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2021 | Summary of the Evaluation Report

Impact assessment
“Emergency initiative in favour of refugees,
migrants and vulnerable local populations”

Senegal-Mali-Guinea-Guinea Bissau



AID 10733

This independent evaluation report has been commissioned by Office III of the General Directorate for Development Cooperation - Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The company STEM-VCR was designated to carry out the evaluation by means of a public award procedure pursuant to art 36 of the Italian Public Procurement Code.

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The opinions expressed herein represent the views of the evaluators, and are not necessarily shared by the commissioning body.

The projects evaluated in this report have been implemented by the following NGOs:

1. CISV – Comunità Impegno Servizio Volontariato
2. Terra Nuova
3. VIS – Volontariato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo
4. Green Cross Italia
5. Fondazione ACRA
6. LVIA – Associazione Internazionale Volontari Laici
7. ENGIM – Ente Nazionale Giuseppini del Murialdo

The cover image represents the dehulling machines at Bafata – Guinea Bissau. Progetto CISV 10733/1 (photograph by A. Fonseca).

The images on the back cover represent: top left, the Dam at Ronkh – Senegal. Progetto CISV 10733/1 (photograph by B. Doucouré); Above right, the Cooperative Bontche at Bissau – Guinea Bissau. Progetto Engim 10733/7 (photograph by A. Fonseca); Photo below, Beneficiaries of the projects to improve the vegetable gardens in Diaobé –Senegal). Progetto ONG ACRA 107333/5 (photograph by M. Yade)

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AICS	Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development
EIG	Economic Interest Group
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
INCA	National Confederal Institute of Assistance
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISRA	Senegalese National Research Institute
MAECI	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
MAER	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Equipment
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAIS	Italy-Senegal Agricultural Programme
PAPSEN	Programme of Support to the National Programme of Agricultural Investment in Senegal
RDA	Regional Development Agency

1. Description of the initiative evaluated

Emergency initiative in favour of refugees, migrants and vulnerable local populations in Senegal, Mali, Guinea and Guinea Bissau (AID 10733) aims to facilitate the improvement of living conditions for populations in areas of high migration potential and for migrants, displaced persons and refugees, in order to **combat the phenomenon of irregular migration**. The programme is part of the framework of migration management policies from a **regional and cross-border perspective** in West Africa.

The initiative takes the form of **seven projects**, implemented through a combination of Italian NGOs (CISV, TERRA NUOVA, VIS, GCI, ACRA, LVIA, ENGIM) and their Italian and local partners, characterised by **slightly different objectives and actions**, and therefore by different logical frameworks, but sharing a **common theory of change**.

The foundation of this theory is the perception of a phenomenon of irregular migration towards Italy and Europe, which originates in some regions of the four countries considered. This phenomenon appears to be strongly correlated with two sets of factors: one of a **cognitive** nature, i.e. the spread of false narratives or myths about migration to Europe, based on a lack of objective knowledge about the risks and actual conditions of the migration process; the other of a **factual** nature, i.e. a lack of employment opportunities at local level, especially in rural areas. Through the projects, the initiative aims to counteract these causal factors by means of communication and education and by action to boost economic and employment prospects. According to this rationale, these actions should lead to a **reduction of the causal factors influencing migration, and thus to a reduction in the migratory flows themselves**.

The **specific objective of the initiative** is to help **mitigate the main causes of irregular migration** through specific local development action to create employment, provide basic services and protect the most vulnerable groups, and the implementation of information campaigns aimed at combating irregular migration.

Strategically, the programme is intended to help **mitigate the root causes of migration** in all their complexity, particularly for the benefit of young people and women, and to provide support for returning migrants in their countries of origin.

Through the individual projects, the programme as a whole effectively consists of **three main macro areas of intervention**:

- **rural development**, i.e. interventions geared to the introduction of innovative agricultural systems, water saving, improvement of agro-ecological practices, supply of seeds and equipment, training in the processing and marketing of crops, support for cooperatives etc...
- support for **job creation**, especially for young people and women, through the creation of and/or support for micro enterprises, business incubators, vocational training etc...
- **protection and improvement of living conditions for returning migrants**, support for potential returnees living in Italy (through diaspora associations) and communication campaigns on the risks of irregular migration, aimed at combating the exodus of young people.

2. Objective of the evaluation

2.1 Type, objective, and purpose of the evaluation

The general aim of this evaluation is to **verify the impact of the initiative as a whole, beginning with an analysis of the individual actions of the projects that compose it.** This report seeks, therefore, to analyse what economic, social, environmental and political effects the initiatives have produced in the medium term, and what transformation processes have been initiated in the areas involved.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to: i) **ascertain the validity of entrusting specific actions to NGOs;** ii) highlight **good practices** to be replicated in the area of communication; iii) verify whether, in terms of **impact**, it was useful to divide the contribution between several countries; iv) identify **good practices to be replicated in the area of cross-border projects;** v) analyse the **procedural aspects of the initiative**, highlighting any critical issues and virtuous processes.

The evaluation is based on the principles of **usefulness, concreteness and reliability.** It was therefore designed to produce useful information and recommendations for the client and key stakeholders.

2.2 Some data on the consultation of direct sources

Overall, **170 stakeholders** of different kinds and involved in various ways were **consulted.** **64%** of the stakeholders involved in the evaluation process fall into the category of **beneficiaries.**

Actors involved in the evaluation process							
Types of actors	In presence					Remotely	Total
	Senegal	Mali	Guinea	G. Bissau	Italy	Italy	
Heads of the implementing NGOs	5	4	1	3	3	12	28
Local Authorities/Technical services	12	1	-	1	-	-	14
AICS	4	-	-	-	-	2	6
MAECI					1	3	4
Diplomatic missions	2	-	-	-	-		2
International organisations (UE, OIM)	4	-	1	1	-	-	6
Beneficiaries	52	33	20	3	-	-	108
Resource persons	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
GLOBAL TOTAL	80	38	22	8	4	18	170

Thanks to their helpful attitude - evidenced by meetings with **28 representatives of the NGOs** - it was possible to directly investigate many aspects of the implementation of the seven projects.

