

RESI Final Evaluation

Report: Final

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations Used	3
Note on the format of this report	3
1. Results Assessment Form	4
2. Executive Summary	9
3. Background to the RESI Project.....	11
4. Introduction to the Evaluation	12
5. Methods	13
5.1 Inception phase and desk study	13
5.2 Field Phase.....	13
5.3 Limitations	14
6. Evaluation Findings.....	16
6.1 Relevance	16
6.2 Effectiveness.....	18
6.3 Efficiency	29
6.4 Impact.....	31
6.5 Sustainability	38
6.6 Validation of findings with key stakeholders.....	41
7. Conclusions on evaluation findings	42
8. Lessons Learned.....	44
8.1 Observations from the Evaluation Team	44
8.2 Lessons Learned by Key stakeholders	46
8.3 What is the scope for replication?	47
9. Recommendations	49
10. List of Annexes.....	50

List of Abbreviations Used

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
CFP	Call For Proposals
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
IMS	Information Management System
IRDS	Integrated Regional Development in Suharekë /SuvaReka
LDF	Local Development Fund
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAFRD	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development
MDC	Municipal Development Centre
MSME	Micro Small and Medium Enterprises
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPM	National Project Manager
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
RESI	Rural Economic Sustainability Initiative
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YP	Young Professionals

Note on the format of this report

The format of this report follows the instructions and guidance of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), as per Annex 7.11 of “Guidelines for Project and Programme Evaluations, Austrian Development Agency, July 2009”¹.

¹http://www.entwicklung.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Evaluierung/Evaluierungs_Leitfaeden/EN_Leitfaden_Evaluierung.pdf

1. Results Assessment Form

Results-Assessment Form for Final Project Evaluations/Reviews

Title of project/programme (please, spell out): Rural Economic Sustainability Initiative (RESI)			
Contract Period of project/programme: 01/09/2016 – 31/08/2019 (no-cost extension until 31/12/2019)			
ADC number of project/programme: Contract Number: 8317-00/2015			
Name of project/programme partner: CARE Österreich			
Country and Region of project/programme : Kosovo, Regions of Prishtinë/Priština, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Kamenicë/a; Ranil(l)ug			
Budget of this project/programme: € 3,031,582.37			
Name of evaluation company (spell out) and names of evaluators: Tyto Alba Limited, Nicholas Finney (Mr) and Lumta Dida (Ms)			
Date of completion of evaluation/review: 11/11/2019			
Please tick appropriate box:			
Evaluation/review managed by ADA/ADC Coordination Office			<input type="checkbox"/>
Evaluation managed by project partner:			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please tick appropriate box:			
a) Mid-Term Evaluation	b) Final Evaluation	c) Mid-Term Review	d) Final Review
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others: please, specify:			
Project Outcome (Please, include as stated in the Logframe Matrix):			
Increased competitiveness of local farmers/producers/processors and new and inclusive rurally-based businesses strengthened/established as a result of an enabling and inclusive environment in the target municipalities.			
For Final Evaluation/Review: Project Outcome: To what extent has the project already achieved its outcome(s) according to the Logframe Matrix? Please, tick appropriate box			
Outcome(s) was/were:			
Fully achieved:	Almost achieved:	Partially achieved:	Not achieved:
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

Please, also explain your assessment: What exactly was achieved and why? If not achieved, why not? (Please, consider description of outcome and relevant indicators)

The project has been extremely well managed appears to be on track to achieve its outcomes. However, some grants /activities have only recently been completed. For such activities it is not yet meaningful to comprehensively comment on outcomes, hence the score of “Almost Achieved”. Meaningful assessment of the competitiveness on supported businesses would only be realistic made 3-5 years after the investment or improvement is installed / activated. Based on an assessment of grants that have been dispersed and completed for 15 months or more, it is highly likely that the outcomes will be fully achieved. It is recommended that a sampling exercise be conducted by ADC in 2022-23 to confirm.

For Mid-Term Evaluation/Review: Project Outcome: To what extent do you think the project will most likely achieve its outcome(s) according to the Logframe Matrix Please, tick appropriate box

Outcome(s) will most likely be:

Fully achieved:	Almost achieved:	Partially achieved:	Not achieved:
n/a			

Please, also explain your assessment: (Please, consider description of outcome and relevant indicators)

This section is not applicable

Project Outputs: To what extent has the project already achieved its outputs² according to the Logframe Matrix? Please, tick appropriate boxes

Output 1 (Please, include as stated in the Logframe Matrix):

The capacity of municipal support structures, Young Professionals and other development actors (NGOs, cooperatives, associations) is strengthened to provide effective and demand-driven services to agricultural producers and processors.

Output was:

Fully achieved:	Almost achieved:	Partially achieved:	Not achieved:
√			

Please, explain your assessment: (Please, consider description of output and relevant indicators)

100% or higher was scored against each indicator. The indicators do not capture the quality delivery against the outputs but the evaluation shows that the capacity development initiatives of RESI were conducted with care, attention to international best practices, and an eye on future sustainability. As was foreseen at the start of the project, the destiny of the young professionals in terms of future employment is not yet clear – they are in the hands of the municipality process for financing posts and recruitment.

² In case there are more than three outputs, please, add them.

Output 2 (Please, include as stated in the Logframe Matrix):

Grant scheme established and operational, supported grants sustainable beyond the project duration and municipal support structures actively engaged in the grant disbursement cycle to enhance ownership and knowledge transfer.

Output 2 was:

Fully achieved:	Almost achieved:	Partially achieved:	Not achieved:
√			

Please, explain your assessment: (Please, consider description of output and relevant indicators)

The project performed exceptionally well in delivering this output, as confirmed by the indicators. There was significant overachievement against two indicators: training on application forms (190%), provision of grants to producers & processors (278%)

Output 3 (Please, include as stated in the Logframe Matrix):

Women and socio-economically vulnerable groups in target municipalities involved into agri-businesses through targeted capacity development and funding scheme.

Output 3 was:

Fully achieved:	Almost achieved:	Partially achieved:	Not achieved:
√			

Please, explain your assessment: (Please, consider description of output and relevant indicators)

A very high level of performance was scored against the relevant indicators with 558% being scored against the indicator measuring the attendance of women, small holder farmers and members of socio-economically vulnerable groups in project trainings

Impact/Beneficiaries:

How many women, men, girls, boys and people in total have already benefited from this project directly and indirectly? Please, explain

Women & girls reached directly = 1,688, Men & boys reached directly = 2,602, Total = 4,290

Women & girls reached indirectly = 5,525, Men & boys reached indirectly = 8,931, Total = 14,456

What exactly has already changed in the lives of women, men, girls, boys and/or institutions from this project?
Please, explain:

All of the women, men, girls and boys who have benefited from RESI have more knowledge in various sectors, increasing productivity and income. They have established better relations with their municipalities and are better informed. They are self-employed, own businesses and have established contacts with other partners. There is growing interest among young people to continue their tradition in agriculture and to renew their interest in living in Kosovo.

Which positive and/or negative effects/impacts in terms of gender can be possibly be attributed to the project?
Please, explain:

Positive impacts for women include: More ownership, financial resources and more chances to apply for government support in the future.

If applicable, which institutions have benefitted from this project/programme and how?

The agriculture and economic development departments of four municipalities in central and eastern Kosovo: Prishtinë/Priština, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Kamenicë/a; Ranil(l)ug benefitted from an institutional strengthening program. A number of associations /NGO that received grants in these municipalities also benefitted institutionally.

Mainstreaming cross-cutting issues:

Gender: To what extent was gender mainstreaming included in the project? To what extent were the recommendations - if any- from the ADA internal gender-assessment considered and implemented?

Women's economic empowerment was fundamental to the design of the project. Relevant recommendations from the gender assessment were implemented.

Environment: To what extent was environmental mainstreaming included in the project? To what extent were the recommendations - if any- from the ADA internal environment-assessment considered and implemented?

Environmental management was mainstreamed in all activities. An environmental assessment took place but could have been done earlier in the project cycle.

Which positive and/or negative effects/impacts in terms of environment can be possibly be attributed to the project? Please, explain

Investments in drip irrigation systems for the vegetable and fruit sector, construction of stables and septic tanks, the establishment of tree plantations, trainings on plant protection and use of pesticides are just some of the elements that the RESI project has contributed to environment.

Social Standards: To what extent were the social standards monitored by relevant partners? Have any issues emerged? Please, explain

The social standards were considered substantially in the design of the project logframe and therefore monitored throughout. No major issues emerged.

Overall/Other Comments:

There are some pressing recommendations for ADC and Municipalities to ensure sustainability of the investments made by RESI.

2. Executive Summary

The Rural Economic Sustainability Initiative (RESI) aimed to support inclusive and sustainable rural economic development in four target municipalities in Kosovo: Prishtinë/Priština, Novo Brdo/Novobrdë, Kamenicë/a and Ranil(l)ug. It was financed by Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) and the Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština and implemented by CARE International in Kosovo.

The approach utilised built on a very successful previous project and featured grants to MSME in agriculture, capacity development of municipality agriculture departments and a special focus on empowerment of women and socio-economically vulnerable groups.

The final evaluation of the RESI took place between 6th October and 11th November 2019. The evaluation aimed to make an independent assessment of the outputs, outcomes and impact of the project towards the end of its 36 month cycle. The evaluation also set out to identify lesson learned, avenues for replication and practical recommendations for the future.

The evaluation team comprised two persons. Following a desk study and inception phase, the team undertook a two week field phase. The team conducted 38 individual interviews with key stakeholders included grant recipients and municipality representatives. 5 focus group discussions were also held to explore key topics. At the end of the field phase a lessons learned workshop was held to validate evaluation findings and to consult key stakeholders on lessons learned and replication ideas.

The findings of the evaluation are organised as per the five OECD / DAC criteria:

Relevance. RESI was found to be highly relevant to the four chosen municipalities and filled critical gaps that were impeding rural economic development at farmer, processor and local government levels.

Effectiveness. RESI has delivered its outputs which is a massive achievement in such a short 3 year period. The project met or exceeded each of its targets as per the output indicators. In terms of outcomes, specific targets were not set but increased income and job creation has occurred and can be linked to RESI. Challenges in precise measurement (before/after) due to the baseline info, farmers' record keeping practices and difficulty in attribution (RESI vs other inputs). The RESI team was applauded by all for their reliability, problem solving and tireless hard work. Many farmers and processors said very clearly that RESI is the best project they have experienced. The RESI team has maintained a very high level of communication with beneficiaries since the start of the project. Monitoring visits are regular and systematic.

Capacity building of municipalities has been effective, but tended to focus on Prishtinë/Priština (as per the agreed logframe). Having the RESI team based in the municipality enhanced this. RESI could have multiplied impact on Novo Brdo/Novobrdë, Ranil(l)ug and Kamenicë/a municipalities if they had seconded staff. Young professionals substantially bolstered the capacity of RESI team and municipality. This has enabled the RESI project to be more dynamic in responding quickly to requests from the field and faster in disseminating information. Young professionals also bring specific technical skills to the rural development process (each holds BSc or MSc in relevant technical area). Young professionals have gained valuable work experience.

Many informants reported increased competitiveness, mostly due to (i) increased production, (ii) speed to market and (iii) improved storage. There is some evidence of farmer/processor cooperation as well (on pricing and sharing equipment). However, "competitiveness" is not clearly defined in the project document so is potentially a

subjective term. Development interventions aiming to increase competitiveness would often give specific support to innovation projects but this was not within the scope of RESI, as per the project document.

Efficiency. RESI was highly efficient. As compared to the previous (IRDS) project the RESI team scaled up all aspects of the project across 4 municipalities and dispersed twice as many grants in only 3 year (as compared with 5). Minor delays occurred requiring a 3-month extension, mostly due to unexpected challenges in acquiring planning permissions for grant projects. No financial wastage or issue has been identified.

Impact. Data gathered by the RESI team shows that 285 new full-time jobs and 490 seasonal jobs have been created so far. Income of grant recipients has increased by 53% on average. There has also been an increase of income at the wider community level. There was some evidence from interview and focus groups that youth migration from rural areas is being reduced due to RESI, and also some evidence of changing attitudes towards women (as business owners and family income earners) due to RESI. The grant modality and beneficiary contribution has countered dependency on aid and social assistance programs in some cases

Sustainability. Overall signs are good, but it is too soon to concretely assess sustainability. The project design squeezed a large amount of activities into only 3 years. A few RESI-managed activities are still being finalised and a further call for proposals (7th CFP) is underway under the management of the Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština. This limits the degree to which the evaluation can give solid evidence on sustainability. Sustainability is highly dependent on continued provision of information, advice and encouragement to farmers and producers. Municipalities are central to success. Further NGO projects can support if well designed. Attention needs to be paid to enabling environment for agriculture – associations and cooperatives, support to access markets, water resources, environmental management.

