

Transforming Food Systems from the Ground Up: A civil society review of GAFSP projects across seven countries

JUNE 2026



CONTENTS

Message from the CSO and PO Representatives of the GAFSP Steering Committee	4
Executive Summary	5
1. Introduction	8
2. Description of the Reviewed Projects	9
3. The Review Methodology	11
4. Review Findings	13
4.1 Farmers' Productivity and Livelihoods	13
– Access to agricultural inputs	13
– Access to extension services	15
– Market-related infrastructure	16
4.2 Market Access and Household Incomes	18
4.3 Climate Resilience, Adaptation and Agroecology	21
4.4 Gender Responsiveness and Women's Empowerment	23
4.5 Nutrition	26
4.6 Community Participation and Cohesion	28
5. Conclusions and Recommendations	30
Annexure – Country Reports	35

List of Acronyms

AFN	Agriculture for Nutrition
AfDB	African Development Bank
AsiaDHRRA	Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas
BIFT	Business Investment Financing Track
CACC	Cambodian Agriculture Cooperative Corporation
CAPAD	Confédération des Associations des Producteurs Agricoles pour le Développement
COSADH	Coordination pour des Actions en Santé et en Développement d'Haïti
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSOs4GAFSP	Civil Society Partnership for GAFSP
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ESAFF	Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers Forum
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD(s)	Focus Group Discussion(s)
F3SRT	Food Systems Supply Services in Rural Tanzania
G20	Group of Twenty
GAFSP	Global Agriculture and Food Security Program
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GBFT	Grant-Based Financing Track
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
KII(s)	Key Informant Interview(s)
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MNHP	Multisectoral Nutrition and Health Project
MSME(s)	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise(s)
MSP(s)	Multi-Stakeholder Platform(s)
MUSO	Mutual Solidarity Fund (MUSO MISO MITAN)
MVIWATA	Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania
PO(s)	Producer Organisation(s)
RENUGL	Resilience and Nutrition in the Great Lakes Region
ROPAGA	Réseaux des Organisations de Producteurs et Productrices
SACCO(s)	Savings and Credit Cooperative(s)
SADFONS	Smallholder Agriculture Development for Food and Nutrition Security
SBCC	Social and Behaviour Change Communication
SC	Steering Committee
VSLA(s)	Village Savings and Loan Association(s)
WFP	World Food Program

Message from CSO and PO Representatives of the GAFSP Steering Committee

With this statement, we wish to acknowledge and commend the significant work carried out by our sisters and brothers in the preparation of this report. As CSO and PO representatives within the GAFSP Steering Committee, we find the findings and insights presented in this report to be extremely valuable.

This work is the result of a collective effort involving the CSOs and POs that form the Civil Society Partnership for GAFSP (the Partnership). Together, we have supported the field visits and contributed to shaping the report's content and recommendations, acting as a unified group of civil society actors engaged with GAFSP. Our shared objective is to learn from GAFSP field practices and to continuously improve the implementation of the programme at the country level, so that more support reaches the smallholder farmers who are feeding the world.

Even before the current war in the Middle East, rural communities in vulnerable countries were already facing severe food insecurity due to the combined effects of conflict, inequalities, climate change and fragile contexts. The impact of the war is further exacerbating this already critical situation, increasing the risk that millions more people will be pushed into poverty, triggering another global food price crisis.

In this context, the contribution of development assistance and international funding mechanisms, such as GAFSP is, and remains, of paramount importance to safeguard global food security and to save lives in the most fragile countries. At the same time, we firmly believe that these efforts must be carried out in close collaboration with CSOs and POs, which work daily to build a world free from hunger. For this reason, we are deeply committed to supporting GAFSP and we value its inclusive governance model.

We applaud GAFSP for enabling us, as CSO and PO representatives on the Steering Committee, to participate in its decision-making processes, while supporting our CSO allies to undertake field visits to GAFSP-funded projects, engage directly with farmers, and bring grassroots perspectives to inform our collective contributions.

It is in this spirit that we extend our sincere appreciation to the Partnership for this valuable report. We commit to conveying its key findings and lessons learned to the members of the GAFSP Steering Committee and to a broader public audience, with the aim of strengthening the impact and effectiveness of GAFSP.

Mathabo Tsepa – Southern Africa Confederation of Agricultural Unions

Pauline Verriere – Action Contre la Faim

Clayton Simamao – Samoa Farmers' Association



Smallholder farmers in Kibogwa village, Morogoro, Tanzania, following the review's focus group discussion. PHOTO: ESAFF

Executive Summary

The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), established by G20 leaders in response to the 2007–2008 global food price crisis, has since 2010 channelled approximately US\$2.5 billion in grants and concessional financing to support food systems transformation in some of the world's poorest and most food-insecure countries. Operating across grant-based financing tracks, including country- and producer organisation-led financing mechanisms, as well as private sector financing tracks, including the Private Sector Window and the Business Investment Financing track (BIFT), GAFSP's mandate spans improved agricultural productivity and livelihoods, strengthened institutions, climate resilience, women's empowerment, and nutrition outcomes. Its Vision 2030 Strategic Plan (2025–2030) further emphasises integrated action at the nexus of multiple global public goods, including climate, food and nutrition security, nature, water and gender equality.

In line with GAFSP's commitment to inclusivity, accountability, and learning, GAFSP selected a consortium of civil society organisations—the Civil Society Partnership for GAFSP—to undertake participatory reviews of selected ongoing projects. These reviews aim to document lessons from practice, highlight promising approaches, and identify challenges to inform future programming and scaling.

This consolidated report synthesises findings from seven country reviews conducted between November 2025 and March 2026 in Burundi, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Lao PDR, Liberia and Tanzania.

The reviewed portfolio includes three country-led projects (DRC, Lao PDR, Liberia) and four producer-organisation-led projects (Burundi, Cambodia, Haiti, Tanzania), implemented across fragile, conflict-affected, and chronically food-insecure contexts. The seven countries share structural challenges, including widespread poverty, reliance on rain-fed smallholder agriculture, weak seed and extension systems, limited market access, climate vulnerability, gender inequality and high levels of malnutrition.

Using feminist, participatory and people-centred methodologies, the review engaged 65 key informants and 626 farmers (52% women) through interviews, focus group discussions, field observations and community dialogues. The approach prioritised inclusion of women, youth and marginalised groups, while upholding safeguarding principles. Findings were documented through written analysis, stories of change, photography and video testimonies, enabling both qualitative depth and comparative cross-country learning.

Key Findings

1. **Local, farmer-led approaches deliver more sustainable and inclusive results** - Projects that place POs and CSOs at the centre of governance and implementation, including in government-led interventions, consistently outperform other models by strengthening farmer ownership, institutional capacity, gender outcomes, market access and long-term sustainability.
2. **Collaboration between supervising entities, government, CSOs, POs and private companies promotes accountability and coordination – in both government and PO-led projects.** Strong coordination, joint planning and aligned disbursements improve implementation quality, institutional accountability, sustainability and farmer trust, while fragmented governance and activities undermine impact.
3. **Strengthening national and local seed systems promotes productivity, while also supporting farmers' autonomy and climate resilience.** Community- and PO-managed seed multiplication improves reliability, affordability and local adaptation, reducing dependency on external supply chains and increasing resilience under climate stress. Collaborations with national public research institutes have the potential to build food sovereignty and resilience
4. **Adoption of sustainable agriculture (agroecological) practices, through inclusive extension, improves income, food security and climate resilience.** When agroecological practices are adopted, there are more demonstrable gains in soil health, yield stability and dietary diversity. Agricultural extension, through site visits, demonstration plots, farmer field schools, and farmer nutrition schools, encouraged farmers – including women farmers – to adopt such practices, allowing them to better navigate extreme climate pressures, pests and diseases, while achieving stronger crop and livestock outcomes. The uneven adoption of agroecological approaches across the projects, reflects the lack of explicit agroecological strategies in project design, as well inconsistent extension and long-term financing.
5. **Yield increases contribute to household food security, but do not guarantee income gains.** Initiatives that improve access to more and greater diversity of food, such as home gardens, enhance household and community food and nutrition security. Improved production, however, translates into higher incomes only where reliable market linkages are established early and aligned with farmer and PO capabilities.
6. **Reliable and accessible infrastructure (irrigation, storage, transport, processing) reduces post-harvest losses, creates value and improves climate resilience.** Targeted investments in irrigation, roads, energy, storage and processing remove systemic bottlenecks, reduce risk and unlock farmer participation in higher-value markets. Benefits, particularly for market-related infrastructure (i.e., processing facilities), are strongest where they are farmer-governed, centrally located, energy-reliable and accessible to women and producers in remote locations.
7. **Gender transformative approaches deliver stronger, sustainable outcomes, particularly when they actively engage communities and men.** Addressing gender norms and power relations achieves shifts in division of labour (on farm and at home), leadership, joint decision making and household wellbeing, beyond ensuring women's participation alone.
8. **Financial inclusion strategies for rural and marginalised communities strengthen resilience and cohesion.** Community-based savings and lending groups allow farmers to buy farming inputs, health insurance and respond to emergencies, promoting household resilience and reducing vulnerability and conflict at community level.

- 9. Nutrition outcomes require institutional, community and household participation.** Improved production delivers nutrition gains only when accompanied by behaviour change interventions. Interventions are further enhanced through links to health services and school feeding schemes.
- 10. Community participation and inclusive governance strengthen social cohesion and resilience.** PO, CSO and community level structures play a critical role in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, enabling coordination, grievance resolution and continuity during shocks.
- 11. Youth inclusion remains largely aspirational** - Despite rhetorical emphasis, youth engagement remains limited in practice, highlighting the need for explicit and youth-led and focused activities, including enterprise support and inclusion in PO governance roles. Female youth, in particular, require deliberate inclusion efforts, as restrictive social norms continue to limit their participation and leadership opportunities.

Based on these review findings, the Civil Society Partnership for GAFSP urges GAFSP – in line with its Vision 2030 -- to continue, and deepen, its shift toward long term, locally anchored and collaborative food systems financing, that:

- Prioritises long-term investment in strengthening POs (both national and local), across all funding tracks, as a key mechanism for delivering inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems outcomes.
- Elevates agroecology as a core strategic pathway for achieving productivity, climate resilience, nutrition and livelihood goals, rather than treating it as an optional approach.
- Strengthens sustainable local seed and knowledge systems by investing in farmer-managed seed multiplication, nationally anchored research institutions, and farmer-centred extension and learning platforms.
- Integrates market access and nutrition outcomes into project design from the outset, ensuring that productivity gains translate into sustained income growth, poverty reduction and improved diets.
- Embeds inclusive governance as a delivery requirement, with gender-transformative, youth-inclusive, and community-led approaches recognised as essential to accountability, equity and long-term impact.

1. Introduction

The Global Agricultural and Food Security Program (GAFSP) was established by G20 leaders in 2010, as part of a wave of measures to respond to the 2007-2008 food price crisis. The groundbreaking multilateral initiative sought to support food systems and producers in the poorest countries by pooling and coordinating funds from various government and philanthropic sources. Since then, GAFSP has distributed approximately US\$2.5 billion in grants and concessional finance across 55 countries.

