



ILO EVALUATION

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This evaluation has been conducted according to ILO's evaluation policies and procedures. It has not been professionally edited, but has undergone quality control by the ILO Evaluation Unit.

Some confidential information has been omitted (Aug. 2021).

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|------------|--|
| AAIDO | Afghanistan Almond Industry Development Organization |
| AFG | Afghani (the local currency of Afghanistan) |
| ANPDF | Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework |
| BCCI | Balkh Chamber of Commerce and Industry |
| BDS | Business Development Services |
| BEAM | Building Effective and Accessible Markets |
| CARD-F | Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development Facility |
| CPOs | Country Program Outputs |
| CSEC | Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children |
| CTA | Chief Technical Advisor |
| DAILs | Department for Agriculture, Irrigation and Livelihoods/Directorate of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock |
| DCED | Donor Committee on Enterprise Development |
| DoWA | Department of Women's Affairs |
| DOLSAMD | Department of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled |
| DWCP | Decent Work Country Program |
| DWT | Decent Work Team |
| FSPs | Financial Service Providers |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GET Ahead | Gender and Enterprise Together Ahead |
| GAP | Good Agriculture Practice |
| HQ | Headquarter |
| HR | Human Resources |
| IDPs | Internally Displaced People |
| ILO | International Labor Organization |
| ILO-ROAP | ILO Regional Office for Asia and Pacific |
| IPs | Implementing Partners |
| JICA | Japanese International Cooperation Agency |
| KIIs | Key Informants Interviews |
| MAIL | Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| M4P | Markets for Poor |
| MOLSAMD | Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs & Disabled |
| MOVs | Means of Verifications |
| MRM | Monitoring and Result Measurement |
| MSA | Market System Analysis |
| MSD | Markets System Development |
| MTE | Mid-Term Evaluation |
| MTR | Mid-Term Review |
| NHLP | National Horticulture and Livestock Program |
| NPPs | National Priority Program |
| PAC | Project Advisory Committee |
| PACA | Participatory Appraisal of Competitive Advantage |
| PPDs | Public Private Dialogues |
| RADP-North | Regional Agriculture Development Program – North |
| RMA | Rapid Market Appraisals |
| R2J | Road to Jobs project |
| SEDEP/GIZ | Sustainable Economic Development and Employment Promotion/ Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) German Development Agency |

| | |
|-------|---|
| SIDA | Swedish International Development Agency |
| SIYB | Start and Improve Your Business |
| SMEs | Small and Medium Enterprises |
| SMAF | Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework |
| TEVT | Technical Vocational Education and Training |
| ToRs | Terms of Reference |
| ToT | Training of Trainers |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Program |
| UNOPS | United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| WFP | World Food Program |

Executive Summary

Project Background and Context

The project “Road to Jobs: Bringing decent work to rural households of the Northern Provinces in Afghanistan” is funded by SIDA and is implemented by ILO Office in Mazar-i-Sharif/Balkh province. This is a three years’ Project which started its implementation in mid-2015 and will end in May 2018. Road to Jobs (R2J) follows a market systems approach to address important underlying constraints inhibiting better growth and employment outcomes, which in turn contribute to improving livelihoods and poverty reduction. R2J targets poor and vulnerable rural households and income earners, who work either in rural communities, or in urban centers and other major centers of employment.

The overall goal of the Road to Jobs (R2J) project is ‘More and better jobs in selected Northern Provinces [of Afghanistan] contribute to improved livelihoods and poverty reduction. The project also aims at addressing the underlying causes of poor market systems performance in selected agricultural sub-sectors, elaborated as expected outcomes 1-3 below:

- Outcome 1: Collaboration and co-ordination among local stakeholders for local economic development is improved;
- Outcome 2: The position of poor and disadvantaged groups within selected sub-sectors is improved; and
- Outcome 3: Access to and utilization of financial services by the farmers and disadvantaged groups improved.

Evaluation Purpose and Scope

The main purpose of this evaluation was to assess the continued relevance of the intervention and the progress made towards achieving its planned objectives, to identify any issues, challenges, new opportunities and to recommend possible adjustments to improve the project performance. The objective of the midterm evaluation was to identify where and how SIDA and the ILO can optimize their support to the Government of Afghanistan in the field of employment generation, with the aim to help Afghanistan create more and better jobs in selected Northern Provinces to contribute to the improved livelihoods and poverty reduction; besides taking into account the direct link of the Project with policy framework of Afghanistan.

The MTR has also assessed the relevance, coherence and validity of design, efficiency, effectiveness, gender, and progress of implementation of the ‘Road to Jobs’ Project. The evaluation has included all activities undertaken by the project from the start of the project mid-2015 to February 2017, and has covered all geographical coverage of the project (including counterparts and beneficiary institutions in both Balkh and Samangan provinces where the project is implemented. The gender dimension has also been considered as a cross-cutting concern throughout the methodology, deliverables and final report of the evaluation.

Evaluation Methodology

ILO’s policy guidelines for results-based evaluation (2nd edition) 2012 provides the basic framework; the evaluation was carried out according to ILO standard policies and procedures.

The evaluation adheres to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards on evaluation as well as to the OECD/DAC evaluation quality standards.

The OECD/DAC evaluation criteria consisting of the relevance, the validity of design, effectiveness and efficiency of resource used and gender integration into the project was applied. For each criterion, specific evaluation questions were developed to address the issues and concerns of the national constituents, stakeholders and ultimate beneficiaries.

A mixed method was employed in undertaking this evaluation, including; 1) Desk review, 2) In-depth interviews with stakeholders and project advisory committee, 3) Key informant interviews with project staff and consultants, and; 4) Interviews with direct (ultimate) beneficiaries.

Summary of Findings

The findings on the project achievements and outcomes have been derived from two types of sources used during the Mid-term Evaluation, the secondary sources, i.e. the project documents reviewed and primary sources, i.e. the data collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with all stakeholders and project staff.

Relevance: The project continued its relevance and responsiveness to the Afghanistan context, the need of constituents, stakeholders and the target groups and it was aligned with government priorities by addressing a number of areas related to the government priorities; like women rights and empowerment, development of agricultural sectors and skills development for establishing SMEs, and improving market systems and value chains. The project is also aligned with the newly defined National Priority Programs (NPPs) of Private Sector Development, Comprehensive Agriculture Development Program, and Women's Economic Empowerment Program. Stakeholder consultation workshops were also organized with different groups of stakeholders to ensure that their needs and priorities are taken into consideration and that those are incorporated into the R2J project interventions.

The aid effectiveness principles have been taken into account by the R2J project. As indicated in 1st and 2nd Progress Reports, the results are oriented with mutual accountability framework. A Monitoring and Results Measurement (MRM) system was in place that was designed based on Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) standard. Relevant guidelines, procedures, tools, reporting templates and elements were developed for the MRM system. An M&E plan was also developed, monitoring reports were prepared, but systematic monitoring visits and reports were not prepared based on M&E plan.

The project was being implemented in close collaboration with key stakeholders, and tripartite constituents. ILO-R2J conducted extensive consultations with all stakeholders in the provinces of Balkh and Samangan to bring them onboard and engage them in the project design, assessments and selection of interventions and adaptation of implementation modalities.

Beneficiary selection criteria were shared with implementing partners, and they selected beneficiaries. However, it requires further improvement as well as monitoring by R2J to ensure beneficiary selection is free of biases and that the poor and vulnerable groups are not excluded during selection.

In terms of selecting vulnerable groups, including poor, disabled, women, migrant workers, IDPs and children; the evaluation team found that these groups were not appropriately

included in the project interventions. However, this is in line with the M4P approach, not directly delivering services to the target groups but working with market players to address important underlying constraints inhibiting the way selected market systems function for the benefit of target groups.

It seems that some of the stakeholders were not engaged in the later stages of project implementation, and that sufficient progress and update was not shared with them. From the R2J side, they had developed news flashes including news, progress and update about different interventions and events of R2J, probably stakeholders were not able to access them or did not have time or interest to read them.

Coherence and Validity of Design: Despite a number of uncertainties, post-conflict situation, increasing insecurity moving to the Northern provinces, the project objectives are still valid and coherent. The impact indicators of; 1) Number of people recording a positive change in working conditions and/or incomes, (disaggregated by gender/poverty status/migrant status), 2) Net additional income accruing to target enterprises as a result of the program; and 3) The net additional employment created and sustained as a result of the program are very much compelling and the current as well as planned large scale interventions under R2J would be contributing to the achievement of these impact level indicators. Large scale interventions that are planned include development of the grapes and raisins, cotton and inputs supply sector value chains.

Two of the three outcomes that include outcome 1: Collaboration and coordination among local stakeholders for local economic development is improved; and outcome 2: The position of poor and disadvantaged groups within selected sub-sectors is improved. Many of the current activities such as the poultry buy-back scheme, production of milk, grape juice promotion (linking farmers with a factory to sell their grapes, and the factory supported by R2J to produce grape juice) and future activities of cotton, grape and raisin, and inputs supply sector value chains development are key to contributing to the achievement of these two outcomes; while the third outcome seems to be not very much valid. Outcome 3: Access to and utilization of financial services by the farmers and disadvantaged groups improved; R2J partnered with Agriculture Development Fund (ADF) to introduce eligible and interested farmers to obtain interest based loans from ADF, but farmers are not willing to receive funds due to the fact that these loans are not Sharia Compliant. Also, market distortion is another big challenge.

A Log frame was prepared before the project was launched, which was revised and improved during the Inception Phase. The Log frame adequately identified risks and assumptions too, yet the Logframe needed improvements in terms of establishing baselines, adding targets and milestones for indicators, and identifying reliable and practical means of verifications.

The capacity of various partners was taken into account in project implementation strategy through providing trainings and technical support. The project is helping the counterparts to build their capacity, however, capacity still remains a challenge within the governmental counterparts and tripartite constituents.

R2J considers capacity building a continuous process throughout the project implementation, and believes that strengthened capacity of counterparts and tripartite constitutes is a building block in achieving and sustaining viable results.

Project sustainability was spelled out in the revised project document, and it also defined a clear vision for sustainability and vision for project ownership by local stakeholders and tripartite constituents.

Effectiveness: It was revealed that some 40-60%¹ of outputs during the first and second year were implemented on time “Unsatisfactory”, with achievement of 60-80% of pre-defined milestones. Based on the indicators, it is likely that majority of outputs will be achieved by the end of the project.

For establishing collaboration mechanisms, Market for Poor (M4P) approach has been followed by R2J, and promoting Public Private Dialogues (PPDs) has also been taken into account. The R2J has promoted PPDs among different partners and stakeholders; and has brought together Private Sector, Beneficiaries, and different governmental entities to share their views, and plan together for interventions. The reluctant commitment level of government and lack of will was identified as a problem as well; but it can be improved through further engagement by R2J and participation by relevant governmental entities.

ILO-R2J has well managed the practice of knowledge management and lessons dissemination and visibility efforts on project branding. R2J developed news flashes that were distributed to all stakeholders and social partners, the news flashes were like monthly newsletters including information on events, trainings, development and progress of implementing interventions, and dissemination of lessons learned.

Efficiency: All project resources, including funding, human, time, expertise and other resources were strategically allocated to achieve project objectives; a detailed implementation plan for 2016 well elaborated budget and had specific allocation for each activity and objective.

ILO/R2J was also collaborating with donor funded projects working with the government like, CARD-F, NHLP, SNAPII, and SEDEP/GIZ, UNDP/Gender Empowerment and FARM/GIZ. ILO has also collaborated with Youth employment project in Kabul. ILO is also collaborating with government to finalize cotton policy.

Gender: The project conducted a gender assessment, and based on the assessment results, a gender strategy was developed and implemented. Gender was considered as a cross-cutting Theme at all the stages of project implementation and gender issues were also addressed in the reporting. The gender disaggregated data and information is available and adequately analyzed and reported in the project documents.

Lessons Learned

Main lessons learned included impressive stakeholders engagement that increased project ownership, commitment of stakeholders and sustainability. Project Advisory Committee was a substantially effective mechanism to engage and inform stakeholders. Moreover, capacity building of counterparts that increased their commitment and ownership of project results; engaging stakeholders in conducting assessments was also effective in building their capacities and reaching out to insecure areas where ILO-R2J staff could not travel. In addition, working through implementing partners increased the geographical reach of the project interventions and led to effectiveness and efficiency. On the other hand, Public Private

¹ First development cooperation progress report p13

Dialogues also increased collaboration and coordination; followed by collaborative interventions with other projects that leveraged financial resources for joint interventions.

Emerging Good Practices

Emerging good practices that yielded positive results through its application included: 1) stakeholders engagement that produced viable results including increased commitment and ownership of project by stakeholders, 2) capacity building of counterparts that cultivated and imparted knowledge about MSD and M4P among stakeholders; and 3) PPDs that increased collaboration and coordination.

