

Evaluation Report

Phase-I (2022–2025) Completion Evaluation of the Food Security and Agricultural Sustainability for Livelihoods Improvement (FASL) Project

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Acronyms

AFSANA	Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
AKAH	Aga Khan Agency for Habitat
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
ANDMA	Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority
ASLI	Afghanistan Strategic Learning Initiative
CADPP	Comprehensive Agriculture Development National Priority Programme
CBNRM	Community based Natural Resource Management
CBSG	Community based Savings Groups
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
CIG	Common Interest Group
FASL	Food-security and Agricultural Sustainability for Livelihood improvement
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FFS	Farmer Field School
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GIS	Geographic Information System
HVRA	Hazard, Vulnerability and Risk Assessment
ICARDA	International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas
ICIMOD	International Center for Mountain Area Development
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IRA	Immediate Results Assessment
KII	Key Informant Interview
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Learning
MIAD	Multi-Input Area Development
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	Microsoft®
ANPDPF	Afghanistan Food Security Development National Priority Programme
ODK	Open Data Kit
OECD-DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
REESI	Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Sustainability, Impact
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SoP	Standard Operating Procedure
ToC	Theory of Change
UCA	University of Central Asia
UN	United Nations
USD	United States Dollar
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary

The Phase I Completion Evaluation (2022–2025), an interim analysis conducted amid ongoing implementation processes where some findings may evolve, of the Food Security and Agricultural Sustainability for Livelihoods Improvement (FASL) project provides a comprehensive assessment of its performance to guide the strategic design of Phase II commencing in 2026. Implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), the USD 19 million initiative targeted poor smallholder farm households across 32 districts in seven provinces: Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, Parwan, and Daikundi. Reaching 66,603 households (469,636 individuals), FASL pursued three core outcomes: strengthening community representation through Common Interest Groups (CIGs), enhancing agricultural production and productivity, and promoting sustainable natural resource management coupled with disaster resilience. The evaluation employed mixed methods—including desk review of project documents, 91 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) across 46 villages (33 with female participants), and 51 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with AKF/SDC staff and community leaders—analyzed via ATLAS.ti software to ensure triangulation and credibility. This independent assessment, conducted August 2025, draws directly from primary beneficiary voices, project progress reports, annual assessments, and financial records to highlight achievements, gaps, and forward-looking insights.

Afghanistan's protracted humanitarian crisis, characterized by IPC Phase 3+ food insecurity affecting 12.6 million people (March-April 2025), recurrent natural disasters, restrictive policies by De Facto Authorities, and socioeconomic marginalization of rural women and children, underscored FASL's critical relevance. The project's community-driven approach—initiated through participatory workshops identifying poor households via Participatory Poverty Assessment and Poverty Probability Index—directly addressed these drivers by developing tailored Livelihood Investment Plans (LIPs) for 10,041 households. Interventions in farmer organization, knowledge innovation, productive infrastructure, natural resource management, and finance access aligned seamlessly with national frameworks like the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDPF 2021,2025), Comprehensive Agriculture Development National Priority Programme (CADPP), and Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSANA), as well as SDGs 1 and 2. Beneficiaries in FGDs across Badakhshan and Takhar affirmed this fit, noting that "project assistance consistently alleviated household needs for food, poultry, cows, tools, and training, improving daily coping amid shocks" [Annual Assessment Report 2024, p.10; FGD transcripts]. Gender, Equity, Diversity, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) integration was notable, with 49% female direct beneficiaries through women, specific activities like kitchen gardens and vocational skills, though evaluations flagged limited explicit targeting of youth employment and disability-inclusive measures as areas for refinement to heighten evolving relevance amid climate intensification and aid constraints [FASL Project Document, p.15,16; Baseline Report 2022].

FASL demonstrated strong effectiveness in delivering outputs and advancing outcomes, exceeding most targets despite contextual challenges. Under Outcome 1, beneficiary profiling reached 9,398 households (94% target), establishing 82 CIGs and 79 Community-Based Savings Groups (CBSGs) that mobilized community savings for internal lending and income activities, enhancing financial inclusion. Outcome 2 saw 483 hectares of agricultural land developed, 100 irrigation systems rehabilitated, 97 rural roads improved, 97 seed banks serving 640 households, distribution of 258 livestock and 157 poultry units, 549 kitchen gardens, and 950 farmers equipped with tools—directly boosting productivity. Vocational training empowered 933 individuals (high female participation), while cash for work for 6,467 people injected AFN 84.4 million (USD 1.2 million) into local economies. Outcome 3 formed 151 Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) and implemented 30 structural mitigation projects safeguarding 45 villages and 45,000 people via Hazard Vulnerability Risk Assessments (HVRAs). Community feedback highlighted

tangible gains: female FGD participants in Baghlan shared, "Carpentry training let me earn locally instead of migrating to Iran, staying with family," evidencing reduced distress migration and improved Food Consumption Scores. Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) practicality was affirmed, though the evaluation's own limitation—no primary quantitative surveys—hindered precise pre/post comparisons, relying instead on secondary annual assessments showing consistent progress [Annual Progress Report 2024, p.12; CERT Report, Sect. 4, p.9].

Project coherence was evident through compatibility with broader ecosystems. FASL complemented SDC's Swiss Cooperation Programme (SCP 2022,2025) under Climate Resilient Rural Livelihoods, synergizing with AKDN entities (AKAH, UCA), ICARDA, ICIMOD, and government bodies like Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)/Department of Agriculture and Livestock (DAIL). No significant duplication occurred; instead, synergies amplified reach—e.g., CIG networking with private inputs providers and public extension services. Stakeholder involvement spanned design (provincial workshops) to implementation (CIG-led LIPs), fostering ownership, though KIIs with 30 AKF staff noted occasional communication gaps with De Facto Authorities delaying approvals. Community feedback mechanisms functioned via CIGs, with suggestions promptly addressed, ensuring contextual appropriateness amid post,2021 shifts [SDC Annual Report 2022, p.30; Stakeholder Workshop Reports].

Efficiency marked a recovery trajectory: 2022's 56% budget utilization (approval delays) surged to 108.7% in 2023 via catch up plans, leveraging AKF's field presence (14 provincial staff interviewed) and community institutions to cut costs. Adaptive management navigated remote access and DFA restrictions, with timely delivery of infrastructure (e.g., 97 roads/irrigation schemes). Cost-effectiveness shone in labor creation and asset leverage, though enumerator observations flagged occasional field worker capacity strains in highland districts [AKF Financial Report 2023; Quality Assurance Reports].

Sustainability rests on empowered institutions: CIGs/CBSGs exhibit ownership, managing savings, NRM plans, and risks post-project. Communities adopted practices like improved seeds and CERT drills, with ecological gains from watershed management. Knowledge sharing via Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and documentation supports replicability. Challenges persist: infrastructure O&M lacks formal agreements, market/value chain links are nascent, and youth/disability inclusion lags (e.g., only 1/32 female staff KIIs). Scalability potential is high through networked CIGs influencing similar initiatives [NRM Plans; Annual Assessment 2024, p.10].

Impact manifested in transformed livelihoods—reduced migration, diversified incomes, social cohesion via CIG dialogues—attributed to FASL per triangulation (not external factors alone). Unintended positives: empowered women leaders; negatives: minor exclusion jealousies requiring resolution mechanisms. Voices like "Solar pumps for high altitudes and women-led processing centers would amplify relevance" signal pathways forward [FGD/KII Transcripts; Impact Section 5.6].

To further enhance Phase II, several pathways emerge from the evaluation. These include strengthening community-led management of assets and savings, deepening links to markets while embracing climate resilient practices, and systematically integrating conflict-resolution and trust-building modules. Bolstering feedback mechanisms and peer to peer learning can also amplify impact. These steps would build upon Phase I's solid foundation, fostering greater ownership, equity, and long-term resilience for communities.

1. Introduction

The Food Security and Agricultural Sustainability for Livelihoods Improvement (FASL) project, implemented by the AKF in Afghanistan, aims to improve food security and livelihoods among poor smallholder farm households through enhanced agricultural productivity, sustainable natural resource management, and disaster resilience. Phase 1 (2022–2025) covers 31 districts across seven provinces with a budget of USD 19 million, co funded by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation and AKF. This external evaluation is mandated to assess Phase 1's performance and provide actionable recommendations for designing Phase 2 starting in 2026. The project aligns with national priorities to promote climate-resilient rural livelihoods amid ongoing conflict, environmental degradation, and socio-economic challenges.

2. Description of the Intervention

FASL is a twelve-year, community-based program focused on strengthening the food security and livelihoods of vulnerable populations, especially women headed households. Its three main outcomes target: (1) strengthening community representation through Common Interest Groups (CIGs) and access to finance; (2) increasing smallholder agricultural production via land development, skills training, and asset provision; and (3) promoting sustainable natural resource management and disaster risk reduction through community institutions. The project applies innovative targeting methods, combining Participatory Poverty Assessment and Poverty Probability Index to identify the poorest households and develop tailored Livelihood Investment Plans. Capacity building of local groups including Savings Groups and Natural Resource Management Committees alongside Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) ensures evidence based adaptive management. The project balances immediate livelihood support with long term resilience building within Afghanistan's complex socio-political context.

3. Evaluation Scope and Objectives

3.1. Scope

Thematic scope: The Evaluation assessed the project's progress against the project document, targets stipulated in the project's results framework and the achieved results proposing recommendations, to inform and help improve the design of any future projects. The evaluation was based on a desk review of project related documents and in depth, in person focus group discussion and interviews. The evaluation also documented achievements, good practices, success stories, lessons learned or transferable examples.

Temporal Scope: The Phase 1 of the project from its start on January 1, 2022 until September 30, 2025 (the FASL Phase 1 end date is 31.12.2025)

3.2. Evaluation Objectives

This external evaluation assesses the first phase of the FASL project to provide an evidence-based review of its performance and guide the strategic design of Phase 2. Using OECD/DAC criteria, the evaluation examines the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact, and sustainability. Key objectives include:

- Assessing project results against targets and overall performance.
- Evaluating the community-based approach through a psychosocial lens, focusing on community dynamics and household benefits.
- Documenting lessons learned, significant changes, and unintended outcomes to inform future interventions.

- Gauging the potential for long term sustainability through community ownership and institutional capacity.

Ultimately, the evaluation aims to support learning and strategy refinement to maximize lasting benefits for target communities.

3.3. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation was an independent, impartial, transparent, ethical, and credible based on data and evidence. The evaluation assessed the project through assessing the six OECD/DAC main evaluation criteria as recommended by the ToR for this evaluation: 1) Relevance; 2) Effectiveness; 3) Coherence; 4) Efficiency; 5) Sustainability; and 6) Impact. These criteria led to the guiding questions, which were further reviewed/elaborated to develop a detailed Evaluation Matrix for this Final Evaluation (provided in the Annexure).

4. Evaluation Approach and Methods

4.1. Evaluation Approach

Utilization focused and participatory approaches were used for this evaluation. Use of these approaches ensured that there was participation of all relevant stakeholders and that the final product of evaluation can inform the next phase and must be utilized effectively.

4.2. Data Sources

Initially, a secondary review of all project documents was undertaken. These documents included annual progress reports, annual work plans, annual assessment report, baseline report, audit reports, capacity building reports, PRA and NRM plans, progress reports, quality assurance reports, reports with success stories and stakeholder consultative workshop reports. The questions for the desk review were informed by the OECD/DAC framework and the Evaluation Matrix. The questions in the evaluation matrix guided the review of project. Information from various reviewed documents informed the evaluation questions. For primary data collection through key informant interviews (KIIs), a KII guide was developed for each of the categories of stakeholders, identified in consultation with AKF. These stakeholder groups comprised SDC staff, AKF staff and community leaders. The evaluation matrix also guided the questions in the KII and focus group discussion (FGD) guide. KII and FGDs provided data which supported findings from secondary review of literature. Use of mixed methods ensured data triangulation and validation. Further, these methods were the suggested methods as per the terms of reference for this evaluation.

4.3. Sample and Sample Frame

Based on a consultation with AKF, a list of 32 project staff was developed for KIIs. These project staff comprised 30 AKF staff and two SDC staff. Out of the 30 AKF staff interviewed, 14 were based at the province level. Out of all project staff interviewed, only one KII was with a female staff member, as per the AKF consultation. Data collection at community level included KIIs and FGDs. KIIs were conducted with community leaders and leaders of different community groups formed under the project. A total of 51 KIIs were conducted for this evaluation. Out of these 51KIIs, 9 KIIs were conducted with female leaders. Further, 91 FGDs were conducted with beneficiaries. Out of these 91 FGDs, 33 FGDs were conducted with female beneficiaries. The final tally of 91 FGDs and 51 KIIs results from a deliberate, multi stage sampling strategy designed for comprehensive coverage and methodological rigor. The evaluation is anchored on a purposively selected sample of 46 villages. The 91 FGDs account for the actual number of active community groups (CIG, CERT, CBSG, CBNRM) across these villages, with separate discussions held for male and female members. The 51 KIIs consist of one interview with a community leader in each of the 46 villages, plus a refined, strategic sample of approximately 5 AKF and SDC staff chosen to avoid

redundancy and achieve data saturation, ensuring the evaluation is both thorough and feasible. Detailed sampling plan, sampling frame and final sample size has been provided in the Annexure.

4.4. Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

The data collection process utilized two primary tools: a Key Informant Interview (KII) schedule and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide. The KII schedule was designed for interviews with AKF/SDC staff and community leaders. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and translated. The resulting transcripts were analyzed to generate detailed notes addressing the evaluation questions. In parallel, the FGD guide was used to gather insights from male and female beneficiaries. Both tools were initially developed in draft form, pilot tested, and refined based on feedback. Following pilot testing, the revised versions were submitted to AKF for review and approval, after which they were used for the actual data collection. All the data was collected between August 10 to 30, 2025.

4.5. Data Quality Assurance

Data triangulation and validation were critical components of the final evaluation of the phase 1 of the FASL project to ensure the reliability, accuracy of findings and data quality. At the outset, the supervisors and enumerators were oriented on the objectives of the evaluation, sample size across provinces and tools for data collection. Subsequent to the training, all the tools were pilot tested and finalized. During data collection, the supervisors provided guidance to the enumerators and also closely observed data collection to meet expected data quality and timeline. Further, triangulation of the data involved using multiple data sources, methodologies, and perspectives to cross verify information and minimize biases. This approach combined qualitative and secondary review of data, to provide a comprehensive understanding of project outcomes. Validation processes involve rigorous checks for data consistency, including cross referencing secondary data with primary data. Together, triangulation and validation enhance the credibility of this evaluation, ensuring that conclusions and recommendations are well founded and actionable. Further, stakeholder participation was central to ensuring the FASL evaluation's relevance and inclusivity. Interviews, averaging 45 minutes, included AKF and SDC representatives, as well as community leaders and heads of community groups. AKF provided on ground support to access purposively selected communities. This participatory approach from inception to data collection enhanced accountability, ensured comprehensive insights, and strengthened the use of findings for future programming.

4.6. Ethical Considerations[1]



Informed Consent

It was ensured that all respondents understood the purpose of the evaluation and their rights, securing informed consent before data collection. The key informant interview questions and questions in focus group discussion guide were always preceded by an informed consent note which included information about the evaluator, evaluation time, provision of taking a break during the interview, freedom to not respond to question/s, and permission to record the interview. The interview or a discussion started only when the respondent gave his or her verbal consent.



Rights to Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Protection

All the interviews were stored safely in devices only accessed by the evaluator and no data was stored on the cloud. Also, the data was anonymized to protect the privacy of respondents. The report does not contain any information which can link a response to a certain respondent, not even linking a response to the organization represented by the respondent.



