaluation systems, complaints mechanisms, realignment of costs to business capacity, and business recovery, among others) need to be seen to completion. Without support, the processes are likely to stall or resort to trade-offs that may result in lost years or permanent loss of benefits for farmers in low potential areas.

Recommendation 6: Revisit and support work to facilitate access to EGS parent material. SAMP facilitated access to EGS parent material across the project countries with the ZSS having direct interactions with the CIMMYT and CBI while LSC and TSC relied on project facilitated access. SAMP sought to support the development of national capacities for the acquisition of EGS parent material. In both Eswatini and Lesotho, these capacities were yet to be developed. In Zimbabwe, the strategic thrust appears to be towards the development of an in-house capacity to develop new varieties. The status at the end of the project reflected some strategy tensions that ought to be resolved with choices being made based on prevailing realities. Key considerations would include whether or not SAMP should develop national capacities in all the countries for a one-size-fits-all approach or view the sub-region as an ecosystem in which each of the companies works with resources available within the sub-region to meet its needs. Under an eco-system approach, the problems of access to EGS parent material are recast from national capacity to acquire to facilitating and entrenching processes for company access to EGS from existing suppliers.

Recommendation 7: Explore a sub-regional ecosystem/network type approach to the challenges faced by the COEs. Each of the COEs individually faced challenges to which consideration of a regional approach carried potential solutions. ZSS had direct access to CIMMYT and CBI while TSC and LSC faced challenges in accessing EGS parent material. Rethinking the relationship

between the three COEs carried the potential for the companies to develop other aspects of their businesses while resolving local challenges to access to EGS parent material. For example, the companies could have focused on importing, demonstrating and marketing seed from ZSS. In turn, ZSS could have been able to address its financial challenges through pre-payment arrangements and earning foreign currency for seed produced on contract. Within such arrangements, ZSS may have stood a better chance of overcoming administrative challenges in obtaining export permits. Similarly, MFC could have benefitted from adopting/maintaining a commodity-specific thrust that would allow for partnerships across borders. The essence of the recommendation is not the focus on specific measures. Rather it is the contrast between the early years of SAMP focused on adaptation to challenges and context and the later years focused largely on consolidation and limited adaptation.

Recommendation 8: Provide support to COE boards to engage in strategic conversations and shape the implementation of recommendations 1 to 7. Part of the challenge in the implementation of SAMP was a focus on solving operational challenges without adequate strategic engagement. The boards of the COEs are relatively new and working with concepts that are evolving. As custodians of the future of SAMP objectives, the boards require more than technical competences. Investment needs to be made in developing conceptual clarity. The recommendations outlined above provide opportunities to contribute to the further empowerment of boards and ensuring they safeguard and sustain delivery on the objectives of SAMP.

Issue: The budgeting approach adopted in SAMP resulted in a disconnect between the results and expenditures. Such disconnects have implications for the efficiency of spending as well as the estimation of value-for-money.

Recommendation 9: SDC should, to the extent possible, consider adjusting its results-based approach to planning and budgeting. The budgeting approach used by SAMP meant that there was no direct link between the bulk of the budget and the interventions listed in the TOA. The implication of this was that there was no way to tell if adequate resources were being invested in each of the listed interventions. The evaluators' expectation was that parts 2 and 3 of the budget, to the extent possible would be linked to specific results.

Recommendation 10: SDC should consider making guidance/templates available to partners to make better use of planning tools such as the TOC and TOA. Providing guidance will ensure that the full benefits of using selected planning tools are realised. In providing guidance/templates, there would be merit in distinguishing between different types of tools such as a programme theory, theory of change, and theory of action. Better articulation of change and how interventions will bring it about contributes better implementation strategies, monitoring and adaptation.

Recommendation 11: In projects that have several components, consideration should be given to developing separate, coherent and complementary strategies for the achievement of project objectives. For each component, attention must be paid to completeness (objectives, target groups, means of delivery, sustainability, monitoring, review and adaptation).

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARDS OF COES

Issue: There exist tensions between the commercial interests of the COEs and their developmental goals.