A number of **lessons learned** can be taken from the project. The grant mechanism was highly inclusive and adopted a poverty reduction approach. The sub-sector selection was quite open to bottom up selection and ended up being quite diverse yielding rich learning across a range of areas. Although RESI was not focused on value chain / market systems development there were a number of innovative investments in collection and cooperative associations that can be learned from in future rural economic development in Kosovo. The institutional strengthening approach was highly innovative, especially where it was applied to its maximum in Prishtinë/Priština. It is worth highlighting that although the RESI project built upon a previous project in Suharekë/Suva Reka, it did not follow exactly the same approach and as a result did not have exactly the same type of outputs. Other lessons learned from the evaluation included the increasing need to support climate change adaptation, address deforestation, improve water resource management and to consider rural to urban migration in the design of future projects.

All of the components of RESI can be replicated in Kosovo in the future and dissemination of materials and learning is recommended to all rural development stakeholders in the country.

3. Background to the RESI Project

The objective of the project Rural Economic Sustainability Initiative (RESI) is to promote competitiveness of farmers, agricultural producers and food processing companies to enhance sustainable and inclusive rural development, job creation and income generation in the target municipalities Prishtinë/Priština, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Kamenicë/a and Ranil(l)ug. To achieve sustainable project outcomes, RESI set out to unlock new forms of agricultural production and innovative technologies to increase the productivity, stability, and resilience of production systems with goals beyond just raising yields, but including saving water and energy, reducing risk, improving product quality, protecting the environment and climate change mitigation.

Expected results: 1) Building upon the experience of the “Integrated Regional Development in the Municipality of Suharekë/Suva Reka” (IRDS) project, also implemented by CARE, this action aimed to offer a comprehensive capacity development and organisational development package for at least 20 staff members from municipal agricultural departments. In addition, 15 young professionals (YP) were to be employed and trained. Thus, the project aimed to significantly contribute to strengthening resources of municipal support structures that will ultimately enhance their profile as modern and efficient service, training and counselling centres in the field of local economic development. This allows them to serve the needs of agricultural producers and processors. 2) A regional grant scheme was to be established with the purpose of strengthening and building integrated agricultural value chains in the respective municipalities. 3) A special emphasis was to be placed on the promotion of initiatives designed by women, socio- economically vulnerable groups and associations/cooperatives representing them.

Target group/beneficiaries: The project aimed to benefit at least 750 farmers (male and female), 15 young professionals, 20 public employees, 90 individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (from which 50% women) and that consist mainly of small holder farmers, members of marginalized ethnic minorities, widows and female headed households. Given the comprehensive training component for the target municipalities, it was expected that at least 10.000 farmers would be indirectly reached via public agribusiness advisory services in the 4 municipalities. Indirect beneficiaries represent some 65.000 individuals from the targeted rural populations.

Activities and context: The multi-layered capacity strengthening component of the project is of special importance. The trained municipal staff and the YPs will be prepared to pass over the knowledge to agricultural producers and food processors. An additional value added will be the identification of lead famers that will introduce innovative farming techniques with the support of the project on model farms. Exchange visits will be organized to promote and encourage best-practice models and to promote women economic empowerment. Particular attention will be devoted to special needs of women and socioeconomically vulnerable groups, as well as organizations representing them. Further synergies would be created by networking and cooperating with research and educational institutions.

The project duration was three years, from 01/09/2016 – 31/08/2019. A four-month no-cost extension was approved extending the end date to 31/12/2019.

The project budget was € 3,031,582.37 with ADC contributing € 1,800,000. The remaining funds came from the Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština.



Map of Eastern Kosovo showing the location of the four municipalities that participated in RESI

4. Introduction to the Evaluation

Tyto Alba Limited was selected by CARE International in Kosovo to conduct the final evaluation of RESI following an open competitive process. The TOR was prescribed by CARE International and stated the following objective:

The objective of the assignment is to carry out a final evaluation of the Rural Economic Sustainability Initiative (RESI). The final evaluation will provide for the donor and for the project implementation unit with an analysis that as a minimum will:

1. make an overall independent assessment about the progress of the RESI project against the outcome, outputs and impact after 36 months after the end of project implementation, paying particular attention to the analysis of the effectiveness, possible signs of the project impact (if feasible), sustainability, and added value of the project
2. The extent to which the project has already achieved its results or is likely to achieve them, including the extent to which the lives of the project/programme beneficiaries (women, men, girls, boys) has already been improved. Also, the extent to which supported institutions have improved capacities to manage grant schemes beyond the project end date.
3. Identify key lessons learned and factors of success; suggest possibilities for improvements; propose recommendations for possible actions, methodologies or approaches which can be replicated in Kosovo and elsewhere. The final evaluation should contain considerations on the inclusiveness of the project activities and the results achieved, specifically considering the involvement of women in agriculture and rural economic development and outcomes related to poverty reduction.
4. Assess the implemented modalities of capacity building in regards to the achievements of the results and whether they can be improved in the future.

The full TOR is annexed (Annex 1).

The evaluation team comprised two persons, a senior international expert and a senior local expert. The evaluation started on 6th October, lasted 24 days in total and followed the timetable below:

Dates	Phase
6 Oct 2019	Preparatory tasks
7 – 10 Oct	Desk study
11 & 14 Oct	Inception phase
17 Oct	Field phase planning
23 Oct – 5 Nov	Field phase (10 days)
6 Nov	Final data gathering
8 Nov & 11 Nov	Production of draft report for CARE
15 Nov	Production of draft report for ADA
22 Nov	Submission of final report

The evaluation process went accordingly to plan and no major unexpected issues were encountered. A small number of interviews did not happen due to scheduling reasons, which was to be expected. The only constraint that the evaluation team faced was the timing of the exercise with regards to realistic measurement of impact and sustainability. This is explored further under findings and conclusions.

5. Methods

5.1 INCEPTION PHASE AND DESK STUDY

The first part of the evaluation was conducted remotely and focused on reviewing and analysing project documents. This enabled the evaluation team to develop a broad understanding of the activities, design and M&E data for the project. Various questions were explored with the project team in Kosovo via email and skype calls so that the evaluation team could fully understand the process that the project had followed.

Following this analysis and dialogue an inception report was written which outlined preliminary hypotheses and proposed the methods to be adopted in the field phase. A detailed plan for the field phase was also presented.

The inception phase and desk study considered how the CARE International and ADA³ requirements for the evaluation would be effectively incorporated and considered by the evaluators. The full matrix is attached as Annex 9 – this details how evaluation questions were planned to be addressed under each of the methods adopted in the field phase.

5.2 FIELD PHASE

The second part of the evaluation was conducted in Kosovo and involved further validation of data and consultation with key informants. The specific methods are described in the inception report and can be summarized as follows:

- **Validation of M&E data** – 10 data points recorded in the project M&E system were cross checked with beneficiaries to ensure that data was being recorded accurately. These data points were randomly

³ pp2. Guidelines for Project and Programme Evaluations, Austrian Development Agency, July 2009, http://www.entwicklung.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Evaluierung/Evaluierungs_Leitfaeden/EN_Leitfaden_Evaluierung.pdf

selected by the international expert from the list of interviewees. When the interview occurred the information recorded in the project M&E system was checked.

- **Gathering of additional data** – the evaluators probed in detail in various areas to consider additional project documentation. Additional sources of data were analysed to try to further understand the impact of the project
- **Interviews with CARE project staff** – semi-structured interviews were held with each of the RESI team members, in some cases on multiple occasions. Staff supporting the project in the CARE Kosovo office were also interviewed.
- **Interviews with national stakeholders** – various key stakeholders were interviewed, including a representative of the donor, ADA. It was not possible to consult the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development due to an issue with their availability
- **Interviews with municipality staff** – semi structured interviews were held with local government staff in each of the four municipalities, generally comprising mayors and agricultural specialists.
- **Interviews with project beneficiaries** – 20 structured interviews were held with grant recipients with a goal of ensuring inclusion of women and socio-economically vulnerable groups. The interviewees were chosen randomly by the international expert with approximately 4-5 selected from each call for proposals. 3 of the selected interviewees were not available (travelling or otherwise busy at the time of the visit). Professional translators were used in the interviews where necessary. The interview data was analysed to consider patterns and trends. However, the interviews were most useful for qualitative information gathering.
- **Focus group discussions** – in total four focus groups were conducted with grant recipients, one in each of the four municipalities. One of the focus groups was conducted in Serbian language with participants from both Ranil(l)ug and Novo Brdo/Novobërdë. Focus group participants were chosen at random by the international expert targeting 7 per FGD. There was a good turnout in Prishtinë/Priština and Ranil(l)ug, 4 persons attended in Kamenicë/a and only 3 in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë. Additionally, a focus group was conducted with the majority of the young professionals attached to RESI, 10 participants in total.
- **Lessons learned workshop** – a half-day event was held in Prishtinë/Priština towards the end of the field phase. A cross-section of persons consulted in the evaluation were invited. The purpose of the workshop “To validate the initial findings of the evaluation, to agree the most important lessons learned, and to co-create replication ideas and plans.”

In summary 20 project beneficiaries, 8 CARE staff/consultants and 6 municipality officials were interviewed (34 in total). 19 project beneficiaries and 10 young professionals were involved in focus groups (29 in total). A list of those consulted in the field phase can be found in Annex 4.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

As expected, the main limitation in an exercise like this is time. This narrows the scope and depth of the sampling and interviews. The second most important limitation is that this evaluation was conducted before the end of the project. This is due to the requirement to have the evaluation contracted by CARE within the project cycle. A more meaningful examination of sustainability would be possible 6-12 months after the project completion. Some other tertiary limitations are:

- Language. The evaluators spoke English-only and English/Albanian fluently. The translation provided appeared to be of a very high quality via a professional company. However, there is always a possibility that some of the Serbian-language inputs were misunderstood or more error-prone. This is not considered a major risk.
- Scope. There were limited means to robustly interrogate the economic ripple effects of the intervention (lack of available economic data, no control group, limits to the scope of evaluation in terms of talking to community members who did not benefit from RESI)
- Likelihood that interviews give more positive picture of RESI than the reality. This is due to those beneficiaries having received a significant cash sum from the project. Most of them would like to receive more investment in the future and might wrongly assume that giving positive engagement to the evaluation team would improve their future chances.
- During the beneficiary interviews it was challenging to gather useful quantitative information from beneficiary interviews (especially to get accurate data about income / employment)
- Overall participation from Novo Brdo/Novobërdë was lower and in the opinion of the evaluators not as open or sincere as for other municipalities.

6. Evaluation Findings

The findings of the evaluation are organized as per the five OECD/DAC criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability. Each of the specific evaluation questions listed in the TOR has been listed below under a relevant heading⁴.

6.1 RELEVANCE

6.1.1 To what extent are the objectives of the project/programme still valid for the partner country, the partner organization and the beneficiaries?

The objectives of the RESI project remain valid for Kosovo in general, the four target municipalities and those directly supported with grants.

The most important aspect of relevance at the individual level is the grant instrument and how it has been targeted. The problem analysis in the final project plan states that “Farmers in Kosovo have limited access to investment capital”. The project was designed to address this problem, especially at the small-holder level, for actors who had problems accessing capital. During the evaluation there were numerous examples of this being a very effective approach.

.....
When I started this business, I had no money, even for my children. I was unemployed and I had to find a way to send my children to kindergarten. I had a loan for my house, and I was in debt. The bank would not give me a loan to start a business⁵
.....

Project beneficiaries consulted in interviews and focus groups were unanimous about this project being highly relevant to them⁶. Additionally, the evaluators found abundant evidence to confirm that for many project beneficiaries (especially those receiving small grants of up to €10,000) had been previously unable to access loans from the bank, or grants from other sources.

.....
We could not get any grants from the municipality. We gained freezing and refrigeration equipment. We can now refrigerate and store mushrooms / raspberries and the products last longer⁷
.....

In terms of the relevance of the project to the targeted institutions – the four municipalities – the project has delivered in two specific areas: Firstly, the young professionals have given the municipalities increased bandwidth to engage with farmers and processors and to respond to their queries. This increased bandwidth is in terms of manpower and in terms of access to specialist skills (young professionals had a range of relevant professional qualifications). Secondly, the capacity development offered in RESI has been relevant to the municipality’s needs

⁴ The exception is the questions on replication. These are better covered under the later section on lessons learned.

⁵ Taken from interview with female grant recipient who started a producer association, 30/10/19

⁶ It should be noted that all of them received a grant and some bias could be expected as noted under limitations, section 5.3

⁷ Taken from focus group participant in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë Municipality, 25/10/19

in terms of increasing knowledge of new agriculture and processing techniques. The capacity development offered by RESI was felt to be much better than the support received via the national government system (MAFRD). A very strong indicator of relevance at the municipal level is the fact that the Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština requested the project and invested their own funds to participate. This was on the basis of finding out about the previous project, IRDS, run by CARE International / ADA in Suharekë/Suva Reka Municipality.

