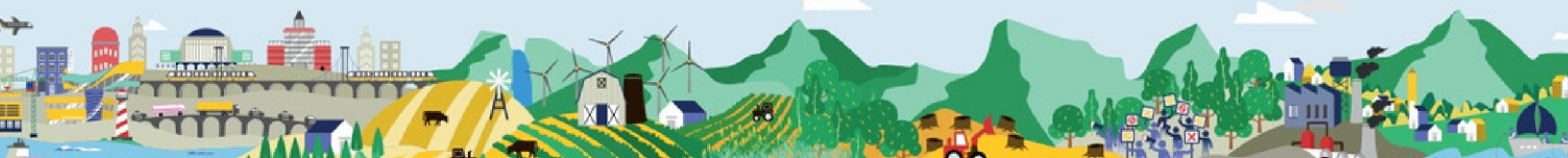




# RECLAIM Sustainability! Mid-term review

Management response 2023



**BUSINESS  
WATCH  
INDONESIA**



**TRUSTAFRICA**

**FAIRFOOD**

**Solidaridad**

## Introduction

The mid-term review (MTR) of the RECLAIM Sustainability (RS!) programme over the period 1 January 2021 - 31 December 2022 was timely. The RS! programme allows the Solidaridad Network and its consortium partners Fairfood, Business Watch Indonesia and TrustAfrica to join forces and collectively work towards a common Theory of Change, seeking to ensure that the interests, voices and rights of farmers, workers and citizens are represented in global value chains. This MTR was an opportunity for the consortium to reflect on our progress and how we work together, to identify corrective actions to achieve maximum programme results by 2025, and also to inform our strategic plans post 2025. The participatory approach used during the MTR process (including reflection & learning workshops and field case studies) has been received very positively by staff members of the consortium partners as well as programme stakeholders, as it enhanced strategic consultation and strengthened partnerships in our projects. We are encouraged by the findings of the review and, where areas for improvement have been identified, we have already started addressing them.

## Process

With input from our internal MTR coordination team composed of PMEL representatives from all consortium partners, a ToR was developed that outlined the MTR assignment. After publishing the tender for the MTR assignment, we received five proposals. Based on our (IOB-informed) evaluation quality assessment criteria, we scored all proposals. The assessment resulted in a preference for the proposal of the consortium of Sustainable Supply Chain consultants in the Netherlands and In-depth Consulting in Kenya. They were then hired as the core evaluation team. At a later stage we also contracted Bopinc to look at three selected RS! innovation projects and undertake a desk study on the RS! Innovation Facility and all RS! Innovation projects. The evaluators developed clear inception reports that were approved by our internal MTR coordination team. The core evaluation team conducted a desk study and five field studies. In addition, the MTR included a total of thirteen learning & reflection workshops at country/regional level, in which stakeholders reflected on project progress. Based on the collected input and after two rounds of feedback, the core evaluators developed the MTR report. Bopinc developed a separate report with their findings related to the RS! Innovation programming. Both reports have been shared with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This MTR Management Response outlines our feedback on the final findings of both evaluations, as well as our responses to the recommendations.

## Overall progress

The evaluators conclude that *"RS! is well on its way to delivering prerequisites for systemic change toward a responsible private sector, vibrant and strong civil society, and supportive*

*public sector. The basis has been laid for implementing all levels of the ToC. The programme has engaged with and strengthened smallholder structures and has identified the bottlenecks to their meaningful participation and consideration in value chains. The excellent practice of (inclusively) developing evidence, will anchor evidence-based dialogues in value chains. Moreover, strengthened civil society organizations are expected to become strong structures for representation in (policy and regulation) dialogues. In sum: the basis has been established to implement the higher outcome levels of RS!'s ToC for the years ahead."* The evaluators were also very positive about the effectiveness of working through multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) as one of the key strategies of the programme. Our assumption that multi-stakeholder initiatives are powerful vehicles to give voice to marginalized groups was found to hold true and was explicitly supported by the evaluation of the RS! Projects: *"MSPs have contributed to improved trust and positive relations among stakeholders, allowing for a common ground that facilitates the push for the Lobby & Advocacy agenda."* The programme's influence on policy has been another area of significant progress. RS!'s collaboration with government bodies and through MSPs has resulted in influencing 102 policies related to sustainable production, trade, and consumption. The formulation and implementation of 31 new and improved policies in both public and private sectors is a testament to RS!'s effective policy engagement. The improvements in policies, for example, in the India-Tea sector, including support for Small Tea Growers (STGs), highlight RS!'s capacity to collaborate effectively with public sector entities and shape policy landscapes.

