

WFP EVALUATION

Midterm Evaluation of WFP Mastercard Foundation Project on Strengthening Food Systems to Promote Increased Value Chain Employment Opportunities for Youth in Rwanda (2022-2027)

Context in Rwanda

Rwanda is a densely populated country, with 27.4 percent of the population living below the national poverty line (31.6 % in rural areas). Agriculture employs over 62 percent of the population and contributes roughly 25 percent of GDP, but smallholder farmers face limited land, weak post-harvest management, poor market access, and constrained access to finance.

Youth aged 16–30 make up 27 percent of the population and face 18.7 percent unemployment.[1] Women constitute 79 percent of the agricultural workforce, yet agricultural loan access for women fell 78.5 percent between 2019 and 2023.[2] Fertilizer and fuel price shocks caused by COVID-19 and the Ukraine war, and escalating climate shocks have compounded these pressures during implementation.

Purpose and scope

This midterm decentralized evaluation, commissioned by the WFP Rwanda Country Office, covers implementation of the Shora Neza project from March 2022 to mid-2025 (evaluation conducted June–December 2025). It builds on a baseline study from 2024 and will be followed by a final evaluation in 2027.

Shora Neza is a five-year (2022–2027) project funded by USD 15 million from the Mastercard Foundation, covering all 30 districts of Rwanda through a three-pronged approach: market access, post-harvest management, and access to finance (each of which is supported by skills development). By mid-2025 it had supported 1,016 Farmer Service Centres (FSCs, 38 % women-led) and reached 125,621 participants (53 % young women).

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used across 15 districts with multistage probability-proportional-to-size sampling, resulting in 400 (201 female) survey respondents (100 FSC owners, 236 smallholder farmers, 64 FSC employees), 15 key informant interviews, 10 focus group discussions, and outcome harvesting with 13 youth participants.

Key limitations included the inability to directly compare data on farmers linked to FSCs as these were not established at baseline, and FSC attrition managed through replacements. The evaluation adhered fully to United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) ethical standards.

Key evaluation findings

Relevance

The project shows strong relevance through a flexible, demand-driven model — the FSC model spans 40+ value chains. Despite being a highly relevant issue, financial services scored lowest in value among participants, confirming capital access as an ongoing gap to focus on. "Quality of produce" ranked highest, reflecting how much beneficiaries value the training and support they have received to improve their agricultural techniques. Employment ripple effects are materializing: 91 percent of the 100 interviewed FSC owners reported hiring additional workers, generating 155 net new jobs in six months (54% to women), and the model is now being embedded in government's PSTA 5 strategy.

Coherence

External coherence is strong, with deep government ownership at both national and district levels. The Joint Action Development Forum functions as an effective coordination mechanism, and banking partnerships with Urwego and Equity Bank have produced tailored financial products with potential to outlast the project. The project utilized evidence-based approaches such as the SheCan access to finance model and Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS). However, external coherence was affected by funding cuts in the sector.

Effectiveness

The project has been highly effective in generating employment: Project monitoring confirmed that 99 percent of youth participants can be considered as Youth in Work (YiW)[3], with 45,395 youth entering employment (52% young women). Progression from attaining work to accessing Dignified and Fulfilling work[4] is more gradual — 68 percent progressed toward it, 31 percent reported accessing it. Market access support reached 64.7 percent of participating smallholder farmers at midterm, up from 8.4 percent at baseline. Eighty-one percent of respondents adopting new Post-Harvest Management technologies reduced post-harvest losses, whereas only 50 percent of non-adopters reduced their PHL. The Bridge Facility disbursed over USD 714,000 to 92 businesses; SheCan reached 6,503 youth through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) (80% young women) and cooperating partners supported 280 VSLAs.

[1] FAO. 2020. Rural youth employment and agri-food systems in Rwanda.
[2] Republic of Rwanda. 2024. The State of Gender Equality in Rwanda. (2024).
[3] YiW (Youth in Work) measures whether a young person has gained new, additional, improved, or sustained employment as a result of project support.
[4] Dignified and Fulfilling Work (DFW) goes beyond employment status and assesses the quality of that work. Youth are in DFW when they have reliable income and experience at least one additional marker: reputable work, workplace respect, or a sense of purpose.

