

MIDTERM EVALUATION OF THE 2022-2026 DGD-FUNDED PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTED BY RIKOLTO

The Sustainable Rice program Uganda

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction and background	3
2	Evaluation approach and methodology	3
3	Findings	4
3.1	Effectiveness	4
3.1.1	Sustainable Production Base	4
3.1.2	Market Inclusion	6
3.2	Sustainability	7
3.2.1	Longevity of impact	7
3.2.2	Potential for scale-up	8
4	Recommendations	8
4.1	Sustainable production base	8
4.2	Inclusive Markets	8
4.3	Enabling environment	9
5	Introduction and background	1
5.1	Overview of Rikolto International	1
5.2	Overview of Rikolto Sustainable Rice Programme in Uganda	1
5.3	Scope and Objectives of the Outcome Level Evaluation	3
6	Evaluation Methodology	4
6.1	General approach	4
6.2	Inception (January, 2025)	4
6.3	Document review and draft outcome assessment report (Mid-Feb – March, 2025)	4
6.4	Additional qualitative data collection (May, 2025)	5
6.4.1	Sampling for complementary data collection	5
6.4.2	Data quality control and field work management	6
6.5	Participatory approach and sense-making workshop (May, 2025)	6
6.6	Data analysis and report-writing phase (May, 2025)	6
7	Findings of the Evaluation	8
7.1	Effectiveness of the Interventions	8
7.1.1	Achievements on Impact Indicators	8
7.1.2	Sustainable Production Base	14
7.1.3	Market Inclusion	21
7.1.4	Enabling Environment	25
7.2	Potential Sustainability of the Interventions	28
7.2.1	Financial sustainability	28
7.2.2	Social sustainability	29

7.2.3	Technical sustainability	29
7.2.4	Potential for scale-up	31
8	Lessons Learned from Programme Implementation to date.....	33
8.1	Sustainable Production Base	33
8.2	Market Inclusion	33
8.3	Enabling Environment.....	33
8.4	Rikolto as an Organisation	34
9	Discussions and Conclusions	35
10	Recommendations	37
10.1	Sustainable production base	37
10.2	Inclusive Markets	37
10.3	Enabling environment.....	38

List of Tables

Table 1: Results of the sustainable rice program in Uganda	2
Table 2: Some of the key documents reviewed	4
Table 3: Interviews and discussions with various stakeholders for Uganda	5
Table 4: Summary of mid-term achievement on impact indicators	8
Table 5: Summary of achievements under sustainable production base strategy.....	15
Table 6: Summary of achievements under the market inclusion strategy	22
Table 7: Summary of achievements under the enabling environment strategy	26
Table 8: Criteria for monitoring the functioning of Multi-stakeholder platforms.....	27

List of Figures

Figure 1: Midterm review evaluation sampling frame.....	5
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List of Abbreviations

AWD	Alternate Wetting and Drying
Agri-SMEs	Agri - Small and Medium Enterprises
BDS	Business Development Services
CBTs	Community Based Trainers
CET	Common External Tariffs
DGD	Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid
DIFACOS	Doho Irrigation Farmers' Cooperative Society
DLG	District Local Government
E4I	Evidence for impact
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FO	Farmer Organization
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GF4C	Good Food for Cities
GST	Global Support Team of Rikolto
IWB	Indicator Work Book
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGA	Local Government Authority
MAAIF	Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MSP	Multi-Stakeholder Platforms
MTR	Mid-term Review
MWE	Ministry of Water and Environment
NAAC	National Alliance of Agricultural Cooperatives in Uganda
NaCCRI	National Crop Resources Research Institute
NARO	National Agricultural Research Organisation
NRDS	National Rice Development Strategy
NSC	National SRP Chapter
SACCOS	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations
SRP	Sustainable Rice Production
ToC	Theory of Change
VSLA	Village Savings and Lending Association

Locally Led, Collaboratively Designed: A Grounded Approach to Learning and Evaluation

The midterm Outcome Assessment are part of Rikolto's broader learning journey. They serve three objectives: to ensure accountability to donors, partners, and target groups; to foster internal learning and reflection; and to improve Rikolto's MEL system and reporting practices.

To implement the assessments, Rikolto partnered with ADE to co-design a practical and innovative methodology adapted to the available time and resources. A key feature of this approach was the engagement of local consultants in each of the 17 countries where Rikolto operates. These consultants worked closely with Rikolto's country teams to jointly carry out the assessments. ADE provided methodological guidance and remained available throughout the process for support and consultation.

This setup reflects a shared commitment to decolonizing evaluation practices and promoting local ownership. No international travel was involved, which not only reduced the environmental footprint but also aligned with our goal of building internal capacity through a learning-by-doing approach.

The assessments drew on three sources of information: existing Rikolto internal documentation and monitoring data; qualitative discussions with Rikolto's implementation staff; and conversations with few key external stakeholders during short field visits.

We recognize that this approach came with several limitations:

- **Time constraints:** The assessments were conducted within a very limited number of working days, restricting depth of inquiry and refinement of the reports beyond the consultants' initial work—at times further affected by unforeseen circumstances, such as regional conflict or personal setbacks.
- **Internal data dependency:** Most of the information came from Rikolto which may introduce bias.
- **Variability in MEL quality:** The availability, consistency, and quality of monitoring data varied across countries and programmes.
- **Limited stakeholder reach:** Consultations with external stakeholders were selective and brief, meaning some perspectives may not have been fully captured.
- **Diverse consultant experience:** The local consultants brought different levels of familiarity with evaluation methodologies, which influenced the depth of analysis and consistency across reports.

To address these challenges, several mitigation strategies were put in place:

- **Critical reflexivity:** ADE and Rikolto actively encouraged local consultants and teams to apply a critical lens—challenging assumptions, seeking diverse viewpoints, and acknowledging bias.
- **Capacity support:** ADE provided hands-on methodological support where needed, including templates, guidance materials, and feedback loops—to the extent allowed by available resources.
- **Strengthening MEL systems:** During the design and baseline phases, ADE offered targeted recommendations to enhance Rikolto's MEL framework and data collection processes.
- **Strategic stakeholder selection:** External stakeholders were carefully selected to represent diverse perspectives, using a mix of online and offline engagement to optimize time and resources.

These reports are the result of a collaborative effort between national consultants, supported by ADE and Rikolto's country teams, supported by Rikolto's Global Support Team (GST). They reflect our collective commitment to learning, improvement, and accountability.

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Executive summary

1 Introduction and background

This executive summary presents the main findings and recommendations of the external mid-term review of the DGD funded Sustainable Rice program of Rikolto being implemented in Uganda from 2022 to 2026. The review was commissioned by Rikolto, an international NGO, working with key partner farmer organizations and food system stakeholders across Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. It was conducted by a local consultant, experienced with food system work in East Africa, and part of the ADE international team of consultants. The primary intended users of the evaluation are Rikolto Global management and support teams, the sustainable rice team, DGD and other strategic allies.

Rikolto, aims at fostering sustainable incomes for farmers, as well as ensuring nutritious and affordable food for all. By establishing connections between smallholder farmer organizations, companies, authorities, and various actors in both rural and urban settings, Rikolto has been implementing innovative approaches for accessing, distributing and producing high-quality, nutritious food, with a commitment to leaving no one behind. Through its global network, the organisation seeks to inspire and engage with others, to address the inter-related challenges of food insecurity, climate change, and economic inequality. In Uganda, Rikolto operates in: Eastern Region - Bugiri, Bugweri, Bulambuli, Butaleja, Kapelebyong, Kween and Mbale districts; Northern Region - Amolatar, Nakapiripirit and Otuke districts and; Central Region - Kampala district.

Under the Sustainable rice program in Uganda, Rikolto has the ambition to:

- Promote safe, healthy, sustainable and quality rice to consumers
- Generate decent profits and jobs for all actors along the value chain especially smallholder farmers, youth, and women
- Reduce the environmental impact of rice cultivation and to preserve the environment for future generations

The objectives of this outcome level evaluation is to review the sustainable rice program in Uganda, mid-term in the program intervention process, specifically seeking to:

- a) Assess the program's effectiveness in achieving the stated results
- b) Assess the sustainability of the program interventions
- c) Provide recommendations for continued project interventions and scale-up
- d) Qualify Rikolto's contribution and provide actionable insights for improvement, scaling, and replication

The evaluation covered the effectiveness and potential for sustainability of Rikolto sustainable rice program. It took into consideration gender equality and, inclusion of youth and women in business relations.

2 Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation approach was inclusive, participatory, and iterative. It was guided by a utilization-focused approach, the Rikolto theory of change, and its operating strategies and principles. It consisted of the following five phases:

- a) **Inception phase (January 2025):** The inception period involved two meetings between the ADE international and local consultants and Rikolto global team and thereafter a meeting between local consultant and the Rikolto sustainable rice program in Uganda. The meetings aimed at developing a common agreement on the understanding of ToR, timelines, roles and responsibilities.

- b) **Document review and draft outcome assessment phase (Mid-Feb – March, 2025):** Involved critical review of Rikolto internal priority and complementary documents, comprised of data collected by its own staff as part of the organisation’s Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system, in order to make a simple comparative analysis of the baseline, midterm and end line indicator values of the Indicator Work Book and prepare a draft outcome assessment report, while identifying information gaps (D0).
- c) **Additional qualitative data collection phase (May, 2025):** The consultant collected qualitative data from selected Rikolto program stakeholders, using key informant interview and focus group discussion guides, to generate extra information to fill the identified gaps. The primary data collection target one SRP rice farmer group, one group of SRP FO leaders, four MSMEs, two Rikolto staff, two staff of Local Government Authorities, three National Rice policy makers and two National Rice Researchers. This data was used to improve the report D0 to produce report D1.
- d) **Reflection and sense-making phase (March and May, 2025):** The consultant engaged Rikolto field staff to reflect on the potential for sustainability of the sustainable rice program and lessons learnt. In a second meeting, staff were engaged in a two-day sense-making session to validate the findings and formulate the recommendations.
- e) **Data analysis and report writing phase (May, 2025):** Consultant combined information from all sources, refined the analysis to produce a final draft (D2).

The main methodological limitation was the very late provision of revised and complete indicator work book, leading to a late start of document review. This was addressed by several back and forth exchange with staff and re-organising consultant’s plans.

3 Findings

The findings are organised around effectiveness of Rikolto program and potential for sustainability. For effectiveness, findings are categorised under the three main strategies, taking into account both common and program specific indicators.

3.1 Effectiveness

3.1.1 Sustainable Production Base

Regarding sustainable rice production, Rikolto implemented a combination of activities, including farmer capacity enhancement to apply key aspects of the Sustainable Rice Production standards, specifically soil, pest and weed management, emissions reduction techniques, farmer organisational capacity building for better organisational management, as well as forming and sustaining valuable business relationships. Achievements of mid-term target by Rikolto in Uganda is very good overall, above 90% of the mid-term target, for most indicators.

Rikolto performed very well in realising midterm targets of aspects of interventions related to rice production and income. Regarding ***volume of environmentally sustainable produce sold to the market via Rikolto-supported farmer aggregation initiatives***, Rikolto Uganda moved from 964 Metric Tonnes of sustainable produce at baseline to 1,525 Metric Tonnes by mid-term review, an achievement of 89% of the mid-term target of 1,720 Metric Tonnes. By implication, ***net profit margin (%) of Rikolto-supported agri-businesses***, yielded very good results, starting at 10% at baseline up to 18% by mid-term review, which means an achievement of 90% of the mid-term target of 20%. Performance was further enhanced by leveraging commercial finance. Rikolto leveraged a lot more ***commercial finance leveraged*** via Rikolto-supported agri-businesses in Uganda than expected. It started with from € 50,000 at baseline and increased up to € 383,170 by mid-term review, reflecting an increase of 338% achievement of the mid-term target of € 100,000. All this achievement depends on the strength of FOs. Regarding the ***number of FOs strengthened to be capable and reliable business partners to off-takers***, Rikolto performed well,

starting with three FOs at baseline to nine FOs out of the 10 targeted at mid-term, implying a 90% achievement of the mid-term target of FOs whose business management capacity has been strengthened.

Success in developing a sustainable production base also depends on farmers reached and their ability to adopt sustainable practices. Rikolto had increased the **number of farmers producing sustainable rice** from 7032 farmers at baseline, up to 7851 at mid-term, leading to an excellent achievement of 101% of the Mid-term target of 7,767. Moreover, most of them have adopted sustainable rice production standards. The overall achievement on the number of farmers engaged in key aspects of **Good Agricultural Practices in sustainable rice production**, was beyond expectations, with most of them achieving over 100% of the mid-term target for various practices. Nitrogen-use efficiency increased from 565 Kg Grain/Kg of Nitrogen at baseline, increasing rapidly to 1165 Kg Grain/Kg of Nitrogen by mid-term review – a 117% achievement of the mid-term target of 1000 Kg Grain/Kg of Nitrogen. The **sighting of key pests and beneficial organisms** in the rice fields increased from 42 at baseline to 53 points/100 against the mid-term target of 50 points/100, reflecting an achievement beyond expectations, of 105%. In addition, Rikolto Uganda achieved a **reduction in methane emissions** per hectare per season (Metric Tonne CO₂eq/ha) from 22,000 at baseline to 15,329 by mid-term review. This is an achievement of 102% of the mid-term target of 15,000 Metric Tonne CO₂eq/ha.

Rikolto's performance related to **score of farmers against SRP standards and other GAP practices** was also very good: the percentage of farmers in FOs who reach **SRP score 90 or more and that pass all thresholds in the SRP Standard**, increased from 40% at baseline to 71.5% at mid-term review against a mid-term target of 70%, indicating a 105% realisation of the Mid-term target; the percentage of farmers in FOs who reach **SRP score 60**, increased from 50% at baseline to 84% at mid-term review, a 105% achievement of the mid-term target set at 80%; the percentage of farmers scoring above the threshold for **good water management** increased from 50% of the farmers at baseline to 80% by mid-term review, reflecting a 114% achievement of mid-term target of 80%; the percentage of farmers scoring above the threshold for **stubble management**, increased from 50% at baseline to 91% at mid-term review, against a mid-term target of 80%, reflecting an achievement 114% of the Mid-term target; the percentage of farmers practising **good straw management** increased from 50% at baseline to 85% against a Mid-term target of 80% (a 106% achievement of the mid-term target), beyond expectations. Furthermore, the percentage of farmers scoring above the threshold for **Nitrogen-fertilizer use** increased beyond expectations, from 30% at baseline to 71% by mid-term review, against a target of 60%, indicating a 114% achievement of the mid-term target.

Rikolto recorded excellent performance regarding **adoption of key aspects of Integrated Pest Management**: farmers are moving away from spraying herbicides as a **weed control method**, to using sustainable practices promoted under the SRP production model, increasing from 50% at baseline to 68% by mid-term review, against a mid-term target of 75%, reflecting a 91% achievement of the target; those scoring above the threshold for IPM practices on **insect management** has increased from 50% at baseline to 84% at mid-term review, showing a 105% achievement of the mid-term target of 80%; those scoring above the threshold for sustainable **disease management** has increased from 50% at baseline to 77% by mid-term review, showing a 96% achievement of the mid-term target set at 80%; those **controlling mollusc** under the IPM practices has moved from 50% of farmers at baseline to 92% by mid-term review, indicating 102% against mid-term target set at 90%; those **controlling rodents** using sustainable techniques increased from 50% at baseline to 82% by mid-term review, reflecting a 109% mid-term target of 75% and, vi) those scoring equal to or higher than the threshold in SRP requirement 16 for **organic matter management** increased from 50% at baseline to 82% by mid-term review, indicating a 109% achievement of mid-term target which was set at 75%.

Regarding support to women inclusion in leadership and accessing finance, Rikolto did well. The percentage of **women holding leadership positions within FOs** has increased from 10% at baseline to 32% by mid-term review, resulting in an achievement of 86% of the mid-term target which was set at 35%. Regarding **women's access to finance**, Rikolto started with 30% of women accessing appropriate finance at baseline and this increased to 32% by mid-term review, implying a 91% achievement of mid-term target which was set at 35%. Performance would have been better, were it not for the many barriers adult and young women face in agribusiness, emanating from *cultural beliefs* that women should not inherit land and that they should only participate in cooperative activities to the extent that the husband allows her to.

Overall, **profitability of sustainable rice** has increased from 23% at baseline to 27% at mid-term review, reaching 93% of the mid-term target. This is not surprising, considering the good performance in realising various results which comprise the sustainable rice production.

3.1.2 Market Inclusion

Of the combination of Rikolto interventions under this strategy, the overall achievement of mid-term targets related to inclusive business practices by Rikolto was generally good, except for: the number of farmers benefiting from inclusive contracts, women and youth working in agri-SMEs and the level of professionalization of five of the nine FOs.

