

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

Learning Report

July 2025

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List of abbreviations

B2B	Business-to-Business
CC	Cocoa-Coffee
CIRIZ	Comité Interprofessionnel du Riz au Sénégal
CONAGROH	Consorcio Agrocomercial de Honduras
CRDB	Cooperative Rural Development Bank
CSLM	Climate Smart Lending Model
CSP	Cocoa Sustainability Partnership
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DGD	Belgian Development Cooperation
E4I	Evidence for Impact
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
EUDR	EU Deforestation Regulation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FOs	Farmer Organizations
GAIN	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GEF7	Global Environmental Facility-7
GF4C	Good Food For Cities
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
GPD	Global Programme Directors
GST	Global Support Team
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LQs	Learning Questions
MAAIF	Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries
MAMCOS	Madibira Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Society
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MSP	Multistakeholder Platform
NARO	National Agricultural Research Organisation
NSRP	National Sustainable Rice Production
PFSS	Participatory Food Safety System
PGS	Participatory Guarantee Systems

SAED	Senegal River Delta Land Development and Exploitation Company
SCOPI	Sustainable Coffee Platform Indonesia
SRP	Sustainable Rice Platform
TARI	Tanzania Agricultural Research Institute

Introduction

The midterm evaluation of Rikolto’s 2022–2026 programme takes place within the framework of a long-term collaboration between Rikolto and ADE, aimed at strengthening the organization’s Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system. In addition to the 21 DGD Outcome Assessment reports—focused on evaluating effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability—this midterm review places a particular emphasis on three selected Learning Questions (LQs) intended to foster internal learning, strategic reflection, and adaptive management.

These LQs were initially formulated by Rikolto’s Global Support Team (GST) and the Global Programme Directors (GPD) as part of a broader set of nine Learning Questions developed at baseline in 2022. In collaboration with the GST, ADE selected the three questions deemed most relevant to address at this stage:

- LQ1. How appropriate is Rikolto’s strategy in reaching the impact they want to achieve?**
- LQ4. Are we able to facilitate/motivate a multistakeholder environment that enables the scaling of our model/innovation?**
- LQ9. How can we make sure that the efforts of the programme will be maintained (by the different stakeholders) also after Rikolto exits the programme/stops funding them?**

The scope of LQ1 is global, and the findings are intended to inform Rikolto as a whole. LQ4 focuses on the Rice programme, and LQ9 on the Good Food for Cities (GF4C) programme. While these two are programme-specific, the insights generated may also offer value at the global level by identifying cross-cutting lessons applicable to other programmes and the organization overall.

The Cocoa & Coffee (CC) programme also defined a specific LQ—*What is the impact of Rikolto’s interventions on women and youth?*—which is currently being addressed internally by Rikolto. ADE will be supporting this work primarily through quantitative analysis; however, since the analysis is led by Rikolto, this question is not included in the scope of this Global Learning Report.

The methodological approach, including the design and implementation of data collection approach and tools, was developed in close collaboration with Rikolto. Local partners were also actively involved, and their Outcome Assessments served as key sources of evidence. This participatory approach aimed to ensure the relevance of findings as well as to reinforce learning and ownership across all levels of the institution.

This Global Learning Report is exclusively for internal use within Rikolto. It is designed to support strategic reflection, foster shared learning across teams and programmes, and guide adaptive management decisions. As such, it does not serve an accountability function toward external stakeholders or donors.

The report begins with an overview of the methodological approach and its limitations, followed by three **dedicated sections addressing each Learning Question**. Each section concludes with tailored conclusions and recommendations, with overlaps across Learning Questions noted to highlight cross-cutting insights.

1. Methodological Approach

1.1. General Overview

The methodological approach used to answer the Learning Questions (LQs) follows a participatory, mixed-methods evaluation design, grounded in an impact-oriented perspective and informed by food systems thinking. It aims to explore the **relevance, impacts and sustainability** of Rikolto's interventions by leveraging both existing evidence and new data collected during the evaluation period at mid-term.

The approach combines Rikolto's monitoring data, a review of key programme documents, and qualitative data gathered through field-based Key Informant Interviews (KIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). More specifically, it builds primarily on:

- Rikolto's internal data collection tools and documents, in particular the *Indicator Workbooks*, *strategic documentation*, the *Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP) assessments*, and *Evidence for Impact (E4I) information*;
- The **Outcome Assessments** produced for the 21 DGD Outcomes;
- **Additional qualitative data** collected by local consultants during field visits;
- A **field mission to Indonesia** conducted by the ADE international team in the context of LQ1.

These various sources were triangulated to generate answers to the LQs at both global and programme levels that are as robust and contextually grounded as possible within the available resources and existing limitations.

The methodological framework was developed in close collaboration with Rikolto's GST in 2023 and informed by preliminary consultations with the GPDs, country teams, and senior management. This joint design process aimed to ensure alignment with Rikolto's internal learning needs and programme realities. To guide the primary data collection, ADE and Rikolto co-developed tailored tools for KIs and FGDs. These were then shared with local consultants and country teams for contextual adaptation. This process was intended to promote local ownership and buy-in, and to ensure consistency and as much as possible comparability of data collection across countries and programmes.

This overall design prioritizes relevance and usefulness for Rikolto's internal learning and strategic decision-making. Given constraints related to time, budget, and the need to operate largely remotely, the approach relied as much as possible on existing data, tools, and processes. This pragmatic and collaborative approach was chosen to ensure that the evaluation remained focused, feasible, and closely aligned with Rikolto's learning needs. The limitations of this approach, including its implications for the depth and scope of findings, are discussed in Section 2.5.

1.2. Case study Selection

The selection of cases varied depending on the scope and focus of each LQ.

For **LQ1** (*How appropriate is Rikolto's strategy in reaching the impact it aims to achieve?*), no individual case studies were conducted. The analysis was global in scope and relied primarily on two-page summary documents specifically designed to link Rikolto's strategies to the intended impacts. These summaries were prepared by local experts, each synthesizing key findings from their respective Outcome Assessments. One summary was produced per outcome, providing structured insights across countries and programmes.

To complement this desk-based synthesis, a field visit to Indonesia was conducted by the ADE international team. Indonesia was selected because it is one of only two countries where all three global programmes (Rice, GF4C, and CC) are being implemented. The visit allowed for deeper exploration of how Rikolto's strategy is operationalized across multiple thematic areas and contributed additional field-level perspectives to the global analysis.

For **LQ4** (*Scaling multistakeholder innovation models*) and **LQ9** (*Sustainability after Rikolto's exit*), the evaluation drew on a set of **three case studies per question**. These case studies were selected by the GPDs in consultation with the evaluation team based on the following selection criteria:

1. **Alignment with the LQ**, ensuring direct relevance to the evaluation's central inquiries;
2. **Learning potential**, with a focus on innovative approaches and unique experiences;
3. **Strategic importance**, prioritizing countries or interventions that are critical to Rikolto's mission or that tackle key organizational challenges;
4. **Programme maturity**, to ensure that interventions had progressed enough to yield meaningful insights;
5. **Contextual feasibility**, considering safety, political stability, and access to intervention areas;
6. **Diversity of contexts**, to support cross-country learning through geographical, socio-economic, and cultural variation.

To explore LQ4, which examines Rikolto's capacity to facilitate and motivate multistakeholder environments that enable the scaling of innovation within the Rice programme, the three selected country case studies are: Tanzania, Senegal, and Uganda.

- In **Tanzania**, the focus is on the implementation of a **climate-smart financing model**, which brings together a diverse range of stakeholders and shows strong potential for scale-up through broader institutional adoption.
- In **Senegal**, the case study looks at the uptake of the **Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) model**, which is generating growing interest among several organizations seeking to adopt its practices.
- In **Uganda**, Rikolto plays a key role in shaping the **National Sustainable Rice Production (NSRP)**

Chapter, successfully advocating for the integration of sustainability and SRP standards into national policy.

To address LQ9, which explores how Rikolto can ensure the sustainability of programme efforts after its exit, the three selected case studies within the GF4C programme are: Tanzania, Vietnam, and Honduras.

- In **Tanzania**, Rikolto pilots a **Participatory Food Safety System (PFSS)** in Mbeya and Arusha to strengthen local certification, traceability, and market access, embedded within multistakeholder platforms. The model aims to ensure long-term sustainability by improving food safety infrastructure and institutional collaboration.
- In **Vietnam**, **Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)** are promoted as a low-cost, peer-based certification model to support sustainable farming and strengthen trust in local food systems. Sustainability efforts focus on embedding PGS in food policies, expanding digital traceability, and building stronger farmer organizations.
- In **Honduras**, Rikolto partnered with the Agrobusiness Consortium of Honduras (**CONAGROH**) to improve access to formal markets and strengthen the governance and financial autonomy of farmer organizations. Following a planned exit in 2023, the transition was supported through structured operational planning and a focus on five sustainability pillars.

1.3. Data sources and methods

The data collection approach was tailored to each LQ, combining Rikolto’s internal monitoring tools with targeted primary data collection by local consultants and the ADE international team. The aim was to ensure that evidence was both relevant to each question and grounded in the experiences of programme stakeholders.

For LQ1, data collection focused on two-page summary documents prepared by local experts. These summaries synthesized key insights from the Outcome Assessments and linked Rikolto’s strategies to the intended outcomes across different contexts. To complement this global-level desk review, the ADE international team conducted a 5-days **field visit to Indonesia**, where all three global programmes are active, to gather additional insights through direct engagement with stakeholders. The agenda and the KII/FGD guide used during the field visit are provided in the Annexes.

For LQ4 and LQ9, the main internal data sources included:

- The Indicator Workbook
- Multistakeholder Platform (MSP) assessments
- The Evidence for Impact (E4I) cases

These internal data were complemented by KIIs and FGDs conducted by local consultants, based on tailored guides developed by ADE. Stakeholder selection for these interviews was done in collaboration with the local consultants and Rikolto’s country teams, based on available time and resources. Local consultants shared

detailed interview and discussion notes with ADE for analysis. In parallel, the ADE international team conducted **remote KIIs with Rikolto staff** to capture internal perspectives related to each LQ. The KII/FGD guides used for each case study, along with the list of stakeholders consulted, are available in Annex 2 and 3. The final case studies are also available in the Annex 1.

1.4. Learning Orientation and Validation

This evaluation process was designed not only to generate findings but also to foster learning and reflection **at multiple levels of the organization**. Validation and learning activities were embedded throughout to ensure that insights remained grounded in programme realities and could meaningfully inform Rikolto's strategic thinking and decision-making.

At the case study level, ADE and Rikolto's GST and local teams engaged in an iterative process to review findings and reflect jointly on emerging insights. ADE first drafted each case study based on available documentation, which was then reviewed by Rikolto's GST and country teams. ADE revised the drafts in response to their feedback and subsequently incorporated additional insights from interview notes provided by local consultants, as well as from remote interviews conducted with Rikolto's local teams. Final versions of the case studies were validated by the respective local teams, ensuring shared ownership of the findings. In Indonesia, these exchanges took place both formally and informally during the field visit.

At the global level, dedicated learning workshops were held with the GST, the GPDs and Regional Directors (RDs). These sessions aimed to foster cross-programme and cross-regional reflection on key learnings and to initiate broader discussions on key topics selected by Rikolto's Evaluation Committee. The workshops also informed the recommendations sections at the end of each Learning Question, where links between recommendations across the three LQs are highlighted to provide a cohesive set of insights, food for thoughts for Rikolto's broader learning journey. To conclude the workshop, participants voted to rank the different key thematic areas in order of priority for discussion in the near future. The results of this prioritization are presented in Annex 4.

