

IFOAM-Organics International

Final Report: External Evaluation of the NMA Project



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Abbreviations

CDP	Capacity Development Program
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EQ	Evaluation Questions
FiBL	Research Institute for Organic Agriculture
FM	Field Mission
GPFS	Global Program Food Security
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
MAAN	Mountain Agriculture Action Network
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MI	Micro Intervention
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NMA	Nutrition in Mountain Agro-ecosystems
NSA	Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture
NSI	Nutrition Sensitive Initiative
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RSP	Rural Service Provider
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SUN	Scaling up Nutrition
SUNSAI	Scaling up Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture Interventions
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
ToToT	Train of Teams of Trainers
WDDS	Women Dietary Diversity Score

Executive Summary

In 2015 the United Nations declared the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the common vision of all nations to improve the living conditions of people by fighting, inter alia, hunger and malnutrition, by securing the availability of food for all and by caring more for the sustainability of the living base through the promotion of organic agriculture and other forms of sustainable production methods, more in harmony with nature and the environment. Due to the central importance of nutrition for health and for economic and socio-economic developments, the UN declared in 2016 the Decade of Action on Nutrition. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) responded to that initiative by introducing its Global Program Food Security (GPFS). It is in this context that in 2015 SDC contracted IFOAM-Organics International e.V., in consortium with HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation and the Swiss Research Institute for Organic Agriculture to implement the project *Nutrition in Mountain Agroecosystems* (NMA) in its first phase. The project operates in five mountain regions, Himalaya, Hindukush, Pamir-Tian Shan, East African Highlands and Andes with a focus on the promotion of Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture (NSA) at various levels, pursuing the overall goal to improve the nutritional status of the local populations. In order to address this objective, the NMA project was designed in a three-dimensional way, which elements are interconnected in a hierarchical form. On the local level, Rural Service Providers (RSP) are sensitised and empowered to design and to introduce schemes for the diversification of the production systems and diets of rural households. It is expected that building on changes in production and consumption pattern, markets react and the dietary diversity of foods increases, leading to better nutrition and ultimately to a better nutrition and health status of the targeted population. Such effects on the ground decently communicated and promoted, will raise the awareness of policy makers at local and national level and motivate them to adjust local and national policy in favour of sustainable agricultural systems and the provision of healthy foods. Local success stories are thus supposed to have an outreach on the political arena, building up from the local to the regional to the national level. The total of such effects in the intervention countries will have an impact on the global level. Success stories of local interventions will be communicated on international events, enrich the global debate on food security and nutrition, so that ultimately many countries in pursuing the implementation of the SDGs are motivated to implement similar approaches in their spheres of influence.

Building on the recommendations of a midterm evaluation, carried out in 2017, the project was extended to a second consolidating phase of three years, ending in October 2021. It is in this context that SDC, through its implementation partner IFOAM, commissioned an evaluation study with the principle purpose to inform the owners and implementing partners on the performance of the project and on the partnership and cooperation modalities of project implementation in both phases. The frame for the evaluation is given by the evaluation criteria of the DAC of OECD and their interpretation follows the guidelines given in the latest edition of 2021. The evaluation took place in summer 2021 between July and October and builds on a whole series of different information sources, inter alia the vast documentation on the project, many interviews with stakeholders and key actors of the project, interviews with local actors and beneficiaries in Nepal and India and various discussion rounds with concerned IFOAM managers.

The evaluation comes to the following conclusions:

- There is no doubt that the objective of the approach to improve the nutritional basis of disadvantaged populations in mountainous areas of specific countries is in line with the general objective of the SDGs and with the strategic orientation of the project owner, SDC.
- The choice of the intervention countries and regions is also in line with the objectives of SDC's GPFS program and the focus of raising agricultural production and food diversity on a local level and increasing awareness for the link between nutrition and responsible agricultural practices as well. However, the diversity among the selected countries in terms of economic and socio-economic and administrative development is substantial, challenging strongly the implementation efficiency of the targeted approach.
- For the implementation of the approach three target groups have been selected: on local level it is Rural Service Providers, on the national level, it is influential persons, predominantly decision makers in governments and administrations and on the global level it is policy makers and donors, influential in the global nutrition discourse, who are target at by the project. The selection of the target group fits to the overall project rational.
- Building on the project concept, an impact-oriented project matrix was set-up, structuring impact, outcomes, outputs and activities in the typical form. Log-frames from phase I to phase II do not differ much and both address the three levels of intervention: the grass root level with work on capacity building of Rural Service Providers and the implementation of limited interventions, the national and the global political level for advocacy work. For all levels indicators are formulated and assumptions named. Formally the planning matrices are correctly set-up, transparent and traceable. However, all formulations and particularly those referring to the political advocacy work reflect ambitions and objectives which, in the frame of a typical cooperation and development assistance project, can hardly be achieved.
- It is mostly the formulated outcome on the field work for which a direct contribution to the overall goal can be established. For the political components, although a certain logic is discernible and an inclusion in a project planning understandable, directly measurable and tangible relationships to the overall project goal cannot be established.
- The field work builds primarily on the formation of Rural Service Providers as key communicators for Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture. Candidates for the formation of RSPs have been selected according to specific criteria, considering their influence, respect and reputation in the villages. If households shall increase production of nutritious foods and a full universe of consumers shall appreciate nutritious food, they need to be guided in a credible way. The approach chosen to recruit message communicators, RSPs, from the community of respected persons in a specific village or region is seen to be very appropriate for credibly propagating NSA.
- Capacity building programs for RSPs, ending with the implementation of an own designed micro-intervention, provides the training concept a very convincing character. This is even more so as the setup of the micro-interventions was only partly supported with limited funds in the first and with no funds in the second project phase.

- The choice of the micro-intervention to be implemented was widely open, but in many cases projects with an economic relevance for the household were chosen, increasing the probability of replication and sustainability.
- For the Mountain Agroecosystems Action Network (MAAN), aiming at fostering and promoting the social capacities among RSPs and supporting through communication and information provision the setting up of the micro-interventions, a decisive role for the success of the RSP program cannot be verified. The idea that RSP use, maintain and further develop MAAN and prefer it in communication and networking over e.g. Telegram and Facebook, was probably right from the beginning too ambitious and idealistic, underestimating the power of global social media. This does however not exclude that in some cases MAAN can and will be used as a promotion tool for NMA and/or for NSA, more by project staff and presumably less by target groups or final beneficiaries.
- The original Capacity Development Program for RSPs, pursued mostly in phase I of the project, is considered as the precursor for the following train-the-trainer program. This program succeeded largely by the voluntary engagement of RSPs, supported financially in a limited form, to act as trainers and to form RSPs. Almost 800 RSPs could be formed, who set-up, largely on their own costs, micro projects, suggesting the conclusion that it is the NSA philosophy which is convincing and which drives the engagement, culminating in a strong ownership, ultimately the elementary condition for sustainability.
- Building on some criticism on the RSP concept, the Scaling-Up Nutritional Sensitive Agriculture Intervention (SUNSAI) approach was introduced in the second project phase. SUNSAIs were supposed to be organised and implemented not by individual persons but more by local institutions, financially support to some extent by the project and having a more holistic outreach than the micro-projects of the RSPs. All in all, 35 SUNSAIs could be implemented, for which however the true reach cannot be verified as the formulated indicators propose formulas for the estimation of the reach which strongly rely on non-verifiable assumptions.
- The field mission has confirmed that the relationship between the RSPs and the SUNSAIs and the impact is straight forward. Improvement of nutrition of the local population could be measured by applying FAO's concept of the Women Dietary Diversity Score (WDDS). In all intervention countries substantial improvements of the WDDS could be achieved. However, to what extent such sustain when the project ends, cannot be verified.
- Political advocacy work played a large role in project implementation and targeted on the national levels at adjusting national policies in such a way that diversified agricultural production and the consumption of nutritional food are politically promoted. A number of activities under this outcome have been carried out, typically in the form of presentations, participations in local fairs, direct dialogues and discussion with decision makers etc. There is no doubt, that political local advocacy work can have an impact on the way of thinking of decision makers and on the decisions taken - and by this determining the conditions under which farmers are producing. It must, however be considered that policy formation is complex and direct links from a project, with limited resources and influence, to national politics is practically impossible to establish.

- On a global level, it is even more delicate to impact global political trends. Attempting to attain an influence on a specific debate on a global level is not very realistic, although it is not excluded that the continuous and widespread presentation of practical examples and success stories influences in one way or the other the global debate on nutrition and on SDGs, which is anyway going on.
- The project with its manifold activities over nine countries in its second phase was endowed with a limited budget of about CHF 3 Mio., leaving per country and year a budget of typically less than CHF 150,000. With such budget many RSPs had been formed, SUNSAIs implemented, awareness creation campaigns and advocacy work carried out, the MAAN platform development, project progress monitored, country activities coordinated and steered and the project progress extensively documented. The use of funds has been extremely efficient.
- There is however the general question to what extent it was truly necessary for working on a specific SDG to cover nine intervention countries and to address three major technical topics within the frame of a given restricted budget and whether a leaner and more realistic approach would not have been more appropriate.

Such appraisal leads to the following DAC scoring:

- As the project targets fully the strategic orientation of SDC and contributes substantially to the fulfilment of some SDGs, a score of 1 for the relevance of the project appears to be justified.
- The part of the project concept which relates to the work on the grass root level has directly and sustainably contributed to the overall goal and thus the impact. This part of the project is highly valued. The intention to impact political orientations was, supposedly right from the beginning, much too ambitious and not realistically achievable. Consolidated, a score of 2 is given to the criterion coherence.
- Similarly, and for the same reasons, effectiveness of project work on the local level is rated to be very high, while on the political levels considerably lower. Nevertheless, for a relatively small budget substantial impacts on the ground could be achieved. Such achievement could have presumably been even higher when the project approach would have been more focused, concentrating more resources on ground level work, rather than on political advocacy and on less countries. Effectiveness scores 2-3 and efficiency at 2.
- The impact of the project is visible and the monitoring results show that the diversity of food and nutrition in general for the target group improved. As the applied indicator WDDS is not without criticism, a score of 1-2 is given.
- Likewise, it can be assumed that the impact achieved on the grass root level sustains and develops further. As such cannot be assumed for the political levels, a consolidated score of 1.5 for sustainability is given.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context of the Evaluation

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) declared the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as the common vision of all nations to improve the living conditions of people by fighting, inter alia, hunger and malnutrition, by securing the availability of food for all and by caring more for the sustainability of the living base e.g. through the promotion of organic agriculture and of other forms of sustainable production methods, more in harmony with nature and the environment. Due to the central importance of nutrition for health and for economic and socio-economic developments in general, the UN declared in 2016 the Decade of Action on Nutrition.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) responded to that initiative by introducing its Global Program Food Security (GPFS). In the context of this program, projects are funded which explicitly contribute to the implementation of one or more of the SDGs. Mountainous areas deserve a particular attention as there, a disproportional high number of the world's chronically malnourished people, reside.

In 2015, SDC contracted IFOAM e. V. (IFOAM-Organics International), in consortium with HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (HELVETAS), the Swiss Research Institute for Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and Wageningen University¹ to implement the project *Nutrition in Mountain Agro-ecosystems (NMA)* in its first phase. The project operates in five mountain regions, Himalaya, Hindukush, Pamir-Tian Shan, East African Highlands and Andes with a focus on the promotion of *Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture (NSA)* at various levels, pursuing the overall goal to improve the nutritional status of the local populations.

In order to implement such a project, IFOAM set up an organisational structure which delegates the implementation responsibilities to local partners, typically carefully selected Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), who manage the activities in the field in the countries of project implementation. IFOAM maintains the overall responsibility and decision capacity and also reserved the responsibility for the global component of advocacy of nutrition sensitive agriculture as one major means to ensure better nutrition of the world's population.

In phase I of the project, decently prepared and implemented between 2015 and 2017 in five target countries (Nepal, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Ethiopia and Peru), different approaches to promote nutrition sensitive agriculture and the consumption of nutritious foods were tried out and lessons drawn for consideration in an eventual second project phase. A mid-term evaluation², carried out in 2017 confirmed the suitability of the approach to implement the overall goal of the project, raising the consumption of sufficient, safe and nutritious foods, particularly in mountainous areas and provided recommendations for a consolidating second phase of three years, endorsed for financing by SDC.

¹ In this text, the consortium is denoted as IFOAM. While all documents available state that the Consortium consists of IFOAM, FiBL and HELVETAS, the mentioning of Wageningen University as a Consortium member is not consistent.

² N.N., 2018 Evaluation of "Nutrition in Mountain Agro-Eco-Systems", NMA, implemented by the consortium IFOAM – Organics International, Helvetas and FiBL with their national partners Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation in Nepal, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Pakistan, Bioservice Kyrgyzstan, Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD) in Ethiopia and IFOAM Latin America in Peru; funded by the Global Programme Food Security of SDC

This second phase of the project adjusted the concept according to the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation, expanded the intervention regions by adding three more countries - India, Ecuador and Tajikistan - and oriented the concept towards consolidation and scale up and towards the delegation of more responsibilities to target groups and partners, so that the approach will sustainably be anchored. The monitoring system for verifying impacts was intensified and focus was given, inter alia, on identifying cases and examples for dissemination on a global scale, demonstrating practically how SDGs can be worked on with limited funds.

1.2 Procedure and Frame of the Evaluation

The second project phase, after three years of implementation and an extension of one year - endowed with an additional fund of about CHF 149,000 - as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, ends in October 2021. It is now the intention of all concerned partners to draw lessons from the implementation of the project across both phases in such a way that the accumulated experience can be used and employed in the design and the management of similar projects in future.

It is in this context that SDC, through its implementation partner IFOAM, commissioned an evaluation study with the principal purpose to inform the owners and implementing partners on the performance of the project and on the partnership and cooperation modalities of project implementation in both phases. Thus, the present evaluation has the main purpose to describe and to assess the quality of the implementation process and the results of it.

The frame for the evaluation is given by the evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The definition and use of these elements is extensively described in many relevant basic documents. For this evaluation, the OECD guidelines in its latest edition from April 2021 are applied.³ The work on these criteria, underpinned by guiding questions as pointed out in the technical proposal⁴ of the evaluation team, shall help to elucidate the pros and cons of the approach, what has worked well and what not, to what extent objectives, defined in the basic planning documents, could be achieved and if not, which were the reasons and ultimately assess the overall impact and its long term effects.

Not all of the defined evaluation criteria have the same weight. The most critical and important ones are the criteria on relevance and impact. Relevance, because in the case a high relevance of the project for the intervention countries and the overall strategy of the financing partner cannot be verified, the project becomes redundant and impact, because if there are no visible and tangible impacts, it is hard to expect long lasting effects, thus sustainability but also because other criteria such as coherence, efficiency and effectiveness depend on the impacts achieved.⁵ Consequently this evaluation focuses extensively on assessing the relevance of the project and on tangible impacts achieved.

Drawing on such an analysis, recommendations are proposed, focusing on to what extent, under which circumstances and with which kind of interventions and actions a further up-scaling and/or replication of the different initiatives and approaches carried out in the project, might be possible and realistic.

³ OECD, 2021: Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully

⁴ See Annex 1

⁵ On the discussion of the value and use of the different DAC criteria, see the many contributions in the Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation.