Representatives of the implementing NGOs met							
Implementing NGOs	In presence					Remotely	Total
	Senegal	Mali	Guinea	G. Bissau	Italy		
ACCRA/Mani Tese	1	-	-	1	-	3	5
CISV	2	-	1	-	-	1	4
ENGIM	-	1	-	1	-	1	3
GCI	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
LVIA	1	-	-	1	-	2	4
TERRANUOVA		3	-	-	-	2	5
VIS	1	-	-	-	3	-	4
Total per Country	5	4	1	3	3	12	28

3. Results of the evaluation

3.1 Relevance

Analysis on the basis of relevance highlighted **paradoxical results**: while in general the seven projects obtained positive or very positive outcomes, the same cannot be said for the initiative as a whole which, in terms of relevance, showed serious shortcomings.

More specifically, the relevance of the seven projects **appears to be on average good**, with some projects showing excellent or outstanding performance (such as the projects of the NGOs CISV, Terra Nuova and VIS) and other projects for which the relevance, though lower, appears sufficient or good (projects of the NGOs ACRA, ENGIM and LVIA). Only one project - that of the NGO GCI - appears highly inadequate.

Positive aspects concern, in general, the link between the dismantling of the migration myth and communication aimed at young people; the production of knowledge, by means of research and socio-anthropological surveys, on the migration phenomenon in the areas where the projects operated; the full involvement of local, traditional and religious authorities; partnerships, including for service provision, with local institutions and organisations; the use of business incubators and mentors to support the creation or development of micro-enterprises; the adoption of cogent strategies to create alternatives for potential migrants; training directly linked to local market and private sector demand.

Among the less positive aspects in terms of relevance, the following can be cited: the introduction of production and marketing systems not particularly suited to the context, in particular poultry farming; underestimation of the maintenance and repair needs of machinery; underestimation of the dynamics of the market and/or private sector at local level; adoption of selection criteria for beneficiaries that are not defined in detail; a poor conception of agroecology in the name of which real "technological revolutions" were proposed, rather than gradual solutions more suited to a process of "technological transition".

Almost all the projects (except that of the NGO VIS) show shortcomings at the level of their logical frameworks, which are often vitiated by a circular logic where the result coincides with the activities, the latter with the indicators and so on. In general, the indicators are not measurable and refer only to the implementation of the activity.

Regarding the initiative as a whole, its relevance is insufficient, mainly due to the adoption of procedures, rationales and mechanisms typical of emergency interventions to address issues - such as migration - that are **structural** in nature and deeply rooted in the society and culture of West African populations. This approach imposed **timescales incompatible** with the implementation of activities which, with the exception of communication, require time to have **an appreciable impact in terms of changing the underlying conditions that favour migration**. Therefore, despite defining itself as a "pilot scheme" or "laboratory" to trial new ways of combating the phenomenon of migration, in particular illegal migration, the initiative was actually of little relevance, precisely because in reality action to change the drivers of illegal migration is linked to logical, semantic and temporal aspects of local development. In fact, the seven NGOs implemented real local development interventions, although the initiative arose in the context of an emergency.

In this sense, it is useful to note that the **problems of relevance affecting the initiative as a whole caused a kind of fracture at the level of individual projects between the issue of migration and that of development**. In fact, from the information collected - from both documentary analysis and interviews with live sources - a separation can be detected, more or less clear depending on the case, between **communication and awareness-raising actions and local development actions**. In fact,

although in the former case the issue of irregular migration is addressed directly and very often targets an audience of tens of thousands, in the latter, concrete local development action geared to changing the underlying conditions that contribute to irregular migration towards Europe is necessarily directed at a very small number of beneficiaries, due to the extremely limited economic and time resources available. Ultimately, this concrete action for social and economic development is almost never connected with the phenomenon of migration. In other words, due to the issues of relevance of the initiative as a whole, each of the seven projects - with the exception of that of the NGO LVIA, which is solely concerned with returning migrants - has two **semantic registers that are not necessarily linked: the issue of irregular migration, addressed through communication, and action for local development**. However, **both registers used by the seven NGOs refer to semantic universes linked to the issue of migration as a structural phenomenon which has nothing to do with the scope of the emergency**.

Moreover, the very NGOs entrusted with the seven projects appear to distance themselves from the emergency approach, not only in comments in their final reports about the duration of the actions and the impossibility of achieving in a very limited time even minimal results regarding the phenomenon of irregular migration, but also, and above all, about **the nature and complexity** of this phenomenon.

It is therefore possible to state that, in terms of **the relevance of the initiative as a whole, the objectives do not seem to be appropriate to the breadth and scope of the phenomenon, which demands far more substantial resources and strategies**, precisely because issues related to migration, in addition to being enormously complex, concern the deepest layers of social and cultural organisation. In light of these reflections, the judgment on the relevance of the initiative as a whole is negatively affected by the approach and instruments used, which are more typical of emergency interventions, while it would have been much more appropriate to adopt paradigms and operating methods typical of development interventions.

In reality, the **coexistence of diametrically opposed rationales - those of the initiative as a whole, which follow the emergency paradigm, and those of the seven projects, whose rationale is typically geared towards the development paradigm**, risks creating a paradoxical situation in terms of objectives and outcomes overall. In fact, partly due to administrative procedures and rules, the initiative as a whole tends to prioritise the execution of individual actions, which in this sense constitute success or failure for the projects, according to a logic that is therefore short term only. Conversely, the seven NGOs - precisely because they are aware of the complexity and structural nature of migration - tend to consider processes that can only be understood and managed in a medium or long term timeframe.

In this context, therefore, if the purpose of the initiative was to **trial** a number of actions in view of more structural medium or long-term interventions, then its relevance could also be judged more positively, since it is vitally important to identify the most appropriate way to deal with an issue as complex as irregular migration. However, precisely because of the intrinsic characteristics of the initiative, i.e. its extremely limited timeframe, we can state that many actions carried out - in some cases involving innovative practices - probably contributed or have the potential to contribute to local development processes, but we have little idea about the extent to which such actions have reduced irregular migration and facilitated return migration.