At the country level, the RESI project is trying to address a macro-level problem in Kosovo where those in rural areas are abandoning agriculture and migrating to urban areas. This is due to there being limited know-how of relevant agricultural techniques, limited access to capital, limited support from local governments, and limited positive role models within the community. There were a number of comments relating to this during the evaluation. RESI is seen as a project that not only gives practical support (finance and training), but also one that helps give rural communities hope that a good living can be made in rural areas of Kosovo. Obviously “giving hope” is an intangible outcome which is hard to clearly measure. However, it is clearly something that a large number of beneficiary communities noticed and recognized as important.

6.1.2 Are the expected results/outputs of the project/programme consistent with the outcome, immediate impact and overall goal/impact (as part of the analysis of the logframe matrix/programme theory)?

On the whole the project is well designed and builds upon a clear problem analysis and puts in place a multi-layered approach to support change at individual level, municipality level and with regards to women and vulnerable groups. The outputs in the logframe are clear and the indicators appropriately chosen (both meaningful and measurable).

The risks and assumptions made in the logframe were generally well founded. 2016 to 2019 has been a stable period politically, with no major change for a business environment (positive or negative) or in terms of relations with EU / Serbia. Municipalities have engaged with the project as planned and there have been no environmental catastrophes (although there have been several stressors such as fire, localised flooding and water shortages). The only comments worth making are:

- Out of the 4 municipalities targeted engagement and contributions have been lower in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, possibly indicative of local authority leadership
- There has been a positive change during the project cycle that was not anticipated – in January 2018 the new Government of Kosovo was formed and a new Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Rural Development appointed
- At the end of the project period a major change occurred with the election of a new government in November 2019. This has the potential to transform the political landscape in Kosovo but it is too early to comment on this and the change does not appear to have had an bearing on the project at this stage
- Export products like berries have been subject to significant price fluctuations during the project implementation period. This has been related to seasonal production levels in other countries

At the outcome level there is no specific definition of the term “competitiveness”. The indicators make the underlying assumptions clear – increased income, increased employment, increased investment from beneficiaries, increased number of business start-ups. The indicator relating to increased investment is chosen to try to ensure

that beneficiaries invest their own funds. This was selected as a way to mitigate aid dependency, a documented issue in other projects in Kosovo. It is a bit unclear how it relates to competitiveness. In terms of the indicator on business start-ups the logic behind this was that by learning how to run a business, business owners had more chance to grow their business in the future, which is logical.

Innovation would often be seen as an ingredient of competitiveness. This was not specifically included in the RESI project logframe. Interviews with project staff confirmed that RESI was not intended to be an innovation project.

The impact statement is very broad and refers to “sustainable and inclusive rural economic development”. This is a broad term which makes sense, but is not specifically defined for the project, nor is it specifically aligned to other plans or instruments. It might have been useful to reference an aspect of a regional or national development plan, for example.

When I saw the M&E plan it seemed that some of the Logframe was not very well thought through - some of the sources of verification would not be very easy to check, especially for impact and outcome level and especially those that require data from the municipal and national level⁸

At the outcome and impact level it seems unrealistic to use data from the statistical office of Kosovo given the poor quality and scope of these sources.

The operational approach of the project and the limited timeframe of 3 years means that some activities were still being finalised at the time of the evaluation. Given the short timeframe, and the lofty impact statement, it is unrealistic to expect to measure sustainable impact at the time of this evaluation, or at the end of the project (end December 2019). Most rural businesses need to be running for a few years before a determination is made about whether that will be viable and profitable (and will be likely to stay open) in the long term. Ideally, a framework would have been put in place with a longer timescale or mechanism for measurement of long-term impact. However, the impact indicators themselves are quite straightforward and measurable provided enough time has elapsed.

6.2 EFFECTIVENESS

6.2.1 To what extent has the project/programme already achieved its outcome(s) or will be likely to achieve it/them?

The **outcome statement** is:

Increased competitiveness of local farmers/producers/processors and new and inclusive rurally-based businesses strengthened/established as a result of an enabling and inclusive environment in the target municipalities

⁸ Taken from interview with RESI staff member, 23/10/19

The RESI project team analysed available data in September 2019⁹ and summarized progress as follows:

“From the beginning of the project until now, 176 farmers/producers/processors (55 women and 121 men) have been awarded with a grant for increasing and improving their production and processing capacities and simultaneously increasing their competitiveness in the target municipalities of Prishtinë/Priština, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë/Novobërdë Kamenicë/a and Ranil(l)ug. Out of the 176 awarded projects, while 132 farmers/producers/processors have successfully implemented their proposed interventions and as a result increased their competitiveness. The number of newly registered business is 102, out of which 35 new businesses have been registered by women farmers.”

The evaluators looked into more detail at the extent to which each indicator is likely to be realized:

Outcome indicators	Comment
Indicator 1: Number of farmers/producers and processors having increased competitiveness and increased their financial income by 20%, or employ one full time or 2 half time employees.	Likely to be achieved. Based on a sample of 21 projects completed before June 2018 100% of the farmers/producers and processors supported meet one or both of these criteria ¹⁰ . No performance target is set for this indicator so it is unclear what the indicator is measured against.
Indicator 2: Increased investments in rural businesses in target municipalities for at least 10 % (incl. share of women/small holder farmers/minorities and financial contributions from project grant recipients).	Guaranteed to be achieved. There is a requirement that applicants contribute 20% or more to their projects. Otherwise they will not receive a grant from RESI. There is therefore no way that this indicator <u>will not be achieved</u> . It is not a very meaningful indicator in this regard.
Indicator 3: Increased number of business start-ups (incl. share of women/ small holder farmers/minorities).	Guaranteed to be achieved. This indicator would be achieved if one new business were started. 102 have been started so far, including 35 registered by female farmers.

The conclusion is that the project is delivering against the outcome indicators to a high level. However, the indicators seem poorly designed and have no targets. They offer a limited indication of project performance.

As part of the evaluation, it was decided to explore how participants viewed their competitiveness, and the establishment of new businesses.

.....

Being more competitive means having increased sales. We can increase sales here by developing better quality products¹¹.

.....

In general terms, farmers and producers were able to clearly articulate how they have become more competitive. The most important factors cited for increased competitiveness were:

- Increased production (due to improved techniques / equipment and due to increased cooperation and price guarantees for primary producers)

⁹ “Progress report, indicators and results framework” dated 30 September 2019

¹⁰ For more on the method applied see section 6.4.4 of this report

¹¹ Taken from interview with meat producer, 30/10/19

- Increased quality (due to improved techniques / equipment and storage / refrigeration)
- Increased speed to market (due to technologies used and storage / refrigeration)
- Diversification of products and launch of new products (due to new equipment / capacity development)
- Improved labelling and marketing of products

RESI made me more competitive. I got equipment that means I can produce pepper paste more easily and get it to market faster¹².

These points were backed up by discussions with municipality staff and young professionals.

They have the opportunity to plant through the whole year due to green-housing. They can grow for 12 months and they can get more income. They are also getting their product to the market faster¹³.

Different constraints seem to apply in different subsectors. For example, processing of organic plants, supply appears to be a challenge - there are not enough certified producers to meet market need. In other subsectors, such as berry production and production of peppers for processing, supply can outstrip demand causing prices to drop and reduced income in some seasons. There were also geographical variations, for example it was mentioned that producers and processors in Prishtinë/Priština Municipality tended to know the markets better, due to proximity and access. This meant they could better understand consumer demands and would be better placed to develop new products that meet those demands.

In summary despite the problems with the design of outcome indicators, there was a lot of evidence that RESI is likely to increase competitiveness of supported farmers, producers and processors.

6.2.2 To what extent has the project/programme already achieved its outputs or will be likely to achieve them?

The following table summarises the situation with regard to outputs, as of 30th September 2019:

Output	Indicator	Achievement ¹⁴	% against target
1: The capacity of municipal support structures, Young Professionals and other development actors (NGOs, cooperatives, associations) is strengthened to provide effective and demand-driven services to agricultural	1: Municipal Development Centre (MDC) in Prishtinë/Priština established and functional.	The operational strategy of Municipal Development Centre (MDC) in municipality of Prishtinë/Priština. The action plan was designed which defines the tasks and responsibilities for establishing and functionalizing the MDC structure.	100%
	2. Capacities of at least 20 municipal staff from MDC and from Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë/Novobërdë, Kamenicë/a and Ranil(l)ug are developed and organisational processes are facilitated by the end of month 15 (including trainings on environmental	From the beginning of the project, 25 staff members included in the training program provided by RESI project.	125%

¹² Taken from Prishtinë/Priština focus group, 25/10/19

¹³ Taken from young professionals focus group, 01/11/19

¹⁴ As per progress report 30th September 2019

Output	Indicator	Achievement ¹⁴	% against target
producers and processors	conservation and sustainability, protection, gender mainstreaming and social inclusion).		
	3: Target municipalities adjust Rural Economic Development Strategies by the end of month 12.	The target municipalities of Novo Brdo/Novobërdë/Novobërdë, Kamenicë/a and Ranil(l)ug have up to date strategies and there is no need for further adjustment. The design of the mid-term Agriculture and Rural Development strategy for municipality of Prishtinë/Priština is finalized.	100%
	4: 15 young professionals trained and placed by month 8 (and at least 30% employed by their hosting institutions by the end of the project).	A turnover of 19 young professional have been part of the program where 4 of them have managed to find other jobs. Existing there are 15 young professionals trained, thereof 6 women; placed in the target municipalities of Prishtinë/Priština, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë/Novobërdë Kamenicë/a and Ranil(l)ug.	100%
	5: # of farmers (women and men) seeking advice from the municipal support structures rise annually by 30% (second and third year).	1,804 farmers	n/a
2: Grant scheme established and operational, supported grants sustainable beyond the project duration and municipal support structures actively engaged in the grant disbursement cycle to enhance ownership and knowledge transfer	1: At least 250 (+Prishtinë/Priština 250) farmers (women and men) and/or prospective agribusiness entrepreneurs trained in developing grant application forms or simple business plans for commercialising their farms and agricultural know-how, marketing and sensitized on horizontal aspects (ecology, gender mainstreaming and inclusiveness).	1,804 farmers trained in developing grant application forms (thereof 224 women) 842 in Prishtinë/Priština 439 in Kamenicë/a 324 in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë/Novobërdë 198 in Ranil(l)ug	190%
	2: # of staff involved in monitoring and # of monitoring missions conducted by municipal support structures	From the beginning of the project implementation 4 staff members appointed from the target municipalities involved in regular monthly monitoring visits for measuring the impact of the awarded grants and approximately 720 monitoring missions (site visit reports, field visit reports, monitoring visits reports, photography etc.)	n/a
	3: Providing grants to at least 18 (+indicative 45 in Prishtinë/Priština) agricultural producers and food processors	176 (28 withdrawn) grants awarded in total 133 in Prishtinë/Priština; 14 in Kamenicë/a; 15 in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë/Novobërdë; 14 in Ranil(l)ug	278%
	4: # providing grants to at least 5 (+indicative 10 in Prishtinë/Priština) associations/cooperatives targeting women/small holder farmers/minorities	13 grants in total 5 in Prishtinë/Priština provided to associations targeting women/small holder farmers and minorities 3 Kamenicë/a provided to associations targeting women/small holder farmers and minorities 2 Novo Brdo/Novobërdë/Novobërdë provided to associations targeting women/small holder farmers and minorities 3 Ranil(l)ug provided to associations small holder farmers and minorities	126%
3: Women and socio-economically vulnerable groups in target municipalities involved into agri-businesses through targeted capacity development and funding scheme	1: At least 90 women, small holder farmers and members of socio-economically vulnerable groups involved in project trainings. (50% women, total targets for Prishtinë/Priština to be agreed)	224 women trained on developing grant application forms In addition 1,173 women were trained on technical trainings, planning and development skills and field visits to demonstration plots	558%
	2: At least 45 businesses owned by women, small holder farmers and members of socio-economically vulnerable groups supported by the project. (50% women)	55 businesses owned by women and 122 small holder farmers including women farmers.	125%

Evaluation team comments on the reported outputs:

- A **very high level of achievement** has been recorded against the output indicators in general terms

- There was significant overachievement against three indicators: training on application forms (190%, Output 2/Indicator 1), provision of grants to producers & processors (278%, Output 2 / Indicator 2) and involvement of women and vulnerable groups in training (558%, Output 3/Indicator 1)
- **Output 1 / Indicator 2**, would be a more robust indicator if there were some qualitative information, or if capacity of municipal staff were measured against some agreed standards or competencies
- **Output 1 / Indicator 4**, part of this indicator requires at least 30% of the young professionals to be hired by the end of the project. Unfortunately, with only six weeks left there is not yet any confirmation from the municipalities on this point, most due to the restrictions on headcount imposed on local authorities by the Ministry of Finance
- Discussion with the RESI team highlighted some of the challenges faced by the team in getting farmers to accurately capture data related to their business. In particular, farmers tended to exaggerate employment data. A lot of effort was made to ensure that this information became more accurate during the course of the project, including the introduction and distribution of a RESI logbook for farmers.
- There is not yet any evidence of equipment purchased by RESI funds being sold or left unused. This was closely monitored by the RESI team because other agricultural development projects in Kosovo have suffered significant problems in this regard.

