Sessions Notes on Takeaways

Session 2: How Well Do You Know GAFSP? — Myth or Reality

Format: Interactive game using colored paper hats (red = myth, green = truth). Participants voted on five statements; GAFSP leaders then revealed the answer and provided context.
Facilitator: Francesca D'Emidio | **Respondent:** Kunda, Deputy Program Manager, GAFSP

Overview
The session surfaced five common misconceptions about how GAFSP is governed, funded, and structured. Participants — drawn from across Supervising Entities, producer organizations, and project teams — showed strong instincts on some questions (most quickly identified statements 1, 2, and 4 as myths) but showed more hesitation on statement 5 about competitive allocation, with a visible split of red and green hats before the reveal. The exercise confirmed that even practitioners directly involved in GAFSP-funded work sometimes carry inaccurate assumptions about the program's governance and funding architecture.

The Five Statements and What Participants Should Know
Statement 1: "GAFSP is a World Bank program. The World Bank chooses which countries and projects receive funding." → MYTH. Most participants correctly identified this as false.
GAFSP is a Financial Intermediary Fund (FIF) hosted at the World Bank — a legally and financially distinct structure. Money flowing through the World Bank does not belong to the World Bank; it is managed on behalf of donor governments toward agreed objectives. Governance sits with the Steering Committee, which holds decision-making authority over program strategy and financing decisions. The World Bank plays three specific roles: Trustee (receiving and disbursing funds, reporting to the SC), Secretariat host (the Coordination Unit operates within the World Bank), and one of nine Supervising Entities implementing projects on the ground. Notably, GAFSP has nine SEs in total — World Bank, IFAD, AfDB, FAO, WFP, ADB, IADB, IFC, and IDB Invest — and the World Bank, while the largest by number of projects and portfolio share (34 projects, 45% of the GBFT portfolio), is one implementer among equals, not the program's decision-maker.

Statement 2: "GAFSP was created as a humanitarian aid program to provide emergency food relief during food crises." → MYTH. Most participants got this right, though a handful of green hats suggested the confusion persists.
GAFSP was launched by the G20 in response to the 2007–2008 global food price crisis — but it was deliberately designed as a long-term investment program, not an emergency relief mechanism. Its founding logic was that the crisis exposed structural weaknesses: low agricultural productivity, inadequate rural investment, and fragile food

systems. GAFSP's mandate is to address those root causes through country-led, multi-year investments in agrifood systems. As Gabriel Ferrero de Loma Osorio noted during the session, while the program has shown agility in crisis moments (including during COVID-19), it will never provide emergency aid. Its response to shocks is to make systems more resilient over time, not to substitute for humanitarian response.

Statement 3: "GAFSP includes civil society organizations on the board and actively partners with civil society on every aspect of the program." → TRUE — with an important nuance. This was the statement where most participants correctly voted green, though the clarification matters.
CSOs have held seats on the GAFSP Steering Committee since the program's inception, reflecting the principle that the voices of those most affected by food insecurity should shape decisions at the highest level. The SC currently includes three CSO seats: two for producer organizations (representing Africa and Asia-Pacific regions, through PAFO/SACAU and SAMOA respectively) and one for the Northern NGO community (currently Action Contre la Faim). A separate CSO Consortium, led by Acción International, conducts independent field visits to GAFSP-funded projects, collects lessons learned directly from smallholder farmers, and brings those insights back to the Steering Committee. Crucially, CSO representatives self-appoint through their own election processes — GAFSP does not nominate them. However, CSOs cannot directly apply for GAFSP funding to implement projects on the ground; their role is governance, accountability, and advocacy.

Statement 4: "GAFSP only funds the public sector." → MYTH. Nearly all participants voted red — the room had clearly absorbed this point.
GAFSP operates across three financing tracks beyond the core public-sector Country-led window. The Private Sector Window (managed by IFC) is a blended finance platform focused on mobilizing private investment in smallholder-linked agribusinesses in frontier markets; since its 2013 relaunch it has approved ~$593 million across 102 businesses in 29 countries, reaching over 2.5 million farmers. The Producer Organization-led track, piloted through the Missing Middle Initiative and mainstreamed in 2021, channels grants directly to farmer-led cooperatives and networks — as of the Forum, nearly $120 million had been allocated to 46 PO-led projects globally, with 70% in Africa. The Business Investment Financing Track (BIFT), launched in 2024 with $75 million, targets agrifood MSMEs and startups using blended finance to catalyze private and climate finance alongside public investment.

Statement 5: "GAFSP provides funding to governments that is pre-allocated to specific countries." → MYTH. This generated visible uncertainty — a meaningful share of the room voted green.
GAFSP resources are demand-driven, not country-allocated. Funds are awarded through competitive calls for proposals to eligible IDA-only countries (the lowest-income countries with the greatest food security needs). Applications are evaluated by an independent Technical Advisory Committee, which produces ranked recommendations submitted to the Steering Committee for approval. The strongest proposals receive funding — there is no pre-assigned envelope for any country.

Countries that have previously received GAFSP grants can apply again; the process is competitive each time.

Key Takeaway
The session revealed that governance and architecture misunderstandings are not limited to newcomers. Even experienced project-level practitioners can conflate the World Bank's hosting role with program ownership, or assume that proximity to public sector programming means GAFSP excludes private actors. The nuance on Statement 5 in particular (competitive allocation vs. country pre-allocation) suggests this is worth reinforcing in any written materials accompanying Vision 2030 implementation.

Let me read the transcript more carefully for the Session 3 Q&A.I now have a comprehensive picture of the session. Let me write the report section.