1.5. Limitations

This assignment was explicitly designed as a learning-oriented exercise to generate actionable insights that support Rikolto's internal reflection and adaptive management. Rather than aiming for measurement or causal attribution, the approach prioritised relevance, engagement, and usability. **Within this context, several limitations should be considered when reading this report.**

First, the assignment relied heavily on existing internal tools and documentation, which, while valuable, varied in quality, clarity, and completeness across countries and programmes. In some cases, information was scattered across multiple documents, making it difficult to determine which project or intervention a specific observation referred to. The Indicator Workbook, for example, is structured by Outcome rather than by

project, despite the projects being used as case studies in this assignment, which limited our ability to link quantitative data to specific projects' context. In addition, as the evaluation team worked primarily with internal documents, it was at times challenging to assess the credibility or consistency of certain data points. For LQ1, the quality and consistency of the local consultants' summaries varied, which may have impacted the depth of the analysis.

Second, the feasible primary data collection approach affected the depth of the findings. For LQ4 and LQ9, primary data collection was carried out remotely with Rikolto's staff and through local consultants for Rikolto's partners and other key stakeholders. While this was a practical and cost-effective solution, it may have affected the depth and comparability of the data. Despite the use of standardized guides and close collaboration with Rikolto country teams, there were inevitable differences in how KIs and FGDs were facilitated and documented across contexts.

Third, the short duration of field visits—both by the ADE international and local consultants—limited stakeholder engagement and depth of data collection. The Indonesia field visit for LQ1 was brief and allowed only limited interactions with stakeholders. Similarly, local consultants in other countries typically conducted their fieldwork over just four days, requiring them to prioritize a small number of key stakeholders within a constrained timeframe. In addition to supporting the Learning Questions, they were also tasked with conducting KIs and FGDs for broader outcome assessments, often involving different stakeholders than those selected for the case studies—further limiting the time available for in-depth engagement.

Fourth, the limited number of case studies restricts the generalizability of findings across all Rikolto programmes. The cases were selected for their learning potential and contextual diversity. Rather than offering universal conclusions, the intention is to provide emerging patterns and strategic reflections that can inform broader organizational learning and guide future inquiry.

Mitigation measures were implemented to address these limitations and strengthen the overall quality and consistency. Standardized data collection tools were used across all cases to promote comparability. In addition, priority stakeholders were selected in close collaboration with Rikolto country teams to ensure relevance and richness of the data gathered, despite differences in data collection contexts. To strengthen the coherence of the findings, the analysis focused on patterns or insights mentioned consistently across interviews. While this supported a more generalizable synthesis, it may have excluded singular but potentially valuable or thought-provoking observations raised by individual respondents. As much as possible, valuable or thought-provoking observations raised by some individuals only were included when deemed relevant.

As part of this approach, individual data sources are not cited for each finding in the report, as the aim was to highlight cross-cutting insights rather than attribute statements to specific interviews or documents—though all findings are grounded in a combination of sources.

Given these limitations, the findings presented in this report should not be viewed as universally representative of all Rikolto programmes. Rather, they should be interpreted as insights drawn from specific contexts that offer valuable learning opportunities. Readers are encouraged to reflect on how these

observations may resonate with or inform their own experiences and realities in other countries and programmes.

2. LQ1. How appropriate is Rikolto's strategy in reaching the impact they want to achieve?

2.1. Introduction: Understanding Rikolto's strategy and intended impacts

Rikolto's strategy is centred on transforming food systems to be more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient. Operating in multiple regions around the world, the organisation seeks to balance the needs of smallholder farmers, businesses, consumers, and policymakers to foster food systems that deliver both social and environmental value. The current strategic framework is detailed in the [Rikolto Global Strategy 2022–2026](#), which builds on lessons from previous strategy periods and reflects the organisation's growing emphasis on systems-level change.

The strategy is structured around three programmatic focus areas: Sustainable Production, Inclusive Markets, and Enabling Environment. These are supported by cross-cutting approaches designed to drive innovation, scale, and long-term change.

As described on Rikolto's website ([How We Work](#)), the following approaches guide Rikolto's operational strategy:

- **A Food Systems Approach:** Recognising that food-related challenges are interconnected, Rikolto adopts a systems perspective in its work. Rather than targeting isolated problems, the organisation works across the entire food value chain — from production to consumption — engaging diverse stakeholders to co-develop context-specific solutions that are economically viable, socially just, and ecologically sound.
- **Inclusive Business Development:** Inclusive business is a core method through which Rikolto builds stronger and fairer agricultural markets. The organisation facilitates long-term partnerships between farmer organisations and private sector buyers, grounded in shared value. This process typically begins with a market assessment to identify obstacles to farmer competitiveness, followed by the co-creation of solutions that enhance business performance while improving farmer livelihoods.
- **Evidence for Impact (E4I):** Rikolto's commitment to learning and scalability is embodied in its E4I approach. This involves testing and documenting promising models with the potential for replication, while simultaneously engaging actors — such as public authorities, civil society organisations, and businesses — who can support scaling at regional or national levels. The dual focus on generating

evidence and influencing ‘upscalers’ aims to ensure that Rikolto’s work contributes to systemic change beyond its immediate interventions.

Rikolto’s current strategy reflects a clear progression from earlier approaches. During the 2017–2021 period, outlined in the [previous strategy document](#), the organisation focused more explicitly on inclusive markets and farmer cooperatives. Prior to that, the emphasis had been primarily on increasing farmer productivity, often with a focus on export markets. The 2022–2026 strategy integrates these earlier experiences into a more comprehensive vision that acknowledges the complexity of food systems and the need for supportive policy environments and consumer engagement. It also reflects a decentralised organisational model, reinforcing Rikolto’s commitment to local ownership and decolonising its operations. **Rikolto’s forward-looking posture — anticipating future shifts and adapting its role accordingly — enhances the relevance of its strategy, allowing it to remain responsive in dynamic food system contexts.**

Through its strategic focus, Rikolto aims to deliver impact across three interlinked outcomes:

- **Improved and sustainable incomes for smallholder farmers**, through better access to markets, enhanced bargaining power, and resilient business models.
- **Wider availability of nutritious, affordable, and safe food**, particularly for vulnerable urban and rural populations.
- **Scalable models and systemic change**, with models that can be adopted by partners, institutions, and markets beyond Rikolto’s direct reach.

2.2. Main findings

2.2.1. Strategic coherence: Alignment between Rikolto’s strategy and intended impacts

Rikolto’s strategy aligns well in theory with its two overarching objectives: (i) sustainable income for farmers and (ii) access to healthy, nutritious, and affordable food for all. This alignment is clearly reflected in Rikolto’s Theory of Change, which adopts a food systems lens. The organisation works across the value chain — from production to consumption — engaging farmers, buyers, consumers, and policymakers, which is consistent with the systemic approach outlined in the current global strategy. Rikolto’s three-pillar structure — sustainable production, inclusive markets, and an enabling environment — provides a coherent framework to pursue these goals.

All three global programmes aim to contribute to both impact objectives (i & ii, see above).

The Cocoa & Coffee and Rice programmes clearly focus on improving farmer income through sustainable production practices, organisational strengthening, and market inclusion. The GF4C programme, while more often associated with urban food governance and nutrition, also supports income generation. Cooperatives engaged in safe vegetable value chains benefit from more stable market access, improved prices, and reduced input costs — notably through the adoption of agroecological and organic practices.

On the second impact objective — access to nutritious, healthy, and affordable food — the GF4C programme shows the strongest alignment. Interventions such as wet market renovations, hygiene upgrades, consumer education campaigns, and food safety labelling have improved the availability and accessibility of safe, traceable, and locally produced food in urban areas. Complementary initiatives, such as youth engagement and school-based food education, aim to drive long-term behavioural change toward healthier diets. **The Rice and Cocoa & Coffee programmes also contribute indirectly to improved food safety and nutrition.** For instance, rice produced under SRP and agroecological standards is free from banned pesticides and complies with national food safety regulations. In Cocoa & Coffee, diversification strategies — including the promotion of other food crops and small-scale animal husbandry — are expected to enhance household food security and diet quality. Moreover, in both programmes, increased farmer income is expected to improve household diets. However, this assumption has not yet been substantiated with concrete evidence, and there are no systematic efforts to measure nutrient content or assess food affordability at the household level.

Affordability remains a persistent barrier. Despite greater consumer awareness, safe and traceable food is still perceived as expensive, particularly in urban markets. Many low-income consumers continue to face challenges in consistently accessing these products, limiting the broader nutrition impact of food system improvements.

Moreover, seasonal fluctuations in production affect supply reliability, and vendors often lack incentives to prioritise certified or safer products, particularly when price competition with conventional goods is high. These dynamics not only limit the nutrition impact of food system interventions but also constrain income generation for farmers.

2.2.2. Connecting the food system: Rikolto's role as a facilitator and bridge-builder

Rikolto's strategy is well-suited to the complexity of the food systems it aims to transform. Built on a systems-based approach, it engages stakeholders at multiple levels — from smallholder farmers to national policymakers — and across sectors including agriculture, health, education, trade, and infrastructure. Rather than acting as a top-down implementer, **Rikolto plays a facilitative role:** bridging actors, convening platforms, and aligning interests around shared goals.

This connector function is widely valued by partners, who describe Rikolto's approach as more comprehensive and integrative than that of many other NGOs. Rather than imposing predefined agendas, Rikolto co-creates them with a broad range of stakeholders — including farmer organisations, companies, local governments, financial institutions, research bodies, and international agencies. Across all three programmes, this bridging role enables collaboration in otherwise fragmented systems: linking producers to markets, embedding inclusive business models, and shaping local food environments.

The strategy is also operationalised through multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs). Rikolto has played a co-founding role in national platforms such as in Indonesia with the Cocoa Sustainability Partnership (CSP) and the Sustainable Coffee Platform Indonesia (SCOPI), where the strategic focus mirrors its own — combining farmer professionalisation with systemic enabling conditions. These platforms institutionalise collective problem-solving and extend the reach of Rikolto's approach beyond individual projects. **Rikolto also**

contributes to territorial coordination, helping actors across levels of government and sectors align around common objectives. Its multi-stakeholder process toolkit is a concrete effort to address power imbalances and ensure that marginalised voices — particularly smallholders — are meaningfully included in decision-making. As one stakeholder noted: *“Rikolto reminds us of the importance of the smallholders’ interests.”*

However, challenges remain — particularly around the depth of private sector engagement. While Rikolto has built relationships with buyers and companies through MSPs and bilateral collaborations, the level of private sector commitment often remains limited to dialogue. In many cases, co-investment, risk-sharing, and long-term engagement are still lacking. Several discussions highlighted that, **in the context of declining development aid, deepening private sector partnerships is critical to sustaining and scaling inclusive food systems.** Rikolto has the potential to address this challenge by strengthening the business case for private sector and designing collaboration models that take into account the priorities and constraints of private sector partners, such as profitability, market growth, and the increasing consumer demand for sustainable and fair food.