Finally, regarding communication and awareness-raising, the relevance of the initiative appears to be high, both in terms of the communication channels chosen and of the content, which takes the form of a genuine "counter-narrative" on the risks of irregular migration. Also regarding return migration, the relevance of communication and awareness-raising actions appears fairly high, due particularly to the involvement of migrants' associations in Italy, while for refugees the project's relevance appears much lower.

3.2 Coherence

The coherence of the projects is on average very high for issues related to local development, but less high for migration issues. For the initiative as a whole, coherence is low.

Specifically, four of the seven projects are characterised by an excellent or very good level of coherence (the projects run by the NGOs CISV, ENGIM, Terra Nuova and VIS), while two projects have an average level of coherence (ACRA and LVIA). The GCI project is also seriously lacking in coherence.

Positive aspects worth mentioning are the involvement of local institutions and local partners to achieve greater alignment with national and local policies; the involvement of supranational organisations and bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies on the issue of local development and, to a lesser extent, migration; the involvement of organisations from manufacturing and the private sector and the signing of formal agreements with these stakeholders for a better relationship between supply and demand in the labour market.

Less positive aspects include the absence of relationships with state and local authorities, or with regional development agencies (limited to one project); and the use of farming practices (herbicides and pesticides) that contradict the aims of the project (limited to one project).

Regarding the coherence of the initiative as a whole, it does not appear to be connected to other Italian Cooperation interventions in the countries concerned, or rather there are no clear links with programmes that are already under way in the area. In particular, in Senegal, during the period of implementation (late 2016 and most of 2017), two rural development programmes - PAPSEN and PAIS - were ongoing in several of the regions covered by the initiative. In this sense, not only is there no contact between these programmes and the initiative, but any kind of relationship with Senegalese institutions, such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Equipment (MAER) and the ISRA, an important agricultural research institute, seems to be lacking. If connections had been sought between the various initiatives of Italian Cooperation, the seven projects could probably have limited some of the technical issues, such as the introduction of new technologies (a typical example is problems emerging with the introduction of new crops or the adoption of new farming techniques, especially in vegetable, rice and fruit growing, as well as poultry farming in general). Lastly, it should be pointed out that there are no particular relations between AICS and governmental institutions in the countries concerned on the issue of migration. The initiative as a whole, therefore, also suffered from a lack of structured relationships with the governments of the four countries. However, it should be noted that the Italian NGOs involved in the initiative, most of which have been present for some time in their respective areas, have established on average very good relations with local institutions.

Furthermore, there are no relations, synergy or complementarity with the projects of other cooperation agencies, except occasionally at individual project level. And this is in spite of the presence in the area of a number of bilateral and multilateral cooperation operators active in migration and local development issues. The IOM would have been a powerful interlocutor among such agencies, but unfortunately, even where its involvement was planned - such as in Mali - the failure to activate it led to the cancellation of some activities related to assistance for Senegalese migrants in transit in the northern regions of Mopti and, above all, Gao. However, Italian Cooperation's participation in the meetings of the emergency/migration cluster coordinated by the Swiss Embassy should be positively reported.

In addition, if the initiative was intended, as stated, to be a laboratory for trialling new ways of social and economic integration to mitigate the phenomenon of irregular migration, then it would have been **appropriate to introduce activities to capitalise** on the experience, in order to ascertain what could feasibly replicated and what should be avoided in the future. Nevertheless the NGO reports -

particularly the final reports - were extremely clear, both about successful actions and problems encountered. Greater emphasis on capitalisation could have been expressed at the meeting between AICS and the NGOs at the conclusion of the initiative.

In short, there **was a lack of reflection on the results of an initiative intended as a laboratory and a trailblazer**, since it was the first AICS emergency initiative on the issue of migration in the area. Such a reflection, which should have had a strategic purpose for future interventions, is naturally excluded from any analysis geared to evaluation. The latter has another function that cannot concern itself with reflection on methods and strategies, except for possible recommendations. Capitalising on the experience would, moreover, have allowed for improved targeting in the formulation of the other two emergency migration programmes that have followed between 2018 and the present. In other words, **the initiative was not coherent with itself**, because to present itself as an experiential laboratory and then fail to encourage reflection or capitalisation of the experiments conducted is to deny its own function.

In this framework, opportunities for direct comparison between the NGOs implementing the projects - with the exception, naturally, of the consolidated relationships between several of them due to their longstanding presence in the four countries - could have been more frequent and more focused on capitalisation. In fact, according to the evaluation analysis, the instigators of the initiative convened a meeting in February 2017 that covered procedural and administrative aspects and issues related to indicators, particularly gender. It would actually have been appropriate for the seven NGOs to meet under the umbrella of the initiative to illustrate how each one had interpreted its action, particularly on the issue of irregular migration and the local development conditions that might affect the phenomenon. It would have been a matter not of standardising actions but of identifying common traits, albeit with differences in the specific methods and experience of the NGOs and the areas in which they operated. Moreover, in Mali and Guinea Bissau, and to some extent Senegal, many of the actions of the seven projects were implemented in the same local area or region (as in the case of Gabù in Guinea Bissau). A second AICS-sponsored meeting with the implementing NGOs was held in late 2017 at the conclusion of the initiative, but although this meeting was more structured than the previous one, it did not include any specific capitalisation exercises.

The outcome of these reflections could have lessened the problem of defining and promoting Italian Cooperation intervention strategies to support refugees, migrants and vulnerable populations in a framework of emergency. In fact, given that the seven projects deliberately adopted a development framework, while rejecting that of emergency, it would at least have been possible to attempt to correct the course for subsequent cooperation initiatives.

Unfortunately, a lack of reflection and comparison prevented capitalisation of the experience gained from the seven projects which, despite difficulties due to the emergency framework adopted by the initiative, achieved on average very interesting and undoubtedly positive results.

3.3 Efficiency

Analysis of the seven projects' efficiency revealed a very good average level, with three projects showing very good or excellent (the projects of the NGOs CISV, LVIA and, above all, VIS); three projects with a good level (the NGOs ACRA, ENGIM and Terra Nuova) and one project that was seriously inadequate (GCI).

Positive aspects include full utilisation of the resources made available; adherence to the timeframe for actions; economies that enabled the implementation of additional activities that were not initially envisaged; the use of regular monitoring activities and field visits, as well as coordination meetings

between project partners; excellent command of the logical framework; and the completeness of activity reports.

