Enabel

**Executive Summary**

# Mid-Term Evaluation Report of the Support Project for Governance, Integration, and Agricultural and Rural Training in the Tshopo Province (GIFT)

COD2100311

DRC

ADE

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# Presentation of the evaluation

This mid-term evaluation (MTE) aims to assess the results achieved and the overall implementation process of the GIFT project. It is guided by 19 specific evaluation questions. It focuses on the analysis of effectiveness and efficiency. The evaluation examines the approach to support insertion, partner involvement, coherence of interventions, and the adopted territorial and systemic approached.

In addition to the criteria established by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the evaluation also assesses the project's impact in relation to four cross-cutting themes prioritized by the French Development Agency (AFD) and/or Enabel, namely gender equity, environment and climate change, digitalization, and decent work.

Overall, the evaluation seeks to support project management, and contributes to the objectives of learning, and accountability. It covers the period from March 2022 to August 2024 and includes all intervention zones targeted by the project. The primary audience for this evaluation consists of all project stakeholders, particularly the donor (AFD), the implementing agency (Enabel), Congolese authorities and the implementing partners.

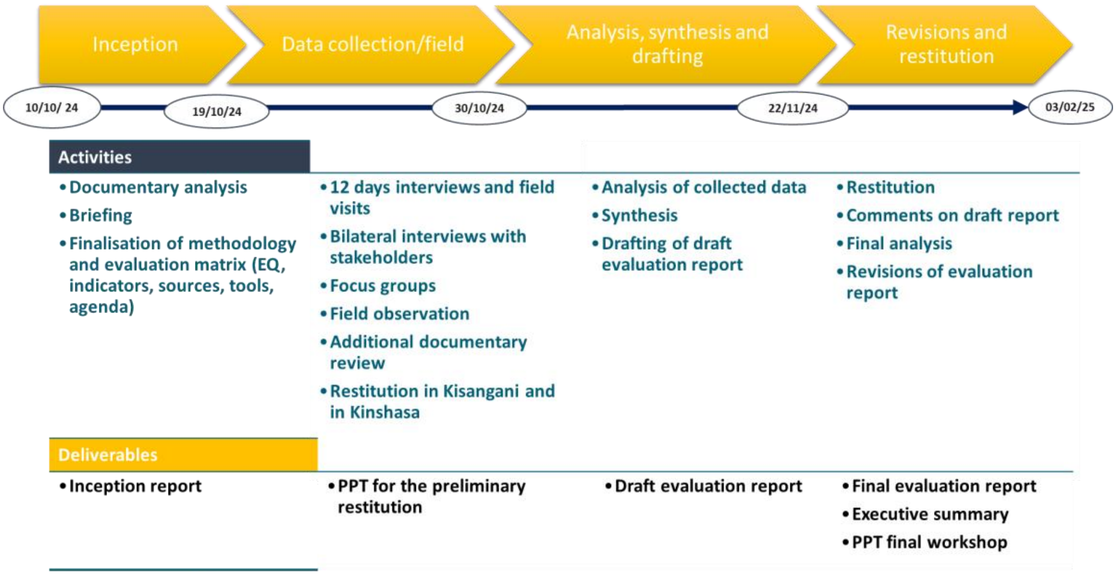
The evaluation was conducted in four phases: an inception phase, a data collection phase (including 12 days of fieldwork), a data analysis and drafting phase, and a restitution phase, concluding with the final workshop of the mission.

For the evaluation, a participatory, systemic, and comprehensive approach was adopted, based on both qualitative and quantitative indicators. Special attention was given to diversifying data sources to enable triangulation.

Based on the evaluation matrix, the data collection phase involved semi-structured interviews (individual and grouped interviews) centered around open-ended questions and themes to cover. These were tailored to the different target groups. These interviews were conducted with project stakeholders in Kinshasa and the Tshopo province, including Kisangani, Yangambi, Yanonge, and Isangi. In Tshopo, several focus groups of 4 to 12 participants were organized with stakeholders, particularly training institutes. Given the large number of partners and the fact that not all are based in DRC, additional online interviews were conducted.

The evaluation process is summarized in the figure below:

*Figure 1. Processus d'évaluation*




Source: ADE

# Findings and Conclusions

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Relevance | B | The relevance of the project is good. The GIFT project meets the needs of the population of the province and the country, and it aligns with the development strategies and policies of the DRC, Belgium, and AFD. It focuses more on secondary and higher technical education than on small rural producers. However, it suffers from a lack of comprehensive analysis of activity systems and agricultural value chains in Tshopo. |
| Coherence | B | The coherence of the project is good. The GIFT project offers complementarities with current and past programs of Enabel, as well as with support from various IFA partners (World Bank, Gates Foundation, EU...), several AFD initiatives, and a broader range of activities supporting training, professional integration, and agricultural development. However, at this stage, the project has mainly focused on establishing partnerships for the implementation of the program and for launching its activities. Although these partnerships are based on complementarity, little effort has been directed toward developing synergies, and complementarities have not been fully maximized. |
| Effectiveness | C | The overall effectiveness of the project is problematic at its current stage of implementation. The majority of activities are delayed, and only 3 out of 16 result indicators report progress, which remains limited. The construction of infrastructure has not started and partner institutions are not yet equipped. Nevertheless, the project seems to have gotten organized. The effectiveness and relevance of its approaches are however not being questioned. The expected results may materialize with more time. |
| Efficiency | C | The efficiency of the project is problematic. Most activities are delayed, and the disbursement rate at the end of the second year is only 20%. In terms of delays, the project has suffered from poor quality at entry, an |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | unfavorable context (inflation and rising living costs, the crisis in the East, the presidential election period, provincial political unrest, floods, Kisangani airport construction…), and the cumbersome administrative management processes of both the Congolese administration and Enabel. However, the project is now well underway, although the accumulated delays are unlikely to be fully recovered. The implementation cost is satisfactory despite a heavy institutional setup that complicates coordination. |
| Sustainability | C | The sustainability of the project is problematic. Despite an interesting approach, there is a challenge in consolidating activities, especially as, while waiting for significant results, the ownership of the action by local partners is limited. In the absence of an exit strategy, this is the main challenge of the project and will most likely require an extension. |
| Expected Impact | B | The projected impact of the project is good. A significant impact by the planned end date of the project is however unlikely due to the limited progress of the project and uncertainties regarding its sustainability. Moreover, the difficult business environment in Tshopo does not facilitate the achievement of broader results by the project. However, if given more time for implementation, the intervention will contribute to strengthening human capital and economic development in the province. |

## 1.1 Cross-cutting aspects

Gender (EQ18): The GIFT project planned an adequate transversal inclusive strategy to promote the improvement of girls' and women's access to technical education and employment. It is difficult at the time of the evaluation to assess the extent of the results in terms of gender equity, but the proportion of female learners is increasing. On the other hand, the active participation of women in decision-making bodies remains low.

Environnement and climate change (EQ19): The promotion of sustainable and resilient production systems through agroecology, agroforestry, and the green economy supports the preservation of natural resources, as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation. An Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) was developed during the project's identification phase. The identified risks mainly concern the construction or rehabilitation of infrastructure. Since these works have not yet started, the ESMF has been minimally implemented at this stage.

## 1.2 Responses to evaluation questions

EQ1: The overall approach to supporting the integration of target groups is relevant. Adapting educational content to the specific needs of the local market, integrating practical elements into training, and developing partnerships with the private sector and the socio-professional representatives of producers allow learners to acquire concrete skills that are directly aligned with labor market requirements, and to become familiar with the realities of the professional world. This experience not only promotes better employability for graduates, but, through the development of income-generating activities (IGAs), can also generate financial resources to support the training.

EQ2: The intervention is aligned with the Congolese national policy as well as with the strategies and cooperation policies of Belgium and France.

EQ3: The systemic approach proposed by Enabel in the agricultural education sector is appropriate and likely to be effective. It takes into account the different objectives of agricultural and food systems, as well as the wide range of actors involved, and the drivers and governance mechanisms that shape their activities.

EQ4: The vast majority of activities are delayed. The project will not be able to achieve its results within the initially planned timeframe. The delays are due to the time the project took to mobilize all its institutional partners and to get organized. They mostly stem from poor quality at entry combined with cumbersome administrative processes. However, the implementation costs are satisfactory, and no cost overruns have been noted.

EQ5: The commitment and involvement of local partners are satisfactory. However, the project's institutional setup, with specific actions assigned to each partner, are carried out over relatively short periods without significant permanence in Tshopo. This led the partners to focus on their partnership agreements without holding them accountable for the broader results of the program.

EQ6: The capacities of the ITAs (Technical Agricultural Institutes) and the IFA (Institute of Agricultural Training) were initially overestimated, particularly in terms of management and monitoring. The project envisioned a more prominent role for the training institutes, and as a result, less support was expected than what is actually necessary for the PMU (Project Management Unit) and the implementation partners. The project lacks field presence to provide regular support to the training institutes. The capacity-building-needs require work over a longer timeframe than initially planned.

EQ7: To date, monitoring and evaluation have received little attention. A baseline was established early in the project, and indicators have been set, but the tools for data collection and processing are still underdeveloped. The monitoring and evaluation officer is shared at the regional office level.

EQ9: The project has not yet started to capitalize on its experience. Potential themes for capitalization have not yet been selected. The monitoring and evaluation system does not include specific data on learning and capitalization. Since the results may only be achieved after the project's closure, capitalization will likely require post-project monitoring and support mechanisms.

EQ10: The capacity-building strategy has a promising potential for success for the target groups. Its practical dimension meets the expectations of the job market and enhances the employability of learners. Furthermore, it offers income-generating opportunities for funding education, thus improving access to education.