In addition to business collaboration, workshop participants identified **infrastructure gap as a critical but under-addressed area within inclusive food systems.** Gaps in storage, processing, transport, and market infrastructure often limit the effectiveness of local food initiatives, especially for smallholders. Participant suggested that Rikolto could explore partnerships with the private sector through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) channels to help close these infrastructure gaps. For example, CSR funds could be used to engage technical experts to design locally tailored infrastructure proposals to be submitted to the competent public authorities. Rikolto’s expertise could be used to identify these infrastructure gaps and to connect private sector with public actors through MSP to find solutions to fill these gaps. MSP could also be used to be more aware of existing and future infrastructure investments made by competent authorities that would foster Rikolto’s impacts. . To play this connecting role between private sector needs and public investments, Rikolto must continue positioning itself as a credible, solutions-oriented partner that can demonstrate both the urgency and the strategic impact of addressing infrastructure challenges in food systems.

In parallel, several discussions highlighted that there is **untapped potential to strengthen collaboration with other national platforms and sector initiatives.** Many of these operate in parallel with overlapping objectives but limited coordination. By actively aligning agendas and fostering cross-platform linkages, Rikolto can help reduce fragmentation, promote strategic coherence, and build broader coalitions around goals such as living incomes, responsible sourcing, or sustainable land use — ultimately amplifying its influence and impact.

2.2.3. Putting farmers first: Supporting sustainable production and resilience

Rikolto’s strategy places farmers at the centre, with a clear emphasis on improving their income and resilience through regenerative and climate-smart production models. The Sustainable Production pillar responds

directly to farmers' needs by building locally co-developed solutions, strengthening farmer organisations, and linking sustainable practices to market opportunities. Interviews with partners confirm that Rikolto is valued for its ability to “adapt to the specific needs of each organisation” rather than imposing rigid models — a reflection of its grounded, participatory approach.

In the Rice programme, Rikolto promotes agroecological practices and the use of SRP standards, which allow for benchmarking and monitoring of environmental and social performance. Farmers are supported to adopt practices such as composting, bio-pesticide production, soil restoration, and efficient irrigation. These interventions have led to improved productivity, reduced input costs, and better-quality paddy — **contributing directly to higher income and climate resilience for farmers, as well as reduced GHG emissions and improved biodiversity.**

The Cocoa & Coffee programme focuses on good agricultural practices (GAP), agroforestry systems, and diversification strategies that increase productivity, support food security, and preserve biodiversity. In addition to on-farm techniques, the programme promotes off-farm income streams to reduce dependency on volatile commodity markets. Certification schemes, traceability tools, and alignment with international standards position farmer organisations as reliable partners for sustainable value chains.

In the GF4C programme, sustainable production is promoted in rural and peri-urban landscapes that supply cities, with a focus on regenerative practices that improve soil health, biodiversity, and ecosystem functions. Rikolto supports farmers in transitioning to organic and agroecological methods, often in partnership with municipalities and local market actors. This includes training producers in negotiation, marketing, and digital commerce, while also facilitating connections between agroecological farmers and urban food vendors, such as restaurateurs.

Across all programmes, Rikolto's strategy emphasises not only technical support but also institutional strengthening — enabling farmers to organise, access markets, and secure financing. This integrated model ensures that sustainable production is not pursued in isolation, but is directly linked to income generation, risk reduction, and long-term resilience.

2.2.4. Making markets work: Promoting inclusive business models and access

A key element of Rikolto's strategy is ensuring that farmers can not only produce sustainably but also sell their products under fair and favourable conditions. The Inclusive Markets pillar is designed to strengthen the position of farmers in value chains by promoting equitable business relationships, increasing access to finance, and enabling compliance with national and international quality standards. This pillar is essential to achieving Rikolto's objective of sustainable income for smallholder farmers.

Rikolto's work is rooted in the inclusive business approach, which fosters long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships between farmer organisations and buyers. This model goes beyond technical assistance by creating the right incentives across the chain — from production and processing to marketing and consumption — to support behaviour change, reduce market barriers, and ensure farmers are recognised

as serious business actors. Through a mix of collective marketing, certification, professionalisation, and business facilitation, Rikolto works to make market systems work better for smallholders.

In the Rice programme, Rikolto has demonstrated that branding, certification, targeted marketing and collective marketing can significantly improve farmers' profitability. Cooperatives supported by Rikolto have improved their capacity to meet certification standards (e.g., SRP and organic) through training in internal control systems, traceability, and digital recordkeeping. Price premiums for certified rice and/or quality rice have been achieved through partnerships with buyers who value quality differentiation, improved post-harvest handling, and sustainability standards. Business-to-business (B2B) meetings between farmer organisations and buyers are a key mechanism, enabling production to be market-driven and partnerships to be sustained over time. The capacity in B2B meeting also foster market diversification (e.g. institutional markets, corner shops, online shops, retailers in the neighbouring city) which bring about higher income for farmers and FOs and reducing risks. However, the inclusive business model faces challenges in periods of market oversupply: for instance, in recent harvest cycles, income gains were eroded when buyer demand lagged behind bumper yields — illustrating the need to strengthen price risk mitigation strategies (e.g., diversification of crops, restauration of soil, storage practices, etc.).

In the GF4C programme, inclusive markets are a lever for food system transformation. The programme focuses on strengthening the commercial capacities of small producer organisations — through training on marketing, sales strategies, digital tools, and consumer trends. This allows producers to better align their products with market demand while respecting traditional practices and local identity. New channels such as online sales platforms, food fairs, and school-based procurement models have helped expand market access. Rikolto's facilitation role has also helped partner organisations build relationships with public institutions and participate more actively in local food policy spaces. These capacities — in both marketing and representation — are widely seen as crucial to the long-term viability of local food systems.

The Cocoa & Coffee programme focuses on improving market access by enhancing production quality, strengthening commercial relationships, and facilitating access to finance. These efforts are particularly targeted toward smallholder cocoa and coffee farmers, women- and youth-led businesses, and farmer organisations. This is achieved by establishing savings groups, offering business development services to start-ups and cooperatives, and linking these actors to commercial financial institutions. However, **implementation varies across contexts, and in some cases, the absence of strong buyer linkages has limited programme outcomes.** Ensuring that cooperatives are effectively connected to markets remains a key condition for success in this sector. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, efforts have focused mainly on market analyses and training, with no direct buyer linkages established. In Honduras, long-term contracts with buyers remain scarce, limiting income stability for producers.

Across all programmes, the strategy ensures that farmers are not only linked to markets but also empowered to meet those markets' expectations through quality assurance, branding, professionalism, and access to financial services. In addition, through its agribusiness cluster approach, Rikolto promotes collaboration among key value chain actors — including farmer organisations, service providers, input suppliers, food processors, and buyers — to strengthen the profitability and sustainability of the entire value chain. This makes Rikolto's Inclusive Markets approach highly relevant and well-targeted for enhancing farmers' market

position, increasing incomes, and fostering more equitable food systems.

Despite the progress made through Rikolto's Inclusive Markets approach, several challenges continue to hinder effective market inclusion. Infrastructure gaps, such as the limited availability of decentralized fermentation and drying centres for cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire, and inadequate irrigation systems in Ecuador, restrict farmers' ability to meet market standards and limit their access to higher-value markets. Additionally, unequal access to digital platforms, especially in regions like Vietnam and East Africa, hinders market participation for cooperatives and vendors with low digital literacy or limited infrastructure, preventing them from adopting essential traceability tools and digital logbooks required by buyers. Furthermore, limited capacity to manage excess supply, particularly in East Africa, disrupts market functioning, with bumper harvests leaving farmers without buyers and undermining their ability to capitalize on peak production periods.

2.2.5. Creating enabling environments: Policy engagement and systems-level change

Rikolto's strategy recognises that sustainable change in food systems cannot be achieved without the right policy and institutional conditions. The Enabling Environment pillar aims to strengthen the ecosystem around smallholder farmers and food system actors by influencing policies, fostering institutional collaboration, and supporting multi-level governance structures. In this area, Rikolto works to connect evidence from the field with policy agendas, supporting structural changes that allow inclusive business and sustainable production models to thrive.

Across its programmes, Rikolto has contributed to shaping enabling environments by connecting field-level innovations to broader policy and institutional agendas. In the **Rice** programme, it has supported the creation and recognition of national interprofessional organisations now involved in sector dialogue, while partnering regionally with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the "Rice Offensive" and contributing to global initiatives like the Global Environmental Facility-7 (GEF7). Rikolto has also worked in collaboration with other stakeholders to embed the SRP standard into national strategies in several countries, using field evidence to inform policy. In the **GF4C** programme, Rikolto has promoted urban food governance through multi-stakeholder platforms, supported research and peer learning, and helped cities design more inclusive food policies. Efforts such as the Healthy Food Neighbourhood research and partnerships with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) illustrate how Rikolto uses evidence to influence planning and procurement frameworks. In **Cocoa & Coffee**, Rikolto plays a convening role in national MSPs like SCOP1 and CSP, where it helps align private and public actors around shared objectives such as professionalisation, responsible sourcing, and sustainable land use — contributing to national strategies for sector competitiveness and resilience.

Despite these contributions, Rikolto's overall approach to advocacy remains underdeveloped. Partners often describe the organisation's advocacy posture as reactive rather than strategic — guided more by opportunity

than by a clear organisational agenda. As one internal stakeholder put it, *“We do advocacy whenever we can.”* While this flexible, participatory orientation aligns with Rikolto’s identity and bottom-up ethos, it also limits the organisation’s capacity to proactively shape policy landscapes, secure long-term commitments, or scale its models through institutional channels.

This reflects a broader reality — there is currently no organisation-wide advocacy strategy to guide priorities, roles, or investments in this area. However, from the workshop discussion, participants agreed that Rikolto is not a ‘voice network’ neither wants to be associated with a confrontational, “naming and shaming” approach (which the organisation consciously moved away from due to its limited effectiveness in the past). Instead, Rikolto embraces a non-confrontational, systems-focused model of advocacy, centred on sharing evidence through the E4I strategy and leveraging MSPs to enable dialogue, build consensus, and catalyse systemic change.

The sensemaking session revealed a shared understanding that Rikolto’s advocacy role is often indirect, and intentionally so. However, participants expressed a need for greater intentionality and clearer articulation of **influence objectives** — including which actors, policies, or practices Rikolto seeks to change, and through which mechanisms. Many suggested moving beyond opportunity-driven advocacy to more strategic planning, potentially supported by internal guidance or light-touch strategies aligned with Rikolto’s identity as a facilitator. At the same time, participants emphasised the importance of maintaining a bottom-up approach to ensure advocacy efforts remain grounded in the realities and priorities of the communities Rikolto works with. Responding to local needs is essential — but as mentioned by some participants, to influence more effectively at scale, Rikolto must be more deliberate in shaping its own ‘advocacy’ agenda with some targeted partners, ensuring that grassroots insights feed into clear, proactive influence pathways.

This gap is reinforced by a lack of internal advocacy capacity. While Rikolto staff are strong facilitators and programme implementers, the organisation would benefit from deeper expertise in political economy analysis, influence strategies, and policy communications. There is also no clear allocation of budget or staffing for advocacy, which raises **questions about whether the Enabling Environment pillar is adequately resourced to deliver on its goals.**

Furthermore, in dynamic policy contexts — such as the rollout of the European Union (EU) Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) or school feeding policy reforms — **Rikolto has sometimes been slow to engage, missing opportunities to lead or co-shape responses.** Participants to interviews mentioned that strengthening context-specific policy intelligence, improving adaptive planning, and integrating advocacy earlier into programme design would improve responsiveness and influence.