Session 3: GAFSP Fundamentals
Format: Presentation followed by open Q&A | **Presenter:** Rufiz Chirag-Zade, Senior Agribusiness Specialist, World Bank / GAFSP Coordination Unit Operations Team

Purpose of the Session
This session was designed as a practical refresher on GAFSP's Grant-Based Financing Track processing guidelines — not to introduce new information, but to build a shared, accurate understanding of how the project cycle works in practice. As Natasha Hayward (former Programme Manager) framed it at the outset: once a project is approved and an SE is engaged, the project is processed entirely according to that SE's own rules and procedures. But there are specific, non-negotiable touchpoints where SE teams must loop back through the Coordination Unit — and those touchpoints are frequently misunderstood or discovered too late.

Key Content: The Project Cycle
The presentation walked through six stages:
Stage 1 — Approval of initial project proposal. Eligible governments or producer organizations submit proposals in response to a Call. The CU screens for completeness, then shares with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), a body of up to twelve independent experts. The TAC evaluates proposals against defined criteria and sends ranked recommendations to the Steering Committee, which takes the final decision. All applicants — successful and unsuccessful — are notified. TAC recommendations on approved proposals are also shared with applicants and SEs for incorporation into the full project design.

Stage 2 — Administrative fee. Once the SC approves an initial proposal, SEs submit an administrative fee request to the CU. This fee covers both project preparation and supervision, and must clearly distinguish between the two amounts, since GAFSP transfers only the preparation portion upfront; the supervision balance is committed only after the SC approves the final proposal. For country-led operations, fees at or below 5% are approved automatically by the CU; above that threshold, SC approval is required. For PO-led operations, the automatic threshold is 9%. Critically, the admin fee is allocated *on top of* the grant — it is not drawn from the project budget.

Stage 3 — Project preparation and appraisal. This stage is governed by each SE's own policies. The final project design should remain aligned with the approved initial proposal in terms of objectives, scope, components, and budget structure. TAC recommendations from Stage 1 must be addressed in the final design. Major changes during preparation — shifts in development objectives, scope, components, or budget reallocations exceeding 25% — require SC re-approval before the final proposal is submitted. Preparation delays beyond 24 months require justification and SC approval, to ensure the project concept remains relevant to current country conditions.

Stage 4 — Final project approval by the SC. Before the SE internally approves the project, the final proposal is submitted to the SC via the CU along with a matrix documenting how TAC recommendations have been addressed. The SC review takes approximately three to four weeks. If the SC has questions or comments, the CU acts as the communication channel between the SC and the SE. Approval is on a no-objection basis; once cleared, the Trustee issues a Letter of Commitment, and the SE submits a Cash Transfer Request.

Stage 5 — Implementation. Supervision and implementation follow SE procedures. Project changes during implementation are subject to a two-track process. Minor changes — adjustments to output or input indicator targets, reallocations between components of less than 25%, extensions of less than 24 months — are handled by SEs under their own procedures, with the CU notified for information. Major changes — PDO revisions, changes to implementation arrangements, outcome indicators, safeguard category, key components, reallocations exceeding 25%, cumulative extensions of 24 months or more, and project cancellations — require SC approval *before* the SE completes its own internal restructuring process. Project suspensions and their lifting must also be notified to the SC.

Stage 6 — Reporting. All GAFSP projects submit Six-Monthly Reports (SMRs) as of June 30 and December 31 each year. At close, SEs submit a full project completion report within six months of the closing date. Financial reporting is required within 30 days of project closure, with unused funds returned to the Trustee. If the GAFSP-funded component closes before the broader project, an interim completion report is required.

Key Challenges and Questions Raised by Participants
The Q&A was substantive and touched on several recurring pain points. The questions are worth capturing not just as curiosities but as signals about where procedural ambiguity is most felt across the portfolio.

The 25% reallocation threshold — what exactly is being measured? An AfDB colleague raised this directly: is the 25% calculated against the total project cost, or against an individual component's budget? The answer from Rufiz was important: the threshold applies to individual components, not the total project. A reallocation can represent a very small share of overall project financing — 5%, 7%, 10% — but still trigger SC approval if it exceeds 25% of a specific component's allocation. This distinction matters because teams accustomed to thinking in terms of total project size can be caught off-guard.

Timing: when to notify the CU, and how far in advance? A WFP colleague working in a fragile and conflict-affected context asked specifically about extensions of less than 24 months — at what point should the CU be notified? The answer was that timing of the notification is governed by the SE's own internal procedures, not by GAFSP's processing guidelines. However, Rufiz made a broader point that applies regardless of the type of change: the CU should be informed proactively and early — not in retrospect through the SMR — so that any issues can be identified before they create delays. Natasha Hayward reinforced this: when in doubt, reach out to the CU in advance rather than discovering a touchpoint has been missed.

Geographical coverage changes in conflict-affected contexts. The same WFP colleague raised a scenario common in FCS environments: security conditions prevent access to the originally planned geographic area, and the team needs to shift implementation to a different location. The answer depends on scale. If the shift is minor and does not materially change the project's design, budget, or objectives, the SE handles it internally and notifies the CU. If the shift is so significant that it changes the project's fundamental structure, prior SC approval is required. The IFAD Somalia project was cited as a real example where changing conditions required re-engaging the SC during preparation — an extension from a four-year to a six-to-seven-year operation that was flagged to the CU before the final proposal was finalized.

The 24-month preparation clock in volatile contexts. A FAO colleague from Yemen raised the tension between the 24-month preparation limit and environments where context evolves rapidly — a concept approved when conditions were one way may need significant re-design by the time a full proposal is ready. The response acknowledged this is a known challenge, particularly in FCS portfolios: the 24-month limit is not a hard cutoff, but extensions require justification and SC approval, with the purpose being to verify that the original concept remains relevant. The message was that the process accommodates this, but the SE must actively manage the communication rather than allowing the timeline to slip without engagement.