6.2.3 What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the outcome(s)/ outputs? (Also consider any which were possibly beyond the control of the project)

The limitation in being able to reasonably measure the outcomes so soon after activities have been completed is considered a design issues that was largely outside of the control of the project team. The 3-year timeframe was a condition of the original funding from the donor, ADA. The RESI team then accepted additional funding on top of this from the Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština without having the scope to adjust the timeframe or to increase the staffing capacity of the core team. Bearing in mind these constraints the team has done an admirable job to deliver all the required activities with only a four-month no-cost extension on the original end date.

In terms of the challenge that is expected with regard to recruitment of the young professionals by the municipalities, the team and the municipalities have been pushing hard to find a solution. It appears this is outside of the control of the project at this stage. This should be a consideration in future projects focused on increasing the human capacity of local authorities.

6.2.4 Was the project/programme managed as planned? If not, what issues occurred and why?

Given the complexity of the project in terms of working across 4 municipalities with 2 different funding sources and the tight original timeframe of only 3 years, the project has largely gone according to plan.

The main issue that slowed down the implementation process was the delay faced by farmers and processors in gaining building permissions for farm improvements from the respective municipality. The vast majority of funded projects from RESI involved building new farm and/or agri-food production facilities in the target municipalities. In order to ensure compliance with existing building legislation, farmers and/or entrepreneurs had to obtain building permissions for the new facilities.

The process for acquiring building permission varied from one municipality to another but delays were faced by grant recipients in all four municipalities¹⁵. In some cases, application fees were also charged to farmers¹⁶. There were also issues with regard to proving ownership of land. This issue was not faced in the previous intervention (IRDS) in Suharekë/Suva Reka. It was not anticipated in the original project plan and was not picked up in the baseline assessment report.

Once the issue arose, the RESI team adapted quickly and lobbied municipalities to try to improve the process. The team undertook advocacy on individual cases and also tried to get municipalities to improve their processes. Presentations were made to Municipal Assembly meetings of Prishtinë/Priština, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, and Ranil(l)ug. The municipality of Prishtinë/Priština removed all the fees for obtaining building permissions for the farms and agri-food production facilities in rural areas and the policy also changed in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë.

Under the third Call for Proposals (CFP) six grant recipients withdrew their applications, since they were not able to obtain the building permissions. In the fourth CFP eleven recipients withdrew for the same reason. The wider impact of this problem was to slow down the implementation of the project and was the single most significant factor that led to no-cost extension to the project.

6.2.5 To assess the approach of the project in terms of implementation arrangements (management structure, operational strategies, monitoring system and procedures). Identify any constraints, internal or external, to achieving progress.

The central aspect of the implementation arrangements is the RESI project team. Extremely strong feedback was gathered during the evaluation from grant recipients and municipality staff. Interviewees consistently commented on the reliability, problem-solving approach and tireless hard work of the team. If anything, the central team was overstretched. The team maintained a very high level of communication with beneficiaries and municipality. Monitoring visits are regular and systematic and the monitoring system in general appears effective, especially given that it is managed by one staff member as only part of their job (the other part of her role is comms).

.....

RESI team answers questions by email and were quick to send an expert to support based on my request. Other projects don't do this¹⁷

.....

Another remarkable aspect is that the RESI team remained unchanged for the duration of the project, apart from one staff member. This is very unusual in NGO projects and in this case enhanced the stability and performance of the RESI project.

.....

My experience with RESI was the best I ever had. There was no point that I called RESI and they didn't respond. So polite and helpful¹⁸

.....

¹⁵ Three month processing time for building permission

¹⁶ The municipality of Prishtinë/Priština, charged farmers €6.5 per square meter for a planning application. It seems that this was due to the planning process in this municipality having been developed for urban development, not support to agriculture.

¹⁷ Taken from a participant in the Novo Brdo/Novobërdë focus group discussion on 25/10/19

¹⁸ Taken from a participant in the Kamenicë/a focus group discussion on 25/10/19

The young professionals supplemented the RESI project team and municipalities, giving each more bandwidth to stay close to developments on the ground and ensuring a more dynamic and “listening” approach with regard to project beneficiaries. Young professionals also brought specialist technical skills closer to the project (each was qualified to bachelors or masters-level in relevant subjects).

We only had to make a request for training from the young professionals and they did it¹⁹

The steering committee of the project was mostly focused on ensuring communication with key stakeholders from RESI, the donor and government. It appears to have fulfilled this role effectively.

There are two comments on the implementation arrangements that could be considered for future projects:

1. Out-of-country staff employed by CARE in Austria and the Balkans region were quite numerous and each had a low % of time committed to the project. It is questionable how much value can be added to a project in another country when less than 10% of ones’ time is committed. It would be better value for money to have less staff, each of whom would be much more engaged.
2. RESI project staff were stationed in the Prishtinë/Priština municipality offices. Teamwork, collaboration and capacity building results were higher here than in the other three municipalities.

6.2.6 Assess to what degree the project has achieved its objectives and targets. As well, identify challenges and obstacles faced during the implementation of the project. In relation with this, identify the degree of flexibility and adaptability to facilitate rapid responses to changes in circumstances. Include any unintended and/or negative impacts.

As detailed in sections 6.2.1 – 6.2.4 the project appears on track to achieve its outcomes, has already met the output targets set and challenges have been addressed effectively by the team. Impact is considered in section 6.4. There is nothing further to comment.

6.2.7 Assess quality control mechanisms of the products supported by the project.

The most important quality control mechanism in terms of controlling program quality and ensuring value for money was the grant application and review mechanism. The process was highly robust and well designed, building on the process adopted for the earlier IRDS project in Suharekë/Suva Reka. The evaluators found that the grant opportunities were well communicated via a range of channels (municipality meetings, word of mouth, social media). Another key finding is how different the RESI project was compared to other grant-giving projects experienced by beneficiaries. The general impression was that RESI was fair and transparent, in stark contrast to all other projects where corruption, lack of transparency and nepotism were widely reported. RESI stood out in this regard.

¹⁹ Taken from a participant in the Kamenicë/a focus group discussion on 25/10/19

The RESI grant review approach anonymised applications to reduce scope for discrimination and/or favouritism in the review process. Additionally, out-of-country experts were utilised as part of the screening process in order to safeguard decision making (this in turn required resources for translation and proof-reading of application documents). Lastly, the review process required a field visit to the site in question, something else which differentiated RESI in the eyes of beneficiaries:

.....

The RESI team came to see the best place to give a grant. The Ministry of Agriculture just review the papers - they don't do a field visit. This means the funds from RESI are being used properly²⁰

.....

In terms of the capacity development provided by RESI the standard appears to be high with a focus on tapping into the knowledge of high-level expertise (sometimes from outside Kosovo) and also using study visits and practical demonstration to increase impact and application.

Young professionals were uniquely placed, sometimes being the first person a farmer / processor would approach. Given their limited work experience it was worthwhile to look at whether or not there were instances where they had given incorrect or inappropriate advice. No examples were found by the evaluation team.

.....

Farmers accepted the young professional's advice and stayed in touch with us. They treated us like RESI officers²¹

.....

The evaluation team has one comment on the grant review mechanism. It is possible that it lacks a proportional approach. The staff time and level of control that goes into reviewing a €3,000 grant application is the same in theory as for a €100,000 application. Whilst this means that the reputation of the project is very strong in terms of fairness, lack of corruption, and quality control it may have been overkill for smaller grants which are aimed more at poverty reduction than economic development (explored further below).

.....

Can confidently say that the project was tightly controlled, possibly controls were too tight for the capacity of the team. It created workload²²

.....

6.2.8 Assess financial management, transparency and accountability.

There was a very deliberate focus on these areas given that grant-giving constituted a large proportion of the overall project and given that previous grant-giving projects have been mired in problems in terms of lack of transparency, lack of accountability, corruption and political/nepotistic interference. The evaluation found the following:

- People heard about RESI through a range of channels – municipalities, internet, Facebook, word of mouth

²⁰ Taken from a participant in the Novo Brdo/Novobërdë focus group discussion on 25/10/19

²¹ Taken from focus group discussion with young professionals, 1/11/19

²² Taken from interview with CARE staff, 23/10/19

- Everyone consulted found that information about RESI was well disseminated and timely. It was also properly translated where necessary.
- All consulted found the RESI staff communicative and engaging. They knew they were not part of the government and all consulted stated that they would be confident to raise a complaint if necessary.
- A very large number of grant recipients stated that they were confident that RESI was fair. You did not have to know anyone in the RESI team to receive a grant, which is in stark contrast to the usual situation
- The application process was seen as clear and fair. The only comments made were about the strict requirements in terms of starting a business, contributing financially to the project and proof of land ownership. Some felt these requirements were too strict.
- The grant giving process was recognised as the main risk to the project from a financial management and fraud management point of view. A robust system with segregation of duties and a series of checks and balances was put in place to mitigate this.
- A complaints-handling mechanism was put in place and presented to grant recipients via the sub-grant agreement.

Everyone who fulfils the conditions benefits, so all feel it is fair²³

The only comment from the evaluation team in this area is that it may be useful to in future projects to disseminate the process for community feedback and complaints more widely, rather than only to grant recipients via the written agreement. It should be stressed that none of the interviewees highlighted this as a problem and all said they found the team approachable. However, in theory there are reasons they might not feel open to mention this in interview.

6.2.9 To what extent have all project/programme stakeholders collaborated as planned?

Project stakeholders collaborated as planned. The only exception was a positive one. The four neighbouring municipalities reported benefit from interacting with one another. They stated that this helped them shared ideas and experiences around rural development. In future projects this could be supported further.

6.2.10 The quality and nature of the relationship between project partners shall be assessed considering participation and inclusiveness.

The project team was widely commended for their efforts in terms of getting information about RESI out to women, social-economically vulnerable groups, and those in remote rural areas. Not a single report was received that countered this. However, it must be remembered that the nature of this evaluation can lead to this effect (we engaged with people that got support and resources from RESI).

²³ Taken from focus group discussion in Prishtinë/Priština, 25/10/19

6.2.11 Describe created linkages with central level, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development;

There were no specific objectives or deliverables in this regard. However, the RESI team made an effort to keep MAFRD, Regional Development Agencies, Mayors and other international aid agencies in the loop throughout the project. This included a promotional event in Prishtinë/Priština on 5th Feb 2018 and an upcoming final conference planned for 26th November 2019. The MAFRD was invited to the evaluation findings workshop on 4th November but cancelled at the last minute due to operational reasons.

6.2.12 Did the project/programme contribute to capacity building as planned?

The project contributed to capacity building as planned. Capacity building comprised the bulk of outputs 1 and 3. As shown in the table in section 6.2.2 the score against the indicators for each of these outputs was high (>=100%). So in reductive terms the project delivered on its capacity building objectives as planned.

A couple of points are worth highlighting alongside of this. Firstly, the project overachieved in terms of involvement of women and those from socio-economically vulnerable groups (output 3). More participants than expected from these target groups were involved in capacity building activities. This is a significant and notable achievement and does not appear to have been at the expense of the involvement of males and majority groups. Secondly, the young professionals program was highly commended by those involved (beneficiaries, municipalities, young professionals themselves) as it offers a progressive route to developing the human resource capacity in agriculture and rural development in Kosovo. It was clearly stated by a number of respondents that a large number of current agriculture and rural development officials in local and national government are not exposed to modern thinking and new ideas in their field. Additionally there is a culture of nepotism and accepting poor performance in many departments, which undermines the quality of the service provided to farmers and producers. There are also barriers to agriculture graduates gaining sufficient experience in order to find full-time work. The young professionals program provides a systematic and strategic approach in response to this human capacity and organisational development challenge. However, ultimate success will depend on the degree to which municipalities can now navigate their own internal bureaucratic hurdles to open up suitable jobs that young professionals will be entitled to apply for. This is their responsibility and not the responsibility of the RESI project. However, if they fail then the impact of the young professionals program will be undermined.

6.2.13 To what extent was gender mainstreaming included in the project/programme and to what extent were recommendations from the ADA gender-assessment considered and implemented?

The project has a stated focus on women's economic environment. The situation of women in project areas has been considered throughout the project design process. The ADA gender self-assessment was completed as part of the design of the project and it appears that all relevant areas have been followed through. The logframe had various references to inclusion of women in the project. Some specific targets on female inclusion were set. A fulltime staff member focused on women's economic empowerment was part of the RESI team. A more detailed gender-assessment was conducted near the start of the project. The third call for grant proposals specifically targeted women. In summary, the inclusion of women in economic activities was deeply considered in the RESI project, and heavily promoted by the team. The situation of men did not get specific reference or attention on the other hand.