MSPs remain one of Rikolto’s most powerful vehicles for policy engagement. However, they are sometimes treated primarily as knowledge exchange mechanisms, rather than platforms for strategic influence and uptake. Stakeholders highlighted the potential of MSPs to serve as engines for scaling — not just showcasing — innovations. Key stakeholders advocated that leveraging these platforms more deliberately to build coalitions, shape norms, and institutionalise change would significantly enhance the impact of Rikolto’s policy engagement.

Finally, visibility remains a limiting factor. Rikolto is not always well-known among national policymakers, which undermines its ability to influence. While local and regional visibility is important and often well established,

particularly where programmes focus on city-level or territorial food systems, national-level recognition is also essential. Some interviewees said to shape policy environments and secure the institutional commitments needed to scale impact, Rikolto must be known and trusted not only by the government actors engaged in MSPs but also by key ministries and national institutions (this is already the case in some countries, such as Uganda for sustainable rice).

This is especially critical given the shifting development landscape, where many donors and governments are moving from a traditional aid model toward an “aid and trade” paradigm. In this context, Rikolto’s influence will increasingly depend on its ability to align with broader economic and policy priorities, engage private and public sector actors strategically, and demonstrate the value of inclusive food systems as part of national development agendas.

2.2.6. From pilot to policy: The potential and limits of Rikolto’s E4I approach

Rikolto’s “Evidence for Impact” (E4I) approach is a core element of its strategy to promote systemic change. It reflects the organisation’s commitment to combining short-term responsiveness with long-term transformation, by piloting scalable innovations and generating learning that can influence wider policy and market systems. Through E4I, Rikolto aims to generate credible, field-based evidence and share it through strategic platforms to encourage the uptake of sustainable food system models.

The strength of the E4I approach lies in its conceptual clarity and embeddedness in programming. It integrates implementation, research, and learning, while also leveraging partnerships across sectors and regions. A clear example is the **GoodFood@School** initiative in Indonesia, Rikolto identified a promising school-based effort already underway, supported it with baseline assessments, and turned it into a pilot. From this, standard operating procedures (SOPs) were developed for other schools, which will then be used to support national-level advocacy efforts and potentially inform future standards.

However, these pilots have also revealed limitations. The GF@S pilots, for instance, demonstrated feasibility — but only under certain conditions. Tailor-made support, both technical and financial, is required for implementation. Yet it remains unclear who can provide this support at scale. Government partners, such as education departments or school umbrella bodies, often lack the capacity or mandate to assume this role. As a result, schools continue to rely heavily on Rikolto and a limited number of NGOs for implementation, raising questions about scalability and institutionalisation.

More broadly, the main constraint to E4I’s effectiveness is the current state of Rikolto’s Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system. While some country teams have strong MEL capacity, others lack the skills to generate rigorous, timely, and policy-relevant evidence. The MEL system does not yet fully support the dual purpose of tracking programme performance and producing strategic learning for external engagement.

Without robust data, Rikolto risks losing credibility with public and private partners who expect to see clear evidence of impact, cost-effectiveness, and replicability. Government actors may be hesitant to adopt or support Rikolto-backed models without stronger proof of results. Similarly, efforts to engage the private sector depend on the ability to make a compelling case grounded in outcomes and return on investment.

E4I risks remaining a powerful concept that is only partially operationalised in practice. Rikolto's commitment to piloting, documenting, and sharing innovations is clear. However, to realise the full potential of E4I, greater investment is needed in data systems, internal capacities, and coordination between MEL, communications, and policy teams.

2.2.7. Planning for the long term: Rikolto's implicit approach to sustainability and exit

Rikolto's approach to sustainability relies on empowering local actors — including community facilitators, farmer organisations, cooperatives, and NGOs — to take ownership of processes and outcomes. The core premise is that with the right capacity, institutional links, and tools, these actors will continue to operate effectively after external support ends. A central element of this model is the inclusion of local NGOs at all stages of project implementation, including MEL, which reinforces local ownership and builds long-term capacity.

Another important feature of Rikolto's approach is the choice to work through farmer organisations (FOs) rather than directly with individual farmers. This strategy ensures that organisational strengthening efforts have a multiplier effect — enabling FOs to become relevant social and economic actors not only for their members but also for the wider communities. These organisations often serve as critical vehicles for resilience, voice, and inclusion in rural areas, making them key pillars of social sustainability. By investing in their capacity, governance, and credibility, Rikolto lays the groundwork for long-term, community-led development.

Since 2020, Rikolto has strengthened its emphasis on building direct connections between local partners and government actors — a notable shift from earlier approaches and from many peer organisations that work separately with civil society and the state. This more collaborative strategy has led to improved joint planning, enhanced advocacy, and greater access to public support for local partners. Involving local authorities in activities such as farmer field schools also helps build political buy-in, enhance replicability, and embed innovations into public programmes.

Institutionalising innovations is further supported through the development of toolkits, guidelines, and training programmes — often co-produced with partners. Training of government officials is a deliberate part of this sustainability logic, ensuring that key functions can be transferred over time to public institutions or local NGOs.

However, despite these strengths, Rikolto still lacks a formal, organisation-wide exit strategy. There are currently no clear criteria or guidance on when and how to phase out support, or how to assess whether partners are ready to operate independently. Exit decisions tend to be made informally and on a case-by-case basis, leading to inconsistencies across countries and programmes. In some contexts, partnerships have continued for decades without a defined transition — raising questions about when capacity building becomes dependency.

This challenge is compounded by Rikolto's identity as a locally embedded actor. In many contexts, Rikolto is seen as part of the local ecosystem — which can enhance trust but also blur distinctions between external support and local agency. Without a clear framework for exiting or transitioning support, Rikolto risks

undermining the very sustainability it aims to foster — and may face difficulty freeing up resources to support innovation and scale in new geographies.

Workshop participants emphasized the importance of intentional exit planning in existing partnerships and when engaging in new partnerships. Several highlighted the need to establish clear exit criteria from the outset, ideally aligned with partnership objectives and supported by tools such as SCOPEinsight or the MSP assessment tool. Exits or scaling down Rikolto's role should be based on whether objectives have been achieved, as determined through consistent monitoring and evaluation. There was broad agreement that an exit should not be seen as a definitive "goodbye," but rather as a redefinition of the relationship. Transparency and mutual agreement were identified as essential to this process. Additionally, participants noted that partnership timelines should not be rigidly tied to program cycles.

2.2.8. Inclusion in practice: Addressing gender and youth in food systems work

Rikolto acknowledges the demographic and gender-related challenges in agriculture and food systems — particularly in sectors like rice, cocoa, and coffee. Despite playing a key role in agri-food systems, they face limited finance and market access, and underrepresentation in leadership positions. In response, Rikolto supports a range of targeted initiatives, including entrepreneurial and technical training, women-led production units, the development of gender policies in cooperatives, and support for small businesses in value-added segments such as by-product commercialisation and agro-services.

Examples from various programmes show how this inclusion strategy plays out. Women and youth have been supported to launch enterprises in fruit, legume, and timber production, contributing both to environmental restoration and to income diversification. In cocoa- and coffee-growing areas, women and young people have been engaged in production, processing, marketing, and business ownership, contributing to wider employment opportunities and stronger value chains.

However, despite these efforts, inclusion of women and youth is still not fully integrated into Rikolto's core food systems strategy. In many cases, these activities operate as parallel or project-specific interventions — such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) or side enterprises — rather than being embedded into the mainstream design of value chain initiatives. As a result, their impact remains partial, with limited influence on broader power dynamics or institutional practices. For instance, gaps in participation persist in key decision-making and entrepreneurship spaces, particularly for young women. In the rice sector, while female participation in marketing has increased, young women remain largely excluded from the growing rice trade — raising questions about how to better ensure equitable access to emerging opportunities.

Rikolto's inclusive approach reflects genuine intent and practical action. However, gender and youth inclusion currently remain more peripheral than fully integrated within the design of interventions. This positioning influences the extent to which these groups can contribute strategically to transforming food systems and realizing the full potential of Rikolto's work for future farmers and entrepreneurs.

2.3. Conclusions

1. Rikolto's strategy is broadly aligned with its intended impacts

Rikolto's strategy demonstrates a strong conceptual alignment with its dual impact objectives: sustainable farmer incomes and access to healthy, affordable food. This is reflected in its systems approach, multi-level engagement, and cross-cutting programme design. However, contributions vary across programmes — Cocoa & Coffee and Rice show clearer pathways to income generation, while GF4C contributes more directly to nutrition and urban food access. Monitoring frameworks do not yet capture nutrition or affordability outcomes consistently across programmes, limiting the ability to track progress on both objectives.

2. Rikolto's position as a neutral connector strengthens food system collaboration

The organisation plays a highly appreciated role as a facilitator and bridge-builder across actors. Its convening power in multi-stakeholder platforms allows for inclusive dialogue and coordination. Rikolto is recognised for enabling collaboration between government, private sector, and civil society in ways that others often do not.

3. The three-pillar framework offers a holistic and appreciated approach

Rikolto's structure around sustainable production, inclusive markets, and enabling environments reflects a comprehensive food systems perspective. This integrated model is both relevant and distinctive, allowing Rikolto to engage multiple stakeholders and levels of governance. Partners particularly value this holistic approach.

4. The Enabling Environment pillar lacks strategic clarity and consistent implementation

Despite notable contributions to local food governance, Rikolto's enabling environment work is less mature than its production and market activities. Its non-confrontational, evidence-based advocacy approach aligns with its collaborative identity but remains under-strategized. Advocacy is often opportunity-driven, with limited internal capacity, dedicated resources, and visibility—particularly at the national level—which hinders Rikolto's ability to influence through its partners policy and institutional frameworks at scale.

5. E4I is a strategic asset but remains underleveraged

Rikolto's E4I approach reflects a clear and thoughtful commitment to learning, innovation, and systems influence. It connects pilots to broader food system strategies and seeks to translate local success into policy and market change. However, implementation remains uneven. While some pilots have generated useful insights and tools, they often face limitations in terms of institutional uptake and long-term support. The MEL system does not consistently provide the type of rigorous, timely evidence needed to support advocacy or policy dialogue, and capacities across countries vary significantly. As a result, the potential of E4I to drive scaling and influence remains only partially realised.

6. Rikolto's strategy on sustainability is strong, but exit planning remains undefined

Rikolto's reliance on local ownership, capacity building, and government integration underpins a strong sustainability model. Working through farmer organisations and local NGOs reinforces social infrastructure and resilience. However, the absence of a formalised exit strategy — with clear criteria and transition planning — leads to inconsistency across contexts and limits scalability.

7. Gender and Youth are addressed but not fully integrated

Rikolto has developed promising initiatives to support women and youth in entrepreneurship, training, and production. However, these efforts are often implemented as parallel or project-based initiatives rather than embedded within its core food system interventions. As a result, their contribution to structural inclusion and long-term transformation remains limited.