On the business relations aspects, specifically the supply of sustainable rice by farmers, performance was good. Overall, **market actors integrating inclusive business practices into their business model** increased from four at baseline to 14 by mid-term review, against a set target of 15, implying an excellent achievement of the mid-term target by 93%; achievement on the **number of companies and FOs engaging in inclusive contract farming agreements on SRP rice or number of market actors integrating inclusive business practices into their business model** was excellent beyond expectations. While at baseline there were no partnerships established between FOs and processors, they were initiated in 2023, and these have grown to 3 by mid-term review, compared to the mid-term target of 2, implying an achievement of 150% of the mid-term target and; the **number of farmers benefitting from inclusive contract farming agreements on sustainable rice** moved from 500 farmers from two cooperatives (Bunambutye and Taabu) at baseline to 2,400 farmers by mid-term, translating to an achievement of 53% of the mid-term target which was set at 4,500 farmers, an average performance.

Regarding aspects related to offering the sustainable rice to consumers, Rikolto has done well. **The number of private actors offering sustainable rice to their consumers** increased tremendously, starting from zero at baseline to 40 by mid-term review, an 80% achievement of the midterm target which was set at 50%. In addition, **communication campaigns by private actors to their consumers on the benefits of sustainable rice** increased from three at baseline to five at midterm, reflecting an 83% achievement of the mid-term target set at six.

Concerning **the number of youth and women working in innovative agri SMEs**, partner reports reveal that in Rikolto's program in Uganda, the number of youth and women working for innovative SMEs increased from zero at baseline to 19 by mid-term review, meaning that 56% of the mid-term target set at 34, was met. Several challenges on both sides, hamper the achievement of good results related to employment of women and youth in companies. On the one hand, many women seeking jobs in SMEs are of reproductive age, with children, making it difficult to work without a provision for day care. On the other hand, companies find women to be low skilled. This makes it easier for the male youth to access company jobs.

An important aspects of market inclusion for FOs is determined by the strength of the FOs. Overall, there is some improvement in **FO professionalism** of four out of nine FOs, indicating progress from 2.7 (out of 5) at baseline to 3 by mid-term, against a target of 4, implying a 76% achievement of Mid-term target. Rikolto made excellent progress for four cooperatives for whom the achievement of Mid-term target was 93-105%, namely: Iték Okile, Ngenge Sub-county rice growers' Cooperative, Busowa Traders and Farmers' cooperative and Idinda Rice Growers' Cooperative. For the rest of the cooperative, performance on FO professionalism was only average (40% to 68%).

3.1.3 Enabling Environment

With this strategy, Rikolto facilitates the coming together of rice sub-sector stakeholders under multi-stakeholder platforms, in order that they may identify key challenges facing the sub-sector and discuss them while negotiating their interests and searching for solutions together. Rikolto has registered good performance in achieving mid-term targets linked to most indicators under this strategy.

Partner records show that the Mid-term target on **evidence generated and shared with relevant stakeholders**, was fully achieved (100%). There was no piece of evidence at baseline, it increased to one, which was also the mid-term target. Regarding the **number of appropriate financial products offered by financial institutions for FOs, agri-SMEs and farmers** however, Rikolto has not yet registered any achievement. Regarding **the functioning of the rice sub-sector multi-stakeholder platform** however, Rikolto has made an excellent achievement, with 100% of the mid-term target achieved, having moved from zero platform at the beginning of the program, since there was none, to 3 by mid-term review, as planned, at level 3 of functioning. Level 3 of MSP functioning means that the MSP now has the capacity to formulate policy proposals on sustainable rice/quality standard/IB relation. The National SRP chapter is now operational with a coordinator from MAAIF and a good representation of other key stakeholder organizations. Regarding the **number of MSP platforms** in which Rikolto or its partners promote sustainable and inclusive food systems, Rikolto Uganda moved from zero at baseline to three as was planned by MTR, an excellent achievement of 100%.

3.2 Sustainability

Sustainability here covers both longevity and potential for scaling up of impact.

3.2.1 Longevity of impact

- **Financial sustainability:** The rating of Rikolto on financial sustainability for Uganda is A, because Rikolto considers that the strategies and tools developed under the intervention of supporting partner FOs in business capacity building are intended for use after the intervention. Moreover, entry point for intervention on sustainable rice is the output markets. Once the stakeholders are benefiting from business that is generated, starting from production through market linkages and investment in service provision, there will be financial sustainability.
- **Social sustainability:** Rikolto's achievement of social sustainability in Uganda is rated A, indicating that its strategy takes great care for the conditions of social sustainability including: stakeholder participation, multiplication of positive outcomes, embedding activities in existing organisations, promoting exchange of expertise and integration in policy. This approach to implementation, empowers stakeholders and promotes ownership of the process of co-designing, the implementation and the outcome of the interventions, all of which are important for social sustainability.
- **Technical sustainability:** Achievement on technical sustainability is rated as A for Uganda, implying that Rikolto's interventions in the ensures that various expertise needed by actors in the program to develop, as well as the necessary equipment are managed and used to the best advantage of the actors, after the program ends. Rikolto emphasises local capacity strengthening, by training and

coaching local government extension workers and CBTs, in that they may own the various initiatives and have the technical skills to apply the SRP standard.

3.2.2 Potential for scale-up

- **Training of local trainers on SRP standards:** The training on SRP standards is done for farmers, as well as LGA extension staff and Community Based Trainers. Once they are empowered with knowledge and skills, they remain active within government structures and in other projects they work in. Within their core mandate, these officers engage in scaling up these methods while continuing with their obligations.
- Rikolto in Uganda has advocated for adoption of the SRP standard in the national policy for the rice sub-sector, implying that partnerships between MAAIF and big rice sub-sector stakeholders will assure scaling up.
- **Market linkage with SWT:** Following the partnership that Rikolto Uganda started with SWT to source sustainable rice from its partners in Eastern Uganda, SWT decided to source SRP rice directly only from 2 cooperatives within the vicinity of their nucleus farmer. For the others, they source indirectly using their agents.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Sustainable production base

- a) It will be helpful for Rikolto in collaboration with agricultural extension staff and agro-input dealers, to support FOs to obtain scientific information on soil nutrient needs in terms of fertilization in order to establish optimum fertiliser needs.
- b) Rikolto, under its collaboration with NaCCRI, could conduct a short comparative study on profitability and other advantages of other livelihoods sources suggested by government versus rice.
- c) Rikolto needs to devise a strategy that takes the marketing of rice to higher levels, by supporting FOs to market across the sub-region in case of such bumper harvest. This will need efforts at higher East African levels.
- d) There is need for Rikolto, in its relationship with NaCCRI to prioritise research on new appropriate varieties which is also preferred by local consumers, suitable for Doho and Olweny irrigation schemes where currently yield is very low.

4.2 Inclusive Markets

- a) Rikolto will most probably achieve better results on including women in markets if it intentionally implements a strategy that supports women in specific stages of the rice value chain that do not require land.
- b) *Women's spaces:* It could be helpful if Rikolto collaborated with FO partners to establish rice business spaces for women only. This helps them to start their own business, the way it is done in Mweya.
- c) *Employment in innovative agri-SMEs:* Rikolto could collaborate with other stakeholders who prepare young people for work, to support young women through skilling to be work ready, as well as engaging in job placements in partner companies.
- d) Rikolto needs to reflect on and devise the best strategy to support FOs to engage in rice business. Depending on whether partners choose milling or selling paddy, the strategies will differ.
- e) In order to facilitate inclusive marketing with better outcomes, Rikolto could add infrastructure on its list of advocacy issues, specifically focussing on infrastructure (power, roads and telecommunication) in paddy production areas.

- f) Rikolto could work with rice stakeholders to support market and product differentiation, so that SRP rice could have a special price, higher than conventional rice.

4.3 Enabling environment

- a) *MSP coordination:* Stakeholders have voiced the need for Rikolto to improve NSC coordination by supporting the central coordination office (the secretariat) with gadgets like servers, laptops and other communication facilities that are able to facilitate better linkages between rice stakeholders in Uganda and those in other parts of Africa and globally.
- b) *Faster and Wider reach:* Enabling environment for sustainable rice production is about policies and institutions. This needs to be intensified and evidence generated and used to reach out faster and wider, in order to capture the attention of the policy makers.
- c) *Specific research to address policy challenges:* Rikolto could engage willing partners like NaCCRI to gather evidence that addresses the current policy controversy surrounding rice production in wetlands.
- d) *Harmonisation of policy:* Rikolto could prioritise advocacy for policy harmonisation in a manner that benefits rice farmers.

5 Introduction and background

This is a report of the Midterm Review of the Sustainable Rice Program of Rikolto, implemented in Uganda since 2022. The program is financed by the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD), as well as other co-financing agencies.

5.1 Overview of Rikolto International

Rikolto, an international NGO with over 50 years of experience, is a key partner for Farmer Organizations (FOs) and food system stakeholders across Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Operating through five regional offices, Rikolto has been at the forefront of initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable incomes for farmers, as well as ensuring nutritious and affordable food for all. By establishing connections between smallholder farmer organizations, companies, authorities, and various actors in both rural and urban settings, Rikolto has been implementing innovative approaches for accessing, distributing and producing high-quality, nutritious food, with a commitment to leaving no one behind. Through its global network, the organisation seeks to inspire and engage with others, to address the inter-related challenges of food insecurity, climate change, and economic inequality. At global level therefore, Rikolto aims to achieve impacts of; i) Sustainable income for farmers, ii) Nutritious, healthy and affordable food for everyone and, iii) Scalability of Rikolto's models. In order to work towards this impact, the organisation employs the following approaches: i) Food system approach, ii) Inclusive business and, iii) Evidence for impact (E4I) .

In 2021, Rikolto launched its 2022-2026 global strategy which aims to empower consumers in at least 30 major and intermediate cities, to access affordable and nutritious food, sustainably produced by more than 300,000 smallholders associated with over 250 FOs or related groups (e.g., VSLA, women groups). The global strategies for Sustainable Rice, Cocoa and Coffee and Good Food for Cities (GF4C) seek change in three key food system domains: i) Sustainable production, ii) Inclusive markets and, iii) Enabling environments. This strategy builds on the previous one but also represents a deliberate shift towards a holistic food system perspective. All Rikolto programs encompass innovative initiatives in these domains, aimed at inducing structural changes to address food system challenges. Rikolto lays emphasis on integrating gender and youth issues, and is committed to reducing biodiversity loss, mitigating environmental damage, addressing the impacts of climate change, and supporting food system resilience against shocks and crises.

In Uganda, Rikolto implements its programs in: Eastern Region - Bugiri, Bugweri, Bulambuli, Butaleja, Kapelebyong, Kween and Mbale districts; Northern Region - Amolatar, Nakapiripirit and Otuke districts and; Central Region - Kampala district. The implementation is done through a highly decentralised organisational structure, comprising teams at regional level who collaborate with a global support team. This mode of operation ensures strategic alignment across all countries of operation, incorporating local context realities, fostering internal learning, and leveraging evidence. Moreover, the responsibility of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) now falls under the country and regional directors.

5.2 Overview of Rikolto Sustainable Rice Programme in Uganda

According to the Theory of Change (ToC) for the rice program in Uganda, Rikolto believes that by engaging in a combination of strategic interventions with various stakeholders in the rice sub-sector, it will contribute to a sub-sector that is resilient, sustainable, inclusive and is able to generate a living income for farmers and business people, both men and women, while at the same time availing consumers with sustainably produced and nutritious food. With farmers in their FOs, Rikolto builds capacity for the application of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), bench-marked against the Sustainable Rice Production (SRP) standard, consequently reducing costs of production, increasing yields and reducing pressure on soils, water and the environment. With service providers, Rikolto engages with and supports them to be able to provide high quality and appropriate services to FOs. With other rice value chain actors, Rikolto

engages and supports aiming to develop and nurture business relationships which include farmers and youth – both men and women. With consumers, Rikolto engages in several promotional and educative activities to promote the consumption of sustainable rice. Among other rice sub-sector stakeholders, Rikolto facilitates and participates in Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSPs) of rice stakeholders, to share knowledge and experience, as well as convince bigger stakeholders to scale up its SRP bench-marked rice production model.

Under the Sustainable rice program in Uganda, Rikolto has the ambition to:

- i) Promote safe, healthy, sustainable and quality rice to consumers
- ii) Generate decent profits and jobs for all actors along the value chain especially smallholder farmers, youth, and women
- iii) Reduce the environmental impact of rice cultivation and to preserve the environment for future generations

In order to realise the above ambition, Rikolto expects to work in partnership with about 20,000 direct beneficiaries over a 5-year period (2022-2026) and about 500,000 consumers annually. The partners and collaborators include: Food system entrepreneurs - food companies, Micro-, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) which include FOs in their early stages and existing ones (2 years and more in existence), sector umbrella organizations, specifically, the National Rice Association, District Local Government Authorities (LGAs), specifically the production and natural resources departments, financial service providers (formal and informal), as well as concerned ministries, agencies, and departments. On the one hand, farmers are expected to realise direct benefits from training via their respective FOs, as well as indirect benefits through policy change. On the other hand, consumers will benefit from affordable, nutritious and healthy rice that has been produced sustainably.

Outcome of the rice program in Uganda: The rice sector in Uganda is more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive, providing a living income for producers and agribusiness entrepreneurs, including women and youth, while increasing the availability of sustainably produced food products on the market.

In order to achieve the above outcome, Rikolto works towards the following **program results** by conducting various activities presented in table 1.

Table 1: Results of the sustainable rice program in Uganda

Results	Activities
1. Farmers adopt GAP, benchmarked against the SRP Standard, to improve profits (from reduced costs), enhance environment sustainability, and to adapt to climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Train and coach farmer organizations and service providers on the use of the SRP Standard- this is the world's first voluntary sustainability standard for rice ➤ Build capacity of food system entrepreneurs to develop agri-business services ➤ Facilitate SRP pilots with FOs to generate evidence on the profitability of SRP rice production by farmers ➤ Coach and mentor FOs on business and management
2. Private chain actors have inclusive and transparent business relations with sustainable rice producers, including women and youth, and offer better quality rice to consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strengthen links between FOs and rice buying companies ➤ Facilitate processors with retail outlets to design effective communication strategies that promote production and consumption of sustainable rice ➤ Facilitate youth entrepreneurs to deliver innovative services in the rice VC ➤ Capacity for youth and women entrepreneurs through running incubation and acceleration programmes ➤ Investment-readiness training for MSMEs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Facilitating MSMEs to transition to green practices (through capacity building and business support) ➤ Facilitating financial service providers to design, pilot, and scale green financing mechanisms/methodologies
3. Policies and governance are more favourable to scale sustainable rice (improved enabling environment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Establish an SRP national chapter ➤ Prepare policy proposals to influence rice-related policies of government and financial institutions ➤ Engage with financial institutions to convince them to include sustainability requirements into their loan terms

Cross-cutting themes inherent in the strategies employed in achieving these results are enhanced gender equality and youth inclusion, through economic relations within the system.

5.3 Scope and Objectives of the Outcome Level Evaluation

The assessment aims to serve accountability purposes for the DGD on the one hand, and on the other hand, inform discussions on the indicator values and progress towards each outcome at midterm so as to stimulate reflection within Rikolto team and enable reflection on what to improve and how to do it, in order to meet end line objectives. The overall objective of this outcome level evaluation is to review the sustainable rice program in Uganda, mid-term in the program intervention process, against the targets and standards set at baseline, on selected OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. More specifically, the evaluation sought to:

- a) Assess the program's effectiveness in achieving the stated results by:
 - comparing midterm to their baseline values,
 - comparing midterm values to the set midterm target,
 - evaluating progress towards end-line target based on midterm values
- b) Assess the sustainability of the program interventions in terms of:
 - The extent to which impact may last,
 - Potential for scaling up by external stakeholders,
- c) Provide recommendations for continued project interventions and scale-up
- d) Prepare a short report to qualify Rikolto's contribution and provide actionable insights for programme improvement, scaling, and replication.

In addition, the Mid-term Review (MTR) took into consideration gender equality and, inclusion of youth and women, resulting from economic relations in the rice sub-sector, as cross-cutting issues. The evaluation was guided by broad common and specific program questions, linked to indicators in the Indicator Work Book (IWB) which is an important output of the Rikolto Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework. The review covered all indicators, related to the three program results of the sustainable rice program in Uganda (Table 1). It used data from key documents generated from the rice program implementation area in Eastern, Northern and Central sub-regions in Uganda. Additional data was generated with partners and other rice stakeholders, sampled from the implementation area in Eastern Uganda, based on information gaps highlighted during the document review.

6 Evaluation Methodology

6.1 General approach

The outcome assessment for the sustainable rice program, being part of the global mid-term review of Rikolto programme, was conducted in conformity with the general methodological approach agreed upon between Rikolto and ADE team of consultants. The assessment consisted of three phases namely inception, document review and report writing, field work and sense making. Based on the data compiled by Rikolto staff and selected key documents, we assessed the effectiveness and potential for sustainability of Rikolto's sustainable rice programme at mid-term in the program implementation period. Document review was complemented by primary data generated through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Primary data generation was done among all categories of Rikolto partners and rice sub-sector stakeholders including: FOs, MSMEs, technical staff of Rikolto and political leaders at the district and national levels and members of the multi-stakeholder platforms, among others. Standardized KII and FGD guides to collect additional qualitative information were developed at global level, in a participatory manner by ADE in collaboration with the Global Support Team (GST) of Rikolto. They were then adapted by the local Rikolto team and the ADE local consultant, to the local context and of the sustainable rice program implementation, for use in primary data collection within East Africa.