Can countries that have already received GAFSP funding apply again? A World Bank colleague (Honduras/PROSASUR project) asked whether there are additional requirements for repeat applicants. The answer is no — all eligible IDA-only countries can apply to each call on equal terms. There is a preference for diversifying the portfolio to reach countries that have not yet been supported, but this does not disqualify repeat applicants. Yemen was cited as a country that has received at least two GAFSP grants. Requirements vary by call, and the guidelines for each call — including any specific eligibility conditions — should be read carefully.

How do the different financing windows complement each other? Multiple participants from FAO/Nepal and Haiti raised questions about navigating between windows — particularly how country-led, PO-led, and private sector (BIFT/PSW) tracks interact, and whether a single country can access multiple windows simultaneously. The responses confirmed that windows serve different recipient types and stages of organizational maturity: country-led grants go to governments, PO-led grants go to farmer cooperatives and organizations (typically more commercially mature), BIFT

targets agrifood MSMEs through concessional loans and blended finance, and the Private Sector Window (IFC) is transaction-driven and IFC-initiated rather than demand-driven. FAO was clarified as not eligible to lead BIFT investments (it is not an investment partner), though it can participate as a technical assistance provider if brought in by an investment lead. Practical guidance: teams interested in PSW/BIFT should engage IFC or the relevant SE directly; calls and procedures vary.

PO cost recovery for proposal development. The Haiti ActionAid co-implementer raised a real and underappreciated cost issue: POs often cannot afford to develop a proposal on their own, and in their case the NGO had to front approximately $10,000 to support the process. The answer was that the admin fee structure (9% for PO-led projects) is intended to cover exactly this — the SE receives a portion of the admin fee upon initial SC approval specifically to fund project preparation, including supporting the PO through the design process. This clarification matters for any SE or NGO considering future PO-led engagements: the cost of preparation support is budgeted, but only from the point of initial SC approval, not before the concept is submitted.

Midterm review: what does GAFSP require? A WFP colleague from Bhutan asked about the scope and GAFSP requirements around midterm reviews. The answer was clear: GAFSP has no specific requirements for midterm reviews; these are governed entirely by the SE's own procedures. Changes recommended as a result of a midterm review follow the standard minor/major change framework — minor changes go through SE procedures with CU notification, major changes require SC approval in advance.

Overarching Message from the CU
Natasha Hayward's opening framing is worth capturing verbatim: the general principle is that project responsibility is fully devolved to SEs and their country counterparts, but there are specific touchpoints — at key stages of the project cycle and when significant changes arise — where the CU and SC must be engaged. These are not meant to be burdensome. The risk is not procedural complexity; it is teams discovering after the fact that a decision they made internally required prior SC clearance, which then creates retroactive compliance issues and delays. The practical advice: when in doubt, reach out to the CU early, before completing internal processes, so that any necessary GAFSP approvals can be obtained in sequence rather than in parallel or retrospectively.

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Session 4: Measuring What Matters

Format: Presentation followed by project case studies and panel discussion | **Moderator:** Francesca D'Emidio | **Presenters:** Yurie Tanimichi Hoberg (GAFSP CU), Victoria Traverso (World Bank, Honduras/PROSASUR), Tawanda Mashonganyika (WFP, Somalia/SMAPIEH), Salum Ramadhani (AfDB, Tanzania/TANIPAC)

Overview

The session surfaced M&E challenges from two angles simultaneously — the CU's perspective on what it sees when aggregating data across the portfolio, and the project level's experience of what actually makes monitoring hard in the field. The three case study projects — Honduras, Somalia, and Tanzania — came from very different contexts (a government-led project in a drought-prone corridor, a PO-led project in a conflict-affected state, a multi-actor aflatoxin control initiative) but revealed a striking convergence of underlying problems. The Q&A added a further layer, with participants from DRC, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the civil society bringing issues that widened the picture beyond what the case studies covered.

Challenges Identified
From the CU side (Yurie Tanimichi Hoberg)
Three persistent challenges were identified in the SMR reporting process, each representing a different category of failure.

The first is **incomplete data**. The most frequently missing element is the very first of GAFSP's fifteen output indicators — number of people receiving direct benefits. This indicator is conceptually straightforward but operationally complex: it requires deduplicated counting across multiple project components, and the methodology varies depending on how a project defines a "direct benefit." Missing baselines and targets compound the problem, as do gaps in gender disaggregation. The CU's M&E officer regularly follows up on missing disaggregated data, but filling these gaps after submission is slower and less reliable than getting them right at the source.

The second is **data quality**. Even when data is submitted, internal inconsistencies are common — most tellingly, disaggregated sub-indicators reporting higher numbers than their parent indicators (e.g., more female farmers recorded as benefiting than the total number of farmers reported in the same period). Incorrect reporting units are another recurring issue. But the most diagnostic quality problem is misalignment across the three sections of the SMR: the indicator data, the implementation narrative, and the cross-cutting themes section are often written by different people or at different times, and they tell inconsistent stories about the same project period. When indicators say one thing and the narrative says another, the CU cannot reliably interpret either.

The third is **reporting out to stakeholders on contribution versus attribution**. As GAFSP grant sizes have declined and co-financing has grown, it has become increasingly difficult to isolate what GAFSP specifically contributed to a result as opposed to what the co-financiers achieved. This is not a problem unique to GAFSP, but it is acute here. The CU is actively working on how to articulate GAFSP's strategic value-add — the question of whether the program is a catalyst, a signal to other funders, or a direct deliverer of outcomes — but has not yet resolved this in its reporting frameworks. Related to this is the persistent delay in receiving project completion reports, which are the CU's primary source of outcome and impact-level data. Without those reports arriving on time, the CU can only report on outputs, not on whether the program is actually achieving food security and income improvements.

A third sub-challenge under reporting is the **difficulty of measuring cross-cutting themes** — climate, gender, and nutrition — at the outcome level. GAFSP's indicators for these themes sit at the output level, which means the CU can report on, say, the number of people who received climate-resilient inputs, but not on whether climate resilience actually improved. Finding a credible way to report upward on these themes without overclaiming is an open problem.