6.2.14 To what extent was environmental mainstreaming included in the project/programme and to what extent were recommendations from the ADA environment-assessment considered and implemented?

The ADA environmental integration checklist was conducted in February 2016. Relevant areas were included in the design of the project. The project generally took an environmentally sensitive approach and promoted organic production where possible. This was especially important because the prevailing context in Kosovo is characterized by extensive levels of soil and water pollution. The grant applications were each screened from an environment point of view, drawing on the support of qualified experts as per the sub-sector. Any equipment purchased with RESI support had to meet relevant environmental standards. Training programs and study visits also worked to try to promote environmental stewardship in grant recipients and municipalities. In summary the environment was well considered by the project team.

An environmental assessment was included as part of the project plan. The resulting report, “Environmental Impact Analysis of Agro-business Activities” was produced in June 2018. Production was delayed due to difficulties in finding a suitable consultancy / firm in Kosovo. The report is very wide ranging and includes quite a lot of secondary information on environmental issues in project locations and sub-sectors. Additionally, the environmental specialist visited a number of RESI-supported projects, providing recommendations where possible. The report is certainly helpful, but the late timing means that it is not likely to have a systematic influence on how the RESI project was delivered. Additionally the recommendations are very broad and not very well tuned to the realities of the project and how it was being managed – for example a large part of the recommendations focuses on incorporating environmental preservation and sustainability indicators in the design of the project, something that is not very realistic with only one year of the project to go. It is recommended that such an assessment be conducted in the inception phase in future.

From the point of view of climate change adaptation there was nothing notable in the design of the project. Given the feedback from those consulted in the evaluation this area needs to be considered in the future in agricultural development activities in Kosovo.

6.2.15 To what extent were the social standards monitored by relevant partners? Have any issues emerged, if so which ones and why?

The social standards were considered in the design of the intervention by ADA and CARE. Recommendations from the social standards assessment were incorporated in the final design of the project (reflected in the Project Document), and specifically the indicators in the logframe. These were monitored on a regular basis by CARE and the project steering committee. Two aspects of the self-assessment are worth noting:

Item from social standards self-assessment	Comment
6. Are there any risks and impacts to community health, safety and security which may arise from project related activities (such as constructions, use of equipment and technology, use of hazardous materials, exposure to water borne, water related and communicable diseases)?	During the evaluation a number of persons highlighted that overuse of pesticide by farmers is a big issue in project areas. There is limited guidance available to farmers. The RESI project tried to provide information on appropriate use of pesticides in a number of RESI training programs and study visits. However, the issue appears to be much wider than

	RESI and should be considered in the design of future agricultural development programs.
9. Are land acquisition/restrictions on land use and/or natural resources or physical and/or economic displacement foreseen? If yes, which safety and security measures are foreseen?	As noted in 6.2.4 issues came up in terms of building permission and proof of land ownership. These were not anticipated at the start of the project.

6.2.16 Assess the inclusiveness of the interventions and the quality of the identification of key stakeholders and target groups (referring specifically to gender and vulnerable groups);

RESI was designed to be inclusive of women and socio-economically vulnerable groups. A pro-poor targeting approach was adopted. In comparison to the previous IRDS project more small grants were given.

Only one grant could be awarded per business (unlike other similar grant-giving projects in Kosovo). Feedback from interviews and focus groups was mixed on this point. Some people felt that this was fair as it encourages a wide range of participation. Others said that this approach prevents businesses with high potential from growing as quickly. Ultimately RESI cannot be criticised as it remained true to the original design in terms of inclusivity and poverty reduction.

6.3 EFFICIENCY

6.3.1 Was the project implemented in the most efficient way (time, personnel resources)? Have any issues emerged, if so which ones and why?

The RESI project was implemented in a highly efficient manner in terms of time, personnel and resources. This was driven by the high-performing team at the centre of RESI. In fact, it could be argued that too much was expected of the RESI team and project in terms of activities and outputs. They were under extreme pressure to put an efficient and robust grant system in place in order to meet the requirements of the two donors. This detracts from the time that can be invested in the quality of delivery and sustainability factors.

It should also be noted that the turnaround time of ADA was quick where their approval was needed to contract staff and consultants, and to approve grants. This further ensured efficiency. It is very common for delays in approval in NGO head offices and donor offices to slow down such projects. This was not observed for RESI.

It is worth highlighting the increase in transaction volume for RESI, as compared to the previous 5-year IRDS project. RESI took place over 3 years across 4 municipalities and dispersed around 170 grants. IRDS took place over 5 years in 1 municipality and dispersed 80 grants. This is further discussed under lessons learned (section 8).

Additionally, as noted previously, the grant mechanism is a one-size-fits all model where the same amount of effort is required for a small grant of €3,000 as for a large grant of €100,000. Whilst it has been robust in ensuring fairness and mitigating fraud, it could be questioned whether this is effective in terms of effort and staff time. Since the majority of the funds were spent through the grant-giving mechanism it is worth noting that the process of reviewing the quotes submitted by grant applications was a further value-for-money mechanism. Several instances were highlighted by evaluators where grant applicants submitted quotes above the typical market rate for a

product or piece of equipment. This was then addressed by the project team saving the donor and the beneficiaries funds. This price checking was done by the RESI team and young professionals.

Some interviewees remarked that having experts from Austria involved in the project might not necessarily represent the best value for money as compared to using expertise from Kosovo. The evaluators explored this point with the RESI team and the rationale in terms of using resources from outside Kosovo was clear – firstly ensuring minimum standards of quality / expertise and secondly ensuring objectivity in the grant decision making process.

In closing this section, it should be noted that no financial / resource wastage or issue was identified during the evaluation.

6.4 IMPACT

6.4.1 How many women, men, girls, boys and people in total have already benefited from the project/programme (immediate impact)?

Based on project M&E data²⁴ the current reach of the RESI project is as follows:

	# women & girls	# men & boys	Total
Direct reach (training and capacity development)	1,561	2,561	4,122
Direct reach (grants)	107	42	149
Direct reach (total)	1,688	2,602	4,290
Indirect participants	5,525	8,931	14,456

These numbers will further increase as outstanding project information is gathered.

6.4.2 What exactly has already changed in the lives of women, men, girls, boys (immediate impact)?

Based data gathered by the RESI team as part of their routine M&E process the following changes have occurred:

- 285 new full-time jobs have been created
- 490 seasonal jobs have been created
- Grant recipients have increased their income by 53%, on average

Additionally, the following sums have been invested in the rural economy via RESI:

- €1,640,833 has been invested by the ADA and Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština
- €632,280 has been invested by grant recipients
- €2,273,113 has been invested in total²⁵

6.4.3 Consider the scale, depth, coverage, multiplier effect (secondary or tertiary benefits), sustainability of impacts. Identify for whom specifically benefits accrued (considering impact related to women and poverty reduction).

.....

Middle-men in neighbouring areas used to exploit Ranil(I)ug farmers due to their distance from the market. Ranil(I)ug farmers would have to travel to the market for around 2 hours to sell fragile products like mushroom and raspberry. Due to the shelf life of these products they may be forced to sell at a very low price or waste their product. This no longer happens due to the freezing and refrigeration facilities (raspberry, mushroom etc)²⁶

.....

²⁴ Taken from employee logs, training records and monitoring visit reports

²⁵ Based on available data for 152 grants in total (not including CFP #7

²⁶ Taken from interview with municipality official in Ranil(I)ug, 24/10/19

- There is some evidence of economic impact beyond grant recipients. This is most evident in areas where processors and associations have been able to expand their sales. This has encouraged producers who did not receive support from RESI to increase their production (and in some cases income and employment). This is most noticeable in beekeeping, organic production, and production of medicinal herbs and plants sub-sectors.
- Improved equipment has increased productivity and competitiveness.
- Capacity development has increased knowledge of markets and marketing approaches.
- Interest in working in agriculture has increased in RESI operating areas, including in some cases with young people.

6.4.4 To measure impact of project activities on the target group and against the base line survey data. Impacts which are identified by beneficiaries but are not necessarily planned (against indicators) should also be noted if occurred

It is first necessary to look at the performance against the impact indicators – there are two of these:

1. At least 500 new jobs (full time/seasonal) in farming, food processing and rural businesses in the target areas created.
2. Increased level of family income in the target regions (an average increase of 30% by the project grants recipients).

In order to analyse the effectiveness of the RESI project against these indicators it is necessary to take a step back. The project input most likely to influence these indicators is the investment in new equipment supported by the RESI grant. Once the equipment is installed there would usually be a period of experimentation, learning, trial and error. This period is likely to be at least one growing season or year in duration. It may be up to five years in the case of some sub-sectors like apple or quince orchards. Once a farmer or processor has learned to use the equipment effectively and has explored / secured markets for his or her products, only then are they likely determine whether a reasonable income or profit can be made and make a decision about continuation.

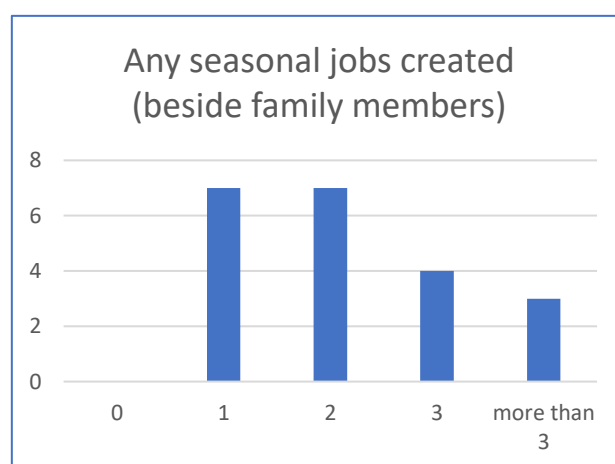
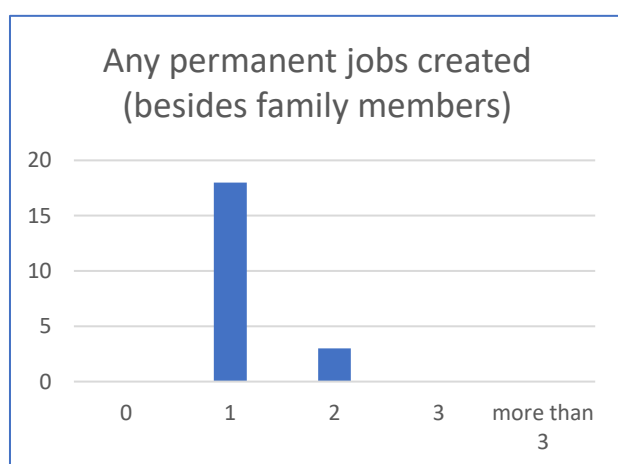
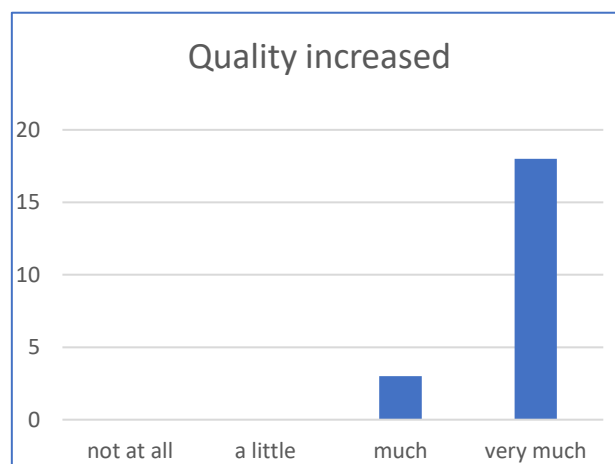
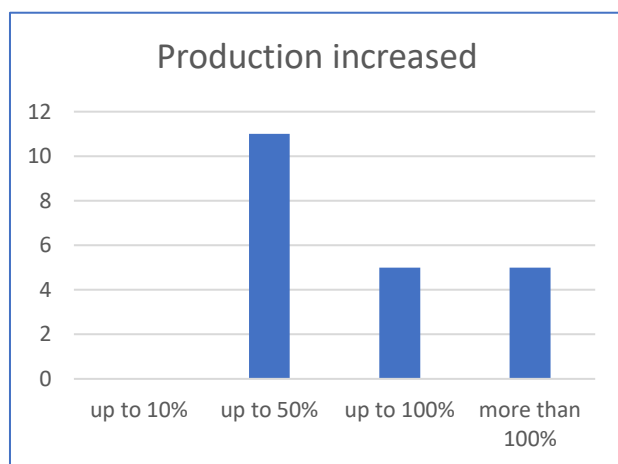
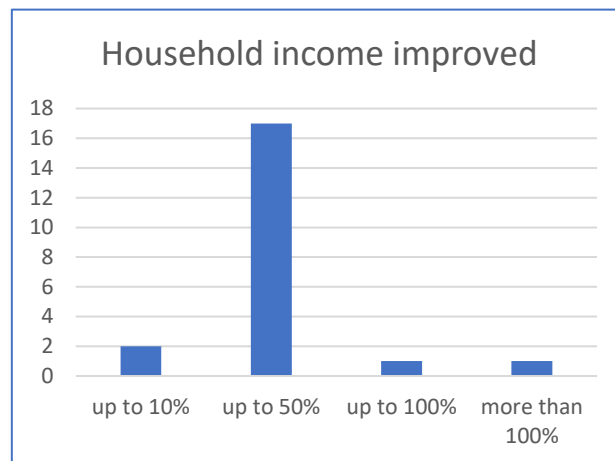
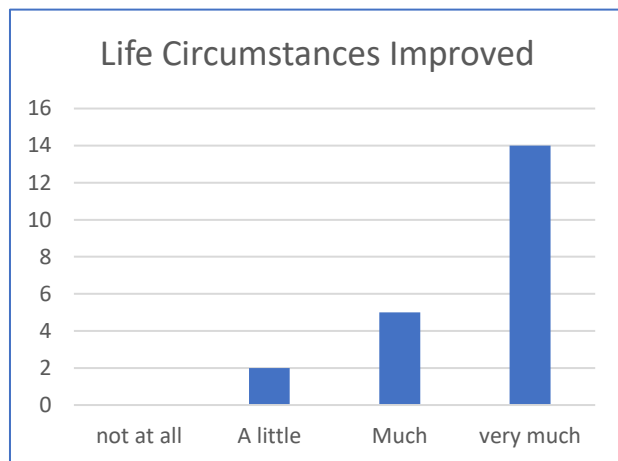
It is therefore desirable to begin to measure against the impact indicators 3-5 years after the initial investment of equipment is purchased and installed. Looking at the data on grants dispersed by the RESI project the first project was completed (i.e. final reimbursement payment made to the applicant, after the equipment was purchased) in April 2017, 2 years and 7 months before the evaluation. Meaningful and accurate measurement against impact indicators is therefore not feasible within this evaluation.