GAFSP has two distinct focus areas: (i) food system outcomes, including increased agricultural productivity, improved farm-to-market linkages, reduced risk and vulnerability, improved rural livelihoods and entrepreneurship, and improved institutions; and (ii) cross-cutting outcomes, including improved climate resilience, empowered women and girls and improved nutrition. GAFSP's new Vision 2030 Strategic Plan (2025-2030) further endorses this focus, while emphasising the need to work at the nexus between climate, agriculture, nutrition and gender.¹

GAFSP operates via three tracks: a grant-based financing track (GBFT), which allocates grants to governments and producers' organisations (POs); a public private partnership-led funding track, which provides both grants and concessional funding through the business investment financing track (BIFT); and, additionally, a private sector window with trust funds managed separately by the International Finance Corporation (IFC). Under these separate modalities, GAFSP aims to reach key food system actors: subsistence farmers via the country track; small and medium farmers via the PO track; emerging small and medium enterprises and start-ups through the BIFT track; and larger agribusiness entities via the private sector window.

The GAFSP Steering Committee (SC) is the main decision-making body for the first two tracks, consisting of donor member countries, supervising entities and CSO representatives (as well as representatives of its fiscal host, World Bank, and its coordinating unit), while the private sector window is governed by a separate donor committee. The SC is widely recognised as being a highly, inclusive, participatory governance platform, that provides space for CSOs and POs to influence how GAFSP funding is provided and to whom. GAFSP also encourages its supervising entities (FAO, WFP, IFAD, World Bank and regional

development banks), who manage the grants in countries, to ensure the active involvement of CSOs and POs in the activities and governance of the projects.

In this spirit of inclusivity and accountability, the GAFSP commissioned a consortium of CSOs in 2025 to lead a series of participatory reviews to document lessons from a selection of its ongoing country- and PO-led grants. The civil society consortium – Civil Society Partnership for GAFSP (the Partnership) -- is led by ActionAid International, together with the Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF), Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (AsiaDHRRA), and Coordination pour des Actions en Santé et en Développement d'Haïti (COSADH).

Between November 2025 and March 2026, the Partnership conducted reviews of GAFSP grant-funded projects across seven countries: Burundi, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Lao PDR, Liberia and Tanzania. The reviews, covering three country-led projects (in the DRC, Lao PDR and Liberia) and four PO-led projects (in Burundi, Cambodia, Haiti and Tanzania) focused on deepening understanding of how GAFSP projects are working to address the nexus of climate, nutrition, income generation and gender within agriculture and food systems, while also supporting smallholder producers. While identifying promising results and offering recommendations to address challenges, Partnership members also sought to highlight lessons to guide GAFSP as it seeks to scale-up its investment in innovative and integrated approaches for transforming agriculture and food systems.

This report provides a consolidated overview of project review findings from across the seven countries. The results are discussed in five sections, each reflecting on the review focus areas: 1) farmers' productivity and livelihoods (including sub-sections on agricultural inputs, extension services and market-related infrastructure), 2) market access and household incomes, 3) climate resilience, adaptation and agroecology, 4) gender responsiveness and women's empowerment, and lastly, community participation and cohesion. The report concludes with a summary of the key lessons and recommendations, based on the review findings.

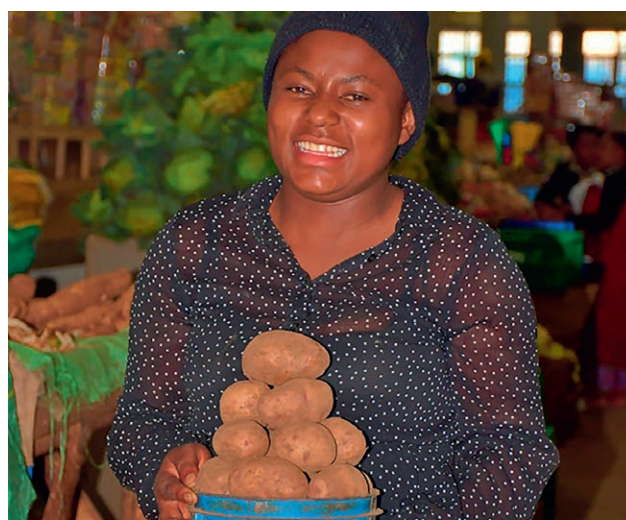
1. [GAFSP Steering Committee Approves 2030 Strategic Plan | Global Agriculture and Food Security Program](#)

2. Description of the Reviewed Projects

The projects selected for review are in countries that are among the world's poorest, with the DRC, Liberia, and Haiti also classified as fragile and conflict affected. Each of the seven countries share common challenges: widespread poverty, acute food insecurity, chronic malnutrition, low agricultural productivity, limited dietary diversity and poor nutritional outcomes, particularly in rural areas. Agriculture remains the primary livelihood source, employing the majority of the population, characterised by small-scale, rain-fed subsistence farming with minimal mechanisation, weak public extension services, and restricted access to quality inputs. Persistent post-harvest losses, poorly structured markets and soil degradation, undermine productivity and resilience. Climate variability, including irregular rainfall, flooding and pests, further exacerbates vulnerability. In response, the projects support smallholder farmers to recover from natural hazards, global health crises and conflict, while aligning with national and continental development priorities promoting inclusive growth, food security and resilience among smallholder farmers.

The Partnership collaborated with the GAFSP to identify and select the projects for review, ensuring a distribution of projects across both PO and country-led grants, a diversity of supervising entities, as well as a geographic spread of

countries representing GAFSP's historic grant allocation since 2010 (60% Africa, 25% Asia, 7% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 3% Middle East and others), with preference for projects that were ongoing (at least 20% completed), and those countries where Partnership members have a presence or strong member/partner organisations.



Ms. Idaya Mwalongo holding a bucket of Irish potatoes at Njombe Market. PHOTO: (ESAFF)

Project Name	Country/ Producer Organisation Led	Supervising Entity	Scope
The Supporting Small-scale Family Farmers who are Members of CAPAD Cooperatives to be Resilient to the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic (PARE-COVID) Burundi	PO-led Confédération des Associations des Producteurs Agricoles pour le Développement (CAPAD)	IFAD	With a US\$2.34 million grant, the project is revitalising banana production and farmer-led institutions post-pandemic, supporting 4,800 small-scale farming families (20,000+ individuals) across six communes. By restoring ageing banana stands with vitamin-A rich varieties and coupling them with biofortified beans, households are strengthening resilience, food and nutrition security, and income through improved production and marketing.
The Building Back Better: Organic Agriculture for Smallholder Farmers in Northern Cambodia Cambodia	PO-led Cambodian Agriculture Cooperative Corporation (CACC)	WFP	Running from January 2023 to September 2026, the US\$2.89 million project (GAFSP US\$1.79M, CACC US\$1.1M) strengthens climate resilience, food security, nutrition, gender equality, and livelihoods for 2,187 smallholder farmers from six cooperatives, particularly Indigenous peoples. By promoting organic and agroecological practices, farmer organisation strengthening, and inclusive value chains, it supports the transition to organic production through access to credit, certification, and branding/marketing strategies.

The Multisectoral Nutrition and Health Project (MNHP) and the Resilience and Nutrition in the Great Lakes Region (RENUGL) DRC	Country-led Ministry of Health	World Bank/FAO	From November 2023 to December 2027, GAFSP's US\$15 million support delivers a triple-nexus intervention in South Kivu and Tanganyika, bridging humanitarian relief, long-term development, and local peacebuilding. Of this, US\$9M contributes to the World Bank-led MNHP (US\$542M total) and US\$6M enables FAO's RENUGL technical assistance. The project targets 30,000 households (41% South Kivu, 59% Tanganyika), improving food and nutrition security through nutrition-sensitive, sustainable agriculture, while strengthening social cohesion, livelihoods, entrepreneurship, and rural financial inclusion via Dimitra clubs, farmer field schools and village savings and loans groups.
The Promotion of Resilient Agriculture through Agroforestry in Grand'Anse: Scaling up and professionalising small-scale initiatives to build back better (PARAGA) Haiti	PO-led Réseaux des Organisations de Producteurs et Productrices (ROPAGA)	WFP	From April 2022 to April 2026, a US\$3 million GAFSP grant is strengthening ROPAGA, a leading farmers' organisation in Grand'Anse, to help members increase and sustain incomes while protecting the environment in a post-COVID, post-earthquake, climate-affected context. Smallholder farmers are supported with quality seeds and technical assistance to boost production, improve food security, and enhance rural livelihoods. The project is implemented by ROPAGA in partnership with ActionAid Haiti.
Agriculture for Nutrition (AFN) Phase II Lao PDR	Country led Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF)	IFAD/WFP	The seven-year project (2023–2030) spans 20 districts and 500 villages across six provinces, targeting 28,000 households (168,000 people) to improve food and nutrition security, enhance climate resilience, and raise incomes by 20% by 2030. At least half of beneficiaries are women, with a focus on children under five, adolescent girls, women of reproductive age, and youth. Vulnerable groups including female-headed households, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities are deliberately prioritised. Implemented by the Government of Lao PDR, the project embeds inclusion at its core to ensure no one is left behind.
The Smallholder Agriculture Development for Food and Nutrition Security (SADFONS) Liberia	Country led Ministry of Agriculture	FAO/WFP	Running from June 2021 to July 2026, the project strengthens food security and reduces poverty by boosting smallholder productivity in rice, cassava, and vegetables, improving value addition, market access, and institutional capacity. Initially covering six counties with US\$9.08M (GAFSP US\$8.2M, AfDB US\$0.43M, Government US\$0.45M), it expanded in 2025 to Bong and Margibi with an additional US\$10M. Led by the Ministry of Agriculture, with FAO providing Farmer Field School training and CARI producing and multiplying foundation seeds, the project supports farmers with low-cost seeds, technical assistance, and stronger producer organisations.
The Food Systems Supply Services in Rural Tanzania (F3SRT) – Baridi Sokoni Tanzania	PO led Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (MVIWATA)	AfDB	The project is strengthening food systems resilience, improving agricultural productivity, enhancing market access and increasing incomes for over 4,000 smallholder farmers in Morogoro (spices and beans) and Njombe-Iringa (potatoes) districts by promoting agroecological farming of spices (cloves, chili peppers, cinnamon, and ginger) and vegetables (tomatoes, peas, beans, and garlic) and potatoes. Through access to training, nurseries and markets, the project supports farmers, especially women and youth, to achieve higher yields, incomes and economic opportunities.

3. The Review Methodology

Civil Society Partnership for GAFSP

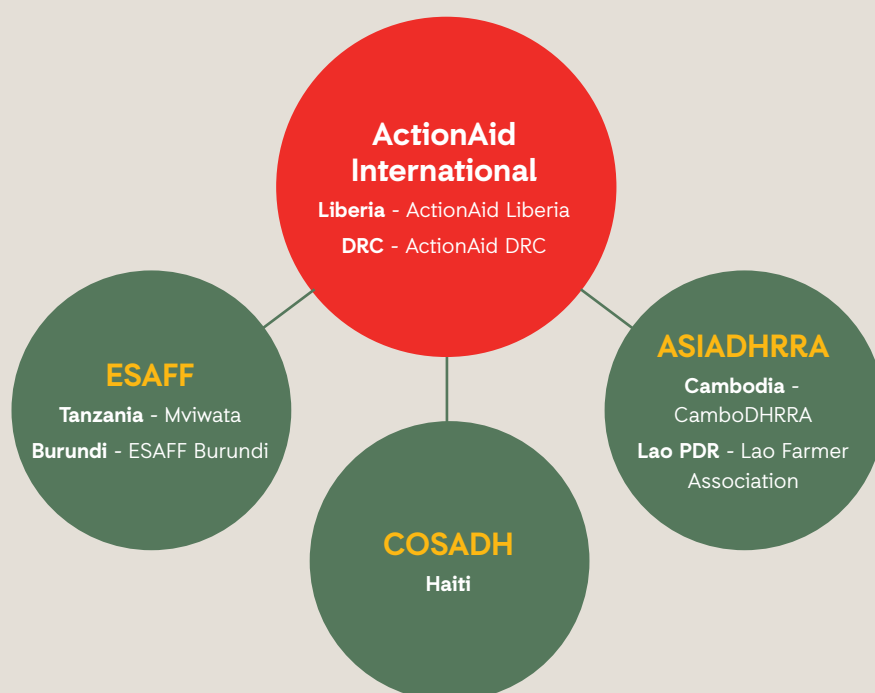
The Civil Society Partnership for GAFSP (the Partnership) is a consortium of civil society organisations that has been contracted by GAFSP to assess a selection of their grant-funded projects. The consortium is led by *ActionAid International*, together with the *Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF)*, *Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (AsiaDHRRA)*, and *Coordination pour des Actions en Santé et en Développement d'Haïti (COSADH)*.