2.4. Recommendations

LQ1-1. Strengthen strategic advocacy and leverage MSPs and E4I for influence

Linked to Conclusions 2, 4, and 5

Aligned with: LQ4-4, LQ9-2

- **Develop a clear organisational advocacy strategy** that outlines strategic goals, priority policy areas, and tailored approaches and expected outcomes by programme and country/region as well as with the selected partners.
- **Ensure that advocacy strategies actively use MEL and E4I outputs**, translating learning into messages, policy proposals, and influencing tactics embedded in programme cycles.
- **Build internal capacity for policy engagement**, strategic communication, and political economy analysis.
- **Leverage MSPs not just for coordination, but as platforms for scaling** proven models and driving collective action.
- **Engage national and cross-sectoral MSPs** to influence public policy, reduce fragmentation, and align agendas.
- **Allocate sufficient resources to advocacy and MSP engagement**, including staffing, communications, and long-term relationship building.
- **Disseminate E4I outputs strategically to inform advocacy and policy influence** through tailored toolkits, case studies, and summaries designed for specific audiences, and position them within relevant policy spaces and networks.

LQ1-2. Strengthen the MEL system

Linked to Conclusions 4, and 5

- **Ensure MEL supports three core functions**: accountability to donors and communities, programme management learning and adaptation, and strategic evidence generation for E4I and advocacy.
- **Embed E4I into MEL system design**, with strong coordination between MEL, programme, and communications teams.
- **Build MEL capacity** across Rikolto and partner organisations, including training on data quality, analysis, and use for decision-making.

- **Streamline and prioritise indicators**, reducing duplication and aligning with Rikolto's theory of change and three-pillar structure.
- Define **relevant indicators and data collection tools on a case-by-case basis**, tailored to the context, programme and E4I goals, and partner capacities.
- **Use MEL data to support exit planning**, by tracking partner capacity, readiness indicators, and sustainability benchmarks over time.
- **Ensure sufficient resources for MEL and E4I delivery**, including staffing, operational budgets, and digital systems.
- **Secure specific funding to conduct rigorous impact evaluations on selected E4I cases** to showcase successful models for scaling up, generate internal learning, and attract new donors.

LQ1-3. Rethink private sector engagement for scale and co-investment

Linked to Conclusions 2, 4, and 5

Aligned with: LQ4-2, LQ9-4

- **Review and adapt Rikolto's private sector strategy** to reflect shifting aid dynamics and rising demand for public-private solutions.
- **Move beyond dialogue-based engagement**, exploring structured co-investment models, shared value approaches, and long-term commercial partnerships.
- **Demonstrate the business case by generating and sharing evidence** on cost-effectiveness, risk reduction, and value addition for private actors.

LQ1-4. Deepen the food systems approach through territorial and landscape engagement

Linked to Conclusions 1, 2, and 3

- **Implement food systems strategies at territorial or landscape level by aligning production, market, nutrition, and environmental interventions within defined geographies** — ensuring coherence across value chains, ecosystems, and local governance frameworks.
- **Use MSPs and local policy platforms to link territorial work to national influence, scale up proven approaches, and coordinate multi-actor solutions.**

LQ1-5. Make Gender and Youth inclusion integral to programme design

Linked to Conclusion 7

Aligned with: LQ4-1, LQ9-1

- **Move beyond standalone initiatives by embedding gender and youth considerations across all pillars and throughout the programme cycle**, ensuring they are integrated into the landscape approach and reflected in context-specific strategies, such as value chain entry points traditionally open to women or youth, or dedicated support structures like women-led cooperatives.
- **Use inclusive business strategies to increase opportunities**, such as youth-run service provision models or women-led by-product processing.

- **Ensure voice and leadership** by enabling meaningful participation of women and youth in governance structures of FOs and MSPs.
- **Partner with organisations that specialise in gender and youth empowerment** to embed inclusive approaches more effectively into Rikolto's core food systems work.

LQ1-6. Clarify and systematise the Exit Strategy

Linked to Conclusion 6

Aligned with: LQ9-3

- **Design exit strategies from the outset** of each partnership or project — whether with farmer organisations, local NGOs, or national-level institutions — as part of initial planning and co-creation.
- **Define clear sustainability benchmarks and readiness criteria** (e.g. institutional maturity, financial autonomy, policy linkages) to guide phasing out.
- **Adapt and update exit plans regularly** based on progress, contextual shifts, and partner feedback — treating exit as a gradual, strategic transition rather than a final step.
- **Define and communicate exit planning transparently with partners** as a sign of progress and shared success, while offering follow-up mechanisms where needed.
- **Clarify internal roles and expectations**, particularly regarding Rikolto's identity as a local vs. international actor, to ensure transparency and accountability in exit planning.
- **Conduct a thorough evaluation of Rikolto's exit strategies** to assess their effectiveness, inform improvements, and enhance the sustainability of partnerships after Rikolto's involvement ends.

3. LQ4. Is Rikolto able to facilitate/motivate a multistakeholder environment that enables the scaling of their model/innovation?

3.1. Introduction: Understanding Rikolto's approach to scaling in the rice sector

Multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) offer a collaborative framework where diverse actors—governments, farmer organisations, private sector firms, civil society, and research institutions—can align around shared objectives to address systemic challenges in food systems. For Rikolto, MSPs are a cornerstone strategy for scaling its innovations by enabling coordinated action, unlocking new resources, and embedding sustainable practices into policy and market systems.

Rikolto's engagement in MSPs supports scaling through five interlinked mechanisms:

- **Resource mobilisation:** Platforms pool technical expertise, financial resources, and institutional support—amplifying Rikolto's reach and enabling co-investment in pilots and scale-up.
- **Knowledge exchange and learning:** MSPs provide spaces for cross-sectoral learning, where actors share evidence, best practices, and lessons that inform continuous improvement and adaptive scaling.
- **Policy influence and institutionalisation:** Through structured dialogue with policymakers, MSPs help embed Rikolto's models—such as SRP standards—into national strategies, regulatory frameworks, and public investment plans.
- **Market linkages and private sector engagement:** MSPs foster inclusive business models by aligning incentives across value chains, enabling more secure and equitable market access for producers.
- **Community participation and accountability:** Platforms promote legitimacy and responsiveness by involving local actors in shaping decisions, thereby strengthening the relevance and sustainability of interventions.

This synthesis draws on three country case studies—Tanzania, Uganda, and Senegal—to explore how Rikolto facilitates and motivates multi-actor collaboration in practice, and how these efforts contribute to the scaling of sustainable rice production. While each country presents a distinct context and trajectory, they offer

complementary insights into the enablers and constraints of MSP-based scaling strategies:

- In **Uganda**, Rikolto helped launch the National Sustainable Rice Production (NSRP) Chapter to align diverse actors around the SRP model, integrate it into national policy, and support regional platforms.
- In **Senegal**, Rikolto focuses on revitalising the national rice platform and promoting the adoption of SRP standards to align value chain actors around sustainable rice production.
- In **Tanzania**, the Climate Smart Lending Model (CSLM) pilot illustrates Rikolto's potential to innovate in inclusive finance, though integration with formal MSP structures remains partial.

Together, these cases illuminate both the promise and limitations of MSPs as vehicles for scaling sustainable innovations. The following sections synthesise findings across key dimensions of Rikolto's MSP facilitation approach and its influence on scaling outcomes.

3.2. Main Findings

3.2.1. Facilitating inclusive platforms: Operationalising MSPs for innovation uptake

Rikolto plays an active facilitation role in designing and supporting MSPs that bring together diverse actors across the rice value chain. This inclusive approach is key to scaling, as it ensures that no single actor is left behind and that the actions of different stakeholders reinforce each other. Rather than creating new platforms, Rikolto typically strengthens existing coordination structures, helping to clarify roles, improve functionality, and embed shared ownership. These platforms provide spaces for joint planning, dialogue, and problem-solving—key enablers for scaling sustainable rice production. The degree of formalisation, maturity, and inclusiveness of MSPs varies across contexts. It is important to note that this assignment has not been able to provide a clear picture of the level of attendance, participation, and commitment of each platform member. Additionally, it remains challenging to assess whether all actors, especially smaller ones, have had the opportunity to express themselves fully and influence decisions.

In Uganda, Rikolto co-initiated the National Sustainable Rice Production (NSRP) Chapter in 2021, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) and other rice sector actors. The platform brings together FOs, processors, government departments, private sector firms, and research institutions, and has been instrumental in creating a shared vision for sustainable rice production based on SRP principles. Rikolto also supported the establishment of regional platforms to ensure decentralised coordination and the inclusion of local actors. The platform includes a general assembly, a steering committee, and thematic working groups on areas such as production, finance, and policy. The NSRP Chapter has developed an operational roadmap, working groups, and structured dialogue with public authorities, positioning it as a credible vehicle for national-level scaling.

In Senegal, Rikolto worked within the Interprofessional Committee of Rice in Senegal (CIRIZ), the established interprofessional platform for the rice sector, to promote the integration of SRP standards into the platform's agenda. CIRIZ gathers government institutions (e.g., Ministry of Agriculture, the Senegal River Delta Land Development and Exploitation Company (SAED)), producer organisations, millers, and NGOs. Rikolto's support focused on revitalising CIRIZ's coordination functions, strengthening inclusive business model development, and aligning actors around shared sustainability goals. By working within CIRIZ rather than setting up a parallel structure, Rikolto helped reinforce an already legitimate platform and increase its relevance to current sustainability challenges.

In Tanzania, Rikolto piloted the CSLM with a coalition of core market actors including the Cooperative Rural Development Bank (CRDB Bank), farmer cooperatives such as the Madibira Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Society (MAMCOS), off-takers, and agro-insurance providers. These actors bear the direct financial risks linked to climate impacts and are central to the functioning of the model. Supporting institutions such as the Tanzania Agricultural Research Institute (TARI) and Local Government Authorities (LGAs) provided training in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), contributing to farmer capacity and alignment with national sustainability goals, although they did not take on financial risk. While the CSLM illustrates a strong example of targeted, multi-actor coordination, it is not part of a broader MSP and remains somewhat disconnected from formal sectoral policy platforms, limiting its potential for scale at this stage.

3.2.2. Strengthening institutional capacity: Building technical and organisational foundations

For scaling efforts to take root and endure, local stakeholders must have the technical, organisational, and leadership capacities needed to carry forward innovations without continued external support. Rikolto's approach emphasises working through and with existing structures—particularly FOs, research institutions, and local authorities—to strengthen these capacities in ways that align with each country's rice sector strategies.

Capacity building is not treated as a stand-alone activity but as a long-term, embedded process that reinforces the legitimacy and operational readiness of each stakeholder group within the MSP framework. Across cases, capacity-building efforts have extended beyond one-off trainings to foster networks of local trainers and support institutional change. **Nonetheless, challenges persist, including staff turnover, uneven geographical coverage, and varying levels of commitment among local actors**

In Uganda, Rikolto supported over 140 trainers from public and private institutions to deliver content on SRP standards and sustainable rice practices. These trainers serve as multipliers, expanding reach through decentralised extension. Rikolto also worked to embed SRP training into public extension systems and supported the development of coordinated learning structures within the NSRP Chapter. Beyond technical content, Rikolto facilitated capacity building on governance and coordination, helping the platform establish a functional steering committee and thematic working groups. However, challenges remain, particularly with

uneven geographical coverage, as capacity-building efforts have been more concentrated in regions involved in early SRP pilots, such as Northern and Eastern Uganda. Furthermore, varying levels of commitment among local actors, especially farmer organizations, and fragmented coordination and stakeholder buy-in in wetland zones continue to hinder the expansion of the national SRP platform.

