

How is the AfDB implementing the Integrated Safeguards System (ISS) in an agricultural project in The Gambia?

Overview

The African Development Bank (AfDB) is financing The [Gambia-Rice Value Chain Transformation Program](#) (RVCTP), which is designed to contribute to poverty reduction and enhance economic growth in The Gambia through improved rice production, processing, and marketing and to reduce the high importation of rice into the country. The project aims to develop the commercialization of the rice sub sector by enhancing private sector and other stakeholder participation in the value chain through improved incomes and employment opportunities, especially for youth and women.

Findings

1. Inadequate stakeholder engagement during project design. The findings revealed that community engagement was inadequate in the project design stage. In 10 out of the 11 sites visited during monitoring, women and youth indicated that they were not involved in project design but were engaged at the start of implementation in 2019. Similarly, Farmers

Field Schools (FFS) and Regional Directors from two of three project intervention regions confirmed to have been consulted at the start of implementation.

2. Initial inadequate risk mitigation measures.

Two years into implementation, the project did not have an Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) to respond to environmental and social harms. In early 2022, a consultant was hired by the Central Projects Coordination Unit (CPCU) to draft the ESMP. However, children were not engaged during the ESMP consultations despite evidence that children are being exposed to social and environmental risks, including child labor. Additionally, the ESMP consultant Terms of Reference (ToRs) did not include social risks such as gender-based Violence (GBV), child sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (child SEA/H), and child labor. After significant advocacy by OSPG, social issues such as GBV, child SEA/H, and child labor were included in the final [ESMP](#).

3. Exclusion of persons with disabilities from project benefits. There is no evidence of persons with disabilities benefitting from this project.

4. High prevalence of child labor in the project area. During 2021 field visits, communities revealed that children from Guinea Bissau were hired as migrant workers during rice harvesting time. During monitoring visits in 2023, a child labor case was found in the RVCTP intervention site where over nine minors (between ages of 11 to 13 years) were working in rice fields in the Central River Region. This was immediately brought to the attention of the RVCTP team and the AfDB. RVCTP management, with support from OSPG, organized community sensitization events on existing laws and consequences of perpetuating child labor. OSPG provided technical support and a solution was initiated through the creation and establishment of a food bank to support marginalized households, particularly local Quranic day school families who were found working in the fields. Additionally, a Child Labor Action Plan was developed and is being monitored by community-based officers who report child labor incidents to the Regional GRM Committees located at the Regional Agricultural Directorates.

5. SEA/H/GBV Risks addressed with an Action Plan. Through OSPG engagement and advocacy in 2023, a SEA/H/GBV Action Plan was developed; however, as of May, 1 2024, it has not been publicly disclosed. As part of the plan, capacity-building was conducted in the 25 intervention villages. This strengthened the awareness and dissemination of messages on the SEA/H/GBV mitigation and response mechanisms in the communities. RVCTP included the plan in its 2023 project annual work plan & budget and organized quarterly project monitoring missions.

6. Initial absence of a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM). 2021 findings revealed that was no GRM system in place since the project's inception in 2019. As a result of OSPG's advocacy and community sensitization activities, in December 2023, community GRCs were established in all 25 communities the project covered. GRC committee members were given refresher training during the routine quarterly monitoring visits by the project Social Development Specialist.

As the findings listed above demonstrate, the project has benefited greatly from the monitoring and recommendations made by CSOs, and AfDB should further encourage CSOs to be involved in project design and implementation.

2. Support the RVCTP to implement the SEA/H/GBV Action Plan. The AfDB has an obligation to undertake due diligence to prevent SEA/H from occurring, mitigating the risk, and responding to it when it does occur. The AfDB should implement the recommendations made by the [IRM SEA/H Advisory Note](#) to provide guidance, support and resources to the CPCU and other borrowers to develop approaches to address SEA/H/GBV in all its projects.
3. The AfDB should work with the RVCTP team to implement the Child Labor Action Plan. AfDB should prioritize technical support and investing in [social protection](#) to address child labor pull-push factors. AfDB and the RVCTP teams should continuously engage with communities and children to update the Child Labor Action Plan and alert the AfDB and the Borrower should child labor arise on or around the project.
4. The AfDB should support the CPCU to mainstream disability inclusion in all projects, including the RVCTP as per the Disability Act.
5. The AfDB should continuously train government officials, project staff, and contractors on the ISS, disclosure, and Access to Information policy, among others.
6. RVCTP, with support from the AfDB, should implement both the Child Labor and SEA/H/GBV Action Plans. These, along with all other project documents, should be publicly disclosed on both AfDB and CPCU websites.
7. RVCTP should develop and display in communities appropriate information, education, and communication materials on prohibition of child labor and SEA/H/GBV, including child SEA/H, and how to access the GRM.
8. RVCTP should create effective and safe referral pathways to report incidents of SEA/H/GBV and child labor in communities such as toll-free lines and permanent complaint boxes that are easily accessible to victims, families and children.

Recommendations to the AfDB and RVCTP

1. Meaningfully engage with civil society organizations (CSOs) throughout the project cycle.