Negative aspects include failure to adhere to the timeframe; failure to comply with administrative and accounting procedures; the use of local partners who lacked the skills required for the job.

While on average, the efficiency of the seven projects can be considered good (with points of excellence, as in the case of VIS, but also with extremely problematic cases such as GCI), the efficiency of the initiative as a whole is less positive, for at least four reasons: shortcomings in the logical framework of the projects; the lack of relevant indicators; the absence of information about the monitoring of actions; the overlap between the agricultural season and project activities.

With the exception of VIS, **the logical framework of the projects implementing the initiative show major problems.** Outcomes often coincide with activities, which in turn coincide with indicators, in a sort of circular logic that ultimately encourages a reductionist and mechanistic interpretation of the actual situation.

Without citing a particular project, an example can be given in the area of communication about the risks of migration, an essential tool common to all the actions of the initiative: in this case the outcome is expressed as "1000 young people in Region X are sensitised on the risks of irregular migration", while the activity is expressed as "sensitisation of 1000 young people in Area X on the risks of irregular migration" and, finally, the indicator is defined as "at least 1000 young people in Area X sensitised on the risks of irregular migration". Here, therefore, there is a complete match between outcome, activity and indicator.

According to the evaluation team, **the initiative as a whole was inefficient because it accepted logical framework for each project that were essentially inapplicable, and consequently provided no indication of project performance in relation to objectives, or of the outcomes of each action.** It would probably have been useful to carry out a joint exercise with the NGOs involved prior to signing the contracts, in order to establish truly useful logical framework for the initiative.

The second aspect is closely related to the first and concerns the **formulation and function of indicators.** In fact, almost all the indicators used for interim and final reports (both of the initiative as a whole and of the projects) refer to activities and, at best, to results. These are what is commonly referred to as outcome indicators, in which the approach is purely administrative, i.e. whether or not actions have been implemented.

In this context, therefore, the important thing is solely accounting compliance with expectations: in the case of training, the indicator often used by the projects is the number of participants on the course, as evidenced by the attendance register; it therefore matters little whether the participants learn anything, because what counts is their mere presence in the classroom. **What the indicators detect are therefore not processes of change initiated or societal changes, but only the accounting fact of the number of participants.** In this sense, therefore, the initiative as a whole is deficient in terms of the efficiency of the tools used to measure the achievement of objectives.

The third aspect, closely related to the previous two, concerns the core functions of the initiative as a whole from a **monitoring** perspective. In fact, given the importance of the issues addressed by the activities in the four countries, and particularly in view of the initiative's intended nature as a laboratory, it would have been useful to establish a monitoring system based on continuous exchange of experiences between the various projects, thus creating a virtuous circle of horizontal communication in order to share problems emerging and possible solutions. In fact, only highly efficient monitoring could have ensured valorisation of the laboratory nature of the initiative, and this did not occur.

Fourthly and lastly, it was not anticipated that the concluding phase of the initiative would coincide with the **agricultural season**. The overlap between the agricultural season, which in most areas of the four countries is very short, and the activities of the projects resulted in varying degrees of delay in the planned actions. Therefore, the decision to start the projects in December and conclude them in September the following year did not display an adequate level of efficiency.

3.4 Effectiveness

The analysis of effectiveness highlighted generally very good performance, with four projects achieving excellent or very good levels (those run by the NGOs CISV, ENGIM and VIS); two projects with average levels (ACRA and LVIA), while only one project was characterised by insufficient levels of effectiveness (GCI).

Positive aspects in terms of effectiveness include: the actions were carried out as planned and in some cases even exceeded; the use of a wide range of communication tools adapted to the local context; the technical content of agricultural activities was compatible with social and institutional aspects; the link with the private sector for marketing activities; tutoring for agricultural and livestock activities; the use of "relais" beneficiaries to multiply the effects of interventions; the involvement of primary and secondary schools in Italy and in the countries concerned on migration issues.

Negative aspects include: the problematic nature of poultry farming with high mortality rates; the very partial involvement of the diaspora; unclear criteria for selecting beneficiaries; the introduction of overly sophisticated agricultural technologies; the ideological conception of agroecology; the priority given to return migrants who are better off economically at the expense of those who lack resources.

With regard to the initiative as a whole, the criterion of effectiveness was positive from a "pilot initiative" or "laboratory initiative" perspective. Aspects with a high degree of effectiveness include: the focus on a better understanding of migration at territorial level; training activities directly linked to market demand or, more generally, to the context; addressing the land issue by ensuring access to land for those who are normally excluded from it; the involvement of local authorities and partnerships with local centres of expertise; the valorisation of micro enterprises, artisan businesses and self-employment; the involvement of the diaspora in Italy and its organisations; and, above all, the trialing of extremely innovative forms of communication and awareness-raising.

Among the less positive aspects, it is worth mentioning: inadequate relations (on the issue of migration) with national administrations in the four countries involved; the introduction of crops and cultivation (and livestock breeding) systems that are not suitable for some areas with extreme climates; a conception of agroecology based on ideological positions rather than on the reality of individual areas; the introduction of sophisticated technologies that did not take into account the actual management capacity of the beneficiary populations.

Undoubtedly, **communication activities managed both centrally and at individual project level were, on average, extremely effective in conveying messages about the risks of irregular migration**. The initiative's decision to carry out research in order to gain a greater understanding of migration in individual areas also testifies to its effectiveness.

Regarding other aspects, in particular the reduction of irregular migration by improving the general conditions in the countries, and also the social and economic integration of potential migrants, or the reintegration of returnees, **analysis can be conducted from two different perspectives**.

The first of these concerns the effectiveness of the initiative in mitigating the phenomenon of migration by altering the underlying conditions that encourage it. From this angle, partly due to

the scattered nature of the different projects, **the contribution of the initiative seems irrelevant in view of the magnitude of the phenomenon.** Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the time factor plays a key role, because it is utterly ineffective to approach a complex structural issue such as migration with an emergency framework and tools. In this sense, we could point to the contradiction in the fact that the initiative aims to address the issue of migration by acting on its causes, i.e. development problems, through the perspective of emergency, which ultimately negates the priorities of development issues.