From the Honduras project — PROSASUR (Victoria Traverso, World Bank)
The Honduras project ran from 2015 to the mid-2020s across an original project and additional financing, targeting 14,000 poor households in the Dry Corridor. Its M&E experience illustrates what happens when a complex, multi-actor monitoring system meets a government transition.

The **parallel reporting burden** was a recurring inefficiency. The project had two reporting obligations — World Bank ISRs and GAFSP SMRs — with indicators that did not fully align. Different people handled each system, which led directly to inconsistent narratives and indicator reporting across the two channels. The solution, eventually, was to designate a single focal point responsible for both systems. This sounds simple but required deliberate coordination between the PIU and the bank team.
Institutional fragility in the PIU was the deeper structural challenge. Implementing firms collected raw data on the ground, but they initially lacked digitized or systematized data collection methods. The adoption of KoboToolbox resolved much of this — it provided a free, accessible digital tool that standardized data collection at field level.

The most serious challenge was the **impact evaluation data crisis** triggered by a government transition in 2022. The project's PDO indicators — its most important outcome measures — depended entirely on IFPRI-administered surveys, the third and final of which (the endline) had not yet been conducted when the government changed. The incoming administration did not prioritize the IFPRI contract, which had been funded by government resources. Had the contract lapsed, the project would have had no way to measure whether it had achieved its development objectives. The resolution required significant problem-solving: a new contract was negotiated directly between IFPRI and the World Bank, funded from project resources, which allowed the endline survey to proceed. The lesson is clear, but pointed — monitoring systems that rely on third parties for PDO-level measurement, and that are financially dependent on government commitments, carry a structural risk that only becomes visible when a crisis arrives.

An additional finding came at the project's end: the project was inadvertently benefiting people with disabilities, but there was no indicator to capture this. The result was documented through other means, but could not be formally attributed.

From the Somalia project — SMAPIEH (Tawanda Mashonganyika, WFP)
The Somalia project targets over 5,000 smallholder farmers across 23 villages in Hirshabelle, a climate-fragile, conflict-affected state. The project involves federal and state government (Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation), WFP as SE, a producer cooperative, and private sector construction companies — a multi-stakeholder

architecture that creates both a robust governance structure and a monitoring challenge.

The central operational challenge is **monitoring under physical disruption**. Hirshabelle experiences drought, flooding, and displacement, all of which disrupt both agricultural activity and data collection in the same moment. Farmers temporarily displaced by flooding cannot be surveyed at their farming fields. This directly affects yield and hectare data, creating seasonal inconsistencies that require reconciliation before SMR submission.

Multiple monitoring layers with misaligned timing add systemic complexity. The project runs a baseline study, quarterly process monitoring (aligned with agricultural seasons), and bi-annual SMR reporting — three different rhythms that do not always nest cleanly into each other. Infrastructure indicators present a specific timing problem: construction and canal expansion is still ongoing during SMR periods, meaning there is nothing accurate to report at the six-month mark for indicators tied to infrastructure completion.

Data consistency between the PO and WFP requires a significant back-and-forth before SMR submission. The PO leads data collection; WFP verifies and filters before uploading. This reconciliation process is a quality control mechanism but also a source of delays.
On data quality more broadly, WFP's approach in Somalia is instructive. Two core principles guide their practice: the quality of the data collection tool, and the stability of the enumerators. On the tool, the framing of questions matters enormously — asking a farmer "how much did you harvest?" versus "how many bags did you get?" produces different answers to the same underlying question. The tool is developed with technical input and tested before deployment. On enumerators, the team works with the same individuals across seasons rather than changing staff — enumerator turnover is a major source of data inconsistency that is often overlooked.

From the Tanzania project — TANIPAC (Salum Ramadhani, AfDB)
TANIPAC was a six-and-a-half-year aflatoxin control project in Tanzania ($20 million GAFSP grant plus a $13 million ADF loan), closed in December 2025. Its multi-actor architecture — extension services, regulatory bodies, laboratories, the Tanzania Bureau of Standards, the Zanzibar Food and Drug Authority, and a ministry coordination unit — made coordination-dependent monitoring particularly challenging.

Capacity gaps at implementation level were pervasive and persistent. Data collectors lacked technical skills in analysis and reporting, which led to inconsistency, incompleteness, and unreliable data from the outset. A specific manifestation: individual people attending multiple training sessions were counted multiple times, inflating training output figures before the project developed a proper unique-identification mechanism.

Weak outcome measurement was the most important structural problem. The project monitored what was easy — trainings delivered, facilities built — rather than what

mattered: were aflatoxin contamination levels actually falling? Output reporting crowded out outcome tracking.

Fragmentation across implementing actors meant there was no natural information flow between regulators, labs, extension workers, and the coordination unit. Without deliberate coordination mechanisms, each actor monitored its own piece, and the aggregate picture was never assembled.

Delayed reporting and non-use of data compounded everything: even when data was collected and reported, it was not fed back into project decisions. M&E was experienced as a compliance obligation rather than a management tool.
The TANIPAC team's response to quality control is notable: during supervision missions, AfDB established a formal set of criteria for assessing the monitoring system itself — checking for data consistency, reliability, completeness (including disaggregation), and utility. The M&E specialist in Abidjan reviewed submitted reports and shared feedback through to the task manager and project coordination unit. The CU in Washington also contributed to this review chain. This multi-layered quality check — beneficiary → district → PCU → AfDB Abidjan → GAFSP CU — created accountability at each step.

From participants during Q&A
Participants raised several challenges that the case studies had not fully surfaced.
A colleague from **DRC** described a situation in 2025 where one of their project's implementation areas was split between government-controlled and armed-group-controlled zones, making data collection in half the target area impossible. This is a challenge the existing GAFSP framework does not directly address: how to maintain M&E continuity when physical access collapses entirely, rather than just deteriorating. The question of whether and when to shift to third-party monitoring in these circumstances was raised but not resolved.

