# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MTR-FMBE

# Presentation of the evaluation

The project follows on from PAREF 2 Be and builds on its outputs. The project strategy is to increase woody biomass production by implementing District Forest Management Plans (DFMP) through partnerships with farmers, cooperatives, community groups and, in public forests, by commercial operators. Result 1 concentrates on simplifying DFMPs to improve their accessibility and use and deliver field activities of agroforestry, roadside planting and private Forest Management Unit plans on consolidated private land. Result 2 focuses on capacity building to support Result 1 and create scope for wider roll-out of the project’s approach.

The project started in December 2016 and will end in June 2021. This review was commissioned to provide opportunity to assess progress to date, determine whether the project is on track to achieve its predicted outcome and propose any necessary changes of approach and/or direction to optimise the achievement of the outcome and the sustainability of the achievements.

The review team was mandated to conduct the review using the five standard sections of the OECD-DAC performance evaluation grid and to address four specific questions encompassing: the institutional framework; pre-requisites and conditions; Rwanda government aim of 80% of public forests under private sector contracts; and gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Although neither reviewer had worked directly with the project, both were familiar with it from other assignments. The methodology was relatively straightforward. The team was provided with very extensive documentation by the project team. After initial document review, the review team spent four days visiting field sites covering most of the activities. There was no activity started within public forests, but the visits covered forest owner cooperative plantations, roadside planting and agroforestry sites in three districts. At each site, semi-structured interviews were conducted with actors and stakeholders and the technical aspects of the various interventions were studied and discussed on site. A workshop for stakeholders and the Project Steering Committee was held at the end May after completion of the Aide-memoire.

This review must be read with the understanding that the project has been piloting innovative approaches to engage with the private sector at all scales and that it is working in some of the more challenging sites in Rwanda with steep, degraded slopes, poor soils and limited rainfall.

# Results and conclusions

## Performance criteria

### Relevance

The project focus has been on enhancing the forestry planning framework to support private sector engagement at all scales from individual farmers, through cooperatives to commercial operators through improved access to geographical, cadastral and technical information and complementary activities such as contract templates. It is very relevant to delivery of the Rwanda policy of private sector engagement in tree planting, to the beneficiaries by aiding their involvement and is also coherent with the donor aims of improved energy sources, poverty reduction, environmental improvement and gender equity

### Efficiency

Overall efficiency has been good, the in-kind local contribution has been delivered fully and the additional finance from Région Bruxelles Capitale allowed increased field activities. The challenging sites mean high unit costs for cooperative plantings but the employment of members as labour gave improved income levels to them. The engagement with local administrations has resulted in excellent understanding and good commitment to project activities but, as the project will close before most planted material matures, there will have to be reliance on this commitment to support growers through to the time at which harvesting can commence.

### Effectiveness

The engagement with district administrations has been very effective, as has the work on simplifying the planning tools and on skills building of field project personnel. The technical part of the project has been less effective. There is an unfortunate complacency in Rwanda with long-established, sub-optimal plantation forestry. There is excessive reliance on a narrow range of species, poor site-user-species matching and limited establishment inputs. The project faced an uphill task trying to overcome this and has only had limited success to date.

### Impact

In considering impact, it is necessary to separate the two threads within the project; the enabling support and the physical planting itself. The enabling support for districts and beneficiaries through training and provision of the updated planning software has excellent potential impact within the project area and can also be rolled out more widely. The impact from planting is less certain and much will depend on support given post project by Rwanda government and possibly another donor. On balance the potential impact is very good, the technical issues would be relatively easy to solve once there is wider acceptance of the need for species diversification and improved practices.

### Sustainability

The complex institutional framework for forestry and agroforestry involving several ministries and local administrations also includes cooperatives as well as individual farmers and commercial contract holders; this presents a challenge for sustainability. The cooperatives will require the greatest level of support and will be most vulnerable once the project ends.

There is therefore a high level of risk in respect of sustainability as well as potential problems from the technical approaches and sustainability has significant problems. The project needs to take steps to minimise these risks in the remaining time to June 2021.