The second perspective, however, is in clear contrast to this. In fact, if the initiative is considered solely as a pilot experience, or rather as a genuine "laboratory", then its effectiveness is undoubtedly far more positive. Naturally, from a methodological point of view, when looking at trialling innovative ways to approach development issues it is necessary to set aside both issues linked to the adoption of an emergency approach, and any calculation or estimate of the number of direct or indirect beneficiaries.

In fact, in terms of the "laboratory" approach, the important thing is to test the effectiveness of certain solutions for the social and economic integration of potential migrants. Following such reasoning, then, the effectiveness of the initiative is undoubtedly positive in many respects, but much less so in others.

Unfortunately, these positive experiences were often offset by negative aspects which undermined the effectiveness of the initiative as a whole.

3.5 Impact

An evaluation of the impact of the initiative's projects cannot exclude its consideration as a laboratory which trialled methods of intervening on the phenomenon of migration, beginning with the underlying conditions that encourage it. Indeed, an evaluation of the impact based on a decrease in irregular migration **would not be possible for three reasons:** i) because the initial situation of the individual territories is not known, and there are no reliable official statistics on this; ii) the very few official statistics available refer to the visible portion of migration and certainly not to the submerged - or irregular - part; iii) because the initiative was characterised by a high level of dispersion over different areas in the four countries.

Data on the impact must therefore be **relativised**, in the sense that it is not possible to make inferences by generalising a situation characteristic of an extremely micro level. In fact, the information gathered does not serve to detect either a decrease or an increase in migration in a given area, or a change in the general contextual conditions in terms of offering greater opportunities and therefore alternatives to departure. The analysis can only detect changes in the personal circumstances of the direct beneficiaries and those who, for example, were employed in the business initiatives that received support.

However, analysis of the impact can highlight the results of the experimentation implemented by the projects in terms of **new ways** to deal with an extremely complex phenomenon such as migration.

Generally speaking, the impact of the seven projects **varies enormously**, both in terms of the projects themselves and in relation to the three main categories whose impact was considered: economic, social and environmental.

Regarding **economic impact**, the seven projects produced **good results** on average, but it should be noted that some projects achieved excellent performance, others much less good and even, in one case, the outcome was decidedly negative.

Positive aspects for economic impact include actions to support business creation, the introduction of agroecology, the rationalisation of agricultural practices and the processing of agricultural products, small ruminant breeding, vocational training, the reintegration of returning migrants, and the link between market supply and demand.

Problematic aspects of economic impact include the introduction of technologies not appropriate for the context, activities related to poultry and fish farming, underestimation of the dynamics of the market and the private sector, and maintenance and repair of agricultural machinery and equipment.

In terms of **social impact**, performance is generally **very high** and concerns, in particular, the recognition of the status of women with a view to their greater centrality within their families and communities, the dynamization or re-dynamization of associations (such as EIGs, particularly of women), the social reintegration of returning migrants and individuals fleeing from conflict and insecurity (especially in the northern regions of Mali). Issues that emerged regarding social impact include the frustration of potential beneficiaries excluded from project support, and the conflict that arose due to the consequences of some particularly unsuccessful activities such as poultry farming.

With the exception of a few cases, **environmental impact** does not appear to have been a particular priority of the seven projects, and consequently performance in this regard is on **average low**. In fact, even activities that were particularly successful in terms of economic impact, such as support for collective enterprises for waste collection, do not place adequate attention on certain environmental issues, such as the absence of properly managed landfill sites for waste disposal. Other projects simply ignored the issue of environmental impact, and even went so far as to introduce chemical pesticides and herbicides in areas with a fragile ecological balance. Among the positive aspects, mention should undoubtedly be made of the introduction of agroecological practices which, moreover, was highly successful and had excellent impact among the beneficiaries.

Regarding illegal migration, the activities of the seven projects and the initiative **have not produced** - at least in an evident manner - a reduction in the phenomenon, partly due to the limited economic impact of some activities. However, even where activities had a good impact, cases of beneficiaries who, despite positive changes in their lives, have not given up the idea of emigrating, sometimes even by illegal means, are not at all rare.

The impact of the initiative as a whole is fairly uneven, partly due to the dispersion of activities over multiple areas in four different countries. With reference to the attenuation of migration and, in particular, irregular emigration, the initiative cannot be said to have produced effects except, indirectly, in some cases by altering the background conditions which favour migration.

In fact, although the impact of the seven projects is essentially good, in reality they are fairly limited situations whose effects have benefited a relatively small number of individuals compared to the size and breadth of the issues that characterise migration and local development. Obviously, the limits imposed by a modest budget and, above all, an extremely short duration, in addition to the geographical dispersion mentioned above, constitute a series of factors that have not helped the initiative to achieve a significant impact overall.

If, however, we change the perspective of observation and analyse the initiative as a "laboratory," then our reflection on impact can be enriched by other elements. In fact, the initiative as a whole was able to provide a wealth of valuable information about the impact of different modes of intervention. Very concretely, it can be stated that: (i) support for collectives generally has greater impact than support for individuals; (ii) the success of support for business creation depends on the extent to which the individual or collective already has an entrepreneurial spirit, both in terms of skills and predisposition to risk; (iii) support for improved farming practices generally has a good impact as long as there are no "technological revolutions" incompatible with the context; (iv) activities geared

to the introduction of agroecology generally have a good impact; (v) poultry farming raised many problems and its impact was ultimately very disappointing; vi) the introduction of sophisticated technologies had a fairly limited impact or no impact at all; vii) impact was reduced in several cases by a lack of efficient maintenance and repair systems; viii) the impact of communication activities was generally very high, and in some cases excellent; ix) the impact is directly related to the duration of interventions which cannot, under any circumstances, be addressed with emergency frameworks and methods.

In general, it can be said that the economic impact of the initiative was average, while the social impact was much greater. In terms of environmental impact, the initiative was characterised by a lack of attention to these issues, which at times jeopardized positive outcomes.

On the other hand, although it is difficult to evaluate the impact of communication activities, the initiative undoubtedly reached a fairly wide audience with highly effective messages about illegal migration.