The same participant raised **household survey bias**: when enumerators visit farming communities, beneficiaries assume that responses might affect future aid flows and answer accordingly — overstating need or success depending on what they believe the enumerator wants to hear. This produces systematic bias at the data collection stage that cannot be corrected in the SMR. Yurie from the CU acknowledged this directly: the CU receives aggregated data and has no visibility into how it was collected. The quality filters sit entirely with the SE and the project team.

A **civil society representative** (Benito, SACAU) raised the question of whether GAFSP has common definitions for its indicators that all projects apply consistently. Yurie's answer was nuanced: the M&E plan does include indicator definitions, but some indicators — particularly the climate resilience indicator, which asks for disaggregation between "received inputs" and "adopted practices" — are context-dependent and rely heavily on the professional judgment of the project team. This is an acknowledged gap: definitional ambiguity creates a version of the data quality problem that cannot be solved at the reporting stage.

The same participant asked about **beneficiary participation in indicator design** — not just in data collection, but in deciding what gets measured. The WFP/Somalia team's response was the strongest: the PO and farming communities were involved in the project design phase to understand what the project was meant to achieve, and the indicators were developed collaboratively in that context. This participatory approach was presented as a quality control mechanism — farmers who understand what is being measured are more likely to provide accurate data.

Solutions Identified

Drawing together the presentations, panel responses, and facilitator synthesis, the session produced the following actionable solutions:

On data completeness and quality at the project level:

- Designate a single M&E focal point responsible for all external reporting systems (WB ISRs, GAFSP SMRs) — changing who fills in reports changes the data.
- Invest early in digitized data collection tools (KoboToolbox, WFP's Farm2Go) at the field implementation level, not as a mid-project retrofit.
- Maintain stable enumerator teams across data collection cycles — enumerator continuity is as important as tool quality.
- Design data collection questions that are linguistically accessible to the beneficiaries being surveyed; question framing directly determines data accuracy.
- Build data quality assessment criteria into supervision missions — AfDB's multi-tier approach (field → district → PCU → regional M&E specialist → CU) is a replicable model.

On protecting outcome measurement:

- The M&E implementation plan, including who is responsible for measuring what and how, must be finalized before implementation begins — not during it.
- PDO-level indicators must be measurable by the PIU independently. Any PDO indicator that depends on a third party (like an impact evaluation firm) represents a structural risk that should be identified at design stage and mitigated through contractual clarity, diversified financing arrangements, and backup measurement methods.
- Impact evaluations with government co-financing commitments need legal and financial security mechanisms agreed across all parties from the outset — not just a good-faith understanding.
- Annual stakeholder review workshops that feed M&E findings back into annual work plans and budgets create institutional demand for M&E — making data useful rather than just required.
- Outcome studies conducted by consultants should include a mandatory capacity-building component for the project M&E team, so knowledge transfer accompanies the outcome measurement.

On indicator design and alignment:

- GAFSP indicators and SE/project results framework indicators should be aligned as closely as possible during project design — indicator misalignment across systems creates parallel reporting burdens that grow into data quality problems.
- Indicator definitions in the M&E plan should be as operationally specific as possible, particularly for cross-cutting theme indicators where concepts like "climate resilience adoption" are open to very different interpretations.
- M&E frameworks should include mechanisms to capture results that emerge beyond the original design — the Honduras disability example shows that significant impacts can go uncounted when there is no indicator to receive them.

On institutional memory and adaptive management:
- M&E knowledge must be institutionalized and documented so it does not leave the project when personnel turn over — this is particularly critical in contexts with high staff turnover or government transitions.
- M&E systems in complex or volatile contexts need to be explicitly designed to be adaptive — capable of accommodating geographic shifts, population displacement, or indicator adjustments without losing data integrity.

On the CU side:
- The GAFSP Portal has meaningfully improved data aggregation, quality control (through built-in validation), and efficiency of the SMR review process — this should be treated as infrastructure to build on rather than a solved problem.
- Completing and submitting project completion reports promptly is the single most important lever for enabling the CU to report outcomes to the Steering Committee — without them, GAFSP can only demonstrate outputs.
- A dedicated M&E community of practice across the portfolio — suggested by the DRC participant — would allow projects to share contextually-specific solutions (e.g., third-party monitoring in inaccessible areas, bias mitigation in household surveys) that the CU cannot itself provide.

Session 5: From Fragility to Opportunity

Format: Portfolio evaluation overview followed by panel discussion | **Moderator:** Joanne Gaskell, Lead for Strategy, GAFSP Coordination Unit | **Presenter:** Yurie Tanimichi Hoberg (GAFSP CU) | **Panelists:** Faiza Hesham Ahmed (World Bank, Yemen), Tint Khine (FAO, Myanmar), Peter Mazedi (Government of South Sudan/IFAD), Mathabo Tsepa (SACAU, CSO Consortium)

Overview

The session drew on GAFSP's first-ever thematic cross-portfolio evaluation — focused on Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (FCS) — and grounded it in four live project experiences from Yemen, Myanmar, South Sudan, and across DRC, Haiti, and Liberia (as reviewed by the CSO Consortium). The picture that emerged was sobering in its challenges but also rich in practical adaptation. The session produced some of the most direct and candid exchanges of Day 1, with participants from DRC, Somalia, Yemen, Honduras, and Lesotho all contributing from direct field experience. The thread running through every intervention

was consistent: in FCS contexts, conventional project design assumptions do not hold, and the projects that deliver are those that abandon rigidity before rigidity abandons them.