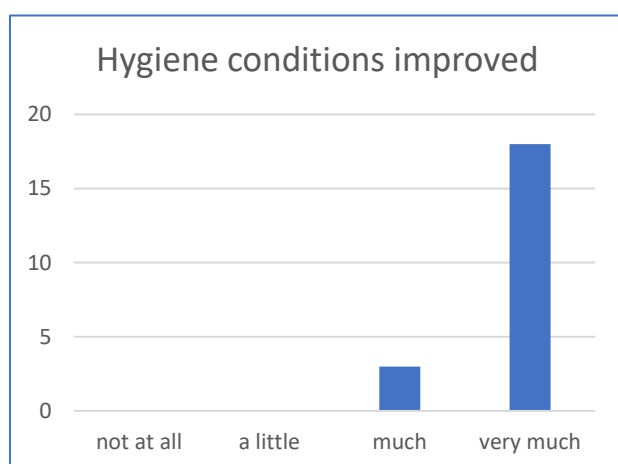
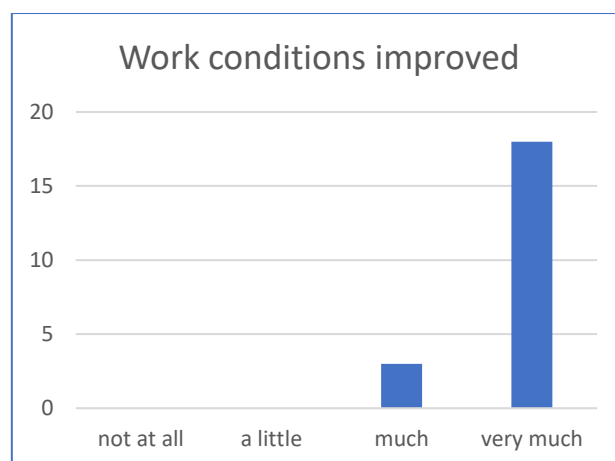
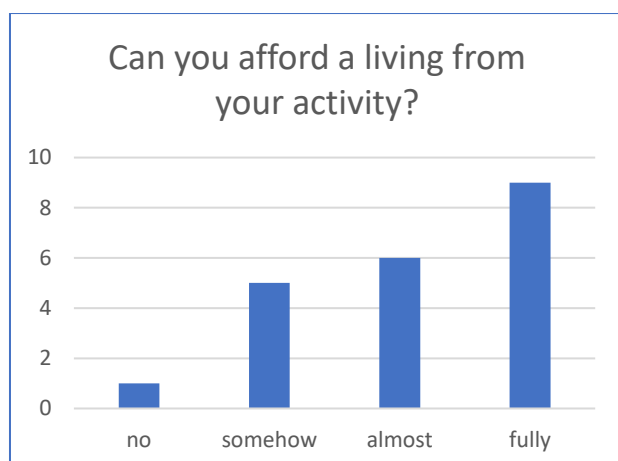
However, it was considered useful to try to look at some proxy data as an indication of whether the project is likely to achieve its impact. A certain amount of extrapolation and estimation is necessary. Monitoring reports were conducted in August 2019 for a large number of completed and partially completed grants. It was decided to examine the reports for projects that were completed (final payment made to beneficiary) before the end of June 2018. This mean that all of these projects had had one year and 3 months to prove their worth and potential competitiveness.

- 36 projects were completed before the end of June 2018
- 21 projects of these projects had been monitored in August 2019 (58% of the completed projects)

- The data from these 21 projects was assumed to be illustrative of the potential for RESI-supported projects to be competitive in the long term

The summary data from this sample of 21 projects follows:





Other results recorded

family can afford education for children	100%	yes
family can afford medical services	100%	yes
have you attended trainings provided by the project	100%	yes
have these trainings helped you	100%	very much

Charts show analysis of monitoring reports from RESI grants completed before end June 2018 (sample size is 21)

If this sample of 21 grants is taken as illustrative of how the other grants²⁷ will eventually perform then an estimate of job creation and increased household income can be made as follows:

Impact Indicators	Target	Estimate for whole project (170 grants)	Data from sample (21 grants)
At least 500 new jobs (full time/seasonal) in farming, food processing and rural businesses in the target areas created.	500	559 (194 FT and 364 seasonal)	69 (24 FT and 45 seasonal)
Increased level of family income in the target regions (an average increase of 30% by the project grants recipients).	Average 30% increase	Average 53% increase	Average 53% increase

It should be noted that the estimated number of jobs created (FT and seasonal) following this methodology is lower than recorded by the project M&E system for the whole of the project so far (section 6.4.1). This indicates that the projects that finished since the end June 2018 have tended to create more jobs in their first year than the projects that were concluded before June 2018. Regardless of measurement technique adopted, it can be concluded that the project will broadly achieve its planned impact, as measured by the two indicators.

²⁷ 170 grants will be delivered by the end of the RESI project

6.4.5 Consider how impacts for this type of project can be maximized (what needs to be improved) when scaling up.

In general terms grant recipients interviewed in this evaluation who received small grants did not yet have ambitious plans to grow their business further. In contrast, some of the larger-scale farmers, collectors and associations exhibited entrepreneurship, an ambitious vision for their business, and a desire to grow further in order to have a bigger impact on the whole community. This in turn can encourage small-scale farmers to increase their production, especially if they know they will get a reasonable price in return.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the main ways to further maximise project impacts in economic terms are as follows:

- Focusing investment on specific sub-sectors based on detailed economic analysis
- Focusing investment in upstream areas of each value chain
- Focusing on identifying and supporting entrepreneurs

This would maximise project impacts in terms of financial return-on-investment. However, this would be less likely to contribute to poverty reduction and inclusion of women and socio-economically vulnerable groups.

In summary, answering this question depends on what is most important for future projects – economic rural development or inclusive rural development.

6.4.6 Assess spill-over effect of the project, cooperation between producers and traders and aspects of transfer of knowledge.

The main point highlighted in interviews and focus groups is that in several locations the cooperation between producers and traders has increased. This has come from increase demand from raw materials and also from increased cooperative mechanisms. Inter-municipal cooperation was not planned as part of RESI. It can be classified as an unintended impact. This aspect can be emphasised more in future projects.

.....
I am really happy that I am not afraid of failing. If some people don't make a profit in one month they might close their business²⁸
.....

6.4.7 Which positive and/or negative effects/impacts in terms of gender and environment can be possibly be attributed to the project/programme?

Gender

The RESI project took a very deliberate approach to increasing women's economic empowerment. For example, only female-owned businesses could apply for the fourth call for proposals. This requirement did appear to have a side-effect in some cases - men were actually running the business but registered it in their wife's name in order to get the grant. The RESI team tried their best to spot where this issue happened and disqualified any application

²⁸ Taken from interview with traditional food producer in Kamenicë/a

where it was suspected that this was the case. However, it is still possible that some of the projects supported were corrupted in this way because of this grant conditionality. This was documented as a lesson learned as follows:

RESI project has observed that some of the beneficiaries in order to comply with eligibility criteria for grants for women farmers and women owned agri-businesses would change land/business ownership to their female members of their families for the sake of being selected as project beneficiaries. The main lesson learned was that during the selection process of beneficiaries, evaluators would go beyond checking the legal ownership and for instance confirm their involvement in the proposed project proposals through requesting from them to present the proposed project and their concrete involvement in the implementation²⁹

Women who were supported by RESI were very motivated to be given the opportunity and support to start a business. It appears likely that many of them will sustain and further grow their businesses.

There was also some evidence RESI has helped to build acceptance that women can play in the rural economy amongst the wider community and local government. However, this would need monitoring over the longer term to see if this acceptance is sustained.

There is now more acceptance for women to start a business. We used to work in the field all day and no one noticed us. Now I am the head of my business. My family supports me. My husband and sons will not stop me because I have increased the family income. I am too old to look for a job so self-employment is my only choice. I have 4 daughters, 1 son and a husband. All of them are working³⁰

Using their internal Gender Marker tool, CARE rates the RESI project as “Grade 3 – Gender Responsive”³¹ (the highest score would be Grade 4 – Transformative). This appears to be a useful process. One of the key lessons learned on gender captured in this tool is also worth repeating here: “Due to cultural barriers in some of the project target areas, RESI project has observed that reaching women farmers through capacity building measures is more difficult if the trainings are facilitated by male trainers. The main lesson learned was to involve more female trainers especially for the field demonstration trainings in all the sub sectors of agriculture.”

Environment

Most interviewees were able to give an example of how RESI has increased an aspect of their environmental knowledge and awareness. Most of this knowledge and awareness has come from one of the RESI training programs and as a result tends to be specific to sector / sub-sector. One of the most frequently cited examples of a positive impacts on the environment was from the beekeeping sector. The role of beekeeping in maintaining the health of

²⁹ CARE Gender Marker Vetting Form, completed for RESI on 12th Sept 2019

³⁰ Taken from a participant who attended a focus group discussion in Prishtinë/Priština, 25/10/19

³¹ CARE Gender Marker Vetting Form, completed for RESI on 12th Sept 2019

the wider ecosystem was frequently highlighted by grant recipients and municipality officials. There were also examples of how improved waste-water treatment or water resource management had been built into RESI-supported investments.

It is hard to easily summarise or generalise positive impacts related to the environment due to this diversity. No significant negative impacts were noted.

6.4.8 Which institutions have already benefitted from the project and how? What has changed for whom (immediate impact)?

Prishtinë/Priština Municipality has benefitted the most from the RESI project having had focused support to establish the Municipal Development Centre (MDC) strategy, plan and information management system. They had extensive support from the OD consultant to develop their staffing structure and key processes. They also hosted the RESI project team meaning that the level of engagement from the project staff was higher than the other municipalities. The municipalities of Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Kamenicë/a and Ranil(l)ug also benefitted from a range of capacity development support offered by RESI, notably the officers in the respective agriculture departments. They also adopted the IMS that was built for Prishtinë/Priština. All four municipalities participated in a wide range of trainings and study visits. Increased inter-municipal cooperation between agriculture departments was highlighted by officials as a positive (and unintended) impact of RESI.

It remains to be seen whether municipalities will benefit in the longer term from the Young Professionals Program. The program has been effective ultimately success now depends on municipalities themselves navigating the hurdles they face in hiring new staff.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Regional Development Agencies have also benefited to some extent from RESI via attendance of trainings and study visits. This was not part of the logframe but the RESI team was inclusive towards those stakeholders and tried to involve them and keep them updated when possible.

Those at a community level were asked via interviews and focus groups whether they had seen improvements in the services offered by the municipality because of RESI. Many positive examples were offered but a number of informants were neutral on the subject. It seems that farmers and other actors in rural areas are very sceptical about the capacity and intent of municipality services due to past experience. It might take sustained improvements over a number of years to change their minds.