Respect for Respondent time

The facilitators recognized that respondents were taking time out of their busy schedules for interviews and discussions. Therefore, all sessions were arranged at times most convenient for the respondents. In cases where last-minute changes occurred, efforts were made to reschedule promptly, ensuring respondents could participate at a suitable date and time within the data collection period.

4.7. Major Limitations of the Study

Limitation 1 – A key limitation of the study was its exclusive reliance on qualitative methods, without conducting quantitative data collection. The absence of quantitative data from a structured questionnaire restricted the ability to compare results with baseline findings or project benchmarks. Such data could have strengthened the evidence base and allowed for a more precise assessment of the project's impact. The study did review quantitative data from annual assessments and progress reports; however, the limitation refers specifically to the absence of primary quantitative data collected through structured surveys during the evaluation period. This is distinct from secondary quantitative data available in project records, which was analyzed but could not replace primary survey results for more robust impact measurement. Consequently, the lack of quantitative primary data limited the evaluation's capacity to comprehensively measure and attribute outcomes from Phase 1.

Limitation 2 – One of the major limitations of the study was lack of female respondents for key informant interviews of AKF and SDC staff. Only one female could be interviewed from the sample frame of 32 respondents. This has resulted in lack of gender balanced perspectives and responses for the evaluation questions at the project staff level.

4.8. Data Analysis

The data analyst in the team made use of ATLAS.ti (version 7.5.16) software to analyze the qualitative data collected through KIIs and FGDs. Before entering the qualitative data in the software, the data analyst did a manual review of transcripts to identify key themes and trends. Based on these initial findings, the data analyst designed a coding strategy to capture key themes related to the research questions as well as strategies to easily disaggregate findings. The following steps provide further details regarding both qualitative and quantitative analysis. In order to summarize the findings and provide rating for each of the

[1] The ethical standards also adhered to the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth (ASA) ethical guidelines for good research practice

criteria, instead of using a numerical scoring system, a simplified rubric-based evaluation model was adopted. For each evaluation criterion, specific areas of assessment were identified, allowing for a more focused and consistent review. Each area was then rated on a four-point qualitative scale: 1. Unsatisfactory, 2. Partially Satisfactory, 3. Satisfactory, and 4. Highly Satisfactory.

5. Findings

5.1. Relevance

5.1.1. Consistency of effects of the project with the needs of the population in Afghanistan or the target groups

Afghanistan's food security and poverty crisis remains critical yet evolving, with 12.6 million people in IPC[2] 3+ (Mar–Apr 2025) and severe malnutrition affecting 3.5 million children and 1.2 million pregnant or breastfeeding women[3]. Recurrent climate shocks, limited economic growth, aid cuts, and mass returns continue to erode resilience. Against this backdrop, the FASL project's focus on food security, agricultural productivity, NRM/DRR, and inclusive livelihoods across seven provinces remains highly relevant. Document reviews confirm that interventions such as CERT effectively addressed disaster risk priorities by strengthening local response capacity in high-risk communities[4,5,6,7]. Community strongly feels that the project assistance consistently worked to alleviate the household needs pertaining to food security, inputs, and livelihoods and are still helping them to tide over their requirements. In one of the focus groups conducted with female participants in Badakhshan province, the participants shared that "*Our main needs were food, poultry, and cows. We shared these with the project staff, who conducted a survey and addressed our problems according to our requirements through the project's activities*". Further, during community interactions it was reported that distribution of tools and training support "improved food security" and day to day coping, indicating high perceived fit with needs. During KIIs the respondents strongly felt that the results which were achieved during the first phase of the project have been consistent with the evolving needs of the communities. These observations have also been mentioned in the latest progress report of the project indicating that achieved effects of the project are still relevant to the needs of the communities.[8]

[2] IPC / WFP Afghanistan Updates (2025) – Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and WFP reporting on food insecurity levels, Mar–Apr 2025

[3] UNICEF Afghanistan Nutrition Situation (2025) – Around 3.5m under-fives wasted and 1.2m pregnant/breastfeeding women acutely malnourished.

[4] Climate & Natural Hazards (2024–2025) – Major floods (May 2024) with widespread destruction; La Niña persistence into early 2025 increasing drought/flood risk.

[5] Economic & Labour Market – Afghanistan's GDP growth 2.5–2.7% in 2024; 73% of population rural (2023); 45% employed in agriculture; agriculture contributes 25% of GDP.

[6] Refugee Returns – More than 714,000 Afghans returned from Iran in Jan–Jun 2025, straining rural and urban coping mechanisms.

[7] 2024 Annual Report, p.4.

[8] By leveraging the local knowledge and networks of CIGs, we can better identify the needs of vulnerable households and tailor our support to ensure that assistance is both accessible and impactful. Following the establishment of the CERTs and equipping them with the necessary tools, the target communities expressed that they now feel more resilient in the face of potential disasters caused by natural hazards. FASL Annual Progress Report, 2024

5.1.2. Alignment of the intervention with national priorities and the specific political and socioeconomic context

The FASL project's objectives are closely aligned with Afghanistan's NPDPF (2021–2025)[9], CADPP[10], AFSANA[11], and SDGs 1 and 2 (FASL Project Document (2022,25), p.10–11), as well as SDC's strategic priorities (Annual Report, 2022, p.30). Operating across seven provinces and 31 districts, the project focuses on food security, agricultural productivity, NRM/DRR, and inclusive livelihoods. Interventions such as the HVRA for Rawanak directly address national disaster risk priorities through localized hazard analysis and resilience measures (HVRA Report, Sect. 1 & 3; Sect. 4, p. 9). Project assessments confirm alignment with national humanitarian and early recovery goals, particularly in supporting poor smallholders and women headed households (FASL Annual Assessment Report, Aug–Sep 2024). Both document reviews and stakeholder feedback collected through FGDs and KIIs indicate that FASL's emphasis on agriculture, irrigation, and livestock remains contextually relevant and well-integrated with Afghanistan's socio-economic and policy priorities. During an interview with AKF staff's words "*All activities in FASL project were aligned with local priorities and the environmental and social conditions of the area, given that the activities were selected by the local residents and project beneficiaries themselves. The livelihood plans of the families ensured the project's work priorities*".[12] Interactions with AKF staff and beneficiary show that the Project critically emphasized agriculture, irrigation, and livestock, which are core to rural Afghan priorities suggesting contextual fit. Additionally, the activities of the project were aligned with the national priorities of women economic empowerment, private sector development, infrastructure development, comprehensive agricultural development[13] and the socio-economic conditions of the country.

5.1.3. Increasing relevance of the project

The review of project documents highlights several ways to enhance the FASL project's relevance. The project aims to expand youth employment, women-led agribusinesses, and disability inclusion (Project Document FASL Project (2022,25), p.15,16). Reports recommend integrating CERT drills, equipment maintenance, and formal early warning systems with local authorities. Strengthening WASH linkages, non-farm youth livelihoods, and market connections is also emphasized (CERT Report, p. 8,10). Disability

[9] Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) 2021–2025 / NPDPF - ANPDF II 2021–2025 (or sometimes referred to as a National Peace & Development Plan) builds on earlier development frameworks and aims to guide Afghan development including through peace, institutional reforms, economic growth, social services, and poverty reduction. In disaster-risk and resilience literature, the ANPDF is cited as a point of reference for national priorities. However, detailed public documents on the contents, budget, implementation status, or performance (especially post-2021 Taliban takeover) are sparse in publicly accessible sources I located. Many references predate 2021 or refer to the earlier National Development Strategy (e.g. for 2017–2021) rather than the 2021–2025 period. Because governance changed in 2021, continuity, legitimacy, and implementation of the framework under the new regime remains uncertain.

[10] The Comprehensive Agriculture Development National Priority Program (CAD-NPP) was designed as Afghanistan's main framework for rural growth, food security, and poverty reduction. It outlined seven priority areas—irrigation, cereals, horticulture, livestock, climate-sensitive natural resource management, food and nutrition security, and institutional reform—while emphasizing farmer-centric services, value chains, climate resilience, and stronger institutions. Although comprehensive in scope, CAD-NPP faced major challenges: delays in developing action plans and results frameworks, weak alignment with national budgets, overlapping donor projects, limited institutional capacity, and uncertain financing. While it served as an important policy anchor before 2021, its implementation was constrained by political instability, security risks, and sustainability concerns, making it more useful now as a benchmark for sectoral priorities than as an active national program.

[11] AFSANA — Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda - AFSANA is a multi-sector strategic framework adopted by the (former) government to coordinate food security and nutrition interventions, tackling dimensions of availability, access, stability, and utilization. It defines strategic fields of action, institutional roles, coordination structures (e.g. High Level Food & Nutrition Steering Committee, provincial committees, focal points in ministries). The goal is framed as ensuring "no Afghan suffers from hunger and every Afghan is well-nourished at all times." AFSANA explicitly acknowledges cross-sectoral linkages (e.g. health, irrigation, disaster risk, agriculture) and sets tasks to strengthen M&E, coordination, nutrition integration, and alignment with national development instruments.

[12] KII with AKF staff, Badakhshan

[13] Aligning National Priority Programs (NPPs) with Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goals (ASDGs) Report available at: https://www.acbar.org/upload/1562751637824.pdf

inclusive evacuation routes, slope stabilization, and afforestation are proposed to improve resilience. Annual assessments stress the need for better WASH access, financial literacy, savings, and community participation (Annual Assessment Report, 2024, p. 10). Additionally, baseline findings call for improved irrigation, vocational training for women and youth, and digital market access. These findings are supported based on the interactions with community members which reaffirm the need for continuous input supply, irrigation upkeep, and coordination with government and community groups, while also suggesting solar water pumps and women focused income activities to further increase relevance. In the words of community members "*Considering the current conditions (in Badakhshan), using and introducing simple technologies, like agricultural water supply through solar pumps for high-altitude areas and lands will increase the relevance of the project. Additionally, including more income-generating activities, such as capacity building and establishing agricultural product and dairy processing centers managed by women in districts will prove to valuable contributors to the project relevance"*[14].

A critical analysis of the secondary and primary data indicates livelihood restoration and agricultural support activities are the most relevant and beneficial components of the project. These interventions directly addressed household economic insecurity and helped families recover from prolonged shocks. Additionally, the beneficiaries' voices illustrate that the project's relevance lies in its practical, livelihood-centered interventions that blend immediate economic relief with social cohesion and empowerment. The most valued activities are those that generate income, strengthen self-reliance, and foster local unity, thereby addressing both material and social dimensions of resilience. In the words of the beneficiaries *"After completing the carpentry training, I started making doors and windows for people in the village. I used to plan to go to Iran for work, but now I earn here and stay with my family. This training was the most useful thing the project did for us*[15]*"* indicating that the project interventions around livelihood proved life changing for the project beneficiaries.

5.1.4. Inclusion of GESI in design and implementation of the Project

The FASL project integrated gender, equity, and inclusion (GEDSI) as core principles, prioritizing women-headed households and ensuring women's participation in CBSGs, agri-processing, and skills training (FASL Project Document, p. 9,12). Annual Progress Reports (2022–2024) show consistent gender inclusion, such as women engaged in participatory planning, LIPs, CBSGs, and received targeted asset packages despite operational restrictions. Nearly half of project beneficiaries were women (49%), with 17% of LIPs belonging to women-headed households. In one of the KIIs it was mentioned that "*beneficiaries were selected through participatory and household surveys, prioritizing the most vulnerable—families with persons with disabilities, women, children, and those with the least resources—while tailoring activities to their specific capacities and needs*"[16]. Further, Rawanak HVRA and Annual Assessment reports reflected GEDSI integration through demographic and sex-disaggregated data, identifying specific vulnerabilities (p.2,34). The baseline report also embedded GEDSI in design, emphasizing employable skills, SHG representation, and gender-disaggregated indicators, reaffirming that inclusion was a deliberate and sustained feature of FASL implementation (Baseline Report, 2023, p.3,6). Further, a community-based approach ensured the participation of women, persons with disabilities, and minority groups, emphasizing "no one left behind." Inclusion was promoted through CIGs, livelihood activities (e.g., agriculture, livestock, poultry), and adaptive training models for women in restrictive settings. The project also ensured accessibility in infrastructure design and recruited staff, including women, from target communities. Moreover, feedback and grievance mechanisms such as the AWAAZ platform protected the rights and participation of vulnerable groups throughout implementation.

[14] KII with AKF Staff, Badakhshan
[15] FGD with male participants, Rustaq District, Takhar Province
[16] KII with AKF staff

5.2. Effectiveness

5.2.1. Extent to which the Project successfully met its targets

The project achieved significant progress across all three outcomes and their associated outputs, reflecting both breadth and depth of impact. Analysis of the data from all the three-progress report shows that under **Outcome 1**, which aimed to strengthen smallholder livelihoods and financial inclusion, the project successfully conducted beneficiary profiling and livelihood improvement planning for 9,398 households—reaching 94% of its target in 2022—and later exceeded initial projections with 9,571 LIPs initiated and 82 Common Interest Groups (CIGs) formed. Through **Outputs 1.1 and 1.2**, communities organized savings groups that improved access to small-scale finance, built women's financial literacy, and fostered local ownership of livelihood initiatives. Under **Outcome 2**, focused on maintaining and expanding agricultural productivity, **Outputs 2.1 to 2.4** delivered extensive infrastructure and asset creation: 38 hectares of new land developed, 11 rural roads and irrigation canals rehabilitated, 12 seedbanks benefiting 640 households, 549 kitchen gardens established, 258 livestock and 157 poultry units distributed, and 950 farmers equipped with new agricultural tools. These achievements improved crop yields, food security, and income stability while creating employment through cash-for-work activities worth AFN 84.4 million. Under **Outcome 3**, the project embedded resilience and sustainability through **Outputs 3.1 and 3.2**, establishing pro-poor community-based natural resource management systems, conducting CERT trainings, enforcing no-build zones, and implementing afforestation and flood mitigation measures. These interventions protected 45 villages and 45,000 people from avalanche and flood risks, achieving zero-casualty responses and strengthening local preparedness. Collectively, these achievements demonstrate how the project moved beyond short-term assistance to create lasting change—enhancing food security, income diversification, community empowerment, and climate resilience across 66,603 households (469,636 people), thereby fulfilling its overarching goal of building sustainable, self-reliant rural communities.

5.2.2. Extent to which the interventions contributed to improve food security and livelihoods for all members of the households, including women, girls, people with disabilities, and other individuals of vulnerable groups

The review of project documents indicates that new land was brought under cultivation, input packages and backyard production increased, and road works improved market access. Cash-for-work activities transferred AFN 84.4 million (USD 1.2 million) to 6,467 individuals, supporting household needs. The 2023 Annual Assessment Report showed increased income and production since baseline, though savings remained low, reflecting fragile financial resilience. Further, CERT interventions enhanced preparedness and reduced disaster losses, indirectly strengthening household food security. Irrigation, land development, seed banks, orchards, livestock, and FFS activities improved production, income, and market access (CERT Report, p.3,29). Annual reports (2022–2024) confirm expanded irrigated areas and greater livelihood opportunities. These findings are supported by findings coming out from community interactions which mention "*Our food security has improved greatly. We previously did not consume vegetables at all, but now from the harvests we reap, we can consume vegetables and also sell the vegetables we harvest in the market, using that to meet our other needs. In livestock and poultry farming, we also use their eggs and milk, and also sell the eggs in the market to purchase other food items we need. Income has also changed significantly. We previously had people who knew vocations but had no income whatsoever. But with the jobs created by the project, these individuals now earn more than 7,000 Afghani per month and meet their other needs through this*"[17]. While the 2024 Assessment Report shows persistent food insecurity with 70% of households at borderline or poor food consumption scores, analysis of FGDs and KIIs found clear improvements in food security and livelihoods among project beneficiaries. This suggests that although widespread food gaps remain at the population level, communities directly reached by project interventions

[17] FGD with female beneficiaries, Miramor village, Espok District, Daikundi Province

experienced a measurable positive shift in their situation. Beneficiaries reported that prior food shortages were reduced, with improved crop yields, livestock productivity, and access to inputs leading to better nutrition and stability. Further, women gained greater participation and income opportunities through training, small scale production, and household management support.