However, the evaluators also recognized that there are opportunities for the RS! programme to further enhance its effectiveness. The MTR identifies a few key areas where we can improve. We need to strengthen connections between programming at project, regional and global level, building on good practices like the coherent value chain approach around the EU Deforestation Regulation and EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive. In follow up of the MTR findings, we have also started to slightly revise our Global Linking & Learning structure, as this will help to facilitate cross-learning and programme coherence. We will also strengthen further our Gender & Social Inclusion approach to better address the impact of socio-cultural and gender norms on inequality. And finally, we will pay more attention to actual change in sustainable practices of the private sector, by focusing more on monitoring implementation of their commitments in MSPs and sector platforms for voluntary standards, as well as enforcement of regulatory frameworks by the public sector. In the second part of the programme, we will evidently also implement a clear exit strategy.

Below, we are responding more specifically to key MTR findings and recommendations related to the relevance, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability of the RS! programme.

## Feedback on different categories

### Feedback on conclusions on 'relevance'

We are encouraged by the findings that our ToC is ambitious and well designed with interconnected strategies to address the sustainability challenges of producers within a reality of unequal power dynamics and unfair value chain practices. The evaluators indicate that the programme has established a good basis for promoting the plight of producers, using collected evidence to inform lobby and advocacy efforts. They also mention that the programme showed flexibility to also extend capacity building interventions to government partners and in some cases also the private sector. This way, the programme responded to identified capacity gaps related to the design and implementation of sustainability instruments. The evaluators also identify areas to further improve the relevance of the programme. We agree with the conclusion that the understanding of the full programme ToC and some of the key concepts and drivers of sustainability (e.g. Fair Value Distribution) could be enhanced. Also Gender & Social Inclusion could be even more integrated in all interventions. We will pay special attention to this in the remainder of the programme.

### Feedback on conclusions on 'coherence'

We fully agree with the conclusion that our programming at project level is aligned with the programme ToC. Lots of new practical evidence has been generated to inform and further focus the project interventions and the programme design is still evolving and adapting, based on new evidence and learning from implementation. However, the evaluators also indicate that programming strategies could be more linked and harmonized at regional and global level to have an even more strategic and coherent value chain approach, ensuring that interventions in the global South inform interventions in the global North and vice versa. Some good examples of a coherent value chain approach were found, for example related to EUDR, but more collaboration, communication and alignment and harmonization of advocacy interventions is advised. The Partnership Coordination Unit (PCU) and Partnership Steering Committee (PSC) will follow up on this and ensure more coherence between the policy agendas of the various RS! Projects and RS! Consortium partners. We also agree with the conclusion of the evaluators that the designed structure for Global Linking & Learning needs realignment to support this better.

### Feedback on conclusions on 'effectiveness'

The RS! Consortium is pleased with the generally positive assessment of our progress against the objectives so far and the outlook for 2025. The evaluators call the programme comprehensive, far-reaching, and intricate, showing courage and audacity. They acknowledge that the consortium has made significant progress in working towards systemic change by empowering a strong civil society with increased capacities for advocacy, with increased voice, with strong relations with key stakeholders in public and private sector and with evidence to back up their advocacy messages. We fully endorse that

the programme has made significant progress in these areas during the first two years of the programme.

Based on evidence collection and consultations of constituencies, project teams have developed evidence-based policy influencing interventions. Civil society organizations have developed capacities in governance, lobby & advocacy skills and the delivery of their mandates. The RS! Programme also successfully empowered women and contributed to their increased participation and engagement in producer organizations and community dialogues. Gender champions developed bargaining & advocacy skills and showed significant confidence to raise awareness and voices of women, and influence social norms. Effective capacity building approaches strengthened CSOs to engage more effectively in debate with public & private sector decision-makers. It resulted in more recognition and legitimacy. The evaluators also recognize the emerging and expanding partnerships with research institutions, media and consultancy firms. These interactions contributed to learning, informed strategy and strengthened civil society. Also relations established through MSPs and CSO networks strengthened partnerships, built trust between actors who previously were not talking to each other and resulted in crafting joint solutions. Various campaigns have raised awareness of sustainability challenges in supply chains, activated citizens to influence the policy agenda, and generated media attention, and built external pressure on public and private actors. Based on these strong foundations, RS! projects now have started full implementation of their policy influencing strategies. In RS! projects that were built on previous projects, the programme is already further advanced.