6.4.9 Assess whether behavioural patterns have changed in the municipalities and how far the changed institutional arrangements and characteristics have produced the planned improvements (e.g. in communications, provision of services for the farmers and ability to generate actions which lead to economic and social development, gender mainstreaming, environmental protection)

The RESI team tried to put in place a one-stop-shop service delivery system in place in the municipalities and a great deal of time has been spent on this with Prishtinë/Priština Municipality in particular. The Directorate of Agriculture for Prishtinë/Priština was established in 2016 with support from RESI. Before 2016 agriculture was only managed as a sector (at a lower level) within the Directorate of Economic Development. It would be fair to say that as a combination of the RESI project and hard work of the Municipality over the last two years the quality and quantity of the service provided to farmers in Prishtinë/Priština has increased.

In terms of behavioural patterns in the other three municipalities the impression of the evaluators is that the project has had the most engagement and impact in Ranil(l)ug and the least in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë. Kamenicë/a lies somewhere in between. It is hard to say exactly why this is but in general terms Novo Brdo/Novobërdë appears to be a challenging municipality with a diverse and scattered population in a mountainous area. Of course, local level leadership will also play a substantial part but it was hard to analyse this factor in detail.

6.4.10 Are there any other important aspects regarding impact?

No.

6.5 SUSTAINABILITY

6.5.1 To what extent are the benefits of the project likely to be sustained after the completion of this project?

It is important to reflect on the overall goal of the project as reflected in the impact statement:

“To contribute to a sustainable and inclusive rural economic development, as well as income and employment generation in the target municipalities Prishtinë/Priština, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë/Novobrdë, Kamenicë/a and Ranil(l)ug”

The impact indicators focus on job creation and increased family income as discussed in section 6.4. Although it is not defined or stated, it is intuitively obvious that for the project to be considered sustainable, jobs and income would need to be sustained for several years, and not just in the 1-2 years following receipt of the grant. Evidence of sustainability can be more realistically studied from 2021 onwards. A number of activities are still be delivered and, as mentioned above, the RESI project has been squeezed into a very busy three-year period. **It is too soon to expect concrete evidence of sustainability.**

With all this being said, in the opinion of the evaluators, should the prevailing macro-economic, seasonal and market factors remain stable in coming years, then the benefits of the project are likely to be sustained after the completion of the project. Sustainability is highly dependent on continued provision of information, advice and encouragement to farmers and producers. The more that municipalities follow-up actively with project beneficiaries over the next 1-2 years, the more project benefits are likely to be sustained. Municipalities are now central to success.

6.5.2 What is the likelihood of continuation and sustainability of project outcomes and benefits after completion of the project?

The outcome statement for RESI was:

Increased competitiveness of local farmers/producers/processors and new and inclusive rurally-based businesses strengthened/established as a result of an enabling and inclusive environment in the target municipalities.

This outcome was measured by indicators focusing on increased employment, income, investment and business start-up. So, the points made in the previous section (6.5.1) apply in response to this question too. The only additional point that is apparent is that it would be useful to monitor the resilience and success of businesses supported by RESI from 2021 onwards.

6.5.3 How effective were the exit strategies, and approaches to phase out assistance provided by the project including contributing factors and constraints?

A substantial part of the project was devoted to building the capacity of municipal support structures with a view to them functioning on their own. Within this a special emphasis was placed on Prishtinë/Priština. There was no specific exit strategy in the original project document. Once it was clear that ADA would not be giving CARE any continuation funding earlier in 2019, the RESI team accelerated the exit planning process. One clear example was working with the Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština to organise for them to manage the 7th Call for Proposals (underway at the time of the evaluation). This is indeed a useful initiative. Ideally, exit planning could have been considered earlier in the project. For example, ownership of the grant process could have been gradually transferred to the municipalities before the 7th Call for Proposals in a way which maintained the quality control³².

6.5.4 How could the sustainability of Project outcomes and the potential for replication of the approach be further improved?

The sustainability of project outcomes is significantly dependent on factors outside the control of individual farmers and processors. Those consulted during the evaluation process highlighted the following constraints to sustainable rural development in project areas:

1. Lack of access to capital for MSMEs to invest
2. Lack of technology and expertise
3. Lack of organisation of producers
4. Poor extension services being provided by municipalities
5. Lack of expertise in marketing
6. Limited of cooperation amongst producers and processors
7. Access to, and knowledge of domestic markets (especially for those in remote rural areas)
8. Access to, and knowledge of export markets
9. Fluctuations in prices for raw materials due to seasonal fluctuations in primary production in Kosovo and internationally. It was specifically noted that collectors / aggregators are exposed to a high level of financial risk and there is no insurance / safety net scheme from the government
10. Limited water resources
11. Increasingly unpredictable weather / seasons and overall warming trend (coupled with lack of knowledge about agricultural practices that could be adopted in a warmer climate)
12. Environmental pollution in forest / wild areas important for organic production

³² This point was made by the RESI National Project Manager

It is important to reflect that points 1 to 8 in this list were somehow addressed by RESI, whilst points 9-12 were not. Given the extent to which points 9 to 12 appear to be impacting production and competitiveness in project areas, it is recommended that future efforts to replicate RESI-type projects consider these factors in their design.

It would also be useful to study the market system per value chain in more detail in designing future interventions³³. It is clear from RESI interventions that each sub-sector needs a different package of support and enabling environment.

6.5.5 How were capacities strengthened at the individual and organizational level (including contributing factors and constraints)?

Based on information gathered in this evaluation the most important capacity strengthening has taken place through participative, practical and immersive processes such as:

- Study visits
- Marketing fairs
- Training held in field sites with practical demonstration
- Teamwork and joint review processes, especially joint monitoring visits between RESI staff and municipal officials.

.....

Direct field training has been very successful. We had earlier trainings from other organizations in the form of lectures that were not helpful³⁴

.....

These experiences appear to have been memorable for participants, and examples were given of the learning from these experiences being quickly applied.

.....

For me the fair was most impactful because we could advertise our products. The fair helped us develop our business. At fairs I was introduced to new purchasers. I had no problems selling my tomatoes directly to restaurants from my house. Study visits were also very helpful to give us a different vision of what and how we can produce³⁵

.....

Lastly, it is important to highlight that when interviewees were asked where they got their specialist information on production and processing techniques, the first response was generally the internet. It is very important that (i) RESI has supported an innovation – the Fermeri App, for virtual extension services – which needs monitoring and

³³ Using tools such as the Participatory Market System Development (PMSD) Roadmap - <https://beamexchange.org/market-systems/what-market-system/mapping-system/>

³⁴ Taken from interview with grant recipient

³⁵ Taken from focus group discussion with grant recipients in Kamenicë/a, 25/10/19

may offer some important learning, and (ii) that future product need to consider how the internet can be used effectively.

6.5.6 Institutional sustainability of its actions, especially sustainability of capacity development undertaken?

The capacity development has been conducted in a professional and highly consultative manner. It is likely that institutional sustainability will be highest in Prishtinë/Priština and lowest in Novo Brdo/Novobërdë for the same reasons given in section 6.4.9.

6.6 VALIDATION OF FINDINGS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The evaluation findings were summarised at the lessons learned workshop on 4th November 2019 to give participants the chance to comment on the findings, and to challenge them if necessary. A PowerPoint presentation was delivered, along with a two-page summary document in English, Albanian and Serbian. Participants at the workshop agreed the summarised findings to be fair and representative of their experience of the RESI project. These validated findings are summarized in section 7 below.

7. Conclusions on evaluation findings³⁶

Was RESI **relevant**?

- Grant recipients were unanimous. This project was, and still is, highly relevant to them. The project identified a clear target group that would otherwise not be able to access capital.
- RESI was and is highly relevant to municipalities as evidenced by Prishtinë/Priština Municipality investing funds and time in the project, and planning to continue this in 2020 and beyond.

Was RESI **effective**?

- RESI has delivered its **outputs** which is a massive achievement in such a short 3 year period. The project met or exceeded each of its targets as per the output indicators.
- In terms of **outcomes**, specific targets were not set but increased income and job creation has occurred and can be linked to RESI. Challenges in precise measurement (before/after) due to the baseline info, farmers' record keeping practices and difficulty in attribution (RESI vs other inputs)
- The **RESI team** was applauded by all for their reliability, problem solving and tireless hard work. Many farmers and processors said very clearly that RESI is the best project they have experienced.
- The RESI team has maintained a very high level of communication with beneficiaries since the start of the project. Monitoring visits are regular and systematic.
- **Capacity building of municipalities** has been effective, but tended to focus on Prishtinë/Priština (as per the agreed logframe). Having the RESI team based in the municipality enhanced this. RESI could have multiplied impact on Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Ranil(l)ug and Kamenicë/a municipalities if they had seconded staff.
- **Young professionals** substantially bolstered the capacity of RESI team and municipality. This has enabled the RESI project to be more dynamic in responding quickly to requests from the field and faster in disseminating information. Young professionals also bring specific technical skills to the rural development process (each holds BSc or MSc in relevant technical area). Young professionals have gained valuable work experience.
- Many informants reported **increased competitiveness**, mostly due to (i) increased production, (ii) speed to market and (ii) improved storage. There is some evidence of farmer/processor cooperation as well (on pricing and sharing equipment). "Competitiveness" is not clearly defined so is potentially a subjective term. The approach of RESI towards innovation and risk taking was not defined.

Was RESI **efficient**?

- Yes, highly efficient. In fact as compared to the previous (IRDS) project the RESI team scaled up all aspects of the project across 4 municipalities and dispersed twice as many grants in only 3 year (as compared with 5).
- Minor delays occurred requiring a 3 month extension, mostly due to unexpected challenges in acquiring planning permissions for grant projects. No financial wastage or issue has been identified.

What is the likely **impact** of RESI?

Initial projection against impact indicators shows:

- At least 200 Full Time Employment jobs have been created – extrapolated data suggests 194 new FT jobs
- 300 seasonal jobs have been created and/or strengthened – extrapolated data suggest 364 new seasonal jobs
- The increase of income by 30% of the project participants, grant recipients – extrapolated data suggests 53% increase

³⁶ For the sake of consistency this section contains the same content that was presented at the lessons learned workshop on 4th November 2019, and validated by participants

- Increase of income of project participants which are part of activities and not recipient of grants – many anecdotal examples
- Other impacts
- Some evidence of youth migration from rural areas being minimised due to RESI
- Some evidence of changing impacts towards women (business owners and family income earners) due to RESI
- Investment in new businesses
- Grant modality and beneficiary contribution has countered dependency on aid and social assistance programs in some cases

Will RESI be sustainable?

- Overall signs are good, but it is too soon to assess. The project design squeezed a large amount of activities into only 3 years. Many activities are still underway and a further call for proposals (7) still pending. This limits the degree to which the evaluation can give evidence on sustainability.
- Young professionals are pending municipality hiring decisions. Bridging may be necessary from another NGO.
- Sustainability is highly dependent on continued provision of information, advice and encouragement to farmers and producers. Municipalities are central to success. Further NGO projects can support if well designed. Attention needs to be paid to enabling environment for agriculture – associations and cooperatives, support to access markets, water resources, environmental management.

8. Lessons Learned

8.1 OBSERVATIONS FROM THE EVALUATION TEAM

Who gets a grant and why?

The targeting of RESI grants was highly inclusive and a lot of effort was put into encouraging all groups to participate. The grants were generally given to very small-scale farmers with the intention of getting them to grow their business to the level where they could access subsidies. This means that RESI generally applied a pro-poor approach. However, the poorest farmers may have been excluded due to the financing contribution required and the requirement to set-up a business. On the other hand, the financing contribution does seem effective in moving farmers away from a “handouts” mentality which has created a negative impact or dependency over the years in Kosovo.

Sub-sector selection

This was a bottom-up process, partially informed by the baseline assessment. It should be noted that respondents mentioned that sub-sectors were generally identified by word of mouth amongst farmers and processors rather than based on concrete info or regional / national development plans. There is a risk that there is limited input from agriculture experts and economists in selection of sub-sectors.

Moving up the value chain

There has been some experimentation and innovation in RESI in terms of investing upstream in the value chain. However, value chain development was not the purpose of RESI and other projects have gone further in this regard (e.g. supporting farmers to find buyers in the Helvatas project). It is critical to learn from RESI and other projects for future programs. Approaches in RESI such as study visits, trade fairs, training on marketing and support to cooperatives got positive feedback. The virtual extension service app (“Fermeri”) is innovative but not yet extensively tested or operating at scale.

Institutions

The MDC-support approach from IRDS was applied to Prishtinë/Priština Municipality and appears to have potential for sustainability. All agree the YPP is a great start but there are problems in the municipalities’ ability to employ immediately. The most impactful capacity strengthening for municipalities might be the joint monitoring visits. The RESI team adapted well to build the IMS for Prishtinë/Priština, but this probably needs more time & testing. At the national level there are clear gaps in the ability of the Ministry of Agriculture to provide high quality training and market info to Municipalities.