## Specific questions

### Institutional context

The complex institutional structure around forestry and agroforestry has been exacerbated by regular changes in primary responsibility for forestry; these are not conducive to personnel motivation. Building skills in districts as well as at the centre should be continued. It is of concern that while there is agroforestry research there is no formal forestry research despite the substantial need for this to reduce the current level of risk from pests and climate change.

### Pre-requisites and conditions

While the policy framework is stable and the project has focused its support on the goal of much greater private sector engagement in tree planting, institutional flux is a major concern. The technical challenges could be fairly easily resolved but there is resistance to recognising the need for this. The magnitude of these challenges and the resistance to change do not seem to have been fully appreciated during appraisal. Without technical changes, the valuable planning support will not yield its full potential value.

### Privatisation of public forests

Apart from a well-conceived contract template, there was nothing to see on this aspect. There is need for more comprehensive quality standards to be developed for this and for all other technical interventions.

### Gender equality and women’s empowerment

The project has addressed this very fully, including within all its contracts. The results have been impressive, women were actively engaged in all activities, held positions of influence in committees and were willing and able to engage in discussions with the team

## Overarching conclusions

The project has been very successful in its effective piloting of engagement with private farmers, cooperatives and communities (Conclusion 1). It prioritised this approach and has dealt effectively with the challenges implicit in these participatory approaches. In doing so, it focused on improving the accessibility of planning tools (Conclusion 2) and building expertise within districts, which are the key partners in implementation, including raising good knowledge of and commitment to the project’s strategy within local government administrations (Conclusion3). While aware of the limitations of current practices and the level of risk these contain, the project has not to date had an effective mandate to address these. There is potential to remedy this in the closing years of support for the project (Conclusions 4 to 6).

1 The project has made valuable contributions to supporting the engagement of the private sector in tree planting.

2 The ongoing work on simplifying district and forest management unit plans is valuable and an essential foundation for all the field activities for this project and for others across the country.

3 The project has undertaken effective skills building on the structure and use of the planning. In parallel, it has made tremendous strides in engaging local administrations’ understanding of and support for its field interventions.

4 The knowledge inculcated into field personnel will need to be consolidated and recorded in guidance material to provide a reference manual for roll out more widely.

5 Limited species diversification and complacency with this and current, sub-optimal practices means there is considerable and increasing sector-wide risk from pests and predicted climate changes, especially on drier and more marginal sites.

6 The poor quality of tree seed supplied from Rwanda TSC undermines investment. There are steps that can be taken to make limited improvement that need to be implemented by service providers. Field demonstrations of alternative approaches will show what can be possible.

# Recommendations

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| **Recommendation** | **Target** |
| **1 Ensure Forest Monitoring and Evaluation System is made fully functional and accessible.**  Finalised FMES should be integrated fully into the district planning system set up by UNDP and SIDA so that forestry is clearly recognised and adequately considered in district plans and budgets. | RWFA  PSC  Project team |
| **2 Secure post-project support for beneficiaries.**  Financial resources should be committed, with partial engagement of another donor if possible, to ensure that beneficiaries will continue to receive an adequate level of support from districts. | RWFA  PSC  Project team |
| **3 Retain and consolidate expertise at district and sector levels.**  Experienced personnel at all levels who have worked in the project and particularly with the field activities should be retained post-project to support existing beneficiaries and to assist with roll-out into other locations. | RWFA  PSC  Project team |
| **4 Fully clarify MoUs with forest owner cooperatives**  Clarify that all forest owner cooperative members understand fully that the land amalgamation prior to planting has extinguished individual ownership. | Project team |
| **5 Finalise roadside planting responsibilities and revenue sharing.**  Work with roadside planting committees to agree a transparent system of allocating responsibilities and benefits. | Project team  PSC |
| **6 Analyse technical risks and design mitigation prescriptions.**  Analyse technical risks in field interventions. Revise and improve prescriptions to optimise risk reduction. | Project team |
| **7 Enhance species diversification and choice to reduce risks.**  During the October 2019 planting season use actions such as species diversification and modified layouts to reduce risks. | Project team  PSC  RWFA |
| **8 Commission Applied Forest Research**  An active programme of forestry research is required to provide a wider range of alternatives to reduce current technical risks. | PSC  RWFA |
| **9 Develop a wider range of quality criteria.**  Identify where quality criteria need to be defined and determine what these criteria should be. This should be guided by the results of the risk analysis. | Project team |
| **10 Specify quality criteria in contracts.**  Include specific quality criteria in contracts for service providers, in MoUs with Forest Owner Cooperatives and others where necessary. | PSC  Project team |
| **11 Demonstrate improved practices in October 2019 planting season.**  Follow up Recommendation 7 to improve current practices for the coming planting season by including demonstration areas of best practice. | Project team  PSC |
| **12 Prepare a short, illustrated set of *Best Practice Guidelines.***  Make this available to beneficiary groups, field personnel and service providers to underpin the quality criteria and related points. | Project team  PSC |