The Civil Society Partnership for GAFSP (the Partnership) designed the review methodology to enhance collective learning and contribute to evidence-based recommendations for GAFSP, as well as informing broader debates on financing a just and sustainable transition in food systems. The reviews sought to generate critical reflections on how GAFSP-supported interventions are contributing to climate resilience (including a transition towards agroecology), gender equality and women's empowerment, improved nutrition, participation and inclusion, and synergies with other in-country initiatives.

In addition to written reports, the reviews documented project impacts, key lessons and recommendations through articles, stories of change, photography and video testimonies and documentaries.

The Partnership carried out field level reviews in seven countries, namely Burundi, Cambodia, DRC, Haiti, Laos PDR, Liberia, Tanzania, from November 2025 until March 2026. The Partnership members collaborated with their members and partners in the countries, as illustrated below.

Structure of the review consortium and country partners



The review engaged 65 key informants (project coordinators, field facilitators and government representatives) who provided insights into the projects, context and broader policy perspectives. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were

held with 626 (296m; 330f) farmers purposefully selected to include voices of women, men, Indigenous and young people for a representative and diverse composition of those involved in and benefiting from the projects.

Summary of field level engagement with project stakeholders

#	Country and Project	# of KIIs conducted	# of FGDs conducted	Total Participants
1	Burundi - PARE COVID	16	4	71 (44m / 27f)
2	Cambodia - Building Back Better: Organic Agriculture for Smallholder Farmers	8	3	27 (11m / 16f)
3	DRC - MNHP and RENUGL	8	6	164 (49m / 115f)
4	Haiti - PARAGA	5	5	80 (52m / 28f)
5	Lao PDR - (AFN II)	7	1	46 (27m / 19f)
6	Liberia - SADFONS	10	11	159 (66m / 93f)
7	Tanzania - F3SRT / Baridi Sokoni	11	4	79 (47m / 32f)
Total		65	34	626 (296m / 330f)

The reviews upheld feminist and participatory methods, ensuring a people-centred evidence gathering process that encouraged women, young, and vulnerable people to critically but safely reflect on the nature of gender power

relations and social realities within their communities and the projects. To achieve this, the reviews ensured informed consent and put in place measures that upheld safeguarding principles.

4. Review Findings

4.1 Farmers' Productivity and Livelihoods

All the projects have demonstrably enhanced farmer-level productivity through integrated, farmer-led, and context-responsive approaches that advance sustainable food systems. Tangible gains in both productivity and livelihoods have been achieved by improving access to quality seed, increasing access to extension services, strengthening cooperatives and fostering inclusive community structures. Additionally, along with value chain-motivated approaches, projects are working to ensure they recognise and directly support smallholder farmers to increase household food and nutrition security.

For most projects, higher and more stable yields, combined with improved market access, have enabled participating farmers to sell surplus produce at more favourable prices, resulting in increased and more predictable cash incomes. Access to technical and extension services, alongside financial inclusion through local savings and loans groups, has further reinforced productivity. Higher and more reliable incomes have empowered households to invest in improved diets, education, healthcare and housing, contributing to enhanced living standards and broader community resilience.

However, these gains remain constrained by persistent structural bottlenecks. Key challenges include climate risk, weak or uneven seed and extension systems, labour and infrastructure constraints, limited market pull, and ongoing gender and institutional barriers. While seeds and planting materials were provided in all projects, farmers continue to face delays in seed delivery, often after optimal planting windows, alongside continued dependence on external input suppliers and weak linkages with national seed systems. These factors limit timely planting decisions, crop choice and yield potential. In addition, weak coordination among implementing partners, supervising entities and government agencies has resulted in delays, poor sequencing of activities, and gaps along value chains.

Despite improved yields, farming across the projects remains highly labour-intensive. Limited access to mechanisation

such as tillers, processing equipment and irrigation pumps constrains area expansion, increases workloads (particularly for women), and slows the transition from subsistence to market-oriented production. As a result, institutional and systemic weaknesses continue to temper productivity gains, even where technical support has been effective.

► Access to agricultural inputs

The reviewed projects have strengthened agricultural productivity by providing a comprehensive package of inputs, including certified quality seeds and seedlings. Demand-driven support has encompassed the distribution of laboratory-tested seeds, provision of tools, cooperative-based extension services, and hands-on training tailored to local agroecological contexts.

In Burundi, DRC, and Liberia, farmers have received diverse varieties of biofortified crops,² while farm implements, such as knapsack sprayers, watering cans, rakes, trowels, hoes, cutlasses, and wheelbarrows, have further facilitated production. In Liberia, cassava processing machines have also been introduced, enhancing post-harvest value addition and market opportunities. Across the reviewed projects, seeds and planting materials have been sourced through a combination of national research institutions, project-contracted suppliers, producer organisations (POs), and farmer-led systems, depending on crop and country context. Most projects prioritised ensuring rapid access to quality planting material by procuring certified or tested seeds, seedlings or vegetative material (such as banana suckers, cassava cuttings and seed potatoes) from national agricultural research institutes or approved private suppliers, often coordinated by the implementing organisation.

Production and productivity of supported value chain crops, as well as home gardens, significantly improved across most countries. In Kinyinya, Burundi, substantial increases in bean yields were reported. Before the project, farmers harvested about 30 kg of beans per acre, with farmers now attesting to harvesting up to 200 kg per acre.

2. The inclusion of biofortified crops is a strategy to increase micronutrient density in staple crops, thereby helping to combat micronutrient deficiencies. Micronutrient-enriched varieties of common staples are bred to provide essential iron, zinc and vitamin A to rural households to improve nutritional status, health and livelihoods.

In addition to higher production volumes, bean quality has significantly improved, enabling farmers to access better markets. In Tanzania farmers have reported yield increases from an average of 8-10 tons per hectare to approximately 12-14 tons per hectare, representing an estimated 30-40% productivity increase in some groups during the last production cycle. At the same time, five out of six focus groups in the DRC reported significant increases in yields. For example, in Walungu, women reported yield increases from 3 kg of seed producing 4 kg of beans pre-intervention to 10-13 kg post-training. The shift from random sowing to technical spacing and the use of locally produced organic inputs were widely cited as transformative, with a clear “knowledge-to-yield” pathway. In Cambodia – the only project where productivity, in the strict sense, has not grown – farmers found that organic rice introduced by the project, had lower productivity compared to conventional rice over the first two years (as farmers are adapting to new practices, and soil fertility was recovering). However, yields have since stabilised, with some farmers reporting nearing levels comparable to conventional rice.

Produce quality has significantly improved in all countries, allowing farmers to sell at higher prices and improving household incomes in all seven countries.

Farmers reported that provision of quality seeds and seedlings, and adoption of agroecological farming techniques, has led to healthier plants, stronger stands and reduction in disease incidence. In Burundi, for example, the project’s provision of quality seeds and seedlings, and adoption of agroecological farming techniques has significantly improved banana quality. Bean quality has also significantly improved, enabling farmers to access better markets. Resultantly, the selling price for beans increased from US\$ 0.8 to 3 / kg, translating to higher household incomes and improved economic resilience. CAPAD has worked with the Bureau Burundais de Normalisation (BBN) on the development of standards to set a benchmark for product quality improvement and market. Linkages with SOCOPA factory for banana offtake has further improved product uniformity and market access for small-scale family farmers. In Cambodia, while farmers reported that their yield of organic rice is only now nearing the level of conventional, they are able to sell it at higher prices, increasing their income.

However, challenges such as delays in procurement, limited availability of locally adapted varieties, and weak national seed systems prompted projects such as in Burundi, Liberia and Tanzania to promote local seed and seedling multiplication as a resilience and sustainability strategy.



Mrs. Heu Sokleap is the Chair of the Board for Aphivat Meanchey Agricultural Cooperative in Cambodia. In addition to growing organic rice, her family manages a highly productive vegetable home garden and livestock area with fishponds, pigs and chickens. This integrated farming approach reduces her daily expenses and provides a surplus for her to sell at the market. PHOTO: CAMBODHRRRA.

Farmers are starting to produce their own seeds and seedlings, freeing them from exclusively relying on external inputs. While each of the projects has distributed seeds and/or seedlings, those in Burundi, Haiti, Liberia and Tanzania have supported farmer groups to strengthen their own local seed production capacities, both as a planned strategy to improve resilience by reducing reliance on external inputs, and as a response to the challenges faced in sourcing seed (including shortages and delays by suppliers). POs have taken a lead role in supporting seed multiplication through community nurseries and demonstration plots with technical support from extension agents. Such an approach has improved farmers’ access to quality seed, freeing them from the unpredictability of external suppliers, while allowing them to increase their yield and the diversify their production at lower cost.

In Burundi, CAPAD has stepped in after delays from Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Burundi (ISABU), supporting farmers to multiply bean seeds, establish local banana nurseries, and share planting material through cooperatives, ensuring equitable access and reinforcing local capacity. In Tanzania, smallholders have gained practical skills in sustainable seed production, post-harvest handling, and ecological practices. Potato groups like Nganda have successfully multiplied indigenous seed, distributed it across farmer groups, and achieved yield increases of up to 40%. In Haiti, the PARAGA project sources seeds

locally and trains farmers to propagate and save them, reducing reliance on annual purchases and embedding community-level self-sufficiency.

Home gardens are boosting household resilience, food security and nutrition in all countries, complementing projects' reach beyond purely value chain-motivated approaches.

This recognises and directly supports smallholder farmers' needs and contributes directly to community and household food and nutrition security. Home gardens emerged as a key pillar of local food systems for all seven reviewed projects, combining nutrition, empowerment and climate resilience. Linking home gardens to broader agricultural training platforms, such as farmer field schools, has enabled farmers (particularly women) to improve their access to affordable and nutritious diets, while also generating income through the sale of their surplus.

The evidence across the projects shows that home gardens and community gardens in Liberia, DRC and Lao PDR often jointly managed by women, are not just household-level interventions but collective spaces of empowerment and resilience. They strengthen nutrition, diversify diets, and generate income, while also reinforcing women's leadership in community structures. When grants or funds are available from savings groups, women frequently invest in processing and value addition of produce from home or community gardens. This uptake demonstrates that gardens are not only about subsistence but also enterprise, linking nutrition and food security with income generation and agency.

Provision of equipment has allowed farmers to improve their efficiency; however, there is a demand for additional investment in small mechanisation to reduce labour and time demands.