The FCS Portfolio in Context

GAFSP has supported 42 projects across 22 FCS countries since 2010, representing roughly 39% of grant-funded projects and 41% of grant financing. The evaluation covered all Grant-Based Financing Track projects from inception to 2024, involving interviews with over 100 representatives, an online survey of 27 SE project leads, and four country case studies (Ethiopia, Liberia, Timor-Leste in person; Haiti online). It was conducted by the consulting firm Syntesia and concluded in 2025.

One methodological finding from the evaluation is worth noting for the report: GAFSP had previously assigned an FCS "tag" to a project at the time of its initial approval, and that tag remained fixed for the life of the project regardless of how conditions evolved. The evaluators recommended updating this classification annually to reflect changes in the World Bank's FCS list. GAFSP has now adopted this practice.

Key Challenges Identified

From the evaluation (Yurie Tanimichi Hoberg)

Over-ambitious project design in low-capacity environments. The evaluation found this to be the most common source of implementation failure across FCS projects. The dynamic is structural: because GAFSP allocates through competitive calls, applicants have every incentive to propose ambitious, complex, innovative designs. Once funded, they face the reality of implementing those designs in environments with weak institutions, limited procurement markets, restricted access, and constant volatility. The evaluation's interviewees were blunt — phrases like "way too ambitious, too much stuff, even for a non-fragile country" and "start with the basics, then if it works move forward" recurred across multiple country contexts. The problems typically surface first in two places: procurement (complex activities require firms or specialists who either cannot operate in the country or charge prohibitive rates) and monitoring (complex interventions require complex data collection systems that local teams cannot sustain).

Difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified technical support. International consultants and specialized firms are often unwilling or unable to work in high-risk environments. This leaves projects without the technical expertise they were designed around, forces improvisation in implementation arrangements, and drives up operational costs when workarounds are found.

Coordination costs of parallel TA structures. The evaluation found that parallel TA projects were generally considered valuable in FCS contexts — described by one interviewee as "the best de-risking mechanism" — but came with a significant and often underappreciated cost. Coordinating two supervising entities (one for investment, one for TA) in an already difficult environment generated friction. Evaluators recorded characterizations from the field ranging from "silo thinking" to "forced marriage" to "disjointed approach." The benefit of TA as a risk mitigation tool is real, but the coordination burden is also real, and projects need to budget for it explicitly.

Youth exclusion as an underappreciated risk. The evaluation flagged a gap in the portfolio that generated significant discussion: while most project leads acknowledged that young people in FCS contexts often do not see agriculture as a viable path forward, very few GAFSP projects explicitly target youth. In FCS settings in particular, where young men without economic prospects are easily recruited into armed groups or criminal activity, this is not merely a missed opportunity — it is an active risk. The evaluators concluded that GAFSP is systematically underestimating youth as an at-risk population in its FCS programming.

From the Yemen project (Faiza Hesham Ahmed, World Bank)

Yemen's Food Security Response and Resilience Project operates in one of the world's most severe conflict environments. Direct government engagement is impossible; the project cannot be designed around government counterparts as implementing partners. Physical access to most of the country is restricted to very limited site visits under strict security protocols.

The impossibility of direct government partnership. The entire implementation modality had to be redesigned around UN agencies (FAO, WFP, ICRC, UNDP) acting as implementing intermediaries, each with their own internal procedures, compliance requirements, and operating standards. Managing across four UN agencies simultaneously adds a significant coordination burden that a non-FCS project would never face.

Geographic instability. Fighting in northern Yemen forced a geographic pivot to the south mid-implementation — a major restructuring that could not have been anticipated at design stage. This is not an edge case: geographic unpredictability is a baseline condition in active conflict zones, and projects must build the structural capacity to shift.

Supervision constraints. The task team cannot visit most project sites. When visits are possible in southern governorates, security protocols limit teams to two or three sites per day with minimal time for beneficiary engagement. The depth of supervision that a standard project would take for granted is simply not achievable.

Financial impact of complex supervision arrangements. A French-speaking participant raised an issue that was widely felt but not always articulated: the layered supervision structure — World Bank task team → UN agency → local implementing partner → community — creates multiple tiers of management costs, all drawn from project financing before funds reach beneficiaries. Faiza acknowledged this directly, noting that UN agency implementation fees run at roughly 8–10% of the total budget, with careful planning and negotiation during design being the main mechanism to keep this proportion manageable.

From the Myanmar project (Tint Khine, FAO)

Myanmar's Climate Friendly Agribusiness Value Chain Sector Project was designed as a joint FAO TA and ADB investment project. Following the 2021 military coup, the investment component was canceled entirely — ADB halted all activities. FAO was permitted to continue, but with a shortened effective implementation window (two to three years instead of five) and in conditions of severe political and security uncertainty.

Total collapse of the government partnership. The project was originally designed to work through government institutions to deliver technical support to communities. Post-coup, this

was no longer possible. All government collaboration had to be suspended and staff relocated out of government offices. This did not just change the implementation modality — it invalidated the entire theory of change, which depended on building government institutional capacity.

Navigating government pressure from the de facto authorities. An important and nuanced challenge emerged during Q&A: the coup government, which had signed cooperation agreements with FAO prior to the crisis, continued to pressure FAO to report on and coordinate through their departmental structures. FAO's approach was careful and pragmatic — using UN privileges and immunities, operating under a one-UN command structure, and limiting reporting to purely technical activities with all sensitive operational information removed. Geographical information about implementation areas was shared only at the technical level, while the team simultaneously worked to identify which areas could still be safely accessed. This navigation required constant judgment calls and could not be reduced to a protocol.

Finding CSO/NGO partners willing to operate in conflict zones. Even local civil society organizations and NGOs — the primary alternative implementation channel once government engagement became impossible — were reluctant to operate in high-conflict areas because of safety risks. Identifying which organizations had both the capacity and the willingness to deliver in specific locations became a project management challenge in its own right.