Recommendations

1. Improve the MRM System, Conduct DCED Audit and Improve M&E Planning and Reporting

1-a: The Monitoring and Results Measurement (MRM) System needs further improvements. The MRM system should be further developed to ensure systematic measurement of outcome and impact level results. R2J should also delineate clearer and segregated responsibilities for the MRM officer and make sure that the MRM officer is not involved in the implementation of interventions.

1-b: ILO-R2J should conduct an audit of its Monitoring and Results Measurement System to ensure its compliance with the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED).

1-c: The Monitoring and Evaluation Plan and Monitoring Reports need to be strengthened. The current M&E plan includes major elements of an M&E plan, it is at the same time a list of major tasks to be undertaken, but it should clearly define assessments, visits and mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress towards achievement of impact and outcome level indicators.

2. Periodically Measure movement towards achieving Immediate Objectives

ILO-R2J should periodically assess its activities' contribution towards achievement of its immediate objectives. In other words, R2J should initiate monitoring of results, operationalize the Monitoring and Results Measurement system.

3. Revise and improve the Project Logical Framework

3-a: The project Logframe should be improved. Baselines for all indicators should be defined, as well as clear and disaggregated targets and time bound milestones should be defined, means of verification should be refined to ensure they are realistic. Frequency of data collection and reporting for each of the indicators should also be defined.

3-b: ILO-R2J should define clear targets for vulnerable groups, including IDPs, Migrant Workers, Disabled, Women, Returnees, etc.

4. Re-Assess Immediate Objective 3 (Outcome 3) of the Project

Project Objective 3 (Outcome 3) should be reassessed to ensure its validity. R2J should make sure this objective is realistic and achievable. There are little activities that support achievement of this objective; it should therefore be revised, down-graded, replaced or simply dropped.

5. Strengthen the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Administration

Project Advisory Committee (PAC) plays a vital role in steering project, providing insights and reviewing the progress. The terms of reference for PAC need to be revised to include clear roles, responsibilities, structures and authorities. PAC meetings should be conducted on regular basis and decisions made by PAC need to be monitored for implementation.

6. Beneficiary selection criteria should be improved, monitored for compliance by implementing partners; and mechanism for identification of vulnerable groups should be identified and implemented.

6-a: R2J should strengthen the process of selecting beneficiaries, ensuring that beneficiaries are selected from all different poor and vulnerable groups, including; IDPs, disabled, women, migrant workers, returnees and nomads. R2J should also monitor implementing partners processes used for beneficiary selection to ensure compliance with criteria.

6-b: ILO-R2J should define a comprehensive mechanism to systematically identify and target the poor and vulnerable groups, and the MRM system should ensure to record and report beneficiaries based on their status.

7. Engage and Inform Stakeholders; and development and implement a stakeholders' engagement mechanism

7-a: Stakeholders' engagement and involvement are crucial for promoting ownership, commitment and future sustainability. Therefore, ILO-R2J should strengthen engagement with stakeholders, in addition to news flashes, other mechanisms such as monthly or quarterly seminars should be organized to engage and inform stakeholders from the project progress. Progress reports should be made available in local languages to enable government stakeholders read them.

7-b: Although the project has well engaged stakeholders from the beginning, yet few stakeholders were not well engaged and informed, and some may have lost interest. R2J should develop a specific stakeholders' engagement mechanism to assess the perceptions of stakeholders periodically, as well as design and implement activities to increase the participation of all stakeholders. Disseminate specific information to each of the stakeholders, get their inputs, engage them in monitoring project activities, etc.

8. Develop Realistic Plans Considering Assumptions and Risks

ILO-R2J annual planning should be more realistic to ensure that planned outputs are implemented as intended. Mitigating measures should be defined to avoid delays in delivery pre-defined outputs. Assumptions and risks should also be taken into consideration when planning for activities.

9. Continue Building the Capacity of Counterparts

ILO-R2J should continue building the capacity of counterparts, including partners, stakeholders, tripartite constituents and social partners. Markets Systems Development (MSD) and Markets for Poor (M4P) are new approaches in Afghanistan, extensive capacity building and awareness raising are required for market players related to MSD and M4P.

10. Scale-up and Expand Markets System Development (MSD) Approach in other Provinces

ILO-R2J has demonstrated viable results in following the Markets System Development (MSD) and Markets for Poor (M4P) approaches in implementing the Road to Jobs project. It is recommended that ILO scale up and expands MSD approach in other secure provinces of Afghanistan; however, it should be contextualized to the extent possible to ensure that sustainable results are achieved.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1. Project Background

The project “Road to Jobs: Bringing decent work to rural households of the Northern Provinces in Afghanistan” is funded by SIDA and is implemented by ILO Kabul. This is a three years Project which started its implementation in mid-2015 and will end in May 2018.

‘Road to Jobs (R2J)’ aims to unleash the economic potential of the expanding rural road networks in Afghanistan, which has been supported by SIDA. The project will enhance competitive value chains connected by the road network through multi-faceted interventions that respond to the underlying constraints inhibiting pro-poor sector growth. Giving special attention to vulnerable and marginalized groups of Afghan society, including women, the project will build on knowledge from the recent JICA-ILO study on cross-country agriculture value chains.

It will draw on lessons from the successful model of a market development approach, as deployed with success elsewhere by SIDA-ILO, to promote market-driven, locally-owned strategies that build on the incentives and capacities of various public and private actors to change: and hence increase prospects for more and better jobs to be created and sustained, based on social dialogue at the local level.

Road to Jobs (R2J) follows a market systems approach to address important underlying constraints inhibiting better growth and employment outcomes, which in turn contribute to improving livelihoods and poverty reduction. Its impact indicators are:

- Number of people recording a positive change in working conditions and/or incomes, (disaggregated by gender/poverty status/migrant status).
- Net additional income accruing to target enterprises as a result of the program.
- The net additional employment created and sustained as a result of the program.

R2J targets poor and vulnerable rural households and income earners, who work either in rural communities, or in urban centers and other major centers of employment.

1.2 Overall Goal of the R2J Project

The overall goal of the Road to Jobs (R2J) project is ‘More and better jobs in selected Northern Provinces [of Afghanistan] contribute to improved livelihoods and poverty reduction’. *The project also aims at addressing the underlying causes of poor market systems performance in selected agricultural sub-sectors, elaborated as expected outcomes 1-3 below:*

- **Outcome 1:** Collaboration and co-ordination among local stakeholders for local economic development is improved;
- **Outcome 2:** The position of poor and disadvantaged groups within selected sub-sectors is improved; and
- **Outcome 3:** Access to and utilization of financial services by the farmers and disadvantaged groups improved.

2. Evaluation Background

2.1. Evaluation Purpose

The main purpose of this evaluation was to assess the continued relevance of the intervention and the progress made towards achieving its planned objectives, to identify any issues, challenges, new opportunities and to recommend possible adjustments to improve the project performance. At the end of the evaluation, a set of practical recommendations for immediate adoption/application have been made available for the remaining period of the Project.

2.2. Evaluation Objective

The objective of the midterm evaluation was to identify where and how SIDA and the ILO can optimize their support to the Government of Afghanistan in the field of employment generation, with the aim to help Afghanistan create more and better jobs in selected Northern Provinces to contribute to the improved livelihoods and poverty reduction.

The midterm evaluation also aimed to assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, potential sustainability and progress of implementation of the currently ongoing 'Road to Jobs' Project; to evaluate the quality of Project implementation so far; and to assess the Project's capacity to respond to the current situation and needs of the country, also in light of other ongoing initiatives in the field of employment generation, at the same time, taking into account the direct link of the Project with policy framework of Afghanistan.

The evaluation has focused on, and assessed the following:

- The assessment of the progress made whether the Project was likely to achieve its immediate objectives as well as contribute to the broader context of DWCP 2014-15, which is linked to the Country Program Outputs (CPOs) of 2014-15: AFG 128: Enhanced conducive environment for developing micro- and small enterprises; also assessed the progress made against the Project's immediate objectives, expected outputs, as well as the delivery of quality outputs.
- Evaluated to what extent the ILO has, in implementing the Project, respected the aid effectiveness principles of government ownership, alignment, harmonization, results-orientation and mutual accountability; and to come up with recommendations, if any, on how to improve (assess the appropriateness of the results framework and appropriateness of its indicators, targets and the overall M&E practices).
- Evaluated to what extent the ILO interacts with other Employment generation Projects and initiatives in order to avoid overlaps and contradictions; and to come up with recommendations, if any, on how to improve.
- Evaluated the management of the Project and Project-internal processes in view of yielding optimum results; in particular the number, qualification and use of staff dedicated to the Project; the Project internal financial management; the coherence of Project documents, Technical and Administrative Provisions; the communication between ILO, government agencies/ministries and other actors; the visibility of the Project and its results.

- Evaluated how the Project has engaged with the tripartite constituents (Government, employers' and workers' organizations) and the direct beneficiaries
- Assessed the internal and external factors that have contributed to the pace and quality of project implementation.
- Documented the lessons learned and identified possible reflection of learning into project implementation in terms of project formation (modification for better results).
- Identified what worked well and what didn't work, and why?

The adopted evaluation process was participatory. Knowledge and information obtained from the evaluation was used to form possible recommendations for the remaining period of the project. The evaluation also supports public accountability of the ILO.

2.3. Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation has included all activities undertaken by the project from the start of the project by mid-2015 to February 2017, and has covered all geographical coverage of the project (including counterparts and beneficiary institutions located both in Balkh and Samangan provinces.

The gender dimension has also been considered as a cross-cutting concern throughout the methodology, deliverables and final report of the evaluation. In terms of this evaluation, this implies involving both men and women in the consultation and evaluation analysis. Moreover the evaluators have reviewed data and information that is disaggregated by gender and assessed the relevance and effectiveness of gender-related strategies and outcomes to improve lives of women and men.

2.4. Clients and Users of the Evaluation

- ILO Project office in Kabul and ILO Liaison office for Afghanistan
- Government of Afghanistan
- Workers' and Employers' organizations
- ILO HQ and DWT-New Delhi
- Donor – SIDA
- ILO Regional Office for Asia and Pacific (ROAP)

3. Methodology of the Evaluation

ILO's policy guidelines for results-based evaluation (2nd edition) 2012 provides the basic framework; the evaluation was carried out according to ILO standard policies and procedures. The evaluation adheres to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards on evaluation as well as to the OECD/DAC evaluation quality standards.

The OECD/DAC evaluation criteria consisting of the relevance, the validity of design, effectiveness and efficiency of resource used and gender integration into the project was applied. For each criterion, specific evaluation questions were developed to address the issues and concerns of the national constituents, stakeholders and ultimate beneficiaries.

A mixed method was employed in undertaking this evaluation, including; 1) Desk review, 2) In-depth interviews with stakeholders and project advisory committee, 3) Key informant interviews with project staff and consultants, and; 4) Interviews with direct (ultimate) beneficiaries.

Figure 1 below illustrates the steps and process followed in undertaking this evaluation.

Figure 1: Evaluation Process model



3.1. Desk Review

Extensive review of relevant documents was conducted to assess the overall project achievements reflected in the documentation; the desk review included review of project inception report, work plan, progress reports, monitoring and evaluation reports and project logical framework, monitoring and results measurement manual, assessment reports, etc. Brief narrative of the desk/literature review is placed at annex 9.5.

3.2. Evaluability Assessment and Inception Report

Before starting the field mission, the inception report was prepared and submitted to the Evaluation Manager. The inception report covered details including study instruments, sampling and selection details, evaluation matrix, evaluation deliverables, limitations, detailed field mission plan and list of planned interviews, etc. In addition, the Evaluability Assessment report was prepared based on review of the documentation to assess whether project was evaluable or not, or to what extent the project is evaluable. The result of evaluability assessment was 1.78 weighted score that meant **“limited Evaluability and needs substantial improvement”**. The overall weighted score table of the Evaluability assessment is presented below.

Table 1: Evaluability Assessment –Weighted Score

| Evaluability Assessment Criteria (Areas) | Raw score | Weight | Weighted score |
|--|---|-------------|----------------|
| Objectives/Outcomes Score | 3.50 | 0.25 | 0.88 |
| Indicators Score | 1.17 | 0.25 | 0.29 |
| Baselines Score | 0.00 | 0.20 | 0.00 |
| Milestones Score | 0.00 | 0.10 | 0.00 |
| Risk Assumptions Scores | 3.33 | 0.15 | 0.50 |
| M&E plans | 2.33 | 0.05 | 0.12 |
| Composite Score | 1.72 | 1.00 | 1.78 |
| Score | Limited Evaluability needs substantial improvement | | |

3.3. Evaluation Matrix and Study Instrumentation

The evaluation criteria as proposed in the ToR was applied, consisted of the relevance, the validity of design, effectiveness and efficiency of resource used and gender integration into the project. For each criterion, some specific evaluation questions were suggested in the ToR to address the issues and concerns of the national constituents, stakeholders and ultimate beneficiaries, the evaluation team further refined the questions to ensure they are in line with the objectives of the evaluation.