# Lessons learned

| **Lesson** | **Main Targets** |
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| While the information base required for effective preparation of District and Unit forest management plans is of necessity very complex, effective use of the data at field level requires substantial inputs to make it readily accessible, used and hence useful. Without adequate innovation and funding to create appropriate accessibility the costly information potentially available will not be used for decision-making, monitoring and reporting. | Enabel  RWFA  PSC |
| The very restricted range of tree species used widely in the country and lack of field evidence for alternatives tends to make risk-averse people prefer the familiar, even when moving to locations that are more challenging than the ones of which they have direct experience. This leads to increasingly inappropriate use of certain species and increases the risk of loss as well as of negative influences such as pest and diseases. Given climate change predictions, which will lead to increased stress on planted trees, there is need for diversification of species to increase resilience | RWFA  PSC  Project team |
| The lack of awareness of what constitutes good field practice, especially for plantations other than agroforestry, means that contractual obligations need to be more closely defined than is currently the case. There is urgent need for clear nationally agreed standards covering all field activities which can provide an agreed quality standard in all contracts. | RWFA  PSC  Project team |
| Amalgamation of individual land parcels into a consolidated block for land restoration requires that individual claims are suspended for the entirety of the period while the trees planted are productive with the costs and revenues incurred and received being spread among the individuals who formed the cooperative on an agreed basis. There appears to be some uncertainty over this matter within some cooperative groups that requires specific action in the creation of such cooperatives to ensure that there is full and free consent and understanding, and which also needs to be explicit in the Memorandum of Understanding. | RWFA  PSC  Project team |
| The complexities of the system of interlocking documentation underpinning activities in Private Forest Management Units needs to be fully understood by potential beneficiaries, contracted service providers and by administrations responsible for supporting and overseeing them. The timing must be sufficiently precise and coordinated to ensure that no delays are experienced. A delay of one month in planting can result in a delay of one year in reaching maturity and hence revenues flowing. | Enabel  RWFA  PSC  Project team |
| There is need for intermediate benefits, especially for plantations, this requires a revised model for field delivery in PFMUs. Grass strips with indigenous trees for NTFPs and fodder could help in this and also reduce soil loss. Intercropping with low growing crops before site capture would also yield intermediate benefits. | PSC  Project team |
| The predominance of a small number of *Eucalyptus* species in the landscape of Rwanda may have created an overly strong reliance on these in the absence of reliable alternatives for harsh sites. There is widespread genetic degrade, site-typing does not reflect wider opportunities, current standards of silvicultural practice do not unlock the growth potential and overall the area planted is not delivering the contribution to the wood supply that would be possible with improved practices and recognition of the limitations. There is a high and increasing risk, accelerated by climate change, of devastating pest and disease outbreaks unless a more diversified approach is adopted, particularly on dry and marginal sites. This needs to be complemented by active management of currently stagnated stands to remove suppressed trees that could be the focus of pest and disease outbreaks and stimulate strong growth. | Enabel  Project team |