The challenge of integrating peacebuilding without a mandate for it. Myanmar's original project design did not include a social cohesion or peacebuilding component. After the coup, FAO recognized that bringing communities together to participate in project activities was itself an act of cohesion-building — but without an explicit design or budget for this, it had to be integrated informally through mechanisms like mother-to-mother support groups and peer learning structures. The question of whether GAFSP projects should design for social cohesion from the outset, or whether this should be added adaptively, was left unresolved in the session.

From the South Sudan project (Peter Mazedi, Government/IFAD)

South Sudan's Livelihoods and Resilience Project (IFAD SE) was designed during COVID-19 and approved virtually — an already difficult starting point for a complex, multi-actor project in a conflict-sensitive country. The project uses a community-driven development approach and works through competitive procurement of implementing partners (BETs), with government playing a supervisory rather than implementing role.

Project design in virtual conditions. Designing a project entirely through virtual engagement — without the field visits, stakeholder consultations, and ground-truthing that normally inform design — created gaps in contextual understanding that only became visible during implementation.

The tension between reaching the most vulnerable and operating safely. Project targeting criteria explicitly exclude areas where active conflict makes access impossible and where project resources would likely be destroyed or diverted. This is a rational risk management approach, but it creates a fundamental tension: the populations in the most insecure areas are often the most food-insecure and most in need of intervention. The project relies on humanitarian actors to serve those populations while IFAD's long-term resilience investment

works in adjacent, more accessible areas. This division of labor is logical but requires explicit acknowledgment — GAFSP resilience projects cannot reach everyone, and being honest about that is important for results reporting.

The sustainability gap. Who carries the work after the project closes? This question is central to the South Sudan approach and was named as a design requirement from day one, not an afterthought. IFAD's model — concentrating investments geographically, starting small and expanding from proven footholds, building local institutional ownership through community facilitators and chiefs — is explicitly oriented toward leaving something behind.

From the CSO field review (Mathabo Tsepa, SACAU/CSO Consortium)

The CSO Consortium conducted field-level reviews in DRC, Liberia, and Haiti — three countries that GAFSP considers fragile — and the findings are available on the GAFSP website. Mathabo presented key findings from a civil society perspective.

Infrastructure quality and governance determine whether investments survive. Small-scale irrigation in Liberia helped mitigate climate risk; storage facilities in Haiti reduced post-harvest losses and improved market access. But in Liberia, poorly located, poorly constructed, or weakly governed facilities eroded rather than built economic gains. The physical investment only delivers if the governance arrangements around it hold.

Yield increases alone are not enough without market linkages. Across all three countries, the review found that increases in food production boosted household resilience and nutrition. But where concrete connections to markets were not established, farmers could not convert production gains into income. Productivity and market access must be treated as a linked system, not sequential objectives.

CSOs are resilience infrastructure, not just delivery channels. The most important observation from Mathabo's presentation was a reframing of what CSOs do in FCS contexts. The DRC example was instructive: after receiving conflict resolution training through the project, community club members independently resolved land use disputes between herders and farmers and developed their own mediation procedures — without any external facilitation. Local groups that stay in the community after projects close become what Mathabo called a "resilience floor" — the bedrock of continuity when international NGOs and donors exit. Treating CSOs as mere subcontractors misses this entirely.

Financial inclusion as a social cohesion mechanism. The CSO Consortium found that community-based savings and lending mechanisms — operating in contexts with no formal banking access — served dual functions: they gave farmers collective access to agricultural inputs and insurance, and they reduced the financial stress that drives family and community conflict. Financial inclusion, in other words, is also conflict prevention.

From participants during Q&A

DRC (Mali Gyop): The project's implementation area was divided in 2025 between government-controlled and armed-group-controlled zones. Data collection in the latter became impossible. The question posed to the panel — what do you do when your implementation area is physically inaccessible? — was addressed indirectly by Peter Mazedi's South Sudan model (exclude high-conflict areas from targeting, rely on

complementary humanitarian actors) but is not comprehensively resolved by any current GAFSP framework.

A participant from the Somalia project raised geographical targeting as a strategic tool: systematically assessing conflict intensity across different regions at the design stage, and selecting areas that are both sufficiently accessible and sufficiently food-insecure, can significantly reduce implementation disruption. But he acknowledged the fundamental tension — the most vulnerable populations are often in the hotspots that cannot be reached.

A participant from WFP/AT raised a question that received strong agreement in the room: the local resource persons and civil society organizations who actually carry projects forward in conflict areas often do so while remaining deliberately invisible, operating under the radar for their own safety. Recognizing and protecting them — in ways that do not increase their risk — is an obligation that the international development system does not always handle well.

A participant from Honduras (RED COMAL, a producer organization), speaking in Spanish, observed that the M&E challenges discussed throughout the day — capacity gaps, indicator complexity, tool inadequacy — were as present in his context as in the FCS situations described by others. His recommendation echoed the FCS lesson applied universally: design projects simply, without sacrificing objectives, and make sure designs are grounded in the realities of the implementing context.

A French-speaking participant from an FCS country raised a question that was parked due to time: does GAFSP provide any preferential treatment or additional flexibility to FCS countries in the evaluation of proposals? This question was noted for follow-up by the CU.

A participant from Lesotho offered a synthesis that brought the day's M&E and FCS sessions together: M&E should not be treated as the M&E officer's responsibility — it belongs to the whole team, must be invested in from the start with appropriate staff and tools, and requires clear indicators set before implementation begins. The observation resonated as a closing note across both sessions.

What Worked

Across the four case study projects and the CSO field review, a set of consistent enabling factors emerged.

Simplification of design in response to context. Both Yemen and Myanmar demonstrated that reducing project scope and ambition when conditions deteriorated was not failure — it was what made continued implementation possible. In Myanmar, the collapse of the investment component forced a leaner, more direct design; FAO concluded that the simplified version delivered more reliably than the original would have. In Yemen, maintaining a simple, practical package — livelihood restoration, productive asset rebuilding, nutrition — with realistic expectations about depth of supervision produced tangible results on the ground.