The DRC, for example, the provision of farm implements, such as knapsack sprayers, watering cans, rakes, trowels, hoes and wheelbarrows, has enabled farmers to increase output. Nonetheless, manual cultivation remains physically demanding and time-consuming, particularly for women who shoulder both domestic responsibilities and project-related tasks. Without access to mechanisation tools such as motorised tillers or walking tractors, farmers remain constrained in expanding cultivated areas without incurring unsustainable labour costs. To transition from subsistence to commercial-scale production, communities have expressed a clear demand for small-scale mechanisation. At the same time, in Liberia, farmers reported that farming implements, including seeds and tools, were not delivered according

to the farming calendar. The tools and machines that were received, including processors, were seen as substandard and insufficient to meet their needs. Women working in rice swamps also indicated they lacked protective gear for working in rice swamps.

► **Access to extension services**

Inclusive and diverse agricultural extension services are being promoted across all reviewed projects, equipping farmers with the knowledge, skills and resources needed to improve practices and boost productivity. Farmers are benefitting from the complementarities between POs, government extension services and private sector support. In all four PO-led projects, farmers receive extension assistance directly from their POs, complemented by government extension officers operating at county, departmental, district or ward levels. Private buyers, such as Amru Rice and Rice Tech in Cambodia, further strengthen this support by providing technical guidance and quality control under organic rice contract arrangements. By contrast, the three country-led projects rely primarily on their respective agriculture ministries' provincial and local offices, with the DRC including collaboration with NGOs to deliver extension and implementation support. Overall, training has focused on seed variety selection, water management and the production of organic inputs such as compost, biofertilisers and biopesticides. This section illustrates how extension services are driving the transformation of food systems within the projects.

Strengthened farmers' access to extension services has boosted yields, resilience and household food security across all countries.

Extension services have proven critical in equipping farmers especially women with the knowledge and confidence to adopt sustainable practices and strengthen resilience. In Haiti, ROPAGA's training on agroecology and water management is diffusing beyond direct beneficiaries, while in Tanzania, local extensionists have helped spice farmers increase yields by 30% through improved disease management and soil fertility practices. In Burundi, government officers and CAPAD facilitators use demonstration plots and peer learning to embed agroecological methods, enabling women to integrate indigenous knowledge with technical skills. Cambodia's farmer field schools and CSO support ensure women and youth are included in training on land levelling, composting, and crop diversification. Across these contexts, extension services not only deliver technical solutions but also create

inclusive spaces where women gain access to training, leadership and peer networks, making them central to scaling sustainable agriculture and community resilience. For example, in the DRC, farmer field schools functioned as practical laboratories, enabling farmers including women to master technical skills such as spacing and lining, which directly contributed to yield improvements. Agricultural extension officers in Tanganyika and South Kivu confirmed that training emphasised low-cost fertilisation using local raw materials.

While projects have built the capacity of government extension workers, further support could improve project monitoring, coverage and sustainability. In the DRC, farmer field schools and Dimitra Clubs have embedded technical knowledge within communities, but weak government logistics such as lack of motorcycles and fuel limit oversight beyond the project cycle. This has fuelled tensions over whether resources should flow through CSOs or state structures to ensure sustained support. In Liberia, capacity-building has empowered county-level staff and improved coordination between district agriculture officers and farmers, yet reviews highlight the need to further strengthen county officials' ability to lead and supervise implementation for long-term sustainability.

Projects have reduced farmers' dependence on chemical inputs, dropping farmers' production costs across all countries. Farmers have adopted ecological methods including crop diversification and soil health improvement to manage pests and diseases without reliance on synthetic fertilisers. In Cambodia, project supported organic rice has reduced farmers' dependence on costly external inputs and improved long-term soil productivity and environmental sustainability. In the DRC, farmers in Walungu described abandoning chemical inputs in favour of self-produced biopesticides and organic manure, lowering costs while improving soil health. In Liberia, however, agroecological practices were inconsistently promoted, with most adoption driven by farmers themselves. Outgrower rice producers noted that the Ministry of Agriculture distributed inorganic fertilisers without complementary efforts to integrate organic amendments, highlighting uneven support for sustainable practices.

► Market-related infrastructure

Agro-processing hubs are centralised facilities that provide cleaning, grading, processing, packaging, storage and

marketing services for agricultural produce. By extending shelf life, reducing waste, creating non-farm employment, and enabling farmers to capture higher market value, they play a pivotal role in transforming rural areas into agro-industrial centres. The reviewed projects showcase diverse models, each contributing to improved livelihoods and advancing food systems transformation. Project-supported processing plants are currently operational in Burundi and Cambodia, and are planned in Haiti, Lao PDR, Liberia and Tanzania.

Processing hubs are improving post-harvest handling, adding value to raw produce, promoting better food distribution to reduce food loss and waste and increasing community self-sufficiency in Burundi and Cambodia. Projects are investing in local processing facilities to reduce post-harvest losses, add value, and create rural employment. In Cambodia, the CACC warehouse and plant allow farmers to store and process paddy close to communities, cutting transport costs and generating jobs in drying, cleaning and grading. In Burundi, the upgraded factory at Société Coopérative de Transformation et Commercialisation des Produits Agricoles (SOCOPA) now guarantees banana offtake at double the market price, encouraging higher production. In Haiti, the ROPAGA centre, nearing completion, will process maize into semolina for school canteens and fruit into value-added products, while in Tanzania a planned potato hub in Njombe will expand market opportunities. In Liberia, cassava and rice hubs are under construction, though farmers have raised concerns about their distance from communities. Lastly, in Lao PDR processing hubs are planned through MSP matching grants with a call to accelerate the approval of these grants to strengthen value chain linkages through the hubs.

While both PO and private company-led processing plants benefit smallholder farmers, the PO run processing hubs tend to more equitably share dividends with members. PO-led processing hubs multiply benefits, supporting farmers directly while also stimulating local economies and resilience. The processing hubs in Cambodia, Haiti and Tanzania are run by the POs involved in the projects, but in Burundi, SOCOPA is a private sector partner (i.e., owned by an outside cooperative). While both models are working to improve inclusion of smallholder farmers in value addition and participation in high value markets, the PO-run processing hubs tended to more equitably share dividends with their farmer members. For example, in Tanzania, MVIWATA offtakes the farmers' products, sells them at a higher price and then shares profits with the farmers.

PO-run processing hubs in Cambodia have created diversified income streams and local employment opportunities. During periods of irregular rainfall, farmers were able to sustain livelihoods by selling vegetables, small livestock and processed products through cooperative marketing channels, reducing vulnerability to climate and market shocks. The establishment of the CACC warehouse

and processing plant further expanded benefits by generating local jobs in rice drying, cleaning, grading and transportation. This demonstrates that processing hubs managed by POs not only stabilise farmer incomes but also strengthen community resilience and create wider economic opportunities.

Lessons

- Productivity gains are strongest where projects combine quality inputs, extension services, financial support and collective action through POs and agricultural groups, creating integrated support systems.
- By combining value chain crops with home gardens and mixed farming systems, projects have improved dietary diversity, risk management and income streams.
- Better seed, practices and post-harvest handling improve produce quality, enabling farmers to access higher-value markets and better prices, even where yield gains are modest.
- When farmers multiply their own seeds and planting materials locally, they reduce reliance on external suppliers and enhance resilience; however, local systems remain uneven in scale and capacity.
- Despite gains, structural constraints—including limited mechanisation, delayed inputs, labour intensity (especially for women), and weak coordination—continue to limit scaling and long-term sustainability.
- Weak institutional coordination between implementing agencies, governments and partners leads to gaps, duplication, and inefficiencies along the value chain, reducing overall impact.



Smallholder farmers from Burundi holding banana juice produced by the SOCOPA factory.
PHOTO: ESAFF

4.2 Market access and household incomes

The review highlighted a diverse range of strategies employed by the projects to strengthen market access for smallholder farmers. By improving farmers' ability to reach buyers, these initiatives enable them to secure fair prices, generate sustainable incomes, and reinvest in their farms. Key approaches include investments in rural infrastructure such as transportation and storage facilities, provision of timely market information, and support to enhance product quality. The institutional strengthening of farmer cooperatives are also playing a critical role in increasing bargaining power and facilitating collective marketing to meet the requirements of larger buyers. In addition, although still at a modest scale, projects in Cambodia and Burundi are beginning to leverage technology and digital platforms to connect farmers directly with markets, streamline transactions, and reduce costs. Together, these interventions contribute to improved livelihoods, enhanced food security, and higher household incomes across participating communities.

In the DRC, however, yield increases did not translate to market access due to insecurity and transport constraints. The review participants recommended that the project invest in organised collection points or cooperatives to benefit from bargaining power and to overcome these challenges. Similarly, in Liberia, due to unmet project commitments to construct mechanisation facilities, storage centres, and hubs for processing rice and cassava, and failure to facilitate rice farmers' access to seed on the commercial market, the project has not adequately provided the planned market support for farmers in rice and cassava value chains.

Market access support has been uneven across PO-led and government-led projects, reflecting their distinct priorities. Government-led initiatives under the country track primarily target loosely or not yet organised subsistence farmers, while PO-led projects focus on farmers already organised with some level of commercialisation. As a result, market access interventions have shown stronger outcomes in PO-led projects, which aligns with their thrust toward linking semi-commercial farmers to markets. The differences in results are therefore not interpreted as shortcomings but a reflection of design, and how each track contributes to the broader food systems transformation.

Institutional strengthening of POs has enabled farmers to move from individual small-scale sales to a more organised value chain approach. Smallholder producers and their organisations (including cooperatives) are playing active roles in delivering activities such as farmer-to-farmer learning, demonstration plots, peer mentoring and engagement with private sector and government actors. This is particularly evident in the PO-led projects in Burundi, Cambodia, Haiti and Tanzania, which are expanding the lead POs' capacity (and in some cases, that of smaller member organisations) to serve their members more effectively and sustainably, by supporting transportation and aggregation of farmers' products, securing better prices and more reliable markets. The projects are reinforcing POs, empowering them to collectively plan production, access inputs more efficiently, and comply with the quality and safety standards, while improving negotiation capacity to benefit from better market terms (price, logistics). By facilitating collective marketing and inclusive business partnerships, POs have helped their members to gain stronger bargaining power, reduce their transaction costs, and create more stable income streams.

Where POs did not yet exist, or lacked formality, individual farmers have been successfully encouraged to join or form groups, particularly through government-led projects in DRC, Liberia and Lao PDR. In the DRC, farmer field schools helped individuals transition into technical cooperatives, with recommendations to establish organised collection points to bridge the gap between higher yields and marketable surplus. In Liberia, smallholders are benefitting from working together in groups and cooperatives, improving coordination and collective resilience. In Lao PDR, at least 468 agricultural production groups have been organised and supported with grants and training, while farmer nutrition schools are providing platforms for collective learning and knowledge exchange.

Collective marketing has reduced dependence on intermediaries, improved price negotiation, facilitated access to local and nearby regional markets and increased household incomes. Projects across the reviewed countries are reinforcing collective marketing and value addition as strategies to strengthen farmer incomes, resilience and food security. In Burundi and Cambodia, aggregation centres and cooperative marketing have improved farm-gate prices, reduced transport costs,

and enhanced bargaining power. In Haiti and Tanzania, the POs, ROPAGA and MVIWATA, provide ready markets and eliminate exploitative intermediaries, enabling farmers to secure better prices, reduce post-harvest losses, and increase financial independence. In Liberia, cassava processing equipment has transformed labour-intensive tasks into profitable enterprises, freeing women and children from risky work and generating new income streams. Meanwhile, in Lao PDR, multi-stakeholder platforms and market infrastructure are being established to connect producer groups to buyers across diverse value chains. Together, these efforts show how collective organisation, processing hubs and market linkages are empowering farmers, especially women, to secure fairer prices, diversify diets, and sustain household resilience.