6.2 Inception (January, 2025)

The inception period involved two meetings: one, between the ADE international and local consultants which form the evaluation team and the client, Rikolto global, and the other, between the local ADE consultant and the local Rikolto team, working on the sustainable rice program at local East African level. The meetings focused on establishing a common understanding of the ToR as agreed upon by ADE and Rikolto, with a focus on the scope of the MTR, the methodological framework, deliverables, roles and responsibilities and the time line.

6.3 Document review and draft outcome assessment report (Mid-Feb – March, 2025)

Rikolto has made available a set of its internal priority and complementary documents, comprised of data collected by its own staff during program implementation (Table 2). In order to make a simple comparative analysis of the baseline, midterm and end line indicator values, the Indicator Work Book (IWB) was the base important document. It also provided data that helped in contextualising the indicator measurements presented. We combined analysis of the IWB data with input from Rikolto staff in response to questions seeking clarifications, in order to draft the outcome assessment report on effectiveness and potential for sustainability of the rice program of Rikolto in Uganda. While drafting the outcome assessment report, we identified data and information gaps arising from the review of the internal documents, for use in adjusting the field data collection tools that we then used in the collecting complementary qualitative data. During the drafting of the outcome assessment report, the local consultant updated the local Rikolto team weekly and the international ADE consultants once every two weeks, on progress of review.

Table 2: Some of the key documents reviewed

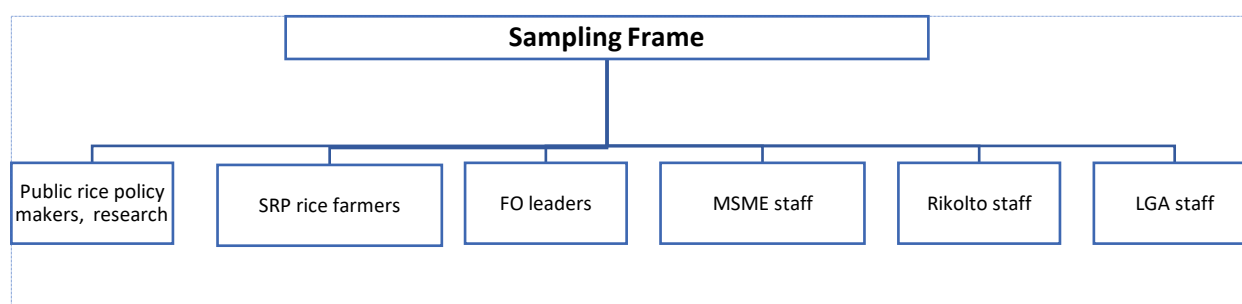
Document	Information derived
1. DGD program document	Theory of change, Objectives and strategies, the results framework
2. Co-funding documents	Collaboration with other donors towards a common objective
3. Indicator Work Book	Progress measurement and monitoring
4. SRP standard baseline report	Bench mark data on sustainability of rice production for the implementation locations of Rikolto
5. Summary of innovations	Presentation of cases select to demonstrate evidence for impact
6. Donor reports for DGD projects	Potential for sustainability

6.4 Additional qualitative data collection (May, 2025)

6.4.1 Sampling for complementary data collection

The methods for complementary primary data collection consisted of (i) Key informant interviews and, (ii) Focus Group Discussions. This primary data collection is focussed on gaps that emerged from analysis of the priority and complementary documents, especially regarding the sustainability of the SRP rice in Uganda, as well as other aspects of Rikolto strategies. The primary data was generated from/with a diversity of the Rikolto stakeholders consisting of (a) Sustainable rice farmers, (b) FO leaders, (c) Staff of MSMEs – processors and traders, (d) Rikolto sustainable rice program staff, (e) technical staff of Local Government Authority (LGAs) collaborating with Rikolto, (f) Members of the MSPs (h) public sector decision-makers – those with policy making roles. The sampling frame is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Midterm review evaluation sampling frame



A summary of the evaluation participant categories is presented in Table 3 below. The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with farmer members of FO partners of Rikolto and FO leaders, while KIIs were conducted for the rest of the participants. All participants were sampled purposively, aiming only for Rikolto partners able to provide the information needed to fill the gaps in the draft outcome assessments. All interview meetings in Uganda were physical, in Kampala and Entebbe for policy makers, and in the operational area of Butaleja and Mbale, for the farmers, processors and traders.

Table 3: Interviews and discussions with various stakeholders for Uganda

Stakeholders	Uganda
SRP rice farmer groups (30 farmers for both groups)	2
SRP FO farmer leaders (14 FO leaders)	2
MSMEs + FI for Uganda	4
Rikolto staff	2
LGAs staff	2
National Rice policy makers	3
National Rice Researchers	2
Total	17

Both the KIIs and the FGDs were conducted by Research Assistants in pairs – 1 Moderator and 1 Note taker, each provided with a hard copy of the interview guide. The discussions were conducted in accordance with the laid down procedures that were shared with the discussants before the discussion began e.g., obtaining consent, assuring confidentiality of the data gathered, among others. The discussions lasted between 60-90 minutes. All the discussions were audio recorded for data verification purposes, after seeking consent from the participants, and thereafter hand written to ensure accuracy, then typed out. Furthermore, the Research Assistants double checked the interview notes for consistency with the

recorded audio before handing over the hand written notes to the ADE consultant, for subsequent transcription and considerations for report writing.

The consultant conducted 13 KIIs and four FGDs of 22 people in total (Table 3). Field notes from KIIs were analysed only after data collection due to time constraints. Information saturation point could only be assessed during analysis. Thereafter, the rest of the data was processed to fill in the information gaps in the draft outcome assessment report.

6.4.2 Data quality control and field work management

Recruitment and training: We recruited four people, from among Rikolto's group of experienced Research Assistants, trained them in a highly interactive manner for half a day on how to collect high quality data for this evaluation. The training focused mainly on the evaluation objectives, interviewing skills, informed consent administration and, data quality and integrity. We recruited only research assistants who are perfectly bi-lingual to enable data collection in the local language of the area where data is being collected. Two of these researchers collected data for the outcome assessment and one collected data on the learning question four.

Data collection process: The data collection tools were given to researchers in English but administered in the local languages, for interview participants who were not comfortable responding in English. Reports of each interview, however, were compiled in English. The data collection team met the consultant every evening during data collection, to ensure data quality control. The last day of data collection was used to verify the data and receive reports. Rikolto Uganda team supported in making all the appointments.

Ethical Considerations: The Evaluation Team utilized approaches that addressed security and ethical concerns including informed consent before interview, privacy during the interviews and confidentiality after the interviews. An introductory letter to the participants was prepared and signed by Rikolto Uganda and the ADE evaluation team leader. Furthermore, informed consent forms were designed by the Evaluation Team and read to the respondents for them to consent prior to participating in the interviews.

6.5 Participatory approach and sense-making workshop (May, 2025)

In a two-day sense making workshop, we worked with Rikolto rice program team of Uganda and Tanzania, through each of the findings, reviewing, clarifying and validating them. The draft outcome assessment report with information from data collection already integrated in it, was used at the sense-making exercise. This draft also had recommendations suggested by the stakeholders interviewed. Concurrently, we formulated recommendations for Rikolto going forward, wherever performance was not adequate. Recommendations suggested by staff were combined with those suggested by stakeholders during the data collection interviews. The draft Outcome Assessment report was shared with the country teams before the workshop so that staff could take time to reflect on the findings and suggested recommendations, in order to provide meaningful feedback during the workshop. This process resulted into refined analysis of some of the findings and generated key recommendations, to enable Rikolto meet the end line targets set. Some recommendations however, may be applicable for the period beyond the program as well, in case Rikolto will be formulating another program in similar direction to the current one. We then incorporated workshop feedback into the report. The workshop was partially physical at the Rikolto offices in Mbale. Some of the participants, joined online.

6.6 Data analysis and report-writing phase (May, 2025)

We reviewed the documents, starting with the IWB, according to the sub-categories of the indicators set by Rikolto under each result. The review covered values at baseline, how achievements against these

indicators progressed throughout the implementation period and the values at MTR. We also compared this progress with the end line targets set, and assessed whether Rikolto is on track to achieve the end line target. This analysis was contextualised using comments in the IWB and responses to clarification questions posed by consultant to the local team. During this process, report writing was done within the reporting template. Moreover, information gaps were identified for input into the interview guides for field work. After field data collection, data from specific participants were analysed, by applying a reasoning that conforms with Rikolto ToC but in response to specific gaps which were identified. This information was then used to revise the evaluation report, ahead of the sense-making workshop. Further analysis of findings happened during the sense making workshop, as we drafted key recommendations in collaboration with the local Rikolto team. Feedback obtained during the sense making workshop was also used to revise the draft report.

The main methodological limitation that we encountered concerned the late availability of revised and complete IWBs. Since these were the basis of drafting the outcome assessment report, it meant that all other subsequent evaluation activities were delayed and had to be rescheduled quite late, overlapping with consultant's other planned activities. This was addressed by revising the work plan and cancelling some other activities of the consultant, earlier planned. In addition, we drafted the outcome assessment with gaps where complete information was not clear and sent it to Rikolto team to address.

7 Findings of the Evaluation

The findings presented in this section are derived from analysis of data from various sources: review of the priority and complementary documents provided by Rikolto, input by Rikolto staff throughout the data analysis process on specific questions of clarification by the consultant, the reflection workshop with Rikolto sustainable rice team on key aspects of program sustainability and lessons, primary data collected from selected stakeholders of Rikolto and the participatory sense-making workshop. The findings focus on effectiveness and sustainability of the Rikolto sustainable rice program in Uganda.

7.1 Effectiveness of the Interventions

Regarding effectiveness, we assessed whether the sustainable rice program of Rikolto Uganda is achieving its objectives by critically reviewing both the values of the common and the program specific indicators, at baseline, over the two years and at midterm review, as presented in the revised and complete IWBs. To ease the logical flow of this report, we present the findings on achievements of results linked to general impact indicators, followed by the findings on achievement of results linked to outcome and impact indicators under each of the three main strategies of Rikolto. The findings are derived from analysis of information from the IWBs and other Rikolto documents, then complemented with input from primary data. At the beginning of each sub-section, we present a summary table of findings, indicating achievement by MTR, followed by descriptive presentation of the findings, including the reasons behind them.

7.1.1 Achievements on Impact Indicators

Although this exercise is an outcome assessment mid-term in program implementation, achievements recorded give indications of the extent to which Rikolto is progressing towards impact on sustainable rice production. Table 4 summarises achievements on impact indicators by MTR.

Table 4: Summary of mid-term achievement on impact indicators

Indicator Name	Baseline	Mid-term target	Value achieved by MTR	% of Mid-term target achieved	End line target
1. Number of farmers supported on sustainable production and inclusive business relationships	7,030	8,030	8,256	103	8,750
2. Number of farmers getting a better deal as a result of Rikolto interventions	N/A	8,032	7,950	99	8,750
3. Number of farmers improving their resilience as a result of Rikolto interventions	N/A	6,425	6,196	96	7,000
4. Average annual net income from the farming system per hectare (EUR/ha)	1,815	2,183	1,650	76	2,892
5. Number of economically viable food system entrepreneurs (service providers, processors, buyers)	0	23	26	113	45
6. Number of individuals having access to sustainable food products	120,500	187,500	210,500	112	312,500

7. Number of new initiatives to promote SFS/IB stemming from supported multi-stakeholder bodies	0	1	1	100	2
8. Number of regulatory measures relating to sustainable food system or inclusive business practices under consideration, adopted or implemented as a result of Rikolto support	0	1	1	100	2
9. Leverage of Rikolto interventions to promote SFS/IB - Amount of new investments into SFS/IB (in EUR)	0	100,000	264,064	264	300,000

Number of farmers supported on sustainable production and inclusive business relationships: According to partner reports and records, Rikolto in Uganda achieved its target beyond expectations. **It started with a high number of farmers, 5775** (Male < 35 yrs – 25%, Male ≥35 yrs – 40%, Female <35 yrs - 11%, Female ≥ 35 yrs - 24%) **and increased to 8256, a growth of 103% against Mid-term target of 8030.** Increase in farmer numbers were proportionate to the various categories of farmers. This achievement is attributed to the big number of farmers Rikolto targeted at the beginning of the program and moreover, this partnership built on achievements already made due to continued partnership with four FOs from the previous program implemented up to 2021. In addition, Rikolto Uganda the strategy of relying on the government extension workers and extension workers of some FOs, to deliver Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) training and later by on boarding Community based Trainers (CBTs), contributed to this achievement. Inclusion of CBTs was possible due to the G-STIC project which co-finances the DGD-funded rice programme in Uganda. Considering that the remaining period for program implementation is slightly over one year, it is most likely that Rikolto will meet end line target for number of farmers in Uganda, since only 494 more farmers are remaining, to reach the end line target (SRP PI Farmers' survey).

Number of farmers getting a better deal as a result of Rikolto's interventions: The SRP PI survey shows that in Uganda, **Rikolto registered an excellent achievement of the annual target of 2024 (99%), with the overall number of farmers getting a better deal reaching 7950, compared to the 8032 target set at the beginning of the year.** Although the different categories of farmers varied slightly in performance, no category was below 88% of the annual target set. The reason behind the good performance is the package of services facilitated by Rikolto to farmers, in terms of access to essential inputs, affordable credit, marketing and adoption of sustainable rice production techniques, enterprise diversification, among others. These services and trainings are offered by extension workers and the Community Based Trainers (CBTs), as well as through continuous coaching and mentoring of the FOs to support their members (SRP PI Farmers' survey). Considering the pace at which Rikolto is registering the results the end line target will be met.

Number of farmers improving their resilience as a result of Rikolto's interventions: The Rikolto farmers' survey revealed that Rikolto in Uganda had an **excellent achievement of the annual target of 2024, with overall number of farmers who improved their resilience being 6196 compared to the 6425 target set at the beginning of the year,** when the indicator was separated from a bigger one. This is an achievement of 96% of the annual target. The best performing category of farmers were the young males (<35) whose number reached 1608 compared to the target of 1522 (106%). The good achievement is attributed to the fact that, on the one hand, the activities linked to the indicator were already going on from the beginning of the program. On the other hand, farmers adopted more sustainable and climate resilient farming

practices, for example, access to reliable inputs (quality seeds, environmental friendly crop protection products), applying better crop management techniques such as IPM and GAP that increase yield, starting livestock farming and using manure to restore soils, practising AWD that increase water use efficiency, among others. All these skills came from training by CBTs. Additional reasons for the good performance in Uganda include diversification of incomes by the members of the FOs, generally applying some of the SRP techniques to other important cash crops and professionalising their FOs – which then makes it easier for them to make and sustain business relationships, as well as facilitating access to services for members. This is in line with Rikolto's strategy on inclusive business according to which it strengthens FOs in order that they are able to be credible business partners to off-takers. There is a high likelihood that Rikolto Uganda will meet the end line target.

Cheptue farmers in Bulambuli district further confirm that by adopting the SRP model, their yield has greatly improved. Before introduction of SRP practices, farmers used to produce 20 bags (about 1,400Kgs) of dry paddy rice in an acre of land, at 14% moisture content and now they are producing 35 – 40 bags (about 2,450 to 2,800 Kgs) of paddy in an acre. Farmers' income has also increased, consequent to increased paddy yield. In addition, increased income has enabled most farmers to hire extra labour and they no longer use young children for labour in rice farms. Farmers also report that they are able to pay school fees from rice production and secure home needs. Rice farming is becoming more profitable than other farm enterprises commonly executed by the farmers like maize, oil seeds, cabbages, among others. Through optimized utilization of resources, SRP practices has enhanced farmers' resilience to climate change, whenever bad weather strikes or when prices drop, it finds them with strong crops, rice inclusive, because of the soil management practices (FGD Farmers).

Average annual net income from the farming system per hectare (€/ha): In Uganda, Rikolto did not perform well on increasing farmers' income and instead farmers' income reduced. The overall net income of farmers started from € 1815 at baseline to 1650/ha, by MTR, realising only 76% of the Mid-term target of € 2,183. **Reduction of income was worse for female compared to male farmers, who actually experienced slight increases in income per hectare from the farming system.** For adult male (>35) income moved from € 1998 to € 2080/ha (87% of Mid-term target achieved). For young male, income increased from € 1748 to €1800/ha (about 85% of the Mid-term target was achieved). Adult female (>35), as well as young female (<35) experienced a reduction in income, from € 1974 to € 1300/ha, and € 1481 to € 1420/ha, respectively. The reduction in net income of farmers in Uganda is attributed to low market prices for food, following the bumper harvest in the 2023/2024 season. This situation compelled most farmers not to sell their non-perishable food products – paddy inclusive, on time. The main reason for the poor performance of both adult and young female farmers is their limited participation in collective marketing within FOs compared to male farmers. If the rice productivity and the consequent low paddy prices continue at similar levels as last year, Rikolto will not meet the program end line targets (SRP PI survey).

When it comes to income, as a direct output from business, women are not doing well, although they performed very well with regard to leadership positions in FOs. This could be because leadership roles only require the space, opportunity and capacity building to be offered to women, after all traditionally, women have always had leadership roles around social activities in communities, rather than economic activities. It could also be linked to the fact that rice and indeed most commercial crops in a patriarchal system similar to the operational areas of Rikolto, belong to men due to its dependence on access to land as the key factor of production. The cultural gender norms prevent women from inheriting land and gender division of labour keeps them busy in reproductive and unpaid social responsibilities at home and in the community.