The evaluators found that in the public sector, capacities related to sustainability practices have improved and many project outcomes have been achieved related to the formulation, review and implementation of policies and regulatory frameworks that have more attention for smallholder needs. In addition, national standards have been supported and promoted to raise the floor and the RS! programme is geared to support implementation, enforcement and compliance. The regulatory frameworks and standards that have been developed or influenced in the various RS! projects have potential to improve sustainable practices of companies. However, the evaluators indicate that few examples have been found yet in the programme where companies have actually improved their sustainability performance. The evaluators also found several promising (digital) innovations to accelerate sustainability norms in value chains, improve access to markets and market information, as well as innovative sustainable (circular) practices. These tools are still in the developmental or proof of concept stages. Some of these digital innovations already contribute to traceability and transparency (for downstream value chain actors and niche markets), but they found no proof yet that those tools contribute significantly to the bargaining position of smallholders.

We agree with the recommendation of the evaluators that we should continue our effective work through MSPs and scale up capacity development of government staff to raise awareness about sustainability and inclusivity concepts and support the enforcement and implementation of existing regulatory frameworks. As recommended, we will also involve the media more in these MSPs to develop the understanding of sustainability issues among journalists and amplify key sustainability messages. The evaluators also recommend exploring other more disruptive strategies to engage and pressure the private sector into

committing to sustainability norms. We continue to test these innovative strategies at a small scale, but based on the hesitance of companies to implement sustainability policies at scale we reemphasize our focus in RS! is on multilateral engagement with the private sector in MSPs and in sector platforms related to voluntary standards as well as on developing regulatory frameworks through which the government sets standards for the private sector. In the second part of the programme, we will focus more on monitoring the enforcement of the regulatory frameworks and monitoring voluntary commitments. Direct engagement with individual companies through partnerships will be done in other programmes of consortium partners (like the Pathways to Prosperity programme of Solidaridad).

## **Feedback on conclusions on 'sustainability'**

We are pleased with the general conclusion that sustainability policies, regulatory frameworks and standards (voluntary and mandatory) have been initiated, established and or promoted at national, regional and international levels. The evaluators indicate that the RS! programme has established and strengthened local institutions and structures that have the potential to continue enabling civic space and delivering on their mandate to producers. They add that capacity development of civil society organizations, as well as public and private sector stakeholders have resulted in transmission of knowledge on sustainable practices, and more engagement and informed dialogues between value chain actors on sustainability issues. However, the evaluators concluded that there is room for improvement. We agree with their recommendations to explore the possibility of gradually shifting the focus of our CSO capacity development to more strategic organizational capacity needs like developing their membership base, delivering on their mandates to members, networking and holding governments accountable for implementation of regulatory frameworks. The evaluators also recommended exploring avenues for making MSPs operate more independently after the closure of the programme, as part of an exit strategy. We are already exploring which MSPs have potential to become sustained platforms (with civic space), focus on this in our capacity development strategies, and making a strategy with other CSOs and NGO partners on how to sustain them beyond the programme.

## **Feedback on 'programme management'**

The evaluators concluded that our programme management structure and our governance structure is well designed and contributes to effective collaboration and coordination. The Partnership Coordination Unit (PCU) is responsible for the operational management of the programme (PCM cycle and financial management) and informs the strategic guidance of the Partnership Steering Committee (PSC). The PSC is composed of representatives (directors and senior staff) of all consortium partners and is tasked with providing strategic oversight and taking decisions related to goals, allocation of funds and capacities. The evaluators also found that some staff of the smaller consortium partners sometimes felt as if they were engaged as implementing partners and not as equal partners in the consortium. This has been discussed in the PSC and it was decided to keep this as a recurring point of

attention on their agenda and continue open discussions to ensure equal partnership relations.