Past Replication

Whilst some see RESI as a replication of IRDS a number of small but important changes were made to the design. What was the same - The implementing team in CARE was broadly the same, the same system for grants was used, MDC approach was adopted and the YPP also adopted. What was different - RESI was much broader than IRDS (4 municipalities rather than one); RESI had a very heavy transaction workload 176 grants vs 84 grants; RESI grants tended to be smaller; RESI was much shorter in duration; IRDS had the scope to give 2 successive grants to beneficiaries; IRDS had to develop tools from scratch; Use of public funds in RESI; RESI had specific objectives on gender / marginalised groups. **RESI went for breadth, IRDS went for depth.**

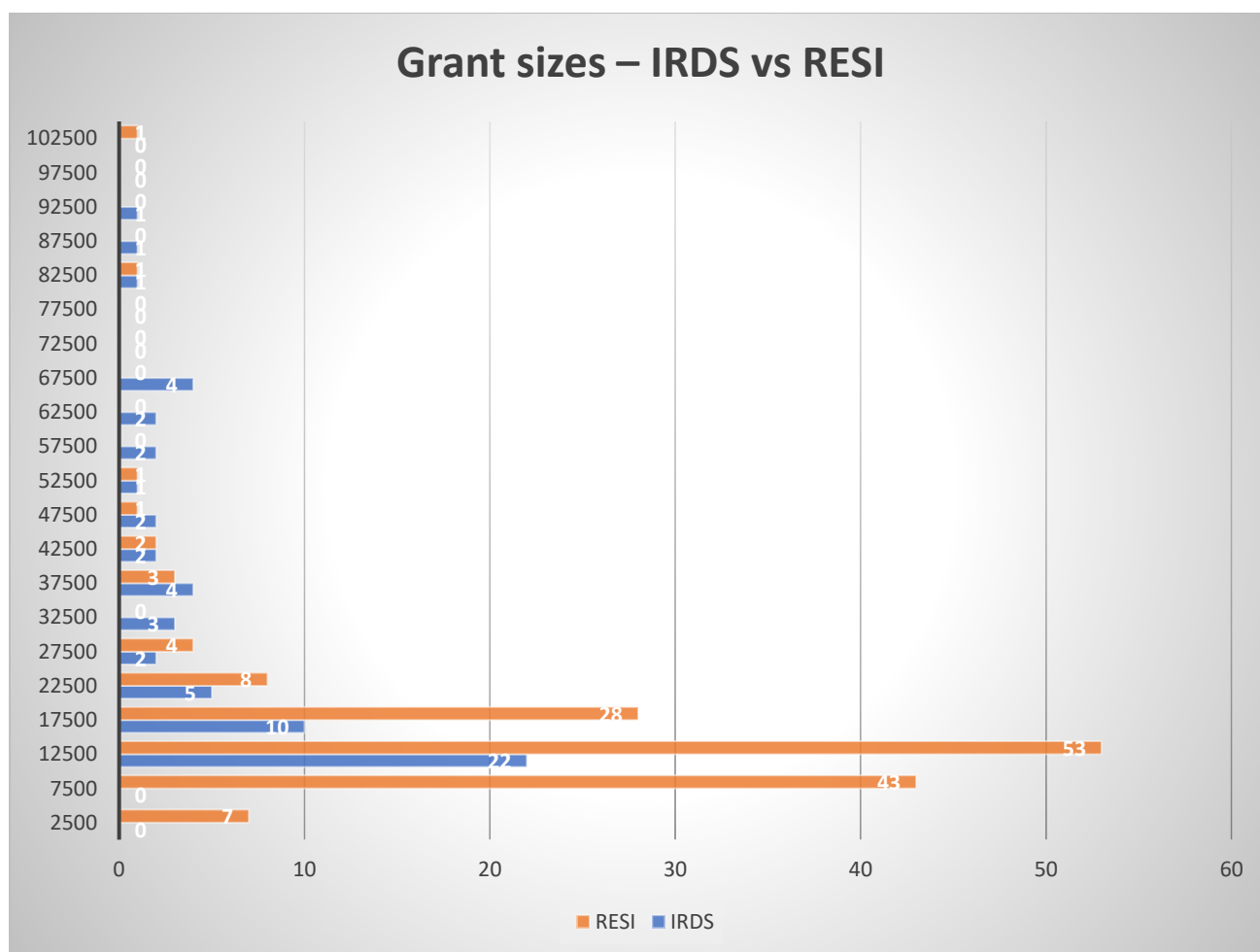


Chart shows a comparison of IRDS and RESI in terms of size / frequency of grants given (y-axis shows grant value in euros in €5k segments, x-axis shows number of grants given in RESI and IRDS)

Moving towards sustainable and inclusive rural economic development

Based on comments from RESI beneficiaries there are a number of factors important in reaching this goal that RESI did not explicitly consider:

- Climate crisis – Kosovo is increasingly facing high temperatures and increasingly unreliable rain / snowfall. This is already impacting agricultural yields and Kosovo risks lagging behind in terms of water conservation and crop varieties that might be suitable for the future
- Deforestation – illegal logging will increasingly impact agriculture and is likely to make landslides and flood disasters more common
- Water resource management – water efficiency of agricultural and processing techniques needs to be looked at carefully, water storage and river basin management need investment. Drilling boreholes needs careful scrutiny
- Youth exodus – young people in rural areas are often not motivated to work in agriculture or to stay in Kosovo.

8.2 LESSONS LEARNED BY KEY STAKEHOLDERS

During the lessons learned workshop the following lessons were prioritized by participants:

Priority Lessons learned for municipality officials

- The establishment of new businesses led to self-employment, fulltime employment and seasonal employment. Each business therefore has a wider impact on the surrounding village or community.
- The RESI grant application process was straightforward and applicants were able to complete the whole form themselves. This is in contrast to other grant schemes – in some of these applicants have to pay others to complete grant applications on their behalf.
- The targeting of grants was strong and achieved the goal in terms of reaching smallholders and women. Equally, larger businesses were not excluded from applying.
- The monitoring of the project and grants was strong and all grant recipients were visited frequently by the RESI team and municipalities. The grant application process was very transparent and involved review by foreign experts and municipalities. The review of application on-site was very useful to help discuss proposed activities with applicants. All of this helped minimize the chance of failure
- Study visits and training help ensure constant engagement with farmers and producers. This engagement was further strengthened by the young professionals who spent time in the municipalities and would often be the first to respond to incoming queries.
- Cooperation and coordination between the RESI project team, municipalities, young professionals and grant recipients was very good
- Cooperation and communication between the four municipalities has helped each of them share ideas and develop further

Priority Lessons learned for the RESI team

- Cooperation with municipalities was effective but could have been even better if RESI project staff are seconded or posted in the municipality office like in Prishtinë/Priština
- There was no exit strategy at the start. The role of municipalities in the evaluation of grant applications could have been increased sooner in the project (instead of at CFP#7)
- In comparison with other donors, the RESI project had simpler application procedures. A looser set of criteria were applied for socially-economically vulnerable groups. However, there was a chance to differentiate more the criteria for medium sized agri-based enterprises and smallholder farmers

8.3 WHAT IS THE SCOPE FOR REPLICATION?

8.3.1 Identify the elements, strategies, and interventions, which can be replicated.

The grant methodology

The grant process was very robust with several layers of compliance and quality control. There can be no doubt that RESI was strong in terms of preventing corruption, fraud and wastage. The beneficiaries commended the approach compared to other grant programs they have experienced. However the transaction costs are high. The key question is how to take the key ingredients of RESI grants and develop a program that municipalities can administer with similar levels of trust and quality control

The capacity development approaches used

Feedback from participants frequently praises the approaches taken the capacity development. All training given tended to take a very practical focus with field work and practical demonstration techniques being used where possible. Study visits (in Kosovo, Albania and Austria) were also highly commended as they gave participants practical new ideas that they could try in their home area. It is very important that the capacity development materials be captured and shared for use in future projects.

The Information Management System (IMS)

The RESI project developed an IMS that was successfully developed with the Prishtinë/Priština Municipality (Agriculture Department) and subsequently introduced in the other municipalities. This has helped municipalities manage key information relating to farmer and producers much better. It was suggested that this system can be easily rolled out to other municipalities and other government service areas.

The Young Professionals Programme

This has been effective in a number of ways for both municipalities and young professionals themselves. Whilst the potential for future replication is apparent there is an outstanding issue about sustainability. It remains to be seen whether municipalities will be able to find a way to recruit young professionals. This needs close monitoring in the coming year in order to evaluate how future programs can tackle the human resource gaps in local government.

8.3.2 Consider how impacts for this type of projects can be maximized (what needs to be improved) in scaling up this project activity.

During the lessons learned workshop this topic was discussed with a group of national-level stakeholders³⁷. The following future emphasis was proposed:

- The capacities of the municipality support structures need further investment and upgrading. This was also noted in the parallel ADA-funded projects, InterDev and SUSI. The focus should be on the advisory and extension services.
- RESI did not focus on one particular sub-sector. It is concluded that a project focusing on only 2 or 3 sub-sectors per municipality would make sense in terms of giving increased focus and supporting a range of interventions throughout the value chain.

³⁷ This was a group comprising USAID, ADA and Caritas representatives

- Formalisation of businesses is important. It is also important to further any develop businesses already established. It might be possible in future to require higher-level standards for existing businesses to receive further funding. For example, book-keeping practices and contracting approaches.
- There needs to be more quality control on goods imported into Kosovo. The quality of imported agricultural inputs such as pesticides, fertilisers and seeds appears to be an issue. Additionally, there are imports of fresh fruit and vegetables being reported that are being over-treated with pesticides and other pathogens.

In the future I would like RESI to help capacity building, study visits and developing standards in food production. Development of bio producers needs specific support as it needs to consider the chain from cultivator to producer. It is best to discourage competition and encourage cooperation - sharing facilities and agreeing pricing. We are hungry for this 20 years after the war³⁸

8.3.3 Stakeholder participation in the management/implementation of the project, the level of ownership, and issues of absorption capacity.

This is already covered above and no further comment is necessary.

8.3.4 Consider where the potential exists for replication, given the requisite conditions for success, as identified by this evaluation.

The grant system is robust and well tested. It can easily be replicated in other locations in Kosovo. The training programs and study visits can also be replicated relatively easily. The institutional development approach can be replicated but a lot of the most important knowledge and learning will be held by RESI staff and consultants. It would be harder to replicate without drawing on their experience.

8.3.5 Identify the resource requirements for replication.

The RESI budget offers a reasonable model with the exception that the core RESI team was probably under-resourced in terms of handling this volume of grants. The timescale of the project was short for this type of work and if extended to five years there would be more opportunity to demonstrate impact and sustainability within the project cycle.

³⁸ Taken from a raspberry farmer who attended the Prishtinë/Priština focus group on 25/10/19

9. Recommendations

This section focuses on practical next steps that should be taken to increase the prospect of impact and sustainability from RESI after it closes on 31st December 2019.

Recommended next step	By whom	By when
<u>Further monitoring of RESI</u> – conduct a short impact & sustainability assessment with municipalities and grant recipients to consider the longer-term effects of RESI. It would be important to know how many businesses are still open and profit / employment statistics.	ADA	2021
<u>Capture capacity development materials</u> – a solution should be explored to ensure that training and other capacity development materials are accessible to other rural development actors electronically. This might be the national ministry or a higher education partner in Kosovo. Alternatively one of the four project municipalities might volunteer to host the materials on behalf of all.	ADA and RESI	Dec 2019
<u>Information Management System (IMS)</u> – future rural development projects should make use of and further develop the IMS rolled out in the four RESI municipalities, rather than develop a new / different system. Further institutionalisation of such a system should also be explored with the MAFRD	ADA and Caritas	2020
<u>Young professionals</u> – determine which organisation and / or partner might be best placed to follow up with municipalities on the young professionals. This organisation should also maintain contact with the young professionals themselves to track their next steps and provide them with info about relevant career opportunities.	ADA	Dec 2019
<u>Fermeri</u> – maintain contact with Prishtinë/Priština Consulting Group ³⁹ to learn the extent to which userbase has grown, future plans for the app, and what can be learned about technological solutions for provision of information / services to rural economic actors in the future.	Caritas	Mid-2020

³⁹ Contact Gelb Shehu, COO at Prishtinë/Priština Consulting Group, www.pcg-ks.com

10. List of Annexes

- 1 Evaluation terms of reference
- 2 Project Logframe
- 3 List of project documents analysed in evaluation
- 4 List of people consulted by the evaluation team
- 5 Lessons learned workshop agenda
- 6 PowerPoint Presentation of key findings, 4th November 2019
- 7 IRDS-RESI grant comparison spreadsheet
- 8 Analysis of grant impact spreadsheet
- 9 Matrix of evaluation questions vs method