The evaluation took place in summer 2021, between July and October, and builds on a whole series of different information sources:

- The documentation on the project,
- Interviews with a number of stakeholders and key actors (see annex II),
- Interviews with local actors and beneficiaries in Nepal and India (see annex III) and
- various discussion rounds with concerned IFOAM managers.⁶

Impressions from the field draw on Nepal and India only. The mid-term evaluation focused with its field mission on Peru and Ethiopia. As however the approach was implemented in all countries in more or less the same systematic and given the ample documentation also on other countries, the illustrations from Nepal and India, in their generalised form, might also apply for the interventions in the other countries and supplement the findings on Peru and Ethiopia, already presented in the mid-term evaluation report.

Travel and working restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic hampered the realisation of the evaluation study massively. It was not possible to travel from Europe to Nepal or India and so the evaluation team proposed initially local experts to carry out interviews with local stakeholders. As in July 2021 the Covid-19 crisis continued to get worse, the team, together with representatives of the project steering committee, decided on July 21 not to send out local experts to target groups directly but only to carry out remote interviews by telephone or internet. Such were decently prepared by the evaluation team and the field work took place during the month of September 2021.

Overview 1: Roles and responsibilities of the members of the evaluation team

Team member	Primary role	Specific tasks / deliverables
Dr Ulrich März	Team leader	Project coordinator and contact person. Responsible for the organization of work, drafting of reports, all aspects of cooperation with the contract partners. Final report and presentation.
Elisabeth Rüegg	Organic expert	Responsible for data collection, coordination and supervision of the field mission of the regional experts. Analysis and interpretation of field data.
Ram Chandra Khanal	Regional expert Nepal	Coordination and implementation of the field mission in Nepal.
Kusum Bhandari	Regional expert Nepal	Assistance to the coordinator of the field mission in Nepal.
IMO CONTROL PVT. LTD. India	Regional expert team India	Coordination and implementation of the field mission in India.

Source: compiled by the authors

⁶ Actors and stakeholders talked to and interviews in the course of this evaluation, see Annex 2

Overview 2: Milestones of the evaluation

Steps	Responsibility/stakeholders	Timing
Familiarization with the project		July 2021
Clarification of the Terms of Reference, detailed planning and kick-off	Ulrich März, Elisabeth Rüegg	July 21, 2021
Workshops and interviews with selected stakeholders	Ulrich März, Elisabeth Rüegg, SDC, IFOAM, FiBL, Helvetas, University of Wageningen, Welthungerhilfe India, Helvetas Nepal	August to September 2021
Field mission Nepal	Regional experts, Elisabeth Rüegg	September 7 to September 27, 2021
Field mission India	Regional experts, Elisabeth Rüegg	September 7 to September 27, 2021
Submission of draft evaluation report	Ulrich März	October 4, 2021.
Presentation of final results	Ulrich März, Elisabeth Rüegg	October 2021
Submission of final draft report	Ulrich März	October 2021

Source: compiled by the authors

The evaluation team and also the commissioning IFOAM team are aware of the shortcomings of the evaluation due to the restrictions on the intended fieldwork. Still and despite these restrictions, it is believed that building on the evaluation of the existing documentation, the interviews and talks held, a clear assessment of the project is provided, and even more important, scope and perspective are opened in the form of lessons learned for the continuation of the approach in a more streamlined way and/or for the use of the principal elements in the design and implementation of similar projects.

It is not the intention of the evaluation to comment and to analyse all activities carried out in detail, but more to review its strategic orientation and the major elements of implementation which made the project work, which led to the results and which have the potential to sustain and to be used in the design and operation of similar projects in future.

2. The Project

2.1 Project Profile

Project Title	Nutrition in Mountain Agro-ecosystems (NMA)
Rationale and background of project	Chronically mal- and undernourished people are more frequently found in mountain than in other regions
Overall goal (intended impact)	Phase I: Households in mountain areas consume more diverse diets Phase II: NMA contributes that men, women and children in mountain areas consume more diverse diets containing sufficient safe and nutritious foods
Outcomes (phase I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers, processors and traders diversify and intensify production, improve post-harvest management and promote a nutritious product range for self-subsistence and to consumers • National policies and action plans support diversified production and consumption • Agro-ecology based diversification is promoted internationally as a feasible and implementable approach to improve nutrition in mountain areas
Outcomes (phase II)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households increase production of nutritious foods and Rural Service Providers design and implement Micro-interventions • People value the benefits of nutritious foods • National policies and action plans support and stimulate diversified production and consumption • Global policies and processes strengthen the nutrition sensitive agriculture approach, particularly in mountain regions
Countries covered	Nepal, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Ethiopia, Peru, India (phase II), Tajikistan (phase II), Ecuador (phase II)
Mountainous areas covered	Himalaya, Hindukush, Pamir-Tian Shan, East-African Highlands, Andes
Project owner	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
Implementing agency	IFOAM-Organics International e. V.
Supporting agencies/ consortium partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (HELVETAS) • Swiss Research Institute for Organic Agriculture (FiBL) • Wageningen University and Research Centre for Development and Innovation in The Netherlands (CDI-Wageningen UR)
Local implementation partners	Helvetas (Nepal, Pakistan), Bioservice (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan), Institute for Sustainable Development (Ethiopia), Heifer (Ecuador), Welthungerhilfe (India), , Asociacion Biodinamica Peru
Target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficiaries: disadvantaged households in rural mountainous regions and within the households particularly women and children • Direct and primary: Rural Service Providers (RSP) in the intervention countries • Secondary: decision makers on local, regional and national level that shape/influence food security strategies and can contribute to the spreading of nutrition sensitive agricultural practices • Tertiary: policy makers and donors on a global level, influential in the global nutrition discourse, strategy setting and project funding
Duration of project	2015-2021 (phase I from 2015 to 2017; phase II from 2018 - 10/2021)
Funding and budget	Total: Budget for phase I: CHF 2.61 Mio, total budget for phase II: CHF 3.15 Mio

Source: compiled by the authors based on project documentation

2.2 Project Rationale

2.2.1 Overall Strategy and General Concept

Currently, global development policy is governed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Effective in 2015 and consisting of 17 specific sub-goals, they continue and expand the policies, set by the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Similar to the MDGs, they articulate a set of global goals with a set of indicators to which all UN members have committed themselves. The goals include specific targets particularly on poverty reduction, the provision of basic services and main elements of environmental protection, expanding the scope of the largely poverty focused MDGs.

Under SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), a special reference is made to nutrition: End hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture⁷. This SDG aims thus at ending all forms of malnutrition, promoting sustainable food production systems and maintaining genetic diversity among others. Also, other SDGs are indirectly referring to nutrition. SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) focuses on health, which starts with nutrition. Nutritious food is also critical for learning, the focus of SDG 4 (Quality Education).

In order to address the SDGs in a concrete way and particularly the SDGs related to nutrition and sustainable agriculture, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is implementing a specific strategy, the Global Program Food Security (GPFS)⁸. Under this program, specific aspects and components will and have to be addressed by funded projects and the NMA project particularly addresses two of them:

- Component 1: sustainable agriculture and food systems with the thematic priority on effective agricultural innovation and extension systems and
- Component 2: improved nutrition for all with the thematic priority on improved nutrition for all.

The GPFS aims to find solutions to global challenges linked to food security. It engages in global political dialogue and manages specific projects, likely to influence regional and international policy. It strives for the development of innovative solutions with the potential to benefit millions of smallholder farmers. Information provided through rural advisory services remains a key factor to agricultural production for smallholder farmers around the world and the GPFS supports on the ground actions and research initiatives to improve access to sufficient nutritious foods for rural communities in mountainous regions through a network of actors, facilitating innovation and diversification of proven nutritious sensitive practices.

Ending hunger and malnutrition demands sustainable food production systems and diverse agricultural practices, resilient to adverse environmental conditions. There is a number of empirical evidence, showing the positive relationship between sustainable agricultural production systems and nutrition. Potentials of suitable agro-ecological production systems for poverty reduction, particularly in marginal areas such as mountain ecosystems clearly exist. One of the concepts to exploit such potentials is the approach of Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture (NSA).⁹

⁷ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/> (accessed: 11.09.2021)

⁸ <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/sdc/organisation/departments/global-cooperation/global-programme-food-security.html> (accessed: 11.09.2021)

⁹ Jaenicke H. & Virchow D., 2013: Entry points into a nutrition-sensitive agriculture; Food Security 5: pp 679-692

NSA is a concept that aims at narrowing the gap between available and accessible food and the food needed for a healthy and balanced diet for all people. It explicitly incorporates nutrition objectives into agriculture and addresses the dimension of food and nutrition security, including health, education, economic, environmental and social aspects. The concept is considered as one possible answer to the assumption that the current global agro-food systems, which are predominantly based on grain and soy beans, will not be able to satisfy the increasing demand of food quality and quantity in the decades to come. More flexible, locally adapted systems have to be in place, providing food and nutrition security, being able to better cope with increasing climate variability, social insecurity, land ownership shifts and resource degradation.

Fostering NSA requires the interaction of a number of different elements. Political rules and guidelines need to be adjusted, mechanisms of collaboration between all actors concerned need to be established, awareness created and actors capacitated, pressure groups selected and coached and sustainable elements of relevant food chains selected and worked on. These elements are not free from the social, socio-economic, economic and political developments and the full basket of the effects of climate change need to be considered and integrated as well.

In order to address these issues and demands, the NMA project was designed in a three-dimensional way, which elements are interconnected in a hierarchical form.

On the local level, Rural Service Providers (RSP) are sensitised and empowered to design and to introduce schemes for the diversification of production systems and diets of rural households. It is expected that building on changes in production and consumption pattern, markets react and the dietary diversity of foods increases, leading to better nutrition and ultimately to a better nutritional and health status of the targeted population.

Such effects on the ground, decently communicated and promoted, will raise the awareness of policy makers at local and national level and motivate them to adjust local and national policies in favour of sustainable agricultural systems and the provision of healthy foods. Local success stories are thus supposed to have an outreach on the political arena, building up from the local to the regional to the national level.

The total of such effects in the intervention countries will have an impact on the global level. Success stories of local interventions and targeted political adjustments will be communicated on international events, enrich the global debate on food security and nutrition so that ultimately many countries in pursuing the implementation of the SDGs are motivated to implement similar approaches in their sphere of influence. Knowledge and experience decently communicated will thus spread over the globe and impact policies and decision making in many more countries than just in those, where the approach is implemented.

There is no doubt that the objective of the approach is in line with the general objectives of the SDGs and particularly with SDG 2 and 3. While contributions to the improvement of the nutritional and agricultural conditions and systems on the ground are supposed to be reachable and manageable, the intended effects on the political (both national and international) levels are seen more critical and challenging to be reached.

2.2.2 Specific Framework Conditions and Choice of the Intervention Countries

All selected countries belong to the priority countries, in which SDC is active through its multilateral initiatives and all countries show vast mountainous areas, in which the number of disadvantaged populations is high.¹⁰ Extending the number of intervention countries in phase II of the project has its roots in the idea, that spill-over effects from neighbouring countries might be used. Agriculture in all of these countries contributes to the national GDPs substantially, being in the range of 20-30% for Pakistan, Nepal, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan and Ethiopia. For India and the Latin American countries, the contribution is smaller, ranging from 7% as in the case of Peru to 15% as in the case of India. However, in all countries the sector is important for absorbing labour force. In the Latin American countries, the share is in the range of 20-30%, while in the other countries, it well exceeds 30% and in the case of Ethiopia 80%. The relevance of the sector for the national economy and political setting increases, the more the sector contributes to the GDP but especially the more labour is absorbed. The agricultural sector of the target countries contributes also to their trade balance. Several of the countries show a negative trade balance of agricultural and food products. Export earnings from the agricultural and the food sector in such cases are lower than the expenses for food imports. Such tendencies indicate that these countries are no longer in a position to nourish their populations, independently from imports, making them dependent from the outside world and draining scarce hard currency resources. Populations in mountainous regions are even more prone by such trends, as the agro-ecological and economical characteristics restrict expansion of production, while population growth remains high.

The choice of the intervention countries and regions is in line with the objectives of SDC's GPFS programme and the focus on raising agricultural production and food diversity on a local level and increasing awareness on the link between nutrition and responsible agricultural practices. However, the diversity among the selected countries in terms of economic, socio-economic and administrative development is substantial. Such diversity can have a strong influence on the degree, changes e.g. in policies can be realised and sustainable anchored.

Changes of economic orientation on a nation level in general imply investments, funds, political capacity and will. The availability of funds relies on taxes collected and the possibility to attract foreign loans and credits or bilateral and multilateral aid grants and loans as far as the state level is concerned and on local and international investments to the extent the private sector is concerned. Tax revenues in all selected countries are relatively low and fluctuate between less than 10% to around 20% of GDP, far away from the typical 30-40% in industrial countries. All countries have a negative credit rating or, as in the case of Nepal and Kirgizstan, no rating at all. Global institutional investors are usually not allowed to invest in government bonds with such or no ratings. Official Development Assistance (ODA) is for all selected countries, with the exception of India relatively high and can exceed \$ 47/person as in the case of Nepal. GDPs per capita in all countries, except the Latin American ones, are with around \$ 1.000 - 2.000 low and even when considering ODAs, the capacity to invest remains limited. Foreign direct investments contribute only very marginal to total investments with less than 1% of GDP as in the case of Nepal and with about 4% in the case of Ethiopia and Peru.

¹⁰ There is ample documentation, prepared and collected by IFOAM for each country on the nutritional and health status of the population in the target regions, verifying the hypothesis that these areas are more disadvantaged than others in the implementation countries.

Changes do not only require finances, but also a political system, which is reliable, providing a frame for building and cultivating trust, confidence and perspective. Governance indicators for all of the project countries show that the political frame for implementing reliable and stable policies is hardly given.

- Corruption scores are all negative with an alarming level in Tajikistan
- Political effectiveness scores are all negative with the exception of India where some effectiveness is obviously existing
- Political stability scores are all negative with alarming scores in Tajikistan and Ethiopia
- Regulatory quality scores are all negative with a slightly better situation in India and
- Rule of law scores are also negative in all countries with a slightly better situation in India.

Beyond these governance criteria, attaining political changes requests openness and responsiveness of the governments concerned. There is some tendency that countries in which international NGOs are active and strong, governments try to restrict their influence as in the case of India and Ethiopia. The way such restrictions are realised varies and reaches from legal definitions to hampering finance flows.

This does not mean that working examples from a local level, presented in the international arena do not influence viewpoints of decision makers; but grand political decisions are usually taken by taking into account many different aspects. A direct link between grass root examples and global decisions or policy decisions in other than the intervention countries, cannot be established and setting such a target is considered to be very ambitious.

In total, the relevance of the agricultural sector for all selected countries is supposed to be high and due to the trend in production, attention to any kind of proposal for improving agricultural production in a sustainable way should be given. However, the administrative and governmental structures in all target countries are very poor. The likelihood for investments and engagements in the agricultural sector, entailing eventually substantial changes in favor of the project messages, is not supposed to be high. Intending to attain on a political level substantial changes in the orientation of agricultural policy, although perfectly logical and justified, was presumably too ambitious, even when assuming that the political network of the implementing agencies in all target countries is well established and having some access to policy makers.