The evaluators found that the strategic guidance of the RS! Innovation Facility (established to support ideation, co-creation, proof of concept, piloting, and scaling of innovative solutions in the consortium) has been limited. Innovation project teams in various consortium partners were rarely in contact with each other, nor with RS! project teams, CoPs and TLGs, where basic information to inform needs and design solutions lie. The evaluation of a number of innovation projects by Bopinc, concluded that smallholders have not directly been involved in the design of the digital solution, some of the tools have no explicit value proposition for smallholders, and teams lacked product development capacities. It was recommended to focus more on user-centered design, value propositions and product development, and integration of innovations in larger interventions. We will follow-up on these recommendations and provide further guidance about the steps that need to be taken in each stage of the innovation process.

The evaluators also stressed that the current RS! Global Linking & Learning structures could be functioning in a more effective way. The Thematic Learning Groups (TLGs) are designed to surface learning and collect evidence, as well as develop aligned evidence-based policy propositions and related materials for capability development. The Communities of Practitioners (CoPs) are designed to ensure alignment in the commodity programmes, and facilitate exchange of knowledge and experiences of commodity staff (generating learning that can contribute to the TLGs). In practice, the evaluators found that only some of the TLGs and CoPs made concrete progress, while others were unable to adequately fulfill their roles. We are aware of the challenges in the implementation of the Global Linking & Learning structures and are making improvements, building on the good practice in for example the TLG for Climate & NRM.

## Conclusion

The RS! Consortium is pleased that comprehensive evaluations of its work are encouraged by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). We thank MoFA and IOB for providing clear guidelines and organizing learning events to provide valuable advice and expertise on methodologies and quality criteria.

Our strategy is ambitious, intertwined and multifaceted, and our consortium is large, dynamic and effective. We are proud of the results we have achieved so far and seek to build on the achievements and the learnings in the remaining two years of the programme, as well as beyond 2025. While recommendations allow us to improve where needed, overall the evaluation also concludes that we are on the right track and are making the envisioned impact. Hence, in addition to correcting courses where needed, we will put most of our focus in the remaining years on continuing what has worked, and can be scaled further. Where possible we have already included follow-up actions in our RS! Work Plan 2024. In the coming 3 months, we will also make a more detailed action plan following up on the

MTR recommendations. This plan will include concrete actions, deadlines and responsible staff. In our RS! Progress Report 2023, we will report on this plan and first actions taken. In addition, Solidaridad will ensure that recommendations that are relevant for the Pathways to Prosperity programme (also funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs) will be taken forward in that programme.

The evaluators have delivered a report presenting a great number of findings and recommendations to follow-up on. We added an Annex with an overview of the most important recommendations, our response to these, and our follow-up actions.



## Annex: Recommendations and follow-up actions

Recommendation in more detail	Agree / Partially Agree / Disagree	Actions
<b>Recommendations on Relevance</b>		
Ensure that all project staff and stakeholders are aware about the global ToC and are able to align their projects with it.	Agree	Individual consortium members will ensure that key project staff and stakeholders understand the programme ToC and how it fits in their contexts.
Review and adapt the ToC assumptions based on lessons learned, and add an explicit assumption related to GSI.	Agree	We will revise the ToC assumptions, and give them attention when we discuss programme ToC and project progress with project staff and stakeholders. Although GSI is integrated in all current assumptions, we will add an explicit GSI assumption.
Encourage the development of contextualized project ToCs together with key stakeholders, and organize annual learning & reflection workshops to jointly reflect on the ToC and ensure it is relevant and effective at project level.	Disagree	We will not develop ToCs for each individual RS! Project. Annual reflection and learning workshops will be organized during the annual planning process. During these workshops, project teams and stakeholders reflect on project interventions, their effectiveness and their alignment with the programme ToC. PMEL advisors will provide guidelines for these annual reflection & learning workshops and support/facilitate where necessary.
Increase understanding of key concepts that are crucial for implementation.	Agree	The TLGs will focus on this during the second part of the programme. They will organize workshops to disseminate concepts clarified during the first part of the programme. The TLG for Climate & NRM will continue its focus on accessible climate finance and locally led adaptation. The TLGs for Decent Work and Fair Value Distribution will promote clear concepts and policy propositions, ensuring intersections e.g. with GSI strategies.
PMEL should focus more on learning, not just on accountability.	Agree	We will stimulate learning at project level (together with stakeholders) and improve related PMEL processes, to enable the flow of learning from projects to TLGs and CoPs to contribute to the RS! Learning agenda.
<b>Recommendations on Coherence</b>		
Strengthen local to national to global linkages and alignment of advocacy strategies.	Agree	We will improve these linkages to align our advocacy strategies (especially related to EUDR & CSDDD). TLGs and CoPs will be asked to map advocacy strategies, identify opportunities for