Semi-structured questionnaires were developed to draw information related to various evaluation indicators based on the evaluation criteria and questions, and to enable the team to gather required data for the study. The questionnaires were kept simple to ensure that respondents understand the questions in order to deliver accurate responses. The questionnaires were finalized in close interaction with ILO team by incorporating feedback and comments.

The primary data was collected at three levels using three different types of questionnaires that included; Key Informant Interviews of project staff, semi-structured questionnaires/interviews of stakeholders, and beneficiaries.

Table 2: Evaluation Matrix

| S.N | Evaluation Criteria | Key Questions | Sub-questions |
|-----|---------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Relevance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The extent to which the project continued its relevance and responsiveness to address the issues and the needs of the constituents in Afghanistan. - Was a gender analysis included during the initial needs assessment of the project? - To what extent is the project perceived as an effort by the ILO to support Afghanistan in addressing the employment generation in provinces of Samangan and Balkh? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How has ILO aligned its R2J project interventions with those of the government priorities? - To what extent the aid effectiveness principles have been taken into account? - How are the results oriented with mutual accountability framework? - How has gender been mainstreamed at different phases of project? |
| 2 | Validity of design | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are the planned project design (outcomes, outputs, activities) relevant and realistic to the situation on the ground? And still address the stakeholders' needs that were identified? - Were the design and the project log frame valid? - Did the design identify risks and key assumption and whether the project has a mitigation strategy taking into account the situation of Afghanistan? - Which strategies has the project undertaken to address challenges? - How relevant and useful are the indicators and means of verification described in the project document and the M&E matrix for assessing the project's progress, results and impact? Are the means of verification appropriate? - To what extend was the ILO's gender mainstreamed strategy adequately and appropriately included in the project framework? - Was the capacity of various project's partners taken into account in the project's strategy and means of action? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are project outcomes, outputs and activities relevant to needs of constituents and ultimate beneficiaries? - Are the needs of stakeholders being met with R2J? - Is there M&E system in place, including valid Log frame? - Is there an M&E plan present? And has it been implemented, and are reports generated based on the M&E plan? - Are risks and assumptions identified, analyzed and adequate measures planned and taken to mitigate risks? - How are indicators identified? Do they correspond to the planned project impact and outcomes? Quality of indicators, and means of verification? - Are there baselines, targets and milestones defined for all indicators to allow for timely monitoring, evaluation and assessment of progress towards outcomes? - Do indicators allow for reporting gender disaggregated information? - Did the project involve government and other partners in all stages of the project, including |

| | | | |
|---|---------------|---|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did the project design adequately plan for an effective participation of governments and social partners (employers' organization and workers union)? - Is the implementation strategy used by the project effective to enhance the capacity of the counterparts? - Is the strategy for sustainability of impact defined clearly at the design stage of the program? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation? - Was the capacity of various partners taken into account in the project implementation strategy? - How has the project helped to build the capacity of counterparts? - Is a sustainability strategy clearly spelled out at the design stage of the project? |
| 3 | Effectiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has the project made progress towards achieving the immediate objectives as per the relevant indicators? - How is the project contributing to achieving the goal set by the government of Afghanistan on employment generation? - To what extent has the project contributed to achieving relevant outcomes in Afghanistan DWCP. - How have stakeholders including the social partners (employers' organization and workers union) been involved in project implementation? - Have the quantity and quality of the outputs produced been satisfactory? - To what extent has the project made strategic use of coordination and collaboration with other ILO projects, other development agencies and on-going initiatives of the government of Afghanistan to increase its effectiveness and impact? - What were the main challenges, constraints, problems and areas in achieving the results? - Assess how gender considerations have been mainstreamed throughout the project cycle (design, planning, implementation, M&E), including that of implementation partners. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the key achievements (tangible outputs) of R2J in relation to what was planned? - Is the project contributing to achieving the goal set by the government of Afghanistan on employment generation? If yes, how and in what nature? - What aspects of R2J contribute to ILO's DWCP outcomes? - Are stakeholders involved in project implementation? If yes, how and in what phases? - Is the quality and quantity of outputs produced satisfactory to stakeholders, partners and ultimate beneficiaries? - Did the project collaborate with other ILO projects for better coordination? - Did the project collaborate with other development agencies and ongoing initiatives of the government to increase its effectiveness and efficiency? - What are the main challenges, constraints and problems the project faced, and how those affected achievement of non-achievement of planned results? - Did ILO utilize any mechanism to coordinate among stakeholders and implementing partners? If yes, how? - Did ILO consider knowledge management and learning lessons? How have these been documented and reflected into |

| | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|--|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assess the ILO's role in coordinating the stakeholders and implementing partners. - To what extent the project has managed the practice of knowledge management and lessons dissemination and visibility effort on project branding. - How has the project been responding to the changing situation of the country and/or of the constituents and partners' priorities? - Do results (effects of activities and outputs) affect women and men differently? If so, why and in which way? | <p>project implementation? And, how are project lessons disseminated to stakeholders and partners to branding purposes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How flexible have the project been in terms of responding to changing situation of the country, as well as constituents and partners? - How results have affected men and women differently, if so, why and in which way? - What worked well, and what didn't work well, and why? |
| 4 | Efficiency of resource used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have the project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner? If not why? What mechanism has been put in place to mitigate the problems? - Have resources (funds, human resources, time, expertise etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve the project objectives? - How economically have the various inputs been converted into outputs and results? - The extent to which the project has leveraged resources/collaborated with other projects? - Were resources (funds, human resources, time, expertise, etc.) allocated strategically to achieve gender-related objectives? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How much staff is working on R2J project, distinguished by full-time and part-time, technical and support staff, as well as men and women? - How is the project doing in terms of timely achievement of planned outcomes, outputs and activities? - What means of value for money has been considered by ILO? - Did ILO leverage resources from other projects, if yes, how? - Are there any cost sharing by other projects, initiatives and government partners in catalyzing ILO interventions? |
| 5 | Gender | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has the project integrated gender equality as a cross-cutting concern throughout its methodology and all deliverables, including the final report? - Has the project ensured that an appropriate percentage of women have received the capacity building training, roughly related to their | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is gender integrated into the project? - Is gender considered as a cross-cutting theme across the project implementation and reporting? - Is gender disaggregated data and information available and adequately analyzed? - Has the project defined capacity building targets for women? - What basis have ILO used to define gender related targets? |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | | percentage of employment in the industry? | |
|--|--|---|--|

3.4. Sampling

For interviews of the project staff, no sampling was drawn; all project staff was supposed to be interviewed, and for interviews of stakeholders and partners, purposive sampling method was used for selection of interviewees. While for interviews of the beneficiaries, convenience sample was proposed by ILO staff and followed by the evaluation team due to time limitation as scheduled, insecure conditions in village for evaluation team, need for hiring of additional local staff and time extension in case of proper sampling of all types of target beneficiaries. However, the proposed list of target groups with sites was provided by ILO team that was supposed to be interviewed. As per ILO team's facilitation and arrangement of the proposed target groups, the evaluation team carried out the interviews accordingly.

Information on the sampling, number of interview with different types of target groups, and percentage of the response has been provided in the following table.

Table 3: No. of interviews (By type of target groups)

| Type of target groups | Planned | Achieved |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Project staff | 8 | 6 |
| Stakeholders | 18 | 16 |
| Beneficiaries | 12 | 3 |
| Total | 38 | 25 |
| Response rate | | 66% |

Gender disaggregated information on number of interviews and different types of target groups have been given in the following table.

Table 4: Gender of interviewed respondents (By type of target groups)

| Type of target groups | | Male | Female | Total |
|-----------------------|---|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Project staff | N | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| | % | 67 | 33 | 100 |
| Stakeholders | N | 13 | 3 | 16 |
| | % | 81 | 19 | 100 |
| Beneficiaries | N | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| | % | 0 | 100 | 100 |
| Total | N | 17 | 8 | 25 |
| | % | 68 | 32 | 100 |

3.5. Primary Data Collection/Interviews

The field mission/primary data collection in Balkh and Samangan provinces of Afghanistan was carried out in the month of February 2017. During field mission, information was gathered through semi structured interviews of project staff, stakeholders, project partners, and beneficiaries.

3.5.1. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Key Informant Interviews were conducted with project staff and consultants; consultants seconded to the project from other ILO projects and staff of the HQ. The KIIs assisted the evaluation team in determining different processes undertaken during the project design, planning, implementation and selection criterion for target areas and beneficiaries. KIIs also revealed information on project collaboration with different constituents, stakeholders and local communities to increase project ownership and sustainability.

3.5.2. In-depth Interviews with Stakeholders and Project Advisory Committee

In-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders and project advisory committee members, these interviews were conducted through semi-structured questionnaires to assess the level of coordination with stakeholders, involvement of stakeholders in different stages of project, including design, selection of target areas, selection of target groups, implementation of interventions, as well as monitoring and evaluation of activities.

3.5.3. Interviews with Direct (ultimate) Beneficiaries

The evaluation team also conducted only 3 proposed interviews with 3 direct (ultimate) beneficiaries (Milk Producer of Dairy Production Sector) of the project on telephone, due to time and security constraints as well no significant interventions in supporting direct beneficiaries until the evaluation period, the team was unable to approach inclusive ultimate beneficiaries for their interviews.

3.6. Data Compilation, Organization and Data Analysis

Data processing and management of completed semi-structured questionnaires was done in Ms. Excel, all data was compiled and organized in Excel due to relatively small sample size that was easily manageable. Analysis and graphs were also prepared in Excel for the quantitative data; while qualitative data was analyzed through identification of patterns and similarities in responses by the evaluation team without using any specialized software.

3.7. Preparation and Finalization of Evaluation Report

The draft report was prepared by the evaluation team and submitted to the Evaluation Manager for feedback and comments. After receiving comments, the draft report was revised by incorporating the ILO feedback and comments into the report.

3.8. Evaluation Limitations

There are always limitations in conducting evaluations, especially in conservative and fragile states like Afghanistan. There were a number of limitations; Main limitations have been discussed as following.

1. **Insecurity to visit project sites:** Due to insecurity, the evaluation team was unable to visit those project sites where the beneficiaries were residing, a number of interventions were delivered in some districts that were no-go for UN, for example, 1,500 women trained in Dawlatabad district of Balkh in dairy production were not accessible to the evaluation team, therefore; 3 telephonic interviews were conducted conveniently.

2. **Inaccessibility of women beneficiaries for interviews:** Evaluation team tried to invite women to provincial center for interviews to ensure that women are also included in the evaluation and that their voices are heard. Due to cultural sensitivity, women were not willing to come to provincial centers or meet with male staff. However, the evaluation team conducted some interviews of direct beneficiaries through telephone.
3. **Complete Lists of Evaluation Sampling Frame was not shared:** For proper sampling, complete list of all stakeholders, and ultimate direct and indirect beneficiaries with details of project sites was not shared by the ILO team. Thus, the evaluation team was not able to select intervention sites and target respondents with the approach of simple random or systematic sampling. However, the selected stakeholders and beneficiaries were proposed by the ILO team for interview purpose and then the purposive list of the target groups with sites was followed accordingly.
4. **Documents for Desk Review:** Tentative list of all project documents, including the documents itself was not prepared in advance for the evaluation, the evaluation team had to struggle with obtaining all required documents for the desk review, ultimately; some of the documents were not shared or were unavailable.
5. **Limited Evaluability of Project:** The project Evaluability assessment revealed that the project was not fully evaluable. The Evaluability assessment concluded “Limited Evaluability needs substantial improvement”. Therefore, reflecting a complete picture of the project would be burdensome through this evaluation report; however, this report presents the best possible reflection from the project on the ground.
6. **Limited time was given for planning the evaluation:** Only a week time was given for desk review, preparing the inception report, conducting Evaluability assessment, and developing and finalizing the evaluation instruments.

4. Project Status and Main Findings

The findings presented under this section are categorized based on the evaluation criterion of; 1) Relevance, 2) Coherence and Validity of Design, 3) Effectiveness, 4) Efficiency, and; 5) Gender.

This section of the report discusses the project status, outputs, outcomes and its impact as emerged from the evaluation findings. The findings on the project achievements and outcomes have been derived from two types of sources used during the MTE, the secondary sources, i.e. the project documents reviewed, and primary sources, i.e. the data collected through KIIs conducted with all stakeholders, project staff and beneficiaries.

Cumulative presentation of stakeholders perceptions have also been presented in the last part of this section.

4.1. Relevance

The project continued its relevance and responsiveness to the Afghanistan context, the need of constituents, stakeholders and the target groups.