Number of economically viable food system entrepreneurs: Overall, Rikolto Uganda started from zero at baseline and by MTR, it is counting 26 economically viable entrepreneurs, implying an achievement Mid-term target beyond expectations (113%), of the Mid-term target of 23 viable food system entrepreneurs. The achievement of this Mid-term target was spectacular for male entrepreneurs. Young and adult male entrepreneurs, who both moved from zero at baseline to 10 entrepreneurs, reflecting an achievement of Mid-term target by 167% and 200%, respectively. Achievement on number of economically viable young female entrepreneurs was lower, from zero at baseline to six at Mid-term (86% of the Mid-term target). The good achievement is attributed to Rikolto Uganda support to traders in Mbale central market in 2024, to campaign for safe rice under the Healthy Rice Initiative (HRI) where they came up with a label known as “Bukedi Savannah Rice”. This is aimed at further encouraging consumption of sustainably and safely produced rice. Much as the MTR achievement is very good, Rikolto Uganda may not be able to reach the end line program target, which requires almost doubling the numbers already realised, in the remaining one year, unless it explores tailored interventions that could increase the number of entrepreneurs faster (Food entrepreneur survey).

Number of individuals having access to sustainable food products: In Uganda, estimated number of consumers increased from 118,000 at baseline to 210,500 by MTR, an excellent achievement of 112% against the Mid-term target of 187,500. This achievement is attributed to increased marketing campaign by SWT and local traders in Mbale market and also increased capacity of the FOs producing rice sustainably. Given the pace of progress, Rikolto will most likely achieve the end line targets (partner records on food volumes sold).

Number of new initiatives emerging from Rikolto supported multi-stakeholder bodies: The MSP assessment revealed that Rikolto in Uganda moved **from zero initiative at baseline to one initiative by MTR**, a 100% achievement of the Mid-term target of one initiative. This achievement is attributed to “The Healthy Rice Initiative” (HRI) which was drawn out of a platform of the Mbale market rice vendors. HRI, has led to a rice brand known as Bukedi Savannah rice, promoting sustainable rice consumption. The end line target for Uganda on new initiatives emerging from the MSPs is already met.

Of critical importance however, is the quality of contribution that Rikolto makes in these MSPs, for example, input to **the National Rice Development Strategy (NRDS)**. Rikolto has been a good partner of MAAIF as far as constituting the National SRP Chapter (NSC) is concerned. While MAAIF took the lead, Rikolto conducted training on the requirements of the SRP standard and mobilised rice sub-sector stakeholders in a well-coordinated and collective voice. The NSC now has a memorandum and articles of association, drafted through stakeholder consultations. Some of the many benefits of the NSC include: improvements in advocacy on key issues in the sub-sector, backed up by evidence, well-articulated issues which guide investments, training opportunities presented through stakeholder networks, among others. As far coordination is concerned, Rikolto has done a very good job making all rice value chain stakeholders aware of their roles and who to go to whenever they meet specific challenges. In the NSC, stakeholders identify with farmers, getting to know their problems and this makes work easy, especially for the district extension workers who are in direct contact with farmers. Farmers are also being trained on various technical aspects of farming (KII District production officer). Rikolto gives evidence and supports MAAIF to develop important documents to move the NSC and the rice sub-sector forward. MAAIF is now finalising key documents for submission to the Africa Rice Chapter (ARC). MAAIF hopes that through this method of work, focused on evidence, Rikolto will guide stakeholders to counter the erratic ban on SRP in wetland (KII MAAIF).

The guidelines of NSC speak to the principles which are in sync with the NRDS, with the common objective of producing rice sustainably. This means the SRP guidelines are informing the implementation of the NRDS. Both are working to integrating SRP standards in the national policies, particularly the wetlands

management policy however, faces the challenge of limited information among policy makers, about SRP model practices and benefits. Most policy makers are not aware of sustainable rice production and therefore do not mind about the SRP model and the opportunities it brings to the environment, farmers, as well as rice self-sufficiency. Funding may also be limited, especially for research that would continuously generate evidence but also adapt the varieties that may be needed for different agro-ecological zones. Additionally, there is a challenge of limited capacity among implementers, especially extension workers. Rikolto trained extension workers only in a few districts and yet, there are many rice producing districts in the country, which are yet to be covered (KII MAAIF).

Rikolto is also working closely with the National Agriculture Research Organisation (NARO) to generate scientific **evidence for advocacy**. NaCCRI is ready with some evidence which will hopefully arm the stakeholders to influence policy from various angles. The evidence covers various aspects of rice production and marketing: rice has a socio-economic value, evidence on innovative water management that significantly reduces GHG emissions and water wastage, better chemical fertiliser and herbicide use according to SRP standard, currently working on technologies to fix some of the GHGs in the soil, especially methane gas. All these pieces of evidence will support the fight against the ban on SRP in wetlands, as well as mobilise stakeholders to promote SRP. At the NSC, stakeholders believe that sharing of this evidence helped to put a caveat on the blanket wetland ban. The President allowed three sub-regions to continue using wetland for rice production for some time as dialogue goes on with leaders. Generation of more evidence on socio-economic impact of rice production on farmer livelihood are on-going. Rikolto commissioned a consultancy to do a study on more evidence and NaCCRI will review the results and support the preparation of a policy paper (KII NaCCRI).

Other partners support Rikolto in promoting SRP standard. NaCCRI participated in meeting with key stakeholders and are at the point of developing a policy document that can be adopted by all, led by a Commissioner of MAAIF. NaCCRI is preparing a position paper so that the decision on blanket ban on rice production in wetlands can be reversed. The general ban emerged soon after the COP 28 meeting, when the government of Uganda signed a commitment regarding the Nationally Determined Commitment (NDC – COP document) to ban rice production in wetlands because of high levels of methane emissions but this pronouncement was done without specific evidence for Uganda, and more importantly, linked to sustainable rice production. Now NaCCRI is investing in research on eco-friendly rice, while MWE is working on a policy on carbon credit, that can form a basis for compensating farmers. All these efforts will hopefully present evidence that will reverse the ban (KII NaCCRI).

Number of regulatory measures relating to sustainable food system or inclusive business practices under consideration, adopted or implemented as a result of Rikolto's support: In Uganda, Rikolto moved from zero measure at baseline to one measure by MTR, a 100% achievement of the Mid-term target of one regulatory measure and the end line target too will be met. **Working in collaboration with MAAIF, Rikolto managed to establish the NSC, two regional chapters in Eastern and Northern Uganda as sub-components of the NSC, and influenced the inclusion of Sustainable Rice Platform framework into the NRDS.** By MTR, a policy brief was already drafted and is now being used by the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE). The department of Wetlands management in the MWE is now reconsidering the ban on lowland rice cultivation in community-managed and tertiary wetlands in Kigezi, Bukedi and Busoga sub-regions following preliminary evidence Rikolto shared with them showing that with sustainable rice cultivation, wetlands can continue performing their eco-system services. Probably, the evidence informed the caveat that the President put, to allow these sub-regions to continue producing rice in wetlands “as he dialogues with the leaders of the sub-regions”.

Rikolto is making other efforts that will impact on progress going forward. It supported a benchmarking visit for one official from the MWE to Vietnam that took place in March 2025, facilitating exposure to first-

hand experience for the official, within an area where Rikolto is implementing the SRP production model at scale. According to MWE official, the visit was very good because he was able to see and learn from the progress already made there and trusts that government can do similar things here in Uganda. The visit was motivated by the desire to look for a solution for the many farmers who are currently depending on rice production in wetlands (KII MWE). In addition, Rikolto has developed and is disseminating materials about the SRP model. According to MAAIF, these efforts are boosting the confidence of stakeholders who exhibit increased confidence in speaking about SRP and they are challenging government to work on sustainability issues (KII MAAIF). From the progress on this indicator, situated in other efforts Rikolto is making on advocacy, the end line target will be met.

We observed however, that **policy confusion** threatens these gains, unless urgent efforts are made by government to harmonise policy. While MAAIF is responsible for guidelines for production of any crop and is promoting sustainable rice production in gazetted wetlands, including rice, MWE is responsible for wetland management and prioritises conservation and restoration. Following the directive by the President, MWE is supposed to move and start implementation, that is, removing farmers from wetlands. MWE has guidelines for restoration and conservation of degraded wetlands, regulations for National river bank and lake shore management. These documents give guidelines on cultivation and acquisition of a wetland user permit, which comes with terms and conditions. Some activities are permitted, for instance harvesting of wetland vegetation, picking medicine and water harvesting for irrigation. Others, for example sand mining, huge infrastructure projects (industrial parks and large scale agriculture, can be permitted but only after a positive environmental impact assessment, showing that the activity in question does not endanger the environment (KII MWE). This situation indicates conflict in policy directions of the key line ministries – MAAIF and MWE.

Regarding new projects, MWE is now questioning whether specific **interventions contribute to conservation and protection of the environment** or farmers should engage in **alternative livelihood sources** such as upland rice production or use of other water sources for irrigation, especially because, according to MWE, there are many problems with rice production in wetlands at the moment including ecosystem disturbance, carbon emissions, degradation, among others. The good news is that MAAIF and Rikolto have invited MWE as a lead agency for wetland management, to participate in on-going meetings to prepare guidelines for rice production in wetlands. MWE emphasises the priority of bringing old irrigation schemes towards sustainable practices and ecosystem preservation so that people can do well. (KII MWE). According to some stakeholders, it may not make much sense for Uganda to ban production of rice in its wetlands for the sake of the environment, aiming to import rice from Tanzania, which is continuing to produce rice in wetlands. According to the public good characteristics of the environment, “*destruction of the environment*” in Tanzania, if they choose unsustainable means of producing rice, will also affect Uganda (KII Rikolto).

Amount of new investments into SFS/IB (€): In Uganda, Rikolto moved from no investment to € 264,064 by MTR, implying 264% achievement of the Mid-term target of € 100,00. This achievement was possible because in 2022 Rikolto leveraged € 50,000 from SWT partnership and in 2023 aBi trust funded SWT to the tune of € 116,064, to promote farmer adoption of rice cultivation practices that are in line with the SRP Standard in Bulambuli and Bukedea districts of Eastern Uganda. This was a matching grant to which SWT contributed an equivalent amount. In 2024, SWT invested an additional € 13,000 in marketing campaigns to influence consumers to switch from conventional, to sustainably-produced rice. Although Rikolto Uganda will most likely not meet the end line target if investment levels remain the same, they are hopeful that a new project, “the Climate Resilient Businesses for wetland adjustment communities”, might support new investments. There can also be small adjustment to the way of working by government, to foster line ministries to work together, rather than continue working in silos – this will facilitate more new investments for sustainability of wetland use. For example, the department of water for production at

MWE has engineers who are working on valley dams for animals and not for anything else, yet, this water too, can be used for irrigation. Valley dams have been dug for animals and the farmers have no water to use during drought. The NSC can help bridge some of the gap (KII MWE).

Some private sector rice stakeholders are worried about **competition from Tanzania rice** that might weaken the benefits of their investments in the sub-sector in Uganda. Many FOs also complain about cheap rice imports from Tanzania, that depresses prices in Uganda. NaCCRI however, considers this a good challenge because we need to understand that each country in East Africa does not need to be self-sufficient. Those that are not like Uganda, can buy from those who are, like Tanzania, through importation. The complaint however, needs to be nuanced because sometimes, rice comes from Tanzania through Uganda, on its way to Congo. The other issue is poor quality of rice from smallholder farmers in Uganda. Our farmers are not well linked to millers so they are a long way from producing consistent quality rice. When farmers are linked to millers, as in Tanzania, the Millers control quality and ensure uniformity and consumers like this. Tanzania has reached this level. Furthermore, many mills in Uganda are small scale and single pass, producing stony and broken rice. There are also big mills but around Kampala and most of them are underutilized. Rice quality in Uganda is further affected by varieties and seed systems. In the Uganda market, one cannot tell the rice variety they are eating and this compromises quality, while in other countries like Tanzania they are branded per variety and consumers like this (KII NaCCRI). Rikolto too, thinks the complaints about Tanzanian rice is an exaggeration because Tanzania rice comes into the Ugandan market mostly from September to November, because there is only one season for rice production in Tanzania, compared to the two in Uganda (KII Rikolto).

Other reasons why Tanzania rice sector may be having advantages over the Ugandan one is related to the use of its **Common External Tariff (CET)**, on imported rice which also affects price and quality. In Tanzania the CET collected is put back into the rice industry for development purposes, while in Uganda the CET is put in the national treasury so the funds to support development of the industry is limited. These are some of the reasons why Tanzania rice is cheaper. The heavy support by the government over time, has lowered the cost of production significantly. Market disruptions through bans is also problematic. Rather than get involved in these disruptions governments in the region should negotiate and agree on how market space should be shared, most importantly by branding the various varieties. DRC and Sudan are now where Uganda was 20 years ago, in that whenever rice is not available, you eat any other thing but as a country moves towards self-sufficiency, where Uganda is, then consumers start to choose and quality becomes very important (KII NaCCRI).

7.1.2 Sustainable Production Base

Regarding sustainable rice production, Rikolto implemented a combination of activities, including farmer capacity enhancement to apply key aspects of the Sustainable Rice Production (SRP) standards, specifically soil, pest and weed management, emissions reduction techniques, farmer organisational capacity building for better organisational management, as well as forming and sustaining valuable business relationships. **Achievements of mid-term target by Rikolto in Uganda is very good overall, above 90% of the Mid-term target, for most indicators.** This means Rikolto will most probably achieve the end line target for most indicators except those regarding: volume of environmentally sustainable produce sold to the market via Rikolto-supported farmer aggregation initiatives, women's access to finance and the number of partners who are strong enough to engage in sustainable business relationships. In these areas, Rikolto needs to make adjustments in order to accelerate progress towards achievement of the end line targets.

The level of achievement on most indicators under this strategy implies that the assumptions made and pathways chosen by Rikolto in the ToC, for the combined interventions of: capacity building of service

providers on SRP standard and indicators, setting up pilots on SRP rice and innovative financial products, as well as capacity building of FOs in business and management, is appropriate in building a sustainable production base for rice. Achievement of results under the sustainable production base strategy is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of achievements under sustainable production base strategy

Indicator Name	Baseline	Midterm Target	Value achieved by MTR	% of Midterm target achieved
1. Volume of environmentally sustainable produce sold to the market via Rikolto-supported farmer aggregation initiatives (MT)	964	1,720	1525	89
2. Net profit margin (%) of Rikolto-supported agri-businesses (FOs, BDS providers)	10	20	18	90
3. Amount of commercial finance leveraged (EUR) via Rikolto-supported agri-businesses (FOs, SMEs, CSLAs, or the like)	50,000	100,000	383,170	338
4. Number of FOs strengthened to be a capable and reliable business partners for off-takers	3	10	9	90
5. Number of farmers producing SRP or organic rice	7,032	7,767	7,851	101
6. N-use efficiency: Amount of grain produced by amount of N-input (kg grain yield/kg N input)	564.9	1,000	1,165	117
7. Biodiversity: Number of individual pesticide applications per season	2	1	1	100
8. Biodiversity: Sighting of key pests and beneficial organisms in field (point/100)	42	50	52.7	105
9. GHG emissions: Reduction in methane emissions per hectare per season (MT CO ₂ eq/ha)	22,921	15,000	15,329	102
10. Percentage of farmers of FO reaching a score of 90 or more and that pass all thresholds in the SRP Standard	40	70	71.5	102
11. Percentage of farmers of FO working towards sustainable rice cultivation having a score of more than 60 and who increase their average SRP-score annually	50	80	84	105
12. Percentage of farmers within FO scoring equal or higher than the threshold in SRP requirement 10 on water management	50	70	80	114
13. Percentage of farmers within FO scoring equal or higher than the	50	80	91	114

threshold in SRP requirements 24 and 25 on stubble and straw management				
14. Percentage of farmers within FO scoring equal or higher than the threshold in SRP requirements 24 and 25 on stubble and straw management	50	80	85	106
15. Percentage of farmers within FO scoring equal or higher than the threshold in SRP requirement 15 for N-fertilisation	30	60	71	118
16. Percentage of farmers within FO scoring equal or higher than the threshold in SRP requirement 18.1 to 18.5 on IPM > Weed Management	50	75	68	91
17. Percentage of farmers within FO scoring equal or higher than the threshold in SRP requirement 18.1 to 18.5 on IPM > Insect Management	50	80	84	105
18. Percentage of farmers within FO scoring equal or higher than the threshold in SRP requirement 18.1 to 18.5 on IPM > Disease Management	50	80	77	96
19. Percentage of farmers within FO scoring equal or higher than the threshold in SRP requirement 18.1 to 18.5 on IPM> Mollusc Management	50	90	92	102
20. Percentage of farmers within FO scoring equal or higher than the threshold in SRP requirement 18.1 to 18.5 on IPM > Rodent Management	50	75	82	109
21. Percentage of farmers within FO scoring equal or higher than the threshold in SRP requirement 16 for organic matter management	50	75	82	109
22. Percentage of women holding leadership positions in the organisations and actively participating in the organisations	10	35	30	86
23. Percentage of women with access to financial products which are adjusted to their needs	30	35	32	91

Volume of environmentally sustainable produce sold to the market via Rikolto-supported farmer aggregation initiatives: According to partner reports, Rikolto Uganda performed very well, beyond expectations, on increasing tonnage of sustainable produce sold, mainly attributed to benefits of the GAP trainings conducted by the CBTs, as well as efforts by Rikolto to link the FOs to other value chain actors and supporters. **Overall, Rikolto Uganda moved from 964 Metric Tonnes (MT) of sustainable produce at baseline to 1,525 MT at MTR, an achievement of 89% of the Mid-term target of 1,720 MT.** Performance was better for diversified sustainable non-rice food crops, which moved from 140 MT to 225 MT at mid-term, achievement of 102% of midterm target of 220 MT, compared to volumes of rice which increased from 980 MT to 1300 MT at mid-term, an achievement of 87% of the mid-term target set at 1,500 MT. The

growth in the volumes of diversified non-rice food crops (horticultural products – beans, carrots, cabbages, tomatoes, livestock, maize, legumes and soya bean) is attributed to messages on diversification for purposes of income and nutrition security, through training and government programs on the one hand, and spill over effects of the application of the SRP techniques on the other hand.