		better alignment and take the lead in strengthening these linkages between project staff.
Revise GLL structure to enhance linking & harmonization of programming (project-regional-global).	Agree	See programme management section below/
<b>Recommendations on Effectiveness</b>		
Continuously assess developing capacity needs of CSOs and focus capacity building of CSOs more on L&A skills, governance, membership, financial sustainability, networking, and delivering on mandate to members.	Agree	We will put more attention on supporting CSOs and farmer organizations' strategic and organizational capacity needs.
Further expand the Training of Trainers approach to ensure scalability and sustainability of program results.	Partially agree	We will look into effective and more scalable approaches for capacity development, of which ToT could be one.
The gender champions approach should be continued and scaled up, making gender champions part of a larger gender-transformative approach.	Agree	We will continue and scale up our gender champion approach as part of a broader effort to adopt a more intersectional and transformative approach to gender and social inclusion across the RS! programme.
Extend capacity building to government, private sector, and other key stakeholders.	Agree	Continue and scale up capacity development of government staff to support enforcement / implementation of existing regulatory frameworks.
Monitor the enforcement of existing regulatory frameworks and focus more on ensuring their implementation.	Agree	In the second part of the RS! programme, we will focus more on the enforcement and implementation of existing regulatory frameworks. We will monitor challenges related to the enforcement and implementation, and support governments through capacity building. We will raise awareness among CSOs and producer organizations about existing regulatory frameworks and involve them in holding governments accountable for implementation.
Keep track of effective interventions in the Advocate pathway through PMEL methodologies / case studies.	Agree	We will scale up our Outcome Harvesting methodology. This can be integrated in the planned annual reflection and learning sessions and related methodology that will be developed by PMEL.
Explore other strategies to engage and pressure the private sector into committing to sustainability norms. Increase engagement with the private sector to influence their business practices towards sustainability. Make a power analysis and work with influential	Partially agree	In RS! we focus on both multi-stakeholder approaches (MSPs and sector platforms for voluntary standards) as well as development of regulatory frameworks through which the government sets standards for the private sector. We will continue these approaches that were positively evaluated and focus more on monitoring the implementation & enforcement. Direct

stakeholders to disrupt conventional business models.		engagement with individual companies will be done in other programmes (like the Pathways to Prosperity programme of Solidaridad).
Focus more on disruptive innovation models and tools that pressure the private sector into behavioral change and spark systemic change.	Partially agree	Disruptive models by nature will be niche. We focus mostly on the adoption of tools that provide for business intelligence needs. In addition, we will gather examples of effective disruptive technologies by working with a limited number of (smaller) companies on them.
For all innovation projects, improve the user-centered design, value proposition and product development, and integration of the innovations in larger interventions	Partially agree	We will ensure these elements get attention in all innovation projects. For some of the innovation projects this is already done.
Re-evaluate the role of digital tools in improving the bargaining position of farmers and workers, considering their impact on sustainability.	Agree	We will continue to test the assumption, so we have collected learning by the end of the programme on how the tools contribute to bargaining power (and fair value distribution).
Improve data interoperability and governance, so data generated by innovations can be used more for advocacy messages.	Agree	Develop internal clarity on the value proposition.
Involve media more in MSPs, learning events and training to develop understanding among journalists.	Agree	We will take this up in 2024.
For learning, measure the effect of campaigning on knowledge and behavior of citizens (in partnership with marketing-gearred partners).	Disagree	We will continue to monitor media coverage / reach, but will not consistently monitor behavioral change as a result of campaigning, as this is considered not to be plausible under the current funding for the RS! programme.
Adopt a more structured, scaled-up and integrated global GSI approach that can be adapted to local contexts, is gender transformative in nature and focuses on inclusivity of marginalized groups in programme governance & interventions.	Agree	The existing gender policy (of Solidaridad) is a bit outdated (2016-17), focuses solely on gender mainstreaming and does not fully take into account or define an intersectional gender transformative (or socially inclusive) approach. Some RS! consortium partners have developed their own strategies, but they have not been coordinated at the global level in RS!. We will explore the most effective way to develop a 'common GSI approach' that guides our global strategy on inclusion, which can then be contextualized for guidance to RS! Project implementation.
Review KPI target for CS strengthening and related monitoring methodology.	Partially agree	We will review the target based on actuals, but not necessarily increase the number too much. We do not aim to strengthen a lot of new CSO, but rather focus on further improvement / sustainability of targeted CSO. We will revise our monitoring methodology accordingly.