Where concrete linkages with markets have not been established, farmers have struggled to access markets, despite improved yields. In DRC, Haiti and Liberia, projects have struggled to fully translate production gains into sustainable market access. In the DRC, technical training improved yields and household consumption but did not generate marketable surplus, reflecting systemic barriers to commercialisation. In Liberia, planned market linkages, such as WFP's purchase of vegetables for schools, were not implemented, and farmers in rice and cassava value chains lacked incentives or structured support to reduce post-harvest losses. In Haiti, producers remain dependent on PARAGA as an intermediary, with fragile mechanisms and limited infrastructure; without formal contracts or diversified buyers, they remain vulnerable to price fluctuations and weak profitability. While production support is effective, sustainable impact requires stronger institutional systems, structured market linkages, and resilient marketing arrangements.

Infrastructure improvements have facilitated farmers' access to market, but poor construction and governance can undermine their potential. In Haiti, project-supported improvements to the agricultural road in Prévillé (an isolated area benefiting from the project) now facilitates the transport of produce, allowing trucks to bring smallholder farmers better access to markets. It is now easier for farmers to transport their goods because the agricultural road allows trucks to pass through the area. In Liberia, farmers noted that the lack of mechanisation centres, poor rehabilitation of irrigation systems in the lowlands, delayed responses to farmers' concerns/feedback, and the overly bureaucratic process for procurement of agricultural materials, have hindered the project's deliverables and the achievement of its

objectives. Supporting micro solar grids for cooperatives and processing plants offers a practical way to mitigate energy and fuel shortages. While this was particularly evident in Burundi, the lesson holds relevance across all project countries.

Farmers, particularly women are transforming their livelihoods through improving their financial planning and savings habits, and increased access to financial resources, including affordable credit, in all countries. In contexts with limited formal banking infrastructure, village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) serve as critical community-managed safety nets and investment platforms. Additionally, the home garden grants in Lao PDR, the Mutual Solidarity Fund (MUSO MISO MITAN) in Haiti, and the VSLA/AVEC model in the DRC demonstrate effective approaches to ring-fencing funds for women within projects. In Burundi, VSLAs and solidarity funds have reduced reliance on informal moneylenders, enabling investments in housing, livestock, and farming. In Liberia, women self-organised into VSLAs to access affordable credit beyond direct project support. In the DRC, VSLAs have transformed household dynamics by granting women financial agency, allowing them to buffer shocks, such as school fees and medical costs, and shifting perceptions of women from dependents to co-providers. In Cambodia, savings groups combined with collective sales have stabilised household income and reduced vulnerability to climate and market shocks. In Haiti, mutual solidarity funds have enabled women to sustain small businesses with limited resources. Also in Tanzania, savings and lending groups, including SACCOS, have strengthened financial security, supported reinvestment and enhanced community solidarity.

When access to credit is expanded, however, financial literacy, transparency and affordability are critical. In Burundi, review participants recommended that CACC look to link them with higher levels of credit than currently available through VSLAs and solidarity funds, including matching funds for equipment. Experiences in the DRC and Lao PDR, however, also highlight the importance of ensuring financial literacy and risk management for any initiatives that expand access to credit for smallholder farmers. In DRC, the abrupt cessation of the US\$1,000 VSLA acceleration fund by FAO, left women who had rented land in anticipation of this support, legally and financially liable. While in Lao PDR, low financial literacy, especially in remote, mountainous areas with limited access to formal education has undermined the sustainability of savings and credit organisations.

Lessons

- Strong POs are central to improving individual farmers' market access, enabling aggregation, collective marketing and stronger bargaining power for better and more stable prices. PO-led market models deliver more equitable outcomes.
- Increased production does not automatically lead to higher incomes. Early, structured and diversified market linkages, as well as context-specific strategies (particularly in fragile and conflict contexts), provide farmers with incentives and channels to convert surpluses into reliable earnings.
- Infrastructure gaps remain a major constraint to market participation, with lack of roads, storage, processing facilities and transport limiting farmers' ability to access markets.
- Financial inclusion mechanisms strengthen resilience and investment capacity, but must be paired with financial literacy, transparency and risk management to avoid debt burdens.



Farmers working in the farmers' field school in Tabaa, Tanganyika, DRC. PHOTO: ACTIONAID DRC

4.3 Climate Resilience, Adaptation and Agroecology

This section examines how, and to what extent, the seven projects contribute to strengthening community resilience to the impacts of climate change, including extreme and shifting weather patterns such as heatwaves, floods, droughts, and cyclones. Central to these efforts is the promotion and support of sustainable agricultural practices.

Agroecology³ offers a useful framework, emphasising the use of natural processes, minimising reliance on external inputs, and promoting closed cycles with limited negative externalities. These approaches strengthen resilience by stabilising yields, improving soil health, and diversifying food sources, ensuring households can better withstand shocks while sustaining nutrition and income over the long term.

Across the projects farmers trained on agroecological practices (even when not referred to as such) and mentored through farmer field schools reported significant improvement in crop management skills, adoption of better and climate-resilient seeds, use of organic manure and integrated pest management practices. The review noted that projects' integration of such practices has contributed to increased or stabilised yields, improved soil health, and more nutritious and diversified diets, demonstrating clear benefits for productivity, resilience and sustainability. Adoption is particularly evident among farmers who received training and technical support. Implementation remains uneven across projects and cooperatives, however, highlighting the need for a broader framework for progressive adoption and monitoring.

Farmers and their communities, across all countries, are adapting to climate change through agroecological practices that enhance resilience, reduce dependency on external inputs, encourage synergies, promote sustainable land and water use, and improve ecosystem health. Experiences from the reviewed countries show that agroecology not only improves productivity and soil health but also equips farmers and communities with adaptive, resilient systems capable of withstanding climate shocks while sustaining food security. In Burundi, farmer-to-farmer

learning, intercropping, agroforestry, and cooperative composting hubs are strengthening biodiversity and soil health. In Cambodia, organic rice production and crop diversification embody agroecological principles, stabilising yields and reducing vulnerability to climate shocks. In the DRC, practices, such as organic fertilisation and soil moisture retention, have been adopted under technical training, even if not explicitly framed as climate programming. In Lao PDR, agroecology is embedded in biodiversity conservation and resource management, with domestication of native species and fish-in-rice systems enhancing ecological resilience. In Liberia, farmers are recycling organic materials and gradually integrating crop rotations and diversification, though support remains uneven. In Tanzania, soil and water conservation, mulching, intercropping and biodiversity integration are reducing vulnerability to droughts and erratic rainfall. In Haiti, widespread farmer training, particularly among women has led to adoption of agroecological practices that sustain harvests despite climate variability.

Investment in climate change adaptation infrastructure has helped build climate resilience for farmers in

Liberia, Burundi, Lao PDR and Tanzania while farmers have requested such support in Haiti and the DRC. Resilient infrastructure for irrigation, storage or aggregation supports climate adaptation, stabilising production, reducing losses and enabling farmers to withstand shocks while sustaining livelihoods. Projects highlight how climate-resilient infrastructure underpins adaptation and sustainability, though with varying levels of delivery. In Liberia, rehabilitating irrigation schemes has the potential to triple rice yields, but inadequate canal repairs continue to hinder water flow and irrigation potential. In Lao PDR, AFN II integrates small-scale irrigation, water harvesting and soil conservation with institutional capacity-building, ensuring communities can manage assets equitably and sustainably. In Tanzania and Burundi, investments in cold-chain systems, aggregation centres, and mobile collection vehicles reduce post-harvest losses and maintain food quality, directly strengthening resilience to rising temperatures and spoilage risks. In Haiti, additional resources are needed to expand storage, irrigation, and rural roads, while in the DRC, adaptation has focused more on soft infrastructure such as knowledge systems and seed governance rather than physical assets.

3. While not offering a comprehensive assessment, the review reflected on project interventions in relation to the 13 agroecology principles defined by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS, under FAO). In addition to agricultural practices, agroecology also underscores the importance of local knowledge and participatory processes that integrate experiential learning with scientific methods, while addressing social inequalities.

Farmers are transitioning from commercial chemical fertilisers and pesticides to locally produced organic alternatives, improving soil health and climate resilience.

Across projects, farmers are adopting organic amendments, crop rotations, and diversification, using locally sourced fertilisers instead of synthetics. In the DRC, there has been a shift from chemical fertilisers to organic alternatives, with farmers noting stronger, more resilient soils and learning to produce biopesticides from local materials driven by both cost and environmental adaptation. In Burundi, locally available inputs, such as *Tithonia diversifolia*, are being used as biopesticides, fertilisers, and manure, improving soil fertility, pest control, and moisture retention, with farmers reporting healthier crops during irregular rainfall. In Tanzania, training in ecological pest and disease management, including botanical pesticides, is reducing reliance on external inputs while safeguarding biodiversity and health. However, in Maryland, Liberia, reliance on distributed synthetic fertiliser without complementary ecological practices underscores the need for more consistent integration across interventions.

Projects across the reviewed countries are also embedding diversified agroecological farming systems that combine crops, livestock, and, where appropriate, agroforestry, increasing both ecological resilience and livelihood options. In Haiti, agroforestry systems combining trees, crops, and livestock restore soils, reduce erosion,

and enhance water retention, with over 99,500 seedlings distributed to mostly women beneficiaries, strengthening both ecological and economic resilience. In Tanzania, tree-based systems contribute to carbon sequestration, mitigating climate change. In Burundi, intercropping bananas and beans improves soil fertility, optimizes land use, and supports climate adaptation and food security. In Lao PDR, farmers are diversifying production by domesticating wild foods, rotating crops, and adopting integrated practices such as fish-in-rice systems, which enhance food security and soil biodiversity.

While only the projects in Haiti and Lao PDR are directly supporting the rearing of animals, farmers, mostly women elsewhere are also proactively diversifying their crops with small livestock such as goats, pigs and chickens. In Burundi, farmers highlight that small livestock improve nutrition, income, ecosystem balance, and manure supply. In Haiti, goat distribution to vulnerable households, mostly women diversified income sources and strengthened family farm resilience. In Tanzania, findings point to gaps in animal health integration that require attention. Meanwhile, in Cambodia, diversified farming systems combining crops, livestock, and agroforestry are enhancing ecological resilience and livelihoods, with farmers recycling residues and manure to reduce chemical inputs, though more systematic nutrient recycling practices could be further promoted.

Key lessons

- Agroecological practices enhance climate resilience, stabilise yields, and improve long-term soil and ecosystem health. Farmers, however, may experience temporary yield declines or adjustment periods.
- Farmer-to-farmer learning accelerates adoption and mastering of climate-resilient, agroecological practices, making peer learning platforms critical for building trust, and adapting and scaling knowledge locally.
- Use of organic and locally sourced inputs reduces dependence on costly external inputs and strengthens self-reliance under climate and market shocks.
- Combining farmer knowledge systems with extension support and climate infrastructure strengthens communities' ability to adapt to climate shocks.
- Adoption of climate-resilient practices remains uneven as many projects lack clear, system-wide agroecology strategies and consistent support, limiting scale and impact. Isolated techniques deliver limited benefits unless combined within holistic farming systems that integrate soil, water, livestock, biodiversity and livelihoods (including social justice and economic fairness).