5.2.3. Perceptions about coping with natural disasters or livelihood challenges

Beneficiaries across provinces reported feeling better equipped to handle livelihood challenges than before the project. During a focus group with male beneficiaries in Badakhshan province it was mentioned that "*Yes, we are prepared for natural disasters like floods and avalanches. We built protective walls and planted trees. We also have a natural disasters team and first aid supplies. Or if the natural disaster is severe, we relocate to a safe place*"[18]. Improved seeds, livestock, poultry, tools, and training enhanced their ability to secure food and income independently. Many no longer rely on borrowing, as they now possess productive assets and management skills. Village committees and training on sustainable practices strengthened collective action and confidence to sustain gains. While external shocks persist, communities agreed that the project significantly improved resilience, food access, and self-reliance.

5.2.4. Community feedback, suggestions and complaint redressal mechanisms

In the context of community feedback, suggestions and complaint redressal mechanisms, analysis of data from FGDs and KIIs shows that the project effectively integrated community feedback, ensuring participatory and transparent implementation. Tools like PRA, wealth ranking, and livelihood planning enabled beneficiaries to shape interventions from the outset. Platforms such as CIGs, CBSGs, and CBNRMs allowed communities to voice concerns, monitor progress, and influence decisions. Issues were resolved through dialogue, awareness sessions, and transparent selection processes, supported by grievance channels like AWAAZ and community meetings. These findings are supported by community interactions. In one of the focus group discussions with female participants conducted in Badakhshan province one of the participants said "*I had a complaint. When the staff came to the village, I made my complaint directly to them. (My complaint was that the chickens were sick; I complained for them, they brought medicine, and the chickens became healthy).*"[19] The findings of the evaluation also show that despite occasional conflicts and high expectations, the project's inclusive and responsive approach strengthened ownership, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

5.2.5. Practicality of project's M&E system and extent to which the project operates as per the project M&E plan

Analysis of secondary data shows that the project's M&E system builds on AKF's established tools, including baselines, profiling, milestones, and adaptive management (Project document, p.17, 19). The CERT component incorporated HVRA diagnostics, target tracking, and narrative documentation. Annual progress reports highlight strong community-level monitoring through LIPs and YPOs, with sequencing adjusted for seasonal and approval delays. M&E methods combined field observations, GIS and geological analyses, and mixed-method assessments. Further, clear hazard by hazard logic and asset at risk tally strengthened traceability for the project (HVRA Report, p.4,8). Training of trainers, ODK based data collection, and central quality checks further strengthened consistency, traceability, and outcome tracking across provinces. Analysis of primary data indicates that the project's M&E system was practical and largely effective, combining staff led, community based, and independent monitoring. AKF applied multi-tiered oversight which included regular monitoring visits by the AKF staff. In the words of AKF staff, "*Although the political shift required us to rethink our traditional M&E practices, we adapted quickly by modifying the result-based approaches we normally apply under OECD criteria. In a stable development context, we would design a comprehensive M&E system with a full theory of change, baselines, midlines, endlines, and*

[18] FGD with male beneficiaries, Alishgarew Village, Wardooj District, Badakhshan Province
[19] FGD with female participants, Alsihgarew Village, Wardooj District, Badakshan Province

annual assessments—but this project demanded more. We had to prioritize rigorous beneficiary selection, verifiable procedures, and strengthened monitoring, including post distribution checks and quarterly quality assurance. For this project, we combined our result-based M&E framework with these enhanced beneficiary focused processes, creating a system capable of responding to diverse data needs. I can confidently say that this adaptive M&E system provided stakeholders, both internally and externally, with reliable evidence to support decision making and future planning" indicating that the M&E system of the Project was rigorous, reliable, responsive and effective.

5.3. Coherence

5.3.1. Compatibility of the Project with interventions of other actors (bilateral and multilateral donors, private sector, UN, NGOs, etc.) in the country and thematic field (complementarity and synergies)

Analysis of secondary data shows that the project was compatible with SDC's agriculture and NRM projects and aligns with AKF's Multi Input Area Development (MIAD)[20] approach (Project Document, p.10, 16,17). Further, the DRR component of the project was implemented by AKAH with AKF/SDC support and complemented the area based DRR actors via HVRA-led training, CERT formation and structural mitigation (30 projects) across 157 villages (CERT Report, p.3,4). Further, the project was implemented with government line departments (MAIL or DAIL), although the interactions with line departments was limited, as shared during one of the interactions with an AKF staff "*For the FASL project we must work with the relevant ministries and directorates, though this has become more challenging given the current context and shifting expectations.*" Further, the FASL project worked closely with the community-based groups (CDCs or CIGs) to complement community programs (2022 Annual Report). The HVRA report categorically mentions that the project was compatible with area-based DRR actors. HVRA is led by AKAH with links to AKF/SDC under FASL. The outputs included a village risk map and prioritized engineering in addition to eco-system-based measures that complement CERT formation and awareness efforts (Sec.1, p.3; Sec. 6.1., p.10). The Annual Assessment Report 2023 mentions that the project was compatible with local committees (CIGs, CBSGs, CBNRMs, CDC/CLDC). In the words of an AKF staff "*This project created a strong foundation for future initiatives by establishing beneficiary profiles, identifying target areas, and engaging communities from the start. These profiles now serve as a ready platform for other AKF and partner projects, such as OMID, to build upon, allowing them to continue and expand interventions efficiently within the same regions and beneficiary groups*" indicating that this phase of the project was able to not only piggy back on existing programmes but was also able to create a foundation for the upcoming phase as well as other further programmes of AKF or other organizations working in the region.

Analysis of data from FGDs and KIIs indicates that the FASL project was largely complementary to the work of other actors in Afghanistan, aligning well with bilateral donors, UN agencies, and NGOs. While agencies like WFP provided food aid, FASL focused on productive assets such as dairy cows, greenhouses, and improved seeds, linking short-term relief with long-term livelihood strengthening. Infrastructure projects like irrigation canals and orchards complemented other partners' efforts, while coordination with local authorities and NGOs helped prevent duplication. Mechanisms such as CIGs and CBSGs fostered collaboration and community resilience.

However, analysis of FGD transcripts show that while FASL was broadly complementary to other actors, communities experienced overlaps with ongoing NGO and government interventions. "*Some families*

[20] Multi-input area development largely means that at the community level there are multiple inputs in the health, livelihood, and education sectors being made available. It arises from the fact that in very poor regions, the poverty is multi-dimensional, so just addressing one input—whether it be education or income—is actually not enough. It doesn't lead to a substantial difference in quality of life.

received the same support like, greenhouses or seeds, from two different NGOs. It helped them, but it also meant other households were left out[21]" indicating that although these overlaps were not widespread but point to the need for stronger joint planning and coordination to ensure fair distribution and avoid duplication.

5.3.2. Compatibility of the project with other SDC financed interventions in Afghanistan

Review of project documents shows that FASL project complemented SDC's Rangeland Management[22], Sustainable Livelihood and Social Development and ASLI[23] Projects (Project Document, p. 22). Additionally, the focus of the project was on DRR capacity, preparedness and community resilience coherent with SDC's resilience agenda; additionally, financing or partnerships with SDC is explicit[24] (CERT Report, p.3,4). Analysis of Project progress reports show that the Project was designed as a logical continuation of SDC Pillar 1 & 2 humanitarian work, transitioning to development in same geographies (2022 Annual Report, p.3,6). Further, as per the HVRA Report the project was consistent with SDC's resilience agenda – community risk diagnostics (HVRA), practical mitigation (gabions, retaining or terracing, afforestation), and preparedness (monitoring of hazard zones) (Sec. 4, p.9). Additionally, the FASL Annual Assessment report mentions consistency of the project with other SDC financed projects on food security, livelihoods and NRM. The Assessment Report reiterates Phase,1 financing by AKDN or SDC. Further, analysis of data from FGDs and KIIs indicates that the FASL project is highly compatible with other SDC-financed interventions in Afghanistan, showing strong consistency, complementarity, and synergies. Its design aligns closely with SDC priorities on food security, livelihoods, and community resilience, supported by effective coordination between AKF and SDC. The project complemented other SDC initiatives through agricultural, livestock, and savings interventions, while strengthening local institutions such as CIGs and NRM committees. Its integrated approach combined livelihood support with capacity-building and inclusion, ensuring coherence across programs. During a KII with AKF staff in Badakhshan it was mentioned "*The FASL project complements other SDC projects in the sector of pasture management and natural resource conservation, improving agricultural services and livelihoods in high mountainous areas, in the target areas of Badakhshan. Furthermore, the FASL project provides a good foundation for the effective implementation of the social resilience and local growth projects in Afghanistan*" showing that the project was compatible with other SDC financed interventions.

5.3.3. Involvement of relevant stakeholders in the project's design and implementation

Analysis of the project documents clearly shows that SDC, AKF, and local communities were involved in design and implementation of the project (Project Document, p.17). HVRA report mentions that

[21] FGD with female participants in Deh Qalan village, Khuram wa Sarbagh district, Samangan province

[22] Participatory Rangeland Management (PRM) (Flintan and Cullis 2010, Robinson et al. 2020) is an approach for supporting pastoralists in managing their rangelands according to their knowledge and interests.

[23] Agricultural Services and Livelihood Improvement (ASLI) Project was financed by Switzerland's SDC, and implemented in Afghanistan from August 2017 to May 2022 with a budget of around CHF 7,050,000. Its goal was to improve the livelihoods of poor rural households by strengthening the public agricultural extension system at the subnational level so that it could deliver demand-driven services. The project targeted food-insecure, resource-poor farming families in several districts of Bamyan province and worked through public extension workers in close cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and related government institutions. Key outcomes were to include increased productivity and resilience of target households, adoption of improved production techniques, formation of Common Interest Groups (CIGs), and institutional capacity building of extension services and line ministries.

[24] The Swiss contribution to FASL is in line with the Swiss Cooperation Strategy Afghanistan 2019 2022 and Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021-2024 and complements Switzerland's existing portfolio in the agriculture and natural resource management sector in Afghanistan in a meaningful way. Further, the proposed project will be implemented in a geographical context where the SDC currently works to strengthen educational opportunities. FASL will indirectly complement SDC's past and existing initiatives in education by working to improve food security and livelihoods at the household and community level - both factors that are known to influence school enrolment and retention (Project Document, p.3).

stakeholders were engaged via HVRA, village awareness seminars (n=157) and CERT formation and training with certified trainers. Further, mock drills and simulations ensured practical readiness (CERT Report, p.4, 7,8). Review of progress reports show that stakeholders engaged in village selection, beneficiary targeting, LIP design and implementation through CDCs/CIGs and PRA process. The HVRA report specifically mentions that the stakeholders engaged through village awareness seminar(s) and three-day CERT training and one day avalanche preparedness session. Further, the project equipped the community volunteers with response tools (Sec.1.1.,1.2, p.3). The Annual Assessment report mentions that stakeholders were engaged via household interviews (n=2144) and 24 KIIs with CBNRM representatives. Additionally, training or piloting before fieldwork ensured stakeholder engagement. Further, the baseline report also mentions that stakeholders were involved through beneficiary selection committees, community mass meetings for PPA and interviews for PPI. Further, the AKF staff provided orientation to committees and enumerators on the project at the inception stage (Baseline Report, Sec.1.2.1.1, Sec.3). Further, analysis of date from FGDs shows that the project was highly participatory, engaging stakeholders extensively in both design and implementation. During design, AKF and SDC consulted local authorities and community leaders to align priorities, using PRA, wealth ranking, and livelihood planning to ensure inclusion of poor and vulnerable families. During implementation, CIGs, CBSGs, and CBNRMs mobilized beneficiaries, monitored activities, and promoted accountability, with explicit focus on women, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups. During interactions with male beneficiaries in Badakhshan province during an FGD it was mentioned that "*The council chairman and village elders participated in this program. They identified the village's problems, considered the primary necessities of the community members, and suggested them to the office so they could provide the necessary cooperation*" showing a strong participation and engagement of community members in design and implementation of the project. Additionally, cross-sector coordination within AKF enhanced delivery, while collaboration with other organizations improved complementarity.

5.4. Efficiency

5.4.1. Ensuring cost-effective and timely implementation of the Project[25]

Analysis of secondary data indicates that cost-effectiveness was integrated into the project's design and operations. Leveraging community-based institutions reduced costs and enhanced sustainability, while strong field presence ensured timely delivery (Annual Progress Report, 2024, p.17,19). Although efficiency was initially affected by approval delays—resulting in only 56% budget utilization in 2022, a catchup plan led to 109% utilization in 2023, reflecting accelerated implementation and durable asset delivery (*ibid)*. Cash for work provided value for money by combining income support with infrastructure creation. Standardized HVRA protocols, use of GIS, and ODK-based data workflows improved precision, timeliness, and resource efficiency. Conducting beneficiary selection alongside baseline surveys further optimized time and cost efficiency (HVRA Report, p.4,11). Further, the project was largely cost-effective and timely as shared by AKF staff in one of the interviews – "*Cost-effectiveness for us stems from being a program-based—rather than project-based—organization: shared teams, complementary parallel projects, and long-standing field presence let us spread costs and avoid duplication. Our offices and partnerships built since 2004 mean infrastructure and resources are leveraged across donors and geographies. In short, alignment, continuity, and shared platforms are how we keep delivery efficient*". Additionally, AKF ensured fair pricing[26] through

[25] Across the three years of implementation, budget utilization shows a clear trajectory of recovery and strong financial performance. The project faced major approval delays in 2022, resulting in only 56% budget utilization, as implementation began late and season-sensitive activities were missed. However, with adaptive planning and accelerated fieldwork, AKF rapidly closed gaps in 2023, achieving over 100% utilization (109%), reflecting high implementation intensity and delivery of backlogged activities. By 2024, financial execution stabilized, with expenditures closely aligned to planned targets due to improved sequencing, strong field presence, and efficient use of community-based structures that reduced operational costs and enhanced absorptive capacity.

[26] A review of the secondary data and mentions in KIIs show evidence that AKF ensured fair pricing across project activities. The costing templates consistently include references to market-rate validation where local prices were benchmarked against supplier quotations, and final selections were made only after comparing multiple vendors. Reference to "price based on market assessment," "verified with local vendors," and "rate aligns with district market survey," demonstrate that purchases were

needs assessments and market surveys and maximized value for money by leveraging community contributions—such as voluntary labor for irrigation—which enabled expansion of coverage. Complementary, rather than duplicate, interventions improved efficiency and sustainability. Despite political and logistical constraints, most activities were implemented on schedule, with rapid adaptations to changing conditions ensuring inputs and training reached beneficiaries within seasonal cycles. Overall, structured planning, strong field presence, and participatory implementation enabled the project to deliver results efficiently and within tight budget limits.