Finally, with regard to the initiative as a whole, beyond the considerations previously outlined regarding the limited duration which inevitably affected the impact and even in the absence of precise data, it is possible to hypothesize the **major impact of the communication activities**, which stood out for the effectiveness of the tools used, the originality of the messages and the number and variety of the recipients reached.

In this sense, it can be assumed that in terms of communication, the impact of the initiative was very significant.

3.6 Sustainability

The evaluation of sustainability did not consider the subsequent twin initiatives (AID 11274 and AID 11659) because firstly, there was no automatic link between the 3 different initiatives, and secondly, because the stakeholders were largely different between initiatives. In fact, the seven NGOs that implemented projects as part of the initiative under evaluation never had any certainty that they would be able to rely on additional funding to continue - or, in some cases, complete - the activities implemented under initiative 10733.

Undoubtedly, partly thanks to the "laboratory" initiative, some of the seven NGOs were able to capitalise on their experience with new missions on the same issues as 10733. An illustration of this is the case of the NGO ACRA, which operated as part of the AICS project, started in June 2018 with a three-year duration, on the issue of job creation /migration, or the EU-funded project (AMIF) for diaspora awareness in Europe (Italy, Spain and Belgium), or the case of LVIA, which was able to obtain substantial funding from the EU for mangrove rice cultivation in the coastal region of Guinea Bissau.

Although these developments are indirectly linked to the 10733 initiative, the judgment on sustainability can only be based on an analysis of what has been achieved by the individual projects.

The analysis of sustainability showed on average high performance by the seven projects. Specifically, four projects achieved excellent or very good levels (the NGOs CISV, LVIA, Terra Nuova and VIS), two achieved sufficient levels (ACRA and ENGIM), while only one project achieved a poor level of sustainability (GCI).

In particular, in terms of the positive aspects of sustainability, the following should be noted: the introduction of crop diversification; the introduction of horticulture during the wet season; access to land by those who were previously excluded from it; the involvement of local authorities, community

leaders and religious leaders; the promotion of small businesses for the maintenance and repair of agricultural equipment; the use of new techniques and crop inputs (including improved seeds) appropriate for the local context; and the implementation of ad hoc market surveys to support farms and businesses.

Regarding negative aspects, the following are worth mentioning: the adoption of electric-powered processing systems for agricultural produce; the introduction of sophisticated and, above all, expensive technologies; the introduction of crop varieties not suitable for arid climates; the introduction of pesticides and herbicides in areas with a fragile eco-environmental balance and high costs; poultry farming in areas with extreme climatic conditions; the prioritisation of individual companies instead of community and collective ones.

Taking the initiative as a whole, sustainability is insufficient: the emergency rationale cannot be compatible with an approach suitable for an intervention aimed at local development or the reduction of migration.

In reality, even analysing the sustainability of an emergency initiative risks being a purely **abstract and contradictory** exercise, since the emergency approach **does not consider** the various aspects of sustainability, except in specific cases.

If we want to proceed to an analysis of sustainability, the initiative as a whole - partly intended as a laboratory for the trialling of new ways to affect the underlying conditions that encourage illegal migration - would be seriously lacking, due both to the limited time period, which certainly does not facilitate adequate testing of such new methods, and to the fact that it **does not provide for any exit strategy**.

3.7 Visibility and Communication

Analysis of the additional criteria of communication and visibility revealed very high performance on average. In fact, 5 projects out of 7 obtained very positive ratings for both communication and visibility, while only two projects registered less positive outcomes, respectively CISV, whose level was average, and GCI, which was rated decidedly inadequate.

Positive aspects regarding communication include the use of a wide range of communication tools; the differentiation of messages on the basis of tools and audiences; the use of indirect communication based on the day-to-day difficulties of people left behind (wives, children, friends, migrant communities); informal "chats" and door-to-door awareness-raising; intensive use of social media for messages addressed specifically at young people; the use of traditional forms of communication such as travelling theatre; direct testimonies from migrants; the involvement of local journalists and professional communicators; the intensive use of radio broadcasts; the use of action research as a tool for knowledge and communication.

The few less positive or partially problematic aspects include the introduction of communication technologies that are too sophisticated to be used (e.g. an app for potential migrants); lower than expected involvement of the diaspora in Italy.

The initiative as a whole had **excellent** communication.

Rather than conveying messages about the risks of irregular migration, communication focused on "inspiring stories of life and work," which proved to have **immediate impact** and great appeal to the target audience of potential migrants and their families. Basically, this was an **indirect style of communication aimed at conveying positive messages** through the testimonies of young people, rather than direct and tragic descriptions of irregular migration.

The campaign was carried out through radio broadcasts ("Foo Jem") and local TV. Moreover, this "Foo Jem" activity was replicated in the subsequent AID 11274 program. In this sense, it can be said that, in terms of communication, the initiative totally fulfilled its function as a "laboratory", with an activity that proved to be **extremely effective and also useful** for subsequent initiatives.

While Foo Jem was designed specifically for Senegal, and therefore highly innovative in content, "Cinemarena" is a **standard initiative**, which AICS replicates in several countries.

In terms of communication, therefore, the initiative as a whole undoubtedly achieved **very important** results that probably constitute the true innovation in a programme to address migration issues. However, it should be noted that communication did not focus on women, but only - albeit with excellent results - on positive testimonials aimed at young people.

Overall, the initiative achieved a **good level of visibility** in the areas covered by the various projects. The visibility of Italian and AICS funding is evident in almost all the communication and training tools used by the seven implementing NGOs.

The many communication activities carried out through radio, video, social media and training/awareness-raising workshops gave the initiative good visibility. This visibility was particularly evident in areas of initiative implementation, and less so at national level.

The successful involvement of local authorities (e.g. RDAs in Senegal) in the work of the seven projects undoubtedly enhanced visibility.

The communication activities implemented by AICS, i.e. the "Cinema Arena" and "Foo Jem" initiatives, resulted in good visibility for Italian Cooperation.

Finally, regarding visibility, both the initiative as a whole and almost all the seven projects helped to raise awareness of Italian Cooperation and its work.