Overview 3: Macroeconomic key characteristics of the intervention countries

Parameter	Nepal	India	Pakistan	Kirgizstan	Tajikistan	Ethiopia	Peru	Ecuador
GDP/capita (\$)	1,071	2,099	1,285	1,309	870	855	6,977	6,183
Share of agriculture in GDP (%)	23	15	19	22	23	35	7	10
Share of agriculture in employment (%)	65	43	37	35	53	85	23	29
FDI (%of GDP)	0.6	1.8	0.8	3.1	2.8	4.0	4.0	1.5
Tax revenue (% of GDP)	20	18	12	20	20	12	15	20
ODA/capita (\$)	47	2	11	70	40	43	15	30
Export earnings (% GDP)	7	18	10	31	9	7	22	22
Import expenditures (% GDP)	34	23	17	52	41	23	23	21
S&P sovereign bond rating	-	BBB-	B-	-	B-	B-	BBB+	B-
Ratio export/import value food and agricultural products	0.2	0.8	0.5	0.3	-	0.1	0.5	2.2
Good governance Indicators (-2.5 worst – 2.5 best)								
Prevalence of corruption	-0.7	-0.2	-0.8	-0.9	-1.3	-0.4	-0.4	-0.5
Effectiveness of public administration	-1	0.2	-0.7	-0.7	-1	-0.6	-0.1	-0.4
Political stability	-0.5	-0.7	-2.2	-0.4	-0.6	-1.3	-0.1	-0.2
Regulatory quality	-0.7	-0.2	-0.6	-0.3	-1	-0.9	0.6	-0.8
Rule of law	-0.5	0	-0.7	-0.9	-1.2	-0.5	-0.5	-0.6
Accountability	-0.1	0.3	-0.8	-0.5	-1.8	-1	0.3	0.1

Source: Compiled by the authors from <https://data.worldbank.org> and <https://tradingeconomics.com>

2.2.3 Target Groups and their Selection

Following the project rationale, there are three major target groups, decently described in the project document.¹¹

On the local level, it is Rural Service Providers (RSP), individual persons – often women - living in the target villages, with a credible reputation and capacity to be trained on nutrition sensitive agriculture and related topics and to transport the messages further through implementation of micro-interventions (MI), who are the central target group. The type of RSP to be recruited (e.g., teachers, extension staff, nurses etc.) is clearly described in the project document, supporting the understanding of the RSP approach. The field missions in Nepal and India have confirmed that the RSPs were selected in a very targeted manner by the local implementation organizations and thus created the basis for the success of the MIs.

In an extended form, particularly pursued in phase II of the project, operators of interventions for Scaling-Up Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture (SUNSAI), became the principal partners in the field. SUNSAI operators are organised groups of people that can, but must not include RSPs and typically comprise associations, NGOs, cooperatives or registered companies.

On the national levels, the target groups comprise influential persons, predominantly decision makers in governments and administrations that have the power to influence policy formation and who are receptive for the messages of the NMA.

On a global level, it is policy makers and donors who are influential in the global nutrition discourse, strategy setting and project financing, considered as target group for this project.

The selection of the target groups fits to the overall setting of the project's rationale. While for the local level, the target group is profiled and clearly defined, the target groups at the national and international level are very generally named. In a basic concept document, such must not be defined in all details. It would however been helpful to profile such target group, e.g., in the course of a startup workshop, so that it becomes clearer at whom precisely (in each country and on a global scale) the NMA project targets at and why targeted decision makers are supposed to have such a strong influence as the project setting assumes.

Multi-stakeholder approaches, although welcome, are very demanding, requiring not only a profound knowledge about them but also a strategy on how to deal with them (stakeholder management system). In combination with the work in several countries, multi-stakeholder-multi-country approaches risk to dilute the intervention capacity and depth.¹²

¹¹ The project document is the description of the technical proposal for the implementation of the project. The term project document used here refers to the version of May 2018 and denotes the description of the second phase of the project.

¹² There is ample literature about multi-stakeholder approaches and their challenges, e.g. USAID 2018: Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives. Lessons learnt

3. Analysis and Appraisal of Project Planning and Implementation

3.1 Relevance

3.1.1 Intervention Logic: Impact and Outcomes

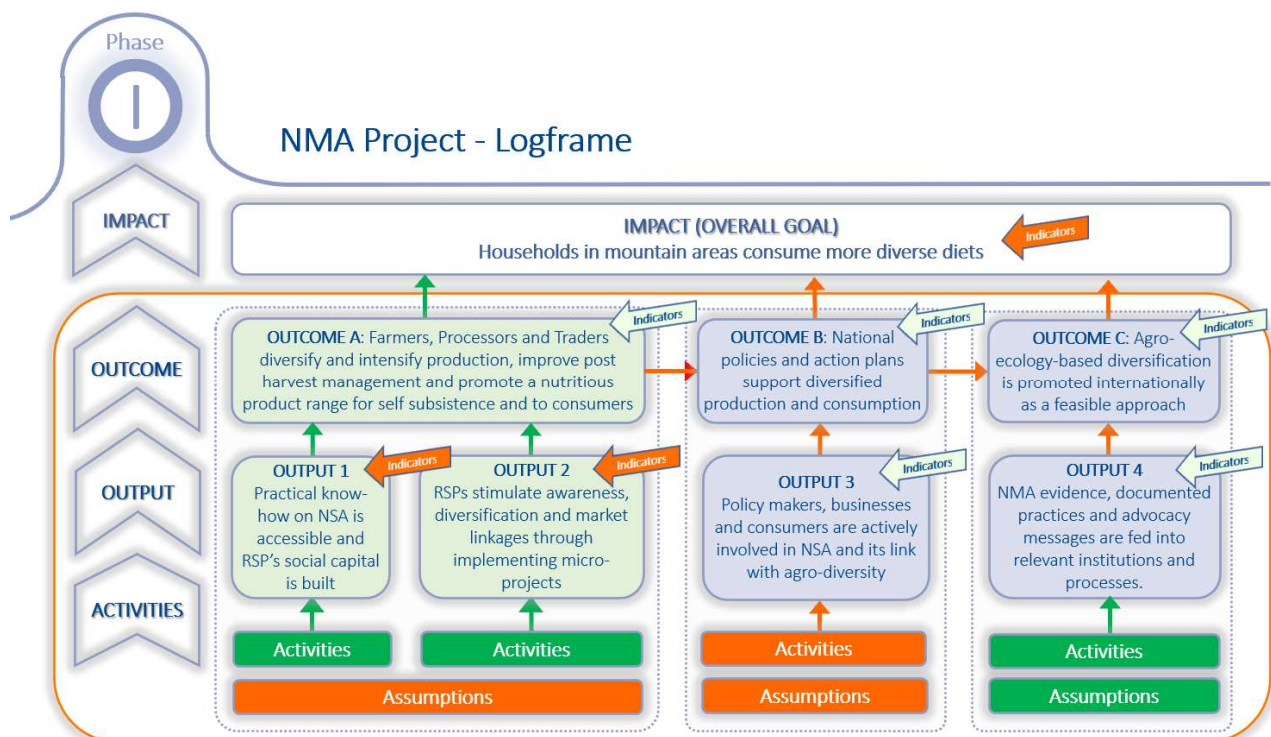
The intervention logic follows the typical hierarchy of outputs, leading to outcomes and the total of outcomes conditions the achievement of the overall goal, the impact.

The project objective (final impact) for both phases has been phrased in a similar way and aims at increasing the consumption of more diverse diets, containing sufficient, safe and nutritious foods of populations living in mountainous areas. The indicator formulated to measure the final impact is the Women Dietary Diversity Score (WDDS), monitored in the regions of intervention. While the indicator as such is concrete, a quantitative specification is not given.¹³

In order to achieve the impact, three outcomes are formulated for phase I:

- Outcome A: Farmers, processors and traders diversify and intensify production, improve post-harvest management and promote a nutritious product range for self-subsistence and to consumers.
- Outcome B: National policies and action plans support diversified production and consumption.
- Outcome C: Agro-ecology based diversification is promoted internationally as a feasible and implementable approach to improve nutrition in mountain agro-systems.

Overview 4: NMA project logic and impact chains, phase I



Source: developed by the authors based on project documents

¹³ It would have been helpful to indicate e.g. what level of WDDS is considered as sufficient or what level of score the project is targeting at

The logical relation between the formulated outcomes and the overall goal is to some extent visible and traceable. On local level, project motivated actions and interventions lead to a higher production of nutritious foods, to more care in post-harvest activities and thus to a reduction of post-harvest losses. Due to the expected production increases, more products will come on markets, thus increasing the turnover of locally produced nutritious foods, which in total lead to a better and higher awareness on nutrition among women and men. All of these effects shall be measured by indicators, demanding survey work.

Local successes will sensitise political actors and decision makers, who, stimulated by successful examples, incorporate the topic nutrition and nutrition sensitive agriculture in their policy plans. Such shall be assessed by policy analysis work.

Upon a success in the intervention countries, the messages will be carried to the global level and propagated e.g., on UN events, verified by the mentioning of the NMA project in international publications, etc.

Outcome A has a direct relationship with the overall goal and the potential to directly contribute to it. Working on production increases, reduction of post-harvest losses or the stimulation of marketing are major undertakings, each one on its own and expecting effects on such major issues within a short period of time, with very limited resources employed, is supposed to be overoptimistic. Additionally, the verification of the set indicators demands major statistical operations and survey work. Experience from many field surveys shows that responses on questions expecting quantitative answers have to be taken with care as the capacity to realistically estimate e.g. of yields or yield losses is usually very limited. In so far, outcome A and related indicators are in principle appropriately set, but much too ambitious and too demanding to be worked on in the field.

There is no doubt that the political advocacy component of the NMA project is justified, as the main conditions under which farmers are producing are decided at the political level and not just because of the choice of consumers. However, policies, as stated already above, are usually formulated and set up by considering many different aspects and do not necessarily always follow rationale or logical reasoning. A project that has, from a country perspective, only a limited relevance for decision makers, can hardly expect to have a major influence on national policy design with an outreach on health, food and agricultural policy. The link of outcome B to the overall goal is seen to be relatively weak and hard to verify.

Presenting NMA messages on global conferences clearly supports the popularisation of the approach and will make the project known to many international, possibly influential actors. All of these international decision makers are targets for many different international development actors and given that their awareness and attention level for individual messages is limited, it can hardly be assumed, that on a global level the impact of NMA messages is so strong that regulations and guidelines, strengthening the composition of diets, in general improve. The formulation of outcome C and the corresponding indicator are only loosely related to the overall goal.

While there is a close relationship between outcome A, addressing interventions in the field with the overall goal, outcome C can, within the frame of a practical project work, be related to the overall goal only to a limited extent. Also, for outcome B, it might be challenging to identify a traceable relationship with the overall goal, although such is not excluded, particularly not in cases when relevant political decision making is decentralised.

For achieving the set outcomes and for the fulfilment of the indicators, a series of assumptions on outcome level are defined. It is appreciated that assumptions are set, showing that the project brainstormed about the framework conditions that must be given so that the intended impacts can materialise.

For outcome A, the assumption that consumers in mountain areas are ready and can afford to consume the offered produce, similar to the second assumption, diversified produce is consumed by farm households and local consumers and not only exported to urban centres, implies that producers and all other actors concerned dispose of sufficient family income, allowing them to purchase and/or to consume food that is in tendency more expensive than the current standard. There is also the implication that when a higher household income is available, such incremental increase is spent for better foods. Many studies, including that one which merited the price in economic sciences in 2019¹⁴, showed that higher incomes of farm households in developing countries are not automatically used for investments in better nutrition. In so far, the formulation of the assumptions for outcome A might in principle be right, but not necessarily fulfilled or achievable.

It would have been appreciated if the NMA project in general would have included in its efforts and activities more economic related considerations, such as improving household budgeting skills and encouragement to invest in better diets.

Similarly, the assumption formulation to outcome B is more a risk than an assumption. National policies in the intervention countries can hardly be considered to be effective. Administrations and authorities are susceptible for corruption and hardly respecting rule of law.

Assumptions are conditions which are expected to be fulfilled in the course of the project and support implementation. Assumptions are distinctly different from risks, which cannot be managed and which occur erratically.

While it is appreciated that assumptions/risks to outcomes are formulated, they address partly more risks than assumptions and set the level of conditions for reaching the outcomes very high.

Following the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation, the planning of phase II kept the overall goal and adjusted mildly its wording. Outcome A and C were rephrased and outcome B kept.

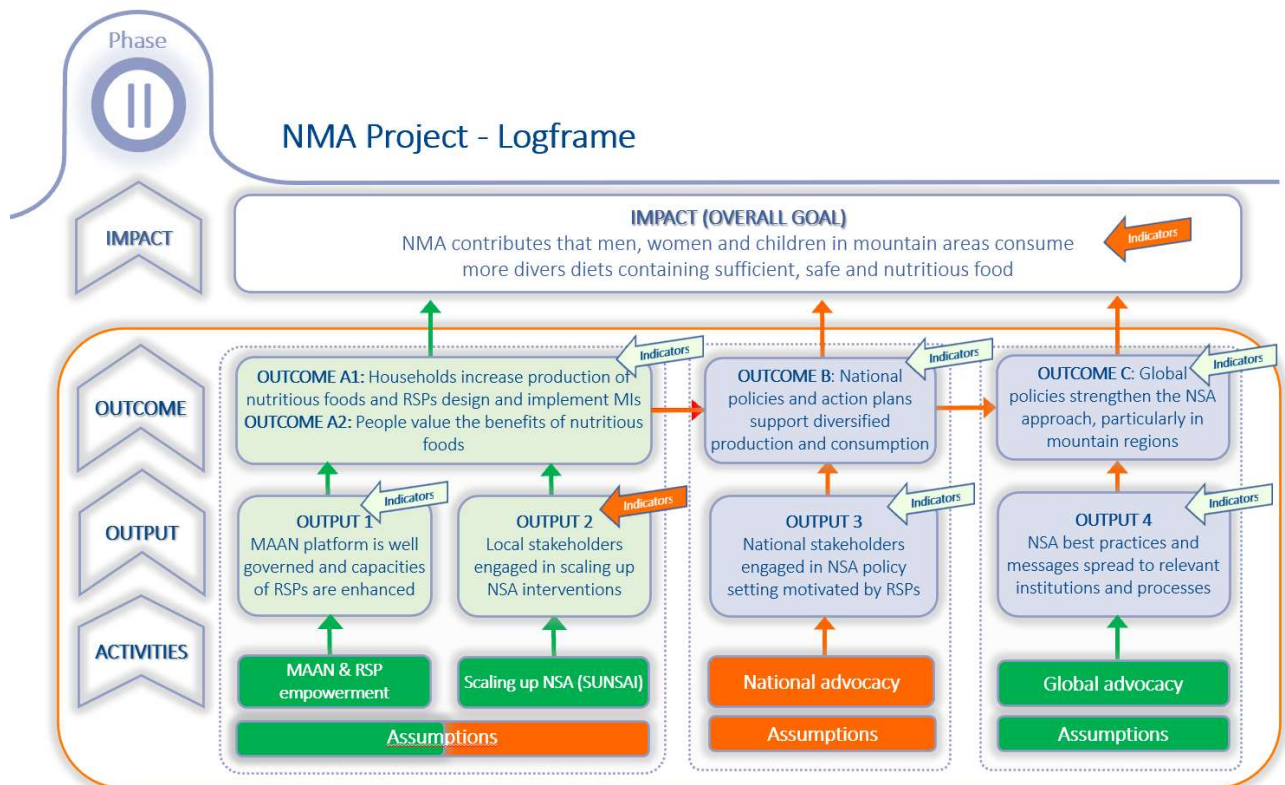
Outcome A was subdivided into two sub-outcomes. Outcome A.1: households increase production of nutritious foods and Rural Service Providers design and implement micro-interventions and outcome A.2: people value the benefits of nutritious foods.