The growth in sustainable rice volumes sold is partly due to several marketing campaigns including one done by SWT and another by the local rice traders in Mbale market, under the Healthy Rice Initiative (HRI). The latter campaign has led to development of the Bukedi Savanah Rice label, as a symbol for rice quality in the sub-region. The process of designing this label involved farmers, traders and FOs. The quality and branding support was given to the cooperatives because they are the ones who produce. The vendors only received communication support to be able to market the rice. As good as the performance at mid-term is, Rikolto may not meet the end line target given the limited nature of factors of production at farmer level and the persistent problem of side selling. Farmers bypass the FOs in search of better prices or immediate cash and yet partner reports capture only the volumes sold through the FOs. Moreover, the very low prices of rice and other food products, due to the bumper harvest across the board in 2023/2024, led to hoarding of produce by farmers, implying that the non-perishable produce were released into the market only in bits and late, as farmers waited for better prices. In addition, local Uganda rice sells at a much higher price than the imported rice from Tanzania, preferred by consumers due to its aromatic attributes. This means that for the marketing period of September to November when the Ugandan rice market is flooded by rice from Tanzania, rice prices are generally depressed.

Net profit margin (%) of Rikolto-supported agri-businesses (FOs, BDS providers): Efforts to increase net profit margin of agri-business yielded very good results as well, starting at 10% at baseline up to 18% by MTR, which means an achievement of 90% of the mid-term target of 20%. The main reason behind this good performance is the increased crop yield, coupled with reduced production costs in the three years of program implementation. Another factor is the benefits of collective marketing of rice, especially the fact that the FOs were able to negotiate higher prices for farmers' rice. Lastly, improvements in milling facilities (high quality rice mills) have also contributed to better quality rice, which fetches much higher prices. Rikolto Uganda will most likely meet the target (partner records; Financial assessment reports).

Amount of commercial finance leveraged (in Euros) via Rikolto-supported agri-businesses (FOs, SMEs, CSLAs): A lot more funding than expected has been leveraged via Rikolto-supported agri-businesses in Uganda. Consequently, the end line target is already met. Commercial finance leveraged in Uganda started from € 50,000 at baseline and increased up to € 383,170 by MTR, reflecting an increase of 338% achievement of the mid-term target of € 100,000. On the one hand, four of the FOs through their Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs) raised € 62,000 of working capital for their members, on the other hand, one FO, Taabu Integrated Cooperative Society Limited, secured a € 93,000 loan from Uganda Development Bank (UDB) for installation of solar-powered micro-irrigation facility in 2023. The end line target will definitely be met (partner records; Financial assessment reports).

According to DIFACOS, farmers are able to save more in the FO SACCO, because of reduced cost of production after adoption of SRP techniques. The savings improved even more with the establishment of the SACCO which is the main place where members access loans. The SACCO managers easily recommends farmer members of the FO because they know them well and these members have land in the irrigation scheme which is managed by the FO. Under the SRP model, farmers are surer that he will get money when practicing SRP techniques and they will be able to pay back. The main challenge is that the demand for the money by farmers far outweighs the capital base of the SACCO, which is low. Timeliness of the loan is also a problem. When farmers apply, it takes about one month to process the loan because the SACCO must first recover the money that was lent to farmers before lending to new applicants. Although it is generally

hard for smallholder farmers to obtain credit because the collateral they have is small, the SACCO got a soft loan from the Microfinance Support Centre (MSC) in 2018 - first got UGX 20 m and then 50 m. This gave a big boost to the SACCO (FGD DIFACOS leaders).

One FO however, highlighted financial constraints as a key issue limiting farmers' access to inputs in a timely manner. High interest charged on loans by financial institutions limits farmers from accessing agricultural loans, making it difficult to invest in new practices. This implies that the irrigation which farmers use is insufficient hence hindering farmers' adoption of new practices (FGD Cheptue farmers).

Number of FOs strengthened to be capable and reliable business partners to off-takers: According to partner reports and records, FO strengthening interventions of Rikolto in Uganda have been implemented as planned, **starting with three FOs at baseline to nine FOs out of the 10 targeted at mid-term, implying a 90% achievement of the mid-term target of FOs whose business management capacity has been strengthened.** The nine FOs include, DIFACOS, Manafa Basin, Taabu, Bunambutye ACE, Ngenge Rice, Idinda Rice growers, Busowa traders, Oyam-Tochi and Iték Okile Multipurpose cooperative society. One FO, Namalu Farmers' Cooperative, was not supported as planned due to the fact that demarcation of wetlands had not yet been undertaken by the wetlands department of Nakapiripirit. This demarcation gives guidance to support NGOs like Rikolto, on whether the farms being supported fall within areas gazetted for rice production.

Once wetland demarcation is completed, and the district natural resource office confirms that the FOs are producing within areas gazetted for rice production, then Rikolto can proceed with FO strengthening interventions, otherwise they will be dropped. SWT confirmed that they are getting quality rice from the FOs supported by Rikolto on a weekly basis and the farmer also paid weekly (KII SWT). DIFACOS also indicated that the support that Rikolto gave the FO included; financial management in a cooperative, good governance, inclusion of women according to DIFACOS constitutions, linking with and sustaining supply with off takers collectively, establishment of a SACCO, among others. This support helped them to improve their capacity to bulk and mill rice, although this milled rice is mostly sold to traders and wholesalers, and at a higher price that is beneficial to the farmers but not under contracts (FGD DIFACOS leaders). Given the dependence on government processes on gazetting the wetland, which is slow in most cases, Rikolto will not meet the end line target.

Farmers producing SRP rice: According to the SRP standard survey, Rikolto's performance on increasing the number of farmers producing SRP rice was excellent for all categories of farmers, male, female, adult and young. **Overall, the program started with 7032 farmers at baseline and increased up to 7851 at mid-term, leading to a 101% achievement of the Mid-term target of 7,767.** The excellent performance was largely because the production model (SRP production model) is attractive to farmers. It helps them to obtain higher grain yield, and yet, at a lower production cost in terms of external inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers. Young male farmers (<35 yrs) performed best, moving from 1941 farmers at baseline to 2273 (103% of the mid-term target of 2210). Achievement of this mid-term target for the rest of the farmer categories was excellent (100%), comparing baseline and mid-term targets set: Adult male (>35 yrs) from 2911 to 3162 compared to mid-term target of 3150; young female farmers moved from 1504 to 1658 compared to mid-term target of 1655 and; adult female, moved from 676 to 758 compared to mid-term target of 752. Overall, Rikolto will likely meet the end line target.

Farmers from DIFACOS further confirm that adoption of SRP model has had a big impact in many ways. No more straw burning, farmers are now planting in lines, using younger seedlings, among others. Before the adoption of SRP techniques, farmers thought that water is needed for rice production day and night but now they know that water use has to be controlled and members are now practicing the AWD method,

increasing water use efficiency. After adoption of SRP model, farmers are now able to utilise both production seasons in the year to produce rice, always adapting to existing climate conditions. Since then, farmers have not lost and some of the farmers are not spraying any more. A combination of these practices increases resilience (FGD DIFACOS).

Good Agricultural Practices in sustainable rice production: In Uganda, **the overall achievement on the number of farmers engaged in key aspects of GAP was excellent, beyond expectations, with most of them achieving over 100% of the Mid-term target.** This is also an indication that end line targets will be met. **Nitrogen-use efficiency** increased from 565 Kg Grain/Kg of N at baseline, increasing rapidly to 1165 Kg Grain/Kg of N by MTR – a 117% achievement of the Mid-term target of 1000 Kg Grain/Kg of N. The main reason behind the good performance is the knowledge and skills that farmers acquired on N-fertilizer use and application. This excellent achievement notwithstanding, Rikolto staff assert that fertilizer use remains very low among smallholder farmers, probably due to access issues and limited use of the soil testing results. Regarding biodiversity, **the number of sprays** using synthetic pesticides has reduced from two at baseline to one by MTR, an achievement of 100% of the Mid-term target, set at one. The excellent performance is mainly as a result of the knowledge and skills that farmers acquired on IPM, emphasising chemical spraying as a last resort and moreover, following recommended application practices (SRP standard survey).

The **sighting of key pests and beneficial organisms** in the rice fields increased from 42 at baseline to 53 points/100 against the Mid-term target of 50 points/100, reflecting an achievement beyond expectations, of 105%. This achievement is due to reduced pesticide use, following adoption of sustainable production practices such as IPM. Reckless application of chemical pesticides usually reduces the population of beneficial pests in the ecosystem thus lowering the sighting numbers. In addition, Rikolto Uganda achieved a **reduction in methane emissions** per hectare per season (MT CO₂eq/ha) from 22,000 at baseline to 15,329 by MTR. This is an achievement of 102% of the Mid-term target of 15,000 MT Co₂eq/ha. The main reason is the adoption of the practice of Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD). This technique is used by rice farmers in Uganda to reduce methane emissions in rice farming, by periodically draining rice fields instead of keeping them continuously flooded. Intermittent draining allows the soil to breathe, thereby disrupting the anaerobic conditions suitable for methane-producing microbes in the soil, consequently reducing methane production (SRP standard survey).

Score of farmers against SRP standards and other GAP practices (water, stubble straw, weed, insect and rodent management): Overall, achievements on the Mid-term targets for the various aspects of the SRP standards and GAP practices is excellent, attributed to adoption of the SRP model which outlines in details all aspects that should be realised. In Uganda, the target Rikolto set for percentage of farmers in FOs who reach **SRP score 90 or more** and that pass all thresholds in the SRP Standard, was met beyond expectations, from 40% at baseline to 71.5% at MTR against a Mid-term target of 70%, indicating a 105% realisation of the Mid-term target. Similar achievements were observed for farmers who have **SRP score 60**, indicating that the FO is working towards sustainable rice cultivation and that they are increasing their average SRP-score annually. The number increased from 50% at baseline to 84% at MTR, a 105% achievement of the Mid-term target set at 80%. With this performance, Rikolto will most likely meet the end line target.

Regarding **water management**, the percentage of farmers scoring above the threshold for good water management has increased from 50% of the farmers at baseline to 80% by MTR, reflecting a 114% achievement of Mid-term target of 80%. The survey on SRP standard, showed adoption of good water use practices. The percentage of farmers scoring above the threshold for **stubble management**, increased from 50% at baseline to 91% at MTR, against a Mid-term target of 80%, reflecting an achievement 114% of the Mid-term target. For **managing straw** in the SRP model, the percentage of farmers increased from

50% at baseline to 85% against a Mid-term target of 80% (a 106% achievement of the Mid-term target), beyond expectations. Furthermore, despite the generally low fertiliser use among farmers, the percentage of farmers scoring above the threshold for **N-fertilizer use** increased beyond expectations, from 30% at baseline to 71% by MTR, against a target of 60%, indicating a 114% achievement of the Mid-term target, due to guidance from the extension workers and the CBTs in the FOs (SRP standard survey). The end line target will be met.

Adoption of key aspects of Integrated Pest Management (weed, insect, disease, mollusc, rodent and organic matter management): The SRP standard survey shows that the percentage of farmers scoring equal to or higher than the threshold for various practices increased overall. The SRP standard survey revealed several things: i) that farmers are moving away from spraying herbicides as a weed control method, to using sustainable practices promoted under the SRP production model. The percentage of farmers applying sustainable techniques in **weed control** increased from 50% at baseline to 68% at MTR, against an Mid-term target of 75%, reflecting a 91% achievement of the target, ii) those scoring above the threshold for IPM practices on **insect management** has increased from 50% at baseline to 84% at MTR, showing a 105% achievement of the mid-term target of 80% and, iii) those scoring above the threshold for sustainable **disease management** has increased from 50% at baseline to 77% at MTR, showing a 96% achievement of the mid-term target set at 80%, iv) the achievement on **control of mollusc** under the IPM practices has been beyond expectations, moving from 50% of farmers at baseline to 92% at MTR, indicating 102% against mid-term target set at 90%, v) those **controlling rodents** using sustainable techniques increased from 50% at baseline to 82% at MTR, reflecting a 109% mid-term target of 75% and, vi) those scoring equal to or higher than the threshold in SRP requirement 16 for **organic matter management** increased from 50% at baseline to 82% at MTR, indicating a 109% achievement of mid-term target which was set at 75%. The farmers adopted the specific IPM practices and other SRP related techniques easily because these techniques are safer and cheaper, demonstrated by the fact that those who adopted IPM methods did not have to spend on the use of chemical rodenticides and other pests. Additionally, the trainings, capacity building for the extension workers and CBTs, who in turn trained the farmers and the farmers in turn adopted the techniques, led to the good performance. The end line target for this set of indicators will be met.

Women holding leadership positions and actively participating in organisations: Partner reports reveal that the percentage of women holding leadership positions within FOs has increased from 10% at baseline to 32% by MTR, resulting in an achievement of 86% of the mid-term target which was set at 35%. This is attributed to the continuous capacity building towards professionalization of these cooperatives, based on the scope insight assessments. The approach of cooperative capacity assessment, followed by coaching on specific identified weaknesses, then re-assessing and repeating the cycle, ensures that key gaps are addressed. Based on the scope assessment of the FOs, women participation in leadership was identified as one of the gaps. In terms of coaching, Rikolto made the cooperative leaders aware of what their constitutions say (30% of leadership positions should be occupied by women). The leaders then put this article of their constitution in practice by electing women in some of the FO leadership positions and training those elected, building their leadership capacity. All FO leaders were also trained in gender inclusion and the benefits thereof, for their cooperative. The FO also instituted another rule to ensure that women whose husbands are already in the cooperative also become members. Another effort made by the FO to involve women, was identifying and giving to women those tasks they are good at, for instance, quality control. Achievement could have been 100% except that some of the FOs had already gone through their election cycles for cooperative leaders and the training would not have changed anything. If Rikolto puts more efforts in sending reminders to leaders before their elections and times the scope assessment to capture the leadership data, it may meet end line target.

Women's access to finance: Partners' reports mention that in Uganda, Rikolto started with 30% of women accessing appropriate finance at baseline and this increased to 32% by MTR, implying a 91% achievement of mid-term target which was set at 35%. This very good result is attributed to increased sensitization of the FO leadership to give women special consideration in their SACCOs and Village Savings and Lending Associations (VSLAs) because in general, access to finance by women is difficult for many reasons including literacy and limited participation in FOs and in the rice business (partner reports). Access to finance is an important incentive for growing businesses. If women continue to face limitations, it means they will find it difficult to grow their business and continue to lag behind. Rikolto may not meet end line target because the FOs highlighted the low capital base of their SACCOs compared to demand for loans by farmers.

Focus group discussions with farmers revealed other *issues that limit the participation of women and youth*, as vulnerable groups, in the rice business. They include: i) limited access to land, since most women do not inherit land the most families where the (male) youth come, land has been fragmented to such an extent that pieces cannot be divided anymore and the youth have to buy for themselves; ii) specifically, for women, the bushy plots in the Doho irrigation schemes at the time of plot allocation, discouraged women. At that time, most women declined from getting these plots because they had no capacity to clear such thick bushes. Without land, they have no collateral to access credit so they cannot improve. Even for credit from Doho SACCO, those with plots in the scheme are easily recommended for access to loans because plot ownership served, not only as an assurance of farmer's interest in SRP but is also a form of collateral. Some improvement however, has been registered in women participation in the cooperative business, which is now about 30% compared to under 10% at the beginning of the program, and; iii) specifically for youth - many fear the to work in the garden due to drudgery (FGD DIFACOS leaders).

It is important to note however, that many barriers the adult and young women face in agribusiness emanates from *cultural beliefs* that women should not inherit land and that they should only participate in cooperative activities to the extent that the husband allows her to. This implies that there could be a silent resistance by husbands against participation of women. The situation is worsened by gender division of labour, some of which is due to the reproductive roles the women play and others linked to socialization while growing up. As a result, women have more responsibilities at home and do not have enough time for agribusiness activities.