Review KPI target and monitoring methodology for campaigning.	Agree	PMEL will clarify monitoring methodology for # citizens activated / mobilized. Based on improved methodology, reported numbers and target will be revised.
Review KPI target for the Advocate pathway.	Partially agree	We will review the target based on actuals, but not necessarily increase the number too much. We will focus on further improvement / implementation.
Review KPI target and monitoring methodology for the Accelerate pathway.	Partially agree	PMEL will revise where necessary.

### Recommendations on Sustainability

Explore avenues for making MSPs operate independently (where relevant).	Agree	We will explore which MSPs have potential to become sustained platforms (with civic space), focus on this in our capacity development strategies, and make a strategy with other CSOs and NGO partners on how to sustain them beyond the programme.
Explore appropriate innovative financing models for smallholders.	Partially agree	This is more of a P2P strategy, but in RS! this could be explored in relation to the capacity of farmer groups to negotiate for better financing /production investments with e.g. input suppliers, concessions and tariffs.

### Recommendations on programme management

Ensure a more equal partnership between the Solidaridad consortium partners and the smaller consortium partners (TrustAfrica, Fairfood and Business Watch Indonesia) with recognition of expertise they bring to the consortium, and prevent working in silos.	Partially agree	The PSC indicated this was not recognised as a major issue, but agreed to keep this as a recurrent point of attention on their agenda.
Ensure that RS! Global Linking & Learning structures capture opportunities for exchange and surfacing of learning, and collection of evidence to prove solutions and to develop aligned policy propositions.	Agree	<p>PSC will develop clear assignments for TLG and CoP Leads, communicate these assignments to them, ensure they have the time/resources/skills to deliver, and PSC (MDs) will monitor their performance and hold them accountable for the agreed deliverables.</p> <p>The RS! assignment of TLG Leads is to collect and capture evidence of effective RS! programming related to their theme, develop a clear evidence-based policy proposition that can be used in RS! projects, develop guidance materials to build the capabilities of staff on this policy proposition, and promote this policy proposition / common approach externally (thought leadership).</p>

		The RSI assignment of CoP Leads is to ensure alignment in commodity programming, facilitate exchange of learning across their commodity programme (ideally contributing to the TLG learning plans), test and provide feedback on policy propositions & guidance materials developed by the TLGs and innovation tools developed through the IF (so CoPs can become a channel for uptake and scaling). In addition they will continue to have a leading role in annual planning & reporting on the commodity programme.
The Innovation Facility needs to provide more central guidance on user-centered design, value proposition and product development, and integration of innovations in larger interventions.	Agree	We will give more guidance about the steps that need to be taken in each stage of the innovation process, e.g. user centered design during the Minimum Viable Product stage. For each innovation, we will explore various business cases. We will stimulate adoption of successful innovations into project interventions.
Ensure better linkages between the learning structures (CoP, TLGs, IF, PMEL).	Agree	PMEL will focus more on collecting learning at project level that can help the development of policy propositions in the TLGs. PMEL will develop stronger processes and tools for this. CoPs will share learning across their commodity programme and identify relevant learning that can be used by the TLGs. They will also test policy propositions developed by TLGs and innovations developed through the IF. TLGs will actively link with CoPs, IF and PMEL to collect input/evidence for the development of their policy propositions and related guidance materials to build capabilities of staff.