Outcome A.1 refers to the concept that the project supports the design and implementation of small local interventions, implemented largely by Rural Service Providers (RSP) in own responsibility, contributing to an increase of the production of nutritious foods. RSPs are individual persons living in target villages or regions, enjoying an impeccable reputation and who, through their occupation and employment have already a relationship with nutrition, agricultural production, health or education. Typically, RSPs are lead farmers, nurses, extension agents or teachers. They thus have a secured living and must not be remunerated by the project.

¹⁴ Esther Duflo, Abhijit Banerjee and Michael Kremer, 2019, on their experimental approach to define ways for alleviating global poverty

They participate in capacity development programs (CDP) because they wish to learn more on the topics and wish to get engaged in the respective community work. As a concluding exercise of their training, RSPs are called to set up micro-interventions (MI), partly on their own cost by applying the acquired know-how. Such micro-interventions can be very diverse (e.g., setting up a school garden, a greenhouse or a chicken hatchery) as long as they have a justifiable connection to the improvement of nutrition.

Overview 5: NMA project logic and impact chains, phase II



Source: developed by the authors based on project documents

Outcome A.2 attempts to expand the effect of such work. The awareness of the target population on nutritious food shall be raised and the concept appreciated. Such expansion is envisaged by up-scaling the micro-intervention approach through its supplementation by a component that supports the implementation of larger projects by organisations in villages and/or regions. These Scaling Up Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture Interventions (SUNSAI) do not address individual RSPs but e.g. NGOs, associations, cooperatives, firms, etc. as long as their project ideas fall in the sphere of raising production, marketing and consumption of more nutritious foods and/or raising the awareness on such issues.

Outcome A of phase II is compared to that one of phase I, more concrete, more tangible and more traceable. Direct effects of micro-interventions or of SUNSAIs can be measured. The up-scaling effects (e.g., 32.500 households increase the production of nutritious foods) as demanded by the attached indicators cannot be measured directly and are supposed to be estimated based on assumptions.

The formulation of outcome B for phase II compared to phase I did not change and the same comments as already stated apply. Outcome C has been rephrased to global policies and processes strengthen the nutrition sensitive agriculture approach, particularly in mountain regions. The related indicator is the same as formulated for outcome C in phase I and consequently the same comments as already stated apply.

On the assumption level, for outcome A the same assumptions as in phase I are made. Additionally, a supplementary assumption is introduced, saying that at least 50% of trained RSPs can mobilise resources to implement MIs. This formulation is considered as a valid assumption with relevance. For all other assumptions, the comments made above apply.

Overall, impact and outcome formulations and related indicators for project phase I and II are similar; the attempt to phrase them more realistically in phase II is visible.

3.1.2 Intervention Logic: Outputs and Outcomes

For each outcome, outputs are formulated. These outputs shall refer directly to the respective outcomes and guide their implementation.

Outputs for outcome A

For outcome A.1 (Households increase production of nutritious foods and RSPs design and implement micro-interventions) and outcome A.2 (People value the benefits of nutritious foods) two outputs are foreseen: The Mountain Agricultural Network (MAAN) platform is well governed and capacities of RSPs are enhanced (output 1) and local stakeholders engaged in scaling up NSA interventions (output 2)¹⁵.

The MAAN platform¹⁶

The Mountain Agro-ecosystems Action Network (MAAN) is a network, aiming at fostering and promoting the social capacities among RSPs at the local, national and international level in the context of different mountain regions and countries. It essentially shall serve the purpose to provide space for RSPs and affiliated actors (policy makers, researchers, students, etc) to find, share and discuss information, related to nutrition sensitive agriculture and to stimulate and to promote action. Compared to public social media platforms, MAAN shall provide a more structured setup for finding relevant information and for engagement in structured stakeholder discussions. MAAN is supposed to be unique in comparison with internet sites in the sense that it targets primarily RSPs, providing them space to share information and to interact. The main objective of MAAN is thus to empower different stakeholders in understanding, promoting and implementing NSA concepts in practice and in different regions. As an active network, MAAN gives priority to those RSPs who are active in mountain contexts. The MAAN platform aims to involve stakeholders actively, to not only access information but also to share own information. The MAAN platform wants to be understood as the information and exchange hub on which capacitating of RSPs and the scaling up of the approach in general might rely on.

¹⁵ It is usually helpful to formulate in full sentences so that misunderstandings are avoided.

¹⁶ Bernet Th. et al, 2019: MAAN Concept & Governance Document

The MAAN platform sets priorities on RSPs and on the NMA country managers and it is assumed that RSPs use the MAAN in two ways: drawing information and inputting information and communicating and networking via the platform. Such use has many technical preconditions, requires specific skills of the RSPs and overall demands unit selling properties, making the MAAN more attractive for use than other electronic information search and communication devices. Access to information and the possibility to communicate and to interact are truly seen as supportive aids to capacitate RSPs and other actors of the project. As part of the field missions, it emerged that uniqueness and suitability of MAAN to this respect is more challenged. There are many different options to communicate, and these exist and develop already since several years. Keeping pace with the development in electronic communication media is demanding and requires strict, competent management and almost unlimited disposable resources. The idea that RSPs use, maintain and further develop MAAN and prefer it in communication and networking over e.g., telegram, Facebook or Viber was probably right from the beginning too ambitious and idealistic, grossly underestimating the power of the global social media.

RSP empowerment

Capacitating RSPs and the scaling up of the approach follows a specific systematic. While continued in phase II of the project, the Capacity Development Program (CDP) and the Training of Trainer program (ToT) were major elements of the first phase.

The objective of the CDP was to improve and to develop the knowledge and skills of selected RSPs, both practically and theoretically in advising on nutrition and nutrition sensitive agriculture and to ensure that RSPs help to grow the global network of service providers for propagating best practices in organic agriculture in communities and regions. For the completion of the trainings, each RSP was motivated to apply the acquired know-how and skills in practice by setting up a micro-intervention (MI), to some extent on his own cost, in line with the vision and grand objectives of the project. The CDP program was supposed to interact with the MAAN platform and trainees shall use MAAN as the platform for interaction, exchange of experience and sourcing of information, necessary to design and to implement their micro-interventions.

If households shall increase production of nutritious foods and a full universe of consumers appreciate nutritious foods which they supposedly did not before, they need to be sensitized and guided. Such guidance requires skillful and credible guides. Credibility not only relies on theoretical messages but best on practical examples. The approach chosen to recruit message communicators, RSPs from the community of respected persons in a specific village or region, is seen to be very appropriate for credibly propagating NSA. The field mission interviews show that the NMA project has found a unique and successful way to carry the message of better nutrition into the community households and establish the project goals on the ground.

The training, ending with the implementation of an own designed micro-intervention, provides the training concept a very convincing character. This is even more so as the setup of the micro-interventions was only partly supported with limited funds in the first and with no funds in the second project phase.

The choice of the micro-interventions to be implemented by the RSPs was widely open, ranging from communication and sensitising efforts to improvements of agricultural or agro-business related projects. Sustainability of micro-interventions and their intended propagation is best ensured, when there is a positive economic perspective, inherent in a convincing concept. Economic aspects in general are barely discussed or considered in any of the implemented approaches, neglecting the relevance of economics in farmer's (and others stakeholder's) decision making.

Long term provision of information and connectivity with other RSPs through the MAAN platform might however not be sufficient to guarantee sustainability.

The original CDP program can be considered as the precursor to the ToT program. Following the implementation of the CDP in phase I, it was decided to replicate and to scale up the training component of the project by offering a ToT program in order to develop and to broaden the base of the RSPs. Trainers were supposed to be trained as teams of trainers (ToToT).¹⁷ These teams were given all necessary content, tools, skills and very limited financial support to replicate the CDP for RSPs. Suitable teams of trainers with the capacity and potential to conduct CDPs according to criteria and curriculum developed during the first project phase, were selected. These teams conducted CDPs building on curricula that ensured that trainee teams understand the principles of sustainable organic agriculture and that they acquire the capacity to bring the same knowledge and understanding to their learners as they acquired in the basic CDP. Once trained, the trainers would have a number of obligations and responsibilities:

- Identify suitable candidates for capacity building under the CDP for RSP program.
- Improve and develop the knowledge and skills of the selected RSPs practically and theoretically
- Nurture and further develop the desired attitude approach in RSPs to become not only processors of knowledge but also multipliers of knowledge through the network
- Help to ensure that RSPs support the global network of service providers, strengthening their voice and impact and ensuring that good and best practices of NSA and of organic agriculture are replicated and applied in communities and regions.

The extension of individual trainings in view of longer lasting effects is typically train-of-teams-of-trainers programs (ToToT). ToToT concepts rely on the assumption that competent trainees can be upgraded to trainers and that these newly formed trainers are also willing to carry out such trainings for others. Any kind of training has financial and organisational implications. Trainers need to organise courses, provide the right facilities and have at least to devote time for the preparation and carrying out of trainings. If such engagement is not remunerated decently, it can well be that ToToTs fail. It thus would have been adequate to address and to discuss the issue of which motivation might drive trainers to carry out trainings.

The Scaling-Up Nutritional Sensitive Agriculture Intervention (SUNSAI) approach

During the first phase, NMA supported the design and implementation of 131 micro-interventions in five countries with the objective to promote NSA, local marketing and consumption of nutritious foods. The mid-term evaluation in 2017 showed that many MIs significantly and positively contributed to the project objectives of enhanced local availability of diversified foods among target families.

¹⁷ The concept and procedures for the CDP and for the ToToT are decently described in project notes and in commented curricula documents.

With the aim of further strengthening the NMA approach, the assessment also came up with several recommendations on how project achievements related to the RSP approach could be improved in phase II:

- Many MIs remained limited in scope and scale, short in time and reached only a limited number of beneficiaries. *Thus*, a more systematic approach to replication and scaling up of successful MIs would be needed.
- Supporting a high number of small MIs comes along with high transaction costs in terms of management and financial administration, *thus* fewer, larger interventions should be supported to increase efficiency.
- Once the NMA project ends, it is unsure whether RSPs will continue to provide services without external support. Many MIs in phase I focused on production only, some focused on dietary diversity and nutrition education, but only few were addressing processing and marketing. *Thus*, especially marketing needs are considered to be integrated more strongly in interventions.
- The explicit link between diversified production and balanced food consumption and awareness on it, was weak in the majority of the MIs. *Thus*, dietary diversity at consumption level needed to become an integral part and starting point of interventions.
- The bulk of MIs promoted one innovation or one food product only. *Thus*, to achieve dietary diversity, a more holistic approach in NSA interventions was supposed to be needed, where diversified production is combined with awareness raising on nutrition at the consumer side.
- Involvement of private sector actors as RSPs or other project partners was not strong in phase I. *Thus*, involvement of both needed to be strengthened.

Such frame led to the development of the Scaling up Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture Interventions, the SUNSAI concept:

- The ultimate goal of NMA is that local institutions, businesses and individuals adopt and promote nutrition sensitive practices in agriculture production, postharvest handling, processing and marketing and in consumption. The adoption shall be based on genuine ownership of local actors.
- Incentives for these local actors must be economically viable.
- NMA aims to foster NSA interventions that have the potential to be adopted by large numbers of producers, processors, traders and consumers and that will be replicated by local actors based on convincing business cases.
- To achieve this, NSA interventions needed to be clearly demand and need driven, and by the willingness to provide own investment, oriented towards practices or business models that are easily replicable and that have the potential to benefit large numbers of people, supported though facilitation rather than direct intervention of projects.¹⁸

SUNSAIs aim at achieving systematic and lasting changes and were supposed to fulfil above criteria more than MIs. They were supposed to increase production as well as consumption of nutritious foods of a larger number of people. SUNSAIs were expected to have a more integral approach towards nutrition, using a multi-sector approach between agriculture, health and education by linking production and consumption and by including an awareness raising component that leads to behavioural changes at consumer level. They were expected to be well embedded institutionally and closely linked with local key institutions such as municipalities, farmer organisations, education institutions, health care providers, etc. SUNSAIs were supposed to offer success stories and learning examples that can be used in national and global advocacy work.

¹⁸ HELVETAS/IFOAM: SUNSAI –Scaling Up Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture Interventions - Guidelines

As it was supposed that SUNSAIs reach a much larger attention than RSPs, a low number of SUNSAIs might reach more people with less effort from the project than RSPs.

SUNSAIs were selected on a competitive fund system. Competitive calls were seen as an effective, transparent and institutionally independent modality of supporting local initiatives that contribute to NMA objectives. NMA announced its objectives, available support, specified technical priority areas of support, target areas and beneficiaries through the appropriate local and national media. Interested institutions could submit proposals in written electronic form, using an application form. The proposals were evaluated by technical committees, based on transparently announced criteria. Upon successful application, SUNSAIs received coaching and co-funding from the NMA project and were closely monitored. Co-funding of up to CHF 10,000 was provided and coaching in refining and implementing the SUNSAI for those RSPs that have not participated yet in such a training, offered. With regards to co-funding, applicants needed to consider the duration of the project and that the local partner and beneficiary contribute a minimum of 50% of total costs of the proposed intervention. Requested funding from the project shall mainly focus on covering costs for capacity building, awareness raising and demonstration of innovations.

SUNSAI proposals were evaluated based on minimum and selection criteria. Minimum criteria were a precondition for SUNSAIs to be eligible and selection criteria were evaluated in terms of the extent, the SUNSAI contributes to the objectives of the project. The criteria are documented and detailed and such documentation formed part of the call information.

The shift from an RSP to a SUNSAI focus is comprehensible and follows the recommendations of the evaluation of the first project phase. However, the critics on the RSP approach must not automatically have led to a complete reorientation. Streamlining and focusing the supported micro-interventions, particularly towards a stronger economics orientation, might have already alleviated some of the criticised weak points by maintaining the strong ones. These strong ones are particularly seen in the fact that the RSPs risk their social reputation in the villages they live by an engagement in the project. Doing so indicates a very high level of ownership, the best precondition for sustainability. Ownership of SUNSAIs can come from different perspectives and levels, such as through the engagement of third parties in financing and might also be high. Overall and in tendency however, ownership by organisations in general is rated less than ownership by individual persons.

It is well possible that SUNSAIs in the short run have a larger outreach and have the possibility to not only concentrate on production and the direct environment, but on more aspects of a specific value chain, than RSPs. In the long run, they might however be more sensitive vis-à-vis sustainability challenges than RSPs. In contrast to the micro-interventions, which demanded in the first phase the mobilisation of partial and in the second phase full funding on their own, SUNSAI applicants did not necessarily need to mobilise own funds, but to give evidence that they can contribute with 50% to the total project costs. Such contribution could have come also from third parties, e.g. the government, other NGOs, etc. lowering the responsibility level for their use.

The aspect of a challenging sustainability is also addressed in the project document, saying that SUNSAIs are not expected to spread on their own without external financial support and thus governments will have to continue supporting implementing or maintaining SUNSAIs, if the approach shall be continued. Such ex-ante perception of a key intervention element is seen critical and a more elaborate exit or phasing-out strategy would have been desirable. This applies also for the RSP approach.

Outputs for outcome B

For outcome B (National policies and action plans support and stimulate diversified production and consumption), one output is formulated for the second project phase (National stakeholders engaged in NSA policy setting motivated by the stories of RSPs).

The output formulation diverges from the formulation for the same outcome in phase I (Policy makers, businesses and consumers are actively involved in nutrition sensitive agriculture and its link with agro-diversity is formulated). The output formulation for phase I demands that political decision makers, business actors and consumers get involved in the project, understand the link between NSA and nutrition and change national policies in favour of nutrition sensitive agriculture. Output formulation for phase II down-scales the expectations but still addresses very ambitiously the national level of decision makers: good examples of RSPs working on the ground motivate policy makers and institutions to broadly support nutrition sensitive agriculture and diversification of diets.