In **Senegal**, Rikolto strengthened the capacity of FOs to adopt sustainable agronomic practices, improve post-harvest handling, and align with SRP standards. This included both technical training and support to CIRIZ member organisations on inclusive business planning and platform coordination. By equipping FOs with relevant production and market-oriented skills, Rikolto helped ensure that sustainability practices were not limited to individual farmers but embedded in collective structures that could advocate for their members. However, uneven geographical coverage persists, as actors from Southern Senegal have only recently begun to be integrated into coordination structures, with CIRIZ, in collaboration with partners like SODAGRI and FEPROBA, actively advocating for the inclusion of producers from these emerging regions.

In **Tanzania**, capacity building was delivered through the CSLM partnership, where Rikolto and its partners supported farmer cooperatives with training on improved seed varieties, irrigation, soil testing, and mechanised planting. The TARI and LGAs played a role in delivering GAP training aligned with national sustainability goals. However, limitations in institutional capacity and coordination at local levels continue to affect consistency and reach. The absence of a Rikolto local office, such as in the Mbarali district, has impeded smooth communication and coordination among stakeholders. Additionally, the integration of SRP practices varies significantly across districts.

3.2.3. Influencing policy through coordination with government: Opportunities and limitations

Rikolto recognises that scaling sustainable rice innovations requires close alignment with public policy and sustained engagement with government institutions at multiple levels. In all three countries, Rikolto has worked with national and local authorities to ensure its approaches—particularly around SRP—are embedded within formal governance structures. This integration has helped legitimize Rikolto's work and align it with national priorities. **While promising steps have been taken, challenges persist related to cross-ministerial coordination, decentralised implementation, and the strategic use of advocacy.**

In **Uganda**, Rikolto anchored the NSRP Chapter within the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), reinforcing government ownership and positioning the platform as a policy vehicle for scaling SRP standard practices. The NSRP Chapter has contributed to the revision of the National Rice Development Strategy and facilitated engagement on sensitive issues such as wetland use. However, progress on inter-ministerial coordination—particularly with the Ministry of Water and Environment—has been slow, delaying policy updates like wetland agriculture guidelines. Government actors have highlighted Rikolto's positive role, while also noting the potential for a more proactive and strategic advocacy function.

In **Senegal**, Rikolto collaborated with government actors through CIRIZ to integrate SRP principles into national policy frameworks. This included working with the Ministry of Agriculture and SAED to build consensus and support capacity building. While CIRIZ has regained relevance as a coordination forum, stakeholders noted that the regulatory frameworks for enforcement of SRP-related commitments remain underdeveloped. Implementation is further hampered by uneven coordination between national and local government, and limited resources for monitoring compliance at decentralised levels.

In **Tanzania**, Rikolto partnered with Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and TARI to implement training and technical support within the CSLM pilot. Although this reflects alignment with national sustainability goals, the CSLM remains outside any formal policy or MSP structure. Moreover, the absence of a permanent Rikolto presence in key districts, such as Mbarali, limits ongoing engagement with district platforms. Coordination challenges between local and national actors, and between financial and agricultural calendars, have also been identified as barriers to timely, policy-relevant action.

3.2.4. Engaging markets: Mobilising private sector actors for inclusive scale

Private sector actors—processors, traders, input suppliers, buyers, and financial institutions—are essential partners in scaling sustainable rice production. Rikolto has mobilised these actors through tailored partnerships and MSPs, promoting inclusive business models and strengthening market incentives for climate-smart practices. **However, engagement levels vary, and the long-term commitment of some private actors remains uncertain.** Indeed, across all cases, private actors often seek clearer value propositions to justify long-term engagement, particularly when sustainability entails higher costs or operational changes. Stakeholders highlighted that Rikolto’s role in articulating these incentives—such as reduced supply risk, consumer trust, and market differentiation—is key to unlocking broader and deeper participation.

To address this, workshop participants underscored the importance of tailoring engagement to the strategic interests of private sector actors. Beyond financial incentives, companies are increasingly motivated by access to traceable, ethical supply chains and the need to comply with social and environmental standards, such as the SRP. Rikolto’s added value lies in acting as a bridge between smallholder producers and private sector actors, translating sustainability into commercially viable business cases.

In **Uganda**, Rikolto has partnered with companies like SWT Tanners and Diners Group Ltd., facilitating contract farming and improved market access for SRP-compliant rice. Initiatives such as the Healthy Rice campaign have expanded consumer awareness and institutional demand, linking producers to buyers like the Uganda Hotel Owners Association. Nonetheless, challenges persist with supply consistency and quality standardisation, limiting the potential for premium pricing. In this context, workshop discussions further suggested that meaningful roles for private sector actors should be defined in MSP structures defined, such as participation in technical working groups where SRP standards are discussed, allowing alignment with their operational needs and deeper ownership of sustainability solutions.

In **Senegal**, Rikolto supported CIRIZ in integrating private actors into discussions around sustainability and market differentiation. The branding of products such as Bukeddi Savannah Rice reflects efforts to build market identity and value. Still, poor post-harvest infrastructure and limited consumer recognition hinder full value capture, and smaller private actors struggle to participate due to capacity and financing gaps. Workshop participants proposed that co-investment models, especially in infrastructure, should be explored more systematically within MSPs, and that Rikolto should create space for private actors to shape solutions rather than only respond to NGO-led agendas. This would strengthen trust and promote joint ownership of outcomes.

In **Tanzania**, the CSLM pilot is anchored by CRDB Bank and farmer cooperatives, with financial institutions directly engaged in de-risking climate-resilient rice production. However, beyond this financial core, the involvement of traders and processors is less formalised, and the model is not yet integrated into a wider MSP framework. This limits its scalability and broader private sector traction.

Across all programmes, workshop participants observed that private sector engagement is uneven and often dependent on individuals or personal relationships. They stressed the need for clearer, more formalised roles for private actors in MSPs — particularly around co-investment, post-harvest infrastructure, and product differentiation. Discussions also suggested that Rikolto could improve how it articulates the business case for sustainability, and tailor messages to different types of private actors (e.g., small processors vs. large buyers).

Participants also noted that private sector involvement, when structured intentionally, can serve as a powerful lever for systems change—shaping market norms, attracting investment, and encouraging broader adoption of sustainable practices. Aligning private engagement with public sector leadership and ensuring shared responsibility for social outcomes—such as human rights due diligence, gender and youth inclusion, and decent working conditions—was seen as essential for building a resilient, inclusive, and investable rice sector. Taken together, these elements strengthen the foundation for scaling inclusive business models through credible, long-term partnerships.

3.2.5. Promoting knowledge partnerships: Involving research and evidence in scaling

Rikolto recognises the importance of evidence in informing scaling strategies, shaping policy, and strengthening multi-actor dialogue. Across the three countries, it has partnered with national research institutions to support technical validation, monitor the uptake of SRP standards, and inform advocacy efforts. However, these collaborations remain ad hoc, and the absence of a structured learning agenda limits their long-term strategic impact.

Across all three countries, Rikolto's partnerships with research bodies have added technical credibility, but the lack of a resourced and strategic approach to evidence limits its utility for scaling. Data collection is often decentralised, feedback loops are weak, and internal capacity constraints further reduce the organisation's

ability to use research for adaptive management and advocacy. Workshop participants stressed that the quality, credibility, and timeliness of evidence shared in MSPs are critical to building trust and influencing decisions. Strengthening internal capacity and improving coordination across data sources—possibly through strategic partnerships with external experts—was identified as a priority to enable more rigorous, actionable analyses.

In **Uganda**, Rikolto worked with institutions like the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) to generate evidence on yield gains, biodiversity, Greenhouses Gases (GHG) reductions, and economic viability of SRP-aligned practices. This evidence has fed into national wetland use policies and rice strategies, challenging outdated international data. However, policymakers emphasised the need for more robust, quantifiable datasets to inform emerging agendas such as carbon credits and wetland management.

In **Senegal**, research institutions have supported CIRIZ's efforts to promote SRP standard integration by adapting sustainability tools to local contexts. Yet, evidence generation remains limited in scope, and gaps persist in aligning research outputs with platform priorities or using findings to drive regulatory change.

In **Tanzania**, TARI contributed to the CSLM pilot through GAP training, measure progress of adoption and outcomes and support for defining sustainability indicators. However, there is no dedicated mechanism to track CSLM outcomes or translate evidence into broader sector dialogue. Communication between research bodies and financial or policy actors remains fragmented.

Finally, participants emphasised the value of regional MSPs as platforms for accelerating cross-country learning. Experiences from Latin America, for example, demonstrate how shared agendas and regional evidence-sharing can fast-track alignment and scaling in comparable contexts. In addition, participants highlighted the importance of intentionally selecting strategic knowledge actors—those with credibility, strong networks, and communication skills—within MSPs to amplify evidence-based messages. This is especially critical for influencing decision-makers, buyers, and the broader public. For Rikolto, this entails not only cultivating relationships but also investing in soft skills such as communication, negotiation, and public relations, which take time and resources to develop. Within MSPs, Rikolto should focus on partnering with those who excel in these areas to foster collaboration and drive impact.

3.2.6. Addressing cross-cutting enablers: Finance, gender, and youth inclusion

Financial access, gender equality, and youth inclusion are recognised as critical levers for scaling sustainable rice innovations, yet they remain areas of partial progress across Rikolto's work in Tanzania, Uganda, and Senegal. Overall, addressing these structural barriers requires more than project-based inclusion. It calls for long-term strategies to shift institutional norms and practices within financial systems and value chains. Stakeholders highlighted that enhancing the business case for inclusive finance, embedding gender and youth perspectives into MSP governance, and ensuring targeted support for marginalised groups will be key

to unlocking their full potential as agents of change in scaling sustainable rice systems.

In **Tanzania**, the CSLM pilot offers a notable innovation by linking sustainable rice production with tailored credit through CRDB Bank. However, broader replication is hindered by limited participation of other financial actors, delays in disbursement, and conservative lending practices. In **Uganda** and **Senegal**, similar challenges persist: high interest rates, limited access to capital, and lengthy loan processing continue to restrict the ability of FOs and farmers to invest in sustainable practices. These barriers underscore the need for patient engagement with financial institutions to shift risk perceptions and adapt financial products to smallholder realities.

Rikolto has also worked to promote the inclusion of women and youth within the rice value chain. In each country, women and young people play active roles in production, processing, and marketing. However, their participation in decision-making bodies—especially within MSPs and governance structures—remains limited. In **Uganda**, efforts to engage youth through entrepreneurship programs have begun to yield results, while in **Senegal**, gender-focused training has aimed to enhance women’s visibility in CIRIZ. Still, these efforts often remain add-ons rather than being fully integrated into platform strategies or business models.

3.3. Conclusions

1. Rikolto effectively facilitates MSPs as vehicles for scaling

Rikolto’s ability to initiate and operationalise MSPs — as seen in Uganda’s NSRP Chapter and Senegal’s CIRIZ — has been instrumental in aligning diverse actors around sustainable rice production goals. These platforms provide the structure and legitimacy required to jointly plan, coordinate, and scale interventions. Rikolto’s approach of working through existing platforms strengthens local ownership and avoids duplication, a key factor in enabling systemic uptake of innovations like SRP.

1. Capacity building within MSPs strengthens scaling readiness

Rikolto’s training efforts have built technical and organisational capacity within farmer organisations, cooperatives, and public institutions. Training-of-trainers models and alignment with government extension systems support continuity. Still, uneven reach, resource limitations, and high personnel turnover remain constraints. Strengthening both technical knowledge and institutional resilience is essential to sustain and spread innovation.