Profitability of SRP rice: According to the SRP performance indicators (PI) surveys carried out in the respective FOs, there has been an increase in the profitability of SRP rice cultivation, from 23% at baseline to 27% at MTR, reaching 93% of the mid-term target. This is not surprising, considering the good performance in realising various results which comprise the sustainable rice production namely, increased rice productivity, rice production, application of GAP, the use of the cropping calendar, all of which combine to increase rice yield, volumes harvested and quality sold. From the trend in performance, the end line target will be met.

7.1.3 Market Inclusion

Rikolto believes that when private rice value chain actors engage smallholder rice farmers, especially youth and women, as well as their FOs in transparent business relations and equitable access to services, they are all able to make a contribution to a sustainable and resilient rice sub-sector, in which all actors obtain living income from their activities while caring for health of people and the planet. To monitor program results under this strategy, Rikolto tracks several outcomes relating to farmer income, viable food system entrepreneurs, farmers benefiting from contract agreements, among others. Rikolto combined several data sources including the business model assessment, Scope insight assessment, as well as partner reports, in tracking performance. As summarised in Table 6 and described in the following sections, the overall achievement of Rikolto on this category of indicators by MTR was generally good, except for: the

number of farmers benefiting from inclusive contracts, women and youth working in agri-SMEs and the level of professionalization of five of the nine FOs.

Considering Rikolto's performance under the market inclusion strategy, assumptions made and pathways chosen in the ToC are appropriate to a certain extent. Rikolto expected that facilitating pilots of SRP and nutritious rice with the buyers would lead to promoting inclusive business relations with key processors such as SWT, developing business cases for SRP and nutritious rice business and promoting SRP and nutritious rice consumption. All this, combined with promoting innovative service provision by youth (men & women) would then lead to program outcomes and results under the market inclusion strategy. The performance however, reveals that significant risks are posed by pathways such as those relying on third parties to deliver FO strengthening services, and yet, without strong FOs, business relations may not yield much fruit. In addition, assumptions on availability and state of important factors in the enabling environment, for instance infrastructure, may not be true.

Table 6: Summary of achievements under the market inclusion strategy

Indicator name	Baseline	Midterm Target	Value achieved by MTR	% of Midterm target achieved
1. Number of market actors integrating inclusive business practices into their business model	4	15	14	93
2. Number of companies and FOs engaging in inclusive contract farming agreements on SRP rice	0	2	3	150
3. Number of farmers benefitting from inclusive contract farming agreements on SRP rice	500	4,500	2,400	53
4. Number of private actors offering SRP rice to their consumers	0	50	40	80
5. Number of communication campaigns by private actors to their consumers on the need for and the benefits of sustainable rice (cumulative)	0	6	5	83
6. Number of youth and women working in innovative agri SMEs	24	34	19	56
7. The level of professionalism of FOs	2.7	4	3	76

Number of market actors integrating inclusive business practices into their business model: Overall, market actors integrating inclusive business practices into their business model increased from four at baseline to 14 by MTR, against a set target of 15, implying an excellent achievement of the mid-term target by 93%. Rikolto Uganda achieved excellent results for all categories of companies, 100% and above, mainly because of efforts to support professionalization of FOs, as well as the B2B meetings it facilitated. The buyer companies are SWT and Diners Group Limited, sourcing rice from partner FOs of Rikolto; the financial institution targeted by Rikolto is Doho SACCO which now supports farmers throughout Butaleja district. Rikolto is planning to promote eco-lending to further augment effort to promote adoption of environmentally friendly production practices under the SRP; Namunasa Local Seed Business is a service provider, selling QDS to four FOs as a source of good quality seed; SWT has also provided some services like ploughing for out-growers and providing hybrid seed for desired quality of paddy. Bunambutye has also obtained fertilizer from Yara and grain pulse. Performance was only fair for engagement with public

institutions where two cooperatives, instead of the targeted three are supplying rice to public schools, implying an achievement of the mid-term target by 67%. Rikolto will most likely meet end line target related to this indicator.

Number of companies and FOs engaging in inclusive contract farming agreements on SRP rice or number of market actors integrating inclusive business practices into their business model: In Uganda, the business model assessment report revealed an achievement of the mid-term target beyond expectations (150%). While at baseline there were no partnerships established between FOs and processors, they were initiated in 2023, and these have grown to 3 by MTR, compared the mid-term target of 2. The processors include SWT, Diner's Group limited and the Mbale market traders' association. This excellent MTR achievement is attributed to other services that Rikolto provided to farmers including access to good inputs, an assured market, trainings on GAPs and linkage to finance, among others, all of which make the FOs attractive for contract farming agreements with companies. It is highly likely that Rikolto will meet end line target in Uganda.

Number of farmers benefitting from inclusive contract farming agreements on SRP rice: In Uganda, Rikolto moved from 500 farmers from two cooperatives (Bunambutye and Taabu), benefiting from inclusive contracts at baseline to 2400 by mid-term, **translating to an achievement of 53% of the mid-term target which was set at 4,500, an average performance.** While farmer members of Bunambutye and Taabu cooperatives are supplying sustainable rice to SWT under a contract arrangement facilitated by Rikolto, and are ready to continue supplying, they need continuous coaching in order to sustain the gains made. Rikolto is in the process of engaging a local coach to strengthen their relationships further. In the remaining year of implementation, the likelihood of Rikolto Uganda reaching the end line target of 8750 farmers for this indicator is very low.

In spite of the average performance, **interviews with key stakeholders highlighted value chain improvements due to contract farming.** SWT works with out-growers, organised in cooperatives, contracting them to produce rice. The out-growers have been highly responsive, supplying SWT with paddy, about four 10 MT trucks of good quality paddy each week. SWT pays the farmers weekly and they have reported higher household income. SWT supplements out-grower production by own production in a farm in Bulambuli but infrastructure around the farm is very poor. For this reason, only a small part of the 5000 acres of land recently secured, is being utilised. The main problem in the past however, is that farmers are not used to buying seeds because most of them recycle seeds, a practice that results in low yields. After Rikolto supported the farmers with training, they now buy good quality seeds and yield is good. A challenge that SWT faces in the contract arrangement is the difficulty in dealing with farmers in a group. They want advances in order to work but then they engage in side selling. This problem can only be mitigated by dealing with cooperatives.

The number of private actors offering SRP rice to their consumers: In Uganda, this number has increased tremendously, starting from zero at baseline to 40 by MTR, an 80% achievement of the midterm target which was set at 50%. The private actors include SWT, Diners, traders from Mbale market and three FOs, who are directly supplying traders in cities and towns across the country. Considering the remaining one year of implementation and the fact that Rikolto Uganda seems to work with a network of traders, it is likely that the end line target will be achieved (partner reports).

Communication campaigns by private actors to their consumers on the benefits of sustainable rice: In Uganda, the number of campaigns increased from three at baseline to five at midterm, reflecting an 83% achievement of the mid-term target set at six. These campaigns have been mainly done on social and print media, as well as talk shows, by SWT, under Rikolto partnership to promote consumption of sustainably produced rice, since 2022. The end line target has already been met.

The number of youth and women working in innovative agri SMEs: Partner reports reveal that in Rikolto's program in Uganda, the number of youth and women working for innovative SMEs increased from zero at baseline to 19 by mid-term review, meaning that 56% of the mid-term target set at 34, was met. This achievement is coming from one enterprise, Bongomin, a mechanization company, providing services to Bunambutye, DIFACOS and Manafa Basin Rice Farmers Cooperative societies. **Although Rikolto had anticipated to have contact with more innovative agri-SMEs on other aspects of the rice business like digital platforms, rice processing, this did not materialise, and yet, Rikolto cannot control the manner in which innovations emerge.** The other thing that affected achievement of the mid-term target is the fact Rikolto did not pay much attention to skilling women in entrepreneurship. This, in addition to the fact that women and youth face specific challenges in entering jobs generally and in agri-SMEs in particular, that slowed down mid-term target achievement. Considering the pace of progress, it is unlikely that Rikolto Uganda will meet the end line target if it does not establish specific interventions to be able to achieve it.

According to SWT, companies experience several challenges in employing women and youth including lack of a day-care centre, yet, women employees are good for the company because they are patient and work diligently. Most women who come to work in the processing companies are young and of reproductive age, they have children and often face difficulties regarding day care for their babies as they work. The other challenge with employing women is the low levels of education, especially among young women. They can weed but cannot run machines due to limited education. Young men are often more skilled compared to young women and they access employment in companies more easily. SWT employs women in the office and in their rice drying ground. These problems could be mitigated by discouraging young people below 18 from looking for employment so they can stay longer in school. Such measure could encourage young women to acquire all skills that are necessary to work in the company, for instance agronomy and machine operations (KII SWT).

SWT confirms its commitment to employing women and youth and does not see any challenge for them to access jobs in the company because it already has a policy of employing 50% women. The company is even putting more efforts to encourage its women employees. It has built an Early Childhood Centre (ECD), for the children of the ladies who are working on the farms, to enable the mothers to work peacefully, while their children are being taken care of nearby. The centre will open in June (KII SWT).

The level of professionalism of FOs: The scope insight reports revealed varying degrees of professionalism among the different partners. Overall, there is some improvement for most of the partners, indicating progress from 2.7 (out of 5) at baseline to 3 by MTR, against a target of 4, implying a 76% achievement of mid-term target. The target of Scope Insight score of 4 was set for all cooperatives individually Rikolto will make progress for four cooperatives but will not make much progress in the remaining implementation period because FO strengthening is generally a slow process.

Rikolto Uganda will make good progress by end line with FO strengthening for the following FOs, whose scores are already quite good: i) Itek Okile which scored 3.7 by MTR, implying a 93% achievement of mid-term target), mainly due to a grant the FO received, which boosted its capacity to do business. The grant was conditional on provision of cooperative policy documents and other records, to which the cooperative complied; ii) Ngenge Sub-county rice growers' Cooperative scored 4.1, a 103% achievement of the mid-term target due to constant mentoring by Rikolto partner NAAC in 2023 and the readiness of the cooperative to aggregate rice in their storage facility and sell collectively to Diners Group limited under contract.; iii) Busowa Traders and Farmers' cooperative scored 4.2, a 105% achievement of the mid-term target, due to action on capacity gaps identified and addressed in the previous assessment scope assessment, training that was given to the leadership, emphasis by leadership on business and record keeping. Furthermore, Rikolto has mentored the leadership regularly and the cooperative membership was boosted by the prospect of government upgrading their scheme to an irrigation scheme; iv) Idinda Rice Growers' Cooperative also scored 4.2, a 105% achievement of the mid-term target, due to their

improved milling facility which has increased their business. Additionally, the leadership of Idinda is always looking for support from government and other partners like Agro-inputs dealers.

For the following cooperatives, Rikolto will not achieve end line target, unless drastic changes are made:

i) Doho Irrigation Scheme Farmers' Cooperative Society (Coop I) scored 2.7, a MTR achievement of 68% due to reduced coaching from Rikolto partner, NAAC who were not present for most of 2024.; ii) Taabu (Coop III) scored 2.7, a 68% achievement of the mid-term target, due to reduced rice business and consequently reduced volume of rice traded, as well as a stronger focus on member trainings; iii) The performance of Manafa Basin Rice Farmers' Cooperative (Coop II) – 2.2, an achievement of only 55% of mid-term target due to less coaching time given to them and complacency by the cooperative, after they got a rice mill from a grant; iv) Bunambutye ACE (Coop IV) – 1.6, a 40% achievement of the mid-term target – the worst performer, mainly because it still lacks the basic finances to do business on behalf of their members and lack most of the mandatory documents despite all the efforts to build their capacity and link them to value chain actors. They need financial support for them to put in practice what they are coached on; iv) Oyam-Tochi Irrigation scheme (Coop IX) scored 1.8, a 45% achievement of the mid-term target, mainly due to low levels of business. Infrastructure in the area poorly developed and this limits the marketing of rice which the main enterprise and consequently limits rice production (Scope reports; Rikolto staff).

In addition to the cooperative related specific challenges above, NAAC, the partner whom Rikolto is using to strengthen and mentor the partners, have their own weaknesses and governance challenges, and were therefore, not able to coach the partners as expected. As a result, Rikolto decided to drop NAAC in the middle of implementation period, taking up some of the roles NAAC was previously engaged for. Rikolto is now planning to engage another partner, ICRA to carry out FO coaching. In spite of the challenges with progress in FO strengthening, FOs leaders interviewed mentioned **several benefits of FO collaboration with Rikolto**. According to DIFACOS, the 10 year collaboration with Rikolto has yielded many benefits: many technologies have been introduced to farmers especially the SRP model of rice production; Rikolto came with a sustainability plan for production of rice, trained members in financial management, marketing, mind set change, SRP techniques, connected DIFACOS to different buyers – SWT and Diner's group, support establishment and initial costs of DIFACOS SACCO, supported the start of an agro-processing unit, piloted a cropping calendar which has helped to increase yields and manage water resources more efficiently, exposed farmers and FO leaders by taking them on a study tour to Rwanda, Mweya, Tanzania and Ntungamo - to learn how financial management for cooperatives, recycling of straws for soil replenishment and linkage with other support initiatives such as EPSEDEC that supported DIFACOS with VSLA creation to link with SACCO. Before the collaboration with Rikolto, farming was done the way farmers wanted but this is changing, although adoption rate is not so high yet (FGD DIFACOS leaders).

According to Rikolto, other multiplier effect benefits of linking FOs to markets as part of the FO strengthening. They include: i) linkage with Farmer Business Organisation (FBO) service providers – Rikolto linked four FOs - Itek Okile, Oyam Tochi, Taabu and Bunambutye to Namunasa Local Seed Business which buys local seeds from communities of the four FOs to make Quality Declared Seed (QDS). The QGS are good quality seeds but of lower level compared to certified seed. The seeds are selected, sorted, verified by the District Agriculture Officer (DAO) and then packaged for sale; ii) SWT has provided ploughing services to out-growers and they also sell hybrid seed to farmers who are producing under contract with them, at a subsidised rate compared to the open market and; iii) Yara and grain pulse companies have sold fertilizer to Bunambutye FO (Rikolto sense-making session).

7.1.4 Enabling Environment

With this strategy, Rikolto facilitates the coming together of rice sub-sector stakeholders in order that they may identify key challenges facing the sub-sector and discuss them while negotiating their interests and searching for solutions together. In some cases, stakeholders make contributions to solutions that may be agreed upon. The strategy enables policy influencing in directions that are relevant to the stakeholders since dialogue and engagement happens directly. Furthermore, Rikolto participates in MSPs with the aim of stimulating the scaling of Rikolto's models and intervention through fund-raising, knowledge exchange, market access and community engagement. Tracking of progress here therefore, is how Rikolto leverages its interventions to promote Sustainable Food Systems/Inclusive Business (SFS/IB) in various ways, explained in the following section. Rikolto has registered good performance in achieving mid-term targets linked to most indicators and most end line targets will be achieved except for: the number of appropriate financial products offered by FIs for FOs, agri-SMEs and farmers. Rikolto's performance under this strategy confirms Rikolto's ToC, where Rikolto made the choice to facilitate Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSPs) to advocate for the use of SRP Standard as a sustainability benchmark, green-financing, and adoption of IWA 29 guidelines for FO professionalization. Achievements are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7: Summary of achievements under the enabling environment strategy

Indicator name	Baseline	Midterm Target	Value achieved by MTR	% of Midterm target achieved
1. Number of pieces of evidence generated and shared with relevant stakeholders for leverage	0	1	1	100
2. Number of appropriate financial products offered by financial institutions for FOs, agri SMEs and farmers	0	1	0	0
3. Level of functioning of the MSP	0	3	3	100
4. The number of multi-stakeholder platforms in which Rikolto or its partners promote sustainable & inclusive food systems disaggregated per category (landscape / urban / national)	0	3	3	100

Number of pieces of evidence generated and shared with relevant stakeholders for leverage: In Uganda, partner records show that the mid-term target on evidence generated and shared with relevant stakeholders, was fully achieved (100%). There was no piece of evidence at baseline, it increased to one, which was also the mid-term target. This is attributed to a policy milestone which led to the integration of SRP standards championed by Rikolto into the NRDS. In the first instance in 2023 and 2024, Rikolto shared preliminary evidence on impact of sustainable rice production on indicators related to biodiversity, Green House Gas (GHG) emissions reduction, yield, and profitability, with relevant stakeholders at both the national and regional levels. Thereafter, a draft policy proposal on sustainable rice production in Uganda was developed and reviewed by a team of key stakeholders including MAAIF, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO), Farmer leaders from cooperatives supported by Rikolto, representatives from selected District Local Government (DLG), Natural Resources Departments, and private sector (SWT). The policy brief is currently in the final stages of formulation.

Number of appropriate financial products offered by financial institutions for FOs, agri SMEs and farmers: This has not yet been achieved because Rikolto Uganda is yet to engage FIs to promote eco-credit products.

Level of functioning of the MSPs: In an annual MSP assessment, Rikolto monitors key aspects of MSP functioning, summarised in Table 7, in order to gauge its level of functioning.