4.4 Gender Responsiveness and Women's Empowerment

The review assessed how the seven projects addressed the barriers facing women and encouraged transformational changes that provide women with resources, strengthen their agency and voice, and facilitate positive social norms change. Women, who contribute significantly to agricultural labour, often face barriers to accessing productive resources, training and market opportunities. Gender-based barriers also restrict women's participation and leadership in agriculture and decision-making.

Overall, the projects have integrated a range of good practices aimed at advancing gender equity and economic empowerment in agriculture. These include making agricultural technologies, extension services and related interventions more gender-responsive; ensuring women's equitable access to income-generating opportunities and employment; fostering women's leadership and participation in farmers' organisations and self-help groups; expanding access to productive assets and training; and promoting awareness of improved nutrition, food preparation, and child feeding practices among women.

However, across the reviewed projects, except in Lao PDR, Haiti and Cambodia, gender is framed more in terms of participation and inclusion, rather than explicitly transformative activities that challenge structural inequalities, such as unpaid care work redistribution, tackling gender-based violence, or shifting social norms. While all projects support women's inclusion and access, projects in Burundi, Liberia, DRC and Tanzania lack explicit gender-transformative activities.

Labour-saving technologies are reducing agricultural workload and are saving women's time on unpaid care work, reducing gender inequalities within communities.

Women's experiences across projects highlight the value of labour-saving and empowerment-focused interventions. In Burundi, women appreciated agroecological techniques such as composting, noting they were less physically demanding. In Liberia, cassava processing machines created income opportunities through value addition while reducing the heavy labour burden of manual grinding on women and children, though women requested protective clothing for rice swamp work. In Haiti, participants reported that appropriate labour-saving technologies reduced domestic workloads, better respected women's time, and strengthened their role in household decision-making.

Deliberative inclusion of gender-transformative focused activities are encouraging more equitable sharing of responsibilities and joint decision-making between women and men, contributing to improved household well-being and gender equality. Across projects, gender-transformative approaches are reshaping household dynamics and women's social status. In Tanzania, joint planning, gender dialogue forums, financial literacy, and safeguards against gender-based violence have encouraged men and women to challenge harmful norms, leading to shared responsibilities and joint income decisions. In Burundi, women reported elevated social status through increased economic contributions, leadership roles, and participation in political activities, which translated into greater household respect and improved decision-making power. In Haiti, training has fostered household cohesion, with men more engaged in chores and meal preparation. In Lao PDR, the use of the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) methodology addresses social patterns and barriers to women's empowerment, representing a best practice for advancing gender equity.

The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) is a participatory methodology that empowers women and men to analyse and transform gender roles, power relations, and household decision-making. Using visual tools and facilitated dialogue, families create shared visions for income, nutrition and well-being, which helps redistribute responsibilities and challenge traditional norms. The approach offers a promising practice for replication in other projects and countries.



"Since attending the training courses, there is better harmony in the family. Before, my husband did nothing around the house; he only focused on his work at the school. But after the training, my husband prepares food, cleans the house, and does the dishes. All of this is an improvement". Gustine Marie Estane, Haiti. PHOTO: COSADH.

Projects that have invested in building women's confidence and leadership have positively influenced social norms⁴ and values, resulting in women taking up increased leadership positions within cooperatives and community structures. Projects are strengthening women's leadership and visibility in agriculture and community structures. In Cambodia, women have gained confidence and voice in community forums, serving as facilitators in behaviour change campaigns and participating across the value chain from organic rice production to cooperative marketing. In Tanzania, women now hold more senior positions, such as treasurers and chairpersons in cooperatives and producer groups, enhancing their influence in agricultural decision-making. In Burundi, women are increasingly recognised as capable leaders, taking roles in cooperatives, savings groups, and peer learning initiatives, which has boosted their confidence and public standing. In Haiti, women's leadership in farmers' organisations and agroforestry initiatives has expanded their economic power, social status, and participation in family and community decisions.

Experiences from Liberia, Burundi, Tanzania and the DRC highlight how entrenched gender norms often limit women's ability to fully benefit from empowerment initiatives, particularly in the absence of concerted empowerment efforts. In some contexts, women's empowerment efforts face persistent structural and cultural barriers. In Liberia, traditional gender norms have limited women's participation, with men dominating training and leadership roles, especially in counties like Bomi, Maryland and Grand Gedeh; even when women hold positions, they often lack decision-making influence. In Burundi, men continue to control marketing and farming proceeds despite women's cooperative roles. In South Kivu, DRC, women lead in food production and adopt biofortified kitchen gardens, yet insecure land tenure, male control of cash-crop sales, and the burden of unpaid care work constrain their empowerment leaving many with doubled workloads. Additionally, reliance on loans from village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) poses risks of overburdening women with debt, as they often assume financial responsibilities traditionally met by men.

Agricultural training has benefited women with enhanced practical skills and information resources across all seven countries. Women's training in agricultural techniques was central to the projects' gender-transformative potential, shaping their capacity to act as agents of resilience and change. It bridged enhanced economic opportunity, climate resilience and social recognition. Women's training

in agroecology, savings groups, and value addition directly increased their productivity and incomes. Access to quality inputs and collective marketing allowed women to move beyond subsistence farming into more resilient livelihoods. For example, in Haiti, women gained artisanal processing and agroforestry skills, receiving fruit and forest seedlings that improved soils and diversified incomes. In Burundi, training in agroecology, financial literacy, and leadership roles strengthened women's decision-making, though leadership representation remains limited. In Lao PDR, women's strong participation in farmer nutrition schools and agricultural production groups has boosted their market engagement and income through sustainable practices and business skills. In Liberia, training in crop processing enhanced food security and income generation, though men still dominate participation.

Earning and managing income through collective activities strengthened women's financial autonomy and resilience. Women farmers have expanded their agricultural production, incomes, and agency through access to quality inputs, technical training, collective marketing, and participation in savings and lending groups. These interventions have enabled women to engage across all stages of the value chain, while agronomic training and improved market access in Tanzania, for example, have delivered transformative gains at economic, social, and household levels strengthening resilience, equity and shared decision-making.

Across the projects, youth are not systematically integrated into agriculture, and efforts to strengthen their participation in the sector are limited. Most projects reference youth involvement in principle, but they often lack dedicated activities to meaningfully engage and support young people. Embedding differentiated, youth-focused interventions that tailor content and approaches for female and male youth alongside gender equity measures would strengthen inclusivity and ensure relevance and broader impact. In Liberia, awareness campaigns by the Ministry of Agriculture in Pleebo and Harper motivated young people to form the Maryland Youth Association, which engages in vegetable production and lowland farming, harvesting five metric tons of paddy rice and securing market linkages. In Haiti, the PARAGA project ensures youth inclusion, with 25-30% of participants aged 18-35 involved in agricultural activities and training groups, while entrepreneurial competitions provide grants to support youth business ideas. These are promising for integrating youth into agriculture, fostering innovation, and ensuring equitable participation.

4. implicit and informal rules generally accepted and followed, mostly influenced by beliefs and economic circumstances

Key lessons

- Projects that go beyond participation to adopt gender-transformative approaches (addressing norms, power relations, and decision-making) achieve more sustainable and equitable outcomes.
- Persistent barriers, such as unpaid care burdens, unequal ownership of and control over assets and land, and restrictive social norms, continue to limit women's full economic and social empowerment. Behavioural change campaigns, especially those that deliberately involve men, are more effective than one-off trainings.
- Technologies that reduce agricultural labour improve productivity and free up women's time, reduce physical strain, and create new income opportunities, contributing to shifts in gender roles.
- Women's leadership in POs and community groups, and participation in collective platforms, strengthens both empowerment and project outcomes, improving women's access to resources and ability to negotiate within both markets and households.



A lot has changed for us," said Julie Jearue, a mother of six. She and other members of the AHWEHDE Farmer's Association in Grand Gedeh county, Liberia, used to grind cassava using their hands, prior to receiving a grinding machine from the project. "When I come from my cassava farm and bring two to three bags of cassava; I just take it to the machine and in 5 to 10 minutes the machine is done grinding all. In the past, I and my children would be grinding for about a whole day or sometimes two days."

PHOTO: ACTIONAID LIBERIA.

4.5 Nutrition

Lessons from GAFSP's decade of experience in promoting nutrition show that increasing agricultural production and crop diversity alone does not guarantee improved nutritional outcomes. Achieving nutrition objectives requires identifying vulnerable groups, monitoring nutrition, educating families, promoting home health practices, ensuring safe food storage and handling, linking with school feeding and rehabilitation programmes, strengthening community health and nutrition workers, integrating nutritious crop varieties, and expanding access to affordable protein sources.

Reviewed projects use contextually relevant activities to promote access to healthy and diversified diets, focused on improving nutrition by increasing the variety of foods consumed, promoting the growing and consumption of biofortified crops for their higher micronutrient density, enhancing how foods are prepared, and changing eating patterns to maximise nutritional benefits from available food resources. The review explored these strategies, their link to sustainable agricultural practices and identified successes and lessons for how such nutrition programming can be enhanced.

Projects are offering practical platforms for promotion, particularly by women, of community nutrition knowledge and improve household food consumption practices. Concepts such as the farmer nutrition schools in Lao PDR were observed as having similar approaches with Dimitra Clubs in DRC and food-for-family groups in Cambodia which complement social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) activities by providing practical platforms for households, particularly women, to apply nutrition knowledge and improve household food consumption practices. These groups bring families together to learn about producing, preparing, and consuming diverse and nutritious foods using locally available resources. In Cambodia, SBCC activities tailored to local realities are delivered through village health support groups, influencing knowledge, attitudes and behaviours on nutrition, health and gender equality. In the DRC, Dimitra Clubs have advanced nutritional education while fostering social cohesion within farming households. In Burundi, women farmers act as community change agents, sensitising schools and households about biofortified crops such as vitamin A bananas and beans. The rice bank model in Lao PDR demonstrates how

community-managed storage and lending systems can serve not only as food security mechanisms but also as practical platforms for nutrition. By ensuring year-round access to staple foods, reducing hunger risks during lean seasons, and reinforcing solidarity, the rice banks act as local safety nets that stabilise diets and strengthen resilience. Supported by WFP through initial deposits, rice banks illustrate how community-led structures can integrate social protection with nutrition outcomes, making food security the foundation for broader development gains.

Targeted nutrition programmes have improved family diets, making them healthier, especially for women and children under two years old. The projects in Lao PDR and Cambodia offer promising nutrition-responsive practices for replication in other GAFSP projects. In Lao PDR, the AFN II project addressed underlying causes of malnutrition through farmer nutrition schools and the promotion of wild food collection and consumption, linking household food security, maternal and childcare, and sanitation. In Cambodia, SBCC sessions tailored to local realities used participatory methods such as storytelling, cooking demonstrations, role plays and debates to promote healthy diets, maternal and child nutrition, hygiene and shared household decision-making. These integrated approaches improved year-round access to nutritious food and reached vulnerable groups, including pregnant and lactating women, with interactive tools to encourage balanced diets. Given women's central role in food production, they stand to benefit more significantly from such targeted nutrition activities that enhance food preparation and consumption practices.