Recommendation 12: The COE boards should develop company charters to set guiding frameworks for strategic and operational decisions and to provide reference points for the maintenance of acceptable balance between competing objectives. Inclusive business models focus on addressing limitations to inclusion without sacrificing business survival. In the case of SAMP, inclusiveness was achieved through the provision of funding to meet some COE operational costs. The coming to an end of the funding put pressure on the COEs to be commercially viable. Achieving commercial viability and sustaining inclusiveness calls for a balance that does not trade one outcome for the other. In the absence of set parameters defining the extent to which inclusiveness can be sacrificed for profitability, there are risks of the farmers that benefit the most from inclusion being excluded as they will most likely contribute more to costs than to revenues. Furthermore, interventions such as GALS that are important at the household level but make no direct contributions to company earnings are at risk of not being carried forward. To address these challenges, COE boards need to provide guidance on what constitutes appropriate balance.

Issue: Strategy development for the COEs has tended towards the character and practices of established seed and commodity firms. Copying the strategies of the larger long-established firms underplays the true nature of the COEs and may result in missed opportunities.

Recommendation 13: COE boards should embrace and optimise on COEs being private sector development (PSD) initiatives towards the reduction of poverty and use this identity to set themselves apart from other market actors. The COEs have unique characteristics that set them apart. These characteristics present the COEs with opportunities to sell not just their products but also themselves and their work as examples of inclusive businesses that are not only meeting market needs but doing so in ways that empower smallholder farmers. Emphasising these characteristics presents opportunities for the COEs to benefit from availing their expertise in addressing food and nutrition insecurity and could potentially allow them preferential treatment and additional revenue streams. Building on the unique origins, characteristics and benefits of COEs is an area that requires expertise in areas where traditional business experts may not be the best to provide guidance. The boards of the COEs ought to exploit opportunities to showcase the unique potential and contributions of the COEs to contribute to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by selling not only products but also a way of supporting communities.

Issue: The COEs in the three countries face a variety of issues. A hallmark of SAMP has been adaptation and pursuing opportunities that are larger than local focus.

Recommendation 14: The COEs should explore the potential for partnerships in which they can assist each other overcome the challenges they face. The design of SAMP led to the establishment of separate COEs. Given their knowledge of each other and the challenges they each face, the COEs could consider ways of working together that could assist them in overcoming the challenges they face. Sustainability in the long-term depends less on how the operations of the COEs were shaped by SAMP but more on their abilities to seek out opportunities and innovate. Innovation need not be limited by geographic boundaries.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SAMP PARTNERS

Recommendation 15: SAMP partners should draw on the lessons of SAMP to establish and/or support innovative ways of promoting community development. SAMP demonstrated the potential for different stakeholders to contribute to community development through fostering

partnerships that opened up new opportunities for communities ranging from seed production, to access to markets and incentivising agricultural production by reducing farmers and service providers' costs. While some of the developed synergies required resources, others required the ability to organise farmers to benefit from working in groups linked to external actors. Early phases of SAMP demonstrated the potential of commodity-based farmer groups/associations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO OTHER DEVELOPMENT SECTOR AGENCIES CONSIDERING PSD, IBM AND SE

Recommendation 16: Learn from the SAMP model. The SAMP model embraced flexibility and took the concept of IBM beyond organising and including SHFs as socially responsible actions to demonstrating the potential commercial viability of SFH owned businesses operated by skilled personnel as managers. While the COEs faced challenges, the challenges were not indicative of faults with the model. Rather they served to highlight risk areas and the need for better anticipation, management and review of risk.

Recommendation 17: Build on the lessons from SAMP to support inclusive interventions that have the potential to deliver benefits in perpetuity. An important observation made by various actors was that the SAMP interventions are leaving behind something tangible (the COEs) that will benefit smallholder farmers in perpetuity. Should the COEs fail to survive, the challenges will relate more to operational weaknesses and limitations at the strategic level rather than lack of potential. There is scope to contribute to the survival of the COEs and improved food and nutrition security of smallholder farmers by giving preferential treatment and opportunities to the COEs.