Efficiency

Financial execution improved substantially, from 13.6 percent of the Year 1 annual allocation to 64 percent of the USD 10.4 million allocated to date by July 2025, reaching 80.3 percent when including commitments. Once the full team was operational, activity targets were met and exceeded. The project demonstrated adaptive capacity by evolving the FSC model, engaging specialized gender expertise, and pivoting financial inclusion strategies based on field evidence.

Sustainability

Sustainability is embedded through a market systems approach: independent FSC business models, durable banking products, and government embedding of the model represent deliberate efforts towards sustainability, but the specific mechanics of transition remain undefined. For example, it would be useful to establish formal graduation criteria for FSCs or exit pathways for post-project support have yet to be articulated clearly.

Impact, Gender, and Inclusivity

The project is on track at midterm, with training, market linkages, financial services, and input support generating meaningful intermediate results, though impacts on income and post-harvest losses remain too early to assess. On gender, structural interventions and transformative methodologies have created conditions for women's income generation comparable to men, with women outperforming men in loan repayment and a majority reporting decision-making gains, though spousal and parental gatekeeping remains a binding constraint.

Conclusions

1. Shora Neza's design and adaptive management are fundamentally sound, but capital access remains the most-cited unmet need, while produce-quality support was rated most valuable.

2. The project shows strong alignment with national frameworks and government collaboration, but some other joint delivery elements fell short: direct school feeding linkages for FSCs did not materialize as government shifted to large-scale aggregator contracts, partnerships were canceled after USAID's abrupt termination, and joint management of the Bridge Facility with UNCDF caused significant delays.

3. The project excels at initial employment but needs sustained attention to help women progress to dignified, fulfilling work.

4. The graduated finance approach is sound but redirecting resources entirely to the micro level risks under-serving larger FSCs and SMEs who will need larger loans than VSLAs can offer to continue to build on their strong job-creation potential.

5. Gender equality gains are meaningful but constrained by structural barriers; disability inclusion needs further systematization.

6. Sustainability foundations are strong but exit planning still needs to be finalized.

7. The project shows promising early impact — youth-led agribusinesses are proving viable and creditworthy, and perceptions of agriculture as dignified work are shifting — but climate risk, capital constraints, and implementation delays have compressed the time available to translate early results into longer-term outcomes.

Lessons learned

1. Durable employment outcomes are enhanced by a demand-driven, market-first approach rather than building supply capacity without confirmed buyers.

2. Integrating an existing WFP approach (SheCan) to fill a financing gap proved faster and more cost-effective than building a new mechanism (the Bridge Facility) from scratch.

3. A varied financial inclusion portfolio — VSLAs for the most vulnerable, commercial credit for established FSCs — outperforms a single product pathway.

4. Financing partnerships need roles and product design to be settled directly with the financial service provider early; multi-layered intermediaries delay credit delivery.

5. Gender analysis strengthens programming only when it drives concrete operational changes in targeting and design, not as a stand-alone exercise.

6. Structured household-level engagement of men (e.g., Journey of Transformation) helps sustain women's economic gains and reduces household conflict.

7. Achieving dignified and fulfilling work takes longer than achieving initial employment; theories of change should measure them as separate milestones.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Develop and implement a comprehensive exit strategy with documented FSC graduation criteria and a government handover plan.

Recommendation 2: Optimize financial inclusion via SheCan VSLAs as the primary pathway to microfinance and commercial credit, while extending support to underserved larger FSCs and SMEs.

Recommendation 3: Mainstream climate resilience into FSC and farmer training, with stronger access to climate information services and risk management.

Recommendation 4: Systematize knowledge management, including an internal review of the Bridge Facility, review and finalization of logframe indicators, and gender-disaggregated outcome tracking.

Recommendation 5: Scale gender-transformative approaches (Journey of Transformation, GALS) to all participants, with scheduling flexibility to address care-work barriers.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen disability and vulnerability inclusion through a brief strategy covering targeting, local partnerships, reasonable accommodations and outcome documentation, with clearer vulnerability criteria and tracking.