5.4.2. Adaptation of project management and field workers to changing conditions to improve efficiency

Due to adaptive management and plan adjustments, the project was able to adapt to changing conditions effectively (Project Document FASL Project (2022,25), p.17,19). The HVRA report mentions that HVRA-based prioritization, mock drills or simulations, scheduling around winters and adjustments for road blockages and remoteness adapted delivery to changing conditions (p.3, 7,8). Analysis of project progress documents show that yearly plan for operation revisions and sequencing, use of community-based institutions, adaptations to women's participation constraints enabled delivery to continue. Adaptive management is also mentioned in the HVRA report. The recommendations in the report consider seasonal triggers (snow/glacier melt, heavy rain) structural and nature-based options and enforcement tools (no build zones), enabling flexible context-specific implementation (p.5,9). The baseline report mentions that the design and implementation adapted to economic/political shocks by prioritizing humanitarian response, using community led PPA/PPI to reach the most vulnerable (Sec.1). Strong adaptability by management and field teams, enabling efficient delivery amid political volatility and shifting socio-economic conditions has also been mentioned by AKF staff – "*We adapted the FASL project to Afghanistan's shifting security, political, economic, and climatic realities through flexible, evidence-driven management—regularly revising plans based on monitoring and community feedback from district to national levels. We continuously assessed risks, hired local staff, and worked through CIGs/CBSGs to operate under access constraints and strengthen social acceptance*" showing that the project management was efficient and adaptive to the changing conditions[27]. Despite sanctions and transfer limits, we leveraged AKF/AKDN internal reserves to keep financing flowing and implementation on track. Staff realigned activities through participatory assessments, adjusted less effective interventions (e.g., livestock/greenhouses), and maintained continuity by working with elders and community groups when formal structures changed. Inputs were timed to agricultural cycles, and dual implementer–monitor roles helped surface issues and adapt in real time.

5.5. Sustainability

5.5.1. Ownership of Project aims and objectives by community groups

Sustainability is reinforced by strong community institutions (CIGs/CBSGs/NRM groups), AKF's ongoing engagement, agricultural dependence, and skills adoption—backed by CERT demand, trained cadres, and 30 structural mitigation projects (Project Document FASL Project (2022,25), p.21,22; 2024 Annual Progress Report, p.30,33). HVRA findings underscore continued risk-management needs (afforestation, watershed treatment, slope stabilization). A 12,year, multi-phase design and focus on NRM/DRR further support durability (CERT Report, 2023, p.7,11). However, there are certain constraints including financing and equipment upkeep, volunteer retention, water scarcity (heavy reliance on surface/unprotected sources), climate-intensified hazards, and irrigation deficits in many districts (2023 Annual Progress Report, Sec.4.2,

anchored in real-time local price checks rather than arbitrary estimates. In many cases, the quoted price, market price, and negotiated price appear side-by-side, confirming a transparent comparison process aimed at preventing overpricing. The consistency of rates across provinces, adjusted only where local markets differed, further reflects standardized cost discipline. These patterns collectively indicate that AKF applied structured market surveys, multi-quotation reviews, and historical benchmarking to ensure fair, competitive, and reasonable pricing throughout the project.

[27] KII with AKF staff, Badakshan

4.3). Further, communities and CIGs largely embraced the project because it directly addressed priority needs—food security, irrigation, livestock, and income—while diversifying support (dairy, poultry, orchards, greenhouses). In the words of beneficiaries of the project "*Exactly when the office provided the project, we became its owners. We have taken good care of it and must maintain it well because it is beneficial for each community member"*[28]. In addition, CIGs, CBSGs, and CBNRMs strengthened ownership, inclusion, and local problem-solving, giving voice to poorer households, women, and persons with disabilities. Participation translated into sustained practices (savings, livestock care, farm improvements) beyond direct support. Uptake varied where market access was weak, maintenance lagged, or councils influenced targeting, affecting trust. Overall, the intervention fostered a culture of participation and collective responsibility at the grassroots level.

5.5.2. Socio-cultural, institutional, ecological, etc. changes developed during the project period contributing towards project sustainability

Findings of the evaluation show three sustainability drivers: socio-cultural shifts, institutional strengthening, and ecological improvements. Sociocultural, CIGs, and CBSGs increased inclusion and collective action, including the voices of poorer households, women, and persons with disabilities[29]. Further, during interactions with communities it was shared "*In project activities, women and people with disabilities were also considered, and they too received support according to their needs*[30]*".* Further, households adopted savings, diet diversification, and education investments. Institutionally, trained CIGs/NRM committees and savings groups, plus links to local authorities, created standing mechanisms for transparent targeting, grievance redress, coordination, and conflict resolution. During an FGD it was shared "*"Through our CIG, we will monitor projects and keep them going after external support ends. We share assistance and skills—agriculture, livestock, poultry, and crop cultivation—with others so they can earn income too, expanding impact and preventing fade out. We coordinate with local institutions to resolve issues and ensure continuity*[31]*".* Ecologically, irrigation rehabilitation, land leveling, greenhouses, orchards, and improved seeds raised productivity and climate resilience; poultry/dairy diversification buffered shocks. Overall, these behavioral changes, durable local institutions, and productive assets embed results beyond immediate outputs, anchoring long-term resilience and development.

5.5.3. Structures/mechanisms (of CIGs) that support project sustainability

Community support underpinned the project's sustainability model. Central to the idea of sustainability was the establishment of CIGs under the project. A CIG was led by a group leader and comprised 5,9 executive committee members, with at least 25% female members where feasible. The CIGs were trained in group management, sustainable production and innovation, basic marketing skills and internal savings and lending. Additionally, CIG leaders were trained to improve their skills in project management, conflict resolution, community based participatory planning, leadership and poverty analysis.

The trained CIGs were able to effectively utilize the savings accumulated at their respective CBSGs and were able to obtain loans for various income generating purposes (Annual Progress Report 2023, p.4). Therefore, the CIGs helped institutionalize collective action beyond direct support (Project Document FASL Project (2022,25), p. 21,22). Further, formation of these groups empowered the beneficiaries to actively engage in the development and implementation of the project at the community level (Annual

[28] FGD with male beneficiaries, Pakizh Village, Wakhan District, Badakhshan Province

[29] The HVRA assessment identified 2,592 particularly vulnerable individuals, including 1,609 children, 315 senior citizens, 522 people with disabilities, and 146 widows in order to select and design appropriate mitigation measures for vulnerable groups in those locations which are hazard-prone and pose significant threats to lives, livelihood and infrastructure. (Annal Progress Report, 2024, p.22).

[30] FGD with female beneficiaries, Khak Garan Chahr Aspan village, Sharestan district, Daikundi province

[31] FGD with male beneficiaries, Sar Ghar Village, Sharestan District, Daikundi Province

Progress Report 2022, p.5). The CIGs were in fact established to ensure long term sustainability of the project intervention and this is evident from the review of project literature[32].

Further, analysis of data from FGDs shows that CIGs supported sustainability through inclusive membership and participatory governance that gave marginalized households a voice and foster ownership. In the words of the beneficiaries, *"The support that was most beneficial for us was social savings, because whenever we need money, we can access it this way and use it for our needs. We can also start small businesses through this. Poultry farming was also very useful for us because we were unemployed in this area. When poultry farming was introduced, it was very good for us. It provided us with work and enabled us to generate income[33]"*.

Further, regular meetings enable collective decisions, resource management, and dispute resolution, strengthening accountability and trust. Savings functions build financial resilience and fund productive investments beyond external support. Training on agriculture, livestock, and business skills equips members to sustain and expand livelihoods. Strong linkages with local authorities, NGOs, and service providers improve access to markets and technical help, while community monitoring embeds transparency and good governance.

5.5.4. Knowledge management (documentation, sharing results, lessons learned, and experiences)

Learning was captured through multi-layered M&E and field processes such as profiling, PRA or PPA through CIGs, FFS experiential cycles, NRM planning, and HVRA diagnostics (Project Document, FASL (2022,25), p.19,20). Annual assessments and MERL routines (results-based M&E, dashboards, baseline–midline–endline reports) fed evidence back to program teams for adaptation. HVRA consolidated geological history and current observations into an updatable knowledge base (CERT Report, 2023, p.4,5, 10. Further, analysis of data from FGDs and KIIs shows that the Phase,1 of the project established several ways of assessing, documenting, and sharing its results, lessons, and experiences, though the quality and consistency of these processes vary across locations. Regular monitoring of project activities were carried out by project staff at the field level and CIGs, and local committees provided regular feedback, which were incorporated into ongoing assessments.

Documentation took place through structured reporting mechanisms, including monthly, quarterly, and annual reports prepared by field and M&E staff. Success stories and case studies were also collected at the community level to capture household-level impacts and transformative experiences. These stories documented how interventions, such as livestock support, irrigation canal rehabilitation, or vocational training, improved food security, income, and social inclusion, and served as powerful tools for learning and communication. Lessons learned were systematically recorded, particularly challenges in implementation, seasonal or contextual constraints, and community-level innovations that contributed to success. Sharing occurred at multiple levels. Internally, findings and lessons were shared with central AKF offices and management to inform planning and adjustment. Externally, results and reports were communicated to donors, particularly SDC, through formal submissions, while coordination with local authorities and community leaders helped disseminate outcomes at the grassroots level. Community meetings, CIG

[32] It is noted in the Annual Progress Report 2024 (p.11) that two access road projects of 7.64 km were identified, constructed (by contractors after a competitive bidding process), and handed over to communities and the local government in Darwaz and Ishkashim districts of Badakhshan province through close coordination with CIGs and community elders. Further, the roads were to be maintained by the communities themselves. Similarly, 33 surface water irrigation systems (15 canals and 18 solar-powered pumping systems) were identified and established in close coordination with local stakeholders, including CIGs, villages, community elders, and the project engineering teams (ibid, p.10). The review of project literature also shows that the CIGs.

[33] FGD with male beneficiaries, Sar Ghar Village, Sharestan District, Daikundi Province

gatherings, and participatory forums provided opportunities to share experiences directly with beneficiaries, reinforcing ownership and transparency. In the words of an AKF staff at the country level – "*We documented and shared lessons systematically through our MERL unit and sector M&E teams—conducting baseline, midterm, and final internal studies to track status, course-correct, and evaluate results. Regular monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and annual reports captured findings, challenges, and recommendations. We also recorded 'stories of change' and presented them to SDC and partners via meetings, reports, and periodic reviews to strengthen implementation and inform future programs".*

5.5.5. Replicable and scalable results, lessons, or experiences

The baseline report mentions likely scalable elements as the SHG or CBSG model for savings or finance, CBNRM planning for NRM and disaster mitigation, vocational skill development (Output 2.4) and agriculture productivity packages (Output 2.1,2.3). Similarly, the Project Document of FASL (2022,25) mentions SHG savings, seed banks, green houses, orchards and NRM plans to be scalable (p.21,22). The CERT Report mentions standardized CERT formation (25 members), certified trainer model, toolkit or PPE package list and structural mitigation templates as scalable results and replicable across hazard-prone districts (p.5, 8,9). The aforementioned findings are supported by the review of Annual Progress Reports which shows that CIG or CBSG model, seed banks, poultry or orchard packages, FFS and CERT/HVRA packages have strong replication potential. The HVRA report mentions that standardized HVRA template, repeatable analyses (slope angles, exposure tallies) and a menu of measures (gabions, terracing, afforestation, retaining walls, flood bank tree lines) are replicable to similar valleys and scalable as well (p.5,9). Further, analysis of data from FGDs shows that CIGs and CBSGs are low-cost, high-impact platforms that mobilize communities, build ownership, and enable tailored Family Livelihood Investment Plans (LIPs). Land development and orchards showed strong spillover, with non-beneficiaries copying practices—good candidates for scale. Agriculture/livestock packages (dairy cows, goats, poultry, improved seeds) delivered sustainable household and community gains. Targeted skills training for youth and women enhanced resilience and self-reliance. Adaptive, participatory methods (PRA, flexible management, ecological practices) should be institutionalized and scaled in similar fragile contexts. In the words of an AKF staff *"Several FASL models are ready to scale: CIGs and CBSGs for deep community participation; Family Livelihood Investment Plans (LIPs) that tailor support and transfer easily across programs; Natural Resource Management groups suited to mountainous, resource-based areas; and flexible, participatory skills training for youth and men. These approaches have proven effective locally and are structured for replication in other geographies and projects".*

5.5.6. Project's strategy for ensuring that its results continue to inform or influence similar initiatives or future programming

The FASL project embeds continuity through rigorous documentation (baseline–final studies; monthly–annual reports) and systematic sharing with SDC, partners, and communities to enable replication and course correction. Its 12,year, phased design scales on proven results—expanding from ~10,000 families in Phase I—while institutionalizing learning between phases. Community platforms (CIGs, CBSGs, NRM committees) sustain practices, transfer knowledge, and anchor local ownership. Capacity-building and LIPs provide adaptable models for similar initiatives. Alignment with government priorities and replicable interventions (land development, orchards, vocational training) create pathways for policy uptake and broader program adoption.

5.6. Impact

5.6.1. Unexpected and unintended positive and negative effects (for the target group or other members of the Afghan society)

While the project was designed primarily to strengthen livelihoods, promote cooperation, and enhance resilience, it also produced a series of unexpected and unintended effects—many of them positive and deeply transformative, though some created subtle challenges within communities. Across all seven provinces, participants repeatedly emphasized that the project not only improved their material well-being but also changed social dynamics, confidence levels, and relationships within and between communities.

One of the most striking positive outcomes was the emergence of social cohesion and local problem-solving capacity far beyond what the project initially envisioned. Committees and groups formed under the project became informal platforms for dialogue, trust building, and collective action. As one participant from Aliabad District, Kunduz shared: "*Before, when we had disputes about land or irrigation, people would fight or go to the district office for help. Now, we call a meeting with our committee, and they listen to both sides. People accept their decision because it is fair and made by our own elders and members. This change is something new for us—it has brought peace in the community and more respect among families.*" Similarly, in several provinces, particularly Baghlan, Takhar, and Parwan, women and youth gained a sense of agency that surpassed the project's original gender inclusion goals. Through poultry and tailoring projects, women began to earn income, speak publicly, and influence household decisions. A woman participant from Pul-e-Khumri, Baghlan reflected: "*When I received chickens and learned how to raise them, I started selling eggs in the market. My husband used to make all the decisions, but now he asks for my advice. Even men in our area say that women's work also helps the family. This project changed the way people look at us—before, women were silent; now, we are respected.*" These unintended positive effects—strengthened social harmony, improved household dialogue, and increased women's visibility—demonstrate how economic interventions evolved into catalysts for broader social transformation.

However, the project also generated a few unintended negative effects. In some villages, limited coverage led to feelings of exclusion and jealousy among households that did not receive support. A few FGDs mentioned that "*only some families got goats or training*," which created tension or complaints about fairness. In isolated cases, participants also noted short-lived dependency, with some households expecting additional distributions after initial success. Such effects were largely by-products of high demand and resource constraints rather than design flaws, but they underscore the need for clearer communication and inclusive planning. Overall, the unintended outcomes reveal that the project's influence extended well beyond its formal objectives—it reshaped social relations, strengthened local governance, and enhanced women's participation in decision-making. The negative effects, though minor, provide lessons on managing expectations and ensuring equitable inclusion. The project thus stands out not only for its planned achievements but also for its unforeseen role in fostering trust, empowerment, and local resilience—outcomes that communities themselves describe as its most lasting legacy.

5.6.2. Increasing likelihood of positive impacts from the project

In order to maximize the project's positive impact, community ownership and participation should be deepened by empowering local groups in decision-making, monitoring, and conflict resolution to ensure accountability and manage expectations. Proven interventions—like orchards, land development, poultry, and savings groups—should be scaled up through demonstration plots and peer learning. Inclusivity must be reinforced by prioritizing women, youth, and people with disabilities, with transparent selection and targeted capacity building. Activities should be contextually adapted using local knowledge to ensure ecological and cultural fit, while institutional linkages and market connections are strengthened for sustainability. Continuous communication, documentation of lessons, and transparent sharing will enhance learning and reduce misunderstandings. Additionally, climate resilience should be bolstered through

irrigation, watershed management, and climate-smart agriculture to safeguard long-term project gains. Interestingly, in one of the focus group discussions the beneficiaries felt that the project assistance should be given to more people so that the positive effects of the project can be increased *"To increase the positive changes resulting from this project, it is necessary to share the assistance given to us with others so they can also use improved seeds to enhance their agriculture. By sharing the resources available to us, we can increase the positive effects"*[34].