Specifically, ILO has aligned R2J project with government priorities by addressing a number of areas related to the government priorities; like, women rights and empowerment, development of agricultural sectors and skills development for establishing SMEs, and improving market systems and value chains, etc. R2J project activities are aligned with the newly defined National Priority Programs (NPPs) of Private Sector Development, Comprehensive Agriculture Development Program, and Women's Economic Empowerment Program.²

All project stakeholders and tripartite constituents interviewed confirmed that the project is in line with the needs of the government, and that the project complements government role too, and that it is also in accordance with the needs of communities and target groups.

All project staff interviewed also confirmed that current project interventions are in line with those of the government priorities and the needs of the ultimate beneficiaries, and that the needs and priorities of government and stakeholders were incorporated into the R2J project through consultations with stakeholders to select any interventions under R2J. Stakeholder workshops or consultative workshops were also organized with different groups of stakeholders to ensure that their needs and priorities are taken into consideration and that those are incorporated into the R2J project interventions.

The aid effectiveness principles have been taken into account by the R2J project. As indicated in 1st and 2nd Progress Reports, the results are oriented with mutual accountability framework. Continued stakeholder engagement is a key for gaining trust and understanding among market actors.

A comprehensive MRM³ system was in place that was designed based on Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) standard, relevant guidelines, procedures, tools, reporting templates and elements were developed for the MRM system. However, based on the assessment of the MRM system, it required more work to operationalize the system and

² Findings from literature review: Project work plan, and progress reports for Years 1 and 2

³ Literature Review: MRM System manual, guideline and tools, intervention guides and monitoring reports

measure results at outcome and impact levels. Project staff confirmed that MRM system is a live system and they are building on it, and that they are also learning from the step by step approach of developing the MRM system. Currently, R2J was also planning to carry out an audit of their MRM system by DCED to ensure that it meets all DCED requirements.

The project⁴ was being implemented in close collaboration with key stakeholders, and tripartite constituents. ILO-R2J conducted extensive consultations with all stakeholders in the provinces of Balkh and Samangan to bring them onboard and engage them in the project design, assessments, and selection of interventions and adaptation of implementation modalities. Project Advisory Committee (PAC) was established from key stakeholders, including Directorate of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (DoLSAMD), Balkh Chamber of Commerce and Industries (BCCI) and Balkh Labor Union. The primary responsibilities of the PAC included advisory, provision of inputs in the project and intervention designs, selection of target areas and monitoring project progress. However, only one meeting of PAC was held in November 2016, and three meetings were suggested per year in the first meeting in November 2016, but those meetings didn't take place. The ToR for PAC was not shared with the Evaluation team, an explicit structure, roles, responsibilities and authorities of PAC were not clearly delineated.

In order to integrate gender into project, a Gender Assessment Study was carried out and on the basis of the findings of that study; a comprehensive Gender Strategy was prepared and implemented. A number of women specific interventions were also designed, some of which were the quick-wins, including training of women on milk production in Dawlatabad district of Balkh province. ILO-R2J had also partnered with one of the USAID funded programs called Rural Agriculture Development Program North (RADP-N) to deliver Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) and Get Ahead trainings to women entrepreneurs. R2J's role was mainly to train the trainers, and RADP-N taking from there to deliver actual trainings to women entrepreneurs in eight northern target provinces of RADP-North that also includes R2J target provinces of Balkh and Samangan.⁵

Beneficiaries were selected based on pre-defined criteria. The criterion included; 1) the beneficiaries should have been one of the target beneficiaries of the project as stipulated in the project document, 2) they should be in the target provinces of Balkh and Samangan, and in the target districts of these two provinces. However, a detailed criterion was not shared with the evaluation team for each of the beneficiary type. Project beneficiaries' selection was done through looking at the initial project documents, then looking at Rapid Market Appraisals (RMAs), Participatory Analysis for Competitive Advantage (PACA), and Markets Systems Analysis (MSAs) and design of interventions.⁶

Moreover, the beneficiary selection criteria were shared with implementing partners who were implementing R2J interventions, and the implementing partners were selecting the beneficiaries. Compliance with the R2J criteria for beneficiaries' selection was not confirmed and ensured by the MRM system, and there was not a systematic monitoring to ensure adherence to beneficiary's selection criteria.⁷

⁴ Interviews with project staff and stakeholders

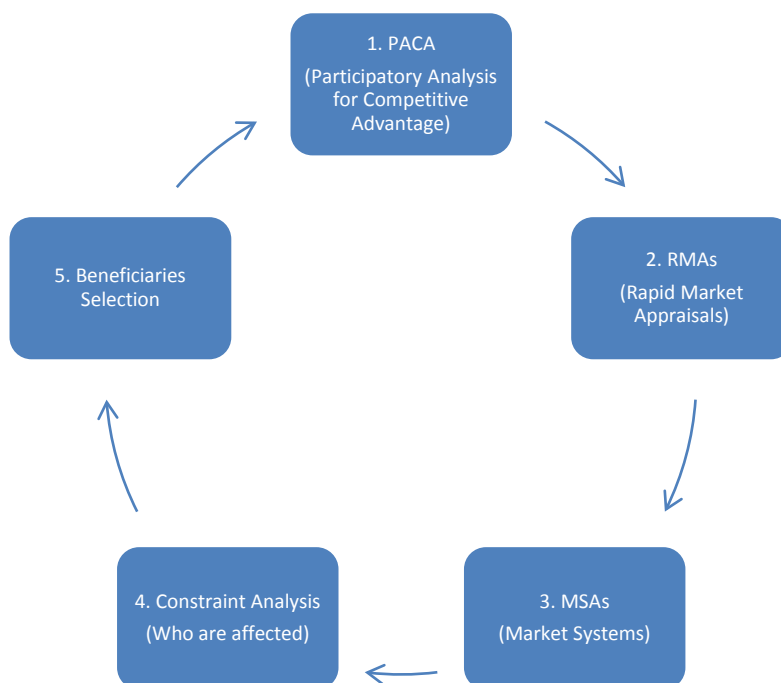
⁵ Literature review: Gender assessment report and gender strategy

⁶ Finding from Key Informant Interviews with Project Staff

⁷ Findings from interviews with Implementing Partners

The overall process for identification of beneficiaries was followed as per figure 4 below. The figure illustrates a very comprehensive methodology for identification of prospective beneficiaries, but lacks systematic approach for selection of beneficiaries. However, following the principle of M4P approach, then it focuses on market players rather than target groups. Beneficiary selection Process has been shown in the diagram below:

Figure 2: Beneficiary selection Process



In terms of selecting vulnerable groups, including poor, disabled, women, migrant workers, IDPs, and children; the evaluation team found that these groups were not appropriately included in the project interventions. This is in line with the M4P approach, not directly delivering services to the target groups, but working with market players to address important underlying constraints inhibiting the way selected market systems function for the benefit of target groups. Covering the evaluation period, R2J is unable to identify how many disabled, migrant workers, IDPs and poor have benefited from the project, and it aims that many of these groups will benefit once large scale interventions reach its potential to deliver results, such as the cotton sector value chain development.

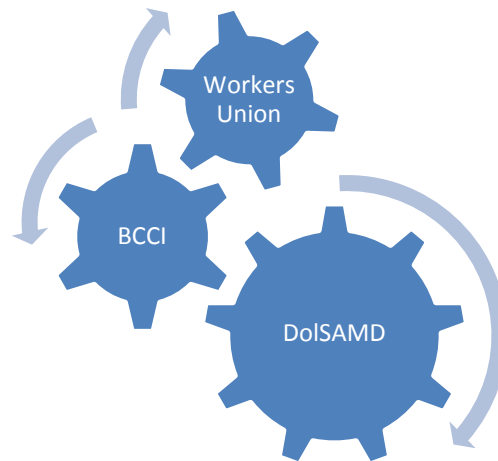
During the first 18 months the project primary focus was on identifying economic activities, conducting Rapid Market Appraisals, Participatory Analysis for Competitive Advantage, and Markets Systems Assessments (MSAs); extensive consultations were convened with all stakeholders and tripartite constituents; interventions were identified; and some quick-wins were also identified and implemented.

The current reporting practices within R2J considered reporting and disaggregation by men and women, but it lacked disaggregation by other vulnerable groups such as IDPs, Migrant Workers, Returnees, and Disabled. R2J also did not have clear targets for these vulnerable groups, and said that once economic activities are implemented and actual services delivered;

it would then be valid to say how many from each of the target groups could be targeted and have benefited from the different interventions.⁸

The tripartite constituents are shown in figure 5 below; the most responsive among them was BCCI.

Figure 3: The tri-partite constituents



The preparatory work⁹, planning, assessments and selection and design of interventions were very comprehensive. It engaged all stakeholders and tripartite constituents; the stakeholders seemed to be very satisfied from the level of engagement by R2J in the initial phases of R2J project. Very good assessments have been conducted by R2J, these assessments have also helped BCCI to understand the market and have data for their own decision making and programming. However, it seems that some of the stakeholders were not engaged in the later stages of project implementation, and that sufficient progress and update was not shared with them. From the R2J side, they had develop news flashes, including news, progress and update about different interventions and events of R2J, probably stakeholders were not able to access them or did not have time or interest to read them. Alternative approaches for engaging and keeping stakeholders informed may be sought.

4.2. Coherence and Validity of Design

Despite a number of uncertainties, post-conflict situation, increasing insecurity moving to the Northern provinces, the project objectives are still valid and coherent. The impact indicators of; 1) Number of people recording a positive change in working conditions and/or incomes, (disaggregated by gender/poverty status/migrant status), 2) Net additional income accruing to target enterprises as a result of the program; and, 3) The net additional employment created and sustained as a result of the program, are very much compelling and the current as well as planned large scale interventions under R2J would be contributing to the achievement of these impact level indicators. Large scale interventions that are planned

⁸ Findings from interviews with R2J Project Staff

⁹ Findings from interviews with project stakeholders

include development of the grapes and raisins sector, cotton sector, and sheep and goats sector.¹⁰

Two of the three outcome indicators are also valid, that include outcome 1: Collaboration and coordination among local stakeholders for local economic development is improved; and outcome 2: The position of poor and disadvantaged groups within selected sub-sectors is improved. Many of the current activities, such as the poultry buy-back scheme, production of milk, grape juice promotion (linking farmers with a factory to sell their grapes, and the factory supported by R2J to produce grape juice) and future activities of cotton, grape and raisin, sheep and goats sectors development are key to contributing to the achievement of these two outcomes; while the third outcome indicator seems to be not very much valid. . **Outcome 3: Access to and utilization of financial services by the farmers and disadvantaged groups improved;** R2J partnered with Agriculture Development Fund (ADF) to introduce eligible and interested farmers to obtain interest based loans from ADF, but farmers are not willing to receive funds due to the fact that these loans are not Sharia Compliant. Also, market distortion is another big challenge, mostly other projects and donors provide free services or equipment to farmers, such as trellising for vineyards, provision of other equipment or services to farmers free of charge or with some contribution from the beneficiaries. Farmers are therefore largely not willing to get something on loan or get loan and buy anything for their farming, because those goods and services may be provided for free or subsidized by other projects or donors.¹¹

Therefore, outcome 3 looks more of an irrelevant indicator based on situation on the ground, and reality of farmers that many are not interested in non-sharia compliant loans.

Moreover, project activities are in line with those of the government priorities, and the needs of ultimate beneficiaries. It has also been confirmed by the project staff, stakeholders and tripartite constituents.¹² The major needs of stakeholders, especially government counterparts and the tripartite constituents include development of the private sector, creating more jobs, developing agriculture sector and specific agriculture value chains, and supporting small and medium sized enterprises. All of these sectors are being addressed by R2J through various interventions. Some of the interventions include:

- Chicken buy-back scheme
- Milk production (Dairy sector value chains development)
- Supporting the development of cotton sector value chains
- Support grapes and raisins' value chains development
- Almond sector development (value chain development)
- Supporting enterprises, including grape juice producer, 79 ton of grapes were purchased by the company from farmers and 2.2 tons from the market, it was processed in grape juice and about 48 tons of grape juice was sold by Hamid Sadaat company that was supported through R2J
- Supporting farmers to access credit (however, not so promising that farmers will get non-sharia compliant loans)

¹⁰ Literature review: assessment of the Logframe, project work plan and revised project document that was further revised during the inception period.

¹¹ Findings from interviews with stakeholders, specifically Agriculture Development Fund (ADF)

¹² Findings from interviews with project staff, stakeholders and tripartite constituents.

- Organic fertilizers production from chicken compost (conserving environment, creating jobs and sustaining a business)

A Log frame was prepared before the project was launched, which was revised and improved during the Inception Phase. The Log frame adequately identified risks and assumptions too. Risks and assumptions were also identified in the project document, and were considered in a changing context of Afghanistan. However, the following elements were missing in the project Logframe:

- Baseline values were not identified for indicators that needed baselines, however, a tool for collecting baselines was shared with the evaluation team, but the actual values were not present in the Project Logframe;
- Specific life of project targets were missing in the Logframe for all indicators;
- Milestones were not defined for each of the indicators' targets;
- Means of verification for some of the indicators were referring to impact surveys, but there were no such plans to conduct impact surveys;
- Frequency of data collection and reporting were not identified for each of the indicators; and
- There were too many output level indicators that maybe difficult to manage reporting against them.