4. Conclusions, lessons learned and best practices

4.1 Conclusions

The analysis conducted thus far has highlighted a sort of paradox between the performance attributable to the initiative as a whole and that of the individual projects that composed it.

In fact, while the initiative as a whole displays quite a few critical points, especially in terms of its emergency rationale and approach, in reality the individual projects, with rare exceptions, achieved excellent performance, in some cases exceptional. This confirms the validity of relying on OCDs in the countries concerned, albeit within the limitations imposed by the short duration and emergency approach of the initiative.

In reality, the general success of the individual projects is mainly due to the fact that the implementing NGOs seem to have followed different rationales and approaches from those of the initiative overall, attributing greater importance to dynamics, methods and tools typical of the development approach - and local development in particular - rather than the semantic and organisational style typical of emergency interventions.

However, taking the initiative as a whole, two additional aspects must be considered, which largely explain the judgment made by the evaluation team. The first of these concerns the pilot nature of the initiative, whose purpose was to trial innovative methods of intervention on the issue of migration,

and irregular migration in particular. This aspect has indeed provided important insights, especially with regard to communication methods.

The second aspect concerns the fact that these indications have not been the subject of a capitalisation exercise, which could have valorised the many successful experiences and good practices that emerged.

In terms of the performance of individual projects, this could have been improved if the time available had not been limited to nine months which - due to the dynamics of development - is a completely insufficient and inadequate timescale.

Despite the handicap of the extremely limited duration and some objective circumstances, such as having to operate under suboptimal security conditions (especially in Mali), the judgment remains generally positive. As can be seen from the table below, the values are all positive or very positive and in fact, with the exception of the GCI project, there are no cases of particular criticality. With regard to the latter, it should be noted that the failure is due to an underestimation of the complexity of introducing technologies that are excessively sophisticated for the context.

The following table summarises the ratings of the seven projects according to the evaluation criteria adopted. Green indicates a positive or very positive rating, while yellow indicates an average rating with some problems detected. Red indicates an inadequate or strongly inadequate rating.

	ACRA	CISV	ENGIM	GCI	LVIA	Terra Nuova	VIS
Relevance	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Green	Green
Coherence	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green
Efficiency	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow	Green
Effectiveness	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green
Impact	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Green	Yellow	Green
Sustainability	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Green
Visibility	Green	Yellow	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green

4.2 Best practices and lessons learned

4.2.1. Best practices

The activities carried out by the seven projects and the initiative as a whole highlighted a significant number of best practices. For reasons of space, the following are those that may be most useful for similar interventions in the future.

Access to land. This is a key issue in the work to combat migration; it was addressed very effectively by the CISV project, and is based on the active involvement of Senegalese institutional actors at the local level, guaranteeing strong sustainability. Access to land for individuals who are normally excluded from it is an essential condition for the creation of alternatives to exodus from their places of origin.

Use of local producers. The use of local agricultural equipment producers, where possible, is a key practice to amplify the impact of projects and extend their benefits beyond the primary beneficiaries. This was implemented by CISV in the Senegal River valley for the artisan construction by a local manufacturer of motor pumps for irrigation use.

Collective beneficiaries. The experience of the initiative has shown that it is more beneficial, in terms of effectiveness and especially impact, to support collective stakeholders, for example the EIG that provides waste collection in Kita, Mali, supported by ENGIM, rather than individuals.

Mentoring. The experience of the ENGIM project highlighted the importance of mentoring as ongoing support for beneficiaries, especially when they have to deal with market and private sector dynamics. Mentoring can ensure the success of the intervention and its sustainability over time, particularly for activities that support the creation of micro-enterprises.

Communication through positive messages. The initiative as a whole highlighted the importance of indirect communication based on positive messages about irregular migration. These messages, aimed primarily at a young audience, are more attractive and effective than those whose content relates directly to the risks. For young people, in fact, the issue of risk does not always act as a deterrent for those who, lacking opportunities in their own country, choose to emigrate, including by illegal means.

Communication about the conditions of those remaining. The experience gained by ENGIM, particularly in Mali, highlighted the great effectiveness and the strong impact of communication content concerning not only migrants but also their families. Issues such as the difficulties of married life at a distance and in particular of wives, children growing up without a parent, the frequency of divorce etc. revealed the problems of those who live "on the other side", and women in particular, demonstrating the harmful consequences of irregular migration, both on migrants themselves and on the lives of their families and communities.

Production of knowledge. One of the central issues of irregular migration concerns both the estimation of the scale of the phenomenon - which, by definition, eludes official statistics - and the understanding of the multiple motivations that drive it. The priority given by the initiative as a whole to the production of knowledge about migration in the regions covered by the projects is to be welcomed as a good practice, as this is an essential factor in identifying effective responses in terms of actions that directly affect the underlying reasons for exodus.

The function of relais farmers. The use of relais farmers by the Terra Nuova project is an effective practice, as it facilitates changes in technical and organisational methods, amplifying the impact of actions and improving the sustainability of changes introduced. Such farmers effectively become genuine "multipliers" of actions.

Market surveys. Market surveys proved to be an excellent tool for understanding the relationship between supply and demand and, consequently, for better regulation of project activities. This is the case with regard to business creation in the case of the ENGIM project, support for agricultural activities in the Terra Nuova project, or the training activities of the VIS project.

Group dynamics. The VIS project underlined the importance of group dynamics, both in training activities and in the implementation of individual actions. The establishment of a group dynamic allows difficulties and problems common to the beneficiaries to be overcome through comparison and sharing, and above all by tackling the individual isolation of those seeking an alternative to emigration.

The adoption of a communication plan. The experience gained by ACRA highlighted the importance of having a real communication plan, through the creation of a schedule of radio programmes, broadcasts and interventions that mark the salient moments in the life of the project. This approach allows continuous and regular communication which is fully integrated with the actions, thus overcoming the problem common to many interventions, in which communication is only one of the activities, and often unconnected with the rest of the project.

Pension rights for returning migrants. The issue of migrant pensions is often an insurmountable obstacle for those who decide to return to their country of origin. In this regard, the experience of the LVIA project is exemplary, since migrants returning from Italy were informed about the services

offered by INCA/CGIL in Dakar and their right to apply for an Italian pension. For those who were interested, data were collected in order to request the contribution, thanks to the project's direct collaboration with INCA/CGIL Dakar.