2. Policy alignment enhances the institutional environment for scaling

Rikolto’s engagement with government bodies at national and subnational levels has facilitated the integration of SRP principles into policy frameworks — notably in Uganda’s rice strategy. By working through government-anchored MSPs, Rikolto positions its models within existing policy priorities. However, stronger advocacy strategies are needed to accelerate uptake and improve coherence across ministries and governance levels.

3. Private sector engagement is promising but requires clearer incentives

While Rikolto has made progress linking producers to buyers and engaging financial institutions, private sector participation within MSPs remains limited in some contexts. To deepen involvement and unlock their potential as drivers of scale, clearer and more tailored value propositions are needed—aligned with business interests, supported by trust-building mechanisms, and reinforced through co-investment opportunities and public-private collaboration.

4. Evidence generation supports scaling but requires a more strategic approach

Rikolto works with research institutions to generate evidence that informs policy and dialogue. However, data collection is often project-specific and lacks a comprehensive strategy. Strengthening feedback loops between research, MSPs, and advocacy efforts could improve adaptive management and support scale-up with stronger empirical grounding. Securing adequate funding, aligning researchers' expectations and Rikolto's needs, and developing more effective communication strategies would further enhance the relevance and impact of the generated evidence.

5. Inclusion of finance, gender, and youth is acknowledged but not yet transformative

Access to finance and the inclusion of women and youth are widely recognised as necessary for scaling, but Rikolto's efforts in these areas remain emergent. Achieving systemic change will require deeper integration of these dimensions into MSP agendas, capacity-building efforts, and business models — not as add-ons, but as strategic enablers of innovation uptake.

3.4. Recommendations

LQ4-1. Strengthen MSP design, functionality, and inclusive participation

Linked to Conclusions 1, 2, and 6

Aligned with: LQ1-5, LQ9-1

- **Continue consolidating inclusive and decentralised MSPs** by investing in governance structures, facilitation capacity, and local ownership.
- **Clarify roles, responsibilities, and operational mandates** within platforms to improve functionality and sustained member engagement.
- **Integrate financial access, gender, and youth inclusion into the strategic agenda of MSPs** — not as side issues, but as pillars of sustainable scaling. Reflect on how to support women and youth in taking a more active role in these MSPs, ensuring their participation is meaningful and influential.
- **Use training-of-trainers and embedded learning approaches** to strengthen capacities of FOs, public institutions, and private actors involved in MSPs.
- **Invest in strengthening the soft skills of Rikolto's team** (such as communication, facilitation,

negotiation, and relationship-building) to enhance their role and impact within MSPs.

LQ4-2. Deepen private sector engagement through inclusive business models

Linked to Conclusion 4

Aligned with: LQ1-3, LQ9-4

- **Strengthen the value proposition** for private actors by aligning commercial incentives with sustainability outcomes, such as risk mitigation, traceable supply chains, and premium market access.
- **Facilitate dialogues within MSPs to co-develop inclusive business models** and address value chain bottlenecks like post-harvest handling, quality differentiation, and data governance (keeping in mind data sensitivity of some specific actors).
- **Broaden private sector participation** by reaching out to smaller, less formal actors — not just large firms or financial institutions — especially in underserved areas.

LQ4-3. Enhance evidence generation and use for adaptive scaling

Linked to Conclusion 5

Aligned with: LQ1-2

- **Develop a cross-country evidence strategy aligned with SRP and policy engagement goals**, and ensure regular data collection on outcomes such as yields, emissions, profitability, and inclusion.
- **Secure adequate funding** to support evidence generation activities, ensuring that resources are available for data collection, analysis, and dissemination.
- **Strengthen partnerships with research institutions** and integrate research outputs into platform dialogues and advocacy efforts.
- **Develop a clear, targeted communication strategy** to share research findings effectively, aligning researchers' expectations with Rikolto's needs to ensure that evidence is relevant, actionable, and better integrated into MSPs for stronger influence on decision-making.

LQ4-4. Make policy engagement more strategic and proactive

Linked to Conclusion 3

Aligned with: LQ1-1, LQ9-2

- **Define clear internal policy engagement strategies** at country level, with timelines, stakeholder maps, and priority entry points, identifying key individuals within ministries with whom to collaborate for advancing initiatives, and adjusting strategies based on the maturity of the MSPs and sector.
- **Leverage MSPs to engage relevant ministries early and often**, aligning SRP and other innovations with national policy frameworks.
- **Anticipate political and budget cycles**, using timely and evidence-based advocacy to support the

institutionalisation of sustainable practices.

- **Facilitate stronger coordination across ministries** (e.g., agriculture, water, finance) and between national and subnational governance levels.

4. LQ9. How can Rikolto make sure that the efforts of the programme will be maintained?

4.1. Introduction: Sustaining food system change beyond Rikolto's support in the GF4C programme

Ensuring the sustainability of programme changes beyond the end of funding is a strategic priority for Rikolto. LQ9 examines how Rikolto can strengthen the long-term viability of its interventions by enabling local actors to maintain and build on programme achievements after external support is withdrawn.

To explore this question, three case studies were selected from the GF4C programme — in Tanzania, Vietnam, and Honduras. Each case highlights different approaches to sustainability in diverse contexts:

- **In Tanzania**, the focus is on the Participatory Food Safety System (PFSS), implemented in Arusha and Mbeya to strengthen local certification, food safety infrastructure, and market access through multistakeholder collaboration. The project started in 2022 and is planned to end in 2026.
- **In Vietnam**, Rikolto has supported Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) to enable low-cost, trust-based certification for safe and sustainable food, with an emphasis on institutionalising PGS in local governance and food policy frameworks. The project started in 2019 and is planned to end in 2026.
- **In Honduras**, the partnership with CONAGROH — a second-tier cooperative — offers insights into how organisational autonomy, market integration, and operational planning contribute to sustainability after Rikolto's exit in 2023.

These cases were selected for their potential to reveal how different strategies — such as investing in farmer-led structures, embedding approaches into policy, strengthening inclusive markets, and promoting innovation — influence the sustainability of outcomes to which Rikolto contributed. Rather than assessing sustainability as a fixed result, the cases focused on identifying key enablers, constraints, and transition strategies that can support Rikolto's efforts toward achieving sustainable impacts and inform its exit strategy.

4.2. Main findings

4.2.1. Building durable local structures: Capacity strengthening of FOs

A key element in sustaining food system change beyond external funding lies in the strength of local

organisations—particularly FOs, cooperatives, and other community-based institutions. Across the three case studies, Rikolto placed significant emphasis on building the operational and leadership capacities of these structures to ensure they could continue delivering services, coordinating actors, and maintaining standards after programme exit.

While progress in the capacity of community-based institutions was evident in all three contexts, the degree of readiness to ensure sustainability varied, highlighting both promising practices and areas for improvement. During the sensemaking session, participants also underlined that maturity is not a fixed state but a dynamic process. Even organisations considered “ready” at exit may face new challenges when contexts shift — e.g., political turnover, market disruptions, or changing funder priorities. This reinforces the importance of adaptive capacity and long-term peer support structures among FOs.

In **Tanzania**, Rikolto supported the establishment and functioning of PFSS in Mbeya and Arusha, working directly with FOs and vendor associations. These groups were trained in local certification processes, traceability systems, and basic food safety protocols. In Mbeya, the local cooperative played a central role in coordinating inspections and managing financial linkages. However, challenges persist, particularly around internal governance, members’ engagement, and the capacity to sustain quality assurance processes without external support. Strengthening the long-term leadership and financial autonomy of these groups remains a key priority.

In **Vietnam**, cooperatives played a central role in piloting and managing PGS schemes, with Rikolto providing extensive support on peer-review systems, documentation, and linkages to local governments and markets. The model has proven adaptable and well-suited to local capacities. Nevertheless, while PGS has gained traction among committed groups, its broader institutionalisation depends on continued support for cooperative governance, quality control, and links to policy and market frameworks. Some cooperatives continue to rely on Rikolto for facilitation and oversight, indicating areas where further institutional maturity is needed.

In **Honduras**, Rikolto partnered with CONAGROH, a second-tier organisation that aggregates and supports seven primary horticultural enterprises. Over the years, Rikolto invested in strengthening its governance, financial management, and ability to represent member interests. Leading up to its planned exit in 2023, Rikolto supported CONAGROH in developing operational plans, monitoring tools, and business strategies. While the organisation demonstrated strong signs of autonomy—confirmed through a SCOPEInsight evaluation—continued vigilance is needed to ensure it can maintain service quality and respond to evolving market demands. Recent interviews confirm that CONAGROH remains active and is implementing strategies to sustain and grow its operations post-exit, though future risks include leadership turnover, reduced access to technical assistance, and challenges in scaling up its support services.

4.2.2. Building shared ownership: Engaging diverse stakeholders through MSPs

A key to sustaining food system change lies in aligning the efforts of all relevant actors — from FOs and cooperatives to public authorities, private companies, researchers, and consumers. Rikolto plays a distinctive role in this regard, acting as a connector and facilitator across institutional boundaries. In all three case studies, its strategy was not to focus on a single actor type, but **to engage the full ecosystem, recognising that one actor's ability to maintain change depends on complementary shifts by others**. This interdependence is critical: when stakeholders operate in silos, sustainability falters. However, even with a shared understanding of the importance of working together, in most cases, working in silos remains the norm. Particularly within Ministries, this siloed approach changes very slowly, and it takes time to break down these ingrained habits.

To build more sustainable MSPs, workshop participants emphasised the need for strategic coordination and clear definition of roles and responsibilities of each stakeholders. Participation in MSPs must also be tied to clear incentives for all actors, helping them understand not only their individual contributions but also how their roles connect to the collective vision. In addition, there was a strong emphasis on being more strategic in selecting the actors invited to these MSPs. The choice of individuals representing these actors at each meeting is equally important, as it ensures that the right people are in place to drive the agenda forward and engage effectively in the decision-making process.

In **Tanzania**, Rikolto worked with FOs, vendor associations, transporters, and municipal authorities to operationalise the PFSS. This engagement was not limited to training or technical assistance — it involved brokering relationships, clarifying roles, and fostering shared accountability for food safety improvements. Although MSPs provided a space for joint planning, Rikolto's more fundamental contribution was in making sure each actor understood their responsibilities in a coordinated system. This helped food safety interventions become more embedded in daily routines and less dependent on external oversight.

In **Vietnam**, Rikolto's facilitation of PGS went beyond support to cooperatives. It engaged local governments to formally recognise the PGS model, consumers to build demand for certified produce, and retail outlets to integrate PGS-labelled products. By working across these actor types, Rikolto helped cooperatives move beyond isolated production improvements to become part of a broader local food governance and market system. This web of relationships strengthened the cooperatives' resilience and reduced reliance on any single actor for continuity.

In **Honduras**, Rikolto supported CONAGROH not only as a service provider to its members, but also as a legitimate voice within multi-actor food councils. Rikolto also facilitated stronger ties between CONAGROH and public agencies, enhancing access to municipal infrastructure and planning processes. Even as Rikolto exited, these relationships positioned CONAGROH to advocate for horticultural producers and navigate policy spaces more independently.