Linking agricultural interventions, particularly biofortified seeds and home gardens, to health centre-based nutrition programming addresses both food availability and dietary quality in the DRC. In DRC, health centres are functioning as convergence points for identification of malnourished children, nutrition education and access points for biofortified seeds. This way, there is a referral pathway where malnourished children identified at health centres are linked to households receiving biofortified seeds and extension services, creating a direct link between clinical health outcomes and agricultural production.

Institutional mechanisms, such as multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs), are critical not only for scaling

nutrition-sensitive agriculture but also for building cohesion among stakeholders, ensuring that nutrition priorities are sustainably integrated into community and district planning. MSPs in Lao PDR have embedded nutrition into local development planning, building trust among actors who traditionally worked in silos, and linking producers to markets and communities to services. By transforming nutrition into a shared responsibility across the food system, MSPs in Lao PDR have institutionalised nutrition-sensitive agriculture and have a potential to sustain impact at scale.



Village planning process in Huay Lor village, Lao PDR.
PHOTO: LAO FARMERS' ASSOCIATION

Although biofortified crops were introduced as affordable options to enrich staple diets, they were not advanced as a standalone path to improved nutrition. Experiences in Burundi, DRC and Liberia show

biofortification as gaining traction as a practical intervention to combat hidden hunger while diversifying staple diets. In Burundi, vitamin A bananas and iron beans have been embraced for their taste, child-friendly use, and role as dietary staples. In the DRC, vitamin A maize and iron beans are reshaping production in South Kivu and Tanganyika, though initial seed procurement delays slowed adoption. In Liberia, vitamin A rice is improving both nutrition and farmer incomes. Importantly, however, all of the projects also supported consumption of diverse crops from home gardens as key to improving nutrition, rather than focusing on biofortification alone.

However, guaranteed transparency about nutrient levels, limitations and expected outcomes is essential. Farmers must be clearly informed whether biofortified seeds are hybrid or open-pollinated, since attempts to retain and replant hybrid seeds often result in loss of vigour and productivity. Equally important is clarity on the source of seed, whether conventionally bred or genetically modified (GMO) so that farmers understand both the nutritional benefits and the agronomic or market implications. Without this transparency and farmer education, adoption risks eroding trust and sustainability, even where nutritional gains are evident.

A key challenge remains the monitoring of nutrition outcomes. In Lao PDR, facilitators from the Ministry of Women's Affairs noted that training activities often lack sufficient follow-up. Similarly, in the DRC, the MNHP/PMNS Project Manager highlighted difficulties in tracking households cultivating biofortified crops for the first time.

Key lessons

- Improving production alone is insufficient; nutrition outcomes require integrated approaches combining agriculture, SBCC, health linkages and household-level practices.
- Community-based platforms are effective in translating knowledge into improved diets and practices, especially for women and children.
- Integrating agricultural interventions with health centres, and referral systems, as well as school feeding programmes, enables more targeted responses.
- Multi-stakeholder platforms and local governance structures help embed nutrition into planning, service delivery, and policy frameworks, ensuring that nutrition-sensitive approaches are sustained.
- Biofortified crops can improve nutrition when combined with diverse diets – particularly through home gardens – however, transparency about nutritional benefits and market implications are essential for sustainability.

4.6 Community Participation and Cohesion

Social cohesion and community participation has been the cornerstone of enhancing inclusive food systems in all seven countries, although only DRC, Haiti and Liberia are officially regarded by GAFSP as fragile and conflict states. The projects are enhancing relevance, ownership and resilience through participatory and adaptive implementation where feedback from farmers continuously refines activities, ensuring that smallholder perspectives are reflected in decision-making. Strategies used to address fragility and conflict include building institutional capacity, adopting community-based and managed approaches, encouraging sustainable agricultural practices to better manage scarce resources, and prioritising economic empowerment of women and youth.

Strengthening POs is been a common path to sustainability across all projects. Collective action has made it easier for small-scale farmers most of whom are women to access inputs such as seeds, water and tools and to aggregate their yields, enabling them to reach larger markets. This in turn allows them reduce costs and improve their bargaining power, better positioning them to improve their food security and move out of poverty at the same time enhancing community cohesion and resilience.



Members of the Dimitra Club in Kawama, Tanganyika, DRC.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID DRC

Projects support the principles of co-creation and sharing of knowledge – key components of agroecology – as farmers combine local knowledge with improved agricultural practices introduced through the project.

Training activities, farmer-to-farmer learning, and technical support also support the principle of co-creation and sharing of knowledge as farmers combine local knowledge with improved agricultural practices introduced through the project. Furthermore, the strengthening of producer groups and cooperatives contributes to social values and responsible governance, enabling farmers to work collectively, improve decision-making, and strengthen their participation in local value chains.

In Lao PDR, group training, participatory platforms, and MSPs foster collaboration among producer groups; micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs); government and private sector actors, while demonstration plots and farmer field schools enable collective adaptation of practices like fish-in-rice, wild fruit domestication, and crop rotations. In Burundi, farmers are experimenting with locally available inputs such as *Tithonia diversifolia*, supported by facilitators and validated through lab tests, reinforcing confidence in locally driven solutions. In the DRC and Cambodia, farmer field schools provide experiential, two-way learning where farmers jointly observe, adapt and refine practices, strengthening nutrition-sensitive production, climate resilience and extension advice. Together, these approaches highlight how participatory, context-specific learning platforms drive innovation, resilience and farmer empowerment.

When smallholder farmers, POs and CSOs are engaged as core partners in the project – across design, implementation and monitoring – rather than passive beneficiaries, it enhances strong local ownership, accountability and long-term sustainability. The role of POs varies across GAFSP's two financing tracks. In the PO-track, they occupy a central leadership position, directly steering project management and decision-making. In contrast, within country-led projects, POs participate as partners but with more limited influence over governance and strategic choices. Across Tanzania, Cambodia, Burundi and Haiti, PO-led projects exemplify how inclusive governance strengthens accountability, ownership and sustainability and achieves deeper farmer agency. In Tanzania, structured reflection and multi-level oversight empower farmers to shape project direction. Cambodia's CACC reinforces transparency through regular consultations, farmer-led monitoring and CSO engagement, embedding continuous learning. In Burundi, cooperatives and CSOs co-design interventions from crop selection to seed standards, ensuring local relevance and advocacy.

Haiti's participatory steering committees integrate farmers, peasant organisations and community leaders at every stage, anchoring sustainability in local ownership.

The country-led projects in Lao PDR, the DRC and Liberia, however, reveal more constrained participation. The Lao PDR project demonstrates progress through participatory planning, multi-sectoral coordination, and inclusive targeting of ethnic groups. However, in the DRC and Liberia, marginalised groups have limited influence over planning and budgeting with project objectives largely pre-determined. Liberia's project, however, shows the starkest gap, with small-scale producers and CSOs mostly sidelined from planning and monitoring, with governance concentrated in the project coordination office, resulting in procurement challenges and weak accountability.

Local groups are acting as governance platforms and strengthening peace and cohesion, and become the 'resilience floor' in the face of conflict. By embedding conflict resolution and governance functions within community structures, projects not only promote cohesion but also build durable resilience, positioning local POs and CSOs as frontline institutions in times of insecurity. In Liberia, community cohesion has been strengthened through the establishment of local grievance redress committees, which provide peaceful mechanisms for dispute resolution and reinforce solidarity among producers. In the DRC, Dimitra Clubs have emerged as neutral dialogue spaces and governance platforms, resolving complex land-use conflicts and fostering

economic cooperation without external mediation, signalling a leap in local institutional maturity. Strong local POs and CSOs act as the "resilience floor," remaining embedded in communities during crises and responding swiftly to shocks, unlike external agencies that often withdraw.

When organisational capacity building extends to local POs, beyond national umbrella groups, it contributes to ownership and long-term sustainability, as well as ensuring benefits extend to the wider community.

PO-led projects are not only delivering services but actively investing in the institutional maturity of their member organisations. Experiences from Haiti, Cambodia, Burundi and Tanzania highlight both progress and remaining needs in building resilient local POs. In Haiti, while ROPAGA's marketing capacity has been enhanced, its local farmer groups still require training in governance and collective planning to ensure long-term sustainability. Cambodia's organic rice project demonstrates how targeted governance training and deliberate inclusion of women and youth can rapidly strengthen cooperative capacity. Burundi's CAPAD showcases comprehensive institutional support, spanning governance, financial oversight, equipment provision and leadership development that has enabled its cooperatives to achieve high levels of formalisation and financial autonomy. In Tanzania, MVIWATA's emphasis on governance, financial management, and collective marketing has boosted membership demand and reinforced institutional sustainability through farmer-led structures.

Key lessons

- Participatory and inclusive governance, where farmers, POs and CSOs are actively involved in design and implementation, strengthens ownership, accountability and sustainability.
- Local groups and POs function as critical resilience systems, enabling collective action, conflict resolution, and continuity during crises, especially in fragile contexts.
- Greater and more meaningful inclusion of local actors is essential to deepen impact, strengthen accountability, and sustain results beyond project cycles.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The review findings clearly show that GAFSP-supported projects are improving farmers' productivity and resilience, as well as community nutrition and social cohesion, particularly when they are locally anchored, farmer-led, inclusive and agroecological. Across diverse and often fragile contexts, the most durable results are evident where smallholder farmers, especially women, are organised through POs, supported by effective extension and peer learning systems, and connected to markets through collective and transparent arrangements.

The review also points to structural challenges—including weak seed and extension systems, uneven market access, short funding cycles and coordination gaps—that limit the scale and longevity of projects' impact. Addressing these constraints requires GAFSP and supervising entities, to deepen investments in local institutions, inclusive governance, and integrated, agroecological food systems approaches, while prioritising longer-term, flexible funding that allows transformation to take root.

Based on these findings, the review offers the following consolidated, key lessons and recommendations:

1. Local, PO-led approaches deliver more sustainable and inclusive results.

Projects that place POs and CSOs at the centre of their governance and implementation. governance and implementation consistently provide the best results in productivity, inclusion, gender outcomes, market access and resilience. Strengthening POs improves their governance structures, ensures reliable operations, improves leadership and financial management, and provides access to peer-to-peer learning platforms. Support for local POs contributes to community cohesion and ensures sustainability of project results by creating strong support structures for farmers.

► Recommendations:

- Increase the level of support for national POs, to allow them to expand their reach to more areas and build the capacity of their local member organisations.
- Support inclusive and robust PO governance, leadership and financial management structures in all projects, regardless of implementing track.
- Build the capacity of local, community-based POs to support farmers with transportation, aggregation and marketing of their products to reduce individual costs and increase incomes.
- Simplify supervising entity fiduciary requirements to expedite procurement and disbursement timelines to align with the operating context of POs.

2. Collaboration between supervising entities, government, CSOs, POs and private companies promote accountability and coordination – in both government and PO-led projects.

Where POs, CSOs and government technicians work together in structured partnerships, there is mutual accountability and monitoring, and efforts are more sustained and reach a wider area. This leverages the organisational capacity and reach of POs while aligning their efforts with national policy frameworks. Inclusion

of private companies contributes to more reliable market linkages, sustainable outside of project support. Poor coordination among supervising entities, line ministries and implementing partners results in uneven and delayed implementation, seasonal misalignment, sub-standard infrastructure and gaps along value chains. Fragmented governance and unsynchronised disbursements also dilute impact and erode farmer trust, even in well-designed projects.