As it is rightly stated in the respective assumption section, healthy nutrition might not be given high priority by politicians. Policy changes in general are hard to work on and given the resource frame of the project, both outcome and output formulations aspire much more than what is realistically achievable. This does however not mean that on a more local, regional basis the potential to influence decision makers does not exist. It might have been adequate to focus the political work more on the direct environment of the RSPs, so their villages, their districts and/or their governorates, rather than on the national level.

As stated already above, outcome B and also the related output are both considered to be much too ambitious to be achieved.

Outputs for outcome C

For outcome C (Global policies and processes strengthen the nutrition sensitive agriculture approach, particularly in mountain regions) one output is formulated (NSA best practices and messages spread to relevant institutions and processes). Similar to outcome B, there is the idea that presenting NSA best practices on global events will stimulate and trigger global policies to change in favour of nutrition sensitive agriculture.

As stated already above, outcome C and also the related output are both considered to be much too ambitious to be achieved.

The respective assumption reads: Nutrition remains a priority topic in international development and is not dominated by food supplement promoters. Nutrition, over the last decades, was always a priority topic of global development work, addressed in various forms. Whether and to what extent the nutritional supplement industry can and will replace the topic of producing nutritious foods by the promotion of its ingredients, has more the character of a risk rather than of an assumption. The likelihood that the project can influence such global industrial trends is considered to be marginal.

Overall, it is very much appreciated that the project tries to set up a planning in a logical, impact-oriented way. However, the planning suffers, at least to the extent its political components are concerned from a strong distance to what is realistically achievable within the frame of such a project and by the absence of an exit strategy or at least elements that allow discerning how the intended achievements might be anchored and continued beyond the project end.

3.2 Coherence

3.2.1 Project approach

The NMA project was launched by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in the frame of its Global Program for Food Security (GPFS), which seeks innovative initiatives to contribute to food systems' improvements and transformative and sustainable impacts on poor people. In the context of this program, projects are funded which explicitly contribute to the implementation of one or more of the SDGs. The strategy of the GPFS for 2017–2020¹⁹ builds on the previous strategic orientation in supporting, among others, the development and implementation of international regulatory and guiding frameworks and in promoting innovative scalable solutions to overcome food insecurity and malnutrition.

The NMA project addresses all of these issues and translates them into action by integrating several countries, following a new approach (NSA) and seeking policy impact within a national and global context.

3.2.2 Project organisation

Under its mandate to support the implementation of the SDG 2, SDC provided the funds for the implementation of the NMA project and assigned IFOAM together with its partners as implementing agency. IFOAM is supported at the global level by its consortium partners:

- HELVETAS, primarily providing its network in the target countries for the implementation and as advisor for the selection process and monitoring of the SUNSAIs
- FiBL, covering the field of organic agriculture and coordinating the development of the knowledge platform MAAN and
- Wageningen University, providing scientific support in the field of sensitive nutrition and in the evaluation of the indicators for MIs and SUNSAIs.

On a local level, IFOAM has contracted in each intervention country implementation partners, usually NGOs or other non-governmental or parastatal institutions. These local partners are responsible for the work in the field and report to IFOAM. All local implementation partners are described in detail in the project document and have been selected according to a set of criteria, ranging from their presence in the intervention country, their skills and knowledge on the approach to be implemented to their organisational and managerial capacities.

HELVETAS in this context has not only a local implementation function but through its headquarters, it is also engaged in the conception of the approach, particularly in the design and implementation of the SUNSAIs in phase II, as further development of the micro-interventions of phase I, in assisting accounting procedures and in co-guidance of the development of the approach in general.

In the target countries, the local implementation partners appointed country managers and coordinators for the rural service provision work, which in phase II largely focused on the support of SUNSAIs and the implementation and monitoring of the CDPs.

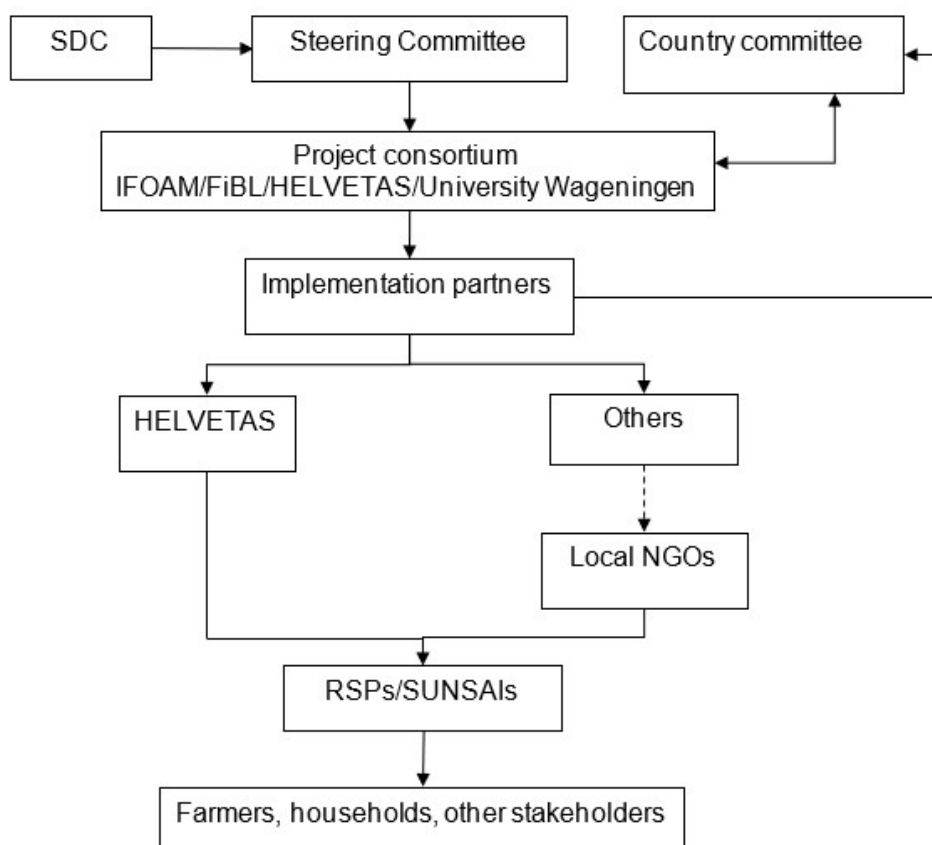
¹⁹ Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation: Strategy 2017 – 2020 Global Programme Food Security. Berne, 2017

The project is steered and supervised by a steering committee, consisting of representatives of SDC, HELVETAS, FiBL and IFOAM, La Molina University of Lima and strategic partners, such as the representatives of the Scaling up Nutrition Network, ICIMOD and the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services. The steering committee meets two times per year and agendas and results of the meetings are documented.

The project structure for the implementation of the local components follows a clear logic. Tasks for the principal partners are clearly described and assigned. For work on the international level, there is additionally a global country representative committee, consisting of the assigned project coordinator from IFOAM and one representative from each country in which the approach is implemented. The committee has the task to represent the interests of the countries and to ensure a smooth implementation and experience exchange across the intervention countries.

Overall, the core management team comprises over 30 persons. Such high number of involved persons is explained by the fact that the project stretches over eight countries and addresses a full diversity of topics. Involving in a project several countries on different continents, target groups with different cultural, economic and social background and speaking different languages and addressing additionally different topics which are all impacted and determined by the country characteristics, makes the steering of such a project extremely complex, thus time and resource consuming and demanding. It is in this context not so much the question of allocation of funds and the need to remunerate all persons involved, but more of the coordination requirements, making the structure of the project very heavy and bulky.

Overview 6: Project structure



Source: developed by the authors

For a project with a funding of about CHF 3 Mio over three years, the structure appears to be bulky and demanding with respect to coordination and management and the harmonisation of interests and of activities. The reasoning for the bulky structure is obvious: several countries, different target groups and stakeholders, interconnected with complex topics need to be coordinated. Such raises the question to what extent it really was necessary to design the project in such a complex way.

3.2.3 Cooperation with other projects and approaches in the target countries

The project document lists extensively all kind of stakeholders per country who might have a relationship with the project's approach. Roles and possible functions of such stakeholders for the project are assigned and provide an impressive insight in the many activities that obviously are carried out in each of the intervention countries on related topics of nutrition sensitive or organic agriculture, efforts to improve the supply of nutritious foods, etc.

There is no doubt that it is highly useful to know the environment in which a project intends to work and also to analyse which topics, already dealt with by other organisations might provide possibilities for cooperation and synergistic interventions. Donor organisation and coordination is a task for which the individual countries are responsible and it would be them to bring these project providers together and harmonise their activities. Several attempts on donor coordination have been made since the Paris Declaration was signed; so far however effects are very moderate. While in theory, cooperation with partners and stakeholders is supposed to yield synergistic effects, any kind of cooperation demands first an investment and in the case of small projects, results in the drain of resources for setting up cooperation before it can yield effects. Cooperation with many different stakeholders thus comes very quickly to its practical limits.

It is very much appreciated that the project lists many different stakeholders, active in the intervention countries on similar themes. It must however not be expected that a close and intensive cooperation with all listed parties is realistically possible. It would have been useful to select only a few partners with whom a closer cooperation is aspired, profile them and define clearly objectives and the mode of cooperation.

3.3 Effectiveness

3.3.1 The Monitoring System

Outputs, outcome and impact (overall goal) are to a large extent specified through quantitative indicators. The impact is measured by a change of the Woman Dietary Diversity Score (WDDS).

- *Outcome A* is verified by measuring changes in the number of households producing nutritious foods, the number of micro-interventions implemented and the number of people with increased nutrition awareness.
- *Outcome B* demands policies and/or actions plans that are in line with the NSA approach and comparative policy analyses shall verify changes.
- *Outcome C* enumerates the number of contributions to international events.

- *Outputs* to outcome A measure a series of indicators related to the use of the MAAN platform, the number of RSP coached, the number of SUNSAIs and awareness creation campaigns implemented.
- *Output* to outcome B counts the number of influential people contacted and supporting the NSA approach.
- *Output* to outcome C counts the number of documents and presentations and is practically identical with the outcome indicator.

Due to the core relevance of outcome A for the overall goal, the project introduced consequently a monitoring system that builds on a series of surveys, which are regularly carried out and which yield information on this outcome:

- RSP activities, specified by country, type of RSP and type of micro-intervention.
- SUNSAIs implemented by country, type of organisation/target group implementing, type of project.
- Estimation of number of farmers/women reached by copying/adopting nutrition sensitive practices, factors motivating/restricting changes, type and magnitude of co-investments and profile of co-investors in the SUNSAI projects, challenges of cooperation with these co-investors and activities on awareness raising.

Supportive to the interpretation of such survey work are focus group discussions among target groups to understand the dynamics of changes observed in the surveys. Supplementary and referring to outcome B is a regular analysis of national policies with respect to the consideration of NSA or related topics.

The overall goal and thus the final impacting result of all project work is measured by a change of the WDDS.

It is very well appreciated that the NMA project is engaged to quantitatively monitor and to follow in many details the effects of its intervention.

The monitoring of the RSP work provides an overview on how many RSPs, in which country could be trained and on which topic. Categories of micro interventions can be established and preferences derived. The survey work on the micro-interventions and on RSPs does however not allow deriving any economic assessment or estimation of the sustainability of the interventions.

The questions of the survey on the SUNSAIs have the potential to categorise the types of projects carried out, learn about motivations for a specific project and also about constraints in implementation. Such information helps to assess the value of the SUNSAIs approved and also to eventually better tailor SUNSAIs in future within the frame of other projects. Questions asked will also provide indications on how SUNSAIs influence the production of diverse foods. Questions on produced volumes of specific products are typically delicate and the reliability of answers can be low. Similarly question on the number of people reached by specific awareness creating activities and/or on which consequences can be expected from sensitised target groups are problematic and answers need to be interpreted with high care, as responses might not necessarily reflect realities.²⁰

²⁰ This survey work is organised in the form of online questionnaire to be filled out by the country coordinators. The evaluation of the surveys, taking place several times per year, falls into the responsibility of the IFOAM project manager.

Additionally, working on surveys across different countries, competencies of interviewers, survey coordinators and target groups, requires massive preparatory and coordination work so that some comparable results can be expected. The questionnaire used does not consider any kind of economic aspect and thus economic implications of the work carried out cannot be assessed. Such would however be desirable in order to obtain an idea on the sustainability and also on the reproducibility of the interventions.

For the assessment of the change of the WDDS, a study team of the University of Wageningen is engaged. They apply the assessment method as proposed by FAO²¹ and interviewed for the determination of the impact of the project work in its first phase in total 2,500 women to recall their foods they have consumed over the last 24 hours. The survey provides a rich data base on which products were consumed and to what extent the calculated WDDS changed during the project intervention.²² While there is, from a methodological point of view, some criticism found in the literature, the WDDS is accepted as a standard measure for a change in nutrition habits. Decently processed, the information can be accepted as true indicator for the fulfilment of the project goal, thus the impact.

While overall, it is highly appreciated that many parameters of the NMA work are monitored, providing valuable information about the project progress and success, none of them targets at estimating some economic effects or consequences of the interventions. Such would have been desirable, so that the approach can also be assessed in view of its (economic) sustainability and reproducibility.

For outcome B, policy analysis work is proposed. Referring to the outcome formulation, the determination of the effect of the project on policy changes, requires policy analysis before and after the project intervention. There is ample literature available on how to carry out systematic, comparative policy analysis work.²³ In the ideal case, a standard methodology in all target countries would have been applied so that results become comparable and traceable. Policy gap analyses, when done in a professional way constitute a valid starting point. Repeating such gap analysis at the end of the project would truly provide an indication to what extent policies changed. A direct reference to NMA interventions might still not be possible. But at least such analyses can demonstrate to what extent policies move in the direction desired.

For outcome C, monitoring of progress and/or an assessment of the impact of the project is not seen to be a realistic undertaking. Counting citations of the project in references might provide an indication on the interest in the project; an impact on global policies is however by such counts not verified.

3.3.2 Outcomes Achieved

Project progress is reported and documented in annual country reports, which are amalgamated to consolidated annual reports. Country reports are structured in chapters on developments of relevance in the national context and in the project and report in detail on outcomes, outputs and activities. Each listing of activities and of tentative effects is accompanied by a reflection section in which an interpretation is provided. Such reflections are finally synthesised in a lessons-learned chapter. Country reports are prepared by country coordinators.

²¹ FAO & USAID, 2016: Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women – A Guide to Measurement

²² Pittore K., 2018: Endline-Baseline Comparison: Nutrition in Mountainous Areas. Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation; Report WCDI-18-011

²³ See e.g. Patton C.V. et al, 2016: Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning.

These annual country reports give an impressive overview on activities carried out, and on outcomes. The reports are detailed, structured and commented. Due to the complexity of the project as such, the use of many abbreviations and the enrichment with a full universe of figures and details of activities, they are not easy to read and to appraise. As a consequence of the indicator formulations and the resulting need to report on progress in a quantitative form, there are occasionally very precise figures reported, which are hard to trace back (e.g., a total of 29,734 household members, of which 51% were women and 7,354 from the production area have been found valuing and consuming nutritious foods²⁴).