In general¹³, the impact level indicators are valid and coherent with project activities; as well as two of the three outcome level indicators are also valid. Quality of indicators was satisfactory, while means of verification needed further refinement. And, the indicators allowed for reporting gender disaggregated information in the Progress and M&E reports. And, ILO gender mainstreamed strategy was also embedded.

A comprehensive Monitoring and Results Measurement (MRM) system was in place which is based on DCED standard. Intervention guides have been prepared for each of the quick-win and other planned interventions, the guidelines detail the activities entailed in the intervention, as well as include targets, means of verification and approaches of implementation. The DCED based MRM system was theoretically very strong, but in terms of its implementation it lacked systematic mechanism, the MRM officer was also overloaded with activities of MRM, and was also involved in implementation of one of the interventions.¹⁴

A Monitoring and Evaluation Plan was developed based on the MRM system. The major elements of the M&E plan included; 1) indicators, 2) target units for monitoring, 3) data collection methodologies, 4) responsible person for monitoring, and 5) audience for the use of M&E reports. However, specific timeline was not identified regarding what M&E activity will be done when, and what will be the output of that specific M&E activity.¹⁵

The capacity of various partners was taken into account in project implementation strategy through providing trainings and technical support; the project is helping the counterparts to build their capacity. However, capacity still remains a challenge within the governmental counterparts and tripartite constituents, but it was adequately considered by R2J as a building block for achieving and sustaining viable results. Moreover, R2J also taken into consideration

¹³ Literature review: Revised project Logframe

¹⁴ Literature review: MRM Manual, guide and tools were reviewed

¹⁵ Literature review: M&E Plan was reviewed

in the capacity of its implementing partners, and have continuously imparted knowledge about Markets System Development, Markets for Poor (M4P) and other successful approaches followed in the R2J project.

Capacity building of counterparts was at the center of the project, R2J continuously worked with all counterparts from the public and private sector to build their capacities. Special capacity building workshops were organized for counterparts to impart knowledge related to the project and the approaches followed in the project implementation strategies. Moreover, overseas trainings were also provided to three staff members of the three tripartite constitutes; the DoLSAMD, BCCI and Workers Union. The trainings were in Zambia.

There are also challenges related to capacity building, specially related to the public sector. ILO-R2J is interested to send more of the counterparts to trainings abroad, but many of the counterparts hardly speak English and ILO-R2J was not sure what and how much will they learn if they can't speak English.

The involvement of different stakeholders throughout the project design, gender mainstreaming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, outcomes and sustainability process was viable. R2J adequately involved different stakeholders in the design, planning and assessment phases of the project. This was also confirmed by project staff, stakeholders and tripartite constituents. One of the stakeholders said that before R2J they didn't know about many other projects that were operating in Balkh province, but after R2J started their activities, now they are connected to everyone, coordination has been increased and there has been enhanced effectiveness and efficiency.¹⁶

Stakeholders' Engagement Process has been explained in the following diagram:

Figure 4: Stakeholders' Engagement Process Diagram



Project sustainability was spelled out in the revised project document, and it also defined a clear vision for sustainability and vision for project ownership by local stakeholders and tripartite constituents. The sustainability focused on incentivizing and capacitating permanent market players to change the way they do business; and once the impact of

¹⁶ Findings from interviews with staff, stakeholders and tripartite constituents

project is demonstrated, assuming that local partners will continue implementing the activities; which is a prominent and successful approach in sustainability considerations. Specially in the context of Markets System Development, since the primary audience of interventions in the project is different players (public and private); therefore, the sustainability prospects heavily rely on the players, and players also see a benefit for themselves in continuing activities and creating more jobs.¹⁷

Few stakeholders did not have enough information about R2J project, and they also seemed not very much involved in the project. These stakeholders also stated that once things are done by R2J then they are informed, and that they are not informed in the design stage of interventions and extensive consultations. However, there are always challenges when working with many stakeholders, the interests of all are not the same and it is also difficult to satisfy the needs of everyone, particularly when there is also lack of interest from some of the stakeholders.

It is common that some stakeholders do not send the same people as focal points to the project consultation workshops and meetings, they rather send different people every time, and there is also lack of mechanisms within stakeholders' organizations to systematically share information with each other if they attend an event.¹⁸

One¹⁹ of the tripartite constituents was also not well aware of R2J project activities and said that he is not well aware of what R2J is doing, despite being one of the tripartite constituents. It is a two-way effort to fully engage stakeholders, R2J's responsibility is to engage them, and then the responsibility of stakeholders is to participate in the engagements, ILO-R2J invites all stakeholders to every meeting, but sometimes the stakeholders do not appear to the events and meetings, and sometimes they send irrelevant persons from their organizations who are unaware of the R2J activities, and they can't learn from it, as well as, they can't share with their superiors what they have learned from the events, meetings or workshops.

The Evaluation team also assessed stakeholders' perceptions related to overall satisfaction from R2J, satisfaction from coordination and satisfaction from inclusion of women voices. The overall satisfaction was rated 3 out of 5, satisfaction from coordination was also 3 out of 5, while satisfaction from inclusion of women voices in the project was 2 out of 5, where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest rating.²⁰

Many of the stakeholders²¹ think that ILO-R2J did plan activities for the poor, but they have not planned visible activities to include vulnerable groups, such as the IDPs, Returnees, Migrant Workers and Disabled. However, ILO-R2J states that the focus of activities is on the market players and the way they work, once the market players benefit from the interventions, then job creation will start for different categories of people in various value chains, and only then we will know how many from each of the vulnerable groups are employed. Stakeholders also think that not many jobs have been created on the ground yet, but they are assuming that with the new activities in the cotton, grapes and raisins and inputs supply sector value chains more jobs will be created.

¹⁷ Findings from literature review

¹⁸ Findings from interviews with stakeholders

¹⁹ Findings from interview with tripartite constituents

²⁰ Survey of the stakeholders during presentation of initial results of evaluation in a stakeholder workshop, findings are based on perceptions of stakeholders

²¹ Findings from interviews with project stakeholders and tripartite constituents

4.3. Effectiveness

This section of the report assesses the effectiveness of ILO-R2J project. The main focus is to assess the progress made in relation to what was planned. From the review of documents, it was revealed that some 40-60%²² of outputs during the first and second year were implemented on time “Unsatisfactory”, achieving 60-80% of pre-defined milestones. While 60-80% of reporting periods’ milestones were achieved. Based on the indicators, it is likely that majority of outputs will be achieved by the end of the project.

Major achievements and tangible output delivery from the project inception up to the evaluation period, i.e. February 2017, are summarized as following:

- Project Advisory Committee (PAC) established.
- Completed six Rapid Market Appraisals (RMAs)
- Trained 12 representatives from stakeholders’ organizations as facilitators to assist in the convening of Participatory Appraisals for Competitive Advantage (PACA).
- Identified 12 quick-wins through PACA in six agricultural sub-sectors of cotton, sheep and goats, poultry, vegetables, almonds and grapes.
- Completed three Markets Systems Analysis (MSAs) for grapes and raisins, cotton and inputs supply.
- 19 interventions were designed, 12 were selected as quick-wins and the implementation of five of the 12 initiated in collaboration with stakeholder working groups, that included:
 - Conversion of chicken litter to organic fertilizer.
 - Dairy development to benefit women farmers.
 - Chicken buy-back scheme to support poultry farmers.
 - Improving farmer access to good quality livestock medicines.
 - Improving the quality of exported almonds.
- A financial mapping study was finalized.
- A gender assessment was conducted and a gender strategy was also developed.
- Child labor assessment was conducted in the provinces of Balkh and Samangan.

The achievement of outcomes could not be assessed, however; contribution to one of the outcomes is very prominent, and that is outcome 1: Collaboration and co-ordination among local stakeholders for local economic development is improved. R2J implemented a number of activities in support of achieving this outcome, most importantly; the extensive engagement of stakeholders have well paved the way for improved coordination among local stakeholders, this was also confirmed by some of the stakeholders that before R2J they didn’t know about activities of many other organizations, but after R2J started activities, they are now so much connected with different stakeholders.

Related to Immediate Objective 2: The position of poor and disadvantaged groups within selected sub-sectors is improved; five quick-wins have been piloted. However, not too many poor have benefited from these quick-wins due to their limited geographic and programmatic scope.

²² First Development Cooperation Report, p13

In terms of Immediate Objective 3: Access to and utilization of financial services by the farmers and disadvantaged groups improved. Only a financial mapping study was conducted, collaboration mechanisms are agreed with Agriculture Development Fund (ADF) and farmers are introduced to ADF to get loans, but so far no loans were disbursed by ADF to farmers.

Moreover, systematic assessment is required to gauge and measure the progress towards achievement of project immediate objectives. It is likely that objective 1 and 2 will be achieved by the end of project, but achievement of objective 3 is not likely.

With reference to the effectiveness of the R2J project, at some points, the needs of BCCI are met, for example, promoting cotton and cotton seed oil and promoting grapes. These are in line with the needs. But, the results produced are inadequate at this point of time; however, it is likely that more results would be produced that would meet the expectations of stakeholders.²³

The trainings of the Para-Vets were rated as very useful, and the livestock sector assessment conducted by R2J was also very realistic and helpful to learn about transferable disease, parasites, etc. Women livestock farmers also benefited from Para-vets services, 50% of Para-vets clients are women. After the training supported by R2J, the Para-Vets have vaccinated about 10,000 livestock. The vaccination of animals has increased 10% after they have received training. The reason is that now they know when to do vaccinations, and also encourage livestock farmers for preventive actions. They plan to target 400 farmers in 2017 with 15,000 livestock estimated. Most of the people who received services are said to be poor.

Insecurity is likely to be a persistent concern throughout the project, and will slow down implementation. Difficulties are being faced in inter-agency coordination and due to lack of constituents or implementing partner commitment; capacity and ownership. The approach followed by most other projects creates expectations among market players and target beneficiaries that run counter to R2J's facilitation strategy. The socio-economic and political environment in Afghanistan is a major determining factor. Finally, the overall situation in the target provinces, with regard to security, access to markets, infrastructure, capacity of market players, and market players' expectations is not conducive to quick wins.²⁴

Finding like-minded partners is also another challenge. Roll out and scale up may not be as spontaneous as R2J would like it to be, because the market actors and investors are just too cautious. Sometimes partners half-heartedly commit with the expectation that R2J project will give them money at some point during the course of the implementation of the pilot. ILO is using the required mechanisms and taking measures for improving coordination, through assuring their involvement in project activities, R2J mainly facilitates investments by private sector and puts many where it is difficult for the investor to invest, or the cost is unusual for the investors, for example, R2J helps in recruiting an advisor to develop a business plan for an investor, or trains their staff on how to operate a machinery, or takes care of other costs that are burden for the investor, but does not put money to initiate something from the scratch for the investor which may not be sustainable in the future.²⁵

For establishing collaboration mechanisms, Market for Poor (M4P) approach has been followed by R2J, and promoting Public Private Dialogues (PPDs) has also been taken into

²³ Findings from interviews with stakeholders

²⁴ Findings from literature review

²⁵ Findings from interviews with project staff, consultants and implementing partners

account. The R2J has promoted PPDs among different partners and stakeholders; and has brought together Private Sector, Beneficiaries, and different governmental entities to share their views, and plan together for interventions. The reluctant commitment level of government and lack of will was identified as a problem, as well; but it can be improved through further engagement by R2J and participation by relevant governmental entities.²⁶

ILO-R2J made maximum efforts to engage all partners, stakeholders and tripartite constituents in the project implementation. These engagements and involvements were in the form of consultation workshops, meetings and trainings. The most effective involvement of stakeholders was training of 12 representatives from 12 different stakeholders as PACA facilitators, these representatives of stakeholders were from governmental entities, including tripartite constituents who led PACA processes in the areas that were not reachable to ILO due to insecurity, and they have also assisted ILO-R2J in conducting assessments in insecure areas that ILO staff were not allowed to travel. This involvement have resulted in two important aspects, first, the capacity of these stakeholders was built, subsequently, these stakeholders felt involved and increased the sense of ownership for future project sustainability.