Routing around government through UN and local partners. Where direct government partnership became impossible or counterproductive (Yemen, Myanmar), routing

implementation through UN agencies and local CSOs/NGOs maintained delivery continuity. This was not seamless — it introduced coordination costs and quality control challenges — but it was far better than suspension.

Third-party monitoring as a supervision substitute. Yemen's use of quarterly third-party monitoring visits (four per year), with reports reviewed by UN implementing partners before reaching the task team, created a functioning supervision chain under conditions where direct field visits were largely impossible. This model is replicable and should be budgeted into FCS project designs explicitly.

Community-driven development and local institutional ownership. South Sudan's model — using community facilitators trained to work with local chiefs and elders, with government supervising rather than implementing — built ownership at multiple levels simultaneously. Government institutions saw the project as theirs and provided security guidance and coordination support. Communities made decisions about their own priorities and owned the outcomes. Peter Mazedi's observation that this creates sustainability beyond the project period was echoed by both Mathabo Tsepa's CSO analysis and the Myanmar mother-to-mother support group model.

Concentrating investment geographically. IFAD's approach in South Sudan — starting small, proving effectiveness, then expanding — was presented as a deliberate alternative to dispersed programming. Geographic concentration allows deeper engagement, stronger relationships with local institutions, and more credible monitoring. It also implicitly acknowledges resource constraints and operational realities rather than pretending they don't exist.

Social cohesion as a programming goal, not just a side-effect. DRC's experience with conflict resolution training, and Myanmar's informal integration of peer-learning and savings groups, both pointed in the same direction: agricultural projects in FCS contexts that actively build social cohesion — rather than treating it as an assumed background condition — produce more durable outcomes and generate positive spillovers (conflict resolution, financial resilience) that extend well beyond the project's formal scope.

Financial inclusion as a resilience mechanism. Community savings and lending groups, particularly in contexts without formal banking, were found by the CSO Consortium to reduce both poverty and conflict simultaneously. Integrating these mechanisms into project design — even when they are not primary program objectives — multiplies the impact of agricultural investments.

Investing in youth deliberately. The Yemen project's experience of youth and women returning from urban areas to farming because of viable income opportunities created by the project was presented as a positive counter-example to the evaluation's concern about youth exclusion. Where the program explicitly or implicitly created pathways for young people, results were stronger and more durable.

Lessons Learned

Simplicity is not a compromise — it is a strategy. Designing simple projects that can be implemented with local capacity, under variable security conditions, with limited supervision access, is harder than designing complex ones. It requires resisting the competitive pressure

to propose ambitious programs and instead asking what can credibly be delivered in this context with this team. The evaluation's finding that complexity is the most common failure mode in FCS projects should be treated as a design constraint, not a criticism.

Build flexibility into the project architecture from day one. Flexibility is not just a disposition — it needs structural form. South Sudan's "Component Zero" (a contingency allocation that can be activated when crises emerge) is one model. Yemen's use of restructuring as a deliberate tool to protect results — reorienting geography, activities, and supervision arrangements without abandoning the project — is another. Myanmar's programmatic reorientation toward local NGOs, once government engagement became impossible, shows that flexibility also means having alternative implementation pathways identified in advance.

Government engagement in FCS is a spectrum, not a binary. The panel illustrated that "cannot work with government" does not mean "no government relationship." In Yemen, gradual re-engagement is happening at the technical directorate level. In South Sudan, a project coordination unit sits within the Ministry of Agriculture but is staffed independently. In Myanmar, FAO engages carefully and narrowly, sharing only technical reporting. Each of these is a context-specific calibration — there is no universal model, but total exclusion of government is rarely the right answer and creates sustainability risks.

Invest in local institutions as if they are the project's legacy, because they are. When international programs leave, local institutions either carry the work forward or they don't. CSOs, community groups, savings clubs, and local agricultural networks are not just delivery vehicles — they are the institutional infrastructure of post-project resilience. Projects that treat them as subcontractors rather than partners miss the most important investment they can make. Planning for this from day one means asking, at design stage, who will carry this work after we leave and what they need to be able to do so.

Peacebuilding and social cohesion belong in agricultural project design in FCS. Several panelists and participants noted that social cohesion was either absent from original designs or arrived as an afterthought. In DRC, deliberate investment in conflict resolution skills produced outcomes that no agricultural indicator captures but that matter enormously to whether project gains hold. In South Sudan, identifying the drivers of conflict in project areas and investing in addressing them was described as directly creating peace. These are not peripheral activities — in FCS contexts, they are often what determines whether everything else works.

Sustainability must be designed in, not added later. Across all four case studies, the most durable results came from projects that treated exit strategy as a design requirement rather than a closing-phase document. This means concentrating investment where local institutions already exist or can be built, avoiding geographic dispersion that prevents depth of engagement, and linking project activities to local governance structures that have incentives to sustain them.

The hidden cost of layered supervision structures must be planned for, not discovered. Multi-tier implementation chains (task team → UN agency → local NGO → community) are often unavoidable in FCS contexts, but each layer absorbs management costs. These costs are legitimate and necessary — UN agencies bring reach, credibility, and security infrastructure that project task teams cannot provide on their own — but they need to be explicitly planned

and budgeted, with transparency about what proportion of project financing reaches final beneficiaries.

GAFSP is systematically underinvesting in youth in FCS contexts. The evaluation's finding that few projects explicitly target youth, despite widespread acknowledgment of their vulnerability in conflict environments, is an actionable gap. In FCS settings, young men without economic prospects are a recruitment pool for armed groups. Agricultural projects that create viable youth livelihoods — as Yemen demonstrates is possible — are also, implicitly, conflict prevention investments.