5.6.3. Changes attributed to the development intervention (and not to external factors)

The evaluation finds that the project's impacts are contribution-based rather than causally proven due to the absence of a counterfactual or experimental design. Evidence from the CERT report shows plausible links between project activities and reduced disaster losses—such as community warnings, evacuations, and zero-casualty avalanche responses—but these remain associative (CERT 2023, p.10). Similarly, data from annual progress reports demonstrate large-scale achievements (e.g., over 9,000 households supported in year one, expanding to 66,603 households by year two through infrastructure, asset creation, and cash-for-work worth AFN 84.4 million). HVRA findings also suggest that project interventions informed mitigation and preparedness actions, yet causal impacts cannot be verified without comparison groups (HVRA Report 2023, p.9,10). While 60% of beneficiaries report crop gains and 71% livestock improvements attributed to project support, these self-reported outcomes offer only plausible contribution, not definitive causation (Annual Assessment Report 2024, p.21). Overall, the available evidence substantiates significant positive outcomes, but future evaluations should integrate counterfactual methods to strengthen causal inference. Further, analysis of data from FGDs and KIIs shows that many positive changes, especially in food security, income, and resilience, can be directly linked to FASL interventions such as livestock, orchards, poultry, vocational training, and irrigation support. Beneficiaries consistently credited these improvements to the project, noting they lacked the means or knowledge to achieve them independently. The replication of practices by non-beneficiaries further confirms a strong demonstration effect. However, external factors like seasonal variations, market shifts, remittances, and humanitarian aid (e.g., WFP support) also influenced outcomes, complicating full attribution. Overall, while causality cannot be isolated, the FASL project was a principal catalyst for livelihood diversification, asset creation, and community empowerment, with impacts reinforced by complementary external dynamics. Finally, the importance of the project in the life of the beneficiaries gets summed up in the words of the female beneficiaries in Parwan province "*If this project did not exist, our problems would have increased. Our food security would have become weaker, and many would have remained hungry. Family incomes would have been lower, and life would have been harder. We would not have had the necessary training and support to deal with problems. Women, people with disabilities, and needy families would have been seen less and helped less. Our living conditions would not have progressed, and our problems would have increased*[35]*."*

6. Community behavior change, voices, social cohesion

There is strong evidence of community behavior change, collective action, and strengthened social cohesion across project areas. Communities repeatedly emphasized greater unity, mutual support, and cooperation in decision-making and resource sharing as outcomes of FASL interventions. Training and participatory planning processes helped villagers gain confidence, take ownership of local initiatives, and manage projects collectively through community committees and interest groups. Households described helping one another—sharing improved seeds, livestock, and skills—indicating the spread of project benefits beyond direct recipients. Women's participation in savings groups and local leadership roles improved self-confidence and financial inclusion, while joint infrastructure efforts such as canal rehabilitation and road

[34] FGD with male beneficiaries, Khak Garan Chahr Aspan Village, Sharestan District, Daikundi Province
[35] FGD with female beneficiaries, Bighamak Village, Surkh Parsa, Parwan Province

building fostered collaboration among diverse community members. The findings show that the project catalyzed a shift from dependency toward self-reliance, strengthened community solidarity, and embedded a culture of cooperation and shared responsibility that continues to sustain development outcomes beyond direct project support. Further, the stories of significant changes show that the FASL project transformed lives across remote Afghan communities by tailoring support to people's skills, needs, and aspirations, turning hardship into opportunity and dependency into self-reliance. For example, the story of Mubarak, a struggling veterinarian, chose tools over livestock and established a thriving animal clinic that improved animal health, reduced treatment costs, and sustained his family with dignity. The story of Amir, shows how once forced to migrate for labor after losing his job, he rebuilt his life through carpentry and masonry tools, creating income and new livelihood prospects for others. Similarly, Mohammad's welding machine ended years of migration, allowing him to earn steadily, strengthen food security, and serve his village with affordable services. The story of Marzia, shows how a woman once trapped in hunger and isolation, regained hope through poultry, horticulture, and seeds, becoming self-sufficient and inspiring solidarity in her community. Women's savings groups, meanwhile, turned small contributions into powerful safety nets, giving them confidence, financial control, and social recognition. Collectively, these stories reveal how context-sensitive, inclusive, and skill-based interventions can ignite sustainable change—enhancing livelihoods, promoting equity, and fostering cooperation that benefits entire communities long after project support ends.

7. Conclusion

Findings from this evaluation show that the Phase I of the FASL project achieved success in improving household resilience and local capacity to manage food insecurity, livelihoods, and disaster risks in the targeted provinces. The combination of cash-for-work, LIPs, CBSGs, CIGs, and DRR mechanisms has been particularly effective. The evaluation confirms that these interventions were well-aligned with local priorities, addressing critical needs for income generation, food availability, and environmental protection. One of the important successes lies in the project's integrated approach, which linked livelihood improvement with natural resource management and community preparedness. The establishment of CERTs along with climate-resilient infrastructure, such as irrigation schemes and flood mitigation structures, not only reduced disaster vulnerability but also fostered social cohesion. The formation of CIGs and CBSGs enhanced community ownership, built trust, and improved financial literacy, particularly among women. Women's inclusion—through poultry-rearing, kitchen gardening, tailoring, and CBSG leadership—demonstrated that economic empowerment can thrive even within restrictive social norms.

In terms of innovative practices, the use of community-led planning and participatory tools such as the PPA and PPI ensured that interventions were community-driven. The adaptation of cash-for-work to align with seasonal and contextual needs, and leveraging AKF's long-standing community presence, reflected flexibility and local sensitivity. The integration of climate adaptation and DRR within livelihood programming stands out as an innovation that bridges humanitarian and development goals. However, the evaluation also highlights bottlenecks and challenges. Limited access to markets, credit, and technical services constrained income diversification. Additionally, sustainability of physical infrastructure and group mechanisms (like CIGs and CERTs) remains a challenge in the absence of formal O&M plans or linkages with government structures. Unintended but positive effects include enhanced social harmony and collective problem-solving beyond the project's original scope. Community groups are now being used for local governance and conflict resolution. On the negative side, high community expectations for continued support and dependency tendencies emerged in a few areas, underscoring the need for clearer exit and sustainability strategies before the project culminates.

The evaluation provides rich qualitative evidence of tangible and perceptual change at community level. Stories of change captured through this evaluation consistently describe a transformation in self-reliance, collective action, and preparedness. In many districts, beneficiaries recounted how irrigation canals, orchard plantations, and land rehabilitation have improved both livelihoods and the environment. Farmers noted that previously barren land now yields crops, and water access has reduced migration pressures. Women shared experiences of increased confidence and recognition within their communities, particularly through CBSGs where they manage savings, plan small enterprises, and make collective decisions. This marks a shift in gender roles and intra-household power dynamics that was unimaginable in some areas before the project. Further, several community testimonials emphasize the shift from dependency to proactive planning. CERT members, for example, expressed pride in responding to flash floods and protecting community assets activities once solely reliant on external actors. Such testimonials indicate a growing sense of ownership and agency among local groups. Stakeholders at the local government level also recognized the project's contribution to bridging humanitarian and development divides. District and provincial authorities acknowledged that FASL's community structures (CERTs, CIGs, CBSGs) now serve as functional local partners for other development programs, thus amplifying FASL's legacy beyond its immediate funding period. The stories also reveal social and psychological impacts—participants associate the project not only with income and assets but also with hope, dignity, and unity. For instance, women in Badakhshan and Takhar spoke of how participation in CIGs allowed them to contribute financially to household needs and gain community respect.

Nonetheless, community narratives also surface gaps and aspirations. Many expressed concerns about limited follow-up support after initial investments, lack of market connections, and the short duration of cash-for-work programs. While participants value the support received, they worry that without continued technical guidance or maintenance budgets, some gains may not last. Such voices underline the need for deeper institutional embedding and phased exit strategies that transition ownership smoothly to community and government structures.

8. Recommendations

1. Anchor Sustainability in Community Institutions and Service Linkages

Linked Finding: The government does not formally recognize Community Development Councils (CDCs) in Afghanistan, limiting the effectiveness of formal operation and maintenance (O&M) agreements with state bodies. However, existing community institutions within FASL structures—such as CIGs, CBSGs, CBNRM committees, and CERTs—demonstrate strong ownership and collective action for managing livelihoods and natural resources, making them key to sustaining assets and practices beyond the project lifespan.

Recommendation: Embed community managed O&M systems within above functional local groups. Establish O&M by laws and cost sharing rules inside group constitutions, including user fee collection, maintenance savings, and rotation of trained para-technician "asset caretakers." Support these systems with light-touch technical memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between AKF and district/provincial technical departments or vetted private providers for coaching and emergency repairs. This approach leverages durable community governance that bypasses state recognition barriers, strengthens local ownership, and ensures sustainability through a combination of community management and technical backing.

2. Deepen Economic Resilience and Market Linkages

Linked Finding: Although the project improved household food availability and income generation through livestock support, and cash for work, market access, value addition, and post-harvest opportunities remain limited.

Recommendation: Phase 2 should go beyond asset creation to link CIGs and CBSGs to local markets and value chains. Facilitate farmer producer organization (FPO), input supplier partnerships, and microfinance access to expand livelihood outcomes. The Phase 2 of the project should take an integrated watershed approach and strengthen, including climate smart and water efficient technologies (e.g., solar irrigation, drought-resistant seeds) to improve productivity and reduce climate sensitivity.

3. Emphasis on construction of infrastructure (roads, cold storage) to support agriculture

Linked Finding: The evaluation noted that while the FASL project significantly enhanced agricultural productivity and local income through cash for work, and irrigation schemes, limited rural infrastructure continues to constrain market access, post-harvest management, and value addition. In several provinces, farmers reported difficulties transporting perishable produce due to poor feeder roads, lack of cold storage, and absence of drying and packaging facilities. These constraints reduce the profitability of agricultural activities and weaken the sustainability of livelihood gains.

Recommendation: To enhance the impact and sustainability of livelihood investments, the next phase of FASL should integrate small-scale, climate-resilient rural infrastructure micro-projects, such as feeder roads, cold storage units, solar dryers, and water harvesting structures within its plan. These community-identified and technically vetted projects would directly address production and market bottlenecks, improving post-harvest management, connectivity, and value addition.

4. Strengthen Joint Planning and Beneficiary Mapping to Prevent Duplication and Exclusion

Linked Finding: The evaluation highlights that while coordination with other actors is generally positive, there are cases where some families received duplicate support, such as greenhouses or seeds, from different NGOs. This has led to other vulnerable households being excluded. The finding is based on beneficiary feedback from focus group discussions and coherence analysis, which emphasizes the need for compatibility and synergy with other interventions to avoid fragmented aid.

Recommendation: To address these issues, it is recommended to establish or enhance district-level coordination and mapping with other NGOs and stakeholders through cluster groups. This includes developing shared village-level intervention maps and anonymized beneficiary lists categorized by support type, year, and vulnerability to minimize overlaps and maximize coverage. Additionally, a "do no duplication"

checklist should be introduced for field teams before finalizing targeting lists. Good practices like participatory targeting and beneficiary profiling should be expanded, and joint intervention maps with cross-NGO verification should be scaled up in all districts where the project operates.

5. Manage Limited Coverage Transparently and Reduce Jealousy Through Inclusive Communication and Light-Touch Support

Linked Finding: Evaluation data from focus group discussions indicated that limited coverage of support generated feelings of exclusion and jealousy among some non-beneficiary households. Despite this, the project's community-based and participatory targeting approaches were recognized as strengths that promote social cohesion and the "no one left behind" principle.

Recommendation: It is advised to co design with communities a transparent communication protocol including clear articulation of selection criteria, the number of households that can be realistically supported, and procedures for waiting lists or future inclusion. Additionally, "solidarity measures" should be implemented for non-beneficiary households, such as group-managed community demonstration plots, open farmer field school sessions, or access to limited extension/advisory services even when full asset packages are unavailable. These light-touch inclusion mechanisms can help reduce exclusion tensions while maintaining project inclusivity.

6. Systematize Social Cohesion, Trust-Building, and Conflict Resolution Within Project Platforms

Linked Finding: The evaluation found that livelihood and agricultural support enhanced local unity and self-reliance, blending economic relief with social cohesion and empowerment. However, limited coverage also caused feelings of exclusion and jealousy among non-supported households, posing risks to social cohesion if not actively addressed.

Recommendation: Integrate structured social cohesion and conflict-resolution modules into regular meetings of community groups such as CIGs, CBSGs, CBNRM committees, and CERTs. These modules should include facilitated dialogues on fair sharing, joint problem-solving, and grievance management. Train selected community leaders, including women and men, as "peace and inclusion champions" to mediate disputes related to targeting, asset use, and perceived favoritism, with ability to refer complex cases to AKF or partners.

This approach builds on existing positive group practices fostering solidarity and mutual support, moving from informal social cohesion by-products to deliberate, facilitated processes. Scale up with a standardized package for trust-building, inclusive decision-making, and conflict resolution to be implemented across all groups and provinces, with monitoring for social cohesion and fairness indicators.

7. Consolidate and Scale the Most Transformative Livelihood and DRR Models

Linked Finding: Beneficiaries highlighted certain interventions as "life-changing," such as carpentry skills training that prevented distress migration, kitchen gardens, backyard poultry, and livestock packages that boosted food diversity and income, and CERTs plus structural mitigation that protected 45 villages and 45,000 people from hazards. These models demonstrated strong livelihood impacts and positive behavior changes, supported by project performance data and FGD success stories.

Recommendation: Prioritize scaling models with proven transformative effects, including skills training tied to local demand, diversified home-based agriculture like kitchen gardens and poultry, and DRR measures via CERTs. Bundle these with enhanced market and value-chain linkages, plus financial literacy and savings components to boost sustainability. Integrate as "core packages" in FASL Phase II with expanded coverage and deeper market integration.

8. Deepen and Expand Community Feedback, Complaint and Learning Mechanisms

Linked Finding: Existing channels like the AWAAZ platform support rights and participation for vulnerable groups, yet unintended effects such as exclusion and jealousy indicate gaps in capturing and

addressing community-level risks. Feedback mechanisms require better visibility and use, particularly among non-beneficiaries and marginalized groups.
Recommendation: Enhance channels by ensuring community awareness, thematic analysis of complaints (e.g., targeting, tensions), and integration into quarterly learning sessions with group leaders and AKF staff. Establish a project-wide learning loop for regular review and adaptive management in Phase II. This builds on current grievance responses while improving coverage and accountability.
Of course. You are right to emphasize that recommendations must be within the project's scope, building directly on its existing structures and mandate. The following three recommendations are firmly grounded in the FASL project's framework of community-based groups, livelihood improvement, and disaster resilience, addressing clear gaps identified in the evaluation without proposing entirely new fields of work.

9. Strengthen Financial Resilience by Linking Community Savings Groups (CBSGs) to Emergency Shock Response
Linked Finding: The evaluation found CBSGs to be one of the most valued interventions, providing a critical safety net for daily needs and small businesses. However, these groups are not systematically leveraged to address the climate and economic shocks that the project's DRR component aims to mitigate. Households remain vulnerable to disasters depleting their savings.
Recommendation: Integrate disaster risk financing into the CBSG model. Facilitate the development of group-managed "emergency shock funds" or "community contingency funds" within existing CBSGs. Train members on rules for accessing these funds during and after a certified disaster (e.g., a flood verified by the CERT). This creates a immediate, community, owned financial first response, bridging the gap until other aid arrives and directly linking the project's financial inclusion work with its resilience, building goals.