Moreover, R2J also presented all PACA, RMA and MSA findings to stakeholders for the sake of validation of findings and consultations, and have also designed the quick-win interventions in close collaboration with stakeholders, including social partners. ILO-R2J also extensively promoted Public Private Dialogues, these are very important to understand context, widen understanding and decrease differences of opinions of stakeholders in implementing viable interventions that will result in economic growth and creation of jobs.²⁷

R2J also built collaboration with other ILO projects, and have made strategic use of those collaboration and coordination. R2J worked with Lab project in Geneva and received assistance from them in establishing the MRM system, and have also collaborated with a training and entrepreneurship project in Turin/Italy. In addition to collaboration and coordination with other ILO projects, R2J have also well collaborated its efforts with other projects in Afghanistan, it collaborated on two important interventions with one of the USAID funded projects implemented by Development Alternative Inc (DAI), name of the project is Rural Agriculture Development Program North (RADP-N), this collaboration was on Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) and Get Ahead, these are special entrepreneurship programs designed for start-up businesses, or for entrepreneurs who would like to start new businesses. ILO supported training of trainers in these two programs, and RADP-N supported the rollout of actual trainings in eight Northern provinces, including the two target provinces of R2J.²⁸

Some challenges identified by the R2J project staff were as following:

- Insecurity avoids reach to project implementation sites, however it was mitigated through working with partners who can have access to implementation sites;
- Finding capable partners to implement developed interventions was another challenge;

²⁶ Findings from interviews with project staff and consultants

²⁷ Findings from interviews with project staff and stakeholders

²⁸ Findings from interviews with project staff and consultants

- Behavior of some of the stakeholders towards the project was also problematic (for example, expecting R2J to invest in a business that is not in line with M4P and MSD approaches);
- Contracting delays, especially when recruiting international consultants through CTG, it was always delayed due to insecurity, inability to find qualified consultants who can travel to Afghanistan, etc.;
- Another challenge was the availability of free money in the market (market distortion by other donors), other donors come and give money for free, people are not interested to contribute and they want everything to be done for them for free, which in return questions the sustainability;
- Human capacity in general, and in specific about Market Systems Development (MSD) is another challenge, people don't know what MSD is and how it work, R2J continuous to build the capacity of all partners, stakeholders and tripartite constituents in MSD; and
- Micro financing was also identified as a challenge, especially sharia-compliant micro financing.

ILO-R2J has well managed the practice of knowledge management and lessons dissemination and visibility efforts on project branding. R2J developed news flashes that were distributed to all stakeholders and social partners, the news flashes were like monthly newsletters including information on events, trainings, development and progress of implementing interventions, and dissemination of lessons learned.²⁹

4.4. Efficiency

Based on the definition of efficiency, it is an economic term, referring to timely achievement of milestones within their budget or with least possible inputs compared to alternatives. The project was 40-60% efficient in timely achievement of pre-defined outputs, however, some of the budget lines were over spent and some activities were also carried out by International consultants that absorbed more money than budgeted, and the project in year one spent about 2% more than budgeted for the year.³⁰

As indicated, about 40-60% of outputs were produced in a timely manner, the rest were delayed. The main reasons behind the delay included late start-up and mobilization of project, insecurity, mobilizing stakeholders and tripartite constituents, and establishing project office in Balkh province. Delay in recruitment of staff, procurement of project vehicles, and recruitment through CTG for International consultants are other reasons for delay in timely delivery of all defined outputs.³¹

All project resources, including funding, human, time, expertise and other resources were strategically allocated to achieve project objectives; a detailed implementation plan for 2016 well elaborated budget and had specific allocation for each activity and objective.

Following the MSD approach, R2J also leveraged investment from the market players which whom it worked, and through whom it implemented the quick-win interventions. For example, in the promotion of dairy production, R2J supported training of 1,500³² women in

²⁹ Literature review: News flashes, project document, progress reports

³⁰ Findings from literature review: Refer to Project Progress Reports for Years 1 and 2

³¹ Literature review and interviews with project staff

³² Findings from interview with implementing partner

Dawlatabad district of Balkh province of hygienic milking of cows, while the private firm “Pakiza Dairy Company” invested in establishment of two milk collection centers in that district, it shows a vivid leverage of funding.

R2L has partnered with RADP-North to provide ToT training on GET Ahead and SIYB business development training programs, targeting women. ILO has involved Banks and Financial Services Providers (FSPs) for provision of financial resources for farmers. So far, 27 FSPs have been identified and 3 banks have been engaged in the project area.³³

The core underlying factor limiting access to finance for households in the project area appears to be a very large Information gap affecting both demand and supply: Lack of awareness, information and knowledge about FSPs, products, terms and conditions limit the contact to and usage of FSPs by the potential customers, and a similar gap in the knowledge of FSPs about the economic strategies and financial preferences of the potential new customers, combined with historical failures in serving rural households, has resulted in a very high level of perceived risk in this client segment. R2J project is now working with FSPs to design interventions which address the above issues. R2J project is funded by ILO & SIDA; while, JICA and USAID have also provided some support.³⁴

Until end of 2016³⁵, the focus was more on learning, negotiating with stakeholders and planning, and more than 10 collaboration workshops were convened. Discussing the ILO collaboration with other projects of ILO to increase effectiveness and efficiency, it was stated that ILO is collaborating with LAB project in Geneva, and training project in Turin/Italy and entrepreneurship project in Turin/Italy; MSD in Zambia. PACA that is part of R2J was based on one of our projects in Sri Lanka (Inter-Growth project in Sri Lanka).

ILO/R2J was also collaborating with donor funded projects working with the government like, CARD-F, NHLP, SNAPII, and SEDEP/GIZ, UNDP/Gender Empowerment and FARM/GIZ. ILO has also collaborated with Youth employment project in Kabul. ILO is also collaborating with government to finalize cotton policy.

Time required for internal decision-making, ability to recruit qualified external collaborators (consultants) and number of staff in HQ technical units with requisite technical expertise were also constraints faced to ensure maximum efficiency of resources used and to operationalize efficiency and effectiveness.³⁶

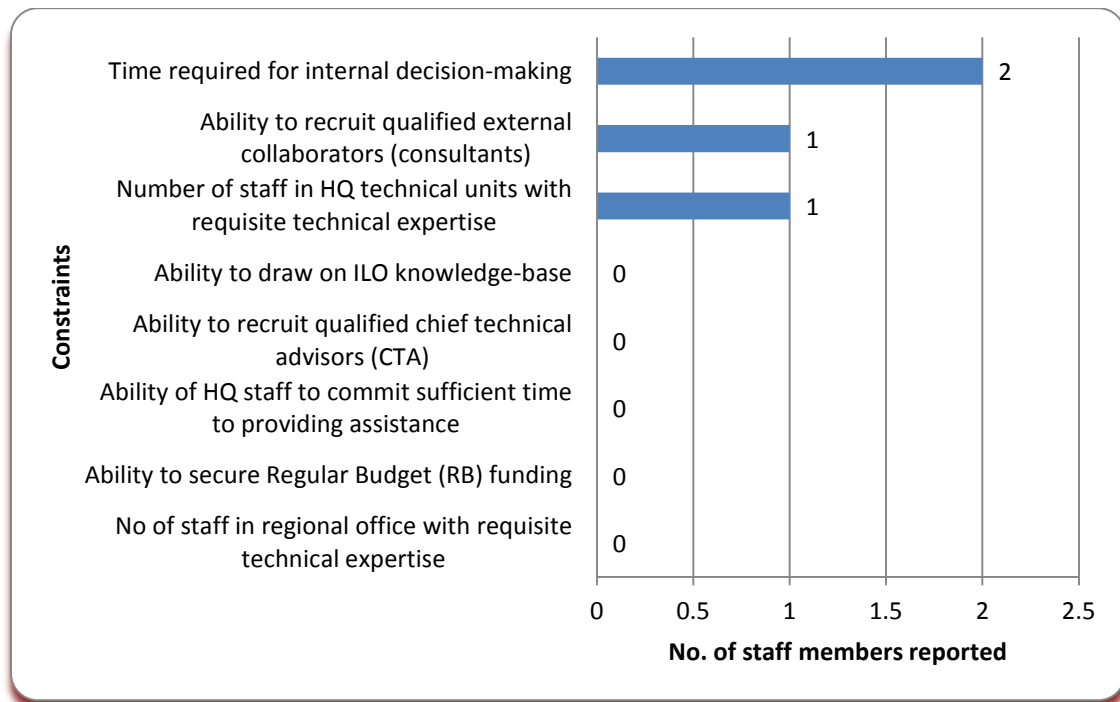
³³ Literature Review: Financial mapping report

³⁴ Literature Review: Financial Mapping report

³⁵ Interviews with project staff

³⁶ Findings from interviews with project staff

Figure5: Main constraints faced to ensure efficiency of resources used and to operationalize efficiency and effectiveness



Resources were also allocated to achieve gender-related objectives, for example, some gender specific interventions were designed and implemented. One of the gender specific interventions was supporting the dairy production; it helped to train 1,500 women livestock farmers who will continue to provide milk to the collection centers established by Pakiza Company in Dawlatabad district of Balkh province.

However, the project took too long to start actual activities. It is also possible that some stakeholders have lost interest, because they were very much engaged in the design, planning and assessment stages, but the actual activities were not starting and they may have lost interest to engage with the project and participate in the project activities.

4.5. Gender

The project well integrated gender into planning and designing of interventions, as well as reporting. In order to integrate gender into the project, a Gender Assessment Study was carried out and on the basis of the findings of that study; a comprehensive Gender Strategy was prepared and implemented. In the gender strategy, the project well identified gender issues in selected value chains. It has also detailed that in what areas of the value chains women can be more effective, and how the project would promote those areas.³⁷

Moreover, gender specific interventions were designed by the project. It included collaborated project with RADP-N to provide specialized business development training to

³⁷ Literature Review: Gender Assessment Report and Gender Strategy

women entrepreneurs, these trainings were Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) and Get Ahead.³⁸

Gender was considered as a cross-cutting Theme at all the stages of project implementation and gender issues were also addressed in the reporting. The gender disaggregated data and information is available and adequately analyzed and reported in the project documents.³⁹

Although, Capacity building targets are not separately defined for women, but there are women on project, women are the key stakeholders, and they are also targeted beneficiaries in some of the interventions. Women were included in each phase, through consultation with women; women were consulted in DoWA in Balkh and Samangan.⁴⁰

Women livestock farmers also benefited from the Para-vets services, because about 50% of clients are women⁴¹. ILO and RADP-N have trained a total of 629⁴² women including 8 women trainers and 314 potential entrepreneurs under SIYB and 9 women trainers and 298 potential entrepreneurs under GET Ahead. ILO has also supported capacity building of 1,500 women Milk Producers (in Dawlatabad). With support of ILO, two new milk collection centers were established that cover 20 villages and 1,500 women milk producers. Hygienic practices of women have improved due to their training of hygienic milking of cows. The responses of the interviewed women show that the women have been involved in the R2J project Milk Production interventions, and they are taking benefits from facilities and trainings provided to them. It is very helpful and it makes them earn money every day to support their families.

To select beneficiaries for poultry buy-back scheme, a survey in Dehdadi and Nahr-i-Shahi districts of Balkh was conducted (both of these are districts located near to Mazar-e-Sharif city). The survey covered 400 households and assessed their interest as well as facilities; and then selected 60 people (21 female, 39 male) for poultry buy-back scheme. These people were independently selected by the company, and ILO did not have a role in it. In terms of gender, the poultry company has also hired two women to work with the company after the support of ILO. However, the evaluation team found an exclusion for some of the target beneficiaries for the poultry buy-back scheme, that they select only those poultry farmers that meet a certain criteria, one of the criterion was that the farmer should have space for at least 200 chicks to raise them, if not; he/she is not selected, which illustrated exclusion of vulnerable and very poor persons.⁴³

4.6. Perceptions of Stakeholders

Once the data collection concluded for this midterm evaluation, the preliminary findings were presented to all stakeholders in a stakeholder's consultation workshop. The purpose of this workshop was to share initial results, and also engage stakeholders in the project evaluation. The evaluation team designed a simple questionnaire to assess the perceptions of

³⁸ Interviews with project staff

³⁹ Literature review: Implementation plan for 2016, gender assessment report, gender strategy and progress reports for years 1 and 2

⁴⁰ Interviews with project staff

⁴¹ Interview with stakeholders: Para-vets

⁴² Figure reported by RADP-North project of USAID

⁴³ Findings from Interview with implementing partner

stakeholders, and this section presents those perceptions related to R2J project by all stakeholders, including tripartite constituents, implementing and social partners.

4.6.1. Types and Number of Stakeholders in Workshop

In total, 37 stakeholders participated in the stakeholders’ workshop, including 7 from government sector; 13 implementing partners and 17 other stakeholders. Details are given in the following table.