4.2.3. Institutionalising change: Embedding innovations in policies and governance systems

Sustainability of programme outcomes is significantly enhanced when successful approaches are not only piloted but also embedded in public governance structures and regulatory frameworks. Institutionalisation within these formal systems provides legitimacy, resource access, and continuity beyond Rikolto's support. In all three case studies, Rikolto worked to align its interventions with local and national policies, building institutional linkages that support long-term uptake and continuity. These efforts focused on engaging public authorities early, fostering co-ownership, and positioning local innovations within broader food system governance. **However, the extent and depth of institutional integration varied, with some cases revealing gaps in ownership, capacity, or systemic support.**

In **Vietnam**, Rikolto worked closely with provincial departments such as the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department of Health to promote PGS as an official mechanism for food safety certification. Authorities were involved in inspections, training, and supervision, and in some provinces, PGS is now included in local food safety management policies. This has opened doors for PGS-certified products to enter school feeding programmes and other institutional markets. However, broader institutionalisation remains partial, and further policy support is needed to scale and standardise the model nationally.

In **Tanzania**, the PFSS was implemented in collaboration with local governments and health authorities in Mbeya and Arusha. In Mbeya, the system was anchored in district platforms and supported by food safety officials, leading to partial integration into municipal structures. Nonetheless, public partners continue to face resource and capacity constraints, which limit their ability to sustain and expand the approach independently. Formalisation of roles and budget allocations remains a challenge, particularly in Arusha where institutional engagement was weaker.

In **Honduras**, Rikolto partnered with CONAGROH to strengthen its role in municipal-level planning and food system governance. Through this partnership, CONAGROH contributed to local development plans and facilitated dialogue with public institutions. While this reflects progress in positioning civil society actors within governance structures, concrete policy uptake at the national level remains limited, and continuity depends on CONAGROH's capacity to maintain these relationships after Rikolto's exit.

4.2.4. Supporting resilience through markets: Access, diversification, and finance

Long-term sustainability of food system initiatives depends not only on strong local structures and institutional support, but also on the ability of producers to access stable, rewarding markets and secure **necessary financial services**. Across the three case studies, Rikolto worked to strengthen the economic foundations of sustainability by supporting FOs and cooperatives in accessing differentiated markets, promoting income diversification, and facilitating connections to financial services. These market-based efforts aimed to ensure that producers could continue implementing improved practices and maintaining standards beyond the end of direct programme support. **However, each case revealed barriers that continue**

to limit the full realisation of this economic sustainability.

In **Tanzania**, the PFSS model was linked to market-based incentives, allowing producers to differentiate their vegetables through local certification and traceability. In Mbeya, the cooperative coordinated marketing efforts and played a role in connecting farmers with buyers. However, affordability remains a key constraint, particularly for consumers. Recognising that most are unwilling or unable to pay a premium for safer products, Rikolto and its partners have instead focused on increasing efficiency across the supply chain to keep prices stable while improving safety and quality. Despite these efforts, vendors often lack incentives and financial support to consistently uphold food safety standards. Although some producers accessed input finance through SACCOs, financial services were not systematically available across all actor groups in the value chain — particularly vendors and transporters.

In **Vietnam**, PGS certification allowed cooperatives to reach niche markets including schools, retailers, and organised food fairs. Rikolto supported efforts to increase visibility and consumer recognition of the PGS label, helping boost trust and demand. Yet, scalability was constrained by inconsistent production, supply volatility, and limited access to credit. Without affordable finance to expand operations or invest in post-harvest handling, producers struggled to consistently meet market expectations — limiting the ability of market linkages alone to guarantee sustainability.

In **Honduras**, CONAGROH worked to connect member organisations to diversified markets, including institutional buyers and opportunities for value addition. These efforts aimed to enhance the resilience and income stability of producer groups. Nonetheless, the domestic market for higher-quality produce remains limited, and consumer demand does not yet provide a sufficient basis for scaling. In parallel, access to formal finance remains weak, constraining investments in processing, logistics, and growth.

These experiences show that market access and financial inclusion are not just complementary to sustainability — they are foundational. Without viable demand and access to capital, even well-governed and institutionally embedded initiatives risk stalling once project funding ends.

4.2.5. Leveraging innovation: Using technology and process innovation for sustainability

Sustaining programme outcomes beyond the project cycle often requires not only organisational and institutional change, but also the use of appropriate technologies and process innovations. These can improve efficiency, traceability, quality assurance, and access to markets, all of which contribute to making food system improvements viable over time. In each of the three case studies, Rikolto introduced or supported innovations tailored to local contexts, with mixed levels of uptake and long-term potential.

In **Tanzania**, Rikolto supported the digitisation of the PFSS through a traceability tool developed with Smart Food Tanzania. This tool enables scanning of vegetable batches and provides consumers with production

and distribution information. In Mbeya, some vendors adopted the technology and shared it with customers, improving transparency and trust in certified products. However, the tool's uptake was limited in Arusha, where fewer vendors were involved, and technical and financial constraints reduced continuity. Sustaining digital innovations like this requires alignment with user capacity and ongoing support for maintenance and adaptation.

In **Vietnam**, innovation was process-oriented rather than digital: the main focus was on institutionalising peer-review systems and participatory inspections within the PGS model. These low-tech innovations were highly adapted to the local capacity of cooperatives and smallholder groups. By embedding quality assurance in routine cooperative functions, the model promoted ownership and reduced dependency on external verification systems. However, respondents highlighted that further innovation — particularly in market communication, logistics, and data management — could support scaling and improve resilience to disruption.

In **Honduras**, Rikolto supported CONAGROH in introducing planning and monitoring tools, including digital templates for production planning, sales tracking, and internal audits. These tools aimed to professionalise operations and support coordination among member organisations. While promising, their continued use depends on the organisation's ability to maintain trained personnel and integrate such tools into routine processes — a challenge if resources and capacities fluctuate after Rikolto's exit.

Together, these cases underscore the value of innovation as a driver of sustainability — but also its dependency on local ownership, technical capacity, and fit-for-context design. **Innovations that are simple, low-cost, and embedded in local practices tend to show greater durability, while more complex or tech-heavy tools require long-term support structures to remain effective.**

4.3. Conclusions

1. Strengthening FOs and cooperatives is a foundation for sustainability

Rikolto's strategy of building the organisational, technical, and leadership capacities of FOs and cooperatives is central to sustaining food systems change. In all three cases, these entities played a key role in maintaining service delivery, managing quality standards, and facilitating coordination. However, the level of autonomy and institutional maturity varied. While some demonstrated high levels of autonomy and internal governance, others showed ongoing dependence on external support, with challenges related to leadership turnover and financial management.

2. Engaging multiple actor types supports sustainability through system-wide alignment

Rikolto's approach consistently brought together a wide range of stakeholders — including FOs, public authorities, private sector actors, and research institutions. This multi-actor engagement has enhanced ownership, created complementary incentives, and increased the relevance of interventions. Sustainability

was strongest when these actors were meaningfully involved from the outset, and their roles clearly defined in relation to shared goals.

3. Embedding innovations into policy frameworks strengthens continuity

Rikolto has worked to institutionalise key approaches — such as PGS and PFSS — by aligning with public governance systems. In several cases, this led to formal recognition and adoption at the local level. However, limited resources, fragmented mandates, and inconsistent engagement with higher-level policy structures constrain full integration. Without systemic support, localised innovations risk remaining isolated or fading over time.

4. Addressing market and finance barriers is critical for long-term viability

Access to stable markets, diversified income streams, and financial services directly influences whether food system actors can sustain changes. In all three cases, Rikolto supported cooperatives and producer groups in identifying new market channels, improving business practices, and accessing finance. Despite this, several actors still face barriers due to weak consumer demand, limited infrastructure, and underdeveloped financial ecosystems — all of which pose risks to continuity.

5. Technology and innovation add value but require sustained support, except when they are simple

Digital tools, traceability systems, and certification mechanisms have been introduced as drivers of sustainability. These innovations were often well-received and helped reinforce transparency and accountability. Still, their effectiveness depended on local capacity to manage and maintain them. Where these tools were not fully integrated into local systems, sustainability remained uncertain.

6. Common risks to sustainability were observed across contexts

Despite progress, several recurring risks emerged. These included limited institutional capacity within FOs, variable levels of engagement by public partners, and reliance on Rikolto for facilitation and coordination. In some cases, external factors such as infrastructure gaps or political shifts also posed constraints. These risks highlight the complexity of sustaining systemic change and the need for ongoing attention to the broader enabling environment.

4.4. Recommendations

LQ9-1. Invest in strong local institutions and multi-actor collaboration to anchor sustainability

Linked to Conclusion 1, 2, and 6

Aligned with: LQ1-5, LQ4-1

- Continue to strengthen the governance, leadership, and financial management capacities of FOs, cooperatives, and second-tier organisations.
- Facilitate long-term peer learning, mentorship, and internal renewal processes to reduce risks related

to leadership turnover or dependence on individuals.

- **Ensure that support to local organisations is paired with deliberate engagement of other system actors** — including local authorities, private sector partners, and research bodies — to maintain systemic alignment.
- **Integrate technological and digital tools only where local partners have or can develop the capacity to manage them independently.**

LQ9-2. Embed innovations into governance frameworks through structured advocacy and policy engagement

Linked to Conclusions 2 and 4

Aligned with LQ1-1 and LQ4-4

- **Develop clearer organisational strategies for policy engagement** at local, subnational, and national levels — beyond ad hoc or opportunistic advocacy.
- **Reflect on how to better integrate political economy analysis and context-specific policy insights** as part of programme planning and adaptation.
- **Continue leveraging existing MSPs as entry points** for embedding innovations into regulatory frameworks and municipal plans.
- **Continue supporting capacity-building for public partners** to help them take over coordination, oversight, and financing functions, while also helping them explore potential co-leadership with the private sector and/or other civil society actors.
- **Increase Rikolto's visibility** among government stakeholders as a relevant policy actor, not just a technical facilitator, while preserving its bottom-up approach in capacity-building efforts.
- **Invest in soft skills training for Rikolto's team** to enhance their advocacy and policy engagement effectiveness. Strengthening skills such as negotiation, communication, relationship-building, and conflict resolution will enable the team to more effectively navigate political contexts, engage stakeholders, and influence policy discussions at various levels.

LQ9-3. Enhance exit strategies to enable gradual, supported transitions

Linked to Conclusion 4

Aligned with LQ1-6

- **Systematically plan exit strategies at the beginning** of each engagement, conducting a maturity assessment to gauge organisational maturity and contextual readiness, and revisiting this assessment throughout the process to ensure continued alignment with exit goals.
- **Co-create transition plans** with partners, including agreed roles, timelines, and support mechanisms.

- **Monitor sustainability indicators over time**, such as leadership succession, financial self-reliance, and external linkages, and adjust plans accordingly.
- **Clarify internally when and how Rikolto transitions** from a facilitator role to a more distant advisory or learning partner.

LQ9-4. Address structural market and financial barriers to improve viability

Linked to Conclusion 3

Aligned with LQ1-3, LQ4-2

- **Support FOs and cooperatives in diversifying markets, improving quality assurance, and articulating a stronger value proposition to buyers.**
- **Explore blended finance models or public–private partnerships** to address infrastructure and financial service gaps.
- **Continue collaborating with financial institutions and fintech actors** to develop accessible, tailored solutions for smallholder and cooperative-level finance.
- **Increase consumer awareness** through targeted campaigns or collaborate with others to strengthen these efforts.

List of Annexes

Annex 1 – Case studies

Annex 2 – KII guides

Annex 3 – List of stakeholders consulted

Annex 4 – Prioritisation of Thematic Areas: Results of Participant Voting