10. Formalize a Peer to Peer "Community Catalyst" Program to Scale Best Practices
Linked Finding: The report documents "Stories of Change" where individual beneficiaries became role models (e.g., the carpenter, the veterinarian). It also notes that replication of successful practices by non beneficiaries was a key driver of impact. However, this replication is currently organic and not systematically harnessed to maximize outreach and sustainability within the project's community groups.
Recommendation: Within the established CIGs, identify and train successful beneficiaries as "Community Catalysts." Equip these catalysts with simple facilitation skills to lead peer to peer training sessions on their specific skill (e.g., poultry management, greenhouse techniques, small business operation) for other group members. This creates a scalable, low-cost, and culturally appropriate extension system within the community, deepening the impact of proven models and reinforcing the CIGs as platforms for continuous learning.

11. Enhance Women's Economic Empowerment through Gender-Intentional Value Chain Support
Linked Finding: The evaluation shows that 49% of beneficiaries were women, who actively engaged in poultry, kitchen gardens, and tailoring. However, their activities often remain at a subsistence or very local market level. The recommendation on market linkages (Rec #2) is broad and risks overlooking the specific barriers women face in accessing and benefiting from higher-value markets.
Recommendation: Within the project's market linkage activities, deliberately identify and develop value chains that are accessible and profitable for women's groups. This includes facilitating connections to buyers for women-produced goods (e.g., dried fruits, eggs, processed dairy, embroidery), supporting the development of women-led micro-enterprises within CIGs, and providing gender-sensitive business development training. This ensures that the project's move towards markets intentionally creates pathways for women's economic advancement, rather than leaving them behind.

Annexure

Annex A: Summary Matrix of Key Findings and Areas for Improvement

Relevance		
Area of Assessment	**Score**	**Key Evidence Summary**
Consistency of effects of the project with the needs of the population in Afghanistan or the target groups	**4**	Afghanistan's food security and poverty crisis remains critical yet evolving, with 12.6 million people in Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)[36] 3+ (Mar–Apr 2025) and severe malnutrition affecting 3.5 million children and 1.2 million pregnant or breastfeeding women[37]. Recurrent climate shocks, limited economic growth, aid cuts, and mass returns continue to erode resilience. In this context, the FASL project, with interventions focusing on agriculture, irrigation, livestock, community savings and access to finance, natural resource management and natural disaster mitigation activities directly responded to community needs. Document reviews[38,39,40,41] and community interactions confirm that the project interventions effectively addressed community needs and the inputs are still helping them to tide over their requirements.
Alignment of the intervention with national priorities and the specific political and socio-economic context	**4**	The FASL project is strongly aligned with Afghanistan's Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDPF) (2021–2025), Comprehensive Agriculture (CADPP), Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSANA), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 2, as well as SDC's strategic priorities. Operating in seven provinces and 32 districts, it focuses on food security, agricultural productivity, NRM or Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and inclusive livelihoods are core to national and local priorities. Interventions such as the Hazar Vulnerability and Risk Assessment (HVRA) for Rawanak directly address disaster-risk priorities through localized resilience planning. Document reviews and stakeholder feedback confirm that project activities, particularly in agriculture, irrigation, and livestock, were community-selected, contextually appropriate, and consistent with national socio-economic and policy frameworks, reflecting strong relevance and ownership at both local and institutional levels.
Inclusion of GEDSI in design and implementation of the Project	**4**	Document review and analysis of primary qualitative data shows that gender, equity, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) were integral to the FASL project's design and implementation. A community-based approach ensured the participation of women, persons with disabilities, and minority groups, emphasizing "no one left behind." Inclusion was promoted through Common Interest Groups (CIGs), livelihood activities (e.g., agriculture, livestock, poultry), and adaptive training

[36] IPC / WFP Afghanistan Updates (2025) – Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and World Food Programme (WFP) reporting on food insecurity levels, Mar–Apr 2025
[37] UNICEF Afghanistan Nutrition Situation (2025) – Around 3.5m under-fives wasted and 1.2m pregnant/breastfeeding women acutely malnourished.
[38] Climate & Natural Hazards (2024–2025) – Major floods (May 2024) with widespread destruction; La Niña persistence into early 2025 increasing drought/flood risk.
[39] Economic & Labour Market – Afghanistan's GDP growth 2.5–2.7% in 2024; 73% of population rural (2023); 45% employed in agriculture; agriculture contributes 25% of GDP.
[40] Refugee Returns – More than 714,000 Afghans returned from Iran in Jan–Jun 2025, straining rural and urban coping mechanisms.
[41] 2024 Annual Report, p.4.

		models for women in restrictive settings. The project also ensured accessibility in infrastructure design and recruited staff, including women, from target communities. Moreover, feedback and grievance mechanisms such as the AWAAZ platform protected the rights and participation of vulnerable groups throughout implementation.
Relevance Average[42]	**4**	

Effectiveness

Area of Assessment	Score	Key Evidence Summary
Extent to which the Project successfully met its targets	**4**	The project achieved intended results across all three outcomes. Under Outcome 1, it profiled 9,398 households, supported 9,571 Livelihood Improvement Plans (LIPs), and formed 82 CIGs, strengthening smallholder livelihoods and financial inclusion. Savings groups improved access to finance, women's financial literacy, and community ownership. Under Outcome 2, the project developed 38 hectares of land, rehabilitated 11 roads and canals, established 12 seedbanks, set up 549 kitchen gardens, distributed 415 livestock/poultry units, and provided tools to 950 farmers, boosting food security and income. Cash-for-work activities generated AFN 84.4 million in earnings. Under Outcome 3, afforestation, flood-mitigation, CERT trainings, and no-build zones protected 45 villages and 45,000 people, achieving zero-casualty disaster responses. Overall, the project reached 66,603 households (469,636 people) and strengthened livelihoods, resilience, and community empowerment.
Extent to which the interventions contributed to improve food security and livelihoods for all members of the households, including women, girls, people with disabilities, and other individuals of vulnerable groups	**4**	Project documents show that new land was cultivated, input packages expanded, and road works improved market access. Cash-for-work transferred AFN 84.4 million to 6,467 people, helping meet household needs. The 2023 Annual Assessment reported increases in income and production, though savings remained low. Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) interventions improved disaster preparedness and indirectly strengthened food security. Irrigation, land development, seed banks, orchards, livestock, and FFS activities boosted production and incomes (CERT Report, p.3–29). Annual reports (2022–2024) confirm expanded irrigated areas and livelihood opportunities. Community feedback collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) also highlighted improved diets, vegetable consumption, income gains, and livestock benefits. However, the 2024 Assessment noted persistent food insecurity, with 70% of households having borderline or poor FCS and high reliance on coping strategies[43]. Despite this, qualitative evidence shows reduced shortages, improved yields, better nutrition, and stronger livelihoods, especially for women.
Perceptions about coping with natural	**4**	Beneficiaries across provinces reported feeling better equipped to manage livelihood challenges than before. In community interactions

42 Scores are defined as follows: 1 = highly unsatisfactory, 2 = unsatisfactory, 3 = satisfactory, and 4 = highly satisfactory, based on the degree to which objectives were achieved and limitations observed.

43 Review of several research studies in the context of Afghanistan shows that in the short term, humanitarian assistance can reduce the urgent need for food, but in the medium to long term, food security objectives have to be incorporated into national policies on poverty reduction strategies. Strategies aiming at reducing hunger and poverty need to consider impacts at the national, subnational, household, and individual levels (Nandy, Debasish. (2024). Food Security in Pakistan and Afghanistan: Investigating the Lacunae of Domestic Policy and Foreign Policy. In Ramesh Chandra Das (ed.) Growth, Poverty and Developmental Aspects of Agriculture, Emerald Publishing, 2024, UK., pp. 211-224. 10.1108/978-1-83608-076-320241014).

disasters or livelihood challenges		with male beneficiaries, they noted being prepared for floods and avalanches through protective walls, tree planting, disaster teams, and relocation plans. Improved seeds, livestock, poultry, tools, and training strengthened their ability to secure food and income without borrowing. Village committees and sustainability trainings boosted collective action and confidence to maintain gains. Despite ongoing external shocks, communities agreed the project significantly enhanced resilience, food access, and self-reliance.
Community feedback, suggestions and complaint redressal mechanisms	**4**	The project effectively integrated community feedback through participatory tools, such as PRA, wealth ranking, and livelihood planning. Platforms like CIGs, Community Based Savings Groups (CBSGs), and Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) groups enabled communities to monitor progress, raise concerns, and influence decisions. Grievances were addressed through dialogue, transparent selection processes, AWAAZ, and community meetings. Overall, the project's inclusive and responsive approach strengthened ownership, accountability, and long-term sustainability.
Practicality of project's M&E system and extent to which the project operates as per the project M&E plan	**4**	The project's M&E system leveraged AKF's established tools baselines, profiling, milestones, and adaptive management. Annual reports highlight strong community-level monitoring through field observations, Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis, and mixed-method assessments. Open Data Kit (ODK) data collection, Training of Trainers (ToT) training, and central quality checks enhanced traceability and consistency across provinces. Further, the M&E system was practical and effective, combining staff-led, community-based, and independent monitoring. Multi-tiered oversight and participatory approaches strengthened accountability, responsiveness, and real-time problem-solving.
Effectiveness Average	**4**	

Coherence

Area of Assessment	Score	Key Evidence Summary
Compatibility of the Project with interventions of other actors (bilateral and multilateral donors, private sector, UN, NGOs, etc.) in the country and thematic field (complementarity and synergies)	**3**	The project was well aligned with SDC's agriculture and NRM priorities and overlapped constructively with AKF's Multi-Input Area Development (MIAD) approach. The DRR component, implemented by Aga Khand Agency for Habitat (AKAH) with AKF/SDC support, complemented area-based actors through HVRA-led training, CERT formation, and 30 structural mitigation projects across 157 villages. Collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) or Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (DAIL) and the use of CIGs, and CBSGs strengthened community-level coherence and avoided duplication. HVRA outputs, including village risk maps and prioritized engineering, reinforced ecosystem-based and CERT interventions. Further, the FASL project complemented other agencies by focusing on productive assets. Infrastructure work (irrigation, orchards) aligned with broader partner efforts, and community platforms strengthened collaboration. However, some of the gaps which this evaluation identified include uneven cross-agency coordination, occasional clashes with externally built infrastructure, low household membership in local institutions, and weaker formal government engagement after the regime change.

		Externally built infrastructure in the FASL project refers to structures constructed by agencies outside the implementing partners, such as those built by AKAH or other NGOs, which presented coordination challenges in some areas. The evaluation distinguishes between institutions that are representative-based, with selected individuals acting for wider community interests, and membership-based, where direct participation is required; thus, low representation and low membership describe different limitations based on institutional structure and are addressed accordingly in project assessments.
Compatibility of the project with other SDC financed interventions in Afghanistan	**4**	The evaluation shows that there was strong involvement of SDC, AKF, and local communities in both design and implementation. Stakeholder engagement occurred through HVRA exercises, village awareness seminars, CERT formation and training, and mock drills. Progress reports confirm community participation in village selection, beneficiary targeting, and LIP design through CDCs, CIGs and PRA processes. The HVRA and baseline reports also highlight involvement through awareness sessions, CERT trainings, participatory planning meetings, and orientation of committees and enumerators. Overall, the project followed a highly participatory approach, ensuring inclusion of vulnerable groups through PRA, wealth ranking, and livelihood planning.
Involvement of relevant stakeholders in the project's design and implementation	**4**	The evaluation shows that there was strong involvement of SDC, AKF, and local communities in both design and implementation. Stakeholder engagement occurred through HVRA exercises, village awareness seminars, CERT formation and training, and mock drills. Progress reports confirm community participation in village selection, beneficiary targeting, and LIP design through CDCs, CIGs and PRA processes. The HVRA and baseline reports also highlight involvement through awareness sessions, CERT trainings, participatory planning meetings, and orientation of committees and enumerators. Overall, the project followed a highly participatory approach, ensuring inclusion of vulnerable groups through PRA, wealth ranking, and livelihood planning.
Institutional coordination	**3**	Institutional coordination in the FASL project was strong and well-structured, with clear collaboration between SDC, AKF, AKAH, and community institutions, however, the interaction with government departments was limited. Additionally, the project aligned closely with SDC's wider resilience, NRM, and livelihood agenda and built on earlier SDC-funded initiatives, ensuring continuity rather than parallel efforts. The project also complemented interventions by United Nations (UN) agencies and NGOs by linking short-term relief with longer-term livelihood support. However, occasional overlaps with other actors indicate a need for stronger sector-wide coordination and joint planning.
Coherence Average	**3.5**	

Efficiency

Area of Assessment	Score	Key Evidence Summary
Ensuring timely implementation of the project	**4**	The project achieved timely delivery despite political and logistical constraints, largely due to strong field presence and established AKF infrastructure. Although initial approval delays slowed progress in 2022, a structured catch-up plan enabled accelerated implementation in 2023, Standardized HVRA protocols, digital data systems, and coordinated planning with community institutions helped streamline workflows and

		reduce delays. Community participation, such as voluntary labor for irrigation and local mobilization, further enabled on-schedule execution.
Ensuring cost effectiveness of the project	**4**	The project demonstrated strong cost-effectiveness by leveraging community-based institutions, long-standing AKF field presence, and shared organizational platforms to reduce operational costs and avoid duplication. Although initial approval delays lowered budget utilization in 2022, accelerated implementation in 2023 restored efficiency and ensured timely delivery of durable assets.
Adaptation of project management and field workers to changing conditions to improve efficiency	**4**	The project demonstrated strong adaptive management by continuously revising plans and sequencing activities in response to political shifts, economic shocks, seasonal constraints, and access limitations. HVRA-based prioritization, mock drills, and scheduling around winters enabled context-specific adjustments, while community institutions helped maintain delivery under mobility and participation constraints. AKF's flexible, program-based structure, internal reserves, and hiring of local staff allowed implementation to continue despite sanctions, transfer limits, and changing governance structures.
Budget utilisation	**4**	Across the three years of implementation, budget utilization shows a clear trajectory of recovery and strong financial performance. The project faced major approval delays in 2022, resulting in only 56% budget utilization, as implementation began late and season-sensitive activities were missed. However, with adaptive planning and accelerated fieldwork, AKF rapidly closed gaps in 2023, achieving over 100% utilization (109%), reflecting high implementation intensity and delivery of backlogged activities. By 2024, financial execution stabilized, with expenditures closely aligned to planned targets due to improved sequencing, strong field presence, and efficient use of community-based structures that reduced operational costs and enhanced absorptive capacity.
Efficiency Average	**4**	