EQ11: The intervention contributes to strengthening the human capital necessary for the economic development of the province. The expected impacts for the province are the development of business activities, job creation, and the emergence of new businesses.

EQ12: The capitalized experiences are:
i) Generating own revenues through the promotion of entrepreneurship involving learners, teachers, and/or training centers; and
ii) Strengthening links between training institutions and the private sector in the context of practical training and professional integration.

EQ13: FAR is a major lever for the development of agricultural production and the many professions in the rural world, both upstream and downstream of agricultural production. The focus on agroecology appropriately addresses the challenges presented in the context of Tshopo (environmental conservation, farmers' empowerment, etc.).

EQ14: In a context of limited results achieved to date, the partners remain in a wait-and-see position. The management, maintenance, monitoring, and control mechanisms for the infrastructure, equipment, and services implemented by the GIFT project may not be operational before the project's completion.

EQ15: The approach proposed by the project has good potential for sustainability, both technically, economically, environmentally, and institutionally. However, the accumulated delays may prevent proper consolidation of the activities.

EQ16: The project does not have an exit strategy. Long-term partners are not particularly concerned about the exit strategy; they are working on a broader program with a long-term approach. Partners "not based" in Tshopo believe there will be a need to consolidate actions beyond the project's closure date, but since they are only responsible for the activities included in their partnership contract, they do not feel accountable for the broader results.

EQ17: The expected effects of the project are still barely perceptible at this stage, and no unintended effects have been noted.

# Recommendations

The main recommendations of the mid-term evaluation are:

| Recommendation 1 | Targeted stakeholders | Priorities | Type |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Define an exit strategy that, in order of preference, would consider: i) A second phase; ii) A 2-year extension with additional costs; iii) A 1-year extension without additional costs; and iv) A closure in 2026 with a focus on training and governance of the institutes. | AFD, Enabel (Bx, Kinshasa, Tshopo, UGP), EDU-NC et MINESU | Short term | Operational |
| 2. Evaluate whether the recent strengthening of the PMU is sufficient and consider adding an additional position (field agent or private sector and entrepreneurship officer). | UGP, Enabel, AFD | Short term | Operational |
| 3. Develop a value chain approach to training by better integrating the upstream and downstream segments of agricultural value chains, particularly product processing. | UGP, ITA, IFA, FEC | Medium term | Strategic |
| 4. Improve the capitalization processes and more systematically capitalize on experiences in an operational logic. | Enabel (Bx and Kinshasa) | Long term | Strategic |
| 5. Promote the implementation of internships lasting several months to maximize their educational value and allow the intern to be trained on the job, thus truly benefiting the host company. | UGP, ITA, IFA, FEC | Medium term | Operational |
| 6. Define a clearer strategy for strengthening the involvement of the private sector based on a more detailed analysis of the labor market at the provincial level. | UGP, ITA, IFA, FEC | Medium term | Strategic |
| 7. Associate multi-partner project setups with strong coordination, focusing on providing advisory support to partners not based locally rather than on their direct implementation of actions. | Enabel, AFD | Long term | Strategic |
| 8. Limit the use of subsidy agreements to projects lasting less than 5 years. | Enabel | Long term | Strategic |

Recommendation 1 is a priority and is crucial to consolidate the activities and ensure their sustainability. Four additional recommendations, considered less urgent, are also proposed.

# Lessons learned

To date, the following lessons have emerged from the implementation of the project:

Lesson 1: Mobilizing implementation partners during the project formulation phase contributes to optimizing the project startup.

It is necessary to identify and mobilize implementation partners during the project formulation phase and before its signature. This would ensure that they are ready to start as soon as the project is signed. Ideally, they should be involved in the formulation process to maximize the ownership of the actions to be implemented and the expected results.

Lesson 2: The subsidy agreement tool is not suitable for projects lasting less than 5 years.

The time required to set up a subsidy agreement—6 to 9 months minimum—means that this tool is not well suited for projects lasting less than 5 years. Over shorter timeframes, the time needed to establish the PMU (Project Management Unit) and prepare the subsidy agreement typically results in a project duration of more than 4 years (or a short subsidy agreement, less than 3 years). Furthermore, the work involved in preparing a subsidy agreement renders inefficient the implementation of very short subsidy agreements.

Lesson 3: Multi-partner projects require strong coordination and a partner role focused on advisory support.

The mobilization of specific skills, however, requires properly sizing a PMU (Project Management Unit) to effectively support development processes. The PMU must be able to maintain regular communication with all partners in order to manage the program as efficiently as possible. Multi-partner projects should therefore incorporate both strong coordination and support for implementation for partners who are intermittently present in the project area. Partners without continuous presence should play an advisory support role rather than direct implementation. Finally, it is essential that all partners share a global vision to successfully carry out their contributions.