► **Recommendations:**

- Invest in the capacity, resourcing and operational reach of public extension agents (e.g. training, transport, fuel, digital tools), and their inclusion in monitoring and oversight of project activities, particularly at district and community levels.
- Strengthen project coordination by facilitating project and community-level joint planning, shared monitoring frameworks, and regular multi-stakeholder reviews.
- Empower the main supervising entity to play an active coordination role to ensure adherence to plans and budgets, particularly where there are multiple institutions supporting project implementation.

3. Resilient local seed systems promote productivity and resilience.

Access to timely, affordable and locally adapted seed is critical for farmer productivity and resilience across all projects. Reliance solely on externally procured seed can, however, can also contribute to delays and dependency risks. Where farmers and POs were supported to multiply and manage their own seed (Burundi, Tanzania, Haiti, Lao and Liberia), seed access became more reliable, costs fell, and autonomy increased—particularly under climate stress. Collaborations with national public research institutes on local seed identification, multiplication and supply also showed potential to build countries’ food sovereignty and resilience.

► **Recommendations:**

- Invest in local seed systems, including community, PO-led nurseries and cooperative seed multiplication.
- Support farmer education on hybrid seed saving ensuring guaranteed transparency on seeds
- Strengthen national public research institutions to produce climate-resilient seed, adapted to local conditions, while supporting distribution channels to ensure farmer uptake.

4. Adoption of sustainable agriculture (agroecological) practices, through inclusive extension, improves income, food security and climate resilience.

Across all projects, agroecological practices have demonstrably strengthened soil health, reduced reliance on external inputs, increased and stabilised yields under climate variability and supported dietary diversification. Agricultural extension, through site visits, demonstration plots, farmer field schools, and farmer nutrition schools, encouraged farmers – including women farmers – to adopt such practices, allowing them to better navigate extreme climate pressures, pests and diseases, while achieving stronger crop and livestock outcomes. By deliberately engaging those often excluded, extension has become both a resilience tool and an inclusive mechanism for resilience, equity and sustainable impact. However, adoption of agroecological strategies varies widely between farmers’ groups and individual farmers, reflecting the absence of an explicit agroecology strategy and uneven extension support.

► Recommendations:

- Require projects to adopt clear, agroecology strategies, using the HLPE agroecology principles as a design, implementation and monitoring benchmark.
- Ensure projects intentionally strengthen all, not just a few, principles of agroecology – including social justice and economic fairness, land and natural resource governance.
- Scale farmer field schools and peer-to-peer learning to expand adoption of low-cost, farmer-led practices: composting, mulching, crop rotation, biological pest control and on-farm recycling.
- Fully integrate livestock and animal health into agroecological programming to strengthen nutrition, manure availability and resilience.
- Support agroforestry initiatives by promoting the planting of tree species that can coexist with crops, thereby enhancing farm biodiversity and strengthening ecological resilience.
- Invest in community-led early warning and climate preparedness systems, linked to national meteorological services.
- Harness ICT to broaden extension services through mobile-based platforms, expanding reach and ensuring farmers access timely information and support.
- Design extension platforms that respect women's time and explicitly account for their unpaid care responsibilities, ensuring equitable access to training, services, and leadership opportunities.
- Prioritise longer-term, flexible funding windows, to allow for institutional strengthening of POs and agroecology transitions to mature over time.

5. Yield increases contribute to household food security, but do not guarantee income gains.

Initiatives that improve access to more and greater diversity of food enhance household and community food and nutrition security. Home gardens, in particular, consistently improve household food availability, dietary diversity and women's control over food and income across all countries. Improved productivity, however, only translates into higher incomes only where reliable market linkages are in place, aligned with farmer and PO capabilities, and are further enhanced by aggregation and processing. In contexts without structured market access, particularly in fragile and conflict contexts, farmers prioritise household consumption of surplus rather than selling, limiting income gains and incentives for reinvestment. Production support should, however, be linked to downstream market systems prioritising territorial before export markets.

► Recommendations:

- Invest early in structured market access, including collective marketing, aggregation centres, processing hubs and contract arrangements. Coordinated support to prevent delays and farmer demotivation is critical where multiple institutions and grants are involved.
- Prioritise PO-led market models, which effectively mobilise farmers and link them to diverse markets, performing better than purely state or private-sector managed approaches.
- Expand market partnerships outside project-led arrangements ensuring farmers first secure household food security
- Develop or leverage PO-led digital platforms to connect farmers directly with markets, streamline transactions and reduce costs.

6. Reliable and accessible infrastructure (irrigation, storage, transport, processing) reduces post-harvest losses, creates value and improves climate resilience.

Targeted investments in irrigation, roads, energy, storage and processing remove systemic bottlenecks, reduce risk and unlock farmer participation in higher-value markets. Small-scale irrigation systems mitigate climate risks, such as erratic rainfall and prolonged dry spells, while investment in roads decrease farmers' costs, reduces post-harvest losses, and facilitates access to markets. Agro-processing facilities reduce post-harvest losses and enhanced incomes where they are accessible, adequately resourced, energy-secure and farmer-governed. PO-led, versus private sector run, arrangements facilitate the equitable sharing of value addition benefits across farmer members. Conversely, poorly located, constructed or weakly governed facilities risk being under-utilised or inaccessible, particularly for women and remote farmers.

► Recommendations:

- Conduct 'impact area analysis' during design phases, to inform allocation of adequate investment to solve farmers' most pressing problems.
- Invest in roads, possibly through co-financing with government.
- Ensure community-level joint monitoring of facility construction and provide grievance mechanisms to ensure projects flag and address concerns timeously.
- Establish centrally located processing and storage facilities, and food safety hubs, that women can access and reach and promotes farmer participation in governance and with reliable energy access.
- Favour PO-run or collectively-managed hubs, rather than those managed by private companies, that most equitably distribute benefits to farmers.
- Support micro solar grids for cooperatives and processing plants to mitigate energy and fuel shortages.

7. Gender-transformative approaches deliver stronger, sustainable outcomes, particularly when they engage men and communities.

Projects that use deliberate gender-transformative tools to address gender norms and power relations achieve shifts in division of labour (on farm and at home), leadership, joint decision-making and household wellbeing. Where interventions focused only on women's participation or income without addressing underlying norms or the demands of unpaid care work, gains remained partial and fragile, likely to decline with the end of project support—particularly where women lack land tenure and control over proceeds.

► Recommendations:

- Make gender-transformative methodologies mandatory, not optional.
- Provide dedicated training in women's leadership and financial literacy training, as well as technical training in food conservation and storage
- Ring-fence support to women-focused savings and credit clubs, and resources for women-led enterprises.
- Address land tenure and debt risks alongside economic empowerment.
- Integrate strategies to recognise and redistribute unpaid care work in households and communities.
- Ensure women's representation in leadership and decision-making within POs so they can fully access services, training, finance, and market linkages.

8. Financial inclusion strategies for rural and marginalised communities strengthen resilience and cohesion.

Community-based savings and lending mechanisms (MUSO, VSLA) allow farmers to collectively save money and access credit, which they use for farming inputs, emergencies and health insurance, promoting community-based financial resilience. By reducing financial stress, such efforts also reduce household and community conflict and promote cohesion. For farmers aiming to expand beyond subsistence and small-scale marketing, however, pathways to larger, affordable and fair finance may be required for enterprise growth.

► Recommendations:

- Strengthen PO and community-led savings and credit systems that are inclusive and accountable, including by providing start-up grants.
- Support POs to expand their mentoring and business development services to reach more members, and link them to larger, external sources of financial support.
- Develop women- and youth-tailored financial products and entrepreneurship support but ensure capacity building for financial literacy to manage debt risk.
- Provide matching grants to help POs acquire farming equipment and power tools that enable farmers to expand the area cultivated and volumes of commodities processed without incurring unsustainable labour costs.
- Align any provision of credit and insurance to smallholder farmers with key principles of fairness, transparency and affordability, and integrate mandatory capacity building for financial literacy, while ensuring risk is shared with rather than transferred solely onto farmers.

9. Nutrition outcomes require institutional, community and household participation.

Improved production alone is insufficient to improve nutrition. Positive nutrition outcomes are strongest where agricultural interventions are deliberately linked with behaviour change communication, nutrition platforms and family-level food preparation practices that promote dietary diversity (including biofortified crops alongside traditional and wild foods). Linking agriculture to health centres and school feeding programmes helps to target the most vulnerable.

► Recommendations:

- Integrate nutrition-responsive programming as a standard pillar (nutrition schools, SBCC, health-agriculture linkages), not only as a complementary activity
- Strengthen referral and convergence pathways between agriculture, health centres and school-feeding programmes.
- Improve monitoring of nutrition outcomes, especially for women and children under five.

10. Community participation and inclusive governance strengthen social cohesion and resilience.

Particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, local groups function as key platforms for conflict resolution, accountability and continuity during crises. Community-level grievance and coordination committees also foster unity and collaboration.

► Recommendations:

- Support activities managed by POs and CSOs, including in government-led programmes.
- Integrate contingency funds within budgets to absorb price fluctuations and to allow CSOs and POs to proactively respond to emergencies.

11. Youth inclusion remains largely aspirational.

Despite frequent references to youth, most projects lacked targeted strategies, assets or leadership development for young people.

► Recommendations:

- Embed explicit youth strategies and activities, spaces and content in projects, to incentivise people to participate in agriculture, including youth enterprise support, ICT and digital platforms. Dedicated strategies should be defined for both young men and women.
- Support POs to establish youth producer groups (wings) and ensure specific youth leadership and governance roles.

Annexure – Country Reports

Strengthening Smallholder Resilience in **Burundi**: Lessons and Recommendations from the PARE-COVID Project

Building Back Better: Organic Agriculture for Smallholder Farmers in Northern **Cambodia**: A civil-society led project review

Food, Finance and Social Cohesion in Eastern **DRC**: Lessons from MNHP and RENUGL Projects

Promotion of Resilient Agriculture through Agroforestry in Grand'Anse, **Haiti**: Scaling up and professionalising smallscale initiatives to build back better (PARAGA) project

Strengthening Livelihoods, Nutrition and Climate Resilience in **Lao PDR**: A review of the Agriculture for Nutrition Project Phase II (AFN II) Project

Advancing Food Security and Livelihoods through **Liberia's** SADFONS Project: A civil society-led review

Strengthening Smallholder Resilience in **Tanzania**: Lessons and Recommendations from the Baridi Sokoni Project

Acknowledgements:

The Civil Society Partnership for GAFSP extends its sincere gratitude to GAFSP for its financial support of the reviews, as well as the CSO members of the GAFSP Steering Committee for their guidance. We also appreciate the invaluable facilitation and participation of supervising entities and project coordinating teams from the respective projects. We further acknowledge the review leads and their communication teams, across the seven countries, whose expert skills and dedication were instrumental in steering the reviews to successful completion—Emmanuel Justin (ESAFF), Ferdinand Nkeshimana (ESAFF Burundi), Ange Maner (COSADH), Florante Villas (AsiaDRRHA), Noeun Him (CamboDRRHA), Pavina Phommachak (Lao Farmers' Association), Abdul Razak Masahudu (ActionAid DRC), James Pewee (ActionAid Liberia), Emillia Nhorido, Julie Middleton and Teresa Anderson (ActionAid International).

With support from



The Civil Society Partnership for GAFSP appreciates the generous financial support of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP). Any opinions, findings or conclusions expressed here are solely those of the Partnership and do not necessarily reflect the views of GAFSP.

COVER PHOTO: Community members generating a nutrition map (bottom) in Huay Lor village, Lao PDR. (LAO FARMERS' ASSOCIATION)
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