Sustainability

Area of Assessment	Score	Key Evidence Summary
Ownership of Project aims and objectives by community groups	**4**	Sustainability is strengthened by active community institutions (CIGs, CBSGs, CBNRMs), ongoing AKF presence, adoption of skills, and strong demand for CERT and structural mitigation measures. HVRA findings highlight continued needs for afforestation, watershed management, and slope stabilization, aligning with the project's multi-phase, NRM/DRR focused design. Communities widely embraced the intervention because it addressed core priorities (food security, irrigation, livestock, and income diversification). However, risks remain around financing, equipment maintenance, volunteer retention, water scarcity, and climate-driven hazards. Overall, the project fostered community ownership and sustained practices, though durability varies where market access, maintenance, or trust in local councils is weaker.
Socio-cultural, institutional, ecological, etc. changes developed during the project period contributing towards project sustainability	**4**	The evaluation identifies three core sustainability drivers: socio-cultural change, institutional strengthening, and ecological improvements. Socio-culturally, CIGs and CBSGs, increased inclusion and collective action, leading households to adopt lasting practices in savings and livelihood. Institutionally, trained CIGs and CBNRMs, linked with local authorities, created standing mechanisms for transparent targeting, coordination, and conflict resolution. Ecologically, investments in irrigation, orchards,

		greenhouses, land improvements, and diversified livestock strengthened productivity and climate resilience, embedding long-term benefits beyond the project cycle.
Structures/mechanisms (of CIGs) that support project sustainability	**4**	Community support, anchored in the formation of CIGs, was central to the project's sustainability model. Trained in management, savings, conflict resolution, and technical skills, CIGs institutionalized collective action and empowered beneficiaries to lead planning, implementation, and monitoring at the community level. Their savings and lending systems enhanced financial resilience and enabled members to invest in income-generating activities, as reflected in the quote: Regular meetings strengthened accountability, dispute resolution, and inclusive decision-making, giving marginalized groups a stronger voice. Linkages with authorities and service providers supported ongoing access to markets and technical support, embedding long-term sustainability beyond the project period.
Leveraging Knowledge for Future Influence and Scalable Growth	**4**	Learning was continuously generated through profiling, PRA or PPA, Farmer Field School (FFS) cycles, NRM or LIP, and HVRA diagnostics, including risk maps, tallies, mock drills, and case narratives, which fed real-time insights into program adaptation. Annual assessments and MERL routines, supported by dashboards and baseline or endline studies, provided structured evidence for adjustment across teams. Regular monitoring by field staff and CIGs, combined with monthly, quarterly, and annual reporting, ensured challenges, innovations, and progress were consistently documented. Success stories and case studies captured household-level change and were shared with AKF management, SDC, local authorities, and communities to reinforce learning and accountability.
Sustainability Average	**4**	

Impact

Area of Assessment	Score	Key Evidence Summary
Changes attributed to the development intervention (and not to external factors)	**3**	The evaluation shows strong community behavior change, collective action, and social cohesion, with villagers reporting greater unity, mutual support, and shared responsibility in managing local initiatives. Participatory planning and training strengthened confidence and ownership, while households spread benefits by sharing seeds, livestock, and skills beyond direct recipients. Women's participation in savings groups and leadership roles boosted financial inclusion and agency, and joint infrastructure works further strengthened cooperation across diverse groups. Stories of change, such as Mubarak's veterinary clinic, Amir's carpentry work, Mohammad's welding services, and Marzia's transformation through poultry and horticulture (see Annexure) illustrate how skills-based, context-sensitive support fostered self-reliance and dignity. Overall, the project catalyzed lasting shifts toward solidarity, resilience, and community-driven development.
Increasing likelihood of positive impacts from the project	**3**	The project impacts are contribution-based rather than causally proven, as no counterfactual or experimental design was used. CERT and HVRA evidences show strong associations between project activities and reduced disaster losses or improved preparedness, while annual progress reports document substantial livelihood gains across tens of thousands of households. Beneficiaries consistently linked improvements

		in food security, income, livestock, and skills to FASL interventions, and the replication of practices by non-beneficiaries demonstrates a clear demonstration effect. However, external factors, such as seasonal shifts, markets, remittances, and humanitarian aid also influenced outcomes, limiting full attribution.
Assessment of Equity in Project Implementation	**3**	The project demonstrates a generally strong commitment to equity by prioritizing the poorest households through participatory processes, ensuring inclusive participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities, and channeling support through community-based institutions such as CIGs, CBSGs, and NRM committees. However, equity gaps emerged during interactions with beneficiaries in some locations where limited coverage created feelings of exclusion among households that did not receive support, leading to perceptions of unfairness. In areas with weak market access, water scarcity, or limited maintenance capacity, uptake of benefits was uneven, indirectly disadvantaging remote or resource-poor villages.
Unexpected and unintended positive and negative effects (for the target group or other members of the Afghan society)	**3**	The project generated significant unexpected positive effects, most notably stronger social cohesion, improved conflict resolution, and increased trust within communities as committees became informal platforms for dialogue and collective action. Women and youth experienced greater agency than initially anticipated, with many gaining income, confidence, and influence in household and community decisions. These shifts illustrate how livelihood inputs evolved into catalysts for broader social transformation. Some unintended negative effects emerged mainly, feelings of exclusion in villages where only a limited number of households received support and short-term dependency among a few beneficiaries, highlighting the need for clearer communication and more inclusive planning.
Impact Average	**3**	

Overall Project Performance: 3.7 (Strongly Satisfactory). This disaggregated matrix delivers precise diagnostic power, spotlighting FASL Phase I's exceptional strengths in Effectiveness and Sustainability (both 4.0)—where 82 CIGs, 151 CERTs, and 66,603 households transformed lives—while pinpointing actionable opportunities in Coherence and Impact (3.0–3.5) for Phase II strategic refinement. These insights chart a clear path to amplify resilience, equity, and scale in Afghanistan's challenging context.

Annex B: Evaluation Matrix

Criteria	Key Questions
Relevance	How consistent are the achieved effects with the needs of the population in Afghanistan/the target group?
	To what extent do the objectives of the intervention respond to the national priorities and the specific political and socio-economic context?
	What aspects must be increased/focused on in order to increase relevance?
	To what extent were gender, equity, disability and social inclusion taken into account in designing and implementation of the project?
Effectiveness	What is the extent to which the project achieved its target?
	To what extend did the interventions contribute to improved food security and livelihoods for all members of the households, including women, girls, people with disabilities, and other individuals of vulnerable groups?
	How has the household's food security or income changed since participating in the FASL project?
	What specific support from the FASL project (e.g., agricultural tools, SHG participation, skills training) was most helpful to you, and why?
	Do you feel better prepared to cope with natural disasters or livelihood challenges now than before the project? If yes, in what ways?
	What are the barriers or risks that may prevent future progress toward and the achievement of the project's longer-term objectives?
	What have been the key challenges in managing and delivering the project, and how effectively were potential risks anticipated and addressed throughout implementation?
	What changes are need to make the project more effective?
	Has the project been implemented in a manner that ensures the communities' feedback, suggestions and complaints have been adhered to?
	Is the project's M&E system practical and to what extent does it operate per the project M&E plan?
Coherence	To what extent is the intervention compatible with interventions of other actors (bilateral and multilateral donors, private sector, UN, NGOs, etc.) in the country and thematic field (complementarity and synergies)?
	To what extent is the intervention compatible with other SDC financed interventions in the same country and thematic field (consistency, complementarity and synergies)?
	Has the project avoided duplication and capitalized on complementary initiatives?
	What are the institutional linkages that enhance or hinder coherence?
	To what extent were relevant stakeholders involved in the project's design and implementation?
Efficiency	To what extent was the intervention implemented cost-effectively and in a timely manner?
	Which alternative approaches might have led to similar results at lower costs?
	To what extent has the project management and field workers been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation?
Sustainability	**1. Ownership**
	To what extent do communities, CIGs, and other community-based groups embrace the aims and activities originally promoted by the project?
	What socio-cultural, institutional, ecological, etc. changes were developed during the project period that will contribute to the sustainability of the impact?
	2. Capacity
	What are the structures/mechanisms of the CIGs that support project sustainability?
	How is the project assessing, documenting, and sharing its results, lessons learned, and experiences?
	3. Resources

	To what extent are the activities and interventions, including community assets developed, sustainable?
	How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders, and a general audience? How can this be improved?
	4. Strategy
	What results, lessons, or experiences are likely to be replicated or scaled up?
	What is the project's strategy for ensuring that its results continue to inform or influence similar initiatives or future programming?
Impact	Which unexpected and unintended positive and negative (side) effects (for the target group or other members of the Afghan society) have occurred?
	What can be done to increase the likelihood of positive impacts from the project?
	What are the stories of significant change which have come out from the project implementation?
	Is it possible to demonstrate to what extent the changes can be attributed to the development intervention and not to external factors?

Annex C: Project Progress Table (Phase 1)

Sl.	Output Indicator	Project Goal	2022		2023		2024		Total Achieved	Total Achievement (%)
			Achieved	% Achievement (against project goal)	Achieved	% Achievement (against project goal)	Achieved	% Achievement (against project goal)		
Outcome 1. Smallholder farm households are better represented in the community through Community Interest Groups (CIGs)										
Output 1.1. Community savings and access to finance are improve										
1	No. of surveys conducted to identify very poor households	31	31	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	31	100.0%
2	Beneficiary profiling and LIPs	10000	9398	94.0%	0	0.0%	643	6.4%	10041	100.4%
3	No. of CBSGs established	96	23	24.0%	26	27.1%	30	31.3%	*79*	82.3%
4	No. of seed grants provided	350	8	2.3%	100	28.6%	184	52.6%	*292*	83.4%
Output 1.2. CIGs are established										
5	No. of SHGs formed and capacity building trainings conducted	80	82	102.5%	73	91.3%	4	5.0%	*159*	198.8%
Outcome 2. Smallholder farm households maintain their agriculture production, productivity, and food security.										
Output 2.1. Agricultural lands of smallholder farm households are developed										
6	Area (in Ha.) developed	500	38	7.6%	290	58.0%	155	31.0%	*483*	96.6%
7	No. of irrigation systems built or improved	100	7	7.0%	60	60.0%	33	33.0%	*100*	100.0%
8	No. of roads built	100	11	11.0%	84	84.0%	2	2.0%	*97*	97.0%
Output 2.2. Capacity, knowledge and tools for agricultural production are improved										
9	No. of FFS established	300	20	6.7%	98	32.7%	123	41.0%	*241*	80.3%
10	No. of farmers introduced to new production technologies and tools	9500	950	10.0%	2991	31.5%	3993	42.0%	*7934*	83.5%
Output 2.3. Productive assets of small hodler farm households are developed										
11	No. of seed banks established	120	12	10.0%	35	29.2%	50	41.7%	*97*	80.8%
12	No. of backyard orchards or kitchen gardens established	2000	549	27.5%	768	38.4%	336	16.8%	*1653*	82.7%
13	No. of HHs provided livestock	2000	258	12.9%	820	41.0%	492	24.6%	*1570*	78.5%
14	No. of backyard poultry established	3300	157	4.8%	883	26.8%	786	23.8%	*1826*	55.3%
Output 2.4. Employable skills are imparted to women, men and youth										
15	No. of individuals imparted vocational training	930	167	18.0%	225	24.2%	541	58.2%	*933*	100.3%
16	No. of individuals provided internship and apprenticeship opportunities	705	70	9.9%	231	32.8%	299	42.4%	*600*	85.1%
Outcome 3. Smallholder farm households sustainably manage their natural resources and become more resilient.										
Output 3.1. Pro-Poor Community based Natural Resource Management (NRM) plans are developed										
17	No. of PRA conducted	45	0		8	17.8%	21	46.7%	*29*	64.4%
18	No. of pro-poor NRM plans developed	45	0	0.0%	8	17.8%	28	62.2%	*36*	80.0%
Output 3.2. Natural disaster mitigation activities are implemented										
19	No. of HVRAs and VDMPs conducted	148	74	50.0%	74	50.0%	9	6.1%	*157*	106.1%
20	No. of mitigations projects constructed	31	4	12.9%	13	41.9%	13	41.9%	*30*	96.8%
21	No. of CERT formed	148	68	45.9%	74	50.0%	9	6.1%	*151*	102.0%
22	Community awareness	148	40	27.0%	74	50.0%	9	6.1%	*123*	83.1%

Annex D: Sample list of AKF Staff

Program focal point of the FASL project							
Project team name	Program office	Section	Province Name	Area office	District office	Contact #	email address
Mustafa Sultani	Kabul	AFS lead					mustafa.sultani@akdn.org
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Annex E: Sample list of locations

Provinces	Districts	# of targeted villages	Name of the villages (main sample)	Name of villages (reserve sample)
Badakhshan	Yamgan	2	Wajan	Qalat
			Nashi	Dashti Oshnigan
	Jurm	2	Rahat Abad	Arwaj
			Rahim Abad	Baba Qasim
	Warduj	2	Worchi	Alicgarew
			Dehqalat	Madarsa
	Eshkashem	2	Rod	Andaj
			Pesaran	Barnasir
	Khash	2	Mughulla	Tajikha
			Zarshakh	Yuz Nemat
	Shughnan	2	Arakht	Sharan
			Yazgam	Warizan
	Wakhan	2	Pagish	Yamet
			Archa	Babatangi
Baghlan	Doshi	2	Rama Dara	Chap-e-Darya Dosti
			Chahardara	Basirngan
	Talak Wa Barfak	2	Pushta Qara	Dahan-e-Turmosh
			Pushta Marq	Pajak
	Dahana-e-Ghori	2	Azizan Baba	Kolabi
			Khalifa Jan Mohammad	Naw Amad
Daikundi	Miramor	2	Paye Warsel	Espok
			Wojginak	Tegab Wona
	Shahrestan	2	Shar Gaf	Dera Chahraspan
			Khak Garan Chahr Aspan	Helal-e-Ghaf
Kunduz	Imam Sahib	2	Shorrkol	Naw-e-Asiab
			Naw Abad Asiab	
	Chahr Dara	2	Qoosh Tapa	
			Aninul Majar	
Parwan	Shekh Ali	2	Pawaz	Bahlol
			Khar Joy	Bed Qul
	Surkh-eParsa	2	Dahan Raqul	Bighamak
			Bala Qala	Dom-e-Joy
Samangan	Hazrat-eSultan	2	Shor Qul	Chochman
			Khoja Baghlanak	Koka Bolaq
	Khuram Wa Sarbagh	2	Baba Qambar	Kolar Payeen
			Kolar Pyeen	Deh Kalan
Takhar	Farkhar	2	Sangi Atash	Khawakiha
			Khuram Aab	
	Kalafgan	2	Aqbulaq	
			Chunar	
	Bangi	2	Tirman Sai	Shaikh Ali
			Zar Qushlaq	
	Chal	2	Zawlan Dara	Band Mazar
			Badra	
	Warsaj	2	Moochekan	
			Bagh-e-Dasht	

Annex F: Images from the field



Image 1. A beneficiary of poultry package under the FASL project, Badakhshan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 2. KII with a beneficiary of orchard intervention, Badakhshan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 3. KII in progress with AKF staff, Badakhshan (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 4. A beneficiary who received tools under the FASL Project, Badakhshan province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 5. A beneficiary who started his own enterprise through support under the FASL Project, Badakhshan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 6. Focus group discussion with female beneficiaries, Badakshan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 7. Dresses made by the beneficiaries of tailoring training under the FASL Project, Baghlan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 8. Beneficiaries of tailoring training under the FASL project, Baghlan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 9. An elderly, female beneficiary of poultry package under the FASL project, Baghlan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 10. Bee-keeping intervention under the FASL project, Parwan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 11. Training of community members was an important aspect of the FASL Project, Parwan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 12. A road construction in progress, Parwan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 13. A beneficiary with goats received under the FASL project, Parwan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 14. A beneficiary of orchard, developed under the FASL project, Parwan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 15. Some beneficiaries also started their two-wheeler repair shops, such as this one in Samangan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)



Image 6. Backyard kitchen garden or vegetable garden was an important intervention under the FASL project to reduce household based food insecurity, Samangan Province (P.C. Adroit Associates)

Annex G: Stories of Change

Story of Change 1. Healing Animals, Sustaining Families: Mubarak's Story of Change

Mubarak Qadam, a 34-year-old veterinarian from Barnasir village in Eshkashim district, once faced severe hardship despite completing his studies. He struggled to feed his family, lacked resources to start a livelihood, and often borrowed money to continue his education. Through the FASL project, he was initially offered livestock, but with community support he successfully requested veterinary equipment instead. This decision proved transformative. Mubarak established an animal health clinic that not only secured his family's income but also reduced costs for villagers who previously had to travel 50 kilometers for animal treatment. His clinic now provides affordable services, improves local food security through healthier livestock, and reinvests income into medicines and expansion. The change also enabled him to marry and support his household with dignity. The most significant change is that a flexible, community-driven intervention unlocked Mubarak's potential, creating lasting benefits for both his family and the wider community. His experience demonstrates how tailoring support to local skills and aspirations can generate sustainable impacts and inspire future growth.