Table 8: Criteria for monitoring the functioning of Multi-stakeholder platforms

Level	Description
0	Actors are working in silo, no MSH platform on sustainable rice/quality standard/IB relation
1	actors are identified and interested in working collaboratively
2	actors agree on common MSP agenda and programmes
3	MSP has the capacity to formulate policy proposals on sustainable rice/quality standard/IB relation
4	MSP is regarded by the government as a competent counterpart in policy formulation on sustainable rice/quality standard/IB relation

In Uganda, **the functioning** of the rice sub-sector MSP is rated as excellent, with 100% of the mid-term target achieved, having moved from zero at the beginning of the program, since there was no MSP, to 3 by MTR, as planned, functioning at level 3. Level 3 MSP functioning means that the MSP now has the capacity to formulate policy proposals on sustainable rice/quality standard/IB relation. The National SRP chapter is now operational with a coordinator from MAAIF and a good representation of other key stakeholder organizations including NARO, MWE, Private sector, JICA, The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and DLGs/LGAs, who are members of the regional sustainable rice platforms. The target is to have a functional MSP by end of 2026 and this will most likely be met. Rikolto has played an important positive role with the coordinated approach in mobilising the National SRP Chapter (NSC) and this has improved rice stakeholder collaboration greatly, giving a platform on which members can express themselves. Members of the NSC are respected by government collaborators, following the many engagements they have undertaken and the quality of the engagements. The platform has promoted advocacy for the industry, influencing policy and planning for the industry, making suggestions to align relevant policies for the benefit of all. Members are now empowered to speak about rice based on evidence. Recently, the NSC secretariat was even able to dispute the statistics of FAO which is not reflecting the gradual increments in rice production in the country in the past decade. The NSC members feel that these statistics need to be demystified based on their own scientific data (KII MAAIF).

Rikolto has so far facilitated the establishment of the NSC at national level and two others at regional levels, as part of the NSC. An important achievement is the strong foundation built in the formation of the NSC, due to the **participatory nature** in which it was constituted. Although Rikolto took the initiative to approach key stakeholders to develop the NSC, they played various pivotal roles. MAAIF being the line ministry responsible for rice production led the initiative. In addition, The National Crop Resources Research Institute (NACRRI), brought in a wealth of experience to the NSC, from many years of conducting research on Maize and rice. It has shared scientific evidence and facts with rice sub-sector stakeholders, about what is possible and what is not. NaCCRI's experience is quite relevant to the NSC and is appreciated by members. About a decade ago, when NaCCRI started focussing on rice, Uganda could meet only 20% of own rice needs and moreover, it used to be food for rich people but now we are meeting 75% of own needs and will soon be self-sufficient. Moreover, everybody can eat rice whenever they feel like. NaCCRI mainly supports the generation of evidence that is required to feed into the work on policy issues, for example, the ban of rice production in all wetland that Rikolto, together with other stakeholders need to fight against. NaCCRI has also been involved in efforts to harmonise policy between MAAIF and MWE

through Policy advocacy, with a focus on some of the politically sensitive topics (KII NaCCRI). The active participation of the various stakeholders is particularly important because the rice association and the millers' association in the country are weak and cannot voice evidence (sense-making workshop).

Regarding the **number of MSP platforms** in which Rikolto or its partners promote sustainable and inclusive food systems, Rikolto Uganda moved from zero at baseline to three as was planned by MTR, an excellent achievement of 100%. This achievement is attributed to the fact that Rikolto has facilitated the establishment of functional MSPs, one at national level, the NSC – coordinated by a high level officer from MAAIF and two regional sustainable rice platforms, established in 2023 – coordinated by the District Natural Resources and Production departments in Northern and Eastern Uganda. For both aspects of the indicator, end line target will be met.

Due to the strong foundation on which the NSC was constituted, the platform has **not experienced any governance challenges yet**, mainly because the local stakeholders followed the guidance received from the Africa rice chapter, in terms of categories of stakeholders to be targeted. All key rice value chain actors and supporters, as well as policy makers are well represented, including; MWE, MTIC, UNBS, MAAIF, NARO, processors, academia, traders, farmers' representatives, among others. Formation of the platform has been a coordinated effort. It enables all stakeholders to contribute to sub-sector solutions and raise their concerns on the possible loopholes (KII MAAIF).

7.2 Potential Sustainability of the Interventions

Rikolto takes seriously the potential for sustainability of its strategies right from program design, through execution, monitoring and evaluation. In tracking the potential for sustainability, Rikolto focusses on financial, social and technical sustainability. Sustainability here covers both longevity and potential for scaling up of impact. On the one hand, longevity of impact emphasises the extent to which communities or beneficiaries served by Rikolto interventions will continue to benefit after Rikolto programs. On the other hand, potential for scaling up explores the readiness of external stakeholders to multiply and integrate Rikolto strategies in their own work.

7.2.1 Financial sustainability

The rating of Rikolto on financial sustainability for Uganda is A, indicating that the strategies and tools developed under the intervention of supporting partner FOs in business capacity building are intended for use after the intervention. The costs for development have been born during the program, making it easier for future users to adopt them. Additionally, Rikolto Uganda strengthens FOs, making them more business-oriented, with stronger management systems and consequently, more attractive to key value chain stakeholders, especially the off-takers and financial service providers.

The entry point for the intervention on sustainable rice for Rikolto Uganda is the output markets. Consequently, Rikolto partnered with a rice processor, SWT, that has integrated environmental sustainability in its business model. The company sponsors farm trainings on sustainable rice farming at their nucleus farm in Bulambuli district, to those farmers from whom it sources. Once the farmers adopt better and sustainable rice production techniques, their yields are higher and their income from rice and other food crops is higher, and their resilience is improved. The market linkage between the FOs and SWT is for profit, and therefore, it is expected the business owners will strive to sustain these businesses beyond 2026 because both the farmers and the processor are benefiting financially from the production and marketing of SRP rice.

Farmer surveys by Rikolto Uganda on ecological and sustainable farming practices revealed that these practices help farmers to sight the pests better, reduce the number of times they spray pests in a season, (some from 3 to 1 spray according to IWB), as well as increasing the nitrogen use efficiency of their rice (section 3.1.1.2 above), hence lowering their production costs. Lower costs of rice production motivate

more farmers to transition to sustainable farming. It is expected, therefore, that smallholder farmers will continue to adopt these practices beyond the programme, due to lower production costs. Furthermore, Rikolto Uganda embarked on a mobilization campaign to encourage local/farmer-led financial institutions to do conditional lending to their members based on sustainability practices. DIFACOS for instance, has established its own SACCO, from which members borrow money. The savings in this SACCO has also attracted other funds from MSC, for onward lending to farmers. Not only does this approach improve liquidity of the rice businesses of the farmers but it also contributes to financial sustainability of the FO. This approach is promising to improve access to finance for smallholders who can then continue with sustainable rice production in subsequent years. In addition, the processor, SWT confirms that a high demand for good quality sustainably produced milled rice exists. This implies that there is a high likelihood for company to continue sourcing SRP rice from smallholder farmers beyond 2026.

Sustainable increase of the profitability of the rice business will lead to Farmer Business Organisation (FBOs) becoming more financially sustainable. The emphasis that Rikolto puts on professionalization of FOs and being able to cover own operational costs, contribute to financial sustainability. Although Rikolto is actually focussing on developing rice based systems, rice is only a base crop but many farmers are now selling horticulture products, which further boosts their financial sustainability and that of their FOs.

7.2.2 Social sustainability

Rikolto's achievement of social sustainability in Uganda is rated A, indicating that its strategy takes great care for the conditions of social sustainability including stakeholder participation, multiplication of positive outcomes, embedding activities in existing organisations, promoting exchange of expertise and integration in policy. In Uganda, Rikolto pilots and business cases are all co-designed and implemented with direct beneficiaries and other stakeholders. All staff have undergone training in facilitating MSPs and multi-actor meetings to ensure that the views of all actors are taken into account. This approach to implementation, empowers stakeholders and promotes ownership of the process of co-designing the implementation and the outcome of the interventions, a very important aspect of social sustainability.

To ensure social sustainability and ownership of the SRP program interventions, Rikolto in Uganda involved farmers in co-designing, testing, and evaluating the SRP demonstrations that the CBTs set up. Furthermore, through its partner, the National Alliance of Agricultural Cooperatives in Uganda (NAAC), Rikolto invested in strengthening the governance capacity of FOs, contributing to their sustainability.

Before farmers participate in the MSPs, they get additional preparations to enable their active and meaningful participation, contributing to FO sustainability plan. Through regular scope insight assessment, leaders of the FO are sensitised to conduct some social work and review the composition of their leadership in order to avoid leaving out the vulnerable categories of leaders. When an FO is rooted in their community in this way, it is strengthened further and this strength also feeds back to profits of the FO because people / members appreciate and can easily engage. This effort relates to cooperative as a rural entity, that should understand the needs of the members and address them.

In addition, skilling youth and women to be able to participate in business and governance of the FO is also important for building a strong social base and strengthening the FO. Empowerment of vulnerable groups on the one hand and skilling on the other hand, leads to more participation and better profits. The only challenge to governance capacity building is founder syndrome.

7.2.3 Technical sustainability

Achievement on technical sustainability is rated as A for Uganda, implying that Rikolto's interventions ensure that various expertise needed by actors in the program to develop, as well as the necessary

equipment are managed and used to the best advantage of the actors, after the program ends. Rikolto emphasises local capacity strengthening, by training and coaching local government extension workers and CBTs, to own the various initiatives and have the technical skills to apply the SRP standard. In 2022, the CBTs received training in post-harvest handling practices, such as the use of tarpaulin drying techniques, in order to improve the quality of paddy supplied by farmers to processors. Such skills will remain in the community beyond the program. In this respect, Rikolto has built the capacity of 120 government and private sector extension workers, as Trainer of Trainers (ToTs) along with 60 CBTs on sustainable rice farming and the use of the SRP Standard. These trainers have also been equipped with SRP-approved training materials, are all locally-based, and will continue delivering GAP training to smallholder farmers beyond the project. FO leaders have also been equipped with knowledge on market requirements (such as quality, pricing, among others), making them well equipped to identify and maintain linkages with profitable markets. Extra training is being delivered directly by the cooperatives and SWT and they are also attracting other partners to support farmers with other aspects of rice production, for instance mechanisation by Bongomin Ltd.

The fact that key government entities like MAAIF and NARO appreciate that the practices under the SRP standard assures sustainability and embrace it, is itself an indication that there will be technical sustainability. Additionally, the NSC, with a wide range of rice sub-sector stakeholders who have been mobilised to improve rice production in the country, encourages the use of SRP standard as its benchmark for rice production. When each of these stakeholders spreads the SRP technique within their networks, it can be a powerful avenue for sustainability.

A critical issue for sustainability of rice production in Uganda is government policy and level of investment. The policy directive recently made by the President of Uganda to drive out all rice farmers from the wetlands because of high GHG (specifically methane) emissions from rice production and claim that the profitability of lowland rice is low, has shaken the whole rice sub-sector. Currently, most government officials, including those collaborating with Rikolto feel uncomfortable to express a different view. It is important however, to highlight that in areas like Butaleja where people's livelihood is all linked to rice, there will be a lot of resistance to getting out of the wetlands. At the moment farmers do not trust government because they think it has a hidden agenda, and could be using the ban on rice production in wetlands to push allocation of wetlands to other enterprises. An example that confirmed their fear is the recent case where government facilitated the development of 'Bukedi strategic plan', and the strategic enterprises selected are cocoa, coffee, poultry and fish. Rice, the most important source of livelihood does not appear anywhere in the plan. Introducing new crops to farmers is difficult because they have invested a lot in rice and in making rice production more efficient. For the Eastern part of Butaleja, rice is the most suitable enterprise but in West Butaleja – coffee and cocoa can be produced. Local agriculture experts also resent the fact that the central government makes such statements as banning production in wetlands, without even consulting them (KII Production officer).

One way in which the government of Uganda can ensure that sustainability of rice production beyond Rikolto is by considering the evidence being generated on sustainable rice production in wetlands under the SRP model. This evidence, according to Rikolto, demonstrates that such production does not drain wetlands, limits agro-chemical use and ensures application modern and sustainable techniques that use water more efficiently such as AWD. Currently, MWE, Danish embassy and Rikolto are working on a model to support the farmers who have been working on wetlands to try out alternative livelihoods as a trial for ecosystem conservation, then see the benefits. There will be a submission to parliament after data collection and preliminary analysis. Before that the current directive to remove all people from wetlands. While MWE continues to ask whether people must grow rice in the wetlands of Bukedi, Kigezi and Busoga, politicians are insisting that they should continue to do so (KII MWE; KII District production officer). At the

moment however, government is thinking about certain measures to act as incentives to farmers to invest in SRP production model, for example by supporting farmers to certify their products with the UNBS standard. All efforts should be focused on the areas within the schemes in order not to scatter the interventions and spread too thin. (KII MWE).

GOU has prioritised water for agricultural production and is availing many resources through projects, with schemes being put in place, others are being rehabilitated and water for production in terms of irrigation, under the ugift project, being co-financed by government. In the NRDS II the priorities are: i) lowland irrigated rice in schemes – Doho I & II, Olweny, Atari in Kween, Tochi – Oyam sub-region and, ii) upland rice. Low land irrigated rice is only in the gazetted lowlands for agricultural production and the rest of the production in non-gazetted lowlands, is not allowed (KII MAAIF).

7.2.4 Potential for scale-up

Inherent in Rikolto strategies for program implementation are approaches that facilitate scaling up, especially working with local partners, capacity building based on needs identified by the beneficiaries, contributing to policy development and inserting initiatives in existing organisations. Several examples are linked to the achievements above in various aspects of sustainability.

Training of local trainers on SRP standards: The training on SRP standards done for farmers, as well as DLG/LGA extension in Uganda, empower these workers technically but they remain active within government structures. Agricultural extension training being the core mandate of government extension officers implies that these officers have already started engaging in scaling – up these methods while continuing with their obligations. The expectation is that they will continue spreading the techniques. Rikolto also trains private sector extension workers from SWT, as well as those from some cooperatives. Once these acquire the skills, they will contribute by using them and training farmers because of interest in the benefits.

Contribution to policy: Rikolto in Uganda has advocated for adoption of the SRP standard in the national policy for the rice sub-sector, implying that partnerships between MAAIF and big rice sub-sector stakeholders will assure scaling up. In addition, based on evidence of positive impact of SRP on wetlands, the government is using this evidence to review its stance on the ban it had put on the use of wetlands for rice production. These are actions which indicate that scaling up will happen. In addition, government is now using the SRP standards to guide rice production in irrigation schemes. Based on evidence from Rikolto, MWE is preparing a cabinet paper on rice production in wetlands, that will guide decision making on whether to allow rice production in gazetted wetlands or not.

Market linkage with SWT: Following the partnership that Rikolto Uganda started with SWT to source sustainable rice from its partners in Eastern Uganda, SWT decided to source SRP rice directly only from 2 cooperatives within the vicinity of their nucleus farm. For the others, they source indirectly using their agents.

Some cooperatives (DIFACOS and Manafa basin, Busowa rice traders and farmers' cooperative) are now processing their own rice. They buy paddy from members, mill and sell as their own products, in competition with SWT. According to what these cooperatives report, they make better profits because they are able to add value on the rice and thereby earning higher prices.

Another thing is conditional lending that some FIs have embraced. Rikolto, through engagement with FIs has convinced some of them on the logic of lending to farmers on condition that the farmer practice SRP. The FIs like the principle because it is simple and they themselves are aware of the complaints by their clients about climate change related issues, which drive down yields. FIs in their conventional practice

have been exacerbating the problem by lending to rice farmers and value chain actors but without caring about sustainability. Now they are asking these questions when clients ask for loan.

Incentives are an important pillar for scaling. Most incentives however, come with a budget cost, especially taking into consideration the fact that the strategic position of government is not to subsidise. This means, possible solutions will target a few key actors in the private sector, bearing in mind the fact that whenever the private sector incentivises production, they too benefit (KII MAAIF). Some incentives however, are at farm level and non-market based, where farmers benefit from higher productivity levels and lower cost of production due to adoption of the SRP model. Other incentives from carbon market resulting from reduced GHG emissions are being explored by the MWE and other key rice stakeholders in the country (KII MWE).

A key driver in scaling innovation is linkage with the private sector. Through such linkages, innovations are multiplied and their ability to generate profit is unleashed. It will be important to continue linking private sector with research in order that research may invest efforts in producing technologies that benefit the market, at the centre of which is private sector (KII NaCCRI). Such collaboration needs to engage other levels and sections of government and private sector, depending on the specific relevance, particularly efforts of institutionalization through FOs, cooperatives and LGAs. Additionally, influencing consumers positively so that they see benefits of sustainable rice while ensuring that it remains affordable (KII NaCCRI).

8 Lessons Learned from Programme Implementation to date

During program implementation, Rikolto has documented lessons related to each of the three strategies in the Uganda sustainable rice program. These lessons were reviewed, together with the sustainable rice program team, in a half day reflection workshop.