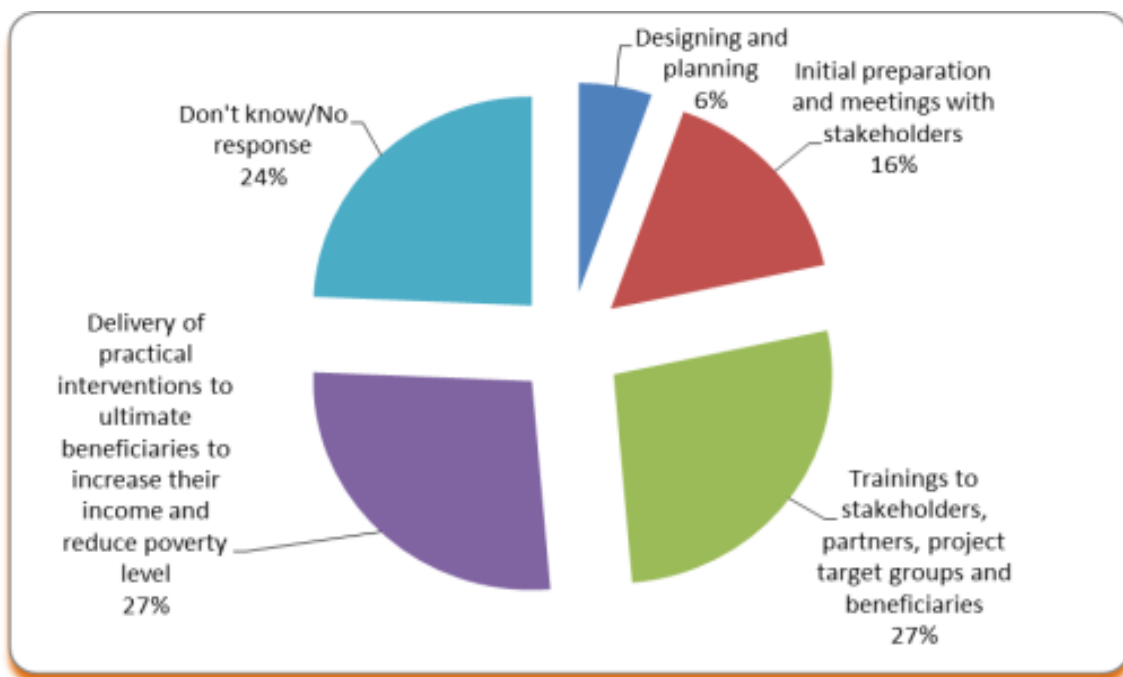
Table 5: Types and number of stakeholder

| Type of stakeholder | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Government | 7 | 18.9 |
| Implementing Partners | 13 | 35.1 |
| Other stakeholders | 17 | 45.9 |
| Total | 37 | 100.0 |

4.6.2. Knowledge of Stakeholders regarding R2J Project Current Phase

Reflecting their knowledge regarding where and in which phase R2J Project is, the following responses were given by the stakeholders: 5.4% said the project is in Designing and planning phase; 16.2% said that the project is in the Initial preparation and meetings with stakeholders phase; 27% said that the R2J project is in the trainings to stakeholders, partners, project target groups and beneficiaries phase; 27% said that the project is in the Delivery of practical interventions to ultimate beneficiaries phase; that is to increase their income and reduce poverty level; and, 24.3% said that they don’t know or they gave no response.

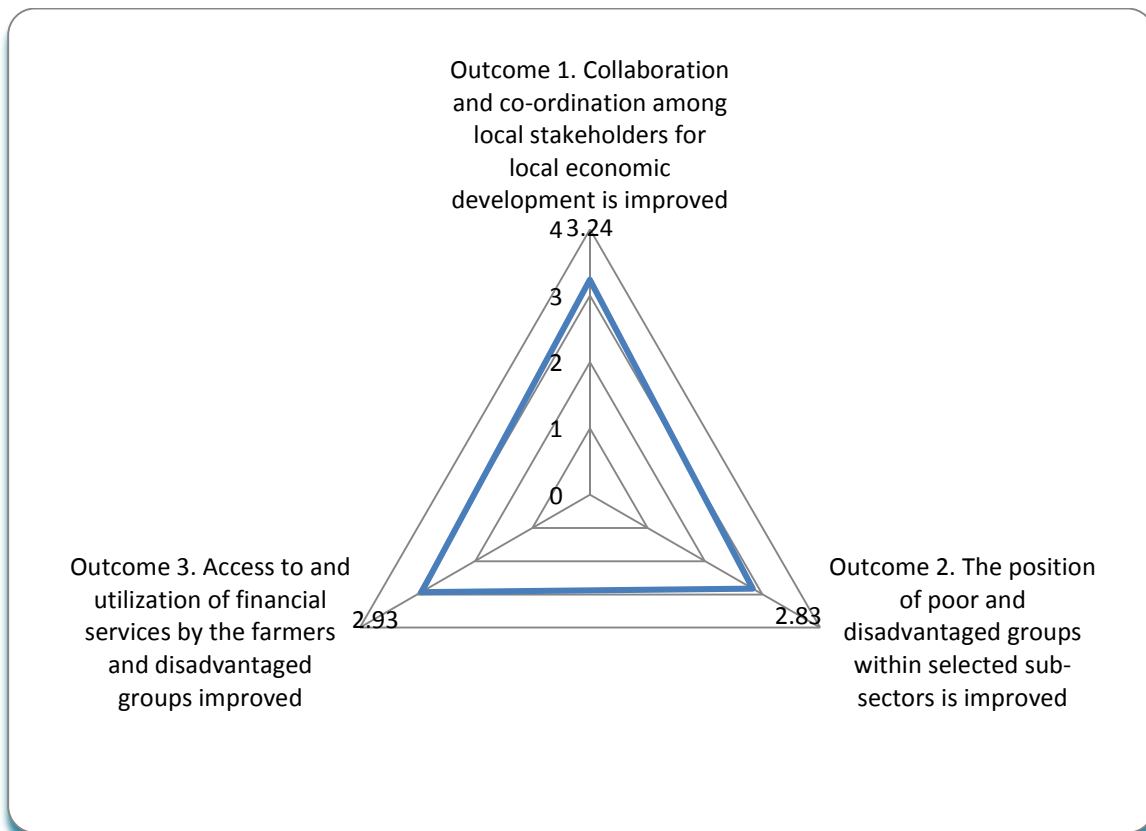
Figure6: Knowledge of stakeholders regarding R2J Project status



4.6.3. Rating Done By Stakeholders on the Achievements of R2J

In the stakeholders workshop, stakeholders/participants were asked that “From your perspective, to what extent the following project outcomes as planned, have been achieved?” the collected data indicate that the mean performance score of the outcome 1 “Collaboration and co-ordination among local stakeholders for local economic development is improved” that is 3.24 out of 4 which reveal that the outcome is between, “to some extent achievement and a lot achievement”. The Outcome 2 “The position of poor and disadvantaged groups within selected sub-sectors is improved” has received 2.83 mean performance score that exist between, “no achievement and to some extent achievement”. Similarly, the outcome 3 “Access to and utilization of financial services by the farmers and disadvantaged groups improved” has also received low mean performance score (2.93) that is exist under, “no achievement and to some extent achievement”. However, the overall achievement position of project outcomes is not satisfactory as perceived by most of the stakeholders in the workshop.

Figure 7: Mean performance score of project outcomes (Out of a possible 4.0*)



* 1. Not at all, 2.No, 3.To some extent, 4. A lot

4.6.4. Fulfillment of Stakeholders Needs

Discussing the level of the fulfillment of stakeholders’ needs by R2J project, 48.6% said yes; 10.8% said no; 32.4% said that they don’t know and 8.15% gave no responses.

Table 6: Fulfillment of stakeholders needs

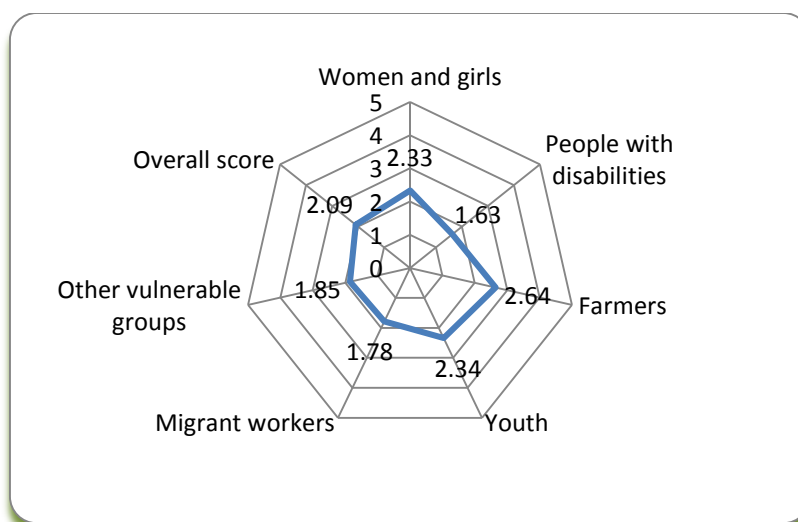
| Categories of Responses | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Yes | 18 | 48.6 |
| No | 4 | 10.8 |
| No answer | 12 | 32.4 |
| Don't know | 3 | 8.1 |
| Total | 37 | 100.0 |

4.6.5. Improvements Made By ILO Interventions on Direct Beneficiaries

Discussing the extent, ILO interventions and services have made improvement on direct beneficiaries; the results reveal that mean improvement score of women and girls is 2.33, Farmers (2.64), and Youth (2.34). Out of possible 5 scores of improvement, the low scores reported indicate that ILO interventions and services have made minor improvement on direct beneficiaries. However, this is due to the fact that many interventions have not yet produced actual results and have not reach to its potential to deliver results. Large scale interventions have also not yet started, that are development of value chains in grape and raisins, cotton and inputs supply sectors.

Similarly, low scores have been reported for People with disabilities (1.63), Migrant workers (1.78), and other vulnerable groups (1.85) which reveal these scores exist under the range of, “no improvement to minor improvement”. However, the overall mean performance score of improvement on direct beneficiaries is not satisfactory as perceived by most of the stakeholders in the workshop.

Figure 8: Mean performance/improvement score of ILO interventions and services on direct beneficiaries (Out of a possible 5.0*)



*1. No Improvement, 2. Minor Improvement, 3. Moderate Improvement, 4. High Improvement, 5. Very High Improvement

5. Conclusions

1. Continued Relevance

Road to Jobs continued its relevance and responsiveness to the Afghanistan context, the need of constituents, stakeholders and the target groups. The project is well aligned with the development agenda of Afghanistan, including National Priority Programs (NPPs) and the overarching strategy of the government of Afghanistan to promote the private sector development considering it the engine for economic growth and job creation. Economic growth, supporting private sector and creation of jobs are among the priorities of the Afghan government that are also being addressed by R2J in the provinces of Balkh and Samangan. Moreover, stakeholders, project staff, tripartite constituents and social partners have also confirmed relevance of the project in line with the needs of the government, partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries.

2. Stakeholders Involvement

Road to Jobs extensively involved and engaged all stakeholders in the project design, planning, conducting Rapid Market Assessments (RMAs), Participatory Analysis for Competitive Advantage (PACA) and Market Systems Analysis (MSA). Project involvements of stakeholders have resulted in building the capacity of partners, including social partners and tripartite constituents, as well as increased coordination and collaboration. However, R2J need to continue involving stakeholders in the implementation of interventions, as well as monitoring and evaluation, because some of the stakeholders were concerned about their decreased involvement after the actual implementation of interventions.

3. Monitoring and Results Measurement System

The Project developed a strong Monitoring and Results Measurement (MRM) system based on the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) standards. Further improvement of the MRM system is needed to ensure results measurement at outcome and impact levels and an audit of the MRM system is also needed to make sure it is in compliance with the DCED standard.

4. Project Advisory Committee

The project successfully established a project advisory committee from key stakeholders, including social partners and tripartite constituents. The committee is responsible to oversee implementation, assist in assessments, design of interventions and provide inputs and advice to improve the project implementation strategy. However, frequent meetings of the committee were not held; and the roles, responsibilities, functions and authorities of the committee need further delineation.

5. Integration of Gender in the Project

The project conducted a gender assessment, and based on the assessment results, a gender strategy was developed and implemented. The role of women was prominently showcased in the project, it developed and implemented women specific interventions, and women were also identified as part of the main stakeholders represented by Department of Women Affairs in Balkh and Samangan provinces. To enhance results for women, the project also partnered with a USAID funded program (RADP-N) to deliver

business development trainings to women, R2J trained the trainers and RADP-N delivered the actual trainings in eight Northern provinces, including the two target provinces of R2J.

6. Identification and Selection of Project Beneficiaries

Project beneficiaries were identified through a consultative process. It followed the project documents, assessments, design of interventions and geographic locations. A criteria for beneficiary selection was developed by R2J and it was shared with the implementing partners (companies implementing interventions on behalf of R2J) and the implementing partners were responsible for the final selection of beneficiaries. However, the contractors or implementing partners did not follow inclusive criteria for selection of beneficiaries, and sometimes a criterion that would benefit the implementing partners was followed, and there was no systematic mechanism to monitor the compliance of implementing partners with beneficiary selection criteria of R2J.

7. Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups

Vulnerable groups of Disabled, Migrant Workers, IDPs, Returnees and Nomads were not systematically included as the beneficiaries of current interventions under R2J. It was difficult to identify how many of these groups would benefit from project interventions. However, this is in line with the M4P approach that focuses on market players to address important underlying constraints inhibiting the way selected market systems functions for the benefit of target groups. Once large scale interventions on Cotton, Grape and Raisins and Input Supply value chains begin, the project would be able to report on number of vulnerable groups that would benefit from those interventions.

8. Validity of Impact and Outcome Level Indicators

All three impact indicators of; 1) Number of people recording a positive change in working conditions and/or incomes, (disaggregated by gender/poverty status/migrant status), 2) Net additional income accruing to target enterprises as a result of the program; and, 3) The net additional employment created and sustained as a result of the program, are valid. Outcome 1: Collaboration and coordination among local stakeholders for local economic development is improved; and Outcome 2: The position of poor and disadvantaged groups within selected sub-sectors is improved are also valid, while Outcome 3: Access to and utilization of financial services by the farmers and disadvantaged groups improved; is not valid due to the fact that there are little current or planned activities that would achieve this indicator, and farmers are also not willing to utilize access to finance which is not sharia compliant.

9. Project Logframe

The project developed a Logframe during the design phase, and it was further revised during the inception phase. The indicators in the Logframe were of quality and valid, but the Logframe did not include some of the important information, including baselines, targets and milestones. Frequency of data collection and reporting were also not defined.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

A Monitoring and Evaluation Plan was in place and it included major elements of a comprehensive M&E plan, but outputs for every monitoring visit were not defined.

11. Capacity Building of Counterparts, Tripartite Constituents, Partners and Stakeholders

Capacity building of counterparts, tripartite constituents, partners and stakeholders was at the center of the project implementation strategy. It was taken into account, and R2J continuously built the capacity of all these partners through imparting knowledge related to MSD by organizing workshops, trainings, presentation of assessments, designing interventions and meetings.

12. Sustainability Prospects

The project developed a sustainability strategy as part of the revised project document; a clear vision for sustainability was defined and communicated with tripartite constituents, partners and stakeholders. At the center of sustainability strategy was promotion of project ownership, incentivizing and capacitating permanent market players to change the way they do business.

13. Communication with Tripartite Constituents

The project have had very good communication with tripartite constituents, news flashes were also developed that included project related information, progress and update on interventions. But, one of the tripartite constituent the DoLSAMD of Balkh was not well aware of project interventions; who was appointed as the Director of DoLSAMD for the past one year. It is also because sometimes the governmental counterparts lose interest or they do not follow the project well.

14. Engagement with Directorates of Women Affairs

Although the project well engaged Directorates of Women Affairs (DoWA) in Balkh and Samangan, but they did not have adequate information about the project, and were also concerned if enough interventions are planned for women. It is therefore important that R2J improve its communication and engagement with DoWA in Balkh and Samangan.

15. Achievements

The project delivered 40-60% of outputs on time, “Unsatisfactory” with achieving about 60-80% of pre-defined milestones during the first and second years of implementation. Based on the indicators, it is likely that majority of outputs will be achieved by the end of the project.

16. Challenges and Difficulties

There are always difficulties and challenges in projects, especially in post-conflict and conservative societies like Afghanistan; the project faced difficulties in inter-agency coordination, capacity and ownership of partners and tripartite constituents. Insecurity was another challenge throughout the project and will slow down implementation. However, the project has had mitigation measure, such as implementing interventions through local partners in areas where R2J staff cannot travel due to insecurity.

17. Public Private Dialogues

Public Private Dialogues (PPDs) were promoted by the project among stakeholders. PPDs were very successful in engaging partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries in discussions, and were also instrumental in facilitating capacity building, and connecting different stakeholders to each other.

18. Efficiency of Project Resources' Utilization

All project resources, including funding, human, time, expertise and other resources were strategically allocated to achieve project objectives; a detailed implementation plan for 2016 well elaborated budget and had specific allocation for each activity and objective. The Project also leveraged funding for mutual activities with other projects.

19. Delayed Delivery of Results

The project initially started six months later than planned, and subsequently; the project took too long to start actual activities. Assessments, planning, identification and designing of interventions took longer than expected. This has also resulted in decreased interest by some of the stakeholders.

6. Emerging Lessons Learned and Good Practices

6.1. Emerging Lessons Learned

1. Stakeholders Engagement

Stakeholders' engagement at ILO-R2J was very impressive. Stakeholders engagement increased project ownership by different stakeholders, and have also enhanced project results, and increased commitment of stakeholders to the project that will result in future sustainability.

2. Project Advisory Committee

The Project Advisory Committee was a substantially effective mechanism to engage and inform all stakeholders, and involve stakeholders in project review, monitoring and evaluation.

3. Capacity Building of Counterparts

Capacity building of counterparts increases their commitment to project and ownership of project results. It also encourages the counterparts, including tripartite constituents, implementing partners and social partners to engage in project activities. More the capacity of counterparts is built, the more they will be engaged in project activities.

4. Engaging Stakeholders in Assessments and Conducting Participatory Appraisals for Competitive Advantage (PACA)

Engagement of stakeholders in conducting assessments and PACA exercises was very effective. ILO-R2J could not reach to insecure areas, and engagement of stakeholders in assessments and PACA enabled R2J to reach to those areas that were not accessible to ILO staff. It has also built the capacity of stakeholders in carrying out assessments and PACA exercises.

5. Working through Implementing Partners

Working through implementing partners increased the geographical reach of project interventions, and have also led to effectiveness and efficiency. R2J have contracted with private firms/companies to implement the interventions, those companies with contextual knowledge and local community buy-in have reached to those areas that were difficult for ILO staff to reach, and understanding about local context for the companies enabled them to implement interventions more effectively and efficiently.

6. Public Private Dialogues Increased Collaboration and Coordination

Facilitating, convening and organizing public private dialogues resulted in increased knowledge of stakeholders about Markets Systems Development, Markets for Poor and Roads to Job project. It also helped stakeholders to stay connected, collaborate and coordinate on mutually interested interventions.

7. Collaborative Interventions with other Projects

It was learned that working in collaboration with other projects on mutually agreed interventions was very successful, it met the demand and requirement of both parties and leveraged resources and increased efficiency and effectiveness of interventions.

6.2. Emerging Good Practices

1. Stakeholders Engagement

R2J continued engagement with stakeholders as a good practice. It produced viable results, including increased commitment and ownership of project by stakeholder.

2. Capacity Building of Counterparts

Capacity building of counterparts was continued and was proven to be effective in cultivating and imparting knowledge about MSD and M4P among stakeholders, which in turn have also resulted in increased project ownership by the stakeholders.

3. Public Private Dialogues Increased Collaboration and Coordination

Public Private Dialogues were continuous activities of R2J, it proved to be very effective in building partnership, increasing collaboration and coordination among stakeholders.

7. Recommendations

1. Improve the MRM System, Conduct DCED Audit and Improve M&E Planning and Reporting

1-a: The Monitoring and Results Measurement (MRM) System needs further improvements. The MRM system should be further developed to ensure systematic measurement of outcome and impact level results. R2J should also delineate clearer and segregated responsibilities for the MRM officer and make sure that the MRM officer is not involved in the implementation of interventions.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J | High | Within six months | Low |

1-b: ILO-R2J should conduct an audit of its Monitoring and Results Measurement System to ensure its compliance with the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED).

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J | Medium | Within six months | Medium |

1-c: The Monitoring and Evaluation Plan and Monitoring Reports need to be strengthened. The current M&E plan includes major elements of an M&E plan, it is at the same time a list of major tasks to be undertaken, but it should clearly define assessments, visits and mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress towards achievement of impact and outcome level indicators.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J MRM | Medium | Immediately | Low |

2. Periodically Measure movement towards achieving Immediate Objectives

ILO-R2J should periodically assess its activities' contribution towards achievement of its immediate objectives. In other words, R2J should initiate monitoring of results – operationalize the Monitoring and Results Measurement system.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J | Medium | Within 6 months | Medium |

3. Revise and improve the Project Logical Framework

3-a: The project Logframe should be improved. Baselines for all indicators should be defined, as well as clear and disaggregated targets and time bound milestones should be defined, means of verification should be refined to ensure they are realistic. Frequency of data collection and reporting for each of the indicators should also be defined.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J MRM | High | Within 3 months | Low |

3-b: ILO-R2J should define clear targets for vulnerable groups, including IDPs, Migrant Workers, Disabled, Women, Returnees, etc.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J MRM | High | Within 3 months | Low |

4. Re-Assess Immediate Objective 3 (Outcome 3) of the Project

Project Objective 3 (Outcome 3) should be reassessed to ensure its validity. R2J should make sure this objective is realistic and achievable. There are little activities that support achievement of this objective; it should therefore be revised, down-graded, replaced or simply dropped.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO Kabul & SIDA | High | Within 3 months | Low |

5. Strengthen the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Administration

Project Advisory Committee (PAC) plays a vital role in steering project, providing insights and reviewing the progress. The terms of reference for PAC need to be revised to include clear roles, responsibilities, structures and authorities. PAC meetings should be conducted on regular basis and decisions made by PAC need to be monitored for implementation.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J | Medium | Within six months | Low |

6. Beneficiary selection criteria should be improved, monitored for compliance by implementing partners; and mechanism for identification of vulnerable groups should be identified and implemented.

6-a: R2J should strengthen the process of selecting beneficiaries, ensuring that beneficiaries are selected from all different poor and vulnerable groups, including; IDPs, disabled, women, migrant workers, returnees and nomads. R2J should also monitor implementing partners processes used for beneficiary selection to ensure compliance with criteria.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J | High | Immediately | Low |

6-b: ILO-R2J should define a comprehensive mechanism to systematically identify and target the poor and vulnerable groups, and the MRM system should ensure to record and report beneficiaries based on their status.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J & ILO Kabul | High | Immediately | Low |

7. Engage and Inform Stakeholders; and development and implement a stakeholders' engagement mechanism

7-a: Stakeholders' engagement and involvement are crucial for promoting ownership, commitment and future sustainability. Therefore, ILO-R2J should strengthen engagement with stakeholders, in addition to news flashes, other mechanisms such as monthly or quarterly seminars should be organized to engage and inform stakeholders from the project progress. Progress reports should be made available in local languages to enable government stakeholders read them.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J | Medium | Within 3 months | Low |

7-b: However the project has well engaged stakeholders from the beginning, but few stakeholders were not well engaged and informed, and some may have lost interest. R2J should develop a specific stakeholders’ engagement mechanism to assess the perceptions of stakeholders periodically, as well as design and implement activities to increase the participation of all stakeholders. Disseminate specific information to each of the stakeholders, get their inputs, engage them in monitoring project activities, etc.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J/PAC | Medium | Within 3 months | Low |

8. Develop Realistic Plans Considering Assumptions and Risks

ILO-R2J annual planning should be more realistic to ensure that planned outputs are implemented as intended. Mitigating measures should be defined to avoid delays in delivery of pre-defined outputs. Assumptions and risks should also be taken into consideration when planning for activities.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|-----------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J and ILO Kabul | Medium | Within six months | Low |

9. Continue Building the Capacity of Counterparts

ILO-R2J should continue building the capacity of counterparts, including partners, stakeholders, tripartite constituents and social partners. Markets Systems Development (MSD) and Markets for Poor (M4P) are new approaches in Afghanistan, extensive capacity building and awareness raising are required for market players related to MSD and M4P.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO-R2J | Medium | Immediately | Medium |

10. Scale-up and Expand Markets System Development (MSD) Approach in other Provinces

ILO-R2J has demonstrated viable results in following the Markets System Development (MSD) and Markets for Poor (M4P) approaches in implementing the Road to Jobs project. It is recommended that ILO scale up and expands MSD approach in other secure provinces of Afghanistan; however, it should be contextualized to the extent possible to ensure that sustainable results are achieved.

| Responsible Unit (s) | Priority | Time Implication | Resource Implication |
|----------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| ILO | Medium | Long term | High |

8. Appendices

8.1. Evaluation Terms of Reference

8.2. Evaluator CV

8.3. Inception Report

8.4. Evaluability Assessment of ILO/Road to Jobs Project

8.5. Documentation reviewed

8.6. Desk Review of the Relevant Literature and Project Documents

8.7. List of Persons interviewed

8.8. Attendance Sheet for Mid-Term Evaluation Stakeholders' Workshop

8.9. Data Collection Instruments

8.10. Evaluation Matrix with Questions and Answers

8.11. Lessons learned (In ILO Template)

8.12: Emerging Good Practices (In ILO Template)

Annexes are attached separately in order to decrease the report length.