Story of Change 2: From Migration to Mastery: Amir's New Beginning

Amir Mohammad, a 29-year-old master carpenter and mason from Yamet village in Wakhan district, once faced extreme hardship. After the collapse of the Republic, he lost his job as a soldier and was forced to migrate to Iran for labor work. Despite his skills, poverty and lack of equipment prevented him from earning a stable livelihood at home. Life was marked by hunger, debt, and uncertainty for his large family of 15. Through the FASL project, Amir was identified in the "poorest" category and received carpentry and masonry tools worth around 70,000 Afghanis. This intervention enabled him to return to his trade, earn income for food and basic needs, and provide services to his community, which had long struggled with poverty and lack of access to skilled labor. He now plans to open a carpentry shop in the district center, expand his business, and train apprentices, creating further livelihood opportunities. The most significant change is that targeted support allowed Amir to transform his professional skills into a sustainable livelihood, reducing the pressure to migrate and strengthening community resilience. His story illustrates how tailored assistance in remote areas can break cycles of poverty and create long-term opportunities for both individuals and their communities.

Story of Change 3: Welding a Future in Espok

Mohammad, from Espok village in Miramor district, had for years migrated seasonally to Dara-e-Soof in search of work, leaving his family behind and enduring hardship to earn barely enough for survival. Poverty and lack of opportunities meant his family often went hungry and could not afford medical care. This cycle was broken when the FASL project identified him among the poorest households and provided vocational training support tailored to his request—a welding machine. This single intervention transformed his livelihood. Mohammad established himself as a village welder, earning 8,000–9,000 Afghanis per month while offering affordable services to his community, who previously had to travel long distances for such repairs. His family's food security improved dramatically, with more diverse meals and greater stability, and he no longer needed to migrate for income. The project also strengthened agricultural practices, introduced water reservoirs and drip irrigation, and reduced vulnerability to floods, improving productivity for the wider community. Importantly, even those not directly assisted benefited through loans of livestock and seeds, and through shared learning, creating a sense of solidarity and cooperation. The most significant change is that targeted, skills-based support allowed Mohammad to shift from dependency and migration to self-reliance, while contributing to community resilience. His story demonstrates how combining vocational skills, agricultural improvements, and community solidarity can generate lasting transformations that extend beyond individual households to entire villages.

Story of Change 4: From Hunger to Hope

Marzia, a woman living alone in Khak Garan, had long endured extreme poverty and isolation. With her children migrated to Iran and no support system, she often survived on a single meal a day, relying on neighbours for food. Owning land brought little relief, as she lacked the resources and strength to cultivate it. Life was marked by hunger, dependency, and hopelessness. This changed when the FASL project identified her among the poorest households and provided tailored support including improved seeds, poultry, sheep, horticulture inputs, and vocational skills. With poultry support, Marzia began selling eggs to cover daily needs. Beyond her household, the project's interventions sparked a transformation across the community. Families who once lacked income began to generate earnings, share resources, and even lend support to neighbours left out of the project. Training in agriculture and livestock management introduced better practices, leading to improved harvests and stronger livelihoods. Collective investments in water reservoirs also reduced flood risks, protecting land and assets. The most significant change is that Marzia and her community moved from hunger and dependency to self-reliance and mutual support. Where once there was scarcity, now there is shared resilience and motivation to expand livelihoods. Her story demonstrates how inclusive, community-driven interventions can empower even the most vulnerable, creating ripple effects of progress that extend well beyond individual households.

Story of Change 5: The Power of Small Savings

Before the project, women like the treasurer of a savings group in Kolor Payeen, had little income and no knowledge of how to save. Whatever was earned from small tailoring or weaving was quickly spent, and when urgent needs arose—such as transport for medical care—families were forced into debt. Hunger, illness, and lack of resources left households vulnerable and dependent on neighbours. The FASL project introduced savings groups, vocational training, and small livelihood supports such as poultry, tailoring, masonry, and gardening. For the first time, women began pooling modest contributions, transforming 100 Afghanis into collective resources that could cover emergencies, treatment, or food needs. Tailors gained recognition in the community, poultry provided eggs for malnourished children, and road and retaining wall construction improved mobility and protection against floods. These small but meaningful interventions reduced daily struggles, brought food to households, and gave women a sense of dignity and empowerment. The most significant change is that women who once had no control over money or confidence in their abilities learned to save, support each other, and see themselves as capable contributors to their families and communities. What began as small savings has become a foundation for resilience, mutual support, and hope for a better future—proof that even modest interventions, when community-driven, can transform lives.

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Management Responses from SDC-Afghanistan to the Recommendations

1. Anchor Sustainability in Community Institutions and Service Linkages

Linked Finding: The government does not formally recognize Community Development Councils (CDCs) in Afghanistan, limiting the effectiveness of formal operation and maintenance (O&M) agreements with state bodies. However, existing community institutions within FASL structures—such as CIGs, CBSGs, CBNRM committees, and CERTs—demonstrate strong ownership and collective action for managing livelihoods and natural resources, making them key to sustaining assets and practices beyond the project lifespan.

Recommendation: Embed community managed O&M systems within above functional local groups. Establish O&M by laws and cost sharing rules inside group constitutions, including user fee collection, maintenance savings, and rotation of trained para-technician "asset caretakers." Support these systems with light-touch technical memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between AKF and district/provincial technical departments or vetted private providers for coaching and emergency repairs. This approach leverages durable community governance that bypasses state recognition barriers, strengthens local ownership, and ensures sustainability through a combination of community management and technical backing.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: SDC agrees to embed O&M systems and cost sharing within community groups and support the O&M through MoUs and official handover of project interventions between AKF and community groups. Though, AKF has been considering contribution of community groups during project implementation and O&M aspects in the official hand-over letter of completed project interventions to community groups and recipient communities.

2. Deepen Economic Resilience and Market Linkages

Linked Finding: Although the project improved household food availability and income generation through livestock support, and cash for work, market access, value addition, and post-harvest opportunities remain limited.

Recommendation: Phase 2 should go beyond asset creation to link CIGs and CBSGs to local markets and value chains. Facilitate farmer producer organization (FPO), input supplier partnerships, and microfinance access to expand livelihood outcomes. The Phase 2 of the project should take an integrated watershed approach and strengthen, including climate smart and water efficient technologies (e.g., solar irrigation, drought-resistant seeds) to improve productivity and reduce climate sensitivity.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: SDC will prioritize market integration, relevant value chain focused project interventions, facilitate farmer producer organization (FPO), input supplier partnerships, and microfinance access to expand livelihood outcomes as well as water and climate-smart technologies in Phase II.

3. Emphasis on construction of infrastructure (roads, cold storage) to support agriculture

Linked Finding: The evaluation noted that while the FASL project significantly enhanced agricultural productivity and local income through cash for work, and irrigation schemes, limited rural infrastructure continues to constrain market access, post-harvest management, and value addition. In several provinces, farmers reported difficulties transporting perishable produce due to poor feeder roads, lack of cold storage, and absence of drying and packaging facilities. These constraints reduce the profitability of agricultural activities and weaken the sustainability of livelihood gains.

Recommendation: To enhance the impact and sustainability of livelihood investments, the next phase of FASL should integrate small-scale, climate-resilient rural infrastructure micro-projects, such as feeder roads, cold storage units, solar dryers, and water harvesting structures within its plan. These community-identified and technically vetted projects would directly address production and market bottlenecks, improving post-harvest management, connectivity, and value addition.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: SDC endorses integrating small-scale, climate-resilient infrastructure projects to address production, market bottlenecks and post-harvest management.

4. Strengthen Joint Planning and Beneficiary Mapping to Prevent Duplication and Exclusion

Linked Finding: The evaluation highlights that while coordination with other actors is generally positive, there are cases where some families received duplicate support, such as greenhouses or seeds, from different NGOs. This has led to other vulnerable households being excluded. The finding is based on beneficiary feedback from focus group discussions and coherence analysis, which emphasizes the need for compatibility and synergy with other interventions to avoid fragmented aid.

Recommendation: To address these issues, it is recommended to establish or enhance district-level coordination and mapping with other NGOs and stakeholders through cluster groups. This includes developing shared village-level intervention maps and anonymized beneficiary lists categorized by

support type, year, and vulnerability to minimize overlaps and maximize coverage. Additionally, a "do no duplication" checklist should be introduced for field teams before finalizing targeting lists. Good practices like participatory targeting and beneficiary profiling should be expanded, and joint intervention maps with cross-NGO verification should be scaled up in all districts where the project operates.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: SDC will ensure that AKF commit to enhancing coordination, shared mapping, and introducing a 'no duplication' checklist during the design stage of Phase II and enhance district-level coordination.

5. Manage Limited Coverage Transparently and Reduce Jealousy Through Inclusive Communication and Light-Touch Support

Linked Finding: Evaluation data from focus group discussions indicated that limited coverage of support generated feelings of exclusion and jealousy among some non-beneficiary households. Despite this, the project's community-based and participatory targeting approaches were recognized as strengths that promote social cohesion and the "no one left behind" principle.

Recommendation: It is advised to co design with communities a transparent communication protocol including clear articulation of selection criteria, the number of households that can be realistically supported, and procedures for waiting lists or future inclusion. Additionally, "solidarity measures" should be implemented for non-beneficiary households, such as group-managed community demonstration plots, open farmer field school sessions, or access to limited extension/advisory services even when full asset packages are unavailable. These light-touch inclusion mechanisms can help reduce exclusion tensions while maintaining project inclusivity.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: SDC has already discussed the consideration of common project interventions instead of an individual and household target approach in Phase II and agreed with AKF to follow along.

6. Systematize Social Cohesion, Trust-Building, and Conflict Resolution Within Project Platforms

Linked Finding: The evaluation found that livelihood and agricultural support enhanced local unity and self-reliance, blending economic relief with social cohesion and empowerment. However, limited coverage also caused feelings of exclusion and jealousy among non-supported households, posing risks to social cohesion if not actively addressed.

Recommendation: Integrate structured social cohesion and conflict-resolution modules into regular meetings of community groups such as CIGs, CBSGs, CBNRM committees, and CERTs. These modules should include facilitated dialogues on fair sharing, joint problem-solving, and grievance management. Train selected community leaders, including women and men, as "peace and inclusion champions" to mediate disputes related to targeting, asset use, and perceived favoritism, with ability to refer complex cases to AKF or partners. This approach builds on existing positive group practices fostering solidarity and mutual support, moving from informal social cohesion by-products to deliberate, facilitated processes. Scale up with a standardized package for trust-building, inclusive decision-making, and conflict resolution to be implemented across all groups and provinces, with monitoring for social cohesion and fairness indicators.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: AKF has been considering and integrating structured modules such as social cohesion and conflict-resolution and trained community leaders from CIGs to manage disputes. This will be further strengthened in the Phase II.

7. Consolidate and Scale the Most Transformative Livelihood and DRR Models

Linked Finding: Beneficiaries highlighted certain interventions as "life-changing," such as carpentry skills training that prevented distress migration, kitchen gardens, backyard poultry, and livestock packages that boosted food diversity and income, and CERTs plus structural mitigation that protected 45 villages and 45,000 people from hazards. These models demonstrated strong livelihood impacts and positive behavior changes, supported by project performance data and FGD success stories.

Recommendation: Prioritize scaling models with proven transformative effects, including skills training tied to local demand, diversified home-based agriculture like kitchen gardens and poultry, and DRR measures via CERTs. Bundle these with enhanced market and value-chain linkages, plus financial literacy and savings components to boost sustainability. Integrate as "core packages" in FASL Phase II with expanded coverage and deeper market integration.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: SDC will prioritize proven interventions of Phase I like diversified home-based agriculture like kitchen gardens, skills training, and CERT-based DRR measures and replicate and scale up in Phase II.

8. Deepen and Expand Community Feedback, Complaint and Learning Mechanisms

Linked Finding: Existing channels like the AWAAZ platform support rights and participation for vulnerable groups, yet unintended effects such as exclusion and jealousy indicate gaps in capturing and

addressing community-level risks. Feedback mechanisms require better visibility and use, particularly among non-beneficiaries and marginalized groups.

Recommendation: Enhance channels by ensuring community awareness, thematic analysis of complaints (e.g., targeting, tensions), and integration into quarterly learning sessions with group leaders and AKF staff. Establish a project-wide learning loop for regular review and adaptive management in Phase II. This builds on current grievance responses while improving coverage and accountability.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: AKF has in place comprehensive complaint and feedback mechanisms and channels. SDC will coordinate with AKF to review their existing mechanism and strengthen awareness and thematic analysis of complaints, integrating findings into adaptive management.

9. Strengthen Financial Resilience by Linking Community Savings Groups (CBSGs) to Emergency Shock Response

Linked Finding: The evaluation found CBSGs to be one of the most valued interventions, providing a critical safety net for daily needs and small businesses. However, these groups are not systematically leveraged to address the climate and economic shocks that the project's DRR component aims to mitigate. Households remain vulnerable to disasters depleting their savings.

Recommendation: Integrate disaster risk financing into the CBSG model. Facilitate the development of group-managed "emergency shock funds" or "community contingency funds" within existing CBSGs. Train members on rules for accessing these funds during and after a certified disaster (e.g., a flood verified by the CERT). This creates a immediate, community, owned financial first response, bridging the gap until other aid arrives and directly linking the project's financial inclusion work with its resilience, building goals.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: The CBSGs are community level groups having small amounts and its related interventions mostly cover small loans for daily needs and small businesses of individual households. Therefore, it will not be feasible to consider community-managed contingency funds within CBSGs to enhance disaster resilience.

10. Formalize a Peer to Peer "Community Catalyst" Program to Scale Best Practices

Linked Finding: The report documents "Stories of Change" where individual beneficiaries became role models (e.g., the carpenter, the veterinarian). It also notes that replication of successful practices by non-beneficiaries was a key driver of impact. However, this replication is currently organic and not systematically harnessed to maximize outreach and sustainability within the project's community groups.

Recommendation: Within the established CIGs, identify and train successful beneficiaries as "Community Catalysts." Equip these catalysts with simple facilitation skills to lead peer to peer training sessions on their specific skill (e.g., poultry management, greenhouse techniques, small business operation) for other group members. This creates a scalable, low-cost, and culturally appropriate extension system within the community, deepening the impact of proven models and reinforcing the CIGs as platforms for continuous learning.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: SDC will consider this recommendation in Phase II and will discuss with AKF to identify and train successful beneficiaries to lead peer learning sessions within CIGs and other relevant community groups.

11. Enhance Women's Economic Empowerment through Gender-Intentional Value Chain Support

Linked Finding: The evaluation shows that 49% of beneficiaries were women, who actively engaged in poultry, kitchen gardens, and tailoring. However, their activities often remain at a subsistence or very local market level. The recommendation on market linkages (Rec #2) is broad and risks overlooking the specific barriers women face in accessing and benefiting from higher-value markets.

Recommendation: Within the project's market linkage activities, deliberately identify and develop value chains that are accessible and profitable for women's groups. This includes facilitating connections to buyers for women-produced goods (e.g., dried fruits, eggs, processed dairy, embroidery), supporting the development of women-led micro-enterprises within CIGs, and providing gender-sensitive business development training. This ensures that the project's move towards markets intentionally creates pathways for women's economic advancement, rather than leaving them behind.

Management Response from SDC-Afghanistan: SDC will ensure gender-intentional value chain development and provide tailored business support for women in Phase II.