8.1 Sustainable Production Base

Early involvement of government increases their interest and potential for scaling: Rikolto in Uganda had a good experience of increasing government interest through involvement. In 2022, Rikolto Uganda was not able to meet its target of conducting sustainable agriculture training in twenty rice growing districts because ten of the targeted districts had not yet been gazetted for lowland rice cultivation, as directed by the MWE. Prior consultation with the district technical leaders on the status of wetland demarcation at planning and budgeting time, would have yielded better results by gradually enrolling the districts over a number of years instead.

Paying attention to challenges of public service partners is critical for success: An example is the partnership between District Local Government (DLG) extension staff and Rikolto Uganda to impart knowledge and skills on sustainable agricultural practices to rice farmers which did not work well. The extension workers had resource constraints, such as fuel for their motorcycles and yet there were not prior discussions with them on this issue. On realising the challenge, Rikolto Uganda facilitated the public extension workers to train CBTs/lead farmers as local trainers for their peers. The role of the public extension workers therefore, changed from farmer trainer, to that of a Trainer of Trainers (ToT), coaching and backstopping the trainers.

Flexibility is important in gathering high-quality data on profitability of SRP rice: Although Rikolto Uganda had planned to collect all data necessary for calculating the profitability of sustainable rice cultivation from seven FOs in July and August, 2024, the peak of first season harvesting time of rice, it did not work out due to the different selling timelines of farmers. This prolonged the time spent on the data collection exercise, into the months of September and October. This lesson will be considered during the next rice season planning.

8.2 Market Inclusion

Synergies with other Rikolto programme increases resource use efficiency: In Rikolto Uganda, two agri-food entrepreneurs involved in adding value to rice products and by-products underwent mentorship and coaching in entrepreneurship under the Good Food for Cities (GF4Cs), another program of Rikolto. Based on synergy between Rikolto programs, it was possible to use GF4Cs program resources to accomplish a sustainable rice outcome and Rikolto Uganda hopes to continue with this practice.

Thorough assessment of FO capacity to supply good quality rice is crucial: Although Rikolto Uganda planned to support farmers from all seven FOs to access better-paying markets for SRP rice, results could not be achieved for four of the FOs because they did not have access to good quality rice processing mills. This important information would have been obtained if Rikolto Uganda had assessed capacity of all seven FOs to deliver good quality milled SRP rice, prior to the market access support. Such assessments improve the market inclusion of smallholder farmers by tailoring support better in accordance with their needs.

8.3 Enabling Environment

Cost-sharing when testing new innovations is critical: This was clearly demonstrated when Rikolto Uganda interested the management of Doho Farmers SACCO to try out conditional lending to their clients, so that before a farmer takes a loan, s/he first commits to implementing the jointly agreed upon SRP practices. The SACCO management welcomed the idea, especially because some of their clients were becoming risky borrowers and defaulting on their loans since the agronomic practices they were using in their rice fields

were not helping them to adapt to the impacts of climate change and did not lead to climate change mitigation. The move from ideation to implementation stage however, was not possible because Rikolto Uganda lacked first-loss guarantee funds. Although Rikolto anticipated to tap into the guarantee funds that are available within organizations such as ACELI Africa and aBi Development (formerly aBi Trust), this too was not possible because these guarantee providers prioritize banks, and not SACCOs. Based on this lesson, Rikolto Uganda immediately engaging in joint fundraising efforts with Doho SACCO for guarantee funds.

8.4 Rikolto as an Organisation

Coordination and collaboration across programme teams: In Rikolto Uganda, staff appreciate the new cross-region team-based organizational structure which has reduced bureaucracy and increased efficiency due to quicker sharing of information among staff from the same team whenever there are any organizational issues. It has also led to talent and skill maximization and resulted in more empowered staff. Furthermore, it has also enhanced experience sharing and learning among staff within the same programme but based in other countries or regions. Rikolto Uganda was able to learn about how DRC was handling the issue of having private organizations working on quality standards of a commodity with success, whereas in other countries Rikolto has built strong collaborations with national level inter-professional bodies and institutional buyers. A challenge that remains is that the teams from the different regional programmes are not making much effort to work more closely together.

Distribution of roles and responsibilities among staff improves motivation and reduces workload: This is the experience of staff in East Africa, after Rikolto's regional management team, decided in 2023, to distribute roles and responsibilities among the different job functions. This has motivated those staff who have been given new roles, as they now feel more ownership and receive more organisational recognition. It has also lessened the workload of other staff, especially the management staff. It also leads to more specialization in roles and creates opportunities for targeted capacity building.

9 Discussions and Conclusions

Sustainable production base: Rikolto Uganda is applying an appropriate combination of strategies in striving for a more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive rice sub-sector, which generates a living income for value chain actors, including women and youth, while availing sustainably produced food products to consumers. Rikolto Uganda targeted a reasonably large number of farmers, through their farmer organizations and is working with them to implement a co-designed sustainable rice program, a starting point that promotes learning, ownership and strengthens farmers in their organizations to do business. The focus on giving farmers technical knowledge and skills in good agricultural practices, including agronomic practices, soil and pest management, techniques to reduce GHGs, conservation of water and other resources in the environment, have converged to improve rice yields, volumes rice produced and marketed, and consequently income of rice farmers. Achievement of mid-term targets overall, ranges from good to excellent beyond expectations and signals good progress towards end line targets. The excellent progress on targets here could be due to the fact that these activities are mostly in the sphere of control of Rikolto and the primary partners, the farmers.

Due to context specific reasons, Rikolto Uganda made less progress in the achievement of mid-term targets for the average annual net income from the farming system per hectare (€/ha), with the lowest two categories of farmers being adult women, followed by young women. This achievement by Rikolto Uganda on net income, lower than expected levels by mid-term was attributed to a bumper harvest, followed by a dip in rice prices. This however, though common knowledge that price fluctuations in agricultural output markets always lag behind product volume fluctuations, may pose bigger problem in future if rice volumes increase and local demand does not cope. Rikolto and partners however, need to reflect on better marketing strategies to address price depression during bumper harvest.

Market inclusion: Rikolto Uganda used a combination of categories of activities covering farmer organizational strengthening, brokerage between farmer organization business and other private actors in the rice sub-sector, capacity building for BDS providers and consumer awareness. All these categories of activities have ensured that farmers and their organizations have knowledge and skills to engage with other rice value chains actors and service providers to the benefit of their sustainable rice businesses. It also enhances farmer capacity to understand market dynamics and to take actions to improve business orientedness of farmer organizations. Rikolto made good progress in achieving most mid-term targets, mostly beyond expectations, including: increases in number of companies offering inclusive contract, consumer access to sustainable rice, annual net profit and access to finance.

Although Rikolto Uganda will likely meet end line targets, areas in which it performed less well in realising the mid-term targets include: the number of economically viable food system entrepreneurs, notably, the least achievement was on women entrepreneurs; the number of youth and women working in innovative agri MSMEs and; the level of professionalism of FOs. Stakeholders confirm that an explanation for women lagging behind on market inclusion and income is linked to the cultural norms in the country which is mainly patriarchal and that considers the role of women to be that of caring and nurturing, rather than involvement in economic activities. Yet, the cost of living and empowerment messages and initiatives continuously push women in the economic arena. One would then wonder whether Rikolto Uganda strategies are adequate in dealing with these prejudices which have become institutionalised in all aspects of society over time. The limited progress in FO professionalization could be linked to the general state of transition of FO members from social organisations supporting subsistence farmers to business-oriented farmer organisations.

Enabling Environment: In order to nurture an enabling environment for sustainable rice production in Uganda, Rikolto implements two categories of activities including facilitating Multi-stakeholder platforms on rice at various levels and access to finance that is appropriate to the needs of the smallholder farmers

and their organizations and promoting sustainable rice production. Regarding the facilitation of the MSPs, Rikolto has worked well to achieve most mid-term objectives and is progressing well towards end line objectives, overall. Although Rikolto Uganda started from zero at baseline, it is now working with three MSPs, comprised of actors interested in collaborating and have developed a common agenda. This level of MSP development goes a long way in raising issues of concern to the sub-sector to policy makers, making proposal and seeking solutions to main challenges in a collaborative manner. The number of pieces of evidence intended for policy change and to convince other sub-sector stakeholders on the benefits of the Rikolto model, is also increasing. Rikolto is particularly appreciated by stakeholders for its role in mobilising rice value chain stakeholders into the NSC, policy contributions to the NRDS, as well as several pieces of evidence on the benefits of SRP model.

Achievement on the number of appropriate financial products offered by financial institutions for FOs however, is not good, and remains zero by mid-term assessment. This probably is an indication that the banks continue to be risk averse, when it comes to financing farmers. The situation is worsened because this old age risk associated with lending to smallholder farmers is now intersecting with the fact that FOs and their members are in transition from subsistence to business orientedness. Additionally, the financial product that would be appropriate for farms in this case, is itself new and may be non-existent, one that supports resilience in the face of climate change. This means, another risk, related to uncertainties linked to climate change is an additional unknown territory. This could also be an explanation for the limited progress in FO professionalization. It could be linked to the general state of transition of FO members from social organisations supporting subsistence farmers to business-oriented farmer organisations.

Women and youth inclusion: Furthermore, Rikolto Uganda intentionally targets women and youth in the rice sub-sector both of whom are strong pillars in rice production and sustainability of SRP efforts. All these interventions collectively contribute to a sustainable production base for rice. Specifically, Rikolto has made progress in supporting women in leadership positions in FOs but when it comes to participation in rice production and rice businesses they are lagging behind. The fact that Rikolto Uganda performed well in empowering women to take up leadership positions but performed poorly on promoting women in business is telling. This could be because leadership roles only require the space, opportunity and capacity building to be offered to women, after all traditionally, women have always had leadership roles around social activities in communities, rather than economic activities. It could also be linked to the fact that rice and indeed most commercial crops in that patriarchal system belong to men due to linkage to land as the key factor of production. The cultural gender norms prevent women from inheriting land and gender division of labour keeps them busy in reproductive and unpaid social responsibilities at home and in the community. Rikolto will have to design specific strategies to target women in the rice value chains, in order to counter these biases. These could include supporting women at specific value chain stages where they already provide services, supporting them to rent land for production and creating specific spaces for women in the rice business.

10 Recommendations

Based on critical analysis of the findings from all data sources, the consultant, together with the sustainable rice program team of Rikolto, formulated the recommendations in this section. While most of the recommendations focus on the remaining implementation period, a few of them are related to the period beyond the current program period, in case Rikolto will decide to continue in a similar programming direction.

10.1 Sustainable production base

- a) One of the important aspects of sustainability that is expected from the SRP indicators is reduced levels of inorganic fertiliser use, yet the IWB highlights the fact that fertiliser use among Rikolto targeted farmers is still low. It will be helpful for Rikolto in collaboration with agricultural extension staff and agro-input dealers, to support FOs to obtain scientific information on soil nutrient needs in terms of fertilization and the state of soils in key operational areas, in order to establish optimum fertiliser needs.
- b) Considering that the government of Uganda is suggesting other livelihoods like fish farming and horticulture in the irrigated lowlands instead of rice that is believed to be a big methane emitter, it could be helpful for Rikolto, under its collaboration with NaCCRI, to conduct a short comparative study on profitability and other advantages of these suggested livelihoods versus rice. This will be important to convince policy makers about the profitability of lowland rice.
- c) An important outcome of Rikolto's work on sustainable production base is increasing rice productivity at farm level, leading to the bumper harvests whenever climate permits. In accordance with price fluctuations in agriculture, bumper harvest leads to price depression, which then demotivates farmers from producing. Rikolto needs to devise a strategy that takes the marketing of rice to higher levels, by supporting FOs to market across the sub-region in case of such bumper harvest. This will need efforts at higher East African levels. Such higher level engagement could include dialogue on how to share the rice market space, branding, product differentiation, labelling requirements to indicate differentiated products, among others. Such efforts could also address the many complaints from private sector in Uganda about Tanzania rice that floods the Ugandan market and depresses prices in Uganda further.
- d) There is need for Rikolto, in its relationship with NaCCRI, to prioritise research on new appropriate varieties suitable for Doho and Olweny irrigation schemes where currently yield is very low, in search for varieties which can be produced sustainably in those specific agro-ecological zones, and which are preferred by consumers.

10.2 Inclusive Markets

- a) While Rikolto has done well in promoting women in FO leadership positions, women are lagging behind when it comes to participation in rice business and consequently on income growth. Considering that one needs to have land in order to engage in rice production and women are culturally disadvantaged regarding access to land, Rikolto will most probably achieve better results on including women in markets if it intentionally implements a strategy that supports women in specific stages of the rice value chain that do not require land. This could be support to women to provide specific services to the rice value chain, for example adding value and selling specific rice products. It could also be support to women to rent land for production, for those who wish to remain in rice production.

- b) *Women's spaces:* In order to look for better ways of supporting women, it could be helpful if Rikolto collaborated with FO partners to establish rice business spaces for women only. This helps them to start their own business, the way it is done in Mweya.
- c) *Employment in innovative agri-SMEs:* According to agri-SMEs, the biggest challenge they find in employing women is limited skills and low levels of education to enable them to perform key tasks such as machine operations. This forces companies to employ them either on farms or drying grounds and as a result, women are lagging behind in getting jobs in innovative agri-SMEs. Rikolto could collaborate with other stakeholders who prepare young people for work, to support young women through skilling to be work ready, as well as engaging in job placements in partner companies. Rikolto could also engage in supporting a willing company like Bongomin Ltd., to expand its activities and employ more women. Additionally, Rikolto could partner with organisations who specialise in skilling for agriculture in order to make progress on this indicator.
- d) Rikolto needs to reflect on and devise the best strategy to support FOs to engage in rice business. The current model emphasises strengthening FOs to be viable business partners to off-takers or other buyers of rice. As FOs grow stronger however, their ambition seems to be milling own rice and sell value added products. This ambition which in itself is good pushes FOs to sell the value added product to whoever is willing to buy at a high price. Moreover, most companies that engage farmer members of FOs in production contract agreements expect paddy and not milled rice, since they too have invested in milling machines.
- e) The private sector stakeholders interviewed all complained about poor infrastructure, highlighting the link between infrastructure, cost of production and successful contract farming arrangements. In order to facilitate inclusive marketing with better outcomes, Rikolto could add this critical issue on its list of advocacy issues, specifically focussing on infrastructure (power, roads and telecommunication) in paddy production areas. This will work better if Rikolto links this issue with evidence on estimated potential of actual economic value of paddy from specific areas. The horticulture sector has already demonstrated that government can respond positively when stakeholders demanded the construction of an alternative road to the broken Masaka road last year, in order for them to access the remote areas where their suppliers are. The old road was closed for reconstruction and an alternative temporary one was constructed.
- f) Rikolto could work with rice stakeholders to support market and product differentiation, so that SRP rice could have a special price, higher than conventional rice. After sharing evidence from sustainable production, Rikolto could work with stakeholders to lobby for a policy on public institutions to purchase sustainable rice in the interest of protecting the environment.

10.3 Enabling environment

- a) *MSP coordination:* Most of Rikolto's work on enabling environment for sustainable rice production is around facilitating fully functional MSPs. Stakeholders have voiced the need for Rikolto to improve NSC coordination by supporting the central coordination office (the secretariat) with gadgets like servers, laptops and other communication facilities that are able to facilitate better linkages between rice stakeholders in Uganda and those in other parts of Africa and globally SRP chapter. It will enhance the secretariat's capacity to engage better digitally.
- b) *Faster and Wider reach:* Enabling environment for sustainable rice production is about policies and institutions. What Rikolto is doing in terms of **influencing policy** is good but it should be intensified and evidence generated and used to reach out faster and wider, in order to capture the attention

of the policy makers. Examples of what would work better are: i) setting up models in designated irrigation schemes to demonstrate sustainability of rice production, using the various SRP techniques; involving line ministries, private sector partners and research institutions in such demonstration, to secure good quality seeds and do the trials, gather evidence and develop policies and guidelines, together; ii) organising internal tour for the influential people in the country, including politicians, who are close to the rice sub-sector in the different levels of government and the private sector and; taking advantage of the current government support to irrigation investments, using the Green Climate Fund (GCF), providing water and other inputs, in order to demonstrate what works regarding sustainable rice production.

- c) *Specific research to address policy challenges:* Rikolto could engage willing partners like NaCCRI to gather evidence that addresses the current policy controversy, particularly, conduct research to **show the percentage of GHG emissions** from the wetland due to sustainable rice production, in order to guide government on the use of wetlands for rice production. In addition, continue collaborating with MAAIF to create synergies with other projects which are promoting sustainable rice.
- d) *Long term institutionalisation:* In order to assure long term institutionalisation of the SRP model in national policies, Rikolto could consider increasing coverage of other rice producing districts with similar message and training activities, especially beyond the current program. This will promote sustainability of the gains already made to cascade the model in other districts. Key stakeholders confirm that the SRP model works and has benefits, the next step should be up scaling. All these efforts should be done in continued working relationship with government to disseminate SRP information and standards to different actors, including consumers.
- e) *Harmonisation of policy:* Rikolto could prioritise advocacy for policy harmonisation in a manner that benefits rice farmers. For instance, the government program to support irrigation infrastructure, could integrate affirmative action to support smallholder rice farmers. If, under the Parish Development Model, government is giving funds to farmers to collaborate with the private sector in business, it should be conditioned for use in gazetted areas and not non-gazetted wetlands.