Consolidated annual reports summarise progress and developments in the intervention countries. They follow the same structure as the individual country reports. Due to the need to report on interventions in eight countries, the reporting structure is complex and the mentioning of many individual figures and the use of many different abbreviations and acronyms make the reports, at least for readers, not directly involved in the daily project work, difficult to understand, to trace and to appreciate.

Outcome A: Households increase production of nutritious foods and RSPs design and implement MIs

For achieving this outcome, the successful implementation of the RSP and the SUNSAI program are important.

The RSP program and micro-interventions

To the end of phase I, 130 RSPs have been trained across five intervention countries and due to the concept of training, 130 micro-interventions have been implemented. To the end of phase II, almost 800 RSPs have been trained, with about 700 micro-interventions installed.

The geographical split shows, that the variation in the number of RSPs trained from country to country is substantial, but there is no intervention country, in which the program failed. Stakeholders to become and to act as RSPs could always be found, motivated to work with the project and to implement micro-interventions, although there was no co-financing provided by the project in phase II.

Overview 7: RSPs trained by country (phase I and II consolidated)

Country	RSPs trained in Project Phase I	RSPs trained in Project Phase II	Change Phase I – Phase II	RSPs consolidated Total
Ecuador	0	81	+81	81
Ethiopia	25	53	+28	78
India	0	103	+103	103
Kyrgyzstan	26	74	+48	100
Nepal	30	77	+47	107
Pakistan	25	135	+110	160
Peru	25	78	+53	103
Tajikistan	0	50	+50	50
Total	131	651	+520	782

Source: compiled by the authors based on project documentation

²⁴ Annual Report Nepal, 2020

As the high number of RSPs trained in phase II could not have been achieved without the ToT approach, the achievement can be considered also as a confirmation of the suitability of the ToT program.

Overall, the RSP approach is considered as a major project success in several respects:

- A high number of competent and respected persons from villages across all intervention countries could be interested to participate in the CBP and aspired to become RSP for nutrition sensitive agriculture.
- As none of the RSPs received remuneration for their engagement in the project, it must be concluded that it is the topic as such which interested and motivated the RSPs to pass the trainings.
- 80% of the RSPs trained in the second phase of the project implemented micro-interventions. This is in so far remarkable, as these micro-interventions were not supported financially by the project.
- The high number of trainings carried out by RSPs, trained as trainers in the second phase also confirms the validity and appropriateness of the ToT concept. It also confirms that despite the absence of a direct economically exploitable component, RSPs trained as trainers are motivated sufficiently to provide trainings for others. Most RSPs have a secure income base, either as employees of other NGOs or the government; but still, they have to invest time, energy and other resources to realize such trainings. This is highly respectable and shows a high degree of ownership.
- Most of the micro-interventions installed refer to economic activities. Fruit tree production, fish farming, conservation and post-harvest techniques, poultry and goat farming, greenhouses or beekeeping, all have economic implications, which, although details are not clearly known, might have some positive effects on the household economics of the RSPs.
- As RSPs, in setting up micro-interventions, do not only risk invested funds but also their reputation in the villages, it can be assumed that most micro-interventions have a positive economic implication and thus have a chance to be replicated by others, observing such effects. To what extent such desired replication truly takes place is not possible to estimate. Whether each RSP reaches 50 households and 50% of them follow the advice and recommendations of the RSPs, as stated in the project planning matrix, might be plausible, but is not verifiable.

Overview 8: Micro-Interventions by RSPs across all intervention countries by type (2015-2021)

Micro-Intervention	Number	Share in Total (%)
School and kitchen garden	227	32
Awareness raising activities	150	21
Value addition activities with local products	87	13
Conservation techniques	64	9
Poultry farming	53	8
Fruit tree production	45	7
Greenhouses	26	4
Beekeeping	20	3
Goat milk production	12	2
Fish farms	3	<1
Guinea pig production	6	<1
Total	693	100

Source: compiled by the authors based on project documents

The RSP program together with the underlying CBP and the ToT are considered as one major contribution for achieving the overall goal

The MAAN Platform

The MAAN platform, its performance, options for improvements and user trends are extensively commented and reported in many of the project documents. While, as already mentioned, there is no question about the general usefulness of supporting the establishment and maintenance of networks of collaborators, and the facilitation of the provision of information, of practical examples from the field, etc. it is difficult to assess to what extent the MAAN platform contributed truly to the project success, or more precisely to the achievement of outcome A.

A governance concept exists, stories and cases can be found on the platform, and there is a certain use of the platform, although the clicks might not have been developed as wanted and expected. The general question however is more to what extent MAAN was/is truly decisive for the success of the RSP, the CDP and the SUNSAI approach and to what extent it contributed to the understanding and propagation of them.

Already in the available documentation, an evolution of the perception of MAAN can be observed. While in the beginning of the project, enthusiasm on what can be achieved and realized by and with MAAN dominated, confirmed by the mid-term evaluation, the assessment became gradually more realistic during the second project phase.

Ultimately, there is no documentary proof that the MAAN platform decisively contributed to the success of the CDP, to the implementation of the micro-interventions or of the SUNSAIs. MAAN might have helped in some cases to communicate, to exchange study cases and to foster the approach among the user community, which in most cases is and was not the RSPs as originally thought and expected, but more country managers of the implementing and partnering NGOs and other academic stakeholders. For the target group in the field, the technical and intellectual preconditions to use the MAAN platform as intended, in many cases did not exist. Internet connections frequently were and still are poor, language barriers largely prevail and the handling of the platform sets many hurdles. The introduction of an app to facilitate the use of MAAN did not alleviate or reduce the principal challenges of becoming the exchange and networking platform as it was designed.

There are no indications that the MAAN platform has contributed to the extent expected to the achievement of outcome A, although a general contribution to raising the awareness on nutritious foods and NSA and to the networking of stakeholders among others can be assumed.

SUNSAIs

Across all countries, 35 SUNSAIs are implemented since 2019 following the procedure as outlined in chapter 3.1.2. Nepal, with 10 SUNSAIs, is prominently represented, followed by Ethiopia with 7. Typical SUNSAIs had an investment volume of around CHF 20,000 to 25,000, out of which 30-35% was financed by the project. The number of applications for the SUNSAI program was consistently higher than the number of SUNSAIs approved, indicating that the interest in the program was and still is high and mobilizing co-finances did obviously not constitute a persistent hurdle, although in some cases SUNSAIs dropped out as the applicants could not mobilise the demanded co-financing share in time.

Overview 9: SUNSAIs by country and investment volume

Country	Number of SUNSAIs	NMA Contribution (1,000 CHF)	Co-funding (CHF)	Total (CHF)	Financial Share of NMA in Total (%)
Ecuador	2	20	35	55	36
Ethiopia	7	54	109	163	33
India	2	21	28	49	43
Kyrgyzstan	2	11	14	25	44
Nepal	10	77	120	197	39
Pakistan	6	46	50	96	48
Peru	6	53	180	233	23
Total	35	282	536	818	34

Source: compiled by the authors based on project documentation

SUNSAIs are implemented by a whole variety of actors, out of which NGOs, foundations and associations dominate. In some cases, also companies and public institutions applied and received co-funding from the project.

Supported SUNSAIs are categorised into four classes:

- Whole value chain approach with focus on nutritional improvements through increased incomes: Such SUNSAIs focus on local crop production, organic agriculture, processing, conservation and post-harvest activities and marketing,
- Whole value chain approach on specific crops with focus on nutritional improvements through increased incomes: These SUNSAIs have a commercial approach on cultivating, processing and marketing nutritious, high value crops in a more commercial style
- Nutrition and consumption promotion: Such SUNSAIs carry out awareness campaigns and advocacy activities,
- Mixed value chain and nutrition education approaches, direct improved production of nutritious foods: These SUNSAIs implement school gardens and other demonstrations on production, conservation, processing nutritious food crops,

Overview 10: SUNSAIs by type of intervention

SUNSAI Category	No
Whole value chain approach with focus on nutritional improvements through increased incomes	9
Whole value chain approach on specific crops with focus on nutritional improvements through increased incomes	6
Nutrition and consumption promotion	7
Mixed value chain and nutrition education approaches direct improved production of nutritious foods	13

Source: compiled by the authors based on project documentation

While the general value and usefulness of the SUNSAIs is not questioned, estimations on the outreach of SUNSAI activities rely totally on assumptions, which are hard to verify. According to the indicator set, each SUNSAI is supposed to reach at least 500 households and 500,000 people shall be sensitised on nutrition via 13 campaigns.

SUNSAIs have been introduced in the second phase of the project in order to strengthen the market connection of the project approach, to foster sustainability and to reach out to more than just production, ameliorating and to some extent substituting the RSP approach. Also, there was the assumption that SUNSAIs spread out to more people than assumed for the RSPs and thus implementing a few SUNSAIs only at reduced transaction costs were supposed to have a higher impact, thus raising efficiency and efficacy²⁵.

While the monitoring of the effects of the SUNSAI work is still going on and the survey work is not yet concluded, the central questions of to what extent the SUNSAI approach has a higher outreach than the RSP approach and to what extent SUNSAI activities will sustain more than RSP activities, will hardly be answered by the survey campaign.

SUNSAIs, compared to RSPs have, among others, truly the advantages that

- it is not only one person applying and implementing, but an organisation,
- SUNSAIs can use the reputation of the implementing organisation for propagation and presumably also can count on a higher professionalism of the staff,
- organisations, applying for SUNSAIs can be selected in such a way that the objective to cover full value chains is met,
- investment volumes allow more intense implementation work,
- funding is coming from different parties, strengthening the effort to integrate more stakeholders in NSA activities.

Whether and to what extent, such advantages are sufficient to justify the assumption that ten times more households can be reached by SUNSAIs than by RSPs, is at least debatable and not really verifiable.

Statements that through the SUNSAIs 19,553 producers, implementing more than 20 NSA practices and technologies to produce more than 50 crops and agricultural products or 166,651 consumers have access to products from the SUNSAIs, appear at least to be very brave.²⁶

Experience from Nepal and India shows that, when switching from supporting RSPs to SUNSAIs, the efficiency of using funds does not automatically increase. Care for 10 SUNSAIs, as in the case of Nepal, is at least as resource and coordination intensive as organising capacity building programs for RSPs.

While there is no doubt that SUNSAIs have a positive effect on propagating NSA and on sensitising producers, processors, marketers and consumers on nutrition and the value of foods, the outreach of SUNSAIs is less clear and not really verifiable. The argumentation logic that led to a switch of the focus from RSPs to SUNSAIs cannot totally be confirmed. Also, to what extent SUNSAIs will sustain better and more than RSPs when the project ends, remains an open question.

Overall and irrespective of the details on RSPs and SUNSAIs, the principal approach to work in the field and in villages with reputed stakeholders on practical and replicable examples is considered to be very adequate for contributing substantially to the overall goal. While efforts to interlink project partners, target groups, and many different stakeholders are also much appreciated and form part of the idea to raise social capital, conform to the philosophy of NSA, the strategic importance of an information and communication platform, such as MAAN, in practice is not confirmed.

²⁵ On the problematic to define and to trace efficiency and efficacy see e.g. Palenberg M., 2011: Tools and Methods for Evaluating the Efficiency of Development Interventions. BMZ Evaluation Working Papers.

²⁶ See: NMA consolidated annual report, 2020, from April 2021, page 20

Outcome B: National policies and action plans support and stimulate diversified production and consumption

A number of activities under this outcome have been carried out, primarily before the Covid-19 crisis in 2020 began. The general impression is that sensitivity and interest of local stakeholders regarding agro-ecology, responsible consumption of healthy and diverse diets overall is high. In all intervention countries, there are networks and organisations, working on the same or similar topics as the project. In all countries some basic policies on NSA exist. As an example, Nepal has agriculture and nutrition-related policies such as i) Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) (2015-2035) aiming to address the problems of food insecurity by promoting nutrition and social protection schemes in the country which are contributing to providing sufficient food and nutritious diet to the poor and socially excluded groups; ii) Multi-Sector Nutrition Policy (MSNP) 2013-2017 aiming to accelerate the reduction of maternal and child under-nutrition in Nepal, in a comprehensive and multi-sector approach; iii) Food and Nutrition Security Plan of Action (FNSP); iv) National Strategy for Reaching the Unreached (2016-2030); and v) 15th development plan of Nepal, among others. The degree of implementation of such policies varies and has been impacted strongly over the last two years by the Covid-19 crisis.

Awareness creation and advocacy activities in all countries across all project years were intense and numerous and stretched from radio spots, messages in social media and face-to-face meetings to presentations and publications. And in some countries, substantial progress towards NSA or organic production can be observed, such as in Peru, where a provincial government declared its full province as organic or as in the case of Ecuador, where a strategic plan to promote and to foster nutrition sensitive agriculture was officially approved and introduced.²⁷

There is no doubt that Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture, organic farming or related topics and issues are discussed on the political level in many countries and as practically all countries have agreed to make major attempts to implement the SDGs, the topic in general is high on the political agendas. Meeting political stakeholders and obtaining confirmation of their interest in the topics of the project was thus well achievable, as the indicative listings in the country reports and consolidated annual reports show.

With reference to the project, there are however two main questions to answer:

- To what extent the project could truly impact the discussions which are anyway going on, in which directions and which tangible results could be obtained and
- To what extent, political statements, action plans and strategies are truly implemented on the ground.

Policy formation and implementation can take long and, as already outlined, must not always follow logical reasoning. Project impacts of policy changes are in general difficult to measure and in so far, the outcome as such, in the strict sense, is not measurable.

²⁷ On more details see the elaborate presentations in the project's consolidated annual reports 2018/2019/2020.

Overview 11: Illustration of major events and activities to advocate NSA and organic agriculture through the project on country level in 2019

Country	Event/activity related to advocacy of NSA/organic agriculture on national political level
Ecuador	Collaboration in the creation of educational communicational materials as part of the Food Guidelines of Ecuador coordinated by the Ministry of Health and the local FAO representative
Ethiopia	Organisation and realisation of a workshop in the context of a regional food fair
India	No activity in 2019
Kyrgyzstan	Dissemination of NMA progress and NSA practices through an agricultural newspaper, distributed widely
Nepal	<p>Presentation of project progress to the National Level Food and Nutrition Security Coordination Committee organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Live-stock</p> <p>The project team participated at the first organic agriculture conference in 2019 and presented a paper on Sustainable Soil Management technologies. The conference was organized by Helvetas Nepal jointly with the Ministry of Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperative, Karnali Province. The paper included the best practices, lessons learned and recommendations for improving NSA in the region.</p>
Pakistan	Recommendations on post-harvest loss management as lessons learned from SUNSAIs and MIs for the Ministry of Agriculture
Peru	Inclusion of the topic of nutrition and better diets in the National Plan for Family Agriculture
Tajikistan	Distribution of a high number of copies of manuals on animal breeding, growing of nutritious vegetables such as tomato and beetroot, legumes and carrots together with the National Institute of Nutrition and a cooperative

Source: compiled by the authors based on project documents

It can be assumed that the many advocacy activities in all intervention countries have contributed to opinion formation and ultimately to the taking of decisions by politicians and by other influential people in the direction favoured by the project. Most probably, effects on local level, thus in communities, in municipalities and in provinces, where politicians and decision makers are closer to their population (voters) and where they also have been more accessible for the project, are stronger than on national level.

Outcome B, as it is formulated is truly reached. It is however not verifiable to what extent the project contributed to the degree of desired change.

Outcome C: Global policies and processes strengthen the nutrition sensitive agriculture approach, particularly in mountain regions.

Similar to the work on outcome B, the project contributed to a number of international events with presentations of the project, results of scientific analytical work e.g. on a change of the WDDS and on the philosophy of NSA, organic agriculture, the relationship between agriculture and nutrition and the value of specific foods, etc. A selection of events in which the project participated or on which the project was prominently presented, is given in overview 12.

Overview 12: Global events to which the project contributed in 2019

Event	Location
The 2 nd Global 'Conference on the One Planet Network Sustainable Food Systems Programme	Costa Rica
United Nations Environment Assembly-4	Kenya
Decade of Family Farming World Rural Forum	Spain
The 1 st International Conference on Agroecology	Kenya
The High-level Political Forum on sustainable Development	USA
Committee on World Food Security 46	Italy
United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change	Spain
Global Forum Food Security and Nutrition	online

Source: compiled by the authors based on project documents

Again, there is no doubt that the project contributed with its activities under this outcome to an increase in awareness on the topic and that it could enrich the global information base with examples from the project's field work. Particularly credible might have been the mobilisation of RSPs and of other local stakeholders to present their cases in the global arenas. From a formal point of view, the indicator to this outcome is fully reached.

The question on outcome C is not so much to what extent the project contributed on a global level to the degree of attention on the subject of NSA. It can be assumed that, due to the attention on the SDGs in general, the topic of nutrition and sustainable agriculture is also on the agendas of many international events and their participants. In the context of a project with limited funds, it is more the question to what extent awareness raising measures on a global level deserve a position as a specific outcome, considering that a link to the overall goal cannot be established and the impact of such efforts not measured.

Generally, any kind of project with the topics nutrition and sustainable agriculture deserves high attention and any kind of activities, raising visibility, are justified. It can be assumed that the participation of the project in global events contributed to the propagation and diffusion of the core project messages. There is however no way to determine the impact of the project's activities in this respect on global political settings and the overall goal.

3.3.3 Achievement of Project Goal

The overall goal, consistent over both phases was that households, men, women and children consume more diverse diets, containing sufficient, safe and nutritious foods. This goal was supposed to be measured by changes of the WDD scores. Effects of project interventions during the first phase are summarised and demonstrated in an analytical report, prepared by the University of Wageningen.²⁸ The report clearly shows that

- WDD scores across all intervention countries, in phase 1, Peru, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Nepal improved
- The number of food groups produced and consumed increased as well.

²⁸ Pittore K., 2018: Endline-Baseline Comparison: Nutrition in Mountainous Areas. Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation; Report WCDI-18-011

For the second phase of the project, the final assessment of the projects work on the WDDS was, in September 2021, not yet available. Preliminary evaluation of the scores for 2020/2021 however shows that a further improvement took place and the diversity of foods produced and consumed increased again.²⁹

Overview 13: Development of the WDDS in the intervention countries/ regions across the full project duration

Country	WDDS		
	2015	2018	2020/21 ³⁰
Ecuador	-	6.2	
Ethiopia	4.0	5.5	
India	-	?	
Kyrgyzstan	5.5	6.0	
Nepal	4.4	5.9	
Pakistan	4.6	6.2	
Peru	5.9	7.3	
Tajikistan	-	?	

Source: compiled by the authors based on project documents

In the strict sense, the overall goal of the NMA is thus fulfilled: There is documentary proof that target populations consume more diverse diets, containing sufficient, safe and nutrition's foods.

The link of outcome A to the overall goal is straight forward: The RSP and the SUNSAI work contributed truly to the improvement of the nutritious status of the population in their environment through the demonstration effects, awareness raising campaigns, etc. The appraisal of the project achievement on the impact level is however restricted as the indicator does not specify a quantitative target. Which is the target WDDS to be achieved and what kind of food diversity is sufficient or adequate and overall, what is safe and nutritious food?³¹ It is also not clear to what extent, figures from different years can, in a statistical sense, truly be compared as it is not evident that the sampling method was always the same. Finally, what do WDDS scores with respect to sustainability really mean? Will they remain at a high level, once achieved? Under which conditions, etc.?

Notwithstanding the obvious success of the project to raise the WDD score, a more precise definition of the target and a clearer statistical sampling design would have helped to appraise the project work and to substantiate its credibility.

²⁹ There is some scope for improvement of the readability of the reports on the Baseline-Endline surveys. Many individual figures and graphics without clear structuring and allocation to text risk the reader to get lost.

³⁰ Preliminary data is meanwhile available, but could not be taken into account for the present evaluation.

³¹ The discussion on WDDS, the underlying survey technique and the interpretation of the obtained results is numerous. Due to the link between WDDS and agricultural practices it would have been ideal if such relationship could have also been investigated in the analytical work. See e.g. Bellows A. et al, 2020: The Relationship between Dietary Diversity Among Women of Reproductive Age and agricultural Diversity in Rural Tanzania. Food and nutrition Bulletin \$/1 pp 50-60; Connors K. et al, 2021: Impact of Crop Diversity on Dietary Diversity Among Farmers in India During Covid-19 Pandemic. Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems Vol. 5, pp1-10

3.4 Efficiency

Efficiency relates the results and the impact of the project to the resources employed. The total budget for phase II of the project did not exceed much CHF 3 Mio. Spread over three years of implementation and eight countries, per country an investment amount of less than CHF 150,000 was available per year. With that amount, the project financed:

- Capacity development programs and the building up of a stock of RSPs,
- SUNSAI projects (partly in the form of co-finances),
- Awareness creation campaigns and advocacy work on the national levels of the intervention countries and on the global level,
- Development and improvement of the MAAN-platform,
- An elaborate monitoring system for outputs, outcomes and impact,
- Country coordinators and country coordination work,
- Extensive overall coordination and management work, including the establishment of a vast and very elaborate documentation.

Overview 14: Direct funds employed per country, RSPs capacitated and SUNSAIs set up, 2018-2021

Country	Direct Funds (1,000 CHF)	No RSPs	No SUNSAIs
Ecuador	181	81	2
Ethiopia	282	78	7
India	182	103	2
Kyrgyzstan	275	100	2
Nepal	368	107	10
Pakistan	314	160	6
Peru	315	103	6
Tajikistan	120	50	-

Source: compiled by the authors based on project documents

There is no doubt that funds, relative to the achievement/impact have been small and thus the employment of available funds is considered to be highly efficient. It is debatable to what extent investments in MAAN have been employed in the right dimension. The same applies for the policy advocacy work. There is however strong evidence that the direct funds employed to capacitate RSPs and to set up SUNSAIs have been exceptionally small, yielding enormous effects on the ground.

Covid-19 in 2020 and to some extent also in 2021 impacted project implementation and rendered the realisation of practically all activities more demanding. The foreseen budget still has not been overrun and an extension of the project by one year to October 2021, as a consequence of Covid-19, could be managed.

As already pointed out, the structure and setup of the project is complex as it stretches over a number of countries, with different topics and intervention levels. The consequence is that many different persons are involved and coordination requirements are elevated. The attempt to document in the best transparent manor project progress comes, due to the complexity of the project, quickly to its limits and occasionally the many numbers and abbreviations used make reading, understanding and tracing difficult.

Project steering committee meetings are well documented and decisions taken highlighted, reflecting again the efforts to include in project steering as many stakeholders as possible and to base decision making on a participatory approach.

Within the frame of a limited budget and numerous obligations, it is practically automatic that communication, coordination and interrelation with the project coordinators and other staff in the intervention countries falls short and not all wishes and necessities of communication could be fulfilled at any moment. Consequently, within the given frame of the project, the coordination and steering is considered to have been the best possible. The question however is, whether and to what extent the design of the project should have already considered the massive coordination work, which entails a complex project with several superposing layers.

Overall and particularly in view of the visible and traceable impact on the ground, a wide network of RSPs and of SUNSAIs, the efficiency of the project in terms of employment of funds available is considered to be exceptionally high.

3.5 Contribution to Superior Impacts

This criterion rates the contribution of the project to changes on the political level, thus on the level which denotes the perception of and trends in organic agriculture, Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture, the understanding of the link between nutrition and sustainable agriculture and related issues.

There is no doubt – and the results of the field missions clearly confirm this - that the project has contributed on various levels to an increase of the awareness on topics related to nutrition, agriculture and the link between both. It is difficult to rate the dimension of the influence of the project on political decision making, political orientation and the behaviour of different stakeholders. The topic nutrition and NSA is high on the agenda of practically all concerned politicians in virtually all countries. NMA has contributed in an illustrative and convincing form to the global discussion on these issues. As one of the unique selling properties of the project in this respect, it has managed to mobilise RSPs and other directly concerned target groups to talk to decision makers and to give credible testimony on the approach, on the philosophy behind, on the effects and on the small funds needed to trigger the effects. Such presentations might have improved the connection between the academic world in which the topics of the project are usually discussed and the realities in the intervention countries, thus rendering theoretical discussions and concept formulations more grounded.

Although not directly quantifiable, it can be assumed that the project contributed to the national and international debates on NSA, particularly through the mobilisation of RSPs and other directly concerned target groups to testify on the approach directly in front of local and global decision makers, rendering the global debate more praxis-oriented.

3.6 Sustainability

In this context, sustainability is interpreted as the chances that the implemented approach stays, develops further independently of the project support and in the best case gets replicated by followers. Such sustainability depends mostly on to what extent the project approach is convincing enough for the target groups to get followed up and on to what extent the framework conditions in a specific environment, are favourable or not. The RSP and MI approach, demonstrated impressively in the second project phase through its propagation by the ToT program, shows all characteristics of a component to stay and to get propagated further: RSPs are convinced by the idea, risk their reputation in the villages they live, invest own funds and resources and most of the MIs installed, have supposedly some economic effects. There is a clear ownership, driving the development and ultimately sustainability.

The SUNSAI approach is more anonymous. While the original idea to introduce the concept might not have been wrong, ownership through organisations is never as strong as through individual persons. Organisations, NGOs, firms, associations or similar, which have implemented SUNSAIs will continue working as long as there is sufficient finances available. Such can also come in future from different sources and thus the sustainability of SUNSAIs will depend on the financial/economic setting in a specific country. A personalisation of SUNSAIs, as in the case of the MIs cannot and will not take place. The probability of sustainability of SUNSAIs is thus rated lower than that of the RSPs.

The long-lasting effect of local advocacy work is not only depending on the convincing communication of a message by project stakeholders. It depends very much also on the receptiveness of the addressed people, their own interests, the framework conditions in which they live in and the socio-economic constellation around them. When the macro-economic and macro-political conditions are favourable for a reception and absorption of a specific message, such message will be taken up, transported and in the best case translated into action, particularly when some benefits result for the communicator and implementer. Such benefits must not always be of financial nature but can unfold also in terms of prestige or social standing. If global tendencies change, it can happen quickly that a topic, high on the agenda today, is downgraded to a topic of low priority the other day. Long lasting ownership in policies is not really given, particular not in countries with low reliability ratings. In so far sustainability of the advocacy work can be given in the case the global trends and framework conditions remain as favourable as they are today. Sustainability can however also abruptly end, when major reorientations in global trends happen. A reliable rating of the sustainability of political, advocacy work is practically impossible.

Due to these uncertainties inherent in political work, the work on the ground with stakeholders and target groups, resuming ownership is even more appreciated and considered as the grand success of the project and of the concept, also in the long run.

4. Overall Assessment and Scoring of Project According to the DAC Criteria

The synoptic assessment of the project according to the DAC criteria, to which the comments on the guiding questions in overview 15 contribute, leads to the following conclusions:

- In view of the global trend to support the implementation of the sustainable development goals, the project has a strong relevance for all of the countries of intervention and for the selected target groups, disadvantaged populations in mountainous areas. The selected sustainable development goals to work on, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, have a strong relevance also for other formulated development goals. Healthy and diversified nutrition supports health in general and fosters learning. And sustainable agriculture is elementary for any kind of environmental protection activity, climate protection and the preservation of adequate living conditions for the global population in general. As additionally basic elements of the approach are considered to be replicable, **the attribution of a score of 1 for the relevance of the project approach is justified.**
- The theoretical concept of the project to work on three levels, a basic grass root level, a local political and a global political level, is considered to be consistent but much too ambitious to be realised over up to eight countries with a very limited resource frame. The approach supplements similar initiatives of other international organisations and an exchange of experience with some of them took place. A substantial cooperation in the sense of jointly carrying out tangible activities was not really looked for and presumably would also have overstretched the management capacity of the project. The project is in full line with the general objectives and strategies of SDC and contributes to their achievements. This coherence of the project with SDC's objectives, balanced by some weaknesses resulting from the overambitious design of the project, **leads to an overall score for coherence of 2.**
- On the local level the project has largely achieved its objective. Through the approach to train and to build up a stock of Rural Service Providers and the implementation of SUNSAIs, the nutritional situation of the targeted populations could substantially be improved and practices of sustainable agriculture introduced. For the political levels, the impact of the project's advocacy work is less clear. This is not only a result of insufficient project work, but simply inherent in political advisory work. A project with a very limited budget and activities over eight countries and three thematic cannot expect to have a major visible and tangible impact on policy formation. Currently global political debates support the consideration of the project's topics. To what extent communicated messages are truly transposed into legally binding regulations or political projects cannot be assessed. **Effectiveness for the component, targeting at the grass root level is considered to be exceptionally high and scored with 1, while effectiveness for the components targeting at the national and global political level is scored with 2-3.**
- Implementing a project over eight countries and three thematic domains with a budget of not much more than CHF 3 Mio for three years, as in phase II, constitutes a major challenge, is inherently complex and consequently demands a complex management system. In view of such setup the project was exceptionally efficient, particularly on the grass root level of the different countries. **From this point of view, the project deserves an efficiency score of 1.**

The question however is, to what extent it was really adequate to design a project in such a complexity for achieving the overall goal and vision. Limiting the number of intervention countries and working only in those of geographical proximity, of similar cultural background and level of development could have reduced the complexity of the project and of the management requirements. Similarly, it is not always clear to what extent demanding project activities, consuming substantial resources such as the MAAN platform truly contributed to the project's success. **Overall, the efficiency score is thus set at 2.**

- The results of the monitoring work clearly show that on the local levels in each of the intervention country the nutritional situation of the target group, measured by the Women's Dietary Diversity Score (WDDS), could be improved. As part of the field missions, it emerged that the WDDS survey was received very positively by local households, as this system enabled them to analyze their own menu and make appropriate improvements to the nutritional situation for their families. In so far, the principle objective of the project is reached. It is however debateable to what extent the WDDS, formulated as an indicator for the overall objective of the projects is adequate, given the inherent shortcomings of the WDDS as indicator, largely discussed in the relevant literature. Still it is appreciated that strong efforts were undertaken to measure the impact of the project on local level. The impressively high number of Rural Service Providers formed and mobilised without offering them much financial incentives, is considered as a strong indicator for the impact of the project on local level. On political level it is the question how the impact of project activities can be measured and the expectation that a small project leads to a substantial change of a political orientation presumably was too ambitious. This applies for the national and the global levels and to a lesser extent to the local and regional levels, at which the political impact of the project is presumably higher. **Overall and particularly due to the strong effects on local level the project's impact is scored with 1-2.**
- Sustainability is largely a product of the relevance of a project and its impact. There is no doubt that the relevance of the project and of its approach is high, in line with the global political trends and national necessities of the countries in which the project was active. Its impact on the ground is substantial and through the high number of RSPs formed, which got engaged in the project without much financial incentives, it must be concluded that the project's philosophy as such is convincing enough for local stakeholder to continue. On the political levels sustainability is less ensured as political priorities can change quickly. Nevertheless, and despite uncertainties resulting from political instabilities, orientations and trends, **a sustainability score for the activities on the ground, the hard core of the project, of 1-2 is justified.**