4.2.2. Lessons learned

The evaluation team believes the following lessons learned should be highlighted.

Logical framework. Despite the very high average performance of the seven projects, the poor formulation of logical framework remains a major obstacle, both for monitoring and evaluation and, above all, for any corrections of course that may be necessary. With the exception of one case, the projects failed to produce meaningful information, due to their inability to apply sensitive indicators to measure the changes produced.

Technological revolutions. The introduction of technology must be fully compatible with the context if failure or potential rejection is to be avoided. The technology itself - such as photovoltaics - may be appropriate in one region but not necessarily in another, even within the same country.

Agroecology. The very current - and to a certain extent fashionable - issue of agroecology should also be measured against the real possibility of its adoption by beneficiaries. Basically, it is a question of avoiding "technological leaps", often the result of ideological positions, and of verifying on each occasion the technical, social, institutional, environmental and economic compatibility of new agricultural practices to be introduced. It is often more effective to introduce agroecology gradually, in a genuine "transitional" approach, in the knowledge that any change in established practices will happen progressively.

Support for collectives. Support for collective organisations such as EIGs, cooperatives etc. is more effective than support for individuals. Indeed, the experience of the projects has shown that individual activities are influenced by numerous variables which cannot always be controlled and managed. Collectives, on the other hand, are not only governed by codified rules, but also have a greater potential impact on the social and economic circumstances of their areas.

The role of the diaspora. There is often a tendency to overestimate the role of the diaspora as a point of reference for mitigating the phenomenon of irregular migration. While the testimonies of those who have suffered the dramatic consequences of illegal immigration could theoretically act as a disincentive for those intending to leave their country illegally, in reality the diaspora can also have the opposite effect, in other words, facilitate migration, since it can not only suggest how to avoid or reduce the risks of the journey, but also represents an effective network of solidarity that replaces the family in the destination country.

The scattered nature of interventions. The splitting of interventions into micro-projects in more than one country greatly reduces their potential impact on the phenomenon of migration. For greater impact, it might be more effective to concentrate resources on geographically defined and circumscribed local objectives. In this sense, multi-territorial interventions may not be the best solution for tackling migration.

The real interest of countries affected by high emigration rates. Any intervention to lessen the phenomenon of migration, especially illegal migration, must necessarily address the sometimes divergent economic interests of families and the communities they belong to, as well as the countries involved. In this sense, the importance of emigrants' remittances for the lives of their families and local areas, and also on the GDP of many countries, can be a factor hindering the success of interventions to combat migration.

5. Recommendations

In conclusion, the evaluation team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations to AICS

- 1** Avoid using the tools and procedures of emergency interventions to address the phenomenon of migration, which is structural nature and linked to development. A nine-month initiative on the issue of migration - or the conditions that drive it - is wholly incompatible with changes and processes that occur in the medium and particularly the long term.
- 2** The issue of migration can be addressed at regional level in the case of interventions in limited cross-border areas, in urgent emergency interventions and where budgets are substantial. Otherwise, regional intervention may be dispersive in terms of impact and use of resources.
- 3** Act in synergy with government authorities regarding national migration policies, and encourage greater coordination with donors active in these issues.
- 4** Avoid geographical dispersion of interventions and resources, and focus efforts on well-defined geographical and territorial goals.
- 5** Improve definition of the theory of change underlying initiatives; a poorly formulated theory - or no theory at all - is likely to be a serious obstacle to the relevance and coherence of the actions.
- 6** Pay greater attention to the logical framework of projects submitted by proponents; these must contain a clear description of outcomes, activities and indicators; the latter must be measurable and record changes that have occurred, and not simply the execution of activities.
- 7** Devote more attention to monitoring, not only for administrative aspects or as mere verification of the implementation of activities, but also for the dynamics and processes activated, as well as preliminary results or effects; only constant monitoring can provide indications on the need to adjust the aim - or even the logical framework - and to adapt strategies.
- 8** Promote initiatives to capitalise on experience; in the case of programmes structured in several projects and of a "pilot" nature, encourage the process of capitalisation, partly by means of horizontal communication between the different actors, which is useful for the identification of good practices and lessons learned.
- 9** Make greater use of the content of interim and final reports from project implementing bodies, with a particular focus on suggestions made.
- 10** Carefully check any overlap between projects of the same NGO in the same places funded by different entities, in particular the Italian Government, avoiding duplication of actions and costs.

Recommendations for NGOs and AICS

- 11** Always define a *baseline*, i.e. the initial situation, both in order to develop responses appropriate to the real situation and to measure the effects of the intervention.
- 12** Pay particular attention to the environmental sustainability of actions: sometimes technological inputs suitable for one area may not be appropriate for another, even if located in the same region or country; agroecology must always be adapted to the context in which it is to be introduced.
- 13** Pay more attention to a preliminary analysis of environmental impact. Improvement of the conditions of the area, particularly in economic terms, cannot disregard the potential environmental damage that may be produced by the actions of development projects.
- 14** Adopt a systemic approach to interventions concerning migration, which is linked to local development issues, technological transition in agriculture, land reform, gender equality, respect for human rights etc.
- 15** Pay special attention to gender equality issues related to local development and migration. Although it is mostly men who emigrate, women play a key role both in decision-making within the family and in dealing with the consequences of family members far from home.
- 16** Formulate beneficiary selection criteria more clearly and transparently. The need to limit the number of beneficiaries, due to limited resources and the enormous demand for support, must take into account that any selection process can lead to conflict and frustration among those who are excluded.
- 17** Experiment with forms of social and economic reintegration for returning migrants other than business creation; this method ultimately favours the "strongest", i.e. those who have already decided to return and who have small amounts of capital and skills, to the detriment of those who have neither means nor skills to employ in their country of origin.
- 18** Experiment with more effective forms of diaspora involvement which can go beyond superficial or accessory functions within projects; while the diaspora can play an important role in mitigating illegal migration, it is also true that it can encourage it by providing solidarity/territorial/family relations.