Overview 15: Comments on key aspects of the DAC criteria as requested by SDC

Key aspects based on DAC Criteria	Score ³²	Justification
Relevance	1	
1. The extent to which the objectives of the intervention respond to the needs and priorities of the target group.		The project aims at contributing to the SDGs and particularly to the SDGs, referring to better nutrition and to a more sustainable agricultural system. The principle target group, farmers in mountainous areas of the selected intervention countries, are supposed to suffer from deficiencies in nutritional and healthy food, for which global scientific evidence exists. In so far there is a justification for the assumption that there is a need to improve nutrition via more environmentally friendly agricultural practices. To what extent better nutrition and environmentally friendly agriculture are truly priorities of the target group has to be left open as such was not verified by empirical field work.
2. The extent to which the objectives of the intervention respond to the needs and priorities of indirectly affected stakeholders (not included in target group, e.g., government, civil society, etc.) in the country of the intervention.		Governments of all intervention countries have signed the UN declaration on the SDGs and committed themselves to undertake major efforts to improve the nutritional status of their populations and to adjust agricultural production systems in favour of sustainability. Such efforts are strongly advocated and promoted by many civil society groups and NGOs. It can thus be assumed that the project's objective is fully in line with political priorities to foster the nutritional and health status of the populations and to develop the agricultural sector towards more environmental friendliness.
3. The extent to which core design elements of the intervention (such as the theory of change, structure of the project components, choice of services and intervention partners) adequately reflect the needs and priorities of the target group.		The concept of the project builds on three dimensions: a grass root dimension with interventions in villages, a local political dimension with interventions on the national level and a global dimension with interventions at global events to advocate nutrition sensitive agriculture. There is no doubt that the grass root interventions yielded substantial and measurable results, contributing to a true improvement of the nutritional status of the targeted populations and to an adjustment of agricultural production. Within the project's theory of change, it is envisaged to positively influence agricultural production conditions which are determined by political structures, infrastructure and policies. However, direct effects on the political level are more difficult to identify and the objective to attain them was presumably, from the beginning, too ambitious.
Coherence	2	
4. Internal coherence: the extent to which the intervention is compatible with other interventions of Swiss development cooperation in the same country and thematic field (consistency, complementarity and synergies).		The SDC strategy is clearly defined in terms of countries of interventions, objectives of development support and strategic instruments to be employed. The contribution to the SDGs constitutes one major objective of SDC with a specific focus on countries with larger mountainous regions and thus populations, frequently disadvantaged. The project supplements in practically all intervention countries other Swiss initiatives, targeting at improving the standard of living, strengthening civil societies, supporting the introduction and popularisation of environmentally friendly production practices and the interaction between different stakeholders and partners.

³² 0 = not assessed; 1 = highly satisfactory; 2 = satisfactory; 3 = unsatisfactory; 4 = highly unsatisfactory

5. External coherence: the extent to which the intervention is compatible with interventions of other actors in the country and thematic field (complementarity and synergies).		Virtually all international development organisations, at least those which are registered in the OECD's data base on Official Development Assistance pursue similar objectives as the NMA project as support to the implementation of the SDGs became mandatory. This applies also for the numerous NGOs, active in the project countries.
Effectiveness	2 - 3	
6. The extent to which approaches/strategies during implementation are adequate to achieve the intended results.		Working with Rural Service Providers and also with SUNSAls has proven to be very efficient for achieving concrete and directly visible results on the local level. Political advisory work is more delicate to appraise as impacts of recommendations might unfold their effects well beyond a project's end, but also because political priorities can change abruptly and the consistent pursuance of political strategies in the countries of intervention is not guaranteed.
7. The extent to which the intervention achieved or is expected to achieve its intended objectives (outputs and outcomes).		The overall project objective, improvement of the nutritional status of the target group, measured by a positive change of the scoring of the Women's Dietary Diversity, has been achieved. It can be assumed that at least the interventions at the grass root level contributed to the project objective in a measurable form. To what extent the advocacy work on the political level, both national and international, have contributed and in which degree, cannot be assessed.
8. The extent to which the intervention achieved or is expected to achieve its intended results related to transversal themes.		The project pursued strongly a participatory approach and emphasised transparent decision making and the inclusion of many different stakeholders in all important project steps. The project is not only understood as a technical one but more as a holistic socioeconomic intervention, combining technical aspects with the promotion of interaction, networking and the social balancing of power and responsibilities. Awareness creation on all of these issues played a large role in the project's activities and it can be assumed that, beyond the technical achievements, the interaction between and among major stakeholders could be improved and substantiated and their mutual understanding increased.
Efficiency	2	
9. The extent to which the intervention delivers the results (outputs, outcomes) cost-effectively.		The budget for both project phases has been limited and considering that in the second project phase eight countries have been covered with activities, not more than CHF 100 -150,000 per country and year could be employed. Given that with such a budget almost 1,000 Rural Service Providers could be trained, several hundred micro-interventions and 30 SUNSAls set up, ready to carry the messages of the project further, the cost efficiency is seen to be very high. To such high cost efficiency contributed also the careful selection of the local implementation partners, who in many cases supplemented the project budget with own resources and voluntary work.
10. The extent to which the intervention delivers the results (outputs, outcome) in a timely manner (within the intended timeframe or reasonably adjusted timeframe).		Timing project activities always relies on a number of assumptions, which are in many cases difficult to influence and to manage. The most prominent example is the Covid-19 pandemic. Nobody could foresee the effects of such pandemic on project activities and therefore no precautions could be taken. Restrictions resulting from Covid-19 impacted the timely realisation of project activities strongly and therefore it is well justified that a project extension by one year was granted, together with a slight budget increase.

11. The extent to which management, monitoring and steering mechanisms support efficient implementation.		The project structure with activities over eight countries and three major themes is considered to be complex, demanding consequently a complex management and steering structure, involving many different staff. Interventions in less countries and the focus on only one or a maximum of two major blocks of activities would have reduced management challenges substantially. In this context, it is even more respectable that the project tried to monitor and to document in many respects project progress. The project complexity again results in a complex monitoring and reporting system, which not always facilitates the interpretation of progress, particularly not in view of ambitiously set indicators.
Impact	1 - 2	
12. The extent to which the intervention generated or is expected to generate 'higher-level effects' as defined in the design document of the intervention.		The principle impacts, which can be traced and verified, are those achieved in the villages through the training and engagement of Rural Service Providers and their practical work and of other stakeholders engaged in setting up SUNSAIs. Micro-projects realised by them are tangible and have strong demonstration effects. It can well be that in the long run the examples, set up in the field and on the grass root level impact the mode of thinking and the mode of action of stakeholders on a more political level and thus influence policy design in general. Similarly, many practical examples decently presented and propagated on a global level can have the power to influence global trends and thus global policies. Still a project of the dimension of the NMA, even so implemented in a number of countries, is not supposed to have major effects on political level and, as long as there is no directly attributable evidence, its impact for policy formation shall not be overestimated.
Sustainability	1-2	
13. The extent to which partners are capable and motivated (technical capacity, ownership) to continue activities contributing to achieving the outcomes.		One major indicator, confirming the high motivation of Rural Service Providers to continue the work, might be the high number of training activities carried out by them for others without any remuneration and the high number of micro-projects, set up by them on their own costs. Ownership, in the true sense of the word, has truly been achieved on this level. Consequently, on the local levels, on which the project was active, there is a high chance that some sustainability is reached. To what extent on the political levels the messages communicated sustain, impact policy formation in the longer run and materialise in political decision making, is difficult to rate as policies can rapidly change and are influenced by many more aspects than just the project's recommendations. As long as the topic as a whole in the form of the SDGs is high on the agenda of global policy making, it can be assumed that some of the project's messages continue to be considered in relevant political dialogues.
14. The extent to which partners have the financial resources to continue activities contributing to achieving the outcomes.		On the local level, the continuation of the started activities not only depends on continued external financial flows but more on the motivation and conviction of the concerned stakeholders to take the messages further and to continue the propagation of the approach as a whole. This does not exclude that finances from other sources than this project can be mobilised to continue the project's approach in one or the other way. To what extent governments will be willing to continue supporting the project's activities cannot be rated as budget allocation is typically influenced by many different aspects and grass root activities do not always rank high on political agendas.

<p>15. The extent to which contextual factors (e.g. legislation, politics, economic situation, social demands) is conducive to continuing activities leading to outcomes.</p>	<p>The current global political trend supports implementation work of SDGs and in this frame also activities such as those carried out by the project. A strong political trend mobilises economic resources and as currently seen, in many cases it is not budget constraints limiting development assistance work. Political priorities, however, can change quickly and with the change of political priorities the allocation of funds and of budgets. It is not automatically given that in the more distant future the same priorities as today are set and if new priorities diverge too much from the topics of the project, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, the conduciveness will at least be impaired, if not strongly hampered.</p>
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5. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

While the number of projects oriented to the implementation of the SDGs on a global scale is vast, the NMA project shows several unique characteristics which discriminate it from other projects. One of these elements refers to the number of countries combined in the approach, another to the implementation of topics which are logically interrelated but which demand distinctly different approaches and a third one refers to the very limited specific budget.

NMA has been implemented over two phases, with a duration of about six years. The working-up of the experience made during this process and the holistic analyses carried out in this evaluation lead to the following conclusions, lessons learned and thus recommendations for the design and implementation of similar projects and approaches:

5.1 Concept

- The promotion of Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture as one possible response to contribute to the food-, nutrition- and agriculture-related sustainable development goals, is considered to be adequate.
- The practical implementation of such concept through the formation of Rural Service Providers and the set-up of micro-projects with a demonstration character, easily replicable is also considered to be appropriate.
- The approach to work through Rural Service Providers is also seen as a means to ensure sustainability, as the concept builds strong ownership, not only relying on financial interest but more on the conviction by the ideas and philosophies behind.
- Ownership and thus sustainability is supposed to be more reached when individual persons are addressed and coached, rather than organisations or similar more anonymous setups.
- The financial demand to implement an approach, which builds on the strengthening of capacity of Rural Service Providers, including the setting up of micro-interventions, can be very limited. It might be of advantage to propose as micro-interventions those for which a positive effect on household economics can be expected. The demonstration that with very limited funds and resources, substantial impact can be reached on the ground when the interventions are decently managed and stakeholders and beneficiaries convinced to take over ownership, constitutes one of the core understanding and rediscoveries of this project.
- While the idea to strengthen the interaction between different stakeholders in the field and across countries is highly appreciated and deserves pursuance also in other projects, there is no need to set-up a specific internet platform being in competition with widely available standard communication and interaction devices.
- Political advocacy work on a country level forms part of any kind of integral promotional activity of a technical, socioeconomic or health related project and shall be kept also as a component in any other related project. However, and considering the instable economic and political environment in most intervention countries for development work, it is unlikely that limited political advocacy work succeeds in the long run. Opinion formation might be better achieved when messages to be communicated are transferred through mass media (e.g. television spots) and widely used social media, addressing consumers irrespective of their social status, following the standard concepts of product promotion. Highest effects are supposed to be achieved when

consumer-oriented campaigns are combined with professional lobby work at the political level.

- Political advocacy work on a global level also has its relevance and justification. However, its impact on direct global and immediately effective political orientation is impossible to trace, while at the same time conference tourism has its challenges with respect e.g. to CO₂-emission. Similar to local advocacy work, lobby work on the global level has primarily a chance to be effective when it is carried out in a very professional way, at best by prestigious and known personalities. Projects with a mandate to impact policies or policy formation demand thus specific staffing and strategic orientation, deserving a set-up on their own.

5.2 Organisation

- A project setup, attempting to work over eight countries and three major topics, is complex and shows major challenges. Such an approach can only be justified when all participating stakeholders are willing and able to contribute the project success in a form well beyond the standard and when substantial voluntary input by all parties can be expected.
- A complex project setup results automatically in a complex coordination and communication, which, given a defined budget, cannot always perform as needed. Less complex projects e.g. covering fewer countries leave more room for communication and coordination, strengthening the ownership of all implied parties.
- The setting up of a steering committee composed of competent partners is adequate and the minutes of meetings allow the tracing of decision making.
- The delegation of implementation responsibilities to local institutions in principle is seen to be appropriate. However, the selection of the local implementation partners must be carried out very carefully and whenever possible those local implementation partners shall be preferred which are known and for which credible and verifiable records of project implementation exist. In this context it is also to consider whether it is worthwhile to work in countries which do not appreciate and welcome the intended development work or the institutions mandated.
- Engaging local implementation partners in principle is seen to be appropriate. If however subcontracts are further subcontracted and the ultimate field work is carried out by actors not directly related to the assigned project implementing agency, transparency of work suffers and the chain of command can no longer be traced back.
- Engaging a number of supporting actors, having the mandate to scientifically accompany and to support the project development, is highly welcome as long as the contracted institutions ensure consistency in the treatment of the topics assigned.
- Limited funding and the feeling that funds are scarce or too scarce to carry out all necessary and planned activities are standard questions frequently raised by project stakeholders. In practice, such question usually does not refer to a limitation of funds as such, but to inadequate planning that underestimates the effort and resources needed to implement a particular activity. It is true that the reach (and impact) of a project can be increased if the allocated budget increases, however there is no linear relationship between available funds and project success.

5.3 Project Planning and Documentation

- Project planning, according to the format of impact chains, is appropriate and leads to transparent hierarchies of intervention steps. Theory of change concepts or any other kind of systematic planning tool are convenient approaches, as long as it follows the basics of the logical framework and/or project cycle management methodology. Still, a rigid reality check of planned activities or envisaged outcomes, outputs and goals might always be needed, in tendency the more the employed planning tools favour academic and theoretical rather than practical thinking.
- The formulation of impact, outcomes and outputs must be unambiguous and realistic. Supporting indicators shall be formulated in such a way that they specify outcomes, impacts, etc. in a traceable and measurable form and do not rely on assumptions which cannot be verified.
- Assumptions are clearly to be distinguished from risks and only those assumptions shall be formulated, which are important for the relevant planning layer and which can be worked on. The listing of assumptions and risks in a project document is welcome. However, in such a case it shall be described clearly what the project intends to do with the listed assumptions and risks.
- Likewise, it is appreciated that stakeholders are listed and profiled. It is however more important to show with which stakeholders on which topic can be cooperated, what kind of results are expected and how a cooperation is managed.
- The presentation of project progress follows the format and structure of the project. The more complex a project is, the more complex becomes a progress report. The use of many abbreviations and the highlighting of many individual figures are, for the understanding of the progress of a project, not always helpful.

Synoptic summaries and interpretation, supplemented by country reports in annexes, could improve traceability of project progress. It goes without saying that all project documents must carry a cover page allowing the identification of the document clearly by title, the date of production and the authors.

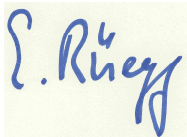
Overall and in summary, the project's principle concept to promote Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture via a strong grass root oriented field work is truly worthwhile to be followed and replicated in similar projects, notably when project setups are less complex than that one of the NMA and can truly be called "lean".

List of Annexes

- I Technical proposal of the evaluation team
- II List of interviewed stakeholders and notes
- III List of interviews and report of the field mission in Nepal
- IV List of interviews, report and notes of the field mission in India



Schopfheim, 27.10.2021: Dr. Ulrich März



Izmir, 27.10.2021: